

Crossing the border: Indian students studying medicine in China

Chair – Dr. NV Varghese, Vice Chancellor, National Institute of Education Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Founding Director, Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), NIEPA

Panelists –

1. **Rama V Baru, Professor**, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University & Honorary Fellow, ICS, Delhi
2. **Madhurima Nundy**, Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi
3. **Sowmiya Ashok**, Independent Journalist

Date- 14th October 2020

Venue: Zoom Webinar, ICS Delhi

The chair welcomed the participants with a brief on the topic of discussion and introducing the speakers and inviting them to start their deliberation.

The first to speak on the topic was **Madhurima Nundy**. The discussion is based on the findings of a field study by the panelists between May to Jun 2019. She said that about 10,000 students from India are going to China every year to study Medicine which started following the bilateral agreement in 2003 between India and China. The first batch went in 2004 with about 150 students which increased to about 22000 in 2019. The reasons for migration are multifaceted which includes firstly the demand supply gap as there are about 14 Lac medical aspirants taking NEET every year, but there are only about 80,000 seats while number of NEET qualified students is about 7 Lacs. The second is the economic issue as the fees for studying in private medical colleges in India is about Rs. 70 Lacs but the cost is much lower in China. Also women consider it safer to study in China. She also discussed on the agents who are facilitators for the student enrolment in Chinese medical institutions. Before 2017, there were about 214 universities but post 2017, 45 are being recognized by MCI for NEET qualified candidates only. She also discussed on the experiences of students studying in China where there is a different stream in the universities for international students. Also there are language and pedagogy issues. The evaluation system is also highly superficial, mainly power point, multiple choice questions are given which are often circulated before hand and hence there is no rigor in the system. The Psycho- social stress is another factor particularly where there are less Indian students given the obvious fact that China had been never part of their imagination so they find it hard to adopt . Also there is a huge financial burden on students considering the economic strata that the

students come from and they do small businesses, trading, give English tuitions etc. Thus the market process is driven by globalization factor and students are navigating multiple institutions and actors in the process. However, in the post covid situation, many agencies have struck down China from their list of countries.

The next speaker was **Rama V Baru**. She spoke about how the movement is facilitated and about the kind of networks – Formal and informal, agencies, actors and institutions in the whole process. The Informal network is comprised of senior students from home town who also act as motivators and sometimes work as sub agents. Then there are agents who act as Key nodal agencies or consultants. Each agent ties up with one institute and normally earns commission of Rs. 2 Lacs to Rs. 5 Lacs per student. Agents are the link between students and Chinese institutes like brokers and often there is a very complex network in place.

She also added that apart from the motivating factors already discussed for students migrating to China, the other factors are Individual and familial aspirations are another factor. On discussing the regional pattern she said that majority of students are from Western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat and Southern states of Tamil Nadu, erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Kerala for lower cost of studying in China although most private institutions for technical education are scattered around these places. Also there is a clustering pattern for students in China like most students from Kerala studying in Wuhan and students from Maharashtra and Gujarat going to Beijing. She also talked about the class, gender and regional composition of Indian students going to China. The economic strata of the students travelling to China are from Middle and Lower Middle Class and mainly first generation learners. Also more men than women are migrating to China mainly from smaller towns. She also talked how the return of the students on completion of their courses is complicated by the huge pressure on students to qualify FMGE (Foreign Medical Graduate Exam) to practice in India. Also when students after landing in China encounter several issues such as quality, language, pedagogy, etc they can't come back in fear of losing face, high expectations from them and as they have invested a lot of money. The dowry issue also grows up as they have foreign degree but not qualifying FMGE and so cannot get the return on their investments.

The last speaker was **Sowmiya Ashok**. She talked about her experience of interacting with students from India at Capital Medical University, Beijing. There are certain things that are not permitted in hostels like students can't plug in induction cookers. In Hebei, on the other hand, students found learning marshal art. Also being a small town, the local residents seeing the Indian as foreigners were taking photographs. Students were also found preparing for FMGE (licensing exam) held twice a year in Jun and Dec. On Jul 1, the graduation day at Tianjen University, many parents also came and it was a proud moment for them and they were saying about the expensive education in India. There were students from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal,

Bangladesh. FMGE by National Board of Exam is a great hurdle. Less than 12% of foreign degree holders get through the qualifying criteria of scoring 150 out of 300 in FMGE. Under Covid, students are asking for relaxation of pass mark to 30% under the present situation so that they can serve the country's medical system in these times of crisis. She also remarked that the students studying in foreign countries should get a level playing field and only they should not be penalized while there might be quality issues of many institutions particularly private institutions in India. The students graduating from Chinese medical institutions go on making unlimited attempts to clear FMGE mostly without any success. On not being able to qualify FMGE, some students join private hospitals through personal contacts as interns or junior doctors.

During the question answer session, there were a number of interesting questions on the qualifying exam FMGE and whether there exams to enter the medical systems in other countries to which the panel replied that there are qualifying criterion to be fulfilled in USA, Germany and other countries also. On another question, the panel replied that Indian students in China are given some limited exposure to the Chinese medicine.

During summing up of the session with intervention of the panelists, the chair threw light on a number of interesting facts. He discussed how going to USA or Australia is different from going to China where there is an overemphasis on agency system. He also talked on the issue of importance of foreign degree which should ideally give high premium in labor market. But unfortunately foreign degree has fewer premiums in developed markets. Students going to China from India are not falling under this paradigm. Here there is primarily soft power or diplomatic issues involved. However foreign students from Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka coming to study in India have the advantage of getting socialized in English. Earlier developed countries were taking educated people from developing countries. In 1960-70s, we used to sell human capital, low or no investment used to fetch high return by working in USA. But now there is preferential treatment for qualification from that country. Students going to developed countries take the high cost, high return path. As returns are high, students are more interested in post study visa. If they work in USA for 5 years, high income earned during that period would help them recover the cost with surplus. About 3.7 Lacs Indian students goes out every year but only 4700 come in mainly from South Asian countries as this is a low cost, low return proposition.

Dr. NV Varghese talked about four types of mobility – Programs moving from developed to developing countries, students moving from developing to developed countries and institutions moving from developed to developing countries and about teacher movements. But money flows in only one direction from developing to developed countries. He also said the once new education policy is in place with Foreign institutes setting up in India, there might be several rectifications and may facilitate equivalence of foreign degrees. Also he talked about that the

curriculum in Oxford or Australia or for that matter in most countries is the same for everyone and not discriminatory as in China. The depth or intensity of teaching to Chinese students is more. Also there is language barrier due to lack of English competency of Chinese teachers.

In the present situation, many students are in limbo, as they are not being able to collect their certificates. Also the students face a lot of discrimination in India. Also it has been observed that these students do not have political, social or cultural capital to be visible. If the government stops allowing people to go to China, nothing can be done. But if going to USA is stopped, then that is a different story as then the bureaucratic or political class will be concerned as their interest is involved which is again a matter of political influence and power game.

This report was prepared by Amitava Banik, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.

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