Study in America: How do Chinese and Indian students differ?

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Asian students form the majority of the internationally mobile students around the world. In 2015, over 56% of all international students came from Asia, according to UNESCO.

The two most populous countries—China and India—are the biggest source of international students for many American higher education institutions. In 2016, American universities and colleges enrolled 787,773 international students in master’s and bachelor’s degree programs, according to data released by the US government’s Student and Exchange Visitor Program. One-third of these students were from China and another one-fourth were from India.

Asian families and students have a high aspiration for America as a destination. They regard American universities and colleges to be of high quality and reputation.

According to UNESCO, in 2015, 37% of 790,850 Chinese studying abroad were enrolled in US institutions. This proportion is even higher for Indian students. Over 48% of 233,540 Indian students who were studying overseas were in the US.

One of the key difference between these two countries is by their level of education.

**Chinese enroll at bachelor’s level while Indians prefer master’s degrees**

The total annual cost of an American bachelor’s degree can range from US$ 30,000 to US$70,000, depending on the type of institution and location. **Chinese families have a higher likelihood to invest** in the high overall cost
of undergraduate level programs. Fifty-five percent of all Chinese students in the US are at bachelor’s level, and the remaining 45% are at master’s level.

![Students from China and India in the US Higher Education (2016)](chart)

In contrast, the majority of Indian students take bank loans. Given the constraints of affordability, Indian students are more concentrated in shorter duration master’s programs. Ninety percent of all Indian students in the US are at master’s level, and only 10% are at bachelor’s level.

**Indian enrollments grow while it slows down for Chinese students**

The rate of growth in Chinese students coming to the US has slowed down for a range of factors, including the slowdown in the economy, a high concentration of Chinese students in some American universities and challenges faced by students in finding jobs after graduation.
Indian students grew at a fast pace as the majority enroll in engineering and computer science related fields with higher job opportunities while at the same time, Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows them to gain three years of work experience. The children of the wealthy professional class who were born in the 1990’s are also college-ready and driving the growth.

Despite the negative perceptions of safety and immigration policies among international students, the quality, diversity and reputation of the American higher education system remains strong. American universities and colleges aiming to continue to attract students from these two countries must realize that in times of shifting trends, institutions must do more to support international students to be successful in achieving their academic and career goals.

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