

# Positive Psychology in International Student Development: What Makes Chinese Students Successful?

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## Abstract

Most of the current literature on the experiences of Chinese international students tends to adopt a deficit-based approach, focusing on the weaknesses, problems, and challenges Chinese students face while studying overseas. In other words, they tend to focus on struggling Chinese students, “problem” Chinese students, and Chinese students who are failing their overseas studies. Though the intention may be good, these studies may strengthen a negative stereotypical image of Chinese international students that is problem ridden. This study aims to introduce some positive psychology in international student development by focusing on successful Chinese students, their success stories, and what success secrets they can share with future Chinese students studying abroad. With the completion of an undergraduate program adopted as a minimum threshold of student success, this study aims to glean the experiences of successful Chinese students in the United Kingdom and disseminate them as lessons for future students. The study finds that proactiveness in networking and seeking support, open and adaptive attitude toward learning and life, and metacognitive skills in self-management are the most important factors contributing to Chinese students’ success in overseas studies.

*Keywords:* international student, Chinese, development, success, positive psychology

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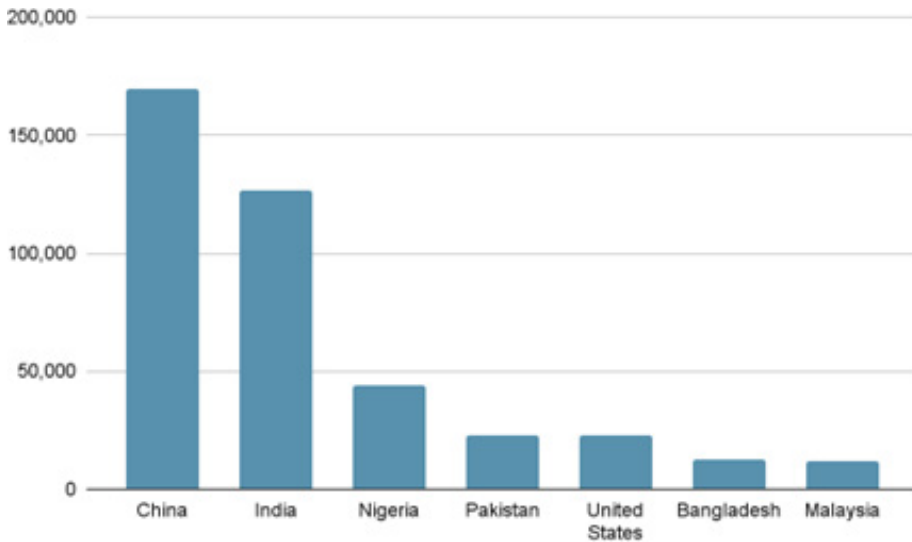
## Positive Psychology in International Student Development: What Makes Chinese Students Successful?

This study is set in the larger context of the increasing number of Chinese students studying overseas in the first two decades of the 21st century. How to help these Chinese students succeed in their academic studies and cultural adaptation has been a key concern of all host countries and universities. This paper discusses a new paradigm on Chinese international student development.

### Chinese International Students

In the past 20 years, Chinese students have quickly become the largest group of international students in major host countries where English is the primary language (Liu, 2021). Apart from economic growth as the most important driving force, the Chinese “education first” culture is another reason that motivates Chinese students’ international mobility (Liu, 2016). A recent survey shows that the United Kingdom is the most favored destination country for Chinese international students (The PIE News, 2023). While other destinations, such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, are facing a declining number of international students from China, the number of Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom has increased 50% in the past five years (BBC News, 2022). The total number of Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom as of March 2023 is 169,320 (including Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), higher than the number of students from all European Union countries combined, and higher than any other major source country, such as India, Nigeria, and Pakistan (see Figure 1; Universities UK, 2023). According to another recent study, the reputation of UK higher education, pedagogical approaches in the United Kingdom, and intercultural learning opportunities are the major pull factors for Chinese international students’ decision to study in the United Kingdom (Yu et al., 2023).

Much attention has been devoted to the experiences of Chinese students overseas both in the research literature and news media; however, the discourse around Chinese students tends to adopt a deficit perspective that focuses on weaknesses, limitations, and problems (Heng, 2016). The deficit perspective on international student development can be seen as a result and a continuation of the disease model of psychology, a dominant model during the second half of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century wherein the emphasis was on treating mental illnesses and abnormal behaviors (Srinivasan, 2015). The cross-cultural experiences of international students can indeed be stressful, so much so that research from the 1950s to 1980s often took it as a mental health issue (Ward et al., 2001). The attention to students’ challenges is necessary, but an overemphasis on problems may serve to endorse and strengthen some negative stereotypes of Chinese international students as a culturally deficient group (e.g., Persell, 1981). Through a deficit lens, Chinese students are often perceived to be wealthy and

**Figure 1. Top Source Countries of International Students in the United Kingdom**

*Note.* From *International student recruitment data*, Universities UK (2023, March 3).

spoiled (Xie et al., 2021), uncreative and only learning by rote (Mathias et al., 2013), and unsocial and unable to speak English effectively (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). They lack necessary skills for success in the United Kingdom (Cheng & Adekola, 2022) and are more prone to face challenges in academic adjustment (Wang, 2018) and mental health (Wang, 2021). Together with strengthened negative stereotypes, the deficit framing can also serve to disempower Chinese students by reducing their sense of adequacy, motivation, and self-image (Song & Pyon, 2008).

Though the focus of this study is on Chinese students in the United Kingdom, the issue of deficit framing of Chinese international students is not unique to the United Kingdom. The same weakness-focused perspective casts Chinese students in the United States as students who have low academic motivation (Griner & Sobol, 2014) and high academic stress (Yan & Berliner, 2009), together with social, cultural, and psychological challenges (Wang et al., 2007, 2012; Ying, 2005). An article in *The Wall Street Journal* (2015) reports that the United States expelled 8,000 Chinese students in a single year for reasons ranging from admission fraud, to low academic standing, to academic misconduct. Similarly, Chinese students in Australia are perceived to experience more mental health issues (Zhao et al., 2022), together with issues in sociocultural and academic adaptation (Yu & Wright, 2016). Studies in Canada found that Chinese students face problems in English language proficiency, academic studies, communication with other students, and understanding of the local culture (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Studies in New Zealand also focus on Chinese students' adaptation problems (Chu, 2002). In the face of the dominant negative discourse, positive energy is needed in research that focuses more on the strengths, resources, and positive qualities of Chinese international students.

## Positive Psychology in International Student Development

Positive psychology is the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), focusing on what is right, rather than fixating on what has gone wrong. With faith in the human internal drive for identity construction and self-actualization through interactions with others (Benjafield, 2010), positive psychology focuses on our strengths rather than our weaknesses and our agencies rather than our vulnerabilities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It seeks to promote mental health rather than merely treating mental illness. Since the 1980s, there has been some research from the lens of positive psychology that takes people in cross-cultural transition not as passive and traumatic victims, but more as proactive agents who are able to learn from such experiences (Furnham & Bockner, 1986; Zhou et al., 2008). In the new century, there are more studies from the strength-based perspective to examine how international students are using their own backgrounds and resources to succeed in their studies overseas (Liu & Brown, 2014; Neri & Ville, 2008; Yakunina et al., 2013).

Based on positive psychology, an appreciative education approach was developed and used by scholars in student services (e.g., Bloom et al., 2008, 2011, 2013; He et al., 2014). The appreciative education approach embraces positive mindsets, leverages learners' assets and strengths, and empowers learners to take ownership of the learning process (He et al., 2014). Appreciative education believes that learning involves metacognitive and affective development; individuals' past experience and vision for the future impacts their present actions and learning behaviors; and social interactions assist in the positive reconstruction of individual experiences and the pursuit of alternative pathways to success (He & Hutson, 2018). An appreciative education study on Chinese international students in the United States found that internal commitment and motivation as well as external familial support are the strengths Chinese students bring with them to the United States (He & Hutson, 2018). The adoption of positive psychology as a new perspective in studies on Chinese international students is a welcome change, as it may serve to reverse the negative stereotypes around Chinese students and to empower Chinese students with success stories and success secrets. However, studies with a strength-based approach are too few and far between to counter the dominant deficit-based discourse. More such studies are needed to glean the experiences of successful Chinese students and to disseminate them as lessons for future students.

One key issue with the deficit approach is that it perceives students as vulnerable victims who are powerless and unable to overcome their own difficulties. Studies from a deficit perspective take interest in discovering challenges faced by international students, but are too quick in making policy recommendations with regard to what the host country, the host university, and the host university's professors can do to help and support international students. Though their help and support are crucial to student success, the deficit-based studies fall short of recognizing international students' own ability, agency, and initiatives in overcoming challenges and succeeding despite all odds in

overseas studies. This study is a positive psychology informed study in the UK context. With the completion of undergraduate studies in the United Kingdom adopted as the most fundamental standard of success, this study focuses exclusively on successful Chinese students and their strategies for success. We do not stop at identifying students' challenges and making policy recommendations; instead, we focus on what strategies they have adopted and what actions they have taken to become successful in the United Kingdom. Though family plays a big role in Chinese students' overseas academic study (Lin & Liu, 2019), this study focuses more on Chinese international students' self-effort and agency in dealing with challenges and succeeding in both academic study and social adaptation. The two research questions we aim to answer in this study are:

1. What are Chinese graduates' self-perceived qualities and actions that have contributed to their success in the United Kingdom?
2. What lessons and wisdom can they share with future Chinese international students to help them succeed?

## Methodology

This study aims to glean the lessons Chinese international students have obtained as they overcame challenges while studying overseas. Informed and motivated by positive psychology, we do not ask what has gone wrong, but rather what they have done right. We do not ask them why they failed; instead, we ask them what makes them successful. For this purpose, we have adopted the completion of undergraduate studies as the most fundamental working definition of student success. We recognize that this is not the perfect definition of student success, as students who do not complete their studies may become very successful in later life and in their careers, and students who do complete their studies may not enjoy continued success after graduation. We settle for this imperfect definition of student success in order to have a manageable qualitative study. The participants of this study are 12 Chinese international students who have recently graduated from an undergraduate program in a British creative arts university. The university has over 6,000 students enrolled in a broad range of creative programs, including fashion, film, acting and performance, graphics, fine arts, architecture, animation, games technology, and business for the creative industries. Since 2017, internationalization has become one of the strategic directions of the university. The university has increased the number of its on-campus international students from about 300 students annually in 2017 to over 2,000 students in 2021, and about 600 of these international students came from China, accounting for about one-third of the total international student body.

The site of the study was chosen conveniently, as two of the authors were working at the university during data collection. The 12 participants were recruited using a snowball sampling strategy; the first few participants were known to the authors. Due to the

limited scope and representation, this qualitative study aims to shed light on the issue under investigation, but does not claim to be universally transferable in its findings. A study with graduates from other types of programs, institutions, and countries may yield different results. The students' responses to the interview questions were analyzed as they were received to monitor thematic saturation. Saturation of themes was reached after we received and analyzed 10 student responses. However, we analyzed 12 participants in total. The written interview questions were shared with the 12 students via the Wechat social media platform, and responses were collected the same way. Students were asked to take time to think and reflect before they answered the questions. They were told that their experiences, stories, and lessons would immensely help young international students from China who are following in their steps. The students were allowed to answer the questions either in English or Chinese. All participants chose to write in Chinese for a fuller expression of meaning. Based on the two research questions, the two interview questions were:

- You have successfully completed your undergraduate study in the UK. We hope to invite you to reflect on your experiences as an international student in a British university and share with us the challenges you faced, and more importantly how you have successfully overcome those challenges. We would love to hear some concrete examples and stories.
- Imagine you are invited back to speak to a new cohort of Chinese international students who are just starting their undergraduate program in your alma mater. What would you say to them to help them complete their studies successfully? Think of this question as the speech notes you need to prepare and deliver at the new student orientation. You may have a few points to share.

Without a predetermined coding scheme, this study followed a bottom-up thematic analysis procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019) to let the themes emerge from the data. A theme is a frequently appearing or salient meaning in the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first layer of coding, we read the responses closely and translated into English the parts that were considered most relevant to this study based on the research questions. The focus was on how the students have overcome their challenges, instead of the challenges themselves. In the second reading, the recurrent or salient statements of the translated texts were highlighted as initial codes, and the initial codes were clustered and refined into thematic categories. This process was repeated for all participants. New codes were highlighted and brought into existing thematic categories or new thematic categories if they did not fit into existing categories. Altogether, 10 themes were identified at the end of the second layer coding, such as "hang out," "seek support," "self-management," "sound judgment," "maturity as success," "keep control," and "adult/independent." During the third and last layer of coding, the 10 themes were merged into three more general themes. Apart from a rigorous emic coding process, intercoder reliability checks among the three authors were conducted throughout the study to ensure the systematicity, communicability, transparency, and

trustworthiness of the findings (Kurasaki, 2000; O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). The coding procedure is described in Table 1.

**Table 1. Three-Layer Coding Procedure**

First-Layer Coding	Second-Layer Coding	Third-Layer Coding
Selecting and translating key texts based on relevance to research questions	Reading translated texts and highlighting recurrent and/or salient statements as initial codes; initial codes categorized under 10 themes	10 themes were merged into 3 more general and more manageable thematic groups based on similarity and closeness of meaning
Intercoder Consensus →	Intercoder Consensus →	Intercoder Consensus →

## Findings

The thematic analysis of the 12 students’ responses to the written interview questions yielded three general areas of attributions to their success in completing their undergraduate studies in creative arts in the United Kingdom, namely proactiveness in networking and seeking support, open and adaptive attitude toward learning and life, and metacognitive abilities in self-management. All themes are expressed both in academic study and in life. Each theme is presented next, with the support of students’ direct quotes.

### Proactiveness in Networking and Seeking Support

Almost all students in this study shared their experiences of overcoming their initial linguistic shocks. One student shared the language barrier she had in her first class in the British university:

I remember I turned on the translation app on my phone all the time, as the instructor’s British accent made it difficult for me to catch all the important information. But each time I bent down to look at my phone, the instructor would call on me to answer a question. I remember I only came up with a single word to answer the first question: “color”!

All of the students unanimously adopted the strategy of “hanging out” with English-speaking students as a way to get comfortable speaking English. For example, one student mentioned:

From the start of the second semester, we began to hang out with domestic students, occasionally cooking and eating together on weekends. They are actually very warm and highly tolerant. They didn’t care when I used wrong grammar or struggled with vocabulary. We also worked together more and more on school projects. English got better that way.



Another common strategy adopted by all students was to seek support and help from instructors. One student wrote:

In study, there were cases when I misunderstood teachers' courses and requirements for assignments. I felt sad and defeated when this happened. But the professors were all very nice. When I emailed and asked if we could meet to discuss the contents of the last lecture, they would always find time to meet up. After a couple of meetings, I understood everything about the class. So my suggestion is that, please do not fear talking to the instructors. Ask for a meeting. If once is not enough, ask for several times.

Beyond their academic study, these students also recommended that new fellow Chinese students actively seek help when they face difficulties in their lives in the United Kingdom. One participant shared the following story:

I was worried that my English was not good, and I was not familiar with the place, and thus dreaded going out. When we first needed to travel to another city, we did not know how to take public transit. We met this nice bus driver, very warm-hearted, who patiently explained to us how to get there. We took his bus to the terminal, and he walked with us to a transfer bus, and told the transfer bus driver where we needed to get off. So what I want to say to new students is that, please don't fear talking to people. If you come across difficulties, just ask others for help. Most people would like to help you out. But watch out for thieves. I lost 5 pounds on my first subway trip to London (laughing with tears emoji).

A couple of participants wrote about the challenges in seeking medical service in the United Kingdom, and their recommendation was also talking to people and learning about the system. Beyond seeking help for survival, most of them believed that they should actively participate in the local community to truly benefit from their overseas educational experience. One student shared: "I learned to ride a horse when I was an undergrad. I learned to work as a DJ too, and my tuition in my Master's and PhD program was all paid with my DJ income."

### **Open and Adaptive Attitude Toward Learning and Life**

Another important quality identified among the 12 participants is an open and adaptive attitude toward learning and life overseas. Several students mentioned that they had to adapt to a new pedagogical culture in the United Kingdom. For example, "team projects" were a pedagogical activity often adopted in instructors' teaching in the United Kingdom. Partly due to language issues, and partly due to unfamiliarity with this different approach to teaching, many students in this study experienced initial difficulties. They did not know how to contribute to the group discussions. One student shared that it took her two years to feel comfortable working on teams with local students:



In my first year as a Movie Production major, we had to work in teams a lot. But because of my introverted character and my lack of flexibility in thinking, I found it hard to join in the discussions with local students. I was always quiet. Sometimes I had many thoughts about a movie project, but it was hard for me to share and express. When I started the third year, I began to feel more comfortable working on teams. Local British students actually enjoyed chatting and joking with me. They would voluntarily confirm my views and encourage me. Once I ran into a little issue, a local student called to cheer me up, saying that I was an awesome student who liked to help others.

We must stress here that being introverted and reserved can be a cultural stereotype imposed or self-imposed upon Chinese students (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). Furthermore, research has shown that introverted students are not necessarily disadvantaged in higher education where group work is prioritized as a learning activity (Walker, 2007). Self-admitted as an introvert, this student's advice to new students is that they should gradually learn to express themselves and to discover and appreciate local students' unique personalities and interests. At the same time, they should learn to express their appreciation so that they could encourage and support each other. By receiving and spreading positive energy, they will become more confident working in teams. In addition to teamwork, another important piece of pedagogical culture in the United Kingdom was the focus on formative assessment. One student shared that instructors in the United Kingdom lay more emphasis on the process of learning, not only the outcome. In particular, in a design class, the students were expected to make their design process visible and meaningful. According to this student, he spent the entire undergraduate program shifting to this approach to learning. Still another aspect of the British learning culture is the emphasis on independent learning and inquiry-based learning. One student wrote:

Different from China where I could get a definite answer from the teacher, the teacher here would provide a website, give me some advice, or some cases. After that, I was expected to learn and explore by myself. It took me a long time to get used to this, more than a year. As a matter of fact, in my entire second year, I was still trying to get used to it.

Getting used to a new pedagogical culture and the expectations associated with it does not seem to be a quick fix and takes longer than the acquisition of English skills. In this process, most students in this study believe that perseverance and dedication to academic study was important. One student believes that, "We should always remember that we are here to study. There are many distractions in the new culture, so it is a difficult thing to stay focused on our studies in a consistent manner."

Excellent academic standing is closely tied to success in social integration. Another student shared, "After I got straight As, I got more local students around me after class. They begin to ask me for my advice. They want to work on designs with me together."

Participants in this study believe that an open and adaptive attitude is also needed when learning about the host society and culture. A compelling story was shared by a student who, as part of his assignment for a course, went to interview a homeless person. They sat in a coffee shop and talked for an hour, during which he learned about the homeless man's difficult experiences but positive attitude toward life. He felt motivated by the man's courage, optimism, and perseverance. He realized that the challenges he faced during his study overseas were nothing in comparison to the experiences of his new homeless friend. After that, he often visited his homeless friend and brought him food and drinks. He felt happy for his ability to help someone who was more vulnerable. His advice to new international students is:

Beyond your identity as an international student, you can construct a new identity as a helper, as a humble man willing to learn from more vulnerable people, and as a creator. As a student in a creative program, I believe that it is all the more important to transcend our student identity and deeply immerse ourselves in the broader society. We should be observers of humanity beyond class, tradition, with deep empathy, and walking out of difficulty and challenges as a real artist would do.

A deficit-based approach to students' learning experiences might be quick to demand host professors adjust their teaching methods so that their teaching is more accommodating to international students' learning styles. However, one important reason for Chinese students to choose to study in the United Kingdom is the British pedagogical approach and teaching culture in the Western Socratic tradition (Yu et al., 2023). As such, it would be a balancing act for the UK instructors to decide to what extent they adopt accommodating pedagogical approaches familiar to international students, and to what extent they stick to the British pedagogical approach that attracted international students to study in the United Kingdom in the first place. More importantly, this study serves to show that Chinese international students are not only capable of learning the "Chinese" way; instead, they are able to adapt to a new pedagogical approach and benefit from a new way of learning.

### **Metacognitive Abilities in Self-Management**

All participants of this study demonstrated good metacognitive abilities in self-management of their academic study and life. Metacognitive abilities are the abilities to reflect on, monitor, and regulate one's thinking, emotions, and behavior (Metcalf & Shimamura, 1994). Students in this study became comfortable studying independently, as was expected by the new pedagogical culture. They realized that they were adults and could not count on teachers like they did as kids. They had to research and explore things by themselves. They developed their own strategies in dealing with challenges in learning, as one student shares:

When we first took theoretical classes, like cultural studies, it was really difficult for me to understand. My way of solving this problem was to preview

the introduction to the course before I went to class, took notes on key words for the interesting parts during class, took pictures (of slides), and read additional materials after class.

One student commented on the standard of success adopted in this study, believing that gaining maturity in their attitudes toward life is a more important indicator of success for Chinese students overseas:

Getting a degree is not an indicator of success, nor is academic performance, or whether we get into a graduate program, or what job we land on, or how much salary we are paid. The most important is how much we have grown, whether we develop new understanding of ourselves and the society.

While living alone overseas, the participants in this study learned to manage negative emotions and solve problems calmly. They learned that discomfort may be a norm, something not to be overcome, but to live with and learn from. They gradually developed patience and resilience and learned not to stress too much. They also gradually gained confidence in keeping their own lives under control. One student shared a long story about using good judgment while making friends by resisting the peer pressure to take “laughing gas” in a bar. Another student shared how he learned to plan and manage multiple tasks so that he was not overwhelmed:

For a while, I tried to take on too much, doing a part-time job, trying to create a business, thinking about gambling a bit too, spending time dealing with an ex-girl friend that I broke up with, and spending time reporting what I was doing to my family. My burden was too heavy. Being alone overseas, I had to figure out what to do. We all had limited energy. I had to drop off some burden.

These metacognitive abilities in managing their academic studies, lives, and planning for a future are important skills that contribute to their success overseas. It should be stressed that these skills are not innate skills and qualities the students brought with them from China. Instead, they are acquired in an environment of forced independence in the United Kingdom. They are the outcomes of education abroad experiences which push students out of their comfort zone and expose them to a world of strangeness and discomfort. These adversities are not supposed to be removed through external help, as they are the fertile ground for the development of independence and metacognitive skills for life.

## **Discussion**

The field of international student development has been long dominated by negative psychology that perceives international students as victims of new environment. This perspective sees international students as passive operants shaped by external forces.

The power of positive psychology, as a new paradigm in understanding international student development, lies in the belief that international students are not totally at the mercy of external conditions in the host country and society (Liu & Rathbone, 2021). Instead, this perspective gives full recognition and credit to students' personal agency in shaping their academic studies and lives overseas. According to Weedon (1987), we all have agency to negotiate a relationship with the social community we find ourselves in. According to Ricoeur (1992), humans are like characters in a story who can pursue a better life through change in words and action. In Norton's (1997) understanding, we exert our agency by constructing a new cultural identity that we desire. Additionally, in Montuori's (2003) understanding, we all have the ability to self-organize in response to the disequilibrium presented by changing environments.

With a focus on students' agency in shaping their own lives in ways they aspire to, positive psychology research needs to ask different questions than previous research. Instead of focusing only on what challenges students face, students need to be asked how they overcome their challenges. Instead of focusing on how they fail, they need to be asked what makes them successful and what advice they can give to future students. This small-scale study with 12 Chinese international students who successfully completed their undergraduate studies at a UK university of creative arts serves to show the power of positive psychology in international student development. It has revealed several important qualities and actions that have contributed to the success of Chinese international students in the United Kingdom both in their academic studies and in their lives. Table 2 summarizes the three key thematic areas and the detailed strategies adopted in each thematic area in both academic studies and in life.

These findings, with a focus on Chinese students' success stories, are valuable contributions to the existing literature, as they serve to reverse the many negative stereotypes about Chinese international students. Findings from this study show that Chinese students are not spoiled brats who are unable to independently manage their lives overseas. Instead, they show strong resilience and strong competence to develop independent learning and living skills. They are not stuck with the uncreative rote-learning style. Instead, they show openness and adaptability to a new teaching style in a new learning environment. They are not introverts who are not able to socialize and fit in. Instead, they show strong willingness and bravery to break out of their comfort zone, find opportunities to use their English, and make new friends. As discussed above, introversion is not an inherently negative trait, nor does it predetermine academic difficulty. The findings of this study can serve to empower, motivate, and support the Chinese student population overseas by providing them with success attitudes, success strategies, and success actions from their peers who have completed their undergraduate degree abroad. They need a break from the flood of negativities about Chinese international students in research literature and news media. They need to read inspiring success stories to live by and live up to. The shift from a deficit approach to a strength approach in research will lay foundations to reconstruct a positive identity for Chinese international students.

Table 2. Qualities and Actions Shared by Successful Chinese International Students

	In academic study	In life
<b>Proactiveness in networking and seeking support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing anxiety in speaking English in class</li> <li>• Making friends and socializing in English</li> <li>• Seeking help from course instructors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking help for challenges in new life overseas</li> <li>• Actively participating in the local community</li> </ul>
<b>Open and adaptive attitude toward learning and life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapting to new pedagogical culture</li> <li>• Maintaining an active learning attitude</li> <li>• Focusing on academic study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively learning about the host society and culture</li> <li>• Reconstructing identity beyond a vulnerable international student</li> </ul>
<b>Metacognitive abilities in self-management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting comfortable studying independently</li> <li>• Developing effective learning strategies, such as preview and review</li> <li>• Learning about oneself</li> <li>• Seeking maturity in understanding the world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing negative emotions</li> <li>• Learning to solve problems calmly</li> <li>• Recognizing that discomfort is a norm</li> <li>• Gaining confidence and patience over time</li> <li>• Making good judgment while making friends</li> <li>• Developing ability to plan and manage tasks</li> </ul>

Focusing on successful students and their successful stories does not mean that we should leave them alone to their own devices to sink or swim, hoping that they will be resourceful enough to succeed. The 12 students' responses to the two interview questions are filled with gratitude and appreciation for their "warm" domestic peers, their "nice" course instructors, and the "friendly" members of the larger community. The support they receive serves to reduce their anxiety and fear, provide assurance and confirmation, and thus give them confidence and self-efficacy. A culture of kindness in the host society is important to the success of international students as new sojourners (Cheng & Adekola, 2022). To a large extent, the success and integration of international students is a test of the host society's equity, diversity and inclusion performance, and the United Kingdom has passed with good grades, according to participants in this study. According to Ricoeur (1998), it is through caring for the self as well as for others that people realize their imagined potential and good life. There are multiple cases in this study when international students received kindness. There is also one case of an international student giving kindness to a local homeless man. It can be argued that

the presence of international students helps bring out the kindness of British society and thus benefits British society, as kindness is mutual and reciprocal.

## Conclusion

As a whole, the current literature on Chinese international students tends to adopt a deficit approach, focusing on issues and challenges. In order to inject some positive thinking in international student development, this study invited Chinese international students who recently graduated from a UK university of creative arts to reflect on their experiences and share their lessons with future students. This study uses a positive psychology approach to international student development and, though small in scale, yields promising findings. With a focus on students' agency and initiatives, this study identifies areas of attitudes, strategies, and actions that contribute to Chinese students' success in international learning, including proactiveness in networking and seeking support, open and adaptive attitude toward learning and life, and metacognitive abilities in self-management. The positive psychology perspective on international student development has the potential to become a beneficial new paradigm in international student research, as it will serve to break cultural deficiency stereotypes and empower international student success. Future research is welcome to adopt the same approach and explore attributive factors of student success in different demographics, disciplines, and regions. Such studies with successful students will serve future international students better than previous studies that focused more on problem students and student problems.

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