

## **Culture Shock for International Students**

Currently, 23,000 international students study in Adelaide. These students think that as a modern Western city, Adelaide offers many opportunities: the chance to work in an international setting; respected qualifications; and experience with an English-speaking culture. This essay is based on two interviews, one with Dr. Lisa Lines, an experienced tutor from Flinders University; and another with a Chinese student named Xiao Lin who studies Accounting at Adelaide University. Drawing on these two interviews, this essay will discuss the differences between Australian and Chinese Universities in terms of entrance and graduation, learning methods, assessment methods and student life, as these may represent a culture shock for Chinese students when they arrive to study at University in Australia.

China has a different educational system to Australia. China has nine years of compulsory education, which means students must finish Grade 1 to Grade 9 before they can proceed to their working life. Everyone has a chance to choose whether they will go to University or not. China has a large population living within 34 provincial-level administrative units. Universities in different provinces have their own standard admission requirements, which include Cumulative Grade Point Averages (CGPA). Lisa agrees that there is keen competition for people who live in provinces other than Beijing and Shanghai to enter highly ranked universities in China. In addition, Xiao Lin points out that if you do not enter a highly ranked University, it

means you have less opportunity to find a good job later on. Degrees from highly ranked Universities are therefore very useful for students attempting to find a suitable job in the future. The Grade 12 national exams at the end of the semester are very important for students who want to continue their study in a post-secondary school. After admission to a University, everything is easier than was the entrance process.

Australia's small population means that University entrance is different than it is in China. It is a much easier process for students to enter University here. Schools do not just have Year 12 courses, but also foundation courses and TAFE courses for students who want to go to University. These courses act as a bridge to University entrance. For example, when you finish some TAFE courses, you can transfer to the second year of University. Entry to these courses depends on the student's study level. Another difference between Chinese and Australian Universities is that University courses are much harder in Australia. In Australia, you must learn different writing styles to those taught in high school, and learn more about academic knowledge to focus on the course that you choose. In addition, it can be even more difficult for some international students, since they are studying in a foreign language.

There are also differences in University learning methods between China and Australia. Xiao Lin said that the learning methods used in these two countries are similar in that both focus on self-directed learning in University. Yet she also mentioned that in China, it is easier because all the learning is based on the textbooks.

She also gave an example to demonstrate the difference between the learning methods. Students who study in Chinese universities need to study more subjects, like the Principles of Marxism, College English, Micro-computer Control Technology and others. If they want to apply for a Masters degree, they need to take an exam including Advanced Mathematics, English and other subjects, even if they do not intend to study Maths or English in the future. This means that Universities in China have a broad focus on all fields of study. Furthermore, timetables are set by the University, and thus there is no flexibility to choose subjects and times. In Australia, learning methods are very different to Chinese universities. Lisa and Xiao Lin both agreed that the learning style in Australia is more flexible. Student can choose their own timetable and subjects (except for their major subject) by themselves. They can therefore adjust their timetable around a part-time job or personal preference. This is better for some students who get up late as they can schedule their classes in the afternoon! Students are also free to focus on specific types of subjects within a degree. For example, if you study history, you would not need to study Maths or Physics.

We can also compare University assessment methods between the two countries. Xiao Lin mentioned that in China nearly 90% of students' grades are based on a final exam, but students' homework is based entirely on their textbooks, so if a student understands their textbooks clearly, they will know how to do well in their exams. The most important piece of assessment at University is the final Graduation Thesis. This paper tests research and academic skills that have been developed by students

throughout their course. In Australia, as Lisa points out, grades are also given for attendance, participation, exercises, major papers and exams, all of which are added together to form the final grade. She says that when marking a student's paper, she always looks at all aspects of the paper, including: spelling, grammar, argument, organisation and references. Xiao Lin observes that when she studied Accounting in Australia, the focus was on the essay, short answers and analysis. In contrast, her friend who did Accounting in China was examined on calculation.

Lastly, Chinese students living in Australia have a different experience of life than they would living in China. In China, when students go to University they usually have two living options. For students who attend school in their hometown, they can live with their family. Another option is living at school. Chinese universities always provide accommodation for students, in the form of dormitories, and most of them have male and female dormitories located separately from each other. This includes a canteen for students and teachers, where students can have three meals a day. Students do not need to worry about bills for the internet or electricity, as their parents or University helps them. In Australia, or in any foreign country, students need to find a room to rent, connect a telephone, pay the electricity bills and cook by themselves. All of the housework needs to be completed by the students too. Xiao Lin said she had moved five times during her five years of study in Adelaide. She also said most of her Chinese friends had done the same thing. 'I found it difficult living by myself. When I first arrived, I could not live as comfortably as in China', she said. She also found that

in Australia, the traffic is not very good, most shopping centers are far from her house, and she has to wait 30 minutes to one hour for the bus on weekends and holidays. It is very hard for a student without a car, especially when the shopping centres are far away from their home. Although she had these problems, she pointed out that the time she spent at her home-stay was a very happy time. She stayed with a very friendly Australian host family, and gained a lot experience with Australian culture. She thinks that most of Adelaide's people are very friendly, and the environment is very suitable for people to live.

Thus it can be seen that there is a high degree of culture shock for Chinese students who arrive in Australia to study at University. Most Chinese students come to Adelaide because they want to improve their English, find a good study environment and study at a top University. Regardless of the differences between Australia and China in terms of entrance and graduation, learning methods, assessment methods and living problems, students will keep coming to Australia because studying in Adelaide provides many benefits.