

Off-campus Agglomeration of International Students in China: Challenges and Strategy Optimization in educational administration

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ABSTRACT : The models of managing students in China's universities are distinctively characterized by concentrating students within campus boundaries for education and life admin. However, a significant number of international students choose to live off-campus due to the discrepancy between their personal needs and expectations and the limited management resources available of universities. The emerging and expanding off-campus assemblages of international students pose challenges to Chinese educational administrators, including information barriers, overemphasis on academic than comprehensive education, and high education costs. Faced with the increasing number of international students and the emergence of off-campus agglomeration, Chinese administrators of international student should optimize strategies to form a synergistic governance structure with internal and external linkages and multi-stakeholder participation, while also leveraging the intrinsic motivation of international students in management.

Keywords - China, Educational administration, International students, Off-campus agglomeration

I. INTRODUCTION

With China's ever-developing economy, the scale of international students coming to China for education has been expanding. Particularly, the number of admissions of foreign students to higher education institutions has been increasing. In 2022, there were 253,177 international students pursuing education in various higher education institutions in China. In terms of educational administration, China has adopted a relatively strict student management system, which is determined by China's national conditions and educational model. China advocates a centralized education method, and it is the most prominent feature of Chinese universities to concentrate students, including international students, within campus boundaries for education and management. However, this management model makes international students reluctant to live on campus and choose to live off campus, which undoubtedly brings challenges to Chinese administrators. During the educational administration, it is undeniable that Chinese universities, under the ideology of converging management, are doing their best to create a good environment for international students. However, the discrepancy between the personal needs and expectations and the limited management resources of universities makes international students more eager to have an off-campus living space that assures them more freedom. In short, the contradiction between individualized needs and limited offerings from universities drives international students to the outside of the campus. When an apartment block begins to have international students and even foreign personnel assembling, the "Agglomeration Effect" will play a role and more international students in the university will gravitate to these residential complex, thus leading to the formation of off-campus agglomeration of international students.

International students in off-campus agglomerations are inclined to keep their native lifestyle habits and intend to establish a community that foster a sense of recognition and belonging. It is precisely because of

the preservation of the home country's living habits and the spiritual returning empowered by the construction of the community that it has become a norm for international students to live off-campus. However, this multicultural perspective makes the situation more complex to educate and administrate international students in China in terms of the working methods, channels, and fields. Meanwhile, international students also encounter more difficulties in adapting to the local community, which has exerted a negative impact on the educational administration for international students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two tendencies in international research on international communities. One tendency of study delves into the origin of the formation of international communities. Linda Basch (1994), Nina Glick Schiller (1995), and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1999) focused on Latin immigrants, proposing the concepts of transnationalism and transnational immigrants, and describing the social experiences of immigrants across countries. Subsequently, some scholars brought different societies into a field, and came up with three dimensions in this approach, namely Transnational Field and Social space and Transnational Community (Nina Glick Schiller, 1995; Thomas Faist, 2000). Schiller NG, Fournon (1998) talked about ethnic agglomeration under the influence of globalization from the perspective of urban social space, making the study of new "bottom-up" transnational ethnic agglomeration a focus.

Another tendency of study is based on the connection between the community and the governance. Tönnies (1887) came up with the dichotomy between community and society in the book "Community and Society", and he refers the concept of community to merely a traditional rural area, while society is the result of modernization. Anderson (2005) in the book "Imagined Communities" believes that differentiation can aggregate communities at a certain distance, and he believes that the impression of communication between community members can exist in consciousness, and this gives the possibility of the formation of national communities. Fox (2000) emphasized new models of resident participation in community governance in his research and called for gradually weakening the government's dominance in community governance.

The off-campus agglomeration for international students in China refers to the international community where international students in China are relatively densely populated around Chinese universities, including Chinese residents and some foreigners who are not students. Therefore, research on off-campus agglomeration for international students in China also needs to take into account the superordinate concept, the study of foreign communities in China. Chinese scholars have conducted research in this field, mainly focusing on two aspects.

The first aspect is the case studies conducted from the perspective of typical communities. Li Huiling (2008) took the "International Community" in Yiwu as an example to explore the cross-cultural interaction and identity of the community. Zhao Yun (2013) took the international student agglomeration in Wudaokou, Haidian District, Beijing as an example to analyze the management model of the foreign student community. Xiong Wei (2014) took three districts and three subdistricts in Guangzhou as survey points to study the innovation of foreign population services and management in Guangzhou. Zheng Jianghua (2013) conducted a study on the construction of the international student community system management outside Tianjin University of Technology and Education. Li Junliang (2018) took the "Bao Han Community" in Dengfeng Street, Guangzhou as an example to explore the governance path of urban agglomeration communities with diverse mobile populations. Zhou Min (2022) took the Tongzilin International Community in Chengdu as an example to explore the predicament and countermeasures of international community governance from the perspective of social embeddedness.

The second aspect is the theoretical studies conducted to enhance the level of management and services. There are four major governance dilemmas in international communities: policy systems, social relations, social structures, and cognitive concepts (Zhou Min, 2022). Managing off-campus agglomerations for international students in China is not only faced with the above difficulties but also faced with the multiple governance subjects, including universities and communities. The main work of student management, which is mainly based on universities, has gradually changed to the joint management of relevant departments such as police, universities, and communities (Zhao Yun, 2013). Besides, according to the characteristics of educational administration for the international student group, the optimization path of the off-campus agglomeration for international students mainly focuses on three aspects: demand orientation, multi-subject governance, and

governance innovation under the information technology network (Lu Wenli, 2021). In this process, in addition to giving full play to the strength of colleges and grassroots multi-sector forces, it is also necessary to enhance the willingness and effectiveness of foreign residents to participate in the community, and to implement "resident management" and "professionalized governance" (Zhao Jujun, 2020).

III. METHODOLOGY

The field objects of this study were selected as Jinhua City Qianjian Community, Gao Village, Luoia Tang Community; Yiwu City Jimingshan Community; Hangzhou City Laodong Road Community, Qinghefang Community; Shanghai City Anbei international Community, Liangyang international Community, Xinjiangwan Community, and Tangzhen International Community. The ten communities all have a certain proportion of international students living there, and are located near Chinese universities, making them typical international student residential areas. The three major international student residential areas in Jinhua City are all located near Zhejiang Normal University, where African and Southeast Asian international students reside. The Jimingshan Community in Yiwu City is located near Yiwu Vocational and Technical College and other several universities, with Middle East and Africa international students being the majority. The Laodong Road Community and Qinghefang Community in Hangzhou City are located near the Hangzhou City University, where many international students from East Asia and Europe reside. The Anbei international Community, Liangyang international Community, Xinjiangwan Community, and Tangzhen International Community in Shanghai are located near East China Normal University, Donghua University, and other universities, with European international students residing there.

Meanwhile, the research is based on field interviews and observations. In order to better understand the living status and adaptation of international students in off-campus agglomeration, fieldworks were carried out in the form of community-based field observation and qualitative interviews. The subjects of the field study included international students in the three communities and their "six-party collaboration mechanism" related administrators - Zhejiang Normal University, Xinshi Police Station, Xinshi Street Office, neighborhood committee (including Qianjian Community Foreign Personnel Service Center), landlords, and volunteers. The interviews with administrators from Zhejiang Normal University and neighborhood committee members occurred in their offices while Xinshi Police Station personnel were invited to the universities for interviews. The study on landlords, volunteers, and international students were carried out through field observation and interviews. Based on first-hand field materials, were the reflections and explorations on the educational administration of international students in off-campus agglomeration put forward.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The off-campus agglomeration of international students in China brings about the time and space expansion of the educational administration and the increase of the education administration party. When international students choose to live off-campus due to the need to construct their own social space, a "wall" is formed with the school as the boundary. This "wall" is not only the campus wall, but more specifically, it actually forms a "wall" for ideological and political education, which invisibly extends the time and space of the educational administration from "inside the wall" to "outside the wall", and the authority of educational administration has also changed from the sole university to multiple parties, including community, street office, police, foreign affairs bureau and other grassroots social governance units.

1. Information Barriers Between Educational Administration Parties

The emergence of off-campus agglomeration for international students has promoted universities and grassroots governors to become the main bodies of educational administration for international students. However, the off-campus agglomeration have made the information transmission between various bodies not closely connected. The time and spatial expansion has impaired the effectiveness of educational administration, because this invisible "wall" makes the educational administration beyond reach of university workers, and grassroots administrators often appear to be absent. The information grasped by all parties inside and outside the school is limited to their position, reflected in that college educators are not clear about the real-time activities and dynamics of international students in off-campus agglomeration, which greatly weakens the original

absolute educational administration discourse power, while grassroots administrators also cannot grasp the situation and all-round information of international students in universities. At present, the construction of a digital management system for international students in China has not yet achieved a broad effect, and the management systems between various administrative departments are not interconnected. This has led to the emergence of "information islands" due to the obstruction of channels for the exchange of information and data.

"We were all minding our own business. The university was in charge of enrollment, and we were in charge of handling cases, and foreign affairs and other departments were in charge of visas and entry and exit. When there was an emergency, we didn't know who to find for their information." (a public security person in charge of the off-campus agglomeration of international students at a certain university)

"The students are outside, and we cannot reach out. We do not know what they are doing outside, all of which makes our educational administration very passive." (a counselor for international students at a certain university)

The "information island" in higher education will result in the waste of resources and cannot achieve real data sharing, but the interactive relationship and sharing process are the necessary path for the construction of the "big education system" in higher education. The information barrier induced by the "separation of people and universities" of international students living off-campus has led to a tricky situation where universities are difficult to manage, landlords dare not manage, streets do not manage, and public security cannot manage so much people. This educational administration "wall" not only blocks the connection between colleges and agglomeration but also blocks the interconnection between educational administrators, resulting in a resource sharing gap and information barriers, forming an "information island" inside and outside the "wall", causing educational administration to be fragmented and stratified, showing a non-continuous, non-systematic situation, and there is also no formation of a joint education force among all units inside the educational administration subject.

2. Drawbacks of the Vertical and Unidirectional Management

Although the power hierarchy of grassroots governance in China are gradually weakening, the vertical management is still prominent, coupled with the long-term unidirectional mode in the educational administration of international students in China, which emphasizes more on the top-down model in the educational administration of international students in off-campus agglomeration. In the traditional vertical unidirectional educational administration network of international students in off-campus agglomeration, each network node participates with the message-relaying work style and a passive attitude towards work, indicating that the "hard" system is sound but the "soft" management is insufficient. The higher-level government and its administrative departments issue policies, and the main bodies of educational administration for international students such as universities, landlords, neighborhood committees, and police stations begin to implement. In this process, the interaction with international students emphasizes the authority to the lower level and the responsibility to the upper level, so it is difficult to establish a smooth trust relationship for educational administrative work, which is also the key difficulty of vertical unidirectional educational administrative work. In this context, international students are also given the only role of the object of education and management, which makes it impossible for international students to have the possibility of self-education and self-management, even if the emergence of international student volunteers has challenged this role setting.

International student volunteers are mostly engaged in assisting the implementation of policies, and their spontaneous actions are also limited to helping international students find housing and other basic living issues. (Person in charge of volunteer organizations for international students in off-campus agglomeration)

The short board of insufficient cross-cultural communication ability and rigid educational administration of workers in agglomeration also makes the vertical unidirectional work model the most convenient choice. Landlords, community committee members, and police officers in the agglomeration often lose their willingness to communicate due to poor language communication, and college student counselors and international office staff often appear to be unable to cope with the management of both Chinese and international students. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, the educational administration of international students who live off-campus had always been in a shallow level, and the most important educational administration effect seemed to be "not making trouble". The outbreak of COVID-19 has made educational administrators inside and outside the school begin to pay attention to international students living in off-campus agglomeration, and the care for living materials, epidemic prevention materials, and mobility in the agglomeration has marked that the university, communities, and other parties' educational administration bodies had achieved a new breakthrough in the educational administration of international students living off-campus. However, this is just to promote the passive "entry" of education administration parties into the study and life of international students in agglomerations, when the interaction is still stuck in the situation of "teaching without nurturing". This situation is reflected in the implementation of epidemic prevention measures and a slightly better interaction than before, but it has not formed a deep-level educational administration ecology and system with rich connotation. Although international students in off-campus agglomeration live in Chinese society, they still maintain the minimum survival interaction with the local society and continue to reproduce the personal space and ethnic space of the mother country.

3. "Mutual Rejection" Increases the Cost of Educational Administration

In addition to considering from an objective perspective, the subjective state of educational administrators and international students is also an important factor that must be paid attention to when handling the challenges in the educational administration. The educational administration for international students in China is lagging behind in exploration, and the subjective "rejection" of educational subjects facing complex educational objects makes it impossible to generate interactions in off-campus agglomeration. First of all, Chinese students remain the majority of clients for the main body, primarily university counselors and relevant administrative personnel, who are responsible for the educational administration work of international students, and the work philosophy, ideas, and modes of the main body are all adapted to serve Chinese students. In addition, the college workers often appear to be out of proportion with students and have to take on additional administrative work, leading to insufficient work strength, depth, and breadth in educating international students in off-campus agglomeration. Besides, the stereotypes and alienation of Chinese residents towards foreign cultures are also hindering the effectiveness of educational administration for international students in off-campus agglomeration. The sense of rejection from Chinese residents in the agglomeration has always been a barrier between international students and Chinese society, and "mess", "noise", "not paying on time" has become the common impression of Chinese residents towards international students. This emphasis on "they are different" and "special treatment" makes "foreigners" and "Chinese landlords", "Chinese police", "Chinese people" become their own pronoun and the only stereotype of each other. At the same time, international students in off-campus agglomeration are also highly vigilant about the "intervention" of personal space and are somewhat dissatisfied with grassroots administrators. There is a situation where international students do not understand and adapt to the educational administration system of Chinese colleges and the grassroots governance system in China, thus regarding it as differential treatment, or even discrimination. However, it is not that international students have resisted integrating into Chinese society from the beginning, but after being subjected to cultural differences, language barriers, and some discriminatory behaviors, they choose to avoid it due to the high cost of cross-cultural adaptation, making international students who were originally eager for Chinese society and wanted to better integrate into Chinese society retreat. After adapting to the life separated from Chinese society, international students generally have a "passerby" mentality in the agglomeration and feel that there is no need to have a relationship with Chinese society outside the school. Additionally, the discrepancy between international students' high expectations for the accommodation in Chinese universities and their being unable to understand the scarcity of educational resources under the background of massification

of higher education in China, coupled with high expectations for the openness of Chinese society, has caused international students to stick to their own living habits in the agglomeration.

V. Implications and Conclusion

Faced with international students in China, especially those living in off-campus agglomeration, Chinese educators should solve from the root the educational administrative difficulties of whom in charge and how to manage those international students.

1.Strategies for the Educational Administration of International Students Living in Off-Campus Agglomeration in China

The most direct and core objective of the educational administration for off-campus international students by Chinese educational circle and grassroots governance organizations is to enhance their satisfaction with China and cultivate their knowledge of and friendship with China. For international students living in off-campus communities, the integration and collision in cross-cultural communication can easily lead to misunderstandings and gaps, affecting their satisfaction with China and, in turn, influencing whether they can become a group that knows and befriends China. If the educational efforts are absent or ineffective during the administration for international students living in off-campus communities, it could lead to the loss of this group who may know and befriend China, or even push them to the opposite side, affecting China's international image. At the same time, cultivating the knowledge about China and friendship with China among international students requires enhancing their satisfaction with China, but it does not mean treat them like "super nationals." Instead, it involves improving the level of convergent management for international students living in off-campus communities. The convergence is based on the actual conditions of China's national and educational contexts, taking into account the special characteristics of international students, providing diverse and high-quality educational management services, rather than pursuing uniformity in the educational management of Chinese and international students. In the process of educational administration, it is essential, among international students, to promote the identification with Chinese education, Chinese systems, and Chinese culture, as well as their harmonious coexistence with Chinese universities, society, and other Chinese residents.

According to Karl Marx, the full development of the human being is "the appropriation by the human being of his full nature in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a complete human being". The comprehensive development of a person is manifested in the development of human activities and capabilities, as well as the development of social relations, ultimately becoming a unity of natural, social, and spiritual factors. The educational administration for international students living in off-campus communities must adhere to the direction of promoting the comprehensive development of students, exercising their cross-cultural communication skills, cultivating their diverse knowledge, fostering their innovative spirit and practical abilities, and constructing a comprehensive system for their growth and fulfillment of social responsibilities. By promoting international students to receive education of socialism with Chinese characteristics and understand Chinese culture, history, and systems, as well as to interact positively with Chinese social development, they can clarify the mission of humanity and their own mission, fully exert their initiative and subjectivity, and achieve "the liberation of human beings" and "free development."

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind is an ideological innovation of the Chinese government and an important goal of China in conducting education for international students is to promote the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. Chinese university workers have always believed that international students, as one of the most important groups of global citizens, are the largest and most favorable group for promoting the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. Their recognition of this concept is a key link in its global rooting. For the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind to realize its value proposition for building a peaceful, stable, and ever-developing world, it is essential to seize the important force of this young group of international students.

2.Optimization of Strategies for the Educational Administration of International Students Living in Off-Campus Communities in China

The educational administration of international students in off-campus communities in China must first establish an inheritable system where multiple forces can converge, extending the reach of both on-campus and off-campus workers, forming parallel governance by linearly connecting multiple working entities, greatly diluting the power hierarchy of traditional Chinese grassroots governance, transforming the previous uni- or bi-directional work patterns and superficial business interactions between on- and off-campus parties. In response

to diverse subjects, it is necessary to promote and continuously implement multi-party interconnectivity involving universities, public security bureaus, community committees, landlords, volunteers, judicial bureaus, foreign affairs offices, petition bureaus, and youth committees. It is essential to break the "information islands", and transform the top-down unidirectional dissemination of educational administration information and resources into a shared resource for multiple entities, thus constructing a "community of educational administration in residential areas" with multiple entities participating in co-governance, co-management, and co-service. It will greatly eliminate the information asymmetry caused by the top-down vertical educational administrative work model, forming a synergistic structure with internal and external linkages and multi-entity governance. Meanwhile, the advancement of digitization and the stimulation of entity participation (to be elaborated later) are two crucial links and key steps in the formation of this structure, which should be advanced with strategic and systemic thinking to promote the construction of a collaborative structure with digital reform as the core.

On the one hand, the formation of a "dual circulation" pattern is both the foundation and prerequisite for the establishment of a subject-coordinated structure, as well as the anticipated outcome of such a structure's establishment. Firstly, on the residential area level, promoting the "internal circulation" should explore the support for the construction of internal self-organization and educational administration networks within the residential area, creating an inclusive social trust and open social network. Supports should be given to the construction of residential area dispute mediation centers, overseas personnel service centers, and community cross-cultural activity organizations, promoting the bottom-up development of residential area governance, forming a self-support system of the residential area that can be "independent" and "self-reliant," as well as mechanisms for obtaining resources and expressing interests. Second, promoting the "external circulation" requires to form a governance synergy between the educational and service providers for international students on and off-campus, to establish a multi-party information sharing repository involving universities, police, and communities, to dismantle the "wall" of collaborative governance between on- and off-campus parties, to establish a long-term monthly analysis system for the governance of African student residential areas, to focus on combining online and offline governance services, and to transform a unidirectional information output into an interactive information exchange.

On the other hand, the optimization requires to take the initiative of international students in educational administration participation, leverage the peer governance advantages of international students, and expand the scale of the international student volunteer team; it is of equal importance to establish channels to introduce international students into residential committees and other related organizations, achieving structural coverage of the residential area's absorption of international students, and supporting the construction of resource support networks for the survival and cross-cultural adaptation and integration in agglomerations. All parties, inside and outside the university, should in collaboration focus on conducting cross-cultural psychological counseling for international students and providing them with employment guidance. A points system for volunteer services in residential areas should be established to achieve quantitative rewards and service centers for overseas personnel according to actual conditions should be set up, to achieve a harmonious situation where grassroots services have a venue, demands have a platform for expression, needs are self-supplied, and conflicts are not escalated.

What's more, it is crucial to achieve deep influence throughout the entire process, extend the "dialogue" domain with international students, and participate in the "informal social networks" established by these students. Attention should be paid to the construction of new media and other important areas of the network, strengthening the reshaping of cross-cultural communication symbols in ways that international students enjoy, and establishing a full media matrix for residential area governance, actively setting network agendas, to occupy the network high ground that is beneficial for the integration in agglomerations, students' identification with Chinese culture, and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. Also, reforms like constructing the "smart governance" platform should be fostered, to deeply promote the "one-stop administrative service" and even "zero-stop administrative service" for international students.

In the context of globalization, real space and media space are complexly intertwined. Therefore, whether there is direct and face-to-face contact with international students has become an important factor in determining the effectiveness of response. Immigrant residential areas should not be seen as isolated "enclaves," nor should they be regarded by the host country's community as a group to be "assimilated," but should be seen as a "linguistic, cultural, and economic bridge" between their country of origin and the host country. Cultures should be utilized to educate people and a connotative culture should be built in agglomerations with a variety of cultural activities carried out. Both the university and community have jointly organized traditional Chinese cultural festivals and other cross-cultural exchange activities, providing opportunities for exchanges and

integration between international students and Chinese residents, and the opportunities for international students to understand the natural and cultural aspects of the residential area, and deepening the "Home+" model, which is supposed to incorporate the advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics, excellent traditional Chinese culture, Chinese concepts, and Chinese stories, and strengthen the education of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper centers on the management of international students in China. It delineates a distinctive administrative approach characterized by two dimensions: firstly, the provision of centralized on-campus accommodation with unified management for domestic students, and secondly, the adoption of a flexible rather than mandatory policy framework for international students' residency, thereby respecting their lifestyle preferences. However, as international students tend to establish community-based belonging spaces within off-campus residential clusters, this tendency presents an opportunity for university administration departments to develop standardized support services. The study particularly addresses the institutional responsibility to transcend campus boundaries when assisting international students confronting loneliness and helplessness in cross-cultural adaptation, while simultaneously exploring solutions to their occasional wariness and resistance towards assistance providers.

While the sample selection in this study is justifiable given Zhejiang Normal University's substantial international student population and proactive service provisions, the sample size remains limited in scope. This limitation underscores the necessity for subsequent research to examine management models across diverse institutions, which would facilitate the construction of a more comprehensive understanding of international students' lived experiences in China. Such expanded academic inquiry could yield multidimensional insights into the optimization of international student support systems within Chinese higher education.

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