



Academic Adaption of Western Students Studying in Chinese Universities

Dr. Shuiyun Liu; Masaki Onuma; Thapanee Rithkerd

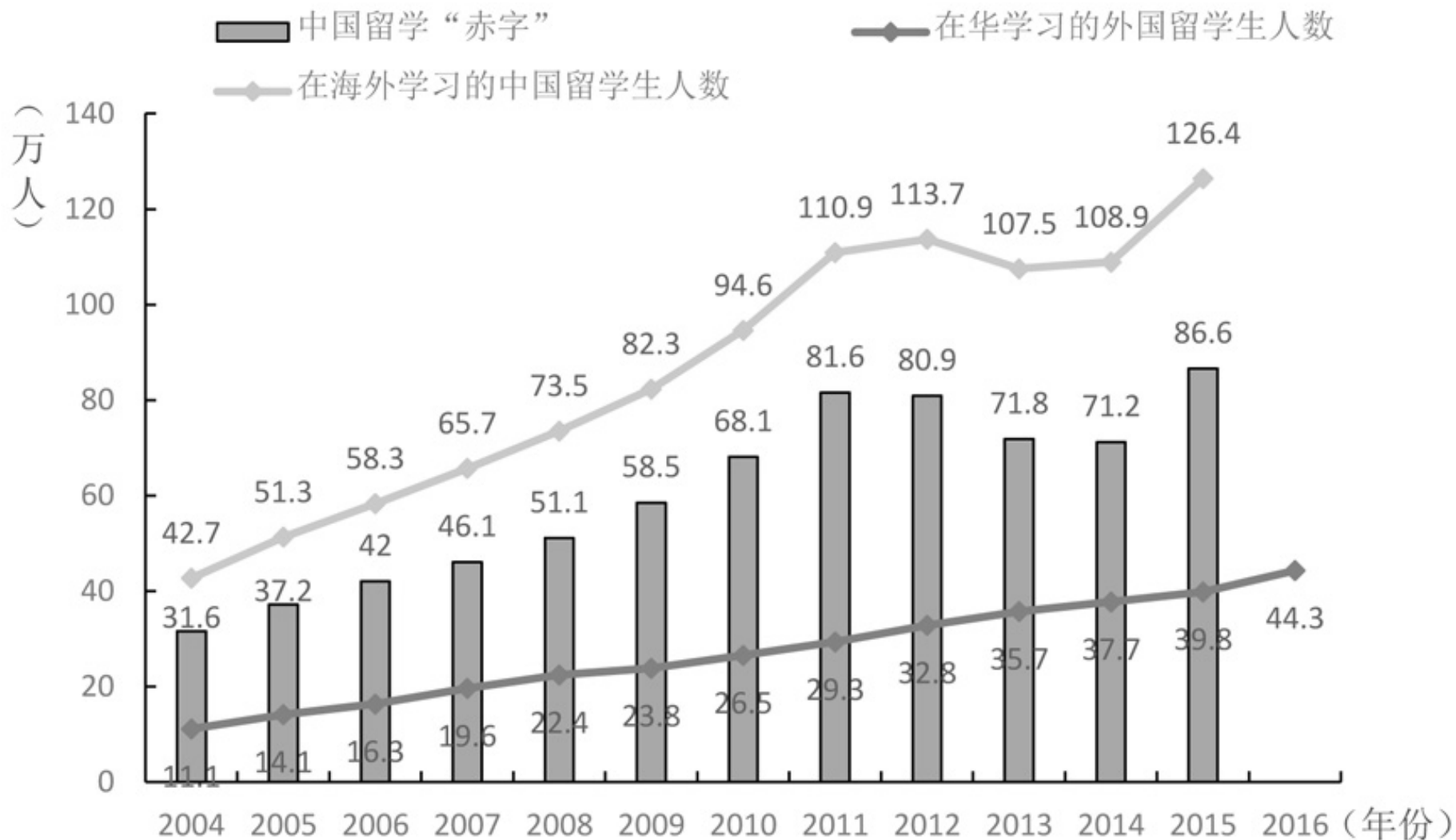
Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University



1. Research background:

- The increasing number of foreign students studying in China.
- The satisfaction of foreign students is not as high as expected (Ding, 2016; Liu, 2017).
- The experience of western students in China has not been fully discussed.

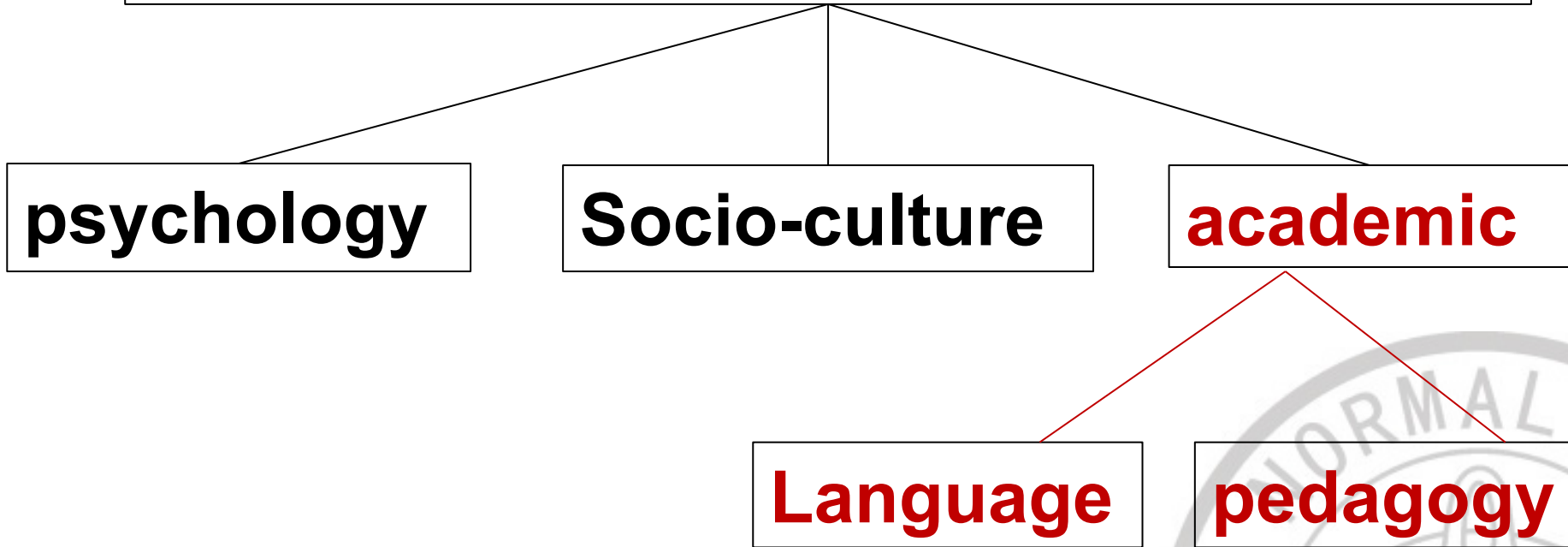
Research focus: the academic adaptation of western students in China



中国留学“赤字”变化情况（2004-2016年）



International students' adaptation

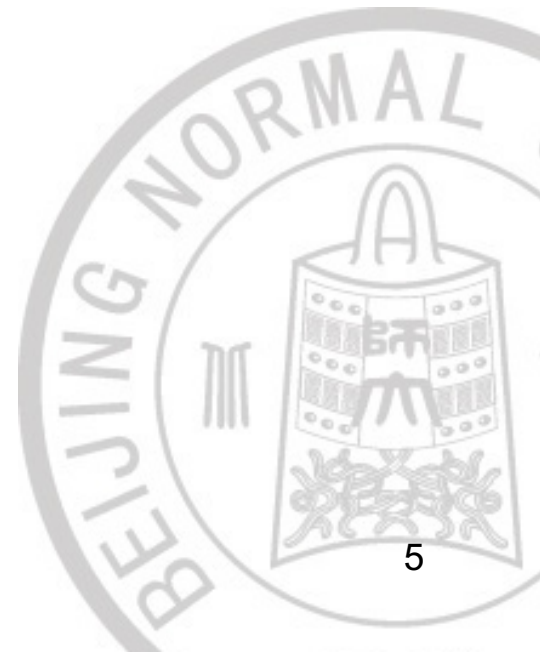


(Zhou and Todman, 2009)



2. Research questions

- What (academic) challenges have western students met in Chinese universities?
- How have they dealt with them? And why?

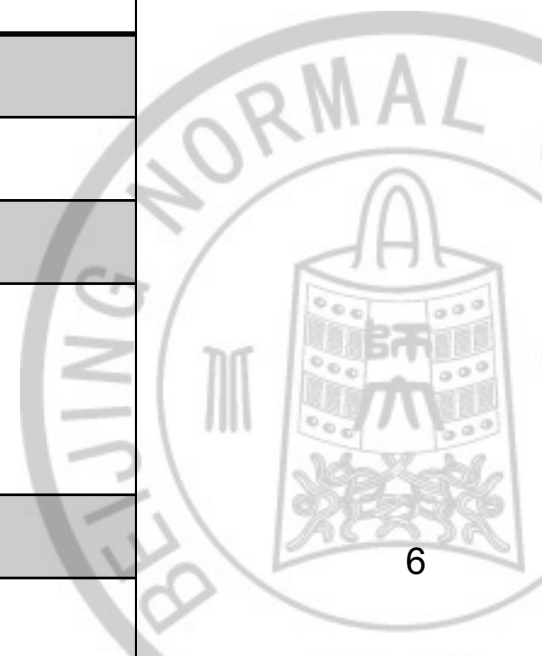




3. Research methods:

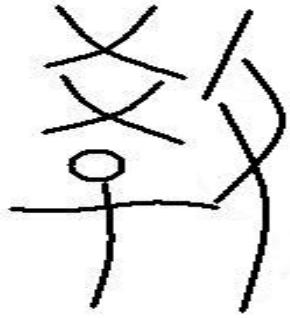
- In-depth interviews with foreign students in China
- 30 students from Western countries from both Chinese (8) and English programmes (22)

UK	5
US	5
Canada	3
Australia	4
West Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium, Spain)	9
East Europe (Serbia, Hungary)	4
Total	30

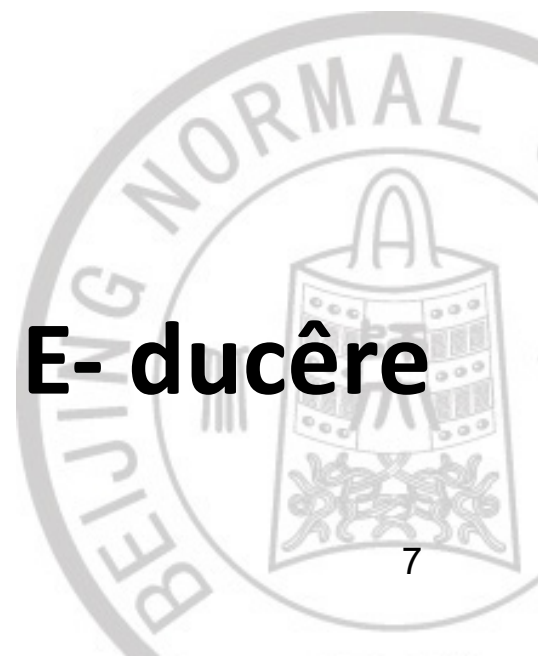




4. Differences of education between the West and the East (China)



上所施下所效也



E- ducêre



	USA	East Asia
Main purpose	Focus on individual Develop individual's full potential Transmitter of cultural heritage	Focus on loyal citizenry Develop literate citizenry Helps select future leaders Transmitter of past cultural heritage
Instruction mode	Learner centred Stresses understanding, application and ability Use of educational psychology Learner active	Teacher centred Stresses recall of facts Use of rote learning Examinations as motivator Learner passive
Curricular orientation	Present-future oriented Development of whole person Social interaction promoted	Past-present oriented Strict exams to develop academic knowledge Concepts first then skills

Chan (1999, p.301)



British academic expectations	Academic expectations held by Chinese and other groups
Individual orientation	Collective consciousness
Horizontal relations	Hierarchical relations
Active involvement	Passive participation
Verbal explicitness	Contextualised communication
Speaker/writer responsibility	Listener/reader responsibility
Independence of mind	Dependence on authority
Creativity, originality	Mastery, transmission
Discussion, argument, challenge	Agreement, harmony, face
Seeking alternatives	Single solution
Critical evaluation	Assumed acceptance

(Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p.78)



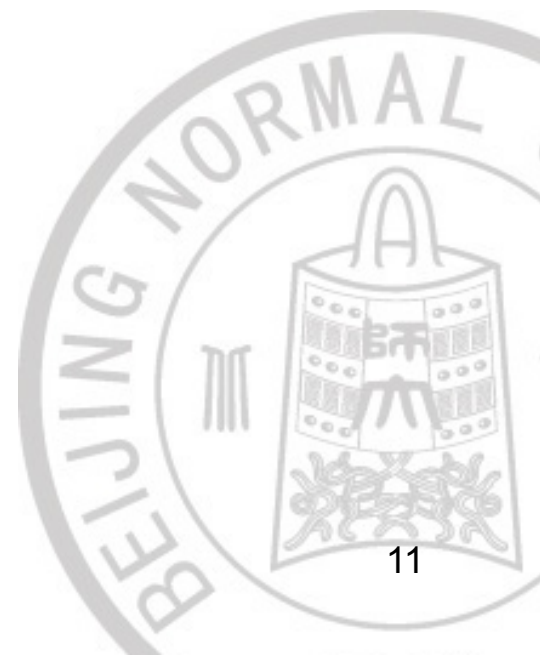
4. Differences of education between the West and the East (China)

- Knowledge transmission
- Dialectic teaching model
- Teachers talking; students listening
- Respect knowledge and teachers
- Teachers-students: hierarchical
- Teacher-centered
- Knowledge construction
- Dialogical teaching model
- Problem solving and critical thinking
- Students: independent learners
- Teachers-students: equal
- Student-centered

(Hammond and Gao 2002; Greenholz 2003; Holmes 2004¹⁰).



5. Research findings

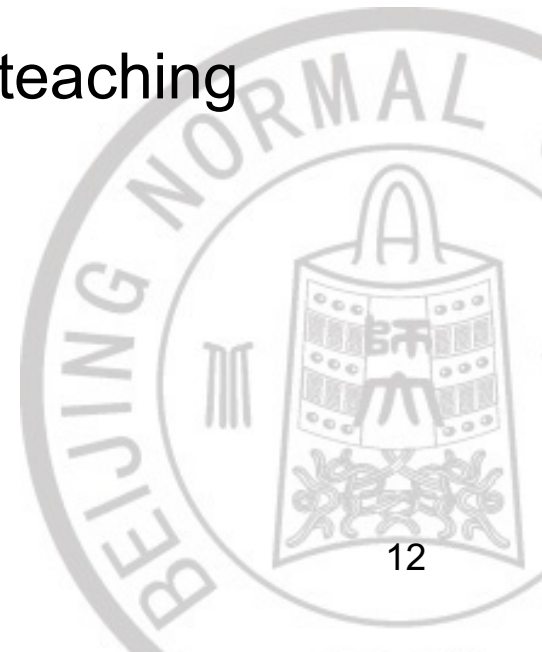




5.1 Course arrangement and course design:

➤ **Students' feedback:**

- Emphasizing knowledge transmission, and theories;
- Students' need and choice are disconsidered;
- The course arrangement and course design are unstructured, with much flexibility;
- Lacking bottom-line quality assurance and teaching quality of different courses is uneven;





➤ **Possible reasons:**

- Knowledge-based teaching and learning
- Teacher-center learning process, not student-centered
- Insufficient education resource, especially English programmes

➤ **Students' reactions:**

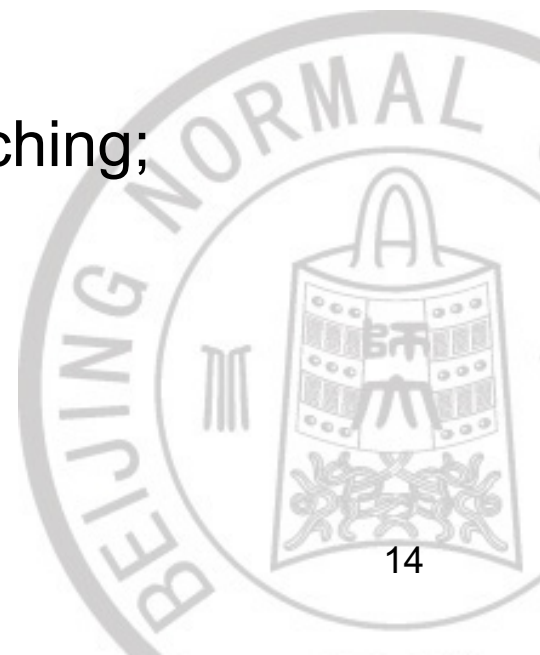
- Not what I chose, not what I need, not what I like;
- (Some) have to attend classes for degree; do what they want me to do;
- Very disappointed with the teaching quality and (some) be absent from classes;
- Try to understand the system but do not agree with;
- Disappointed, criticize, but no solutions.



5.2 teaching style

➤ Students' feedback:

- Teachers dominated the teaching-learning process, not much interaction between teachers and students;
- Chinese students are passive;
- There is discussion part, but different from that in the west;
- Hierarchical teacher-student relationship;
- Chinese teachers are less committed to teaching;





➤ **Possible reasons:**

- Knowledge-based and teacher-centered learning;
- Teacher-student relationship: hierarchical;
- Western way of teaching: adopted formally but not really absorbed;
- Different ideology of education and good teacher;

➤ **Students' reactions:**

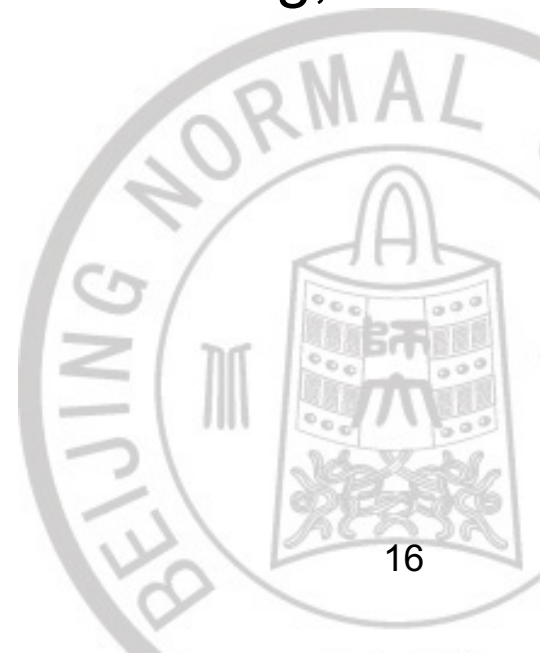
- Actively participate in classes when there are opportunities;
- Not agree with the teaching style, but have to attend classes, to get degree;
- Sit in classes, killing time; or do something interesting, or do homework.
- Self-comfort, with compensation (China, Beijing, scholarship)



5.3 Critical thinking

➤ **Students' feedback:**

- Not required, not encouraged;
- Asking questions is not appreciated by most local teachers;
- Chinese students have no training for critical thinking;



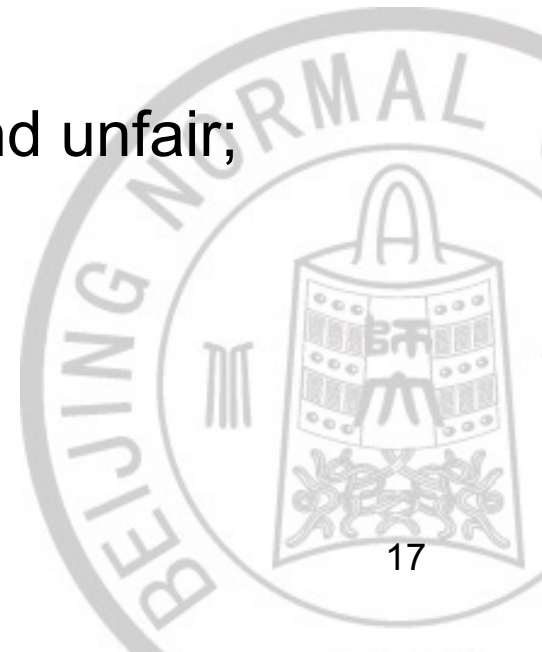


➤ **Possible reasons:**

- Ideology difference: knowledge is passively absorbed instead of co-constructed;
- Teacher-student relationship: hierarchical
- Culture: Mianzi, and political environment

➤ **Students' reactions:**

- Control themselves in class, feel painful and unfair;
- Try to understand the situation;
- Do not make efforts in writing assignment;





5.4 Student assessment

➤ **Students' feedback:**

- The evaluation process is quite flexible (no criteria, no feedback);
- Very generous for grades (feel not deserve), but not much distinction among students, not fair;
- No formative assessment, not beneficial for improvement;
- Teachers commitment problem;



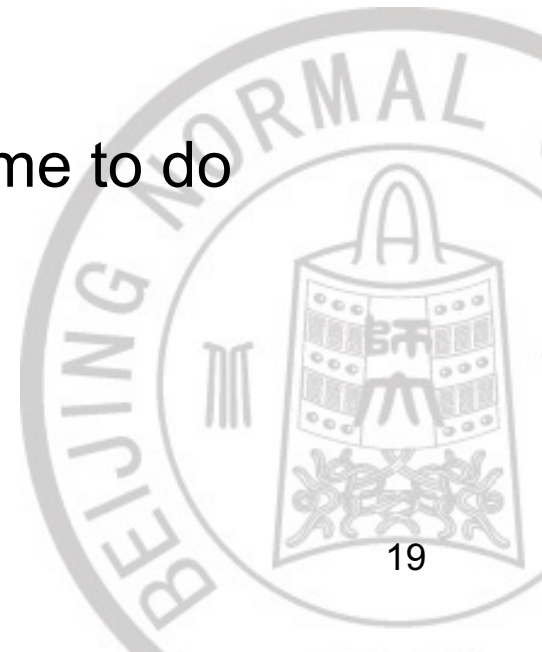


➤ **Possible reasons:**

- Lacking bottom-line quality assurance;
- Purpose: for judgment of teachers instead of student improvement (teacher-centered);
- Strict enrollment, loose graduation in Chinese universities;
- Teachers' commitment problem;

➤ **Students' reactions:**

- Make minimum efforts to pass, and use time to do something more important;
- Do not really care ;
- Try to understand the situation;

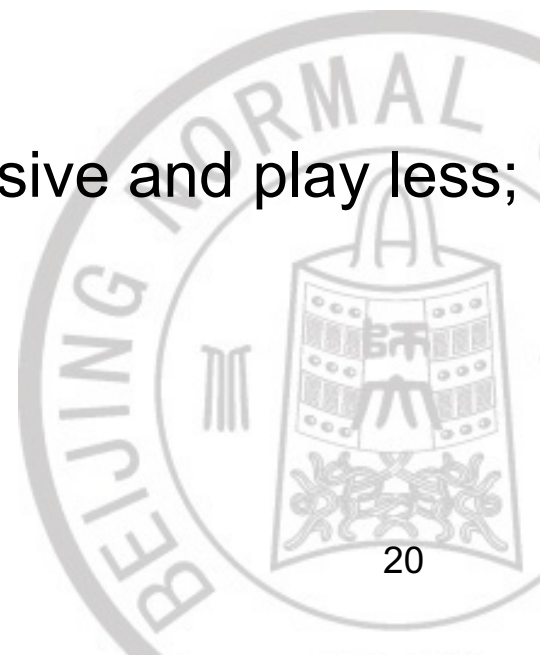




5.5 Relationship with supervisors/teachers

➤ **Students' feedback:**

- Quite different, either very good or very bad;
- Personal but not professional;
- People care about Guanxi, and make efforts to make good teacher-student relationship;
- Hierarchical relationship;
- Teachers' commitment problem: not responsive and play less;
- Like reading club organized by supervisors;





➤ **Possible reasons:**

- Lacking formal institutions for bottom-line quality assurance;
- Culture: Guanxi, hierarchical relationship, etc.

➤ **Students' reactions:**

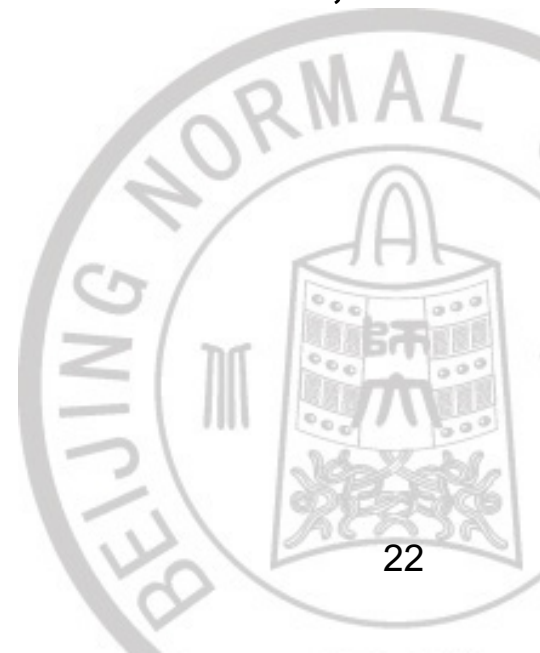
- Some of them like the personal relationship, and some of them feel not professional;
- Frustrated and feel helpless;
- Be independent; do what they need to do and ignore the other stuff;
- Have realized feedback is useless and everything is top-down here, and no action to change



5.6 Academic administration

➤ Students' feedback:

- Most frustrating part: policies are not clear, confusing, and keep changing;
- Very bureaucratic and less-trust based management;
- People are equal to policy: flexible but not professional;
- Language barrier;





➤ **Possible reasons:**

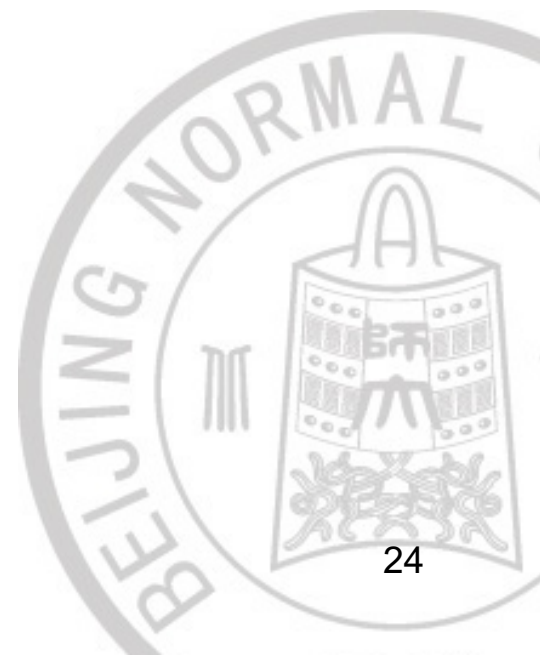
- Rely more on informal institutions;
- Cultural background: bureaucratic, less trust;
- Less internationalized

• **Students' reactions:**

- Very hard to follow the policies;
- Choose to rely on classmates and friends for information;
- Share with friends and try to release pressures by themselves;
- (Some) try to adapt to the new environment: when in Rome, do as the Romans do.



6. Discussion





6.1 Roots of the challenges for students

Chinese Universities' provision

Knowledge transmission

Teachers talking, students listening

Teacher's role: knowledge transferor

Students' role: passive learner

Teacher-students: hierarchical

Teacher-centered

Informal institutions

Less

Western students' expectation

Know construction

Discussion, argument, critical thinking

Facilitator

Independent learner (adult)

Teacher-student: equal

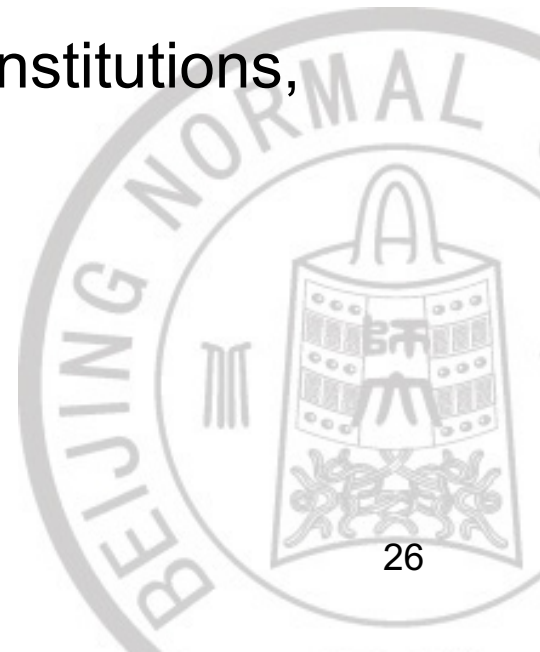
Student-centered

Formal institutions

More internationalized



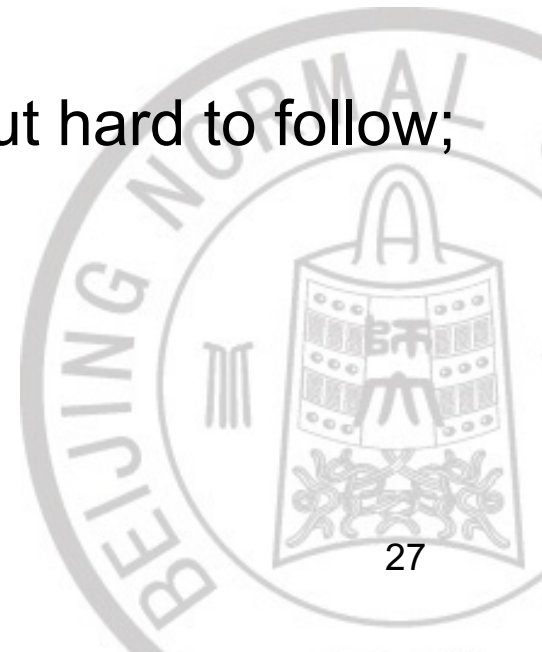
- Different norm of “good” education and “good” teacher;
- Western pedagogy in China: superficial borrowing;
- Lack of bottom-line quality assurances: rely more on the constrains of **informal institutions**;
- Commitment to teaching: big population, research, not fulltime or do not care students?
- Cultural factors: Mianzi, Guanxi, informal institutions, etc.





6.2 Students' reactions

- (Some) do not want to adapt and prefer the Western system;
- (Some) understand the situation but not agree with it;
- Not active: have to do it, for degree; can not change it, and have to accept it;
- Low commitment to learning;
- Self-comfort;
- Attitude to Chinese culture: feel attractive but hard to follow;





➤ Why?

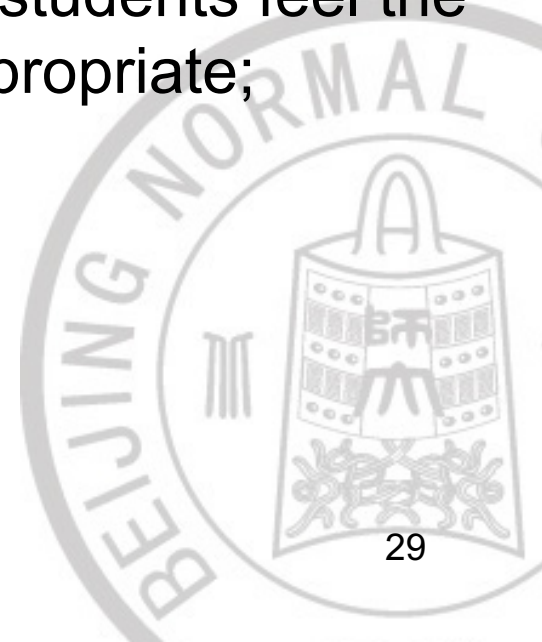
- Subjective motivation of students and objective condition
- **Student motivation:** whether students want to adapt;
- Objective condition: whether the new academic norms are accessible and easy to follow.





6.3 Students' motivation

- Theoretical framework: New institutionalisms
- Formal and informal institutions
- **Calculus approach:** whether international students perceive the new pedagogy as being “effective”;
- **Cultural approach:** whether international students feel the new learning approaches are culturally appropriate;
- **Combined action**





7. Conclusions

- The academic challenges of Western students in China
- The roots of these challenges
- Students' reactions and their motivation





Thank you for your attention!

Dr. Shuiyun Liu

Beijing Normal University, China

shuiyunliu@bnu.edu.cn

