A Study of Housing Preferences and Choice Behaviors of International Students from Different Cultures in China

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Abstract Under the background of the "Belt and Road" initiative and the internationalization of education, the number of international students coming to China continues to grow, and their quality of life in China is increasingly concerned. As a key factor for international students to adapt to a new cultural environment, their housing preferences and behaviors reflect important features of cross-cultural adaptation and life satisfaction. In this study, 16 international students of different nationalities coming to China from School J in Province S were interviewed and questionnaire surveyed to explore their housing preferences and choice behaviors. The results showed that 55% of the international students preferred to rent the university village, showing strong residential autonomy; nearly 80% of the international students had a monthly consumption level higher than 1,500 yuan, which was higher than the average level of Chinese university students; 32% were at the medium integration level, and 35% were at the higher integration level, showing better cultural adaptability; and the sense of belonging satisfaction was the highest among the international students from East Asian backgrounds, with an average score of 0.94, which indicating that cultural background has a significant effect on residence satisfaction. It is concluded that international students in China are characterized by strong autonomy, high consumption ability, and obvious differences in the degree of cultural adaptation in the process of choosing housing, and their housing choices are affected by multiple cultural factors, so it is necessary to optimize international students' housing services in colleges and universities by combining the theories of culture shock and culture acquisition.

Index Terms international students, housing preference, cross-cultural adaptation, consumption level, culture shock, sense of belonging

I. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, with the continuous development of China's economy, the strengthening of its comprehensive national strength and the increasing degree of foreign cultural exchanges, the expansion of higher education and diplomatic relations has also been steadily advancing, with more and more Chinese schools gradually receiving international recognition, and more and more foreigners being attracted to study in China [1]-[4]. Among them, the policy of accepting and dispatching international students, as an important symbol of reform and opening up, not only opened up the policy of self-financed international students, but also allowed some institutions of higher education accepting government scholarships to enroll self-financed international students, which triggered the rapid growth of the scale of international students [5]-[7]. Among them, the number of international students coming to China from Asia is the largest, and the coverage of countries of origin of international students is stable, and the countries along the "Belt and Road" have become the main starting point of international students coming to China, and this group of increasing scale of international students coming to China mostly flows to the major cities where the universities and scientific research institutes are relatively concentrated [8]-[10].

For the influx of international students, accommodation and settlement are the most important issues. International students from different countries and nationalities have different housing preferences due to differences in religion, work and rest time, diet, customs, beliefs, space needs, and adaptability of management systems [11], [12]. As for international students' housing choices, safety, cultural friendliness, economic cost, transportation convenience, and spatial comfort are the relevant decision-making factors [13], [14]. However, at present, there is a gap in the research on housing for international students coming to China. By studying the housing preferences and choice decisions of international students coming to China from different cultural backgrounds, we can provide references for the housing-related planning of institutions or schools.

Against the backdrop of increasing internationalization of higher education globally, China, as one of the major education destinations, has attracted a large number of international students from all over the world. These

students not only face challenges in their professional studies, but also need to adapt to a new living environment, cultural practices and interpersonal patterns in a short period of time. As an important part of their lives in China, housing not only involves daily living, but also carries the functions of emotional belonging and cultural adaptation. Especially for international students who come to China for the first time and have significant differences in cultural backgrounds, the choice of housing environment directly affects their cross-cultural adaptation process, life satisfaction and academic performance. Therefore, clarifying the correlation mechanism between housing preferences, consumption behaviors and cultural integration of international students in China can help deepen the theoretical and practical knowledge of universities in international student management and services. At the same time, this topic is also in line with the trend of multidisciplinary research in sociology, anthropology and education, which is of positive significance in promoting the "student-centered" internationalization management path in universities.

In order to understand the behavioral logic and cultural motivation behind the housing choices of international students, this paper focuses on 16 international students from different cultural backgrounds in School J of S. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and questionnaires, the study explores the differences in their preferences, consumption characteristics, and cultural adaptations in the process of housing choices. The study introduces culture shock theory, social symbiosis theory and culture acquisition theory as the analytical framework to reveal the psychological changes and behavioral adjustment paths of international students when they face unfamiliar cultures, and to assess their sense of belonging and willingness to stay in the city from the dimensions of cultural background, living habits and social networks. This research path helps to systematically construct a cultural-psychological-behavioral explanatory model of the housing choice behavior of international students coming to China.

II. Study design
II. A. Definition of concepts
II. A. 1)   International students coming to China
Currently, scholars tend to use the terms "incoming students", "foreign students" or "international students" to denote foreign students studying in China. The Ministry of Education refers to international students, i.e., international students coming to China, as foreign students who do not have Chinese nationality according to the Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China and who are receiving education in schools. According to the needs of the research, this paper defines international students coming to China as foreign students, including undergraduates and graduate students, who do not have Chinese nationality but leave their own nationality and come to study in Chinese colleges and universities.

II. A. 2)   Cross-cultural adaptation
Cross-cultural adaptation refers to the changes in cultural patterns caused by the continuous contact between two groups with different cultural backgrounds. When international students leave their own countries and come to a relatively unfamiliar cultural environment, there are differences or even conflicts between their long-acquired values and behavioral patterns and the new cultural environment. In addition, international students have the dual identities of learners and cultural sojourners, and their main goal is to complete their studies. Therefore, a multidimensional perspective should be adopted when exploring the cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Based on this, this paper defines cross-cultural adaptation as a process by which cross-cultural learners leave their familiar cultural environments and face a variety of adaptation problems in new cultural environments, including language, academic, life, and social interaction problems.

II. B. Rationale
II. B. 1)   Cultural Shock Theory
After the study of cultural adaptation, the "U-shaped curve theory" was proposed, which describes the stages of the process of cross-cultural adaptation and elaborates on the decomposition problems in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The theory believes that when a person enters a specific unfamiliar culture, his or her psychology will change, and this phenomenon can be regarded as a cross-cultural adaptation disorder. It divides the process of cross-cultural adaptation into three stages: from initial novelty to depression and then back to mood, which represents the psychological adaptation trajectory of "contact-discouragement-adaptation" experienced by sojourners in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Cross-culturalization usually goes through three stages: initial adjustment, crisis, and re-adaptation.

Since then, many scholars have developed the U-shaped theory, which is a more representative and classic theory of cultural shock. "Culture shock" is proposed in response to the obstacles and symptoms that people appear in the process of cross-cultural adaptation, that is, "due to the loss of their familiar social communication symbols

or symbols, and unfamiliar with each other's social symbols, resulting in a sudden anxiety and confusion of deep anxiety, like suddenly leaving the cultural cocoon in which they grow, a very uncomfortable and uncomfortable feeling". It is characterized by pathological symptoms such as anxiety, loneliness, and homesickness. Symptoms of culture shock include, "physical symptoms such as excessive hand washing, excessive worry about eating and drinking, fear of physical contact, and difficulty concentrating, as well as internal emotional symptoms such as helplessness, anger, frustration, rejection, and worry."

However, culture shock does not persist throughout the entire process of cross-cultural adaptation.The four stages of cross-cultural adaptation? The honeymoon stage, the frustration stage, the recovery and adjustment stage, and the adaptation stage, with the frustration stage being the high incidence of culture shock. The "honeymoon phase" refers to the state of excitement, thrill, and contentment when a sojourner enters a new and unfamiliar cultural environment for a short period of time and feels a sense of novelty about the new culture he or she has encountered. The "frustration stage" refers to the fact that after the euphoria of the honeymoon stage, cross-cultural adapters are in constant collision with foreign cultures due to cultural differences and language barriers, thus generating negative emotions such as confusion, frustration, loneliness, anxiety, sadness, etc., and physiological symptoms such as weakness, anorexia, insomnia and other discomforts, and falling into a state of cultural shock; The "recovery stage" refers to the re-adaptation of some cross-cultural adaptors to the new culture, after which they will consciously adopt strategies to adjust their psychological and physiological state, and actively adapt to and try to integrate into the new cultural environment.

Generally speaking, all aspects of adaptation in this stage are better than in the previous stage, and the psychological and emotional well-being will recover to a certain extent. The "Adaptation Stage" refers to the fact that after the cross-cultural adaptor has gone through the recovery and adjustment stage, he or she is able to achieve better integration and balance with the new cultural environment psychologically and physiologically, thus truly realizing cross-cultural adaptation. It is believed that culture shock may only be one of the stages in the process of cultural adaptation, but because culture shock represents the most significant and important part of the process of cross-cultural adaptation, understanding culture shock is equivalent to understanding the meaning and essence of cultural adaptation [15].

II. B. 2)   Social symbiosis theory
The term "symbiosis", which first appeared in the field of biology, is based on the phenomenon of experimental feedback, and is used to describe the relationship between two different organisms. At this time, this concept is a relatively broad concept, and parasitism, saprophyticism, symbiosis, etc. all belong to the scope of "symbiosis". Later, the concept of "symbiosis" was further revised, and a detailed distinction was made between parasitism and saprophyticism, and the connotation of the theory of "symbiosis" also changed from a broad sense to a narrow sense. Since then, through the continuous improvement and application of the meaning of the word "symbiosis", its influence has gradually expanded, and its applicability has been fully expanded, not only from the field of natural sciences such as biology to social sciences, but also gradually enriched the subject categories, such as sociology, economics, management, anthropology, philosophy and other fields have made reasonable use of the theory of symbiosis.

II. B. 3)   Cultural Acquisition Theory
The theory of cultural acquisition emphasizes the acquisition of cultural skills through effective cross-cultural contact with groups of different cultures in order to achieve cross-cultural adaptation. From the perspective of cultural acquisition, social interaction is an organized and skillful behavior, therefore, the cultural acquisition approach advocates that sojourners need to continuously coordinate and adjust to the new environment to learn specific cultural skills and ultimately achieve cross-cultural adaptation. However, studies have shown that international students have limited access to sociocultural acquisition through daily contact with local members in the host country. Based on the perspective of cultural acquisition theory, we focus on the subjective behavior in the process of intercultural communication and emphasize the importance of intercultural communication competence. "In the process of cross-cultural contact, the meaning of both linguistic and non-linguistic symbols will be different, which leads to the difficulty of effective cross-cultural communication, so the acquisition of the meaning of the social symbols of a different culture is particularly critical for socio-cultural adaptation" [16].

II. C.Subjects of the study
II. C. 1)   Study sites
The research site of this study is School J in Province S. School J is a comprehensive university with two campuses and 30 colleges, including the College of International Education and Communication (CIEC), which is in charge of study abroad in China.Since its establishment in 2004, the CIEC of School J, with a background of international

study abroad education in the past few decades, has been responsible for the enrollment of international students, Chinese language teaching, day-to-day management, and life services. The college enrolls students from all over the world, and accepts all kinds of short-term and long-term students. It has received and trained more than 3,000 international students from African countries such as Congo (Brazzaville) and Cameroon, Asian countries such as South Korea and Indonesia, European countries such as Russia and Britain, and American countries such as the United States, Mexico and Brazil. There are a variety of majors for international students, including physics, chemistry and other science and technology majors, as well as Chinese international education, literature, international economics and trade and other liberal arts majors. International students are enrolled at various levels, including undergraduates, masters and doctoral students. At present, there are more than 60 international students from Russia, Congo (Brazzaville), Cameroon, Thailand and other countries, covering the continents of America, Asia, Europe and Africa. In summary, international students from School J have rich and diverse cultural backgrounds, come from many countries, have balanced educational levels, and have a high degree of heterogeneity, which makes them highly representative. In addition, as the school where the researcher studied, School J is more convenient in finding interview subjects and collecting data, so School J is taken as the research site.

II. C. 2)   Basic information on research subjects

In this study, the research subjects were overseas students who came to China to study and all of them were studying in J-school. Due to the impact of the epidemic, School J has suspended the enrollment of international students after 2022, so the international students who are the respondents have been in China for 2 years or more. There were a total of 8 male and 8 female students among the interviewees, and the interviewees mainly came from Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, and their academic levels covered the three levels of bachelor's degree and master's degree. According to the collected interview data, N1~N16 was used as the basis for coding, and sequential numbers were assigned according to the actual order of interviews, and the specific codes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The basic situation of the interviewees

Numbering	Gender	Majors	China time	Education degree	Nationality
N1	Man	Electrical engineering	2	Undergraduate	Bangladesh
N2	Man	Chemistry	2	Undergraduate	Pakistan
N3	Man	Chinese international education	3	Master	Cameroon
N4	Man	Chinese international education	3	Master	Cameroon
N5	Female	International economy and trade	2	Master	Laos
N6	Female	Computer	2	Master	Bangladesh
N7	Female	Material	2	Master	Pakistan
N8	Man	Material	4	Doctor	Cameroon
N9	Man	Control engineering	3	Master	Mexico
N10	Man	Chinese international education	3	Master	Congo
N11	Man	Chinese international education	3	Master	Japan
N12	Female	Computer	5	Undergraduate	Russia
N13	Female	Chinese international education	2	Master	Russia
N14	Female	Chinese international education	2	Master	Russia
N15	Female	Chinese international education	3	Master	Russia
N16	Female	Chinese international education	2	Undergraduate	Thailand

III. Analysis of housing preference and choice behavior of international students coming to China

III. A. Data sources

III. A. 1)   Interview survey method

The interview survey method is to understand the international students' perceptions of the human environment in which they live through dialogues, in which the investigator and the respondents have face-to-face exchanges, either individually or in the form of a symposium. The interview survey method can reflect the subjective perceptions of international students about the human environment and understand the reasons and background behind these perceptions. The results obtained by this survey method are more comprehensive and accurate, but the sample size will not be very large because the interview survey method requires a lot of time and manpower.In this study,

16 incoming international students from J-school in S province were interviewed in order to find out the subjective ideas of international students about the living environment.

III. A. 2)　Questionnaire method
The questionnaire method is a series of questions designed by the investigator, mainly in writing, to understand the subjective perception of international students about the living environment. Using the questionnaire method, the investigator generally cannot communicate with the respondents in time, and all the information collected can only be understood through the medium of the questionnaire. Therefore, the design of the questionnaire is very important.

III. B.　Analysis of findings
III. B. 1)　Analysis of residential location preferences
The residence of international students in the international student colony is mainly divided into two types: active choice of residence off-campus and passive choice of residence on-campus, and the results of the analysis of residence location preference are shown in Fig. 1, in which A: student apartments, B: communities, and C: university villages. Among them, 55% of international students rented off-campus university villages, while 29% and 16% lived in international student apartments (or dormitories) provided by the university and in the community. In terms of length of stay, international students mainly live temporarily, with a high percentage (nearly 37%) having lived there for 2-4 years, while first-time international students account for about 22%, and 15% have been living there for more than 6 years. In general, international students in the University Village International Student Colony have relative autonomy in their choice of residence and are characterized by the temporary nature of their stay.
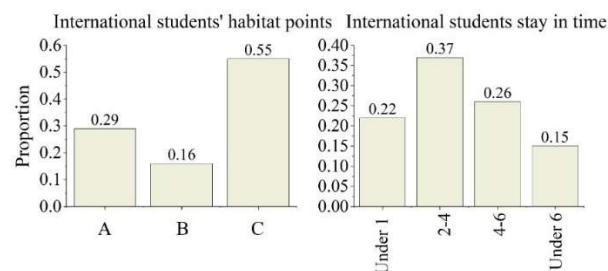

Figure 1: Habitat point

III. B. 2)　Consumption level analysis
According to the survey, the consumption level of international student groups in the international student ghetto in the University Village is generally high, and the results of comparing the monthly spending (spending other than tuition and accommodation fees) of international students with those of Chinese university students are shown in Fig. 2, which shows that the median monthly spending of Chinese university students is 1,220 yuan, and that, if we take the monthly spending of Chinese university students as the standard, we can If we take the monthly spending of Chinese college students as the standard, we can divide the three intervals of students' spending into low (below 1,000 yuan, gray), medium (1,000-1,500 yuan, green), and high (above 1,500 yuan, brown), and then compare them to the group of international students and find out that the number of international students who are at the low and medium spending levels only accounts for about 20%, while close to 80% of the international students' monthly spending is equivalent to the high spending level of Chinese college students. This suggests that international students in the university village are concentrated in the same area. This indicates that the overall consumption level of international students in the international student neighborhoods in the university village is higher than that of Chinese university students, which is closely related to the overall economic level of the country of origin of international students or the family conditions of individual international students.
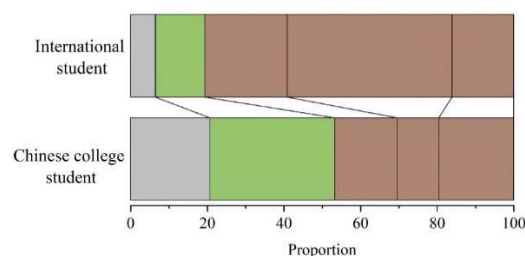

Figure 2: International students spend more time with Chinese students

III. B. 3) Analysis of the degree of environmental integration

Referring to the studies on cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China by domestic scholars, this paper selects three indicators to characterize the integration of international students, namely, the degree of understanding of Chinese culture, the composition of people they interact with and the frequency of interaction with locals, and assigns values to the options with different degrees of integration, and then obtains relevant results based on the questionnaire survey and statistical measurements in the university village and the international student colony. Based on the questionnaire survey and statistical measurements in the international students' neighborhoods, the relevant results are shown in Figure 3.
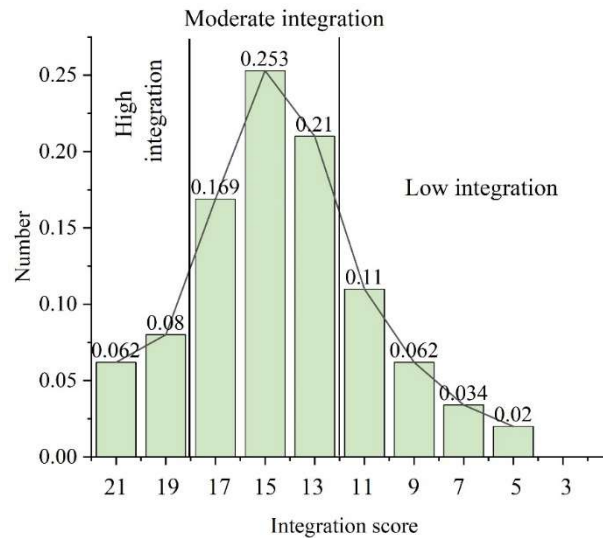

Figure 3: Classification of students' integration

After dividing the integration degree of international students in the international student colony in the university village as shown in Fig. 4 into three intervals of high (20-22), medium (14-18), and low (4-13), it is found that 32% of international students are in the interval of medium degree of integration, which indicates that the international student group is still well adapted to the interaction and integration of a foreign country, and is able to communicate with the people in other countries and regions relatively freely, and is also They are able to communicate with people in other countries and regions with relative ease, and adapt to the life in foreign countries better. Meanwhile, nearly 35% of the international students are in the high integration range, indicating that they can fully integrate into the local life. However, it is worth noting that more than 20% of the international students are still in the low integration range, and most of them only socialize with people from the same country or similar backgrounds, and are not able to integrate well into the local life.
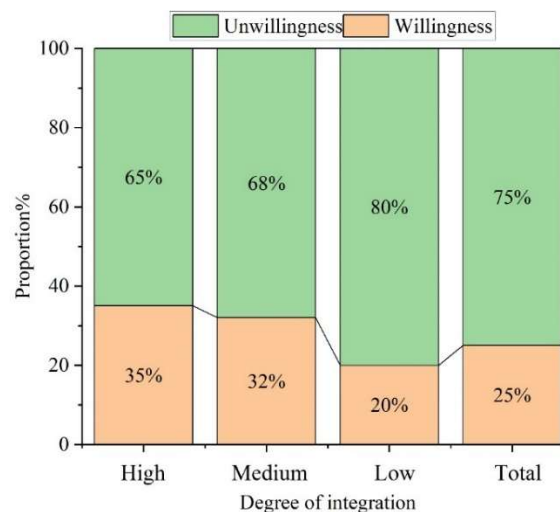

Figure 4: Analysis of retention will

Overall, against the backdrop of a generally favorable local integration situation, there are still considerable individual differences in the local integration of international students, with varying degrees of integration. In terms of willingness to stay, the overall willingness of the international student group in the international student colony in the university village to stay is weaker, and international students choose to leave Province S after graduation for reasons such as going to other countries to further their studies, missing their hometowns, difficulty in adapting to China, and family factors, etc., whereas those who choose to stay mostly do so because they like Province S and think that there are better opportunities for development in China, etc., which can to some extent also This also confirms the integration analysis above. Generally speaking, the proportion of international students who would like to stay in China is relatively high in the high and medium integration groups.

III. B. 4) Belonging satisfaction analysis

The data on the satisfaction of belonging is shown in Table 2, which shows that the sense of belonging of international students seriously affects the evaluation of international students' satisfaction with the human habitat. Psychological research shows that everyone is afraid of loneliness and isolation and wants to belong to one or more groups, and this situation has a particularly serious impact on international students who are in a foreign country. Sense of belonging is mainly influenced by the background of international students, and international students with different backgrounds will have different satisfaction with the same influencing factor. Therefore, in the analysis of the satisfaction of belongingness of international students, this study chooses international students' background as the research variable, and international students' background is represented by the five international student sources that were previously divided.

Table 2: Sense of belonging satisfaction data

	Neighborliness	National cultural characteristics	Around the country	Availability of domestic goods	Religious activity field	Mean
Biogenesis A	0.7	1.2	1.2	1.4	0.2	0.94
Biogenesis B	0.5	0.3	0.2	-0.7	-0.9	-0.12
Biogenesis C	1.2	0.6	-0.4	0.2	-1.5	0.02
Biogenesis D	0.4	0.4	0.2	-1.4	-1.6	-0.4
Biogenesis E	0.5	-0.6	-0.7	-1.6	-1.7	-0.82

As shown in Fig. 5, international students from East Asia, such as Japan and South Korea (Biogenesis A), have the most sense of belonging to the living environment in S. International students from all five origins are satisfied with the friendliness of the neighborhood, and international students from Europe, America, and Russia have a certain sense of belonging to the Western architectural and cultural ambience in S. The construction of the human settlement environment in S is still not enough to create a sense of belonging to other countries besides Japan and South Korea. However, the construction of the living environment in S-province has not yet created a sufficient sense of belonging among international students from countries other than Japan and Korea, and much effort is still needed in this regard.
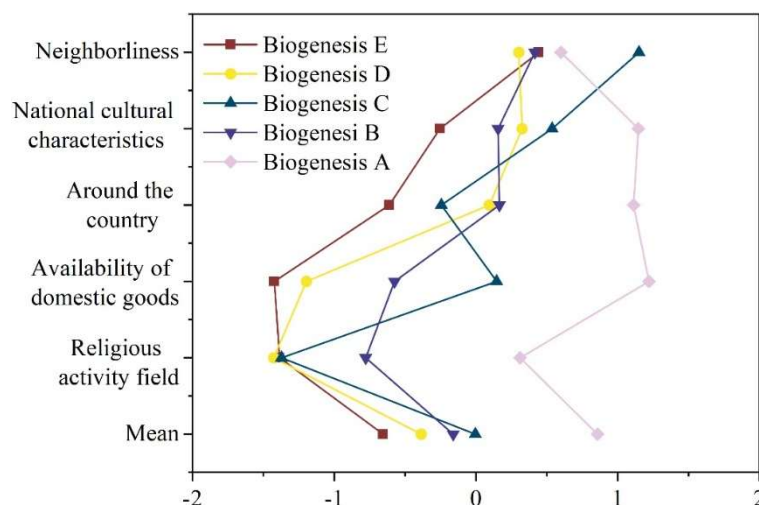

Figure 5: Sense of belonging satisfaction SD chart

IV. Conclusion

International students show a diversified trend in their residential preferences, with data showing that 29% of international students choose on-campus apartments and 16% live in ordinary neighborhoods, which is closely related to their cultural backgrounds and personal adaptation strategies. In terms of length of stay, 37% of the students have lived in China for two to four years, indicating that their residence decisions are characterized by obvious stages and transitions. In terms of environmental integration, 20% of international students were assessed as having a low degree of integration, reflecting a restricted range of social interactions, which were mainly concentrated within the native-speaking community, a socialization pattern that impeded the deepening of the process of cultural acquisition and psychological adaptation. As for the satisfaction of belonging, the evaluation of the indicators of "space for religious activities" and "neighborhood relationship" was significantly distributed among students from different cultural origins, for example, the average score of Biogenesis E group was only -0.82 on the five indicators, which showed that the mechanism of cultural symbiosis had not been fully effective. For example, the average score of Biogenesis E group is only -0.82 on the five indicators, showing that the mechanism of cultural symbiosis has not been fully utilized. Overall, international students show obvious heterogeneity in their housing choices and cultural integration, and more differentiated and inclusive housing services and management strategies should be formulated in accordance with their cultural needs and living habits to improve the quality of their study and life in China, and enhance their sense of belonging and confidence in their development.

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