Navigating Family and the University

East Asian Ethnographies (Anth 499 NA): University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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Overview

This project examines the role parents and/or other family members in relation to international undergraduate students from Mainland China. Specifically, the research focuses on the role of family within three distinct time periods for an individual student: as the student applies to study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; given the physical separation between the involved parties, to what extent are parents and/or other family members involved with the student while they are studying at the university; and the level of impact family on the student as he/she completes his/her studies at the university and pursues his/her post-graduation endeavors.

Method

Using a snowball sample method we built on pre-established contacts of group members to locate participants from Mainland China.

Conducted in depth individual interviews with participants focused on the following questions:

- How were parents of these students involved in the decision for them to study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign?
- Conducted in depth individual interviews with participants focused on the following questions:
- What is the nature of the communication and/or interactions between the specified students and their family while they are students?
- How do these expectations affect the respective student, and how do the students’ plans compare with those of their parents?

Cultural/Social Capital

"Human capital” development is fundamental for economic growth and social progress” (Hoffman 2010).

"I think my experience will help me regardless of where I go in the future. My parents think that if I had gone to an even better school in the USA, then I would have even better opportunities. To Chinese, studying abroad is a valuable opportunity. Companies hire employees based on this, and they consider studying abroad to be an advantage because the employee will have more experiences and studied in a better education system.”

"Many engineering businesses in China respect an American Degree over a Chinese degree. It's just how it is, that's why my parents were so eager to push me towards American Universities.”

Long Distance Parenting

“My parents feel less bothered by me, and we have less arguments, actually no arguments with my mom in the past two months because she misses me. I do not like to tell my parents about bad things that happen to me because I don’t want to worry them. My grandfather told me not to spend too much time with my girlfriend, to study hard, and not to stay in the USA after I graduate. My friends and I thought it would be cool to study in the USA because of NBA games, and that life would be more interesting than in Canada.”

“I talk with my parents about once a week using Skype on my iPhone, I sometimes text them on their phones and they then call me back.”

“My parents every Friday through hotmail video chat...I see my parents every summer but I have to pay for their flight. Usually I see my Grandma...during winter break.”

Family decisions/influences

"Here I focus on the importance of immigration as an 'educational' strategy incorporating multiple family members” (Waters 2005:181).

"I did not apply to any universities in China and Canada. I applied to 11 universities in the United States (6 liberal arts colleges and 6 big public institutions). I applied based on the the overall ranking of each university.”

"...In America...after two and a half years I see more opportunities back home, first and second I see myself being more competitive than here...”

"My parents really wanted me to go to University in America so they were really supportive but I really didn't want to go.”

"I always talked about my future plans with my parents when I was in high school. I want to go to graduate school in the USA after I finish my Bachelors degree, though I might do a different major for grad school, such as an MBA or Marketing. I want to get my license for doing Actuarial Science.”

"My parents heard all these stories about how other children were attending these universities in America and getting good jobs so my parents decided that I should go to university in the U.S.”

"I wanted to be an architect but my parents influenced me to choose the path of Engineering and we chose schools based on how good the engineering program was, There were really no options for me so I chose the major tat was the closest to architecture.”

Bibliography

