



Taken by JinKai Feng

## “Running with Scissors”

### Chinese Students’ Predicament in International High Schools

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## **Introduction**

In China, besides the normal Chinese High school students, who are taking the “Gao Kao” and being well known by the public, and those who are going to high school abroad, there is still a “grey zone” between them, which is the students studying in “international high school” or “international department of a normal high school” in China mainland (we call them “international students” or I.S. hereinafter). As part of the group of international students, we would like to study this particular group of students and their fellows, for our own profit, and also for the great future of the generation.

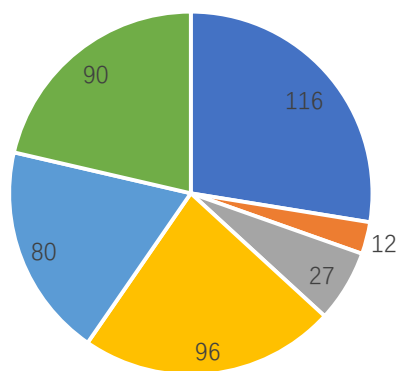
## **External**

“I was gradually dropping out from my social circle.” During the interview, Miss. Luo, a 16-year-old international student, shared her social problem. “After being admitted to an international high-school, I always feel embarrassed during meetings with my old friends,” she said, “Basically, it’s because that I have less common topics to discuss with them. My school life is so different compared to theirs”. She then listed several examples: “When they complain that they have too many classes to learn, too many difficult tests to do and too little free-time in school, I always remain silent. The reason is not that I don’t want to talk with them, but is that I do not encounter those problems. Studying in an international school, I have a lot of free-time in school and can choose preferred classes to study.” However, this is not the worst situation. “While I admit that I have a loose schedule, little homework and few classes, they tend to feel that I, or even the typical ‘international student’, was far more relaxed than them in school”, Miss Luo said. This misunderstanding always occurred between international students and normal high school students. In fact, an international student has to face a lot of difficulties to succeed in a different school system and to go to a good university

In normal Chinese high-schools, having a good grade in “Gao Kao” is the prerequisite and the only requirement to get a student into a prestigious university. However, for international students,

foreign universities not only demand high academic ability and GPA, but also require distinct personalities, after-class activities and integrated development of students. Therefore, to meet the expectations from universities, international schools have a special school system. In the school, international students have more free-time to develop their hobbies, participate in activities, join competitions and dig deeper in their interested fields. They have the right to only sign up for the courses they prefer. However, many Chinese normal high-school students and their parents simply label it as “have loosen school rules”, “schools for the rich”, “relaxed” and “easy to get in”. From our research taken by 71 normal high-school students, 73% of them describe their first impression for international students as “having a good family background”, and nearly 20% of them even regard international students as “students who do not possess a good score”. When traditional high-school students are asked that whether they think the international students have more pressure at school, 36% of them choose “no”.

the first impression to international students of Chinese normal high-school students and their parents

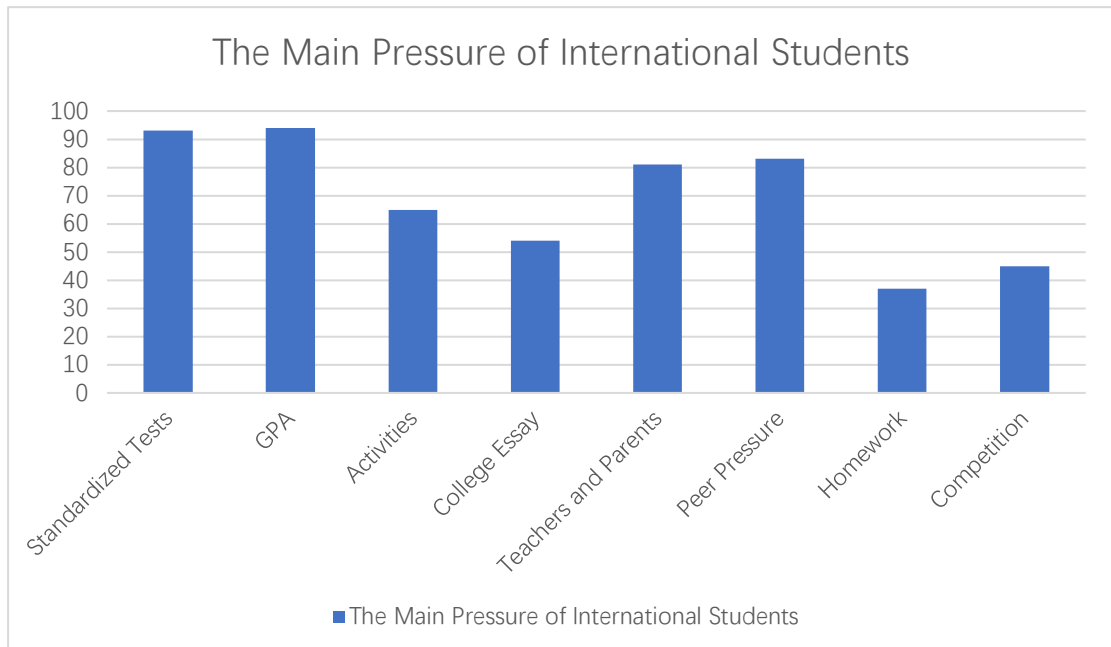


- have a good family background
- do not possess a good score
- have good time management skill
- have little work to do
- do a lot of extracurricular
- sociable, open-minded

## Internal

In international schools, the education system differs vastly from that of normal Chinese high schools. To exemplify, the standardized test system in the two schools are drastically distinct. The international schools implement the GPA system, one that only Chinese universities use in China, while Chinese normal high schools have the normal learn-and-test system. Thus, students in the two kinds of schools experience entirely disparate pressure as well as anxiety. Due to the lack of understanding of the teaching content of international schools and the possible existence of a large number of stereotypes, some ordinary high school students and parents believe that international students possess little learning ability and have no pressure on daily studies and exams whatsoever. However, the majority of international students suggest otherwise. They claim they experience pressure just as much as normal high school students do. In terms of studying, while students usually experience pressure and frustration when an exam is near in Chinese normal high schools, which is primarily centralized at the mid-term or the end of the semester, students in international schools experience enormous amounts of stress and anxiety every single day, 24/7 since GPA scores are widely spread throughout the whole semester. Thus, in order to acquire a high GPA, one has to excel consistently. If one fails at one exam, it is highly possible that they would miss the window of opportunity to achieve straight As for the whole school year. In addition, other than the standardized tests they are required to take, they must do well in other academic ability proving tests as well, such as the TOEFL and the SATs. As a result, under such an intense and steady dose of pressure and potentially anxiety (most students don't have enough confidence to excel in every exam), it is not only rational but also necessary to think that such students are likely to develop psychological conditions or illnesses. Corresponding with the hypothesis, we can easily conclude that the primary source of international student's pressure comes from GPA and standardized tests (TOEFL, etc) from our survey, respectively at 68.8% and 70.4%. We can also know that international students mostly believe that they experience more pressure, taking up 63.39% of the entirety of the test subjects. In addition, although close in percentage, more normal high school students who have taken the survey believe they have identical amount of pressure with the international students, exceeding the other normal high school students who think they have more pressure by 10.39%,

with the raw data being respectively 45.45% and 35.06%.



Another problem (potentially heart-breaking) among international students is that it is very difficult for them to be in close touch with their old friends in junior high school. The truth is, many relationships with great potential are nipped in the bud or murdered in the cradle because one person left and went to an international school. It is not that they don't desire each other anymore or have given up on the relationship, but it's simply due to the painful truth that only months after the first semester, they would have close to nothing in common to talk about in their daily lives. With distinct educational systems and assignments as well as completely different future planning and disparate groups of people to work with every school day, it is extremely easy for one side to slowly and steadily drift away. After all, students nowadays would most likely only have hobbies to talk about when they have vastly distinct prospects ahead of them. While one may argue that it would be the same if they both went to different normal Chinese high schools, it certainly would not be worse than this situation. At the very least, they receive the same education and live in the same social context. As expected, from the survey, more than half of normal high school students claim to have heard about international students and their lives, with a shocking percentage of 55.56%. Although this may be affected by the number of international students admitted by international schools every year, it is

clear that a rather large amount of people has some or no idea of what goes on in the campuses of international schools, which although somewhat off topic, lead to the constructing or enhancing of stereotypes.

## **Conclusion**

In the “grey zone” between traditional education and overseas education in China, international departments deserve much more attention and understanding. Due to currently existent social environmental factors in China, students in international departments are often misunderstood by not only strangers from the public but also their loved ones—their own parents. While they struggle to cope with numerous tough obstacles in their way, such as GPA, TOFLE and SAT, they also face the risk of losing their precious friendships from junior high school. According to these factors, it seems not only logical but also necessary for people in China to understand international students and care for them as soon as possible.