

A SURVEY OF THE INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF NIGERIANS IN CHINA

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Abstract

In the current wave of globalization, China has witnessed rapid economic growth and rising international status. A lot of people from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities come to live, work and study in China. Nigerians also make up a large proportion of these troops coming to China and while in China, they often encounter various difficulties, most of which are due to lack of adequate preparation on their part before coming to China, language barriers, communication difficulties and discrimination faced after coming to China. In view of these difficulties in adapting in China by Nigerians, the case study and interview methods were used to obtain information on the cross-cultural adaptation of Nigerians in China, and after data analysis was done, the cultural adaptation challenges by Nigerians in China were identified and suggestions were provided on coping with these challenges.

Keywords: Nigerians, China, Intercultural Adaptation.

Introduction

With the progression of economic globalization in the 21st century, academic exchanges as well as technological cooperation between countries and regions have become more frequent. China has made remarkable achievements in various fields since her reform and opening up, and her international status has continuously improved, attracting more and more foreigners to work and study in China.

In 1950, the People's Republic of China, PRC welcomed its first group of international students – all 33 of whom came from the then-Eastern Europe (Yu, 2010). Since the early 1960s, when the first cohort of African students arrived in China (Sullivan, 1994) under the auspice of the Ministry of Education, which offered full scholarships to citizens of developing nations, there have been tensions in the relations between some African students and some of their Chinese counterparts. Despite the occasional tensions in the relationship between Africans and the Chinese, China has continually made efforts to strengthen her relationship with the African continent. China has approved research funding for Africans to do research in China, as well as set up Confucius Institutes and Chinese cultural centers across African countries.

According to statistics, the number of inbound tourists to China in 2019 was nearly 155 million, a clear increase from 141.2 million in 2018. According to statistics from

the Ministry of Education, China, a total of 490,000 foreign students studied in Chinese universities in 2018, and the growth rate has exceeded 10% for two consecutive years.

These international students come from 204 countries and regions. The top ten countries of origin are Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and some African countries. It can be seen that among the foreigners in China, Africans account for a great percentage. China has a history of good relations with Africa. As early as the period when the African people were fighting for national independence, China firmly stood by the side of the African people, and vigorously supported the African people's struggle against imperialism and colonialism. African nations in like manner have demonstrated their love for China by supporting China's entry into the WTO and China's bid to host the Olympics.

In 2000, China established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation with the 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic relations and the African Union Commission. In 2018, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held the 7th Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing. The theme of the summit was "Win-win Cooperation and Join Hands to Build a Closer China-Africa Community of Shared Future." The relationship between China and Africa, as a result was further strengthened. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on February 10, 1971, bilateral relations have been developing smoothly.

With the deepening of Sino-Nigerian relations, a lot more Nigerians have come to China. This article focuses on this phenomenon and a case-study research is carried out on some Nigerians living in China, in order to find out the factors that attract Nigerians to China, as well as the cultural adaptation situation of Nigerians in China, the difficulties they encounter, thus creating a reference guide for Nigerians who intend to travel to China in the future.

Theoretical Background

Definition of the Concept- Culture

The word 'culture' has a long history. The concept of culture in English language initially referred to the cultivation and care of certain crops. Later, it gradually transformed into the education and cultivation of human temperament and morals. In Chinese, the term culture" first appeared in the <Yi Zhuan·Xi Cixia> at the end of the Warring States period, and it had the following meaning: 'to observe astronomy', 'to observe time changes', 'to observe humanity', 'to transform into the world.' Here, 'humanity' refers to society. The term culture in ancient China only focused on the spiritual aspect. From the Chinese and western origin of the term culture, it is seen that China's understanding of culture is focused on the spiritual, while the Western understanding of culture is based on human and material life. The western understanding of the term culture is more comprehensive.

The Definition of Acculturation

In 1880, the first Director of the Bureau of American Ethnology (John Wesley Powell) first proposed the concept of acculturation, and in 1883 gave the definition of acculturation to mean individuals from inferior cultures who imitate the behavior of

people in advanced culture (Li, 2015). Redfield, Linton and M. J. Herskovits in (Li, 2015) defined adaptation as the phenomenon of continuous and direct cultural contact between two groups composed of individuals with different cultures, leading to changes in the original cultural model of one or both parties. The interpretation of this concept has become classic, and is still in use today.

The object of research in cultural adaptation includes both short-term travelers to other countries and long-term travelers living in other countries. In this article, the cultural adaptation investigation and research is mainly aimed at Nigerians (including students, working personnel, etc.) who come to China to live in China and have series of contacts with the Chinese society.

Cultural Adaptation Model

In 1955, Lysgaard conducted an investigation and research on 200 Norwegian scholars visiting the United States and reached a conclusion. He discovered that foreigners in a new territory go through three stages in general: initial adjustment phase, crisis phase and adaptation phase. He noted that upon arrival in a new cultural environment, one experiences what is called the initial euphoria stage (Li, 2015). During this period, he has less contact with the second culture; but after a period of time, after having established interpersonal relationships with members of the second culture, he begins to experience language barriers, cultural conflicts and subsequent frustrations begin to appear. Gradually, he becomes familiar with the social and cultural environment, and his mood gradually improves. So Lysgaard drew the U-shaped trajectory of emotions from high to low to high according to the adaptability of foreigners in a new territory (Li, 2015).

Oberg believes that foreigners in a new territory generally have to go through four stages in the process of cultural adaptation: the honeymoon phase, the frustration and hostile stage, the adjustment stage and the adaptation stage. In the honeymoon phase, the individual is elated when he first arrives in an unfamiliar environment, and finds the surroundings novel, but after a period of time, when the freshness and novelty have passed, culture shock is ushered in. He begins to feel nostalgic, nervous, depressed and helpless, begins to deny cultural differences, has strong resistance or attack psychology to different cultures, and even sometimes has mental illnesses or suicidal thoughts. In the adjustment phase, individuals continue to increase their interest in understanding the foreign culture and they begin to gradually establish an objective view of the second culture, prejudice becomes less and less, and the ability to engage in cross-cultural communication is gradually improved. In the adaptation phase, individuals gradually become accustomed to life in the new society (Li, 2015). Although the culture shock theory has a huge impact in society, there is still no convincing answer as to whether this model is correct.

Research Methodology

Considering the need to obtain in-depth, thorough and concise information on the adaptation situation of Nigerians in China, the case-study approach was adopted by the researcher in carrying out research. The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context. Case study approach is defined

as a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences (Crowe et al. 2011).

In order to develop a thorough understanding of the case, (Stake 1995, Lincoln 1985, Mason 2002) opined that the case study approach usually involves the collection of multiple sources of evidence, using a range of methods (e.g. interviews, focus groups and observations). This research process combined the use of the case-study method as well as the interview method.

Analysis of Factors Affecting Cultural Adaptation of Nigerians in China

Based on 50 case studies that were obtained, some cross-cultural adaptation factors that affect Nigerians in China were derived. They are as follows:

Age difference

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (19-27 years old)	11	44%
First group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (19-27 years old)	14	56%
Second group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (28-42 years old)	9	36%
Second group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (28-42 years old)	16	64%

The above table summarizes the age differences based on the case studies received. There were 50 case studies, aged 19-42, but most of them were 25-30 years old. They were categorised into groups, 19-27 years old is the first group with 25 people; 28-36 years old is the second group with 24 people; 37-42 years old is the third group with one person. Since the third group has too few people, it is classified into the second group. The fifty case studies were categorised into two groups. The first category of Nigerians have a positive feedback and have adapted to situations they find themselves. This category can be regarded as the well-adapted category. The second category of Nigerians have a negative feedback and have difficulty adjusting to challenging situations.

After classification, it was found that 11 of the 25 people in the first group were in the first category, that is, the well-adapted category; 9 of the 25 people in the second group were in the first category. After taking the percentage, we found that the first group had a good adaptation rate of 22%, and the second group had a good adaptation rate of 18%. Therefore, we can preliminarily conclude that the difference in age affects the intercultural adaptation of Nigerians in China. And the younger group is stronger in

cross-cultural adaptability, which may be because young people have a higher ability to accept new things and a more tolerant mentality.

Gender differences

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (Female)	12	36%
First group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (Female)	21	64%
Second group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (Male)	8	47%
Second group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (Male)	9	53%

The above table summarizes the gender differences based on the case studies received. Among the case studies, there were 33 females and 17 males. The women made up the first group and the men made up the second group. Among the 33 women, 12 were well-adapted; among the 17 men, 8 were well-adapted. After taking the percentages, it was found that the percentage for females who had adapted well was 36.4% and that for men was 47.1%. Therefore, we can preliminarily conclude that gender differences will affect the cross-cultural adaptation of Nigerians in China, and the adaptability of men is higher than that of women. This may be due to the fact that men's physical characteristics and psychological quality are better than women, and their psychological sensitivity is lower than that of women.

Time Factor

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition– (short length of time)	7	33%
First group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition– (short length of time)	14	67%
Second group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition– (long length of time).	13	45%
Second group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition– (long length of time).	16	55%

The above table summarizes the time factors based on the received case studies. The same method was used to analyse whether the length of time in China has an impact on the intercultural adaptation of Nigerians in China. The 50 case studies were divided into two groups. The first group had been in China for 5 months to 2 years, with a total of 21 people, and the second group had been in China for 2.5 years to 5 and a half years, with a total of 29 people. Seven of the 21 people in the first group had a good adaptation condition, and 13 of the 29 people in the second group had a good adaptation condition. After taking the percentages, it was found that the first group, the group with foreigners who had spent a shorter length of time in China, had a good adaptation rate of 33.3%, and the second group, the group with foreigners who had spent a lengthier amount of time in China, had a good adaptation rate of 44.8%. Therefore, we can preliminarily

draw the following conclusion: the length of time in China has a certain impact on the intercultural adaptation of Nigerians in China, and the longer the time spent in China, the better their adaptation rate. With time, Nigerians have more and more contact with the Chinese culture, customs, natural environment and social conditions. They follow the customs and gradually understand the many differences between the two countries and gradually integrate into them.

Language Factor

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (have a basic proficiency in Chinese language)	14	56%
First group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (have a basic proficiency in Chinese language)	11	44%
Second group: Nigerians with positive cross-cultural experiences (have an advanced proficiency in Chinese language)	16	64%
Second group: Nigerians with negative cross-cultural experiences (have an advanced proficiency in Chinese language)	9	36%

From the table, it can be deduced that Nigerians with an advanced proficiency in Chinese language have a better adaptation than Nigerians in the other categories. In general, the adaptability of Nigerians in China with advanced Chinese proficiency is better than that of Nigerians in China with poor/basic Chinese proficiency.

Language is the most important communication tool for human beings and the main way of expressing one’s self is by communication. The official language of Nigeria is English. English is the language of the Indo-European family of Germanic languages. In addition, Nigeria has about two hundred native languages. Most Nigerians not only speak English but also one native language. The language composition of Nigeria is a direct reflection of the whole of Africa, because it includes the three main languages in the African language family: Niger-Congo, Afro-Asian and Nile-Saharan. The lingua franca of China is Chinese, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. The two languages belong to different language families and have several differences. In addition, most beginners find Chinese difficult to master compared to other foreign languages. Therefore, Nigerians in China who speak Chinese communicate smoothly with other people in China, and they adapt better than Nigerians who do not speak Chinese.

Experience going abroad

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition– (have experience living abroad)	7	70%
First group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition– (have experience living abroad)	3	30%
Second group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition– (lack experience living abroad).	11	27.5%
Second group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition– (lack experience living abroad).	29	72.5%

The experience of going abroad has a certain impact on the intercultural adaptation of Nigerians in China. People with more experience going abroad come into contact with people from more cultures, have a broader vision, and have a certain understanding of the differences between other countries and their own countries, so they have a higher tolerance for people from other cultures. Compared to those with less experience living abroad, their social support network is richer and so the adaptation status in China is better than those with less experience abroad.

Nigerians who have experience living abroad are able to adjust better to life in China compared to those who recently moved to China without experience living abroad.

Working personnel and Students

Category	Numeral	Percentage
First group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition – (students)	18	38%
First group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition – (students)	29	62%
Second group: Nigerians with good adaptability condition – (working personnel)	2	67%
Second group: Nigerians with poor adaptability condition – (working personnel)	1	33%

The above table summarizes the social factors based on the case studies received. The 47 students were grouped together and the 3 working personnel made up another group. After taking the percentages, it was found that the students in the first group had a well-adaptation rate of 38%, and the working personnel in the second group had a well-adaptation rate of 67%.

Therefore, we can preliminarily draw a conclusion: the difference in attributes between working personnel and students will also affect the intercultural adaptation of Nigerians in China. This may be due to the fact that the working personnel have already stepped into the society, have a better understanding of social conditions, are more mature, and can solve various difficulties relatively smoothly. However, students are still inexperienced in the world, are not very knowledgeable on how to cope with certain challenges, thus, their social adaptability is weaker than that of working personnel.

Suggestions on Cultural Adaptation

Based on the case studies in this article and the influencing factors analysed, the following suggestions have been put forward, for: i. Nigerians intending to come to China and ii. Nigerians who are currently in China.

Suggestions for the Nigerian Embassy in China

The Nigerian embassies and consulates in Beijing and Shanghai should offer integration classes for Nigerians arriving in China for the first time. The course should address common problems faced by Nigerians in China and provide suggestions on how to solve these problems. The Nigerian Embassy should encourage Nigerians in different cities across China to set up welcome groups to receive Nigerians and give them basic orientation courses on how they can adapt to the new environment.

Suggestions for the Policy Makers in China

In order to further strengthen the relationship between Nigerians and Chinese, the Chinese government should encourage Chinese entrepreneurs who are willing to establish business partnerships with Nigerians, to learn how to prepare some Nigerian cuisine, and then open Nigerian restaurants in different cities across China. Through this measure, more employment opportunities will be provided for the Chinese, thus leading to the development of the Chinese economy. This way, Nigerians will be able to taste the cuisine of their hometown even if they are far away from their hometown. To further increase the chances at adaptation, immersion opportunities in the form of summer camps, winter camps could be made available to first-time comers where all aspects of the culture will be introduced to them to better prepare them for everyday life in China.

Suggestions for Nigerians in China and those who intend to come to China

I. Have psychological expectations before entering China

Nigerians must prepare for cross-cultural adaptation before coming to China, by having psychological expectations. Psychological expectations are one of the important factors that affect cross-cultural adaptation. The psychological expectations shouldn't be too high or too low. If the psychological expectations of the destination country (China) are too high, on arriving to the destination country (China), one might find that what they see is inconsistent with what they expected, and this might make them to be devastated. If a person's psychological expectations of the destination country (China) are too low, it will lead to unwillingness to contact the surrounding people and culture. Nigerians must be psychologically prepared before coming to China. They might experience discrimination and have curious looks from the Chinese, thus psychological preparation is necessary before moving to china.

II. Learn Chinese language

As the most important tool for communication amongst human beings, language has a great impact on people's lives, and the proficiency of Chinese directly affects the cross-cultural adaptation of Nigerians in China. Therefore, Nigerians in China should work hard to learn Chinese by enrolling for Chinese classes and actively interacting with Chinese to improve their proficiency. For Nigerians who intend to come to China, they should take the initiative to learn Chinese while they are back home, for a level of proficiency in Chinese language is a prerequisite for better adaptation in China.

III. Actively understand Chinese culture

Nigerians in China should take the initiative to learn about Chinese culture. They can learn through books and the Internet, ask Chinese friends or participate in activities related to Chinese culture. Nigerians who intend to come to China should understand the climate of the destination country, cultural background and living habits of Chinese indigenes etc. They can learn about these by looking up related information on the internet, communicating with their friends and colleagues in China.

IV. Build a strong social support network

The social support network is one of the important factors that affect a foreigner's adaptation to the second culture. Nigerians in China can make more Chinese friends by participating in various activities, and at the same time they should endeavour to keep rapport with fellow countrymen.

V. Arriving with some raw Nigerian food

Nigerians who have not tasted Chinese food before coming to China, should bring some food that can last for a while before they get used to Chinese food. They can cook and eat Nigerian food, while trying the Chinese food until they find something they can adapt to.

Conclusion

There are several studies on the investigation of the cross-cultural adaptation of foreigners in China, but studies on the cross-cultural adaptation of Nigerians in China is relatively few. This article identified the challenges Nigerians in China face and proposed measures to cope with these challenges. Further research can study the adaptation status of Nigerians in China more specifically. Example: an analysis on whether different weather and food in the north and south of China will affect the adaptation status of Nigerians in Northern China and Southern China.

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