

BRICS STUDENTS EDUCATION IN CHINA FROM 2010 TO 2018: DEVELOPMENT, PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS¹

A educação dos estudantes dos BRICS na China entre 2010 e 2018: desenvolvimento, problemas e recomendações

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Introduction

Attracting international students is an important way to promote the internationalization of one country's higher education, and to enhance youth and education exchanges between countries. As the biggest developing country in world, China has attached importance to the international students education in China since 2010 so as to improve the quality of China's higher education and promote its internationalization.

What's striking is that in September of 2010, for the first time, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China from the perspective of national strategy mapped out a plan targeting the international students education in China, and released Study in China Program, which was designed to "promote the communication and cooperation between China and other countries in education, prompt the sustainable and healthy development of the international students education in China and improve the internationalization of Chinese education". This program highlighted that China would "accelerate the quota of scholarship step by step in accordance with the need of national strategy and development", with the targets of attracting 500,000 international students by 2020 and "making China the top destination country in Asia for international students" (China's Ministry of Education, 2010:647).

With the attention and promotion of the Chinese government, since 2010 the international students education in China has stepped into a new phase, in which it has been improved a lot not only in scale but also in quality. What its most impressive is that the number of international students in China has increased

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quickly from 265,090 in 2010 to 442,773 in 2016, or by a rate of 67.03%.³ In 2016, China became the most popular destination country in Asia for international students and the third most popular in the world (after the United States and the United Kingdom). This shows that China has achieved four years ahead of schedule some of the targets set out in the Study in China Program issued in 2010. In 2018, the number of international students studying in China increased to 492,185, approximately 500,000.

Among international students in China, those from the BRICS countries⁴ take up a considerable share. In 2010, with the accession of South Africa and BRIC expanding to five members, BRICS mechanism came into effect. From then, promoting the BRICS students in China has become an important part of the exchanges and cooperation in higher education between China and the BRICS countries, which can enhance their mutual learning and complementary advantages in higher education, so it receives common support of BRICS countries. In July 2014, Article 56 of BRICS Leaders Fortaleza Declaration approved by BRICS leaders at the 6th BRICS Summit stated:

We recognize the strategic importance of education for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth [...] We are willing to strengthen intra-BRICS cooperation in education and welcome Education Ministers' Meeting of BRICS held in Paris in November 2013. We intend to continue cooperation with relevant international organizations and encourage the initiative to establish the BRICS Network University. (BRICS, 2014)

In September 2017, Article 62 of *BRICS Leaders Xiamen Declaration* approved by BRICS leaders at the 9th BRICS Summit stated:

We stress the importance of education to promote economic and social sustainable development and to strengthen BRICS partnership and appreciate the positive progress in our education cooperation. We reiterate our support for BRICS Universities League and BRICS Network University in conducting education and research cooperation, and welcome efforts to promote think tank cooperation and youth exchanges through organizing youth summer camps and providing more scholarship and other measures. We agree to share experiences and practices in achieving sustainable development goals in education. (BRICS, 2017)

With the cooperation between China and the BRICS countries since 2010, the platforms such as BRICS Education Ministers' Meeting (2013), BRICS University Presidents Forum (2015), BRICS Network University (2015) and BRICS Universities League (2015) have been established and they have promoted exchanges and cooperation among BRICS countries in higher education, including the BRICS students education in China.

So, since 2010, with the Chinese government's attention to the international students education in China and the formation and development of BRICS mechanism, what development has been made in the BRICS students education in China? What are the problems? How to further improve it? In view of these problems, there are no special research results in China and abroad. Most of the research findings focus on

³ All data cited in this paper on international students education in China, if not explained, come from the statistics released by China's Ministry of Education

⁴ The students studying in China from the BRICS countries involved in this paper, if not explained, refers to those from the four members of BRICS, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa, with the exception of China.

the international students education in China from one of the BRICS countries, especially from Russia⁵ or India⁶, but lack of the overall analysis and comparative research on the international students education in China from the BRICS countries.

Thus, this paper will focus on the BRICS students education in China from 2010 to 2018, including its development, problems and suggestions, on the basis of the statistics released by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, mainly using comparative research and quantitative research methods. To demonstrate the ideas, the paper will be divided into five parts. After the introduction, the second part will present the evolution and development overview of Chinese policy on the international students education in China from 2010 to 2018. In the third part, it will concentrate on the analysis of development in the BRICS students education in China from 2010 to 2018, and its problems will be analyzed in the fourth part. At last, the fifth one, there will be a conclusion and some recommendations for its further development.

Policy Evolution and Development Overview of International Students Education in China from 2010 to 2018

Policy evolution on international students education in China from 2010 to 2018

The international students education in China is an important part of China's higher education, and thus its evolution is closely linked to the development of China's higher education. In the second year after the establishment of New China, that is, in 1950, China began to receive international students. However, due to the influence of political factors at home and abroad, the international students education in China had been in an unstable state for a long time. After 1966, it was forced to be suspended for 7 years and was not restored until 1973. After the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy in 1978, the Chinese policy on international students education in China "turned from closed to open" (CHENG Jiafu, 2012:33, and from then on, the international students education in China gradually went on the right track, but for a long time, it developed slowly until the 1990s. According to the statistics released by China's Ministry of Education, from 1973 to 1977, China only received a total of 2066 international students; from 1978 to 1989, a total of 14,273. In contrast, from 1990 to 1998, China received a total of 234,691 international students from 164 countries, with the average annual growth rate of 28.56% (CHENG Jiafu, 2012:32-35).

In 1999, China began to implement the policy of higher education enrollment expansion, which increased significantly the number of Chinese students enrolled in China's higher education institutions. As a result, since the 21st century China's higher education entered a new period of quantitative expansion. In 1998, the gross enrollment rate of Chinese higher education was 9.8%. After four years, in 2002, the gross enrollment rate of Chinese higher education reached 15%, and by that time, China had entered the stage of "popularization" of higher education. In 2007, the gross enrollment rate of Chinese higher education

⁵The research results on Russian students education in China can be seen: ALEFEYEV (2017), YANG(2017), YU (2017), YANG (2004).

⁶The research results on Indian students education in China can be seen: WU, ZHANG (2017), ZHANG (2014), GONG, LIU (2010).

reached 23%, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions reached 18.85 million, and China has become the country with the largest number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the world (YU Fuzeng, 2009:67).

Stimulated by the large-scale expansion of Chinese higher education, the international students education in China has developed rapidly. In 1998, the number of international students studying in China reached 43,084; in 2000, it exceeded 50,000 for the first time, reaching 52,150; in 2002, it exceeded 80,000 for the first time, reaching 85,829; in 2004, it exceeded 100,000 for the first time, reaching 110,844; in 2005, it increased to 141,087; in 2007, it was close to 200,000, reaching 195,503; in 2009, it increased to 238,184.

With the rapid scale expansion of Chinese higher education, it is urgent for China to improve the quality of its higher education. To this end, on July 29, 2010, China's Ministry of Education promulgated *Outline of National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)*, setting a new goal of "transforming from a big country in education to a strong country in education and from a big country in human resources to a strong country in human resources", with emphasis on improving the quality of talent development, establishing a classification system for higher education institutions, implementing classification management and accelerating the construction of first-class universities and first-class disciplines. Based on it, the focus of Chinese higher education has shifted from scale expansion to quality improvement (China's Ministry of Education, 2010).

In this context, since 2010 the Chinese government attaches more importance to the international students education in China, taking it as an important way of improving the quality of Chinese higher education, promoting its internationalization and "constructing world-class universities". In the *Outline of National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* issued in 2010, China's Ministry of Education emphasized:

China needs to "further expand the scale of international students in China, increase the number of Chinese government scholarships [...] optimize the structure of international students in China, implement the preparatory education for studying in China, increase the subjects taught in foreign languages in higher education institutions, and improve continuously the quality of international students education in China". (China's Ministry of Education, 2010)

In 2010, while promulgating the *Outline of National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)*, in order to promote the international students education in China, the Ministry of Education held a national working conference on international students studying in China and formulated Study in China Program. In this program, the international students education in China for the first time was planned from the perspective of national strategy. It was emphasized that the international students education should be guided by the policy of "enlarging scale, optimizing structure, standardizing management and ensuring quality". The ministry would coordinate the scale, structure, quality, and benefits, promote the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of the international students education in China, and propose the goal of attracting 500,000 international students studying in China by 2020 and "making China the largest destination country in Asia for international students". (China's Ministry of Education, 2010: 647)

In order to achieve the above goals and attract more international students especially those high-level ones studying in China, the Chinese government has successively introduced a series of scholarship programs for international students studying in China since 2010, such as *the Scholarship Program for International Students Studying in China*, *the Scholarship Program of Confucius Institute*, *the Scholarship Program of Great Wall of Chinese Government*, *the Scholarship Program for Outstanding Students*, *the Scholarship Program for Winners of HSK*, *the Scholarship Program of Chinese Culture Research Project*, and etc. As a result, the number of Chinese government scholarships for international students studying in China has been greatly increased and the channels for international students in China have been broadened.

In order to enhance the cooperation between different ministries and jointly promote the international students education in China, on November 22, 2011, China established the Inter-ministerial Coordination Mechanism and Coordination Group for International Students Studying in China, which was composed of several ministries and commissions of the State Council, including Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. At the first working conference of the Coordination Group, Vice Minister of Education Hao Ping pointed out that the international students education in China is an important part of international exchange and cooperation in education, and an integral part of Chinese overall diplomatic work. (China's Ministry of Education, 2011)

In 2014, for the first time, the Chinese government put forward the concept of "paying equal attention to Chinese students studying abroad and international students studying in China" (WANG Huiyao & MIAO Lu, 2015:219-220), which reflects that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the international students education in China. In December of the same year, the Chinese government convened a national meeting on studying abroad, emphasizing that studying abroad is national strategy and an important way to enhance core competitiveness and advantages. A developing China needs more overseas talents, and an open China welcomes talents from all over the world (CHEN Qiang, WANG Enlin, YU Shucheng, 2015:4).

In July 2015, the five Chinese ministries including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly issued the *Action Plan for Studying Abroad from 2015 to 2017*, which proposed to "promote the sustainable and healthy development of the international students education in China [...] improve considerably Chinese attraction to international students in the world [...] and form basically the unified and efficient working system for international students studying in China" (China's Ministry of Education, 2015).

In 2018, China's Ministry of Education issued *Higher Education Quality Standards for International Students Studying in China (Trial Version)*, which is the "quality standards document formulated by the Ministry of Education for the first time specifically for international students education in China. The document is a nationally unified basic guideline that guides and regulates the international students education in China for higher education institutions. It is also the basis for carrying out internal and external quality assurance activities for international students studying in China". With the purpose to

“guide higher education activities and continue to improve the quality for international students education in China”, in the document the training objectives, enrollment, admissions, teaching, management and services for international students studying in China are formulated in detail and the idea of “promoting quality and management standardization, and realizing the healthy and sustainable development of international students education in China” is put forward. (China’s Ministry of Education, 2018)

Development Overview of International Students Education in China from 2010 to 2018

Since 2010, With the increasing attention and promotion of Chinese government to the international students education in China, the continuous improvement of China’s comprehensive national power, and the rapid development of Chinese higher education, the international students education in China has set foot on the development path that takes into account both scale expansion and quality improvement. Among them, in the period from 2010 to 2018, the number of international students studying in China, and the number of Chinese higher education institutions receiving international students have grown rapidly. As shown in Table 1, in 2010, a total of 265,090 international students from 194 countries studied in 618 institutions of higher education in China; in 2012, the number of international students studying in China exceeded 300,000, reaching 328,330, from a total of 200 countries around the world, received by 690 Chinese higher education institutions; in 2016, the number of international students studying in China exceeded 400,000, reaching 442,773, with China becoming Asia’s No. 1 and the world’s No. 3 “importer” of international students. In 2018, the number of international students studying China was close to 500,000, reaching 492,185, received by 1004 Chinese higher education institutions. In addition, in 2010, the number of Chinese higher education institutions that received 500 or more international students was 125 and in 2018 it increased to 249. Among Chinese higher education institutions, Beijing Language and Culture University has always been ranked first in the number of international students enrolled, and in 2010 the university received a total of 11,628 international students, compared with 9056 in 2018.

Table 1: Statistics of International Students Studying in China (2010-2018)

Year	Number of International Students in China	Number of Source Countries of International Students in China	Number of Chinese Higher Education Institutions Receiving International Students
2010	265,090	194	618
2011	292,611	194	660
2012	328,330	200	690
2013	356,499	200	746
2014	377,054	203	775
2015	397,635	202	811
2016	442,773	205	829
2017	489,172	204	935
2018	492,185	196	1004

Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Table 2: Top 10 Chinese Higher Education Institutions Receiving International Students in 2018

Ranking	Name of University	Number of International Students Enrolled	City Located
1	Beijing Language and Culture University	9056	Beijing
2	University of International Business and Economics	8555	Beijing
3	Peking University	7793	Beijing
4	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	7412	Shanghai
5	Zhejiang University	7193	Hangzhou
6	Fudan University	7057	Shanghai
7	East China Normal University	6472	Shanghai
8	Tsinghua University	6379	Beijing
9	Yunnan University for Nationalities	5812	Kunming
10	Donghua University	4865	Shanghai

Source: China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China in 2018*, p.13.

In addition to the rapid growth of the number of international students in China, as shown in Table 1 above, since 2010, the international students studying in China have come from a wide range of source countries, coming from about 200 countries and regions in the world, and the number of international students studying in China from all continents has grown significantly. Due to the close geographical location and similar cultural traditions, Asia has always been the main source of international students to China, accounting for more than half of the total number of international students studying in China. As shown in Table 3, in 2010, the number of international students studying in China from Asia reached 175,805, accounting for 66% of the total number of international students in China. In 2018, the number reached 295,043, accounting for nearly 69% of the total number of international students in China. Among

the 10 countries with the largest number of international students studying in China, except for the United States, Russia and France, they are Asian countries. Among them, South Korea, Thailand, India, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan and other Asian countries are ranked among the top countries for the number of international students studying in China.

Table 3: Number and Percentage of International Students in China from Asia (2010-2018)

Year	Number of International Students in China	Number of International Students in China from Asia	Percentage (%)
2010	265,090	175,805	66.32
2011	292,611	187,871	64.21
2012	328,330	207,555	63.22
2013	356,499	219,808	61.66
2014	377,054	225,490	59.80
2015	397,635	240,154	60.40
2016	442,773	264,976	59.84
2017	489,172	293,222	59.94
2018	492,185	295,043	68.74

Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Table 4: Top 10 Source Countries of International Students in China in 2018

Ranking	Name of Country	Number of International Students in China
1	South Korea	50,600
2	Thailand	28,608
3	Pakistan	28,023
4	India	23,198
5	United States	20,996
6	Russia	19,239
7	Indonesia	15,050
8	Laos	14,645
9	Japan	14,230
10	Kazakhstan	11,784

Source: China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China in 2018*, p.5.

Development made in the BRICS students education in China from 2010 to 2018

Since 2010, with the scale expansion of international students studying in China and the development of exchanges and cooperation between China and the BRICS countries in higher education, attracting the BRICS students in China has been valued and supported by BRICS countries, and some development has been made in the BRICS students education in China.

Rapid growth of the number of students

In the period from 2010 to 2018, the number of international students in China grew rapidly, from 265,090 in 2010 to 492,185 in 2018. Consistent with the growing trend of the number of international

students in the country from all over the world, the number of students from the BRICS countries studying in China also grew rapidly. As shown in Table 5, in 2010, the total number of students from the BRICS countries (Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa) studying in China was 22,641, accounting for 8.5% of the total number of international students studying in China. In 2013, the number exceeded 30,000, reaching 30,204, and in 2016 exceeded 40,000, reaching 40,028. In 2018, the number reached 46,881, accounting for 9.5% of the total number of international students studying in China.

Table 5: Number and Percentage of Students from the BRICS Countries in China (2010-2018)

Year	Number of International Students in China	Number of Students from the BRICS Countries in China	Percentage (%)
2010	265,090	22,641	8.5
2011	292,611	24,339	8.3
2012	328,330	27,290	8.3
2013	356,499	30,204	8.5
2014	377,054	34,238	9.1
2015	397,635	36,580	9.2
2016	442,773	40,028	9.0
2017	489,172	44,949	9.2
2018	492,185	46,881	9.5

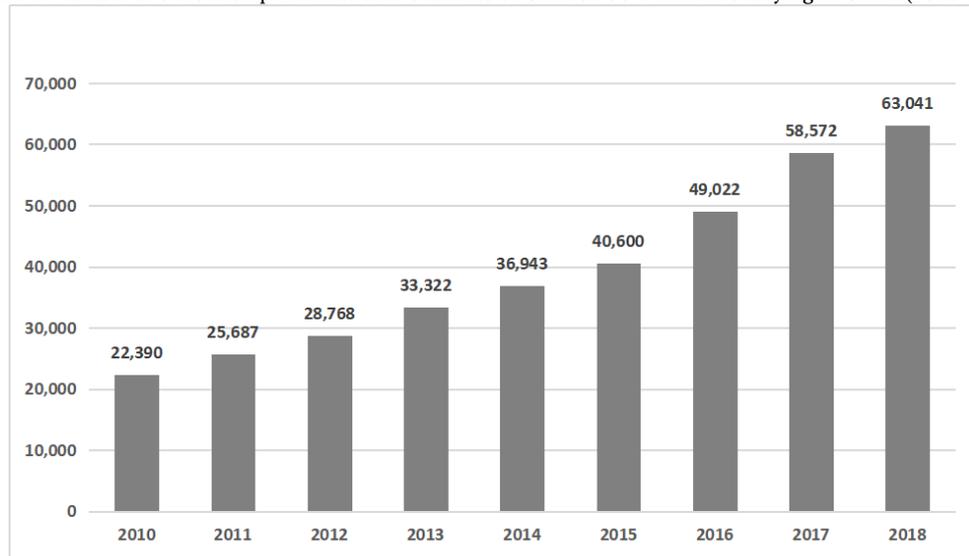
Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Continuous growth in the number and proportion of scholarship students

As for the source of tuition, the majority of international students studying in China are self-funded, accounting for about 90% of the total number of international students in China. However, after "Study in China Program" was issued in 2010, so as to attract more international students, especially those high-level ones, the Chinese government has been increasing quotas of scholarships, which has led to an increase in the number of international students who are granted scholarships by Chinese government, and the proportion has continuously increased. As shown in Figure1, in 2010, the total number of international students studying in China was 265,090, of which 22,390 were scholarship international students of Chinese government⁷, accounting for 8% of the total number of international students in China, with an increase of 22.7% year on year. In 2016, the number of scholarship international students of Chinese government studying in China increased to 49,022, accounting for 11% of the total number of international students in China, with an increase of 20.7% year on year. In 2018, the number of scholarship international students of Chinese government studying in China increased to 63,041, accounting for 13% of the total number of international students in China, with an increase of 7.5% year on year.

⁷ The statistics on the number of scholarship international students of Chinese government, released by China's Ministry of Education, refer to the number of scholarships international students awarded by Chinese central government, and do not include those awarded by Chinese local government.

Figure 1: Number of Scholarship International Students of Chinese Government Studying in China (2010-2018)



Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

The source of tuition for students from the BRICS countries studying in China is consistent with the source of tuition for international students studying in China from all over the world. In general, students in China from the BRICS countries were mainly self-funded, but since 2010, the number of scholarship students of Chinese government from the BRICS countries studying in China has continued to grow, and the proportion also kept an increasing trend. As shown in Table6, from 2010 to 2018, the number of the BRICS students of Chinese government scholarship increased from 1184 to 4509, with the percentage of the total number of the BRICS students in China increasing from 5.3% to 9.6%. In terms of each member of BRICS, during the period from 2010 to 2018, the number of students of Chinese government scholarship in China from Russia is the largest and increased from 1065 to 3547, followed by India whose number of students of Chinese government scholarship in China increased from 208 to 666, and finally is from South Africa whose number increased from 36 to 186, and from Brazil whose number increased from 55 to 110.

Table 6: Number and Percentage of Students of Chinese Government Scholarship in China from the BRICS Countries (2010-2018)

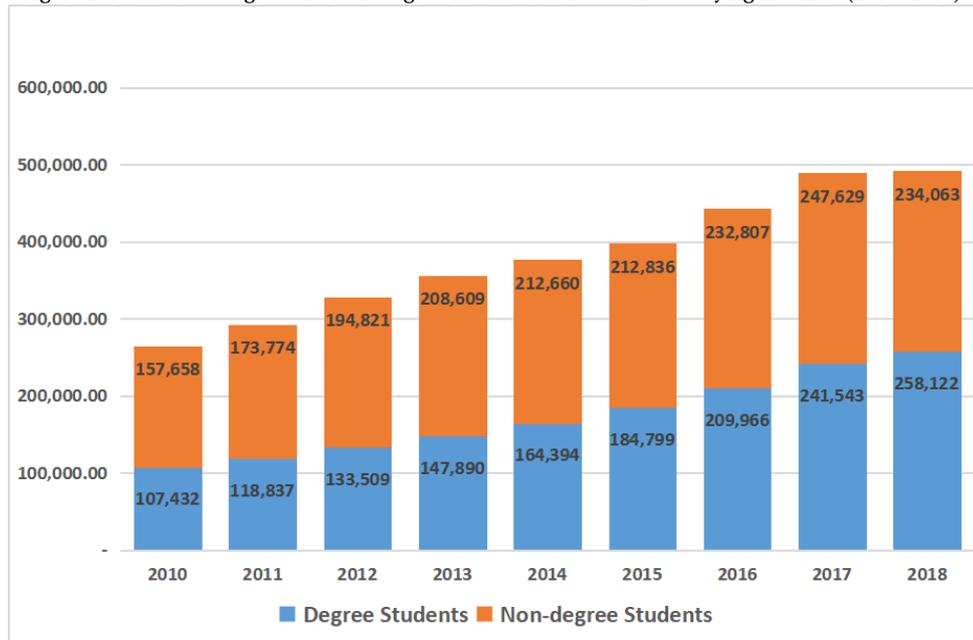
Year	Number of Students in China from the BRICS Countries	Number of Students of Chinese Government Scholarship in China from the BRICS Countries	Percentage (%)
2010	22,641	1184	5.3
2011	24,339	1601	6.6
2012	27,290	1871	6.9
2013	30,204	2324	7.7
2014	34,238	2628	7.7
2015	36,580	2926	8.0
2016	40,028	3539	8.8
2017	44,949	4236	9.4
2018	46,881	4509	9.6

Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Steady growth in the number of degree students

The categories of international students studying in China, including those from the BRICS countries, are divided into both degree students and non-degree ones. Among them, international students studying in China for degree education include three-year college students, undergraduates, masters and PHD students. International students studying in China for non-degree education refer to those studying in long-term or short-term programs without pursuing degrees, including senior advanced students, general advanced students and short-term students . (China's Ministry of Education, 2018As shown in Figure2, from 2010 to 2018, the number of international students for degree education studying in China have been a steady growth, from 107,432 to 258,122, with the proportion of the total number of international students studying in China increasing from 40.5% to 52.4%. Compared with that, although the number of international students for non-degree students studying in China has increased from 157,658 in 2010 to 234,063 in 2018, the proportion of the total number of international students studying in China is on the decline from 59.5% to 47.6%.At present, the main body of international students studying in China is for degree education.

Figure 2: Number of Degree and Non-degree International Students studying in China (2010-2018)



Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

During the period from 2010 to 2018, consistent with the steady growth of the number of international students for degree education studying in China from all over the world, the majority of the students from the BRICS countries studying in China is for degree education and the number of degree students from the BRICS countries studying in China each year exceeded that of non-degree students. Meanwhile, the number of degree students from the BRICS countries studying in China had grown steadily, from 12,743 in 2010, which accounted for 56.28% of the total number of students from the BRICS countries studying in China, to 31,160 in 2018, which took up 66.47% of the total number (Table 7). In part, the steady growth of the number of degree students from the BRICS countries studying in China reflects the increasing attraction of Chinese higher education, and they are related to the increasing comprehensive national power of China, the gradual development of Chinese higher education as well as the increasing exchanges and cooperation between China and the BRICS countries in higher education.

Table 7: Number and Percentage of Degree and Non-degree Students studying in China from the BRICS Countries (2010-2018)

Year	Degree Students	Percentage (%)	Non-degree Students	Percentage (%)
2010	12,743	56.28	9898	43.72
2011	13,579	55.79	10,760	44.21
2012	14,858	54.44	12,432	45.56
2013	17,206	56.97	12,998	43.03
2014	20,184	58.95	14,054	41.05
2015	23,403	63.98	13,177	36.02
2016	26,089	65.18	13,939	34.82
2017	29,086	64.71	15,863	35.29
2018	31,160	66.47	15,721	33.53

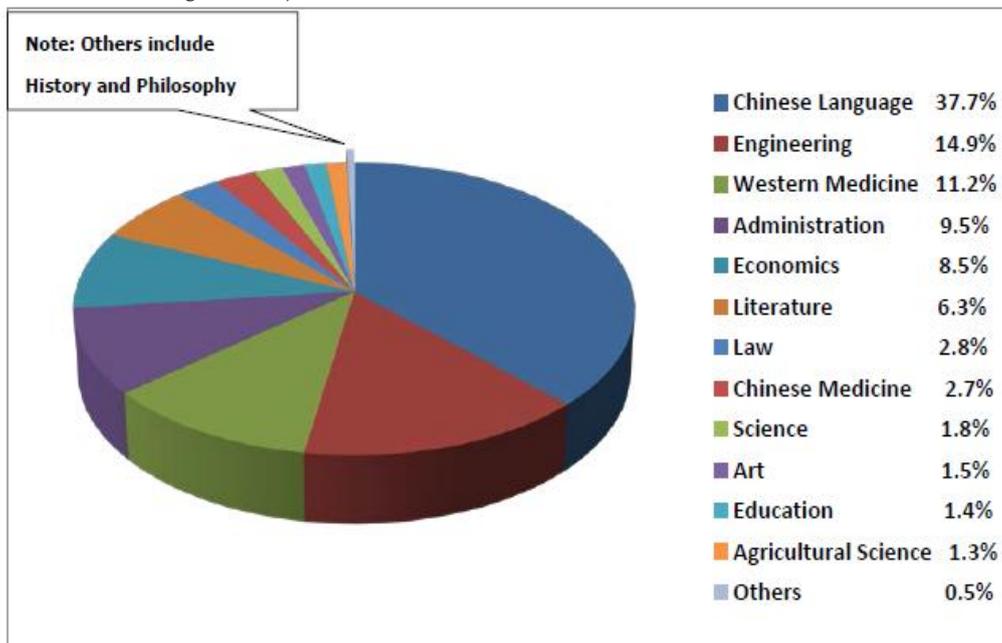
Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Increasing diversification of majors

For a long time, the majors for international students studying in China including the BRICS students, had long focused on Chinese traditional majors such as Chinese language, literature, medicine, art, and management, etc., and at the same time, the number of international students in China studying in engineering, science and other fields was fewer. Among them, the major of Chinese language taking the lion's share has been ranked first in majors for international students in China for many years. However, since 2010, the major choices of international students studying in China including the BRICS students, have become increasingly diversified, under the influence of employment prospects, the need of economic and social development in source countries and the development of Chinese higher education, etc. Although the international students studying in China including the BRICS students still give priority to Chinese traditional majors, the number and the proportion of international students in China studying in engineering, western medicine, science and other fields have continuously increased, and the majors have become increasingly diversified.

Among them, the number of international students in China including the BRICS students studying in Chinese language which has been ranked first in majors for international students in China, decreased from 55.1% in 2010 to 37.7% in 2018. At the same time, the number of international students in China studying in engineering increased from 15,130 in 2010 to 73,533 in 2018, with the increasing proportion of the total number of international students studying in China from 5.7% in 2010 to 14.9% in 2018, ranked second in majors for international students in China in 2018, second only to the major of Chinese language. The number of international students in China studying in major of western medicine increased from 25,203 in 2010 to 55,225 in 2018, with the increasing proportion of the total number of international students studying in China from 9.5% in 2010 to 11.2% in 2018. The number of international students in China studying in major of science increased from 2535 in 2010 to 8634 in 2018, accounting for 1.8% of the total number of international students in China in 2018, ranked 9th in majors for international students studying in China in 2018. With the increasing diversification of the majors, the top 10 majors of international students studying in China in 2018 are Chinese language, engineering, western medicine, administration, economics, literature, law, Chinese medicine, science and art (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Majors Distribution for International Students in China in 2018



Source: China's Ministry of Education. Concise Statistics of International Students in China in 2018, p.33.

Problems of the BRICS students education in China from 2010 to 2018

Limited number of students in China from Brazil and South Africa

Since 2010, some development has been made in the BRICS students education in China, while there are still some problems. Among them, the numbers of students studying in China from Brazil and South Africa are very limited, and the students from the two neighbors of China - Russia and India - occupy the main share of the total number of students in China from the BRICS countries and far exceed those from Brazil and South Africa. Therefore, there is a big difference in the number of students studying in China among the BRICS countries. During the period from 2010 to 2018, Russia and India had been ranked among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of the number of international students studying in China. Among them, as shown in Table 8, the number of Russian students coming to China in 2010 was 12,481, ranking 6th in the total number of international students studying in China. In 2018, it increased to 19,239. For India, the number of their students in 2010 was 9014, ranking 8th, and in 2018, it increased to 23,198 and ranked 4th. Compared with the numbers of students from Russia and India studying in China, those from the two further away countries - Brazil and South Africa - are very small, after ranking 37th in the total number of international students studying in China. Brazilian students studying in China are no more than 2,000 per year and South African ones no more than 3,000. This is due to the remoteness of the two countries from China, differences in language and culture and lack of mutual understanding, etc.

Table 8: Number of Students from member of BRICS Studying in China and Their Rankings in the World (2010-2018)

Year	Russia		India		Brazil		South Africa	
	Number	Ranking	Number	Ranking	Number	Ranking	Number	Ranking
2010	12,481	6	9014	8	797	40	349	/
2011	13,340	6	9370	8	1052	38	577	60
2012	14,971	5	10,237	8	1289	41	793	56
2013	15,918	5	11,781	8	1486	40	1019	55
2014	17,202	4	13,578	7	1675	46	1783	39
2015	16,197	5	16,694	4	1627	49	2062	40
2016	17,971	6	18,171	5	1587	51	2299	42
2017	19,751	6	20,911	5	1624	55	2663	41
2018	19,239	6	23,198	4	1463	59	2981	38

Source: Elaboration by the author based on the data released annually by China's Ministry of Education. *Concise Statistics of International Students in China*, from 2010 to 2018.

Lack of mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees

The mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees is an important way to attract international students and promote educational exchanges and cooperation between countries. By the end of April 2017, the Chinese government had signed agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees with 46 countries and regions (China's Ministry of Education, 2017). However, unfortunately, up till now, among the BRICS countries, only Russia (1995) and South Africa (2018) have signed agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees with China and the other two countries - Brazil and India - have not been involved yet. The lack of mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees has a negative impact on the development of international students education in China, students exchange and higher education cooperation between China and the other two countries.

Unitary source and limited number of scholarships

Since 2010, in order to attract more international students, especially those high-level ones studying in China, the Chinese government has successively introduced a series of scholarship programs for international students studying in China, and has been increasing quotas of scholarships, which has led to an increase in the number of scholarships international students studying in China. However, the source of scholarships is unitary and its number is still limited. At present, the Chinese government scholarship is the main source of financial support for international students studying in China, including ones from the BRICS countries, while Chinese local governments, universities, enterprises, non-governmental organizations and individuals have limited financial support for international students studying in China.

The unitary source of scholarships restricts the supply of scholarships, and the central government alone cannot afford enough quota of scholarships. As a result, the number of scholarships granted to international students studying in China is still limited. The majority of international students studying in China including from the BRICS countries is self-funded, accounting for more than 90% of the total number.

Correspondingly, the proportion of international students with scholarships has always been less than 10% due to limited number of scholarships. Among the BRICS countries, except Russia, which is a big source country for international students in China and the number of its scholarship students is also big, the numbers of scholarship students from India, South Africa and Brazil are very limited. In 2017, the number of Russian students coming to China was 19,751, and among them, 3365 were granted Chinese government scholarships, accounting for 17% of the total number. In the same year, 20,911 Indian students came to China to study, which was more than the number of Russian students studying in China, while among them, only 567 Indian students were granted Chinese government scholarships, accounting for 2.7% of the total number. The numbers of South African and Brazilian scholarship students in China were only 167 and 137 respectively, accounting for less than 9% of the total numbers of students in China from the two countries (6.3% and 8.4% respectively). In order to attract more the BRICS students coming to study in China, China needs to increase the source and the number of scholarships for them.

Poor quality of China's higher education

The quality of higher education is decisive for the international competitiveness and attractiveness of a country's higher education, and greatly affects the scale and quality of its international students education. Since 2010, although both the number of Chinese students studying abroad and the number of international students studying in China have increased rapidly, there is a large gap between the two, with the latter rather small compared with the former. In 2017, the number of Chinese students studying abroad exceeded 600,000 for the first time, reaching 608,400 and the number of international students studying in China was about 490,000, with a clear deficit, which in part reflects that the quality of China's higher education needs to be further improved. According to The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018 released by the World Economic Forum in September 2017, China ranked 47th out of 137 countries in terms of the global competitiveness of higher education and training, being in the middle part in the world, and there is a big gap between global competitiveness of China's higher education and China's comprehensive competitiveness (ranked 27th) (World Economic Forum, 2017:90). In addition, the international ranking of Chinese universities partly reflects the quality and international competitiveness of Chinese higher education. According to the results of world university rankings from "QS World University Rankings"⁸, "Times World University Rankings"⁹ and "Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities"¹⁰, which are widely recognized by the international community, only a few Chinese universities in Chinese mainland can enter the top 100 international universities ranking every year, which is far from developed countries. Compared with developed countries, China's higher education quality and competitiveness are far behind, which negatively affect its appeal to international students including ones from the BRICS countries as well as its development of international students education.

⁸ QSWorld University Rankings. see: <https://www.topuniversities.com/>.

⁹ World Reputation Rankings. see: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/>.

¹⁰ Academic Ranking of World Universities. see: <http://www.shanghairanking.com/>.

Although as mentioned above, since 2010, the total number of international students in China has grown rapidly and now is close to 500,000, China is far behind developed countries in terms of the proportion of international students in the total number of students enrolled in higher education in the country and the proportion of international students studying in the country in the total number of international students in the world. During the period from 2010 to 2016, the proportion of international students in the total number of students enrolled in higher education in China had always been less than 2%, far behind the proportion of 10%-20% in some developed countries (CHEN Yufen, 2018:47). Among them, in 2010, the proportion of international students in the total number of students enrolled in higher education in China was only 1.2%, while the average proportion in the OECD is 8% (LI Xiaohong, FANG Xiaotian, 2018:61).

In addition, due to the poor quality and lack of attraction of China's higher education, the number of high-level international students coming to study in China is limited. In 2015, there were 397,635 international students studying in China. Among them, there were 127,909 undergraduate students, accounting for 32.2% of the total number of international students in China, and 53,572 graduate students including master and doctoral students, accounting for 13.5% of the total number of international students in China. In comparison, in the same year, among 35 OECD countries, 80% of them had the proportion of undergraduate students accounting for less than 10% of their total number of international students, the proportion of their master students accounting for an average of 10%, and the proportion of doctoral students accounting for more than 25% (LI Xiaohong, FANG Xiaotian, 2018:61), which shows that there is a gap between China and developed countries in attracting the high-level international students and the quality and competitiveness of China's higher education need to be improved.

Poor teaching quality for international students in some Chinese universities

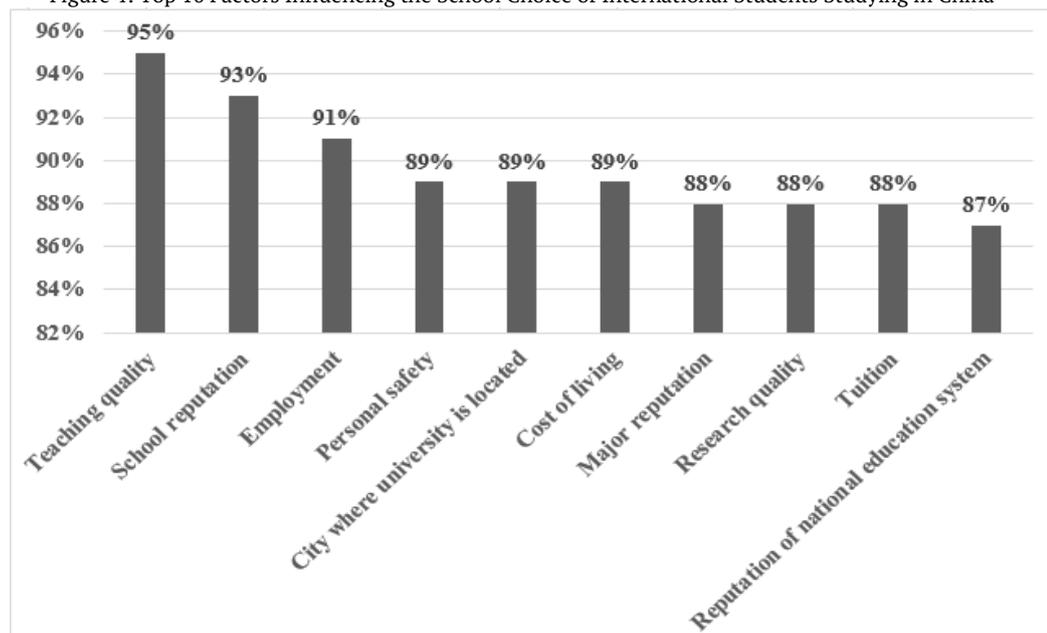
The teaching quality is concerned by international students, and is the key factor influencing their school choice. As shown in Figure 4 with the questionnaire by Tsinghua University in 2014, among the factors influencing the school choice of international students coming to study in China, the teaching quality had been ranked first, followed by school reputation and employment (China Overseas Student Network, 2014).

However, along with the poor quality of China's higher education, the teaching quality for international students in some Chinese universities is not satisfying enough, and there are some problems in teaching as follows: unreasonable curriculum, the shortage of teachers with English competence, the slack assessment towards international students, the widely adopted cultivating model of "easy entrance and easy graduation" and the lack of a comprehensive cultivating system, etc¹¹. Among them, according to the survey by China Overseas Student Network in 2014, it showed that nearly 90% of degree international students studying in China preferred to choose the major and courses taught in English. However, the

¹¹ Some Chinese scholars had discussed the problems of teaching for international students in some Chinese universities, as CHENG (2018); LUAN, SUN (2018); LIU, HU (2018).

number of Chinese universities offering English courses for their international students only took up 15% of the total numbers of Chinese universities enrolling international students in 2014 (China Overseas Student Network, 2014). Obviously, the number of English courses for international students in some Chinese universities can't meet the needs of international students, and it is due to the shortage of teachers with English competence which leads to the situation that some professional courses cannot be set up. Therefore, the teaching quality for international students in some Chinese universities needs to be improved.

Figure 4: Top 10 Factors Influencing the School Choice of International Students Studying in China

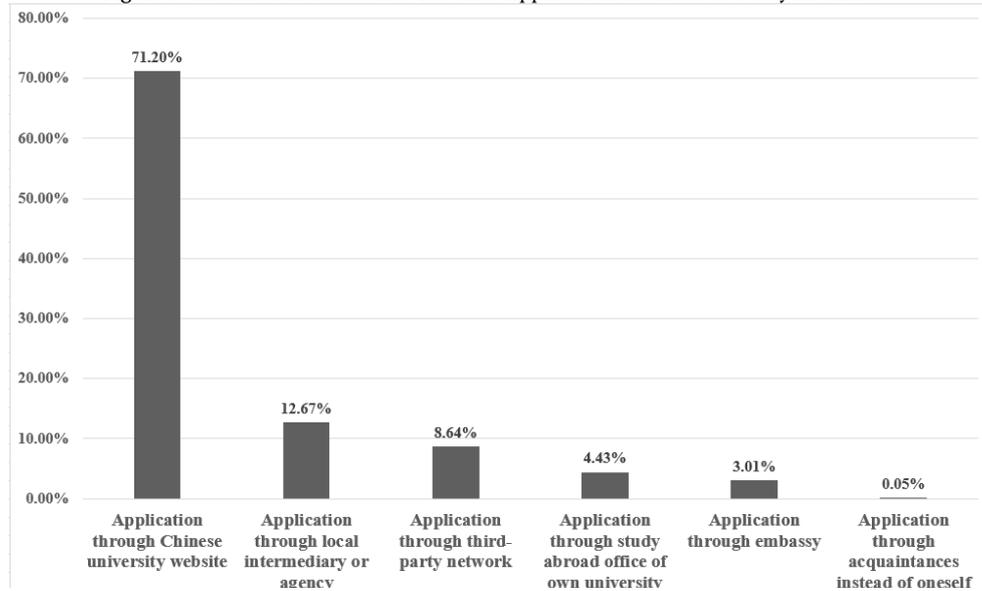


Source: China Overseas Student Network, 2014.

Insufficient information introduction and dissemination

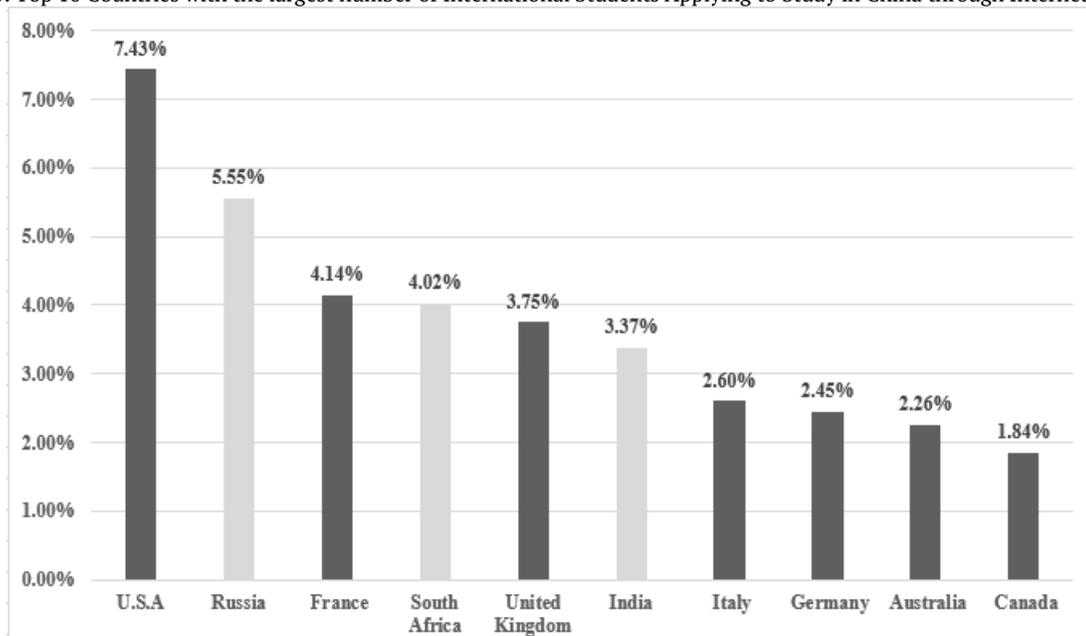
As we know, in today's society, it is particularly important to use the Internet and other emerging media to introduce and disseminate information to the outside world, which can help us to be better known and improve our influence, attraction and soft power. Since 2010, the number of international students through Internet applying to study in China has been growing rapidly, accounting for 23.55% of the total number of international students applying to study in China in 2010 and 40.13% in 2014(China Overseas Student Network, 2014).Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 5 with the questionnaire conducted by China Overseas Student Network in 2014, nearly 71.20% of international students prefer to apply through Chinese universities websites to study in China, and this application method comes first in all ones. In 2014, Russia, South Africa and India were among the top 10 countries in the world with the largest number of international students applying to study in China through the Internet (Figure 6).

Figure 5: International Students' Favorite Application Methods to Study in China



Source: China Overseas Student Network (2014).

Figure 6: Top 10 Countries with the largest number of International Students Applying to Study in China through Internet in 2014



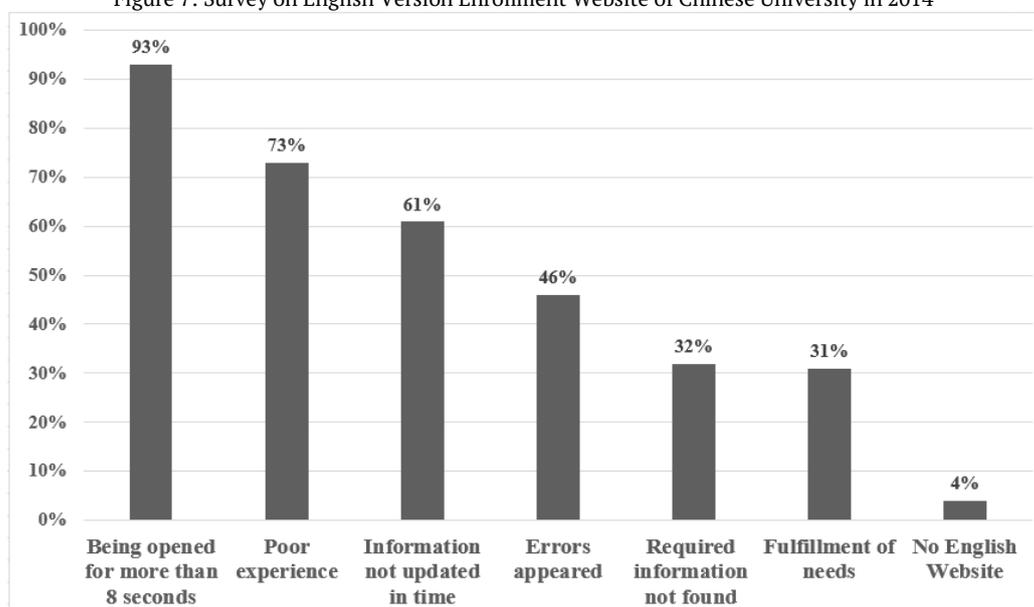
Source: China Overseas Student Network (2014).

However, faced with international students' needs of information in coming to study in China, some Chinese universities "cannot provide corresponding services and products, which directly hinder the development of international students studying in China" (China Overseas Student Network, 2014). As shown in Figure 7 with the questionnaire on English version enrollment website of Chinese universities conducted by China Overseas Student Network in 2014, among the 100 Chinese universities participating in the survey, 93% of Chinese university websites were opened more than 8 seconds, 73% of the websites left a poor experience to the international students, 61% of the websites were not updated in time, 46% of the websites had errors, 32% of the websites showed few information needed, and 4% of the universities had no

clue of the websites. Only 31% of Chinese university websites met the needs of international students studying in China (China Overseas Student Network, 2014).

From this survey, it shows that many Chinese universities ignore and lack sufficient and effective information introduction and dissemination to international students. There is an old saying in China that good wine needs no bush. It means that if the wine is well-brewed, people will come to taste it because of the good smell though it is in a deep alley. The saying implies that as long as the thing is good, even if it is in a very remote area, people can always know it through its excellent quality. This sentence reflects a traditional belief that Chinese people focus on getting things well done, but ignore publicity to the outside world. Although to do things well is very important, the information introduction and dissemination to the outside world is equally important. Both need to be taken into account. In terms of international students education in China, due to the neglect and lack of information introduction and dissemination to international students in many Chinese universities, many international students and universities including ones from the BRICS countries have limited knowledge and understanding of China's higher education, of China's international students education policy and current situation of some Chinese universities, etc., which further influence international students' choice of study destinations and the development of international students education in China. Therefore, some Chinese universities need to change the traditional belief that *good wine needs no bush* and attach importance to increasing information introduction and dissemination to the outside world.

Figure 7: Survey on English Version Enrollment Website of Chinese University in 2014



Source: China Overseas Student Network (2014).

Conclusion and recommendations

BRICS countries are located on four continents, covering the northern and southern hemispheres. The sum of five countries' land area accounts for 26.46% of the total area of the world's territory, the sum of their population accounts for 42.58% of the world's total population, and the sum of their economic aggregate accounts for 23.24% of the world's total economic aggregate (2017). (China's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, 2019) In China's foreign exchanges and cooperation, the BRICS countries occupy an important position. Since 2013, under the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, China has actively strengthened exchanges and cooperation with the BRICS countries in the field of higher education. By the end of May 2017, China had cooperated with the four BRICS countries in more than 150 institutions and projects (MENG Zi, 2017:45). The international students education is an important part of higher education exchanges and cooperation between China and the BRICS countries. It is of great significance for promoting the internationalization of higher education of both sides, fostering youth exchanges and enhancing friendship between the countries.

During the period from 2010 to 2018, with the promotion of the Chinese government and the support of the BRICS countries, the total number of the BRICS students studying in China continued to grow, currently approaching 50,000. Among them, degree students took up a main share, and the number of them was increasing steadily. Meanwhile, the number and the proportion of scholarship students had continuously increased. In addition, the choice of majors of students was being more diversified, with the rapid growth in the number of students studying engineering, western medicine, science, etc. While some development has been made, there were still some problems in the BRICS students education in China, including limited number of students studying in China from Brazil and South Africa, lack of mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees, unitary source and limited number of scholarships, poor quality of China's higher education and international students teaching in some Chinese universities, and insufficient information introduction and dissemination, etc.

As a result, in order to increase the attractiveness of China's higher education and promote the development of the BRICS students education in China, China needs to make efforts from the following five points:

- a) While continue to promote the scale of students studying in China from Russia and India, China needs to overcome some difficulties including remoteness of distance and lack of mutual understanding, and make some effort to attract more students from South Africa and Brazil, which have the limited number of students studying in China, through increasing scholarships, developing students exchanges programs studying in China and promoting exchanges and cooperation in higher education, etc.
- b) In order to recruit more students studying in China from Brazil and India and promote higher education cooperation, China needs to gain the support of Brazil and India to achieve mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and degrees with the two countries
- c) Scholarship is an important means of attracting international students, especially those high-level ones, and the unitary source and limited number of scholarships to international students studying in China are not good to promote the international students education including from the BRICS countries. Therefore, China needs to broaden scholarship sources to provide more scholarships for international students studying in China. Besides the central government, it is necessary for Chinese business community, universities, local governments, and individuals to set up and participate in scholarship programs. Meanwhile, with the cooperation of the BRICS countries, China can explore some special scholarship programs for their students to study in China.
- d) In the face of the fierce international competition of the world's education powers, to promote the sustainable and healthy development of international students education in China including from the BRICS countries, it is fundamental to improve the quality of Chinese higher education and teaching for international students in

some Chinese universities, through improving the level of internationalization of teaching staff, offering more courses in English, setting up the curriculum rationally, and establishing a systematic cultivating system for international students, etc.

- e) To meet the needs of international students including ones from the BRICS countries, while improving the quality of teaching, some Chinese universities need to increase information introduction and dissemination, especially about their international student education policy, university profile, scholarship programs, and special majors, etc. Meanwhile, it is necessary to expand the channel of information introduction and dissemination, including improving access to university English version website, adopting the Internet and other emerging media, enhancing cooperation with intermediary agencies for studying abroad, and strengthening information sharing in running school with foreign universities, etc.

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RESUMO

Esse artigo busca fazer uma análise geral e pesquisa comparativa acerca da educação dos estudantes originários dos países BRICS (Rússia, Índia, Brasil e África do Sul) na China entre 2010 e 2018. Durante esse período, com a promoção do governo chinês e a cooperação entre os BRICS, o número total de estudantes do bloco estudando na China cresceu continuamente, finalmente alcançando 50.000. Baseado em estatísticas divulgadas pelo Ministério da Educação chinês e principalmente utilizando métodos quantitativos e comparativos, esse artigo foca no desenvolvimento e problemas da educação dos estudantes BRICS na China durante tal período e fornece algumas recomendações para a ampliação desse processo. Para demonstrar as ideias, esse artigo está dividido em cinco unidades. Depois da introdução, a segunda parte aprenda a evolução e fornece um panorama da política chinesa para educação de estudantes internacionais. Na terceira parte nos concentramos em uma análise do desenvolvimento da educação dos estudantes BRICS e seus problemas serão analisados na sequência. Por fim, há as conclusões e algumas recomendações para maior desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Educação de Estudantes Internacionais; China; Países BRICS; Educação Superior.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to make an overall analysis and comparative research on the BRICS students education in China from the BRICS countries (Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa) from 2010 to 2018. During this period, with the promotion of the Chinese government and the cooperation of the BRICS countries, the total number of the BRICS students studying in China had continued to grow, finally approaching 50,000. Based on the statistics released by China's Ministry of Education and mainly using comparative research and quantitative research methods, the paper focuses on the development and problems of the BRICS students education in China during the period from 2010 to 2018, and gives some recommendations for its further development. To demonstrate the ideas, the paper will be divided into five parts. After the introduction, the second part will present the evolution and development overview of Chinese policy on the international students education in China from 2010 to 2018. In the third part, it will be concentrated on the analysis of development in the BRICS students education in China during this period, and its problems will be analyzed in the fourth part. At last, the fifth one, there will be a conclusion and some recommendations for its further development.

Keywords: International Students Education; China; BRICS Countries; Higher Education.

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