

# Functions of International Student Volunteers and Long Term Contributions

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**Abstract:** This study delves into the critical roles of international student volunteers in establishing a platform for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and promoting the publicity of China's stories, providing valuable insights for academic research and practical international student volunteer service activities. Firstly, international student volunteers actively facilitate cross-cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries through diversified volunteer activities. They not only broaden the worldview of the Chinese people but also foster deep communication and understanding between Chinese and international students. Secondly, international student volunteers played a critical role in telling China's stories well. Through their active participation in social media, campus publicity and media cooperation, they have effectively conveyed the true image of China, helping establish a positive image for China in the world and enhance its international influence. Finally, to ensure the sustainable development of international student volunteers, this paper proposes a pathway to construct a long-term mechanism for their team building. It includes establishing a diversified international student volunteer organization, ensuring resource support, optimizing volunteer experience, and creating multi-dimensional international communication, which effectively promotes the enthusiasm of volunteers and the sustainability of activities.

**Keywords:** international student volunteers, cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, long-term mechanism, tell China's Stories Well

## Introduction

Volunteers are defined as "individuals who freely contribute their services, without remuneration, to public or volunteer organizations engaged in all types of social welfare activities" <sup>[1]</sup>. Volunteer service is an essential way for college students to participate in social affairs, through which they utilize specific skills and resources in spare time to provide gratis assistance to others and to the society<sup>[2]</sup>. In China, international students refer to those who do not have Chinese nationality but receive education in China, according to *the Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China*<sup>[3]</sup>. Correspondingly, international student volunteers can be defined as foreign students that study in China while participating in social welfare and community service activities. They are willing to utilize their own skills and resources in spare time to provide gratis assistance to others and to the society. To promote cross-cultural understanding and Community(the Global Community of Shared Future) development, international student volunteers can engage in various volunteer activities relating to community development, cultural exchange, etc. The increasing number of international students has promoted their higher level of participation in volunteer activities. In China, international student volunteers are playing increasingly crucial role with significant increase in their number, popularity and organized level. Particular differences in their cultural backgrounds, language environment, thinking modes and religious beliefs require case-by-case

methods during organization construction, incentive system and long-term management, etc. However, there is still nowhere near enough research on this issue. Research on the construction and development of international student volunteers' team has both academic and practical significance, calling for much more attention.

## **1. Functions of international student volunteers**

### **1.1 Promoting the all-round development of international student volunteers**

International student volunteers benefit a great deal in personal growth and career development through participating in multiple volunteer activities, realizing both interdisciplinary and cross-cultural progress.

On the one hand, volunteer activities provide international students with opportunities to develop their leadership and teamwork, helping lay the foundation for their future careers. On the other hand, cross-cultural practices have cultivated a global vision and cross-cultural communication skills for international student volunteers, promoting them to respect diversity, listen well and communicate effectively, which are of great value in the work of international cooperation, multinational enterprises, international organizations, etc. Volunteer activities provide an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural learning platform for individual students, laying a solid foundation for their future career and social success through cultivating their diverse abilities.

Additionally, community service and social welfare activities enable international student volunteers to recognize the complexity and urgency of social issues and cultivate a sense of social responsibility.

For example, the international volunteers who participated in the social practice of "Science and Technology Backyard" and "Experience China" have learned about the urgent scientific research problems to be solved in reality and the urgent practical problems to be solved in developing countries, which inspired them to actively participate in scientific research and explore China's experience. Such sense of social responsibility will lead them to pay continuous attention to social issues in their future careers and social experiences, and contribute to social development.

### **1.2 Fostering cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries**

*Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* emphasizes that the key to better telling China's stories is to "collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture and showcase them to the world". To achieve this, we need to adopt various means including organizing visits, research, cultural activities and volunteer services to assist international students to have a deep understanding of Chinese society, experience and comprehend modern China by themselves. International student volunteers have built a platform for promoting two-way cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, which not only broadens the Chinese people's understanding of the world, but also provides international students with volunteer opportunities to participate in Chinese society.

For instance, among active international student volunteers at the Asian Games, China International Import Expo (CIIE) and Winter Olympics, Mostafa from Egypt provided accurate translations for Chinese and foreign technical officials and coaches at the Asian Games. During the pandemic, Harley from Afghanistan, an international from Southeast University, traveled to Kabul and three nearby cities in four days to collect 20,000 masks and donated them to Wuhan. And international students of the "Belt and Road" association of Tsinghua University utilized their language skills and international liaison advantages, to seek medical supplies and launch a humanitarian appeal. Besides, students from Huazhong Agricultural University shot publicity videos in seven languages to tell the true story of the fight against the epidemic in Wuhan.

The active involvement of international student volunteers, such as planning and holding international cultural festivals, international shows and other activities, provides cultural opportunities for individuals to have a deep understanding of other countries and promotes cross-cultural exchanges to unfold a broad way for Chinese individuals to participate in and comprehend global affairs and world culture. Through personal participation and communication, Chinese individuals are able to have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the diversity around the world, hence becoming more open and inclusive to better integrate into the world. In addition, the cooperation between

international student volunteers and Chinese students in carrying out joint social practice, innovation and entrepreneurship, scientific research and academic annual conferences, helps build an open, inclusive and diversified international campus. According to foreign experiences, the international experience of foreign students and their various perspectives when dealing with problems can bring new inspiration to local students' learning and research, producing better peer group effects<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **1.3 Telling China's stories well.**

In the fifth group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held in May 2023 on building a leading country in education, Xi Jinping stressed that "It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of 'Study in China,' tell China's stories well, spread China's experience, make China's voice heard, and enable China's education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world".

International student volunteers publicize their volunteer activities through internationally shared social media and in ways familiar to young people, including introduction to campus activities and learning environment, and even self-made publicity videos of the campus and the city. In such way, they display China's traditional culture and modern development to the world, demonstrating China's real experience as well as sense of global responsibility. The volunteers have told the China's stories from a positive perspective and presented the true China to the world, thus helping build a positive international image of China as an international educational destination and cultural exchange center. Their publicity activities also provide strong support for international initiatives such as "the Belt and Road".

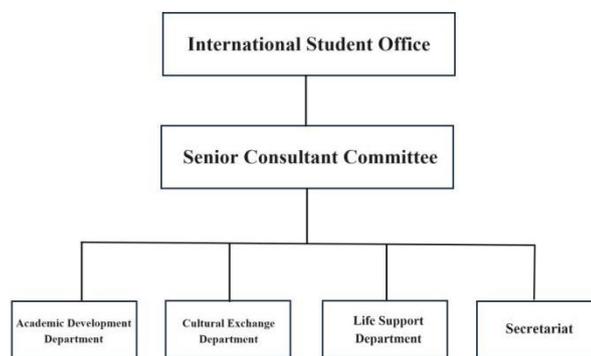
International student volunteers play a significant role in removing rumors about China, amplifying China's voices on the international stage and establishing a good international image of China. For example, during the epidemic period, international student volunteers in many Chinese universities actively took part in the fight against the epidemic and their deeds were widely reported. The universities include Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan University, Huazhong Agricultural University, Central China Normal University, Wuhan University of Technology, China University of Geosciences, and Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, etc. These volunteer organizations displayed a friendly international image of China, and made great contributions to preventing the spread of fake news and maintaining China's good national image as well. The channel of interpersonal communication based on trust that is established by the volunteers is key to international communication, achieving significant communication effect.

## **2. Ways to establishing long-term mechanism of international student volunteers**

Establishing a long-term mechanism of international student volunteers is a key step in ensuring their steady and sustainable development. Its functioning requires multilevel support, including organizational guarantee, resource support, incentive mechanism, and publicity platform.

### **2.1 To establish a diversified international student volunteer organization focusing on its adaptive organization structure and fine selection system**

It is crucial to build an efficient volunteer organization structure for international students from various cultural backgrounds. To meet the students' diversified needs, we have designed a clear and detailed division of responsibilities, and set up volunteer departments respectively focusing on their academic development, cultural exchange, life support, etc. The departments jointly ensure the orderly operation of activities and effective allocation of resources. With an emphasis on the top-level design and equal informational exchange, we maintain a clear division of labor and give full play to the function of peer counselling, striving to create an efficient and orderly organization structure, as shown in the figure 1 below:



**Figure 1** Organization Structure

Additionally, it is necessary to establish a clear and mature selection system where instructors play an active guiding role to ensure the selection of volunteers. The volunteer leader is responsible for overall planning and resource coordination to promote the stability and development of the organization. Since equal communication is specially stressed in the group of international student volunteer, appellations like director or minister should be avoided while international accepted ones such as coordinator and vice coordinate are encouraged, so as to weaken the sense of class in the organization and reflect equality and respect. As for the selection process, special attention should be paid to individuals equipped with an international vision and social responsibility. The balance of their source countries, majors and grades needs to be taken into consideration as well to promote the effective guide of volunteer leaders in the cross-cultural environment, thereby ensuring the stability and consistency of the organization.

Also, the posts in the volunteer organization must be carefully set up to make full use of the volunteers' interests, skills and expertise, which involves matching volunteers to positions that for their strengths and clearly defining job duties and expectations for each position. In such way, volunteers can give full play to their personal strengths and make contributions to the organization.

## **2.2 To ensure the resource support to empower the long-term stable operation of international student volunteer organizations as well as the comprehensive development of their members**

For the long-term and stable operation of international student volunteer organizations, ensuring the resource support is an important guarantee, among which mentors' guidance and support are foremost. The mentors of the volunteers should actively participate in the top-level design and planning in the early stage of the activity to provide comprehensive guidance, get involved in the whole process of the activity and provide real-time guidance to ensure its successful conduct, and lead the volunteers to carry out a comprehensive review after the activity to evaluate its implementation and provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. Such method of early planning, whole-process participation and final review is helpful to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of volunteer activities.

In addition, it is encouraged to actively seek the support of universities, communities and other social organizations. It helps to ensure that international student volunteer organizations can obtain necessary funds, supplies, training and activity venues and other resources, and in the meanwhile expands the cooperation network to create good conditions for the continuous operation and development of the organizations.

Furthermore, volunteers need to be provided with comprehensive training and development opportunities. This can not only motivate volunteers to participate in volunteer activities, but also improve their personal ability and professional skills. The training programs not only matter in volunteer activities, but also help lay the foundation for their future academic and professional development. Therefore, resource support is much more than a necessity to maintain the normal operation of the organization, but a key factor to improve the willingness and ability of volunteers to participate in

volunteer activities, providing a solid foundation for the implementation of a long-term mechanism.

### **2.3 To optimize the volunteer experience through establishing and improving the incentive mechanism for international students**

Volunteer incentives have always been one of the core issues of research on volunteer organizations at home and abroad. Effective incentives for volunteers are essential to maintaining their active participation and engagement. Scientific and reasonable incentives can significantly improve the participation and satisfaction of volunteers, thus helping to ensure the stable development of the organization. The volunteer incentive mechanism plays an crucial role in the construction of a long-term mechanism for international students in the following ways:

Firstly, establish honor incentives. Publicly reward and recognize members who are outstanding in volunteer activities, with certificates, medals, and appraisal of excellence, etc. Also, insignia like exclusive work cards and customized clothes can help strengthen the volunteers' sense of identity and enhance their pride in participation.

Secondly, provide volunteers with opportunities for development. Conduct training courses and provide opportunities to participate in specific positions or serve as project leaders, enabling volunteers to improve their personal skills and leadership. For volunteers themselves, it contributes to their personal development; while for the organization, it help cultivate more backbone forces and lay a solid foundation for the long-term development.

Besides, create communication opportunities between volunteers. Hold regular volunteer group activities to promote their communications and unity. Exclusive opportunities to go out for communications can deepen the emotional bond between volunteers and the organization, and provide a platform for communication and cooperation.

The above volunteer incentive mechanism can stimulate the enthusiasm of international student volunteers to get more involved in volunteer activities and improve their personal development. This can not only help to maintain the vitality of the organization, but also to promote the effective operation of the long-term mechanism, providing strong support for the internationalization of colleges and universities.

### **2.4 To create multi-dimensional international communication by building a long-term publicity mechanism for international student volunteer organizations**

The use of diversified publicity means and communication channels, especially the full use of social media, campus publicity, media reports and other channels, can effectively convey the outcomes and social influence of international students' activities to a wider audience.

In terms of social media applications, the outcomes of volunteer activities, social service projects and cooperation with other organizations can be shared in real time through platforms such as Weibo, Wechat, Facebook, etc. Apart from this, multimedia forms including pictures, videos and texts can vividly show the participation of volunteers and their positive influences, stimulating the interest and enthusiasm of more people. As for campus publicity, the purpose, characteristics and achievements of international students can be regularly publicized by means of campus radio, posters, brochures and other methods. Regular held exhibitions, lectures and communication activities can help more students understand the significance of the organization and recognize the practical impact of volunteer activities. In addition, it is encouraged to actively cooperate with the media. Through ways such as press releases, reports and interviews, we can convey to the society the importance of international students and their contributions to internationalization of universities and sustainable development of society. Media coverage can establish a good image for the organization, improve public awareness, and attract more attention and support.

In summary, taking publicity as a part of the long-term mechanism can provide a stable publicity platform and social support for the sustainable development of international students, so as to lay a solid foundation for the long-term influence and value creation of the organization.

### 3. Conclusion

This study explores the key role of international student volunteers in building a platform for the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and promoting the publicity of China's stories. Through a comprehensive analysis of the background, functions of international student volunteers, as well as the path of establishing its long-term mechanism, we draw some important conclusions.

Apart from promoting the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, international student volunteers played a critical role in telling China's stories well. Through their active participation in social media, campus publicity and media cooperation, they have effectively conveyed the true image of China, helping establish a positive image for China in the world and enhance its international influence.

To ensure the sustainable development of international student volunteers, we propose a path to establish a long-term mechanism. This includes establishing a diversified international student volunteer organization, ensuring resource support, optimizing volunteer experience, and creating multi-dimensional international communication, which effectively promoting international student volunteers to better participate in activities and improve their personal development.

In conclusion, international student volunteers play an essential role in promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and the publicity of China's stories. The organization and management of them, as well as the establishment of a long-term mechanism, can provide a useful reference for the real international student volunteer service activities in addition to their great significance in academic research.

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#### Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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