Chapter 1

Asian International Graduate Students’ Academic and Social Experiences in American Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The authors identify and discuss current issues and concerns of Asian international graduate students about their academic and social experiences in American higher education. International graduate students from countries outside of the U.S. are an important constituency for research institutions in America due to the added cultural richness they bring to the academy. However, many Asian international graduate students in U.S. encounter difficulty when attempting to acculturate and may have difficulty adjusting to their environment. This chapter includes discourse on academic and social challenges, time management difficulties, dueling agendas, and socioeconomic struggles. Important also, this chapter offers recommendations for Asian international students on American college and university campuses. Lastly to better support Asian international doctoral students, this chapter encourages academic departments, administrators, faculty, and all graduate students to learn to view themselves as playing various roles as academic advisors, teachers, and graduate students.

INTRODUCTION

International students are an increasingly important vibrant source of diversity on college and university campuses in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007). They contribute new perspectives to discussion and enhance student and faculty awareness and appreciation for other national origins and cultures (Bevis, 2002). Students from Asian countries such as India, China, and South Korea comprised approximately

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50% of all international students enrolled in American colleges and universities (Institute for International Education [IIE] Network, 2014). More specifically, in the 2013–2014 academic year there were 886,052 international students from Asian countries where English is not one of the official languages (IIE Network, 2014). This indicates the increase presence of international students from Asia countries on American campuses. Asian international students compose more than 10% of enrollments at Institution of Higher Education (IHE) in the U.S. and they are primarily enrolled at research IHEs (IIE Network, 2011). International graduate students from countries outside of the U.S. are an important constituency for research IHE in America due to the added cultural richness they bring to the academy (Tan, 1994).

Globalization has changed the way the world works, and employers and companies increasingly seek potential graduates who have international skills and expertise. The term globalization is defined as the practice of growing societal interaction and connectivity among people around the world, creating economic, social, cultural, political, environmental, scientific and technological interdependence (Levin, 2001; Marginson, 2007). Studying abroad must be viewed as an essential component of a college degree and critical to preparing future leaders. There is a growing segment of the educational tourism market that consists of graduate students who study at an overseas university for a few years (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008).

In recent years, there has been an increasing influx of students, often supported by their native countries’ governments, from China, Japan, South Korea, and many other Asian countries into IHEs in America. For example, The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) (2009) announced that the Japanese government would increase the number of Japanese students studying abroad to 300,000 by 2020. In kind, some Japanese universities have promoted graduate study abroad programs strategically, under the authority of internationalization by the Japanese government (Paige, 2005). Many of these students selected American colleges and universities for their academic sojourn; that is, study abroad. American colleges and universities acknowledge growing financial dependence on international student enrollment, which accounts for urgent tones of competitiveness emanating from these institutions and their governments (Dirlik, 2012).

Some information mentioned in this chapter also appear in the previous works of the authors (see, Sato, 2007; Sato & Hodge, 2009; 2013; 2015)

Cultural Values and Communication Styles between America and Asia

The term “graduate student” is defined as student gains qualities, skills, and knowledge and demonstrate abilities beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable in a wide range of contexts and professions (Bowden & Marton, 1998). Many Asian international graduate students at IHEs in U.S. encounter difficulty when attempting to acculturate and may have difficulty adjusting to their environment (Sato & Hodge, 2009; Uba, 1994). They come from cultures that have different values from highly individualistic societies as in the U.S. Further, they may experience conflict when compromising their traditional roles versus a new cultural norm (Sam & Eide, 1991). For example, Gudykunst et al. (1996) explain that Asian values show positive interpersonal sensitivity and use of indirect message that translate “guessing what someone means”. In contrast, American students’ value inferring meaning, being open, being precise that emphasize tasks over the relationships (e.g., precise communication, academic achievement, and avoidance of inaccurate information from others). Therefore, when an individual’s environment is not matched with her or his culturally-influenced positioning, there are cultural and social differences (Sam & Eide, 1997). Nonetheless, they rarely express concerns about emotional and
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