

A Study on the Identity, Cross-Cultural Management Behavior and Career Adjustment Path of Foreign Student Counselors in China Based on Social Role Theory

Kedi Mo*, Yaoxiong Li

School of International Culture, South China Normal University, Guangzhou 510631, China

*Corresponding author: Mo Kedi, 1147768364@qq.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Counselors for international students are not only professional identities but also social roles, encompassing counselors' professional responsibilities and expectations, international students' needs and expectations, as well as the influence of social and cultural environments. Under the guidance of social role theory, this paper first analyzes the current status quo of the identity of foreign student counselors in China and discusses the role conflicts and related work difficulties faced by this profession. Secondly, it explores the relationship between foreign student counselors' understanding of their careers and their cross-cultural management behavior. Finally, the paper puts forward suggestions for strengthening the relevant system guarantees and providing platform experiences from the perspective of the state to the universities. Additionally, it proposes suggestions for self-empowerment from the perspective of the practitioners, offering a new path to the high-quality development of international students' education.

Keywords: Counselors for international students in China; Social role; Identity; Career adjustment; Cross-cultural communication

Online publication: February 27, 2024

1. Introduction

The profession of international student counseling specializes in managing students studying abroad in the era of globalization. In 2017, the Administrative Measures for School Recruitment and Training of International Students, jointly issued by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Public Security of China, first proposed the establishment of the position of "International Student Counselor"^[1]. This initiative has significantly influenced the creation of a conducive international teaching and research environment, the promotion of overseas education in China, and the dissemination of Chinese culture abroad^[2]. Consequently, it is imperative for colleges and universities to establish and enhance the workforce of full-time counselors for international students. This is not only a necessary measure for the internationalization of higher education

institutions but also an essential guarantee for promoting the high-quality development of international education.

The identity of counselors for international students in China transcends being merely professionals who assist international students in adapting to campus life and academics; it represents a multidimensional and complex concept. However, the professional recognition of international student counselors remains low. Many universities in China have yet to establish full-time and part-time counseling positions for international students, and this role lacks relevant industry standards and recognition mechanisms^[3]. Consequently, the value pursuits and behaviors of international student counselors are driven by institutionalized needs for survival and development, preventing them from establishing a comprehensive professional identity. This, in turn, hinders their ability to provide high-quality services and diverse support to international students.

Therefore, guided by social role theory, this paper analyzes the various dimensions of the identity concept of foreign student counselors in China and explores counselors' cross-cultural management behavior. Subsequently, it proposes a constructive adjustment path for this profession.

2. Analysis of the identity dilemma of foreign student counselors in China based on social role theory

The concept of counselors for foreign students in China encompasses a complex professional identity, and the degree of social recognition of this identity is closely linked to their effectiveness in professional roles. According to social role theory, society functions as a grand stage where individuals assume various roles. Fulfilling the rights and obligations associated with a particular status constitutes playing a role^[4]. Delving into the role expectations, conflicts, and commitments encountered by international student counselors during their work aids in revealing the nature and impact of their identity dilemmas^[5].

Role expectations entail the various requirements and anticipations imposed on individuals' attitudes and behaviors based on societal role norms. The role expectations placed on international student counselors are diverse; they are expected to fulfill roles such as administrators, educators, friends, and cultural liaisons. Their responsibilities include facilitating international students' adjustment to new environments, providing guidance on academic and personal matters, advocating for students' rights, and fostering cross-cultural exchanges^[6]. Consequently, the breadth of responsibilities and workload for international student counselors in China is substantial. They must address not only issues similar to those encountered by counselors for Chinese students but also navigate the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Without a fair distribution of workload or adequate support, the profession may struggle to fulfill its potential.

Role conflict arises when individuals must reconcile conflicting obligations associated with multiple roles. In China, international student counselors simultaneously assume the roles of counselor, manager, and service provider, leading to inherent conflicts^[7]. While the managerial role necessitates enforcing school regulations and ensuring student safety and well-being, these responsibilities may seem restrictive to international students. Thus, counselors must expend additional effort in elucidating the importance of rules and regulations to foster student compliance. Moreover, as service providers, counselors must assist international students with various issues, ranging from accommodation^[8] to cultural integration. However, an excessive focus on service provision may impede effective student management, thereby compromising school efficiency. Striking a balance between managerial and service roles and implementing measures to mitigate role conflicts poses a common challenge for international student counselors.

Regarding role commitment, international student counselors in China serve as primary points of contact for students adjusting to Chinese culture, living conditions, and academic settings. They are committed to

facilitating students' integration and providing essential guidance and support for personal development. However, there exists an imbalance between the efforts invested and the outcomes achieved in fulfilling these commitments. Given the diverse needs and abilities of international students, coupled with language and cultural barriers, counselors expend significant time and energy in understanding and addressing students' concerns ^[9]. Moreover, the complexity of issues facing international students, spanning societal, national, and institutional domains, complicates the problem-solving process, adding to counselors' burden.

Despite the intricate professional identity associated with their role, international student counselors in China remain inadequately recognized in society, leading to an identity dilemma. Firstly, their work is often constrained by organizational evaluation mechanisms that fail to account for the unique challenges of counseling international students ^[10]. Consequently, counselors are pressured to conform to evaluation criteria designed for counseling Chinese students, neglecting the distinct needs of international students and hindering their ability to fulfill their professional roles effectively. Hence, there is a pressing need for tailored evaluation and incentive mechanisms to enable counselors to better serve their roles and responsibilities. Secondly, schools or departments provide insufficient support to international student counselors, neglecting to furnish essential resources and opportunities for professional development, such as training and cross-cultural communication initiatives ^[11]. As a result, counselors struggle to meet students' needs and expectations. Schools and departments must allocate more resources and support, including training and cross-cultural communication opportunities, to enhance counselors' professionalism and service quality ^[12].

3. Understanding the role of foreign student counselors and their cross-cultural management behavior

Social role theory posits that individuals' behavior and attitudes are shaped by the social roles they inhabit. As cross-cultural managers, foreign student counselors in China encounter the role commitment conflict stemming from cross-cultural communication barriers. Given the prevalence of cross-cultural interactions in their work, encountering communication barriers is inevitable. The understanding of their social roles significantly influences their cross-cultural management behavior when interacting with foreign students.

Firstly, individuals' internal cognition of their identity and role significantly impacts foreign student counselors' attitudes and behaviors in cross-cultural communication. In their role as facilitators of international students' adaptation to Chinese cultural environments and problem solvers in academic, personal, and mental health matters, counselors require cross-cultural communication skills and awareness. Effective recognition of their role orientation and proactive acquisition of cross-cultural communication knowledge and skills enable counselors to fulfill their roles more effectively.

Secondly, the organizational expectations and requirements placed on counselors influence their behavior in cross-cultural management. The identity and role of foreign student counselors in China shape their cross-cultural management practices. As cross-cultural managers, counselors must possess cross-cultural sensitivity, cultural adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. Mindful communication, attitudes, and behaviors during interactions with international students help prevent misunderstandings and conflicts, fostering trust and rapport.

Finally, external perceptions and evaluations impact the career development of foreign student counselors in China. Others' expectations and evaluations of counselors influence their cross-cultural management effectiveness. By fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, building trust, and providing appropriate support, counselors enhance cross-cultural adaptation and development among international students. This, in turn, boosts counselors' self-efficacy and sense of accomplishment.

4. The adjustment path of role conflict and cross-cultural management obstacles of foreign student counselors in China

From the perspective of social role theory and cross-cultural communication, it is evident that international student counselors currently grapple with increasingly pronounced role conflicts and cross-cultural management barriers. To promote and ensure the professionalization and vocationalization of international student counselors in colleges and universities, it is imperative to address these issues through appropriate adjustments and focal points.

Firstly, optimizing the performance appraisal, training, and promotion system for international student counselors is crucial to providing a robust institutional framework for their growth and development. The imperfect career development system for foreign student counselors in China is the root cause of role conflicts, as their work has long been expected to conform to the standards of general counselors^[13]. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, provincial education departments, and universities should establish a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and three-dimensional security system. This may involve implementing work management measures tailored to foreign student counselors in China, specifying responsibilities and workload calculation methods^[14], diversifying avenues for recognizing outstanding performance, establishing a robust performance reward and punishment mechanism, and updating evaluation criteria to align with the unique context of foreign student counseling in China. Legalizing and institutionalizing the construction of international student counselors promotes their integration into the larger ideological and academic workforce, optimizes their assessment, and fully mobilizes their enthusiasm and initiative to advance internationalization and high-quality development.

Secondly, leveraging the advantages of internationalization platforms is vital for enhancing the ideological refinement, political acumen, practical skills, and professional training of counselors for international students in China. Given the specialized, diverse, and multi-level nature of their occupation and clientele, utilizing the Ministry of Education's and local colleges' internationalization projects and platforms is essential. This may involve utilizing Sino-foreign cooperative education projects for counselor exchanges and learning from successful education and management models abroad. Additionally, capitalizing on domestic and international academic exchange opportunities, organizing professional development activities, and inviting experts to share relevant experiences can enrich counselors' international perspectives, professional knowledge, and cross-cultural communication abilities^[15].

Thirdly, counselors for international students in China should actively reshape their role concepts and pursue self-empowerment for career development and job performance enhancement. To effectively mitigate role conflicts and cross-cultural communication barriers, practitioners must address subjective factors. This involves adjusting self-awareness, integrating into the work environment, cultivating professional satisfaction, and overcoming existing professional challenges through role literacy, skill enhancement, and self-empowerment. Self-empowerment encompasses cognitive, emotional, action-oriented, and demand-driven aspects. Continuous learning, exploration, and reflection improve cognitive abilities, while empathy, patience, and mentorship foster emotional connections with international students^[16]. Taking timely actions to address students' needs and challenges demonstrates action ability, while actively seeking solutions to problems encountered by international students demonstrates a commitment to their well-being. Only through active self-empowerment can counselors effectively address the complexities of international student education in China.

5. Conclusion

As counselors of international students grapple with challenges such as severe role conflicts and cross-

cultural management barriers, it is imperative for relevant departments, from the national level to universities, to prioritize the career and professional development of these counselors. Efforts should focus on enhancing the profession's identity, bolstering institutional support, and providing training platforms. Counselors for international students in China must also comprehend their social roles and responsibilities fully. They should cultivate their cross-cultural communication skills, actively seek opportunities to enhance their cross-cultural management abilities and empower themselves to assist international students in better adapting to and integrating into new cultural environments. International student education plays a pivotal role in higher education's international cooperation and exchange^[17]. Collaboration is essential to provide robust talent and logistical support for the high-quality development of international student education and international education as a whole.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhou Y, Ding G, 2022, Thoughts on the Career Development of International Student Counselors in Colleges and Universities. *Western China Quality Education*, 8(15): 3.
- [2] Hu Z, 2023, Discussion on the Training Mechanism of Foreign Student Counselors in the Convergence Management of Studying in China. *Data of Culture and Education*, 2023(2), 202–206.
- [3] Li B, Xiong F, 2018, Student Management Team Construction of Thinking. *The Guide of Science & Education*, 2018(26): 178–179.
- [4] Li B, 1995, Social Role Theory and Its Application. *Journal of Guilin Normal College (Comprehensive Edition)*, 1995(2): 41–42 + 31.
- [5] Wang H, Hou F, 2015, Post Analysis of International Student Counselors from the Perspective of Role Theory. *Vocational Education Research*, 2015(1): 55–58.
- [6] Xie X, 2023, Study on Cross-Cultural Social Adaptation of International Students and Its Strategies. *Overseas English*, 2023(8): 185–187.
- [7] Geng P, 2020, Research on Role Conflict and Adjustment of Full-Time Counselors in Colleges and Universities, thesis, University of Science and Technology Beijing.
- [8] Lin W, Ye Q, 2023, An Exploration of Cultural Identity of International Student Counselors in China from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence. *Journal of Wuyi University*, 42(10): 104–109.
- [9] Ding Q, 2021, Analysis on the Management of International Students in Colleges and Universities. *Data of Culture and Education*, 2021(7): 116–117 + 153.
- [10] Chen J, 2019, Research on the Path of Professional Construction of International Student Counselors in China. *Invention and Innovation (Vocational Education)*, 2019(11): 88–89.
- [11] Gao M, Wu J, 2020, Discussion on the Ability, Quality and Duty Orientation of Professional International Student Counselors. *Journal of Tianjin Sino-German University of Applied Sciences*, 2020(2): 90–93.
- [12] Xie Y, 2019, Exploration of the Career Development Path of International Student Counselors in Colleges and Universities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 2019(24): 140–142.
- [13] Lin Y, 2018, Analysis of the Work of International Student Counselors Under the Guidance of College Counselors. *Learning Weekly*, 2018(34): 25–26.
- [14] Wang J, 2021, An Analysis of the Path of Professional Quality Improvement of International Student Counselors in

Colleges and Universities in the New Era. *University*, 2021(38): 147–150.

- [15] Xu X, 2023, Research on Management Promotion of International Students in China from the Perspective of Instructors' Competence. *World of Public Relations*, 2023(17): 117–119.
- [16] Yang Z-Y, Liao S-Y, 2022, Construction of the Quality and Ability System of International Student Counselors in International Vocational Education. *PR Magazine*, 2022(13): 139–141.
- [17] Zhan S, Li S, 2023, Development and Characteristics of International Student Education Research – Based on the Analysis of International Authoritative Journal Texts. *Higher Education Exploration*, 2023(1): 119–128.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.