

## **Introduction**

Before attending an international high school, I did not have plans to pursue an international study. However, my perspective on education changed after I travelled abroad and participated in summer camps, which led me to enroll in an international high school and eventually gained admission to The University of Warwick. During my two years at Warwick, I experienced great joy and curiosity, contradicting to the traditional Chinese education system accompanied by my learning journey. The international experience was not just about academic exchange; it felt like a communication and fusion of different cultures. Influenced by the rich history and deep cultural heritage in the UK, I experienced endless surprises and challenges from the completely different educational approach and teaching system. In the context of multicultural environment, I not only learned how to adapt to a new way of life and enrich my extracurricular activities but also deeply reflected on the cultural differences between China and the UK. This portfolio aims to document my learning experiences and daily life at the University of Warwick, which evidences my academic journey and personal growth. In the following sections, I will discuss the differences between the educational systems of China and the UK, share my experiences living in the UK, and explore how these experiences have shaped my outlook. Through this portfolio, I hope to showcase my academic abilities and personal development and offer a unique perspective on academic exchange to peers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

## **Experience**

My time studying in the UK has been filled with novelty and challenges. Initially, I was struck by the culture and excitement because of the completely different cultural environment from what I was familiar with. The streets, architecture, landscapes, and lifestyle in the UK felt both unfamiliar and amazing. Every day brought new discoveries, from the traditions of an English breakfast to the elegance of afternoon tea. These small details gradually helped me immerse myself in and understand the local cultural customs. I found myself enjoying and quickly adapting to the pleasant local atmosphere, characterized by a relaxed and laid-back vibe that is less common in my country. While China is rapidly developing, Chinese people often bear considerable pressure, working hard in their respective roles and even overlooking the enjoyment of life (Southerton, 2020). Therefore I learnt to put down my phone and laptop to enjoy the good life while studying hard.

Despite of my quick adaption to the British lifestyle, I still encountered many challenges. One of the major problems I faced was the language barrier. Although my English was sufficient for academic communication, the fast pace and various accents in daily conversation often confused me. This was particularly challenging in class and during group discussions, where I sometimes chose to remain silent due to difficulties in expressing myself or a fear of speaking up. It often took me a long time to think whether I should share my opinion, which significantly decreased my learning efficiency.

In addition, I also took considerable time to adapt the British teaching methods, the self-discipline, and the social dynamics of different cultural backgrounds. Unlike high school with supports from parents and teachers, university life demands a greater degree of self-discipline and self-monitoring. During my first semester, I mistakenly thought that not having homework

assigned by teachers meant I did not need to study. I skipped reading course materials as they were not assigned. This misunderstanding stemmed from my previous experience with China's exam-oriented education system, which eventually resulted in less satisfactory academic performance in Year 1. It was not until I interacted with local students in class that I realized the importance of self-study outside of class hours. I learned that it was crucial to independently reinforce and deepen my understanding of the knowledge to prepare adequately for final essays and exams. Therefore, this realization marked a turning point in my academic approach.

These challenges, however, also presented numerous opportunities. Engaging with classmates from the world broadened my perspective for diverse cultures. We often share our own countries' news and foods after class. For Academic perspective, the British education system's emphasis on independent thinking and critical analysis sparked my potential. Additionally, the various resources and opportunities provided by the university, such as libraries, lectures, and career counseling, greatly enriched my learning experience. I began to enjoy studying sessions in the library and diligently watched lecture recordings to better absorb the material. Gradually adapting to this new style of university learning, I eventually saw an improvement in my academic performance.

### **Difference**

This international learning experience has made me rethink my original culture. Interacting with classmates from the UK and other countries, I began to recognize unique aspects of Chinese culture, such as collectivism, respect for elders, and emphasis on education. In academic settings, there are noticeable differences between China and the UK. For example, Hofstede (1980) proposed the cultural dimensions theory in understanding these differences. However, in today's globalized world, the lines between collectivism and individualism have become more blurred. Ryan (2013) noted that in cross-cultural educational environments, Chinese students often lean towards collectivism, valuing group goals and harmony, which can influence their classroom participation and interaction levels. For example, Chinese students typically tend to remain quiet after a teacher's explanation rather than actively asking questions. Influenced by the collectivism, I fear that my questions could be seen as inappropriate or too basic, potentially affecting the class's overall image. During lectures, even when lecturers encourage questions and discussions, I might refrain from asking questions. In contrast, as the UK encourages individualism, students tend to independently express their views. This cultural difference can be challenging for Chinese students, as they may find it difficult to break away from the norms of their home culture.

Moreover, I also experienced significant differences in teaching methods between China and the UK regarding the role of language and culture in education, as noted by Jin and Cortazzi (2013). In China, education tends to be teacher-centered, with students acting primarily as passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, British educational methods emphasize interactivity, where discussion and debate are integral parts of the classroom experience. Teachers often serve as facilitators, encouraging students to ask questions and share their insights. This interactive learning environment not only increases student engagement but also enhances their critical thinking skills. Additionally, British teaching methods place a greater

emphasis on critical thinking and independent research, requiring students not only to understand knowledge but also to question and critically assess what they learn. At the beginning, this ability was my biggest weakness because my previous education did not provide opportunities to engage with critical thinking. As a result, I often struggled to consider different perspectives when required to think from multiple angles. However, when I repeatedly expressed my shortcomings to my teacher, she taught me to constantly ask why and how. I began to practice this way of thinking, and even now, I am continually working to improve my critical thinking skills. Moreover, the evaluation methods in the two countries also differ. In China, final exams usually play a major role in assessment, with grades often reflecting students' ability to memorize and comprehend course material. However, in the UK, a more diverse range of assessment methods is used, including essays, project reports, presentations, and group work. Tran (2013) notes that this variety in assessment not only evaluates academic abilities but also practical skills and teamwork. This diversity allows students to demonstrate their capabilities in multiple ways, beyond just written exams. I believe that this diverse form of assessment greatly enhances students' confidence because evaluation is not solely based on exam scores. Some students might not perform well on exams and may even fall just a few points short of passing, but they can improve their overall grade through other assessment methods, such as the proportion allocated to presentations.

Furthermore, I also experienced the difference in relationship between teachers and students. In the Chinese educational environment, there is typically a clear hierarchical distinction between teachers and students. Students should show a high level of respect for their teachers. This cultural trait extends beyond the classroom, often leading to limited interaction between students and teachers. Zhao and Coombs (2012) highlighted that this hierarchical division often results in students being less likely to engage proactively with teachers. In contrast, the British educational environment encourages interaction between students and teachers both inside and outside the classroom (Turner and Robson, 2011). Teachers are seen not only as knowledge providers but also as supporters and guides in students' learning journeys. Thankfully, at the University of Warwick, a peer mentoring system was implemented, where senior students support freshmen. This system is particularly valuable as students may feel reluctant to ask faculty members for help with personal or academic issues. Peer mentors, being closer in age and experience, can offer guidance in a more relatable and accessible way, helping new students adjust to university life and navigate the challenges they may encounter.

As globalization accelerates, educational systems are continuously adapting to the new global environment. Ryan (2013) pointed out that the trend of internationalizing cross-cultural education is transforming traditional educational models. Both the Chinese and British educational systems face challenges in better adapting to and integrating global educational concepts. The development of modern educational technologies, such as lecture capture, has provided more learning opportunities and resources but also requires students to have higher self-directed learning abilities and time management skills. One profound experience I had was with an independent research project. In China, research topics are usually assigned by teachers. In contrast, I had the opportunity to choose topics that interested me and complete the research independently in the UK. This independence was both exciting and challenging. I learned how

to conduct literature reviews, develop research plans, and solve problems independently. This experience greatly enhanced my self-directed learning abilities and research skills. During my second-year study, I explored students' perceptions of lecture capture technology. This research was fascinating because integrating technology into education has both advantages and disadvantages. While it provides students with more convenience, it can also potentially impact their grades and attendance. Such technology is not yet implemented in Chinese universities, which led me to consider why it isn't promoted in China. Is it due to differences in teaching methods or a lack of societal support? These questions encouraged me to consider the potential for integrating such technologies into Chinese education in the future.

Through observing and experiencing the differences between Chinese and British education, I have come to understand the combination and integration in educational system. In China, the systematic and rigorous education ensures students have a solid foundation of knowledge while it sometimes lacks the cultivation of critical thinking and creativity. Conversely, British education emphasizes student independence and innovation, offering more freedom but also it depends on students' strong self-discipline and time management skills. This cross-cultural academic experience has prompted me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses in learning and consider how to find a balance between the two educational systems. I realize that combining the strengths of both Chinese and British education can develop global talents with a solid knowledge foundation, critical thinking skills, and innovative capabilities.

## **Future**

Studying in the UK has been an unforgettable and challenging journey. This period has provided me with growth both on academic and professional, as well as profound personal reflection and transformation. The cross-cultural learning experience prompted me to reassess my study methods and thought processes, constantly adjusting and optimizing my learning strategies. As a Chinese student, my time in the UK also made me more aware of the importance of cultural identity. When faced with cultural conflicts and competing opinions, I learned to build bridges through communication and understanding rather than simply holding onto my viewpoints. This process made me value my cultural background while also respecting the uniqueness of other cultures. The experiences of studying and living in the UK have also profoundly influenced my future career and personal development. Whether entering multinational companies or working in international organizations, I hope to use my unique perspective and experience from both Chinese and British cultural backgrounds to promote cross cultural collaboration and communication. I am particularly interested in the fields of education and cultural exchange, as I believe these areas can provide significant platforms and opportunities for the integration and understanding of Eastern and Western cultures.

Ultimately, I aspire to become a bridge between Chinese and Western cultures, spreading China's culture and ideas to the world while bringing global practices and concepts back to China. My experience at University of Warwick has provided me with knowledge and skills and clarified my future direction. This international experience has encouraged me to find a path to common development in a globalized world by fully understanding and respecting different cultures. I look forward to translating these experiences and insights into action,

continuing to explore and grow in my future life and career.

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