

# *China's National Image in Higher Education Market*

—A Survey on Perception of China from International and Chinese Students'

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**Abstract**—The purpose of the essay is to evaluate the national image of China and to increase the country's higher education quality. A questionnaire was designed and a detailed analysis of the data was made to determine the similarities and differences in view of the international and domestic students and their overall impression on China as well as their emotional, physical, economical, political, social, cultural, and educational evaluation on it. The author finds out that international students give a lower evaluation on China than Chinese students, especially in the field of its political image. But they are more optimistic about its education and citizenship. In addition, both parties agree on the economic performance and cultural enchantment of the nation. Based on the research they made, the essay puts forward suggestions to optimize China's national image and to enhance its education competence in the higher education market.

**Keywords**—National Image; Higher Education Market; Image Building Strategy; Cri Index

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, military power is no longer the only measure of a nation's strength while many other factors, for example, national image, are taken into consideration. The national strength is the foundation of their diplomacy [1] (Rourke 1997). Therefore, as the external appearance of the national power, national image is playing a more and more significant role in diplomacy [2].

Higher education Market (abbreviate to HE market) is an international phenomenon [3] that needs attention in the national-image building strategy. Apart from the quality of higher education, national image is also a vital factor in the fierce competition of higher education of the world. It is well known that students are the main audience of HE market, we believe that comparing their perception of China can help us recognize and improve China national image.

The research aims to make an evaluation of both international and domestic students' view of China and find out their difference and similarities. Furthermore, it puts forward the strategies and suggestions to the optimization of the development strategy of the national image and the promotion of the competitive power of China.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Research on National Image

Domestic researches on national image mainly focus on the field of Journalism and communication as well as Chinese and International Politics. And four main topics are being emphasized, such as Cultural Imperialism theory, national image establishment and communication, the crisis management of national image and the event of national image promotion [4]. But little concern has been made to the interdisciplinary research, such as the research on the relationship between national image and higher education.

### B. Evaluation of Higher Education

The market-oriented development of higher education (Higher education market) turns the students and their parents into consumers with independent power. Accordingly, teachers become the provider of the educational service. Schools, on the other hand, are regarded the educational service market while students become the products [5]. Nagashima [6] (1970) first came up with the concept of country of origin image in the higher education market. As a segment of national image research, country of origin image points out the significant role of the nation in establishing market competence in the marketing aspect and further considers the relationship between the function and factors of the country of origin image. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to

study and verify whether the impact of national image still exists in today's higher educational market.

### C. Measurement of National Image

Many researches have done upon the measurement of National Image. Particularly, Country Reputation Investigation (abbreviate to CRI [7]) was invented and used in the measurement of the Country Reputation of Liechtenstein. Another model, called push-pull model [8], separates decision into three processes with the second process of which focus on the option of the host country. Besides, the push-pull model which is specially designed for those who want to study abroad are highly coincided with CRI, and demonstrates the necessity to conduct national image survey to the international students.

TABLE I. MEASUREMENT INDEXES OF NATIONAL IMAGE

Index	Including Index
Emotional Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I respect [COUNTRY].</li> <li>- I like [COUNTRY].</li> <li>- I trust [COUNTRY].</li> </ul>
Physical Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a beautiful place.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] has well-educated residents.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] has good infrastructure of roads, housing, services, health care, and communications.</li> </ul>
Financial Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COUNTRY] is an inviting place to do business.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a well-developed industrial sector.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a low-tax country.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a safe place in which to invest.</li> </ul>
Leadership Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COUNTRY] has charismatic leaders.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] communicates an appealing vision of the country.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] is well-managed.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] upholds international laws.</li> </ul>
Cultural Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a socially and culturally diverse country.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] has a rich historical past.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] offers enjoyable entertainment activities.</li> </ul>
Social Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COUNTRY] supports good causes.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] is a responsible member of the global community.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] supports responsible environmental policies.</li> </ul>
Educational Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is easy to obtain information on [COUNTRY]'s higher education.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] has good quality of education.</li> <li>- [COUNTRY] provides beneficial environment for learning.</li> <li>- The cost of studying in [COUNTRY] is relatively low.</li> <li>- There is an established population of overseas students in [COUNTRY].</li> </ul>

The methodology of questionnaire is used to gather data and analyze data to come up with conclusion and suggestion.

### D. Research Method

Given the fact that the educational environment and social formation of students from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau are different from that of students in Mainland China, we classify them as International Students. Therefore, our research subjects are divided into two groups. One group includes students from other countries and from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, who are abbreviated as International Students while the other Mainland Students--- those from Mainland as well as the Chinese students who are studying aboard.

The questionnaire is designed to have two versions--- one in Chinese and the other English, with the same structure and same content and is divided into three parts. In the first part, the author makes use of the 'seven-point scale' to estimate the overall impression on China global reputation. And in the second part, the writer tries to reveal China National Image in seven different aspects by adopting seven-point scale, i.e. Emotional Appeal, Physical Appeal, Economical Appeal, Political Appeal, Social Appeal, Cultural Appeal and Educational Appeal. In addition to the six index in the CRI[7] of Liechtenstein, the Educational Appeal from Push-Pull factors[8] is included (as shown in TABLE I ) to suit students in HE market. Furthermore, the third part aims to gather Demography data.

The essay released questionnaires in Google Drive. The English version is delivered via e-mail and other social networks like Facebook. And Chinese version is delivered via Wechat, QQ and other social networks.

## III. DATA ANALYSIS

270 questionnaires have been collected, 269 of which are effective, including 145 International Students and Mainland Students.

### A. Analysis of China National Image

Three calculation indexes (as shown in TABLE II) have been applied to evaluate and analyze China Comprehensive National Image--- the subjective, objective and comprehensive image. The subjective image comes from the statistic on China Global Image, which is in the first part of the questionnaire. The objective one results from the average score of the first and the second part whereas the comprehensive Image is measured according to the average index of the second part.

By comparing the three indexes between the two with independent t-test (as it is shown in TABLE II), it is found that for Chinese mainland students, China's overall reputation is significantly better than that of International Students.

However, the average points of the Subjective Image of both groups are much lower than that of the Objective Image, which means the cognitive discrepancy between Chinese subjective and objective image. It also turns out that both groups have a kind of 'prejudice by first impression' towards China's Image.

TABLE II. INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF OVERALL CHINESE NATIONAL IMAGE

	Average		Independent sample T-test
	International Students	Mainland Chinese Students	
Subjectivity Image	3.94	4.31	0.035*
Objective Image	4.19	4.61	0.010*
Average Image	4.20	4.62	0.010*

a. \*means correlation under 0.05

#### B. Analysis of China's National Image in Different Appeals

Seven appeals between the two were compared with independent t-test (as shown in TABLE III). It is found that Mainland Students' points are significantly higher than International Students in Emotional Appeal, Political Appeal, Social Appeal and Cultural Appeal, which indicates that Chinese students have a more positive attitude towards China's politics and the society, while international students tend to be quite pessimistic in these aspects. Both groups are slightly positive towards Physical Appeal and think highly of the Cultural Appeal of China.

TABLE III. INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHINESE NATIONAL IMAGE IN DIFFERENT APPEALS

	Average		Independent sample T-test
	International Students	Mainland Chinese Students	
Emotional Appeals	4.01	5.33	0.000*
Physical Appeals	4.20	4.42	0.133
Economical Appeals	4.79	4.25	0.000*
Political Appeals	3.30	4.41	0.000*
Social Appeals	3.19	4.81	0.000*
Cultural Appeals	5.22	5.38	0.265
Educational Appeals	4.33	4.27	0.606

b. \* means correlation under 0.05

The research also shows that International Students give significantly higher evaluation on Economical Appeal and Educational Appeal than Mainland Students, which explains the fact that international students have more confidence in Chinese economy and education.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The essay demonstrates to us China national image through survey and research on International and Chinese students. The country with a long history of 5,000 years, China's Cultural Appeal is the most favorite appeal to international students. The study also indicates their positive attitude towards Chinese Education, while Chinese students feel quite pessimistic towards it. It is suggested that making good use of Chinese Cultural and Confucius Institute can definitely of great help for us to improve and establish a good national image in the international society. Regretfully, Chinese politics and society are two factors that international student's think poorly of, which may be the result of their different political system from us. To improve China national image, it is believed that Chinese government should put more emphasis on external publicity.

External publicity must be highly valued by all. More reports should be put forward to show Chinese government's willingness and positive actions to take its international responsibility. Apart from that, to share our achievements of the reform and opening-up policy, it is wise to make good use of Chinese cultural advantages to communicate with international world friendly.

More cultural works are needed to show Chinese social life thoroughly to convey our kindness and hospitality towards international friends. It is also important for us to make full use of the digital media to communicate with young generation throughout the world. Moreover, the current modern social networks such as Wechat, QQ, Facebook and Twitter can also be used to help Chinese government to get in touch with the worldwide young generations and establish the positive national image.

More organizations like Confucius Institute are encouraged, too. We hold it to be true that higher education students are the backbones of future international society. We believe that using properly, education is due to be a significant approach to the improvement and promotion of Chinese national image.

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