

# The Globalization of Korean Universities and Chinese Students: A Comparative Analysis between Universities in Seoul and a Provincial City\*

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(In lieu of an abstract) In the mid-1990s, the Korean government called for educational reform to improve its competitiveness in the increasingly globalizing world. As a result, many Korean universities set university reform as their central goal and carried out strategies of internationalization. These schools began to focus on university evaluations conducted by third parties, as they came under pressure by government policies that emphasized international competitiveness. University assessments included a variety of indexes that measured the university's level of research, education, as well as globalization. The index of globalization was generally determined by the percentage of foreign instructors, foreign students, and lectures given in English in each university. This article analyzes the increasing number of Chinese students in Korea from the perspective of macro-dynamics of Korean universities and Chinese students' motivations and experiences, while comparing one university in Seoul with another in a provincial region.

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## 1. Introduction

“Kids who are not good in school naturally don’t study. Students who really excel in school or whose family has money normally go to the U.S. or Australia. Students who were not very well off or didn’t do well in school usually come to Korea... So they are not as empowered.”

—Jang Ro, a Chinese student at B University, Case 1

In the mid-1990s, the Korean government called for educational reform to improve its competitiveness in the increasingly globalizing world. As a result, many Korean universities set university reform as their central goal and carried out strategies of internationalization. These schools began to focus on university evaluations conducted by third parties, as they came under pressure by government policies that emphasized international competitiveness (Hong 2009). University assessments included a variety of indexes that measured the university’s level of research, education, as well as globalization. The index of globalization was generally determined by the percentage of foreign instructors, foreign students, and lectures given in English in each university.

In the summer of 2010, a renowned private university in Seoul, referred to as “B” University in this article, held a model orientation for incoming foreign students for the school year of 2011. A faculty member who was in charge of the event first stated that the university placed 151<sup>st</sup> in the 2009 QS-The Times World University Rankings<sup>1</sup>—emphasizing that it had joined the ranks of universities that had placed in the 100s. According to him, “B” University rapidly rose in rank every year and finally joined the division of schools included in the 100s, preserving its first place among private Korean universities and reaching an elite status among the most distinguished universities in the world. Next, he revealed that “B” placed 19<sup>th</sup> in the 2010 Chosun Ilbo-QS Asian University Rankings<sup>2</sup> and compared its ranking with Seoul National University (6<sup>th</sup> place), Peking University (12<sup>th</sup> place) and Tsinghua University (16<sup>th</sup> place). The first 18 universities in the rankings were all public schools, which made “B” the

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<sup>1</sup> QS-The Times World University Rankings is a joint-effort produced by *The Times*, a highly respected daily national newspaper based in London, and Quacquarelli Symonds, a company that specializes in providing educational assessments. They have been jointly producing World University Rankings since 2003.

<sup>2</sup> These university rankings were conducted by *The Chosun Ilbo* and Quacquarelli Symonds.

highest ranked private school and the first private school to rank at 19<sup>th</sup> place. The professor added that by this index, “B” would be considered the best private university in all of Asia. For the past several years, Korean universities underscored the importance of the global image associated with their own universities and worked hard to attract international students.

International students Korean universities were able to attract were largely from Asia (over 90 percent), Chinese students comprising most of them. In 2009, over 60,000 Chinese international students attended Korean universities, amounting to 77.7 percent of the international student population of 77,743 from roughly 130 countries (Yu Deok-yeong 2009). The increasing number of international students in Korean universities, particularly Chinese students, can be gauged even by casual observation. Their numbers have dramatically risen in the past few years since the mid-2000s. While the number of non-Chinese international students rose 2.7 times from 6,350 in 2004 to 17,299 in April 2009, the number of Chinese students increased 5.5 times from 10,988 to 60,444 in the same period.

The growing number of Chinese students has had a diversifying effect on the ethnic makeup of the student body, thus contributing to the globalization of Korean universities. At the same time, however, there have been concerns regarding the rapid increase, predominantly in the number of Chinese students. The media viewed this phenomenon ambivalently. For example, one daily newspaper reported that 13 percent (7,999) of the 60,000 Chinese students were illegal residents and that the number of illegal Chinese students had risen by 11.7 times in the five years since 2004 (Yu Deok-yeong 2009). The illegal Chinese students initially received a student visa (D-2) or a language-training visa (D-4) to come to Korea, but they automatically lost their legal status if they failed to renew it. Sometimes, they intentionally obtained the student visa from a university (a visa relatively easy to receive) but sought to find work in Korea rather than to study. They became untraceable and illegal once they escaped the stewardship of the university. The newspaper asserted that the influx of Chinese students led to many different variables, including the rising number of illegal Chinese students. Further, a special news article with the headline, “The Pros and Cons of 60,000 Chinese International Students,” reported that universities in both Seoul and in provincial areas accepted an overwhelming number of Chinese students in order to earn more revenue, a strategy that led to a series of side effects (Yu Deok-yeong and Hwang

Hyeongjun 2009; Hwang Hyeongjun, Yu Deok-yeong, and Shin Mingi 2009). The article criticized universities for enrolling Chinese students for financial gain without properly overseeing their bachelor's degree progress and turning a blind eye when students abandoned school to find work. Despite these negative effects, some saw value in the changing perceptions of globalization among students and university administrators, as universities provided Chinese language services on their websites and circulated Chinese hand-written posters during student council elections as a result of the rising number of Chinese students. Moreover, the influx of Chinese and other international students resolved the imbalance of outgoing students who left Korea, revitalized the regional economy, and energized the exchange between various Korean and Chinese communities.

In order to dig deeper into this subject, I examined who these Chinese students were, what their motives were for attending Korean universities, and what their subsequent experiences were. As quoted in the beginning of this article, Chinese students who came to Korea were lacking in academic capabilities or financial resources compared with those who chose to study in the United States or other English-speaking countries. In global university rankings, Korean education is valued less than education in English-speaking countries. Therefore, I wanted to analyze how the motives and experiences of Chinese students coincided with the globalization strategies of universities, especially when massive numbers of Chinese students enrolled in Korean universities. This phenomenon is examined here within the global contexts of world university rankings and the disproportionate flow of students to Western countries.

The increased number of Chinese students in Korea can be interpreted as an effect of globalization, especially the globalization of education as a whole. Transnational exchanges between countries have progressed beyond the realm of economy to culture and population migration. Along with work and marriage migration, more and more students are crossing national borders to study in foreign countries. The global movement in education began in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and spread to East Asian countries such as Japan, China, and Korea. Many countries and universities have broadened the programs that allowed their students to study abroad in universities or to enroll in language training curriculums. Additionally, these universities also increased efforts to attract a larger number of foreign students to transform their universities into a place of international exchange. The Korean government and universities

worked to appeal to and recruit foreign students in the context of this global trend.

However, it's important to note that student migration didn't occur to the same degree among all participating nations. In other words, just like migrant workers, students gravitated toward more developed Western countries. Since English speaking abilities played a significant role in education and employment in an increasingly globalizing world (Francis and Ryan 1998; Park and Abelmann 2004), countries that were regarded as centers of higher education, such as the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand became the main receivers of students from various countries around the globe. India, China, Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries became the main providers of international students to their Western counterparts. In this transnational context in which students were unequally distributed, Korean universities worked diligently to attract students from different parts of the world. Despite these efforts, foreign students who applied to Korean universities were mostly from China and other Asian countries. The pool from which Korean universities could attract Chinese students reflected the most popular countries for international study (1<sup>st</sup> United States; 2<sup>nd</sup> Korea) and university rankings. This new transnational phenomenon of studying in foreign countries was, in the decades leading up to the millennium and beyond, no longer reserved for elite Asians who sought education only in English-speaking countries; its purpose had become much more diversified.

As Aihwa Ong (Ong 2006: 149-151) explained, Chinese expatriates in the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries, especially upper- or middle-class elites, obtained education in the hope of gaining permanent residence in their host country. While China has had a long history of sending its students to the United States or other Western countries, the acceleration of Chinese student migration to Korea has been more recent. This was due in part to improved diplomatic relations between Korea and China, the growing patterns of economic and cultural exchange, as well as the educational, political, and economic changes galvanized by Chinese economic reform. However, in this article I examine Chinese student migration within the framework of world university rankings and the disproportionate distribution of international students around the globe. In this context, I focus on the motives behind Chinese students' decisions to study in Korea and what these decisions meant for

the students, while also investigating how this new educational transnationalism coincided with the globalization strategy of Korean universities. To this end, I conduct a comparative analysis between two universities whose rankings differ greatly in the institutional hierarchy of Korean universities: “B,” a renowned private university in Seoul and “C,” a virtually unknown private university in a provincial area.

First, in this analysis I examine macro-dynamics related to the recruitment of Chinese students as part of the globalization strategy of Korean universities. Specifically, I compare the real motives of the universities for recruiting Chinese students and the issues of educating and evaluating Chinese students at both “B” and “C” universities. Second, I shed light on why Chinese students chose to study in Korea, compare the reasons they expressed for choosing their respective schools (“B” and “C”), and explore what their choices meant to them. I use the term *dongsangimong*<sup>3</sup> in the title of this article to outline the purpose of this research: to investigate the reasons behind Chinese students’ decisions to study in Korea, to explore the significance of their motives, and to consider how these individual motivations corresponded or clashed with the globalization strategies of Korean universities, particularly their recruitment of foreign students. By so doing, I illustrate how a range of motives created an environment of dynamic interaction. Before delving into this topic, however, it is necessary to place Chinese students within the context of the globalization of university education and the significance of world university rankings by surveying studies that have already been conducted.

## 2. The Globalization of University Education, World University Rankings, and International Students

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, exchanges of population, resources, and information between nations has been increasing, which has resulted in a rising number of students migrating to foreign countries to study. Exchange between participating countries is no longer limited to the

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<sup>3</sup> (Translator’s note) The Korean term *dongsangimong* (동상이몽 同床異夢) means “having different thoughts or goals while doing the same work.” However, due to the difficulty of compressing this idea into a few words, I translated the title to read “The Globalization of Korean Universities and Chinese Students.”

realm of economy; but has been rapidly expanding to include the domains of culture and education (Pieterse 2004). The trend of global education was triggered by educational reform in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and other Western nations in the late 1980s. The United States and Japan, in particular, showed early interest in international education as well as the internationalization of universities and have recently doubled efforts to globalize university education (Burbules and Torres 2000). Further, in the 1990s and following the start of the millennium Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, and other Asian countries began to accelerate their plans to reform and internationalize university education (Altbach and Umakoshi 2004; Huang 2007; Mok 2007). One of the main items on the agenda of globalization strategies employed by Asian universities was to expand exchange programs and increase interaction between their own universities and international students (Mok 2007: 444-445). In other words, they actively recruited foreign students to their countries, while sending their own students abroad to receive university education or language training.

As mentioned earlier, many students from less developed or under-developed Asian countries chose to study in universities in the United States and countries in Europe as well as other “Western” locations. This outflow of students became a transnational trend due, in part, to world university rankings. Although the rankings of universities have recently been reconstructed by a different set of assessments, universities from the United States, Europe, Japan and other advanced countries still constitute the large majority of those placed at the top, while universities from less developed or under-developed countries are placed in the middle or bottom (Kim Jongyeong 2008: 72-73). The value of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees produced varies as well,<sup>4</sup> since the merit of academic

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<sup>4</sup> A bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate degree is a certification that proves that the recipient has completed a particular course of study. In many societies, one’s level of education is deeply connected with the reproduction of social class or status. A French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, conceptualized educational credentials as an institutionalized form of cultural capital. Along with economic capital, Bourdieu affirmed the importance of cultural and social capital. He subdivided the concept of cultural capital into three parts: embodied cultural capital such as gestures, physical appearance, posture, attitude, and language; objectified cultural capital such as a person’s properties (works of art, books, antiques); and institutionalized cultural capital such as academic credentials (Bourdieu 1986: 243-246). Kim Jongyeong (2008) expanded this theory by adding the concept of global cultural capital, pointing to the

credentials depends on the rankings of the universities from which they are earned. In a situation where Korean universities in overall are standing precariously in the mid-low ranking among world universities, those highly-esteemed universities such as “B” place great weight on global university assessments, while universities in less privileged positions like “C” rely on strategic recruitment of Chinese students through scholarships. In addition, Chinese students gauged the value of universities through their own system of ranking and strategically realized their individual goals by choosing to study in Korea.

After economic reform, the Chinese government openly acknowledged university education problems in the country that had arisen over the past few years and implemented various projects to enhance the global competitiveness of Chinese universities, thus driving the efforts of globalization (Mok 2007: 444-445). Being accepted into Chinese universities became more and more difficult, and education in China no longer satisfied consumers with higher spending capacity, which resulted in a massive exodus of Chinese students out of their country to study abroad. As of 2007, the number of Chinese students who were studying abroad reached approximately 144,000. In order to prevent losing domestic talent to other countries, the Chinese government provided returning students with significant employment or startup opportunities. In part because of this government subsidization, Chinese student migration to foreign countries has been predicted to continue to rise in the future (Kim Hyejin 2008: 17-18). Surpassing Japan, in the 2000s Korea became the second most preferred country for these Chinese migrants—the United States being first—and an overwhelming percentage of Chinese international students paid for their own tuition (Kim Huigyun and Choe Changbong 2007). By examining the hierarchies of global universities, one can answer questions of the “whos” and the “whys” of student migration to Korea.

The Korean government spurred the reform of higher education in various ways in conjunction with efforts by Korean universities, processes which taken together actively worked to internationalize university education. Beginning with the loosening regulations of overseas study and travel in the late 1980s, followed by the advent of an English education frenzy and the introduction of globalization government policies in the

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disproportionate production, exchange, and distribution of current academic degrees within the stratification of world universities.



mid-1990s, Korea has become, in recent years, one of the main providers of international students to Western countries. Consistent with the transnational trend of student migration to Western countries, Korean students have generally preferred to study in the United States or other English-speaking countries (Bak Sojin 2010; Kim Jongyeong 2008). In 2008, approximately 216,800 Korean students (including students in language training programs) left the country for the purpose of obtaining higher education. Although the number of incoming foreign students to Korea has recently been steadily increasing, the migration of Korean students to other countries significantly outnumbered the foreign students coming to Korea, creating an internal deficit in the balance between outgoing and incoming students (e-Statistics Korea 2012). As a result, the Korean government introduced a comprehensive plan called “Study Korea Project” to increase the number of foreign students in Korea. Likewise, Korean universities—each with their own specific plans and motives—increasingly enrolled foreign students as part of the strategy of internationalization.

Recently, the percentage of lectures given in English in Korean universities has increased drastically in the name of globalization. In addition, the students, administration, and faculty members of universities have not only become ethnically but also culturally diverse. Thus, Korean universities have been rapidly changing, although only a handful of studies on the globalization of Korean university education have been conducted and their topics have been limited to discourse on policies or university assessment systems based on statistics (Hong 2009; Kang 2009). This article seeks to take a new approach by investigating the globalization of Korean universities through a comparison of two universities—one in Seoul that is highly renowned and another lesser-known school in a provincial area—to examine how Chinese students were recruited and what their enrollment in Korean universities meant to them.

Domestic research on student migration has been generally focused on Korean student migration to other countries. First, social controversies surrounding parents sending young children and teenagers (elementary or middle school students) abroad to study and the subsequent development of the so-called wild-geese dads<sup>5</sup> became the subject of empirical studies.

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<sup>5</sup> (Translator’s note) “Wild geese dad” or *gireogi appa* refers to a father who remains in Korea to work and financially provide for his family living in a foreign country for their children’s education.

This research examined the transnational migration of families for the purpose of educating their children while one family member remained behind and highlighted issues of family, education, and reproduction of social stratification within the context of transnationalism (Jo Eun 2004; Yi Gihong 2005; Jo Hyeyeong 2007). The second type of research consisted of observing post-modern student migration from a historical point of view (Kim Hyeongyeong 2006a; 2006b). There have been ethnographic investigations of Korean students studying abroad conducted from a university in the southern part of the United States (Jeong Sunjin 1996) and on Korean undergraduate students in Malaysia (Yi Gyuho 2006). Additionally, there have been ethnographic studies of Korean students undergoing graduate programs in the United States (Kim Jongyeong 2008) and on the experiences of students in short-term language training or exchange programs (Bak Sojin 2010). These analyses need to be differentiated by the types of student migration, such as the migration of children or adolescents, students who are enrolled in short-term language training courses, and those in a bachelor's or graduate programs. This article focuses on Chinese international students earning a bachelor's degree in Korean universities. These students are set apart here from other Chinese students enrolled in language training courses or in graduate programs with the aim of contributing a new element to the diversification of studies on Chinese international students.

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, multiculturalism has become one of the main subjects of study in humanities and social sciences, including cultural anthropology. Most of the research on this topic has been on foreign women who have migrated to Korea for marriage, migrant workers, and their children (Yu Myeongki 1995; Kim Minjeong, Yu Myeongki, Yi Hyekeyeong, and Jeong Kiseon 2006; Kim Hyeonmi 2008; Jeon Gyeongso, Kim Minjeong, Nam Yeongho, and Bak Dongseong 2008). International students have been differentiated from other migrants since their goal for education is relatively clear and their stay in Korea has been temporary. However, with the sudden rise in the number of foreign students coming to Korea, Korean universities have transformed into multicultural places, and I predict that studies of Chinese international students will contribute to the expansion of research on multiculturalism in Korea. A majority of the articles written about the sudden increase of Chinese students deal with issues regarding their language and cultural adjustments, interpersonal relationships, the stress

they feel, and their stress management plans (Kim Hyejin 2008; Im Chunhui 2009; Jo Jaehyeok and Jeon Gyeongtae 2009). Other studies include educational sociological research addressing how Chinese students perceived Korea through the filter of the Korean Wave (Jo Hyeyeong 2003), thesis papers examining what led Chinese students to watch Korean drama series and their attitudes about the shows (Kim Seonnam 2008), studies focused on experiences of Chinese students working in Korea (Cha Minyeong 2007), and an analytical report on the lack of friendship between Koreans and Chinese (Gu Jaeok 2010). Unlike previous research that has been conducted on such topics, this article analyzes the increasing number of Chinese students from the perspective of macro-dynamics of Korean universities and Chinese students, while comparing one university in Seoul with another in a provincial region.

Additional related studies have included research on foreign international students—especially Japanese, Indian, Chinese, and other Asian students—studying in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Altbach 1986; Creamer 2004; Rizvi 2005; Brown 2008; Lee 2008; Simpson and Ten 2009). Of particular interest is Fazal Rizvi’s (2005) research on Chinese and Indian international students studying in Australia. He examined how the identities and cultural affiliations of Asian students changed as a result of their education in Australia and how they used their foreign education to build their professional careers. The research conducted outside of Korea has mostly concentrated on Asian students studying in Western countries. By contrast, this article—focused on Chinese international students in Korea—illustrates how the countertrend of students moving to an Asian country to study diversifies discourse on student migration.

### 3. Research Method and Research Participants

This article compares two private universities that have enrolled a large number of Chinese international students: a highly esteemed “B” university in Seoul and “C” university located in a provincial region. I conduct a comparative analysis on the motives for admitting Chinese students at each institution, and examine their strategies and management plans. Additionally, I investigate what it means for Chinese students to study in Korea from the students’ perspectives.

In-depth interviews and academic articles were the main sources for this research. To learn more about how universities operated, I interviewed an administrator who was in charge of international students at “B” university and attended a foreign student orientation. For the past few years, I gave lectures at “B” university, which gave me the opportunity to meet and observe Chinese students. I was able to recruit research participants through these lectures and the students I met at international student council. At “C” university, I interviewed faculty members who frequently interacted with Chinese students. With the help of additional professors, I met with the president of the international student council who introduced me to students who were willing to participate in this research. I visited the “C” university campus multiple times and conducted interviews in locations such as lecture halls, cafes, dorm rooms, and others. At times, I shared meals with a few students after their interview and conversed casually. Through in-depth interviews with six participants from “B” university and ten from “C” university, I investigated the reasons behind their moves to Korea and chronicled their experiences. Interviews were generally conducted in Korean, but I relied on co-participation from a Chinese-Korean research assistant as needed. All the research participants I interviewed were in the process of obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Their particularities are noted in Table 1 (names used in the list are pseudonyms). Additionally, I conducted supplementary interviews with one Chinese exchange student at “C” university and two Korean students who regularly interacted with Chinese students. I met with each student for a discussion one to three times between April 2010 and June 2011, each interview lasting about one to three hours. With their permission, I recorded the contents of the interviews in an audio form.

In order to properly analyze and interpret the recorded interviews, I replayed and listened to them using a process of open coding to mark the various subjects, categories, and issues found in the content. Then, using focused coding, I redistributed and re-sorted the information based on the specific subjects and issues that are analyzed in this article (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Through these coding processes, I selected the main and subordinate subjects, which I analyze in context and supplement with background information. Also through these processes, I constructed the ethnographic framework in which my research subjects are discussed. In the general analysis, I used five key topics to capture Chinese students’ motives for seeking education in Korea (interest in Korean language or

**Table 1.** Chinese students who participated in the interviews

Case	Sex	University/Major/ Year of Enrollment	Ethnicity	Notes
Case 1 Jang Ro	M	"B"/ Social Science/ 2006	Han Chinese	Studied in Australia in high school
Case 2 Jin Wui	M	"B"/ Social Science/ 2006	Han Chinese	Attended the language school at "B" for 2 years
Case 3 Choe Yeong	F	"B"/ Humanities/ 2008	Korean Chinese <sup>6</sup>	President of Chinese international student council at "B"
Case 4 Jeong Chung	M	"B"/ Business/ 2009	Korean Chinese	Attended the language school at "B" for 1 year
Case 5 Kang Seolhwa	F	"B"/ Business/ 2006	Korean Chinese	Attended the language school at "B" for 1 year/ Language training course in the US for 1 year (took leave of absence)
Case 6 Mu Jeong	F	"B"/ Humanities/ 2010	Han Chinese	Majored in Korean for 1 year at a Chinese univ./ Language course in another Korean univ. in Seoul for 1 year
Case 7 Wang Hao	M	"C"/ Humanities/ 2007	Han Chinese	Transferred after majoring in Korean for 2 years in China/ President of Chinese international student council at "C"
Case 8 Jang Somae	F	"C"/ Humanities/ 2008	Han Chinese	1st year in "C" language school
Case 9 Baek Ran	F	"C"/ Humanities/ 2007	Han Chinese	1 yr. of language school at another univ. near "C"
Case 10 Jang Myeong	M	"C"/ Media, Social Sciences/ 2007	Han Chinese	Transferred after 2 years of study at a Chinese univ.
Case 11 Jo Min	F	"C"/ Business/ 2007	Han Chinese	Attended a junior college in China
Case 12 Wang Hong	F	"C"/ Business/ 2007	Han Chinese	Transferred from a junior college in China
Case 13 Ju Munho	M	"C"/ Media, Social Sciences/ 2007	Han Chinese	6 months of Korean at language school at a Chinese univ.
Case 14 Son Jingbin	M	"C"/ Engineering/ 2007	Han Chinese	1 year at a sister Korean language school in China/ President of Chinese international student council
Case 15 O Rim	F	"C"/ Business/ 2009	Uyghur	6 months of Korean at language school at a Chinese univ.
Case 16 Ju Yeon	F	"C"/ Media, Social Sciences/ 2008	Han Chinese	Transferred from a Chinese univ. in a major city/ graduated in 2011 and enrolled in a graduate program at "C"

<sup>6</sup> (Editor's note) Korean Chinese refers to ethnic Koreans in China. Most of them live in Northeast China, especially in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture.

Korea, earning a Korean degree as an alternative to studying in English-speaking countries, a stepping stone to another global migration, a second chance, work over study). For the purpose of this article, I chose to do a comparative analysis of the motives of the students at “B” and “C” universities and what studying in Korea meant to them.

#### 4. Dynamics of Globalization and Recruitment of Chinese International Students in Korean Universities

Although “B” university was a renowned university in Seoul while “C” was a lesser-known regional university, both were established by American missionaries and began developing policies to internationalize their schools relatively early compared to other universities. “B” university has formed exchange arrangements with universities in the United States, Europe, and other countries. “C” university created sisterhood ties with Chinese universities and expedited Chinese cultural exchange and recruitment of Chinese students through a China-related center, effectively institutionalizing the process.

Both universities currently have a large number of international students, especially Chinese students, allegedly as part of their strategies for globalization. However, these two universities had differing motives under the guise of university internationalization. The difference in their motives reflects the status of their respective schools based on Korean university rankings. For both schools, the general purpose of admitting Chinese students was to reinforce their global competitiveness and improve the global image of their universities. However, according to the interviews I conducted with university administrators and faculty members, “B” university allowed a large number of Chinese students to enroll in order to receive a higher university assessment, while “C” university primarily admitted Chinese students for financial gain.

In the case of “B” university, the number of international students in 2008 stood at 1,671 (including students in language training courses), of which 559 were Chinese. In 2009, the number increased to 2,148, Chinese students numbering 766 (Higher Education in Korea 2012). That year, university administrators came to the conclusion that the index of university globalization played an important role in determining their academic status. As a result, they created an admissions policy accepting as

many international students as possible from among those who met minimal academic standards for the academic year of 2009, leading to a sudden increase of foreign students. That year alone, “B” university admitted 230 international students into the bachelors’ programs, over 80 percent of whom were Chinese. The number of Chinese students has drastically increased ever since that year. In 2010, 2,669 international students were admitted to “B” university, 920 of whom were Chinese.<sup>7</sup>

The real reason behind “B” university’s increased enrollment of Chinese students was not so much to reinforce its global competitiveness, but to boost the number of international students and improve its index of university globalization, resulting in a better ranking. In my interview with a university administrator, I learned that a large number of Chinese students were admitted to the university in 2009, because of the newly implemented school policy that emphasized the importance of the globalization index, which was reflected in university rankings. The globalization strategy of “B” university largely consisted of three parts: sending their own students abroad through exchange programs, internationalization of university education (gauged by the number of English lectures and employment of foreign faculty members), and enrolling foreign international students. These three factors were converted into a numerical value and used as an index of globalization by many institutions that rank universities. “B” university also established and ran a variety of international student exchange programs with other universities. As of October 2008, it had partnered with 574 foreign universities from 59 countries and sent 800 Korean students to study abroad in 2007 alone. The number of English lectures had also increased by 2007 making up 27 percent of all lectures. In addition, “B” university had steadily hired more foreign faculty members and was ahead of other universities in their credit exchange programs. Enrolling foreign students was part of a globalization master plan and quickly became an important aspect of the globalization index of “B” university.

Moreover, along with its reputation as a highly esteemed university in

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<sup>7</sup> The most popular majors among Chinese students at “B” university were business management and economics. About 30 percent of Chinese students who applied to the university indicated one of these fields as their choice of major. The second most popular majors included English literature, journalism and mass communication, and Korean literature. Chinese students generally preferred humanities, social sciences, and business management to natural sciences.

Korea, “B” university advertised the value of its brand in Asia as a way of luring Chinese students. Since “B” university has had a long history of engaging in international student exchange programs, it did not offer partial scholarships or tuition waivers to Chinese students, unlike “C” university. According to one university administrator, “B” university was able to enroll a large number of Chinese students without much difficulty despite this fact because Chinese students were well aware of the value of the university brand, many of them having attended a Korean language school of another university before applying to “B” university. When asked about why Chinese students might have chosen to study at particular institutions in Korea, one university administrator at “B” university replied that “There are many reasons...but I heard in China that students who were planning on studying in Korea knew about SKY.<sup>8</sup> That means they were already aware of the university rankings in Korea.”

For this reason, Chinese international students expressed pride in attending “B” university. However, since they were admitted through a special screening process, they said they had a very difficult time keeping up with their studies and became stressed in class. Further, they were aware that their academic or language abilities were inadequate when compared with the abilities of their Korean classmates. For example, a professor at “B” university stated that one Chinese student routinely missed class and got zeros in both the mid-term and final. The professor gave the student a chance to turn in a report at the end of the semester to make up for his grade, but gave him an F for the class after finding out that his report was plagiarized. In turn, the student wrote an email to the professor stating he couldn’t accept his failing grade and that the university was responsible for readily admitting Chinese students whose academic and language abilities didn’t match the level of Korean students. His email<sup>9</sup> was written as follows:

Do you know how “B” university selected foreign students? We didn’t have to take any tests, or submit our previous grades. All we had to do was turn in an application. I wouldn’t even have dreamed of getting into “B” university if I had been born in Korea. There is a huge difference between us and the

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<sup>8</sup> (Translator’s note) SKY is an acronym for the top three universities in Korea: Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University.

<sup>9</sup> While conversing about the difficulty of teaching Chinese students, the university faculty member sent me the email in entirety to elucidate his point.



outstanding Korean students who got into this university by taking college entrance exams or through rolling admission. Foreign students are not familiar with the language or the culture. Not only that, we don't understand a word that is spoken in class. It's hard to take notes, and since we don't understand what we are reading, we can't retain any information.

While it would be an exaggeration to state that the university didn't consider anything before admitting Chinese students, it was certainly easier for foreign students to enroll in "B" university than for Koreans. Chinese students have been admitted unprepared to meet the challenges of academic rigor and the Korean language. Coming to Korea to study has become an easy option for students and this has smoothed the way to an increasingly diversified student body reflecting the status of "B" university among other Korean universities in Asian and world university rankings. It should be no surprise that Chinese educational migrants have faced difficulties in their studies, especially when they discover the differences between their own skills and the skills of Korean students who were accepted into a renowned university through a difficult academic vetting process. However, rather than publicly discussing these issues of education and university assessment, university authorities have considered the underprepared Chinese students as a problem to be resolved or negotiated privately between students and professors.

"B" university admitted foreign students by examining only their records such as high school grades, a statement of intent, and a list of awards they received without requiring even a basic level of competence in the Korean language. Recently, the university began to implement a policy limiting the number of general education courses foreign students could take if they didn't pass a certain level in the Korean language test and required them to take Korean classes at an affiliate language school. Further, in 2001, "B" university established a global undergraduate studies program in a reenergized effort to attract more foreign students. If their Korean language skills were found lacking, they were enrolled into the global undergraduate studies program with an undeclared major, and for 6 months to a year, they were required to take language courses along with other general studies courses. Thus, the university has changed its screening process of foreign students over time in a concerted effort to lure more international students with a system that would help them prepare for rigorous study. Even so, the practice of readily admitting students without a thorough examination of their language abilities has become a

cause for a variety of problems.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike “B” university, which enrolls Chinese students to manipulate its globalization index, “C” university has actively recruited Chinese students as part of a method to avert a pressing crisis. On the surface, “C” university has underscored the importance of the enrollment of Chinese students, as this positively has contributed to the university’s global image and reinforced its global competitiveness. However, the real motives lay in the fact that the university has needed to fill the school with a certain number of foreign students in order to replenish its finances, a difficult challenge for a virtually unknown university in a provincial town. In 2008, private “C” university, admitted 877 foreign students, 814 of whom were Chinese. The number of foreign students increased to 1,051 in 2009, and Chinese students to 913 (*Higher Education in Korea* 2012). At the time of my research, over 90 percent of foreign students in “C” university were Chinese. Like many other regional universities, “C” university has actively and competitively recruited Chinese students by offering a variety of scholarships. The institution was motivated to enroll Chinese students mainly because they were faced with a managerial crisis spurred by a lack of applicants; admitting Chinese students has helped with university finances. Foreign students were not subjected to many regulations, as they were exempted from the admission criteria Korean students had to meet and this led to challenges for them academically. However, their enrollment has contributed significantly to the relief of financial strains of the university even with the offers of partial scholarships.

In order to obtain more Chinese students, “C” university has partnered with about five Chinese universities and offers a variety of scholarship benefits. In addition to these universities, other institutions that provide study abroad information have helped channel Chinese students from various backgrounds to “C” university. Upon enrollment, foreign students automatically receive a waiver of 30 percent of the standard tuition, as well as housing in the dormitory and a variety of scholarships based on grades. The university also has established a China-related center in order to manage Chinese international students and support cultural exchange between Korean and Chinese students, especially through the efforts of the

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<sup>10</sup> From time to time, the media reported the problems caused by Chinese students’ inability to communicate fluently in Korean (Yi Taemu and Yi Chunhui 2010, April 27).

Chinese international student council and the departments of China-related studies. However, despite these efforts, it has been difficult for Chinese students to form close relationships with Korean students and as a result, they typically only befriend fellow Chinese students. Aside from the case of Wang Hao ([Case 7] former president of the Chinese international student council), who positively assessed such sponsored exchanges between Chinese and Korean students, the majority of Chinese students stated that these one-time events attracted only regular goers and did not provide an opportunity to truly interact with Korean students. A Korean student I interviewed at “C” university also revealed that only Chinese students attended such events while almost no Korean students showed up. She stated that it seemed they had a “league of their own” and that Chinese students isolated themselves like an “island.”

According to a faculty member at “C” university, the Chinese students who enrolled were even less academically and linguistically qualified than their counterparts who were accepted into Korean universities in Seoul. Many students came to “C” university because they were denied entrance to Chinese universities. While there were students who came to Korea because of their interest in the Korean language and business industry thanks to the Korean Wave, many enrolled in the university to earn money through part-time work, using the relatively cheaper living expenses of a non-metropolitan area to their advantage and abandoning their studies. “C” university didn’t require much in the way of language or academic skills in order for Chinese students to enroll in their programs. Moreover, they could receive partial tuition waivers and reduce living expenses by living in the outskirts of Seoul. These conditions made “C” university a viable option for Chinese students who had been rejected by renowned Chinese universities or who failed college entrance altogether, as long as they had minimal financial support.

In general, Korean universities compete to recruit a lot of students, but they are not capable of providing proper instruction. I don’t think there are many universities in Korea with a system that could effectively educate Chinese students. They just select them... and I am sure teaching international students takes a different technique. Places like the Ministry of Education should come up with some guidelines, but they haven’t. They just placed responsibilities on us, the professors. And since there weren’t many Chinese students who could speak Korean well or who were intellectually gifted, we just left them alone.

Underlying the above statement of a “C” university professor is the fact that Chinese students were admitted to “C” university in order to keep the university financially solvent. Problems regarding the education of Chinese students were not discussed publicly, and the solutions to these problems were placed on the shoulders of university faculty members. The lack of public discussion about the almost effortless admission process for Chinese students to “C” university also led to lax graduation requirements for international pupils. Such students were almost never dismissed from the university even when they failed academically. Even though some minor differences existed among professors about how Chinese students were treated, most professors graded international students on a curve separately from Korean students in order to prevent them from dropping out before they completed their degree.<sup>11</sup> When I asked about the dropout rate of Chinese students due to their inadequate Korean-speaking and academic skills, a “C” university professor responded as follows:

There aren't very many dropouts. This is part of the problem our university has. We try not to kick out international students if we can help it. I think universities in provincial areas are mainly the ones that grade international students on a curve. The reason we don't have very many dropouts is in part because of the evaluation system. We grade them on a curve based on only the grades of international students. We don't combine their grades with the grades of Korean students. That's how they get passable grades. There is a joke that's been going around that says you can write down a cooking recipe in place of an answer and still get a passing grade.

While this professor confessed that most of his colleagues expressed disappointment in Chinese students, he also acknowledged that in order to relieve the university from financial strain, they had no other choice but to accept these students and give them easy grades to prevent them from dropping out. Chinese students at “C” university often mentioned their work being graded on a separate curve and regarded this discriminatory practice as a thoughtful consideration on the part of professors and the school. By contrast, in an interview I conducted with a Korean student at the university, she stated that these differences in the grading system became a source for frequent complaints among Korean students. Grading

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<sup>11</sup> The drop-out rate of “B” university international students (except students in language training courses) in 2010 was 12.3 percent while “C” university's drop-out rate was 5.1 percent (Higher Education in Korea 2012).

on a curve was supposed to be no more than a temporary measure introduced by the professors to keep Chinese students enrolled in order to meet the financial needs of the university. However, to Chinese students, universities in provincial areas such as “C,” were more accessible in that they provided a lax admissions policy and an easy bachelor’s degree.

## 5. The Motive and Meaning Behind Chinese Students’ Migration to Korea

Yang Hansun (2011: 425-426) argued that as market economy expanded in China, the idea that one’s educational level was the most significant measure of one’s value and competitiveness became widespread, boosting the reinforcement of competitive education. Middle-class parents rearing only one child have been ready to generously invest in their child’s education to facilitate the upward mobility of her achievement and social class. This new social trend increased the popularity of so-called prestigious universities as well as the competitiveness of college entrance exams.<sup>12</sup> As an alternative, middle-class parents send their child abroad to study. Studying in the United States, Great Britain or other English-speaking countries differs greatly from studying in Korea, as the university rankings determine not only the educational value of each university but reflect the financial and academic capabilities of applicants. However, emphasis on the importance of education and the aspiration of middle-class families for their children’s education has encouraged individuals to seek opportunities outside of their country and enroll in a bachelor’s degree program abroad.

When I asked the Chinese students why they chose to come to Korea to study, the most common answer was that they were interested in the Korean language and in the country. Their interests in the Korean language and subjects related to Korea were sparked by various circumstances: they were influenced by the Korean Wave, their parents or relatives were involved in a business relationship with Korea, they had Korean friends in China, or they lived in an area with a big Korean

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<sup>12</sup> College-going rates in China have recently increased. In 2007, the college-going rate was approximately 20 percent (Wu Sugeun 2008: 30) while it is nearing 25 percent at the present time (Seo Wutae 2012, January 26).

population. Many students reported that they became interested in Korea and the language when they began watching Korean drama series through the effects of the Korean Wave. The Korean Wave, which began in the latter part of the 1990s, spread positive images of Korea to Chinese teenagers (Jo Hyeyeong 2003: 220, 223-224). Mu Jeong (Case 6) who attended “B” university said she learned Korean by watching Korean drama series when she was younger, and majored in Korean for one year at a Chinese university before coming to Korea.

I accidentally began watching Korean drama series when I was in elementary school, and that’s how I became interested in Korea. I continued to watch because they were so entertaining... I thought I needed to go to Korea... I am not sure when in middle school, but the summer after I graduated from middle school, my Korean teacher asked me what my dream was. I said my dream was to live in Korea. When I was in high school, I knew I needed to go to university, but I asked my parents multiple times if I could study in Korea. So I came after studying one year at a Chinese university. (Mu Jeong, Case 6)

When asked about why she came to Korea to study, Kang Seolhwa (Case 5) of “B” university attributed her decision to being influenced by the Korean Wave. She watched Korean drama series when she was young saying, “The actors spoke Korean beautifully. It sounded soft. I came here because I liked Korean and wanted to learn the language.” Kang first enrolled in a language-training course at “B” university and later joined a business management program. Many students at “C” university reported that they became interested in Korea and the language when they began watching Korean drama series when they were in middle school or high school. Similarly, Jang Myeong (Case 10) said he watched many Korean shows with his mother and decided to come to Korea to major in media production. Ju Yeon (Case 16), who also studied media production, stated that she wanted to learn Korean because most people chose to study English. She said she came to Korea to study because Korea had a more advanced media or film industry than China.

Although the Chinese students’ interest in Korean was often sparked by Korean drama series or by the influence of their local Korean networks, the impetus behind their move to Korea was also galvanized by the expectation that the Korean language would become a valuable resource for their future employment or career after graduation. For example, Wang Hao (Case 7), who was studying in a Korean language-related program,

expressed interest in returning to China to teach Korean or to work as a translator. Even if their work wasn't directly related to the Korean language, students such as Jo Min and Wang Hong (Cases 11 and 12), who were majoring in tourism management and commerce-related study respectively, believed they could work in Korean corporations in China or companies that required Korean. Hence, they believed learning Korean would help with their future careers.

Aside from the Korean Wave, other factors fanned Chinese students' interests in Korea and their eventual move to Korea: having a Korean friend in China (Jin Wui, Case 2), parents or relatives who conducted business in Korea (Jang Ro, case 1), and the Korean networks of their Korean parents in the case of Korean Chinese students. For example, Choe Yeong (Case 3) and Jeong Chung (Case 4), both Korean Chinese students at "B" university, came to Korea at the encouragement of their (Korean Chinese) fathers.<sup>13</sup>

Chinese international students all shared a common interest in Korea and the goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree while learning Korean. However, the students at "B" and "C" university demonstrated different reasons for choosing the specific school they were attending and what they wanted to accomplish through their studies in Korea.

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<sup>13</sup> Choe Yeong (Case 3) spoke fluent Korean, having attended a Korean Chinese school. Although she admitted she was able to form closer relationships with Korean students because of her fluent Korean, she identified herself as Chinese rather than Korean Chinese. She claimed that Korean students cast a negative view on Korean Chinese so, she usually told Koreans that she was Chinese without revealing that she was Korean Chinese if she wasn't pressed to reveal more. This example illustrates the existence of prejudice and negative attitudes toward Korean Chinese in Korean society. Indeed, there have been research studies of Korean Chinese experiencing more discrimination than Han Chinese (Im Chunhui 2009: 95). Thus, Korean Chinese international students underscored their national identity more so than their ethnic identity. Another Korean Chinese student participant, Kang Seolhwa (Case 5) never attended Korean Chinese school and simply identified herself as Chinese, as she didn't truly consider herself as Korean Chinese. Some Korean Chinese, like Jung Chung (Case 4), didn't speak much Korean and were required to attend a language training school for one year before being allowed to attend "B" university. Even after a year, his inadequate Korean speaking skills sent him back to the language training school, limiting the number of general education classes he could take. As the number of Korean Chinese international students continues to increase, Korean institutions face a greater need to conduct a closer examination of their unique traits and particularities.

*1) Pride in a School Brand and its Limitation: Chinese International Students at "B" University*

Chinese students who attended "B" university were well aware of the prestige associated with this university well before their enrollment and felt pride in the fact that they were selected for admission. In the case of Jung Chung (Case 4), his father, who was well acquainted with the business of living in Korea, told him not to even bother studying in Korea if he wasn't going to attend "B" university. The Chinese students who only considered enrolling in prestigious Korean universities in Seoul markedly distanced themselves from other Chinese students who chose to go to universities in provincial regions and saw them as "students who did poorly in school or whose family suffered financial difficulties." Kang Seolhwa (Case 5) said she was impressed by how passionately "B" university Korean students worked and played, adding that unlike academically stellar students at Peking or Tsinghua University, Korean students knew how to have fun even while excelling in school. By watching Korean students, she said she learned how to live life more fully. Even though these students compared "B" university with other highly esteemed schools in China, such as Peking or Tsinghua University, they didn't believe they were academic equals to Korean students or students who attended prestigious universities in China. Most Chinese students at "B" university felt a great amount of stress in school. Kang Seolhwa (Case 5) said she wanted to take a break from school, but went to the United States for a semester to study English instead at her father's suggestion.

Jin Wui (Case 2), an upper classmen at "B" university, complained that the language or academic skills of Chinese international students who were recently admitted to the school fell well below the level the university typically required of its students. In some cases, students came to Korea even when they were not interested in studying only for the reason that their parents were financially well off. He claimed these students tainted the reputation of Chinese students at the university.

Frankly speaking, most of the Chinese students at "B" university don't do well academically. Well...I... think "B" university is really weird. I don't understand why they are not more selective... and it was so random... I just enrolled without [taking an exam]. You can just create references if you want. I think it's really ridiculous. Simply ridiculous. What are they doing here? Seriously. Frankly, they are crippling other Chinese people... [Researcher:



You mean they are harming other Chinese students?] Of course. They don't do well in school. Especially now.

Having taken Korean classes at the language training school at "B" university, Jin Wui (Case 2) thought of the university as a place of international diversity. However, he said he was disappointed when he actually enrolled in a university program because it was difficult to make Korean friends and foreign students interacted only with each other. In addition, he experienced discrimination at the orientation even before he began his bachelor's degree program. An intoxicated Korean upper classman offered him a handshake but immediately cursed and slapped him in the face, saying he didn't return the handshake culturally appropriately. Although other students stepped in to stop him, Jin Wui was shocked into silence, not knowing how to resist an older upper classman. After that experience, he had an even harder time interacting with Korean students.

Furthermore, while Chinese students felt pride in the fact that they attended a prestigious school in Korea, their first choice was to study in the United States, Great Britain or other English-speaking countries. Korea was their second choice, knowing that the value of studying in Korea wasn't calibrated the same way as studying in the West. Once Mu Jeong (Case 6), a student at "B" university, had a conversation with a taxi driver who asked her, "Aren't all Chinese students in Korea rich?" She replied, "If they were rich, they would go to the United States. Why would they come to Korea?" This answer reveals a hierarchy of country preferences for international study. Moreover, it was an expression of resistance to the prejudiced idea that China was "poor" or an "economically underdeveloped country" by contextualizing Korea's status within the ranks of other Western countries such as the United States or Great Britain. A Korean student asked Choe Yeong (Case 3) a similar question to which she answered that many Chinese students came to Korea because it was geographically closer to China, but "more students wanted go to the United States or Great Britain if it was possible." In the case of Jang Ro (Case 1), he attended an international school when he was in middle school, which gave him plenty of opportunities to interact with Korean students. When he was in high school, he left to study in Australia. However, he returned to China, having had a difficult time adjusting to a Western country, and then came to Korea for university. He pointed out

that compared to the students who went to English-speaking countries, the students who came to Korea were not as academically capable or financially well off. As his quote in the beginning of this article indicated, students who excelled academically and had sufficient financial support migrated to the United States, Australia, or other English-speaking countries to study. On the other hand, students, who didn't do quite as well in school or didn't have enough financial backing, came to Korea.

As evinced by the examples above, Chinese students at "B" university felt a certain degree of pride in the brand of the school they were attending. However, they were aware that their language and academic abilities fell far behind those of Korean students and that the merit of attending a Korean university was less than attending Western universities, as implicated by world university rankings. Knowing this, some students planned to move to a different country, using their experience in Korea as a launching pad. At the time of our first interview, Jin Wui (Case 2) was in his the third semester of his fourth year at "B" university, and was interviewing for jobs at companies that had a relationship with China. On the day of our first meeting, he came dressed sharply in a black suit, saying he was coming from a job interview. He already had an offer from a Korean company, but had no intention of accepting it because they paid a very small salary to foreigners. He was waiting for a better offer from other companies. When he entered the job market, he learned that Korean companies required fluent English in addition to Korean and Chinese, and that they didn't like to hire Chinese with Korean degrees. It was more beneficial to Korean companies to hire Chinese from China who obtained a degree at a Chinese university and to pay them a lesser salary. Jin Wui ended up being hired by a major Korean company he wanted to work for and was dispatched to a company branch in China in July of that year. In an interview I conducted with him before he left the country, he revealed that he chose to work for the company for the sake of its name, since it was internationally renowned and it would look impressive on his résumé when he applied to MBA programs. However, he said it would be difficult to survive in Shanghai with the salary he was offered.

Jin Wui planned to work for the Korean company for a few years, using his Korean degree to his advantage. His long-term goal was to earn an MBA degree and citizenship in the United States (or in Canada or Australia).

Of course I need to study more. I want to take the GMAT between my third and fifth years in the Korean company and then get an MBA in the U.S. My dad wanted me to change my citizenship. So I have to graduate and go there to get citizenship in the U.S., Canada, or Australia. (Jin Wui, Case 2)

Jin Wui declared that he was going to invite his parents when he receives his citizenship and live with them. When asked about the importance of his identity or nationality as a Chinese, he said it was very difficult for Chinese people to get visas to visit other countries; he wanted to live freely and globally. Wui aimed beyond his Chinese roots to achieve a more cosmopolitan identity through what Aihwa Ong (Ong 1999) called “flexible citizenship.” To him, education in Korea was a stepping-stone or a lay-over to his next global destination.<sup>14</sup>

## 2) *Easy University Admission and Degree: Chinese International Students at “C” University*

The Chinese students I interviewed who enrolled in “C” university were mostly students who failed their college entrance exams in China or transferred after attending a low ranking university or community college. In many cases, the students who took classes at the few Chinese universities “C” had partnered with were able to transfer their credits and enroll as upper classmen at “C” university. Ju Munho (Case 13), a student at “C,” wasn’t interested in studying when he was in high school and did not score well on his college entrance exam. To provide him with a new opportunity, his father suggested that he go to study in Korea.

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<sup>14</sup> Son Jingbin (Case 14), a student at “C” university, wanted to attend a graduate school in Seoul after graduating from college and earn a doctorate degree in the United States or Australia if he was given the opportunity. Although he roamed the world while he was young, he ultimately wanted to return to China where his parents lived, which contrasted with Jin Wui’s (Case 2) plan which was to obtain flexible citizenship. Most of the students at “C” university acknowledged the increasing globalization of the world but also expressed their desire to return to China to work for their country or to be with their parents. As Vanessa Fong (2004) points out in her research, the passion demonstrated by Chinese adolescents for moving to a foreign country could at times be problematic. To young Chinese, not returning to their home country meant they were selfish and disloyal. She argued that they were trained under the influence of nationalism that underscored the importance of fulfilling their filial duties to their parents and loyalty to their country by returning home from their global ventures. She coined a new term, “filial nationalism,” to describe this phenomenon.

I never considered studying abroad before coming to Korea, because I didn't study at all in high school. I failed the scholastic ability test, *gaokao*, and college entrance exam. I could have gone to a third-tier university in China...but my father is the type of person who constantly tries to provide me with opportunities others have. If life is a game and if I am out, he will provide me with another opportunity. (Ju Munho, Case 13)

Ju Munho vacillated between New Zealand and Korea but when his father's business faltered, he decided to come to Korea with the help of a relative who taught Korean classes. He first learned Korean for one year in China and with the encouragement of his father, enrolled in the media program at "C" university with the hope of working in the media industry. He said he had a difficult time adjusting due to the language barrier and foreign environment. In an effort to practice Korean, he mingled with Christian friends and eventually converted, which helped improve his life in Korea.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, when Jang Somae (Case 8) received a rock-bottom score on her scholastic ability test, she hid at her aunt's house for a month. Since she didn't want to go to a community college or wait another year to re-apply to universities, she followed the advice of her aunt and chose to come to Korea. She enrolled in the language training program of "C" university and studied basic Korean for approximately a year and a half before transferring to a bachelor's program in a Korean-related field. Earning a second chance at a Korean university, she received a full university scholarship only given to international students with a GPA of over 4.2, in addition to a government scholarship given to students who were recommended for their academic excellence. She was adjusting well to her university life. Although most Chinese students complained that it was difficult to make Korean friends, her major of Korean-related studies gave her opportunities to do language exchanges with Korean students who studied Chinese and to make Korean friends. In the future, she wanted to teach Korean or work as a translator or interpreter. She asserted that foreigners in Korea could "easily achieve excellent results if they worked hard."

However, this confidence—and her hard work and effort—must be

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<sup>15</sup> Jo Hyeyeong (2007: 238-239) argued that religious activities or networks function as a mechanism that relieves the stress young Korean students feel in foreign countries and helps in preventing them from acting out. More research is needed on how religious conversion or related activities affect Chinese international students and their studies.

understood in the context of how the grades of international students were given; they were graded on a curve in accordance with the “C” university policy to prevent foreign students from dropping out due to low grades. While a few Chinese students stated that it was difficult to keep up with the classes due to the language barrier, many students acknowledged that their work was evaluated generously because they were foreigners. In fact, they complained less about school-related stress than their Korean counterparts. “C” university’s active recruitment of Chinese students and separated curved grade evaluation provided a welcomed opportunity to Chinese students who fell behind academically or failed to enter a Chinese university; with minimal financial support, they could easily enroll in a university and obtain a degree in Korea. The two stories just discussed above exemplified the case in which Chinese students took an easy alternative course of studying in Korea after failing to enter a university in China. The students in these two cases ended up adapting well to their studies and life in Korea. However, most of the Chinese students who came to Korea previously failed college entrance exams or attended low-ranking schools before transferring, and generally did not express much interest in academic studies, as one “C” university professor pointed out. Unlike the two students mentioned above, most of the Chinese students had difficulty adapting to their new environment.

These Chinese students also claimed they wanted to attend a better school in Seoul but chose “C” university because of their lack of financial support or because it was too difficult to get in to schools in Seoul. Although they gained an easy entrance to “C” university, they questioned whether their degree would be considered legitimate when they returned to China, since they knew the school ranked at the bottom in Korea, as well as in global university rankings.

The value of the degree... I heard that China doesn't acknowledge the degree we earn here [at “C” university]... There are a lot of people who are graduating from universities in China now... Korea is very close to China and it's relatively easy to get a visa to come here. So coming here isn't considered as valuable. I don't think our degree will be held in high esteem when we go back. (Jang Somae, Case 8)

To students at both “B” and “C” universities, coming to Korea was an alternate choice to studying in an English-speaking country. They were also aware of the fact that “C” university, a provincial one, was ranked lower

than “B” university, a prestigious school located in the capital of Korea. As a result, especially students at “C” university placed greater weight on the actual learning of the Korean language and the unique experience of living in a foreign culture, believing these skills would contribute more to their future employment and career than the degree itself.

Nonetheless, the easy admission to Korean universities sometimes became a conduit for people who came to Korea to earn money, rather than to study. At times, students who weren’t interested in studying obtained part-time jobs, which eventually became their primary focus, defeating the purpose of their education. Many research participants reported that they knew students who quit coming to class and gave up their studies in order to work.

It is so easy get a student visa. I’ve heard of people who run away to Korea to work....There are people who are from poor families, but there are also people who say, “I don’t want to study. I have no intention of studying. I am not interested in studying, but my parents sent me here, so I can’t return home.” They feel like they need to do something, so they find work. They are not really working to earn money but just to kill time. (Jang Somae, Case 8)

While there weren’t very many “B” university students who had part-time jobs even when they didn’t receive a scholarship, all of the “C” university students I interviewed have had at least one or two part-time jobs. They worked in places such as restaurants, coffee shops, factories, and billiard rooms while school was in session or when they were on breaks. Studying and working in a foreign country provided international students with an opportunity to learn about Korean culture, which could be seen as another aspect of learning (Cha Minyeong 2007). However, in the case of “C” university students, part-time work became a sort of a trend among Chinese students, which affected their schoolwork.

Bae Ran (Case 9) was adapting to her school life relatively well when she lost interest in school for a year after living in Korea for just 6 months. She relayed how she completely gave up her studies, focusing more on making and spending money.

I played hooky a lot. I went to different places and had fun. I started working part-time early on and learned how fun it was to spend money... I spent more than other Chinese people at the time... I asked myself why I was working so hard when I could live better this way. I told myself I could buy pretty clothes and eat expensive meals. I impulsively spent a lot of money

that way. I went to work as soon as class was over. If I was working at a restaurant, I often stayed until one or two in the morning. Since I was so tired, I couldn't get up in the morning and often missed class.

Baek Ran (Case 9)—whose parents were both professors—began working part-time not because she was financially struggling but because she found herself spending more money as her earning capacity increased, which led her to neglect her schoolwork. She became comfortable speaking Korean and even changed her lifestyle. Eventually she focused on school, working only as a Chinese tutor. However, she said there were still a significant number of students who spent their time working instead of studying just like she did in her earlier time in Korea, which tainted the reputation of Chinese students among “C” university professors and students. Baek Ran stated that although studying in Korea helped her grow, as it gave her the opportunity to experience a foreign culture and learn how to accept different ways of thinking, being alone also allowed young students who were away from their parents to stray and lead a self-indulgent life. In one of our conversations she remarked, “You can do anything you want [once you move to Korea]. It's good for people who are independent, but I didn't think it would necessarily be good for people who aren't. They could go astray. That part isn't good.”

Ju Munho (Case 13) reported that one of his student acquaintances only earned money while he was in Korea and returned to China without graduating. A “C” university professor pointed out that when students—who only wanted to earn money—learned enough Korean, they immediately began working and eventually extended their work time to weekends and nights, placing their schoolwork in the backburner. He confessed that it was realistically difficult to guide and manage these students.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article I examined how Chinese student migration to Korea and the motives of these students coincided with the globalizing strategy of Korean universities as well as the implications of global university rankings and the imbalanced flow of Asian students to Western countries. By comparing and analyzing two Korean universities—one that is highly esteemed, located in the capitol of the country and another lesser-known university

in a provincial region—I investigated how the ranks of these two universities affected the choices of the Chinese students reflecting their differing motives for receiving a higher education in Korea.

First, Korean universities actively sought to bring in more Chinese students under the guise of globalizing their schools. However, “B” and “C” private universities had other and different reasons for doing so, as their differing ranks in the Korean university ranking system demanded different needs. The prestigious “B” university largely increased the number of Chinese students in order to receive a better assessment on its index of globalization and to increase its competitiveness which, in turn, would increase its attractiveness to foreign applicants. On the other hand, “C” university, located in a provincial region, had been assertively recruiting Chinese students for some time to avert a managerial and financial crisis due to a lack of enrollees and continued to do so as globalization became increasingly popular. By appealing to the value of its brand, “B” university easily attracted Chinese students. In the case of “C” university, it established exchange agreements with several universities in China and provided a variety of scholarships to Chinese students in order to be attractive to them. Although these two universities were placed in different ranks in Korea, they were both placed precariously with other Korean universities in the middle or bottom of global university rankings.

To increase the number of Chinese students, both universities inevitably lowered the threshold for their admission. This strategy at both of these universities provided an opportunity for Chinese students of guaranteed admission to a Korean university without having to demonstrate academic excellence or language ability as long as they had some financial support, a stark contrast to the requirements of Western universities in English-speaking countries. Since a majority of the Chinese students who have enrolled in these universities have inadequate academic and language skills, a variety of problems related to their education and evaluation surfaced. During the period of research, “B” university experienced a big gap between the abilities of Korean and Chinese students, which caused difficulties in properly educating and evaluating Chinese students. It was even easier to enroll in “C” university, which ranked at the bottom of Korean universities. The school accepted students who failed college entrance exams in China, had attended a community college, or were disinterested in academic studies, which inadvertently created situations in which students abandoned their studies in order to work. Further, in order



to prevent the Chinese students from dropping out and to maintain the financial welfare of the university, faculty members at both institutions employed a “temporary” solution of grading their assignments and exams on a curve separately from the work of Korean students. And in the cases of both universities, rather than publicly discussing the education, evaluation, and management issues of international students, the universities placed these responsibilities solely on the shoulders of professors.

Second, I compared and analyzed the motives of the Chinese students who chose to come to Korea to study by examining their experiences and the significance they placed on their respective studies at “B” and “C” universities. As the education fervor of middle class families has increased, Chinese society has placed greater weight on the importance of one’s educational level. In this social climate, going to Korea has been seen as an opportunity to enroll in a Korean university to receive an easy academic degree. Moreover, heightened interest in the Korean language and Korea related subjects have been affected by the increasing popularity of the Korean Wave. This and students’ or their parents’ local Korean networks were some of the main reasons Chinese students chose to study in Korea. Particularly, Chinese students have hoped that their improved Korean speaking ability would become a valuable asset to their future employment or career.

Although the students at both universities shared interest in the Korean language, Korea related subjects, and acquiring a college degree, they had different motives for studying in Korea, as the ranks of these two universities differ greatly. Students I surveyed who attended “B” university felt pride in the value of the university brand and its global image, but only to a limited degree, since they were aware of the discrepancy between their own academic and language abilities and those of their Korean counterparts. In addition, they saw how Koreans discriminated against international students and were unable to freely interact with them. Chinese students thought of attending a Korean university—a school that ranked lower than Western universities of English-speaking countries—as an alternative choice to studying in a Western country and some considered their education in Korea as a stepping stone to their next global move.

The research revealed that Chinese students could enroll even more easily in “C” university—which ranked at the bottom both in global and Korean university rankings—since the institution actively and indiscriminately recruited international students as part of their strategy

for financial survival. Also, in order to prevent Chinese students from dropping out, professors graded them independently. This kind of environment provided Chinese students who failed their college entrance exams or who were attending low-ranking universities or community colleges in China with an alternative opportunity to obtain a degree at “C” university. However, they questioned the value of their degree from such a low-ranking university. So, rather than relying on their degree, they hoped that their Korean skills and experience in a foreign culture would help them in their future career path. Such an easy admission to this university also allowed students to use this system as a conduit to earn money in Korea.

Other studies of Chinese international students and their recent influx in Korea have largely focused on language barriers, cultural adaptation, interpersonal relationships, stress, and the management methods of these students. As of this study, not enough cultural-anthropological research has been conducted on the diverse effects of Chinese international students on Korean universities. This study is unique in that it examined the motives behind Chinese student migration to Korea and what studying in Korea meant to individual students in the context of institutional strategies for internationalization. I also investigated why the two universities recruited a large number of Chinese students in particular and how this played a role in their globalization strategies. I aimed to illuminate the problems of the enrollment, education, and evaluation of Chinese students and how these issues manifested differently in the two universities. By comparing these two universities, I also shed light on the internal diversity among Chinese students and how their differing experiences affected meanings of their study in Korea.

Nonetheless, this research was limited in a few ways. Since I mainly focused on comparing and analyzing the motives of the two Korean universities and the Chinese students who attended those schools, I wasn't able to examine the experiences of Chinese students in more depth. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a multilateral analysis of why Chinese students chose to study in Korea based on socio-cultural and economic realities of China. There is a need for more and varied types of research on Chinese international students and their experiences based on social class, ethnicity, gender, and the kind of degrees they are in the process of earning. By comparing the results of studies of Chinese students in Korea with studies of Chinese students who migrate to another country

after their studies in Korea, the outcomes of comparative educational ethnography would become clearer and further expand the discourse on the particularities of Chinese international students. Data collection for non-Chinese international students in Korea and a comparative analysis of the findings also remains a necessary task for future researchers.

Korean universities are brimming with the rallying cries of globalization, global competitiveness, and globalizing universities. However, Korean universities must reflect upon and remind themselves of the real meanings of globalization rather than simply increasing the number of international students to manipulate their globalization index. The authorities and faculty members of these universities must seriously consider and discuss publicly how they intend to guarantee the quality of education for international students, rather than simply lowering admission standards to increase their number and these institutions should further investigate methods to enhance multicultural learning and sensibility by facilitating the exchange between Korean and international students.

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