Keeping them safe: A review of Chinese students’ safety issues in New Zealand

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Abstract

The export education industry has become the fourth biggest industry in New Zealand, although currently the industry is experiencing difficulties with a decline in the number of Chinese students choosing New Zealand as their educational destination. Safety is believed to be one of the most important contributing factors in this decline. This paper reviews news reports, research articles, and government documents, published in print or online in China and New Zealand, to highlight and discuss some significant safety issues facing Chinese students in New Zealand, including the risks of Chinese students as victims and perpetrators in gang-related crimes, their involvement in drug dealings and problem gambling, sexual health problems, road safety, and racial discrimination. The paper concludes that multiple factors may have contributed to these problems, the solution of which requires the host institutions’ moral obligations and the support of the receiving community to ensure Chinese students’ welfare and safety. Finally, the paper suggests that host institutions offer a safety educational programme to raise the awareness of Chinese students’ safety and security.

Introduction

The export education industry has become the fourth biggest industry in New Zealand, creating thousands of jobs and contributing billions of dollars to the economy. The presence of international students in New Zealand has attracted considerable attention from central and local governments, education providers, scholars and researchers. A report commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Internationalisation in New Zealand Tertiary Education, suggests that “the quality and sustainability of the domestic system will ultimately depend on the nature and extent of international engagement” (McInnis, Peacock, & Catherwood, 2006). After almost a decade of
large-scale engagement, New Zealand has won a reasonably big international education market niche in spite of the small size of its population.

New Zealand, however, faces serious challenges in competing with other strong competitors, such as the United States, Britain, Australia, China and Japan, in attracting international students. These challenges are aggravated by adverse media reports and other contributing factors that have cost the New Zealand export education industry dearly in the past five years. Gerritsen (2008) noted that in the first semester of 2008 tertiary international enrolments have fallen sharply by 7 percent to 19 percent in the eight New Zealand universities. According to the figures provided by the New Zealand Immigration Service in March 2008, the number of full fee-paying international students in New Zealand in 2007 was 92,702. There has been a steady decline in the number of Chinese students from 66,093 (55.4 percent of the total) in 2004 to 34,465 (37.2 percent of the total) in 2007.

Yang’s (2008) study suggests that multiple factors contributed to the decrease in Chinese students; these factors included academics’ unhelpful attitudes, their lack of understanding of the needs of international students, racial prejudice and discrimination, and unsafe learning and social environments. She noted that Chinese students, who made up the largest number from a single source country, need proper protection and a safe learning and living environment.

This paper will first review the relevant literature on the issues of international students’ safety and security to identify the key factors that have affected the lives of international students. It will report the methods used for this research and then examine these factors by looking at Chinese and New Zealand media reports, government documents, and research publications. The last part of the paper will discuss some of the issues and recommend some solutions to address Chinese students’ safety concerns.
Literature review

In this article, *safety* refers to the physical, social, psychological and emotional conditions of being protected against danger, risks, and harm. Safety has always been an important factor when international students choose their study destinations (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, and Sawir, 2005; Mazzorol & Soutar, 2002; Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2007).

According to the survey conducted in 2006 by I-graduate International Student Barometer (based at the University of Salford, UK) in which 13,988 international students from 46 nationalities in 125 tertiary institutions worldwide participated, safety and the Internet were both ranked most important for students studying overseas; both rated 3.62 out of 5 on a Likert scale (Archer, 2006). In 2007, five New Zealand universities participated in the survey: the University of Canterbury, Massey University, University of Otago, University of Waikato and Victoria University of Wellington. There were 3,862 student responses and an average response rate of 36 percent. Forty-five percent of participants were Chinese international students. The findings of this survey show that international students consider quality of lecturers, the Internet, safety and course content as top concerns; 86 percent of the participants, however, did feel safe in New Zealand (Archer, 2007).

Deumert et al. (2005) argued that international students, because of their multiple vulnerabilities as educational service beneficiaries, consumers, temporary migrants, workers, and human beings, deserve rights for social protection and personal safety in the host country. However, their research in Australia found that safety and protection instruments often “fall significantly short of providing adequate coverage” (p. 330). They maintained that international students’ personal safety issues relating to social isolation, loneliness, racial discrimination, and personal health are often ignored by receiving societies. In their view, the international students’ safety and security regime should be built into the protective programmes and practices of host institutions and civil society networks at institutional and national levels.

Waters (2006, p. 1046) described international education as “social reproduction in both student sending and receiving societies”. In the process of recent
“neoliberalisation” in Canada, Waters claimed, “international students are generally viewed as a ‘cash-cow’, offsetting public disinvestment in education and declining domestic enrolments” (p. 1064). Consequently, international students’ interests and personal safety concerns are often sidelined or neglected.

In New Zealand, personal safety has also been a significant concern for educational providers, host institutions, international students and their parents. The revised version of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students was introduced in 2003 to protect the interests of international students and to safeguard the export education industry. The Code requires signatories to provide support services and information to international students about safety issues in relation to accommodation, welfare facilities, driving laws, driver licensing requirements, road codes, personal health, mental health, drug education and counselling, problem gambling, sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health services, harassment and discrimination. The Code demands that international students be “well informed, safe, and properly cared for” (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.31). Nicolas (2005) asserted, "The Code makes 'the industry' visible, makes a market, controls brand NZ education, regulates through consumer assurance, and imposes direct disciplinary controls on institutions” (p. 5).

In spite of the introduction of the Code, however, the lucrative export education industry was still not effectively regulated and “cowboy” practices were not uncommon (Collins, 2006). The required pastoral care did not seem to exist in these cowboy institutions where international students’ personal safety became a serious concern, manifested in a series of extensively reported murders, kidnappings, extortions, problem gambling, sexual health issues, and high rates of abortions (Cleave, 2006; Ellen, 2003; Gower, 2007; Gregory, 2007; M. Li, 2007; W. Li, 2007; Yang, 2008). Asian students, especially Chinese students, found it unsafe to study in New Zealand, where they experienced isolation, loneliness, insecurity, racial prejudice and discrimination, and racial attacks (Ho, Li, Cooper & Holmes, 2007; McKenzie-McLean, 2007; Ward, 2006). Butcher and McGrath (2004) proposed that host institutions adopt a proactive approach to responding to the needs of international
students and addressing their safety concerns; these could include academic and social orientations, living skills, mental and sexual health issues, and friendship building, through effective pastoral care.

China Daily journalist Ling Liu (2003) interviewed some Chinese students studying in Australia and New Zealand. All her interviewees came from one city in China: Fuzhou. Liu found five factors that might have contributed Chinese students’ safety problems: (1) past poor academic achievements, unhealthy learning habits and lifestyles; (2) inability to control oneself when a monitoring system was absent in a foreign country where language schools did not care about the welfare of their students; (3) difficulties in making cultural, academic and social adjustments in a new learning environment; (4) unclear goals in learning because many were forced to study overseas by their parents; and (5) a tendency to brag about, and inability to manage, large amounts of money that Chinese parents send out with their children. This final factor was the result of the difficulty of sending money from China which often made the children the targets of kidnapping and extortion.

Although there has been extensive and sensational media coverage of Chinese students’ safety issues in New Zealand, which may well discourage many students who would otherwise choose to study in New Zealand (Huo, 2007), Chinese student safety in this country has not been sufficiently researched. This paper, based largely on Chinese and New Zealand news reports and research publications, aims to fill such a gap. The paper attempts to address these two research questions:

1. What are the major safety and security issues that face Chinese students in New Zealand?

2. What strategies should be adopted to address these issues?

Methods

This study adopted a multi-method approach to examine the scope and the extent of the issues that perceptibly had threatened the safety of international students, Chinese students in particular. It reviewed New Zealand Government documents such as the Code of Practice and the literature of previous research (see literature review in 2.0) to identify the research gap in the area. Content or textual analysis was another
method used for this study to allow the author to sift through large volumes of data from media news reports and online resources. Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 14). It is a useful technique for the author to discover, code, describe, categorise and analyse the data through qualitative analysis (Stemler, 2001).

**Procedure**

The author used some key words identified from literature searches to Google search relevant information from Chinese and New Zealand websites. Some important events had been reported worldwide by the media. Therefore, one key word Google search could generate thousands of items. The author sifted through most relevant data and drew on the major themes on Chinese and international students’ safety and security by making inferences from 633 research articles and media news stories (including those in New Zealand-based Chinese language newspapers) published in New Zealand and in China from 2001 to March 2008. The timeframe was determined on the basis of statistical analysis: Chinese student numbers began to soar from 2001 and reached their height in 2003 (Education New Zealand, 2007).

In the next section, the six major issues that have been identified in relation to Chinese students’ safety and security in New Zealand will be reported and discussed: Chinese students as victims and perpetrators in gang-related activities, Chinese students’ involvement in drug trafficking, problem gambling, sexual health issues, road safety, and racial discrimination. However, it should be noted that some of these issues are not mutually exclusive and a clear categorisation is difficult. For example, gambling could lead to criminal activities and drug trafficking. The last section of the paper will discuss some implications from this study and will propose some practical strategies to raise safety awareness of all those in the export education industry, including education providers and Chinese students.

The author acknowledges that as this article is based largely on reviews of published media stories and research articles, there is a limitation for this paper to extend its scope and depth of research, analysis and discussion. Although a number of problems have been identified and reported on, to locate the fundamental causes of
these problems presents a significant challenge within the allowed paper length. However, this paper, with its extensive sources and practical insights, can shed some lights on international student safety issues that have been under-researched.

**Safety issues facing Chinese international students in New Zealand**

This section will present six themes relating to Chinese students’ safety and security in New Zealand: victims and perpetrators, drug trafficking, problem gambling, sexual health issues, road safety, and racial discrimination. The thematic categorisation is somewhat arbitrary. The purpose is to highlight the individual issues and present to readers a broad picture of the safety issues facing Chinese students in New Zealand. Many of these issues are interrelated and mutually inclusive.

**Victims and perpetrators**

This subsection discusses the impact of the New Zealand existing gang culture on the Chinese students who were likely to involve themselves in gang activities or become victims of gang extortion, kidnapping and murder.

It should be acknowledged that one of the reasons that Chinese students chose to study in New Zealand was that it is perceived to be “stable and safe there and students’ security wouldn’t be a problem” (L. Liu, 2003, para. 3). There have been growing fears in China, however, and the perceptions of Chinese leaders at a high level that Chinese students “are getting hooked on crime in this country” and the country has become “a school for crime” (Ellen, 2003, para. 1) has been worrying. Chinese students in New Zealand are young, “hot-tempered”, unable to exercise self-control in their “reckless period” of character shaping, and vulnerable to being led astray and to unhealthy influences (L. Liu, 2003, para. 8). They can be tempted or forced to participate in illegal gang activities, organised crimes, triads, kidnapping, extortion, violence, and murder (L. Liu, 2003, para. 9). Pan (2006, para. 7) wrote,

Asian (read Chinese) students themselves can be perpetrators of their own misfortunes. Some students come to New Zealand with pre-existing negative attitudes. Others have conducted themselves more foolishly or even wantonly in New Zealand than they would in their own country.
Gangs, such as the 14K, the Big Circle Gang, the Taiwan Gang, the Vietnamese Gang, the Cambodian Gang, and the Japanese Gang, often targeted new arrivals in language schools and demanded “protection money” of up to $1,500 per year (Middlebrook, 2001, para. 19). Jingmin Li, for example, was beaten up after he refused to pay “protection fees” to an extortion gang. He said extortions in language schools were a popular game (Cleave, 2006).

Chinese students became easy kidnap targets “because of a public perception that fee-paying Asian students come from wealthy families” and that they had large sums of money at their disposal (Middlebrook, 2001, para. 16). Ling Liu (2003) agreed that the main reason for these kidnap crimes was the public perception that Chinese students had too much cash with them and as a result, some innocent Chinese students became the targets and victims of these gangs.

Ling Liu (2003) reported that the kidnappers were often found to be Chinese nationals who had acquired New Zealand residence or citizenship. They committed crimes by themselves or they paid money to people from other ethnic groups to commit crimes on their behalf. These young Chinese gang members, aged between 18 and 25, often gathered at nightclubs dominated by Chinese students to spot their possible prey; they were looking for rich and vulnerable victims (Beston, 2005; Gower, 2003a). The brutal death of Wan Biao in April 2006 shocked the whole world. Wan, a language school student in Auckland, was kidnapped, murdered, decapitated, cut into pieces, put in a suitcase, and dumped into the Waitemata Harbour in Auckland by an extortion ring on Good Friday 2006.

In Ji’s (2003) view, there were many causes for the crimes committed by Chinese students: financial pressure, love rivalry, greed and personal ego. Ji argued that although the number of students who committed crimes was of a very tiny proportion overall, the fear inflicted upon other Chinese students was major. These “bad apples”, Ji suggested, were the ones from wealthy families in China, who were used to living a dissolute life. When they had squandered the money their parents had sent them, they took risks robbing other students of their money, abducting them to get a ransom, or even killing them. The reason for coming to New Zealand was not to study, but to
enjoy “the full personal freedom” in New Zealand and to prey upon other Chinese students to feed their insatiable greed (L. Liu, 2003, para. 6).

The repeated incidents of kidnappings and extortions seemed to have exhausted the patience of police (Gower, 2003b). Judge Cecilie Rushton in Auckland said, "Hardly a week goes by in this court without a case involving the kidnap of a Chinese student and a ransom demand” (Gower, 2003b, para. 6). She sentenced a kidnapper, Da Wan, 25, to eight years’ jail for kidnapping a fellow student and demanding a $1.25 million ransom. She regarded such a crime as an “endemic” in the Chinese student community and considered that it required tough sentencing to send a loud message to the Chinese student community that “an offence of this nature will bring a substantial jail sentence” (“Don’t shoot,” para. 1). Compared with death penalties in China, however, what was thought to be a tough penalty by the New Zealand judge might be considered to be lenient to potential offenders (Phare, 2006).

The negative media reports about Chinese student criminals and their victims send a strong message to Chinese students in New Zealand, their parents and other prospective students in China that New Zealand may no longer be considered a safe place for Chinese students (Tan, 2006a) as parents fear that their children might get involved in, or become victims of violence, extortion, kidnapping, and murder.

**Drug trafficking**

Drug trafficking is another form of illegal activity that puts Chinese students at risk. Because of their student status, Chinese students become the easy targets for organised transnational drug trafficking syndicates. Some are lured into the industry out of greed, and some out of ignorance.

Most drug trafficking cases involving Chinese students were related to Contac NT capsules which can be used as precursor chemicals to extract addictive drug ‘P’ or methamphetamine. Those precursor chemicals are banned in New Zealand, but they can be bought cheaply as flu pills over the counter in China. Chinese students were often not informed that these cold remedies were illegal in New Zealand so consequently some Chinese students became involved in criminal offending without realising that they were committing a crime.
According to police Inspector John Mitchell, drug trafficking is on the increase and drug smuggling has become a very “heavy traffic” (Revington, 2004). Tunnah (2005) reported that in 2004-2005, an estimated $90 million of methamphetamine ingredients, 98 percent of which originated from China, were busted in 525 individual seizures at borders and more than 60 people, 80 percent of them short-stay Chinese students, were arrested. Organised transnational trafficking syndicates prey on the greed, naivety and ignorance of Chinese students who, as pawns or mules, are directly involved in the drug trade or are paid to let their names and addresses be used for mail import of the pills by drug “cooks” (MacLeod, 2004).

Shocked by such an increase in Chinese students’ involvement in organised crimes, the Chinese Embassy in Wellington issued warnings to Chinese students with regard to Contac NT pills:

> Large quantities of Contac NT capsules are forbidden to be carried, couriered or mailed from China to New Zealand. Contac NT capsules contain precursors to make Class A addictive drugs, and have become the targets of criminal trafficking. Since January this year, two incidents have occurred. The Chinese students involved in couriering thousands of Contac NT capsules to New Zealand have been arrested for transnational drug trafficking. (Chinese Embassy, 2005, paras. 1-2, my translation)

These warnings, however, did not seem to get across to Chinese students. Some were still lured to the trade by the profits, without considering the risks and serious consequences. In 2006, 2.3 million Contac NT capsules were intercepted, enough to produce 147kg of methamphetamine, worth $147 million (Taylor, 2007). In 2007, three Chinese students were arrested and charged in two of the country’s largest-ever drug busts. They were jailed for conspiring to supply pseudoephedrine and methamphetamine found in Contac NT capsules imported from China, worth $8 million and $22 million, respectively (Woulfe, 2007).

**Problem gambling**

In this subsection, the issues of problem gambling facing Chinese students in New Zealand are presented and discussed. It points out that Chinese students are prone to developing gambling habits and addiction which could lead to other gambling-related criminal activities.
Gambling is illegal in China but it is legal in New Zealand. When Chinese students arrive in New Zealand, they are curious about casinos and often want to visit them to satisfy their curiosity (Li & Chan, 2006). Nie (2003) pointed out that the casino business in New Zealand was thriving because of the arrival of Asian students and immigrants.

The research study conducted by Abbott and Cheung (2005) revealed that 52 percent male and 45 percent female Chinese student participants responded that they had gambled. Fifty-two percent of those who had gambled were between 18 to 24 and 25 percent between 25 and 29. Their research study found that the longer these Chinese students stayed in New Zealand, the more likely they were to become addicted to gambling; problem gamblers rose from 17 percent in the second year of their stay in New Zealand to 23 percent in the third year.

Research suggests that Asian students, especially Chinese students, were considered the most at risk group as regards gambling addiction (Li & Chan, 2006). Chinese students sometimes saw gambling as an escape from cultural adjustment problems (NZ Ministry of Education, 2007), as a form of socialisation, a release from stress and an escape from failure, a time killer, a way to have enjoyment and fun, and a way to make money (Li & Chan, 2006). Multiple other factors may also contribute to Chinese students’ gambling habits: language barriers, boredom, social isolation, loneliness, unrestricted freedom, easy access to a large sum of money from parents, light study load, lack of entertainment and social activities, and negative experiences in language schools (Abbott & Cheung, 2005; Tse, Wong & Chan, 2007; Li, Hodgetts & Ho, 2006; Nie, 2003).

Li and Chan’s (2006) research, which involved 12 Chinese students in Hamilton and Auckland, found that gambling could lead to many problems, including study concerns, legal issues, monetary issues, health problems, stress, depression, mood disorder, relationship breakdown, loss of self-esteem and increased rates of smoking and drinking. Gambling is often associated with many social and personal problems: financial pressure, family debts, mental stress, anxiety about personal and family member’s safety, violence, and criminal activities, such as theft, burglary, fighting, kidnapping and murder (Tse, Wong & Chan, 2007, pp. 83-84).
Gambling caused serious financial hardship for some Chinese students. For example, an 18-year-old Chinese student, Zhao Yunfei, who was involved in gambling in a casino in Christchurch, lost the $75,000 that was for his education and living expenses during his 14 months stay in New Zealand (“Risk,” 2002). Wendy Li’s study (2007) found that one student gambled 112 hours a week, leaving no money to pay tuition fees.

Financial difficulties often led these student gamblers to borrow money from loan sharks and consequently they sank deeper and deeper into debts (Abbott & Cheung, 2005; Gregory, 2007). Gambling then became a pathway to crime and prison. To pay off debts, some gamblers were forced into drug dealing and prostitution (Gregory, 2007). Some heavy problem gamblers, according to Nie, used different excuses to demand money from their parents or friends, and began to take risks in robbery, kidnapping, and extortion. Student Xiangwu Zhang, 24, was jailed for two years nine months for a bank swindle of $287,000 carried out to feed his gambling habit (“Chinese,” 2004).

John Stansfield, the Problem Gambling Foundation's chief executive, affirmed that casinos were an attractive place for lonely and vulnerable Asian students. He concluded:

A significant proportion of young Asians in our prisons are victims of the casino. This pathway to crime and prison cannot be tolerated by a civilised society - we all lose. (“Peters,” 2007)

Problem gambling has caught the attention of the Chinese Embassy in Wellington. The Chinese embassy writes on its website:

Some Chinese students in New Zealand are addicted to gambling. They often visit casinos in Auckland and Christchurch and gamble thousands of dollars. Some students in Wellington also gamble in clubs and betting venues. When money is lost, they borrow money from all available sources, to an extent of extortion. Gambling problems have caused many social concerns. Gambling does not only ruin many people’s future, it also leads to tragedies to the family and others (Chinese Embassy, 2004. para. 44, my translation).

When meeting with Chinese government officials in Beijing in 2007, Winston Peters, New Zealand’s Foreign Minister, conceded that Chinese students’ welfare had not
been properly monitored outside class hours and that they had become victims of the casinos. He assured the Chinese government that Chinese students in New Zealand would be properly cared for in future (“Peters,” 2007).

The scope and pervasiveness of the problem gambling remains unknown. The sampling for the two research studies undertaken by Li and Chan (2006) and Tse, Wong & Chan (2007) was too small to make a generalisation and as gambling is legal in New Zealand, there are no police records available. What is presented here, however, from media and website stories, suggests that Chinese students are susceptible to becoming involved in gambling and in gambling-associated crimes, such as extortion and kidnapping. A larger nationwide research project is needed to find out the scope, risks, and pervasiveness of Chinese students gambling in New Zealand.

**Sexual health issues**

This subsection discusses sexual health issues that have damaged Chinese students’ image of New Zealand. It examines the cohabitation-related consequences for Chinese students, Chinese students’ involvement in the sex industry in New Zealand, and the extent of sexual diseases among young Chinese students.

Most Chinese students studying in New Zealand secondary and language schools and tertiary institutions are between the ages of 16 to 25. Sexual health is an important issue as most have never received any sex education. These young students, especially female students, come to New Zealand inadequately prepared for living in a country where they have free access to sex and adult materials (Head, 2005). Pansy Wong, a Chinese MP in New Zealand, points out, “the young women are vulnerable because it is often their first time away from home” (TVNZ, 2002, para. 11).

Cohabitation – living together in a sexual relationship – is believed to be a popular phenomenon with Chinese students in New Zealand. The exact statistical figure of Chinese cohabiting students is unknown. However, Li and Huang (2003) in their article published in the *Chinese People’s Daily*, a Chinese official newspaper, estimated that at least 80 percent of Chinese students in New Zealand cohabited. This
figure was confirmed by a survey conducted in 2006 by the World Journal, a Chinese language newspaper in the USA, which concluded that 80 percent of the Chinese international students in USA, Canada, the UK, Germany lived together in a sexual relationship (Chang & Qing, 2006). A book published by two former New Zealand university students, titled Christmas in Summer, also asserted that more than 80 percent of Chinese students cohabited in New Zealand (Yang, 2008). Gao’s (2001) research study of 90 Chinese university students in the USA, however, showed that 58 percent of undergraduate students and 40 percent of graduate students cohabited, a figure much lower than that of the World Journal.

There are many contributing factors to cohabitation: boredom, loneliness, homesickness, study pressure, curiosity about sex, and sexual needs. Chang and Qing (2006, para. 6) found that:

To many Chinese students, the biggest obstacle is not the language barrier, nor cultural shock, but spiritual emptiness. When they embark on a journey to the foreign soil to arduously pursue their studies, what they first encounter are not difficulties with reading textbooks, but living problems. Loneliness is the most important factor to their cohabitation (my translation).

Problems associated with cohabitation have received wide coverage by the media in New Zealand and in China. These include high rates of pregnancies, abortions, sexual diseases, family breakdowns, love triangles and rivalries, and murders. In addition, cohabitation involves multiple-party complications that have led to many tragedies. There is a common pattern: a girl loves a boy and begins to cohabit and then falls in love with another one and moves away from the ex-boyfriend; the jilted boy avenges himself by killing the love rival or both. For example, a girl named Ja Ye, 20, first cohabited with Junjie Ying, 22, in Hamilton, and then fell in love with another boy Wenbin Sun. The jilted boy murdered both the girl and the love rival and was sentenced to 20 years in jail (“Double,” 2004).

The over-representation of Chinese students’ sexual health issues creates fear among Chinese parents who are extremely worried about their children’s health, their welfare and sexual behaviour in a country where nobody is there to care for them or provide any counselling (Turner, 2007). These problems can prevent their children from achieving their goals. Media reports claimed that 25 young Asian students a week
had abortions, a rate highly disproportionate to any other ethnic group in New Zealand (TVNZ, 2002).

Ling Liu (2003) interviewed a Chinese student who returned to China to terminate her unwanted pregnancy. She told the reporter that the 14 students in her language class were all Chinese and were all dating and cohabiting to fight boredom and loneliness. Most of them had been forced to study overseas as a status symbol for their parents. She strongly advised parents “not to push their children into the fire pit in order to save their face” (L. Liu, 2003, para. 5, my translation). Liu also reported that a Chinese student, 19, had become a father, and yet did not have any means to support the mother and the child.

Chinese students’ involvement in the sex industry is a major factor to Chinese female students’ safety. According to the figures provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Justice (2005), between 25 percent and 60 percent of sex workers in New Zealand are non-New Zealand residents, and most of these workers are international students on a student visa. There has been a significant increase in Chinese students’ involvement in the industry. In Auckland, it has been reported that nine out of 10 illegal brothels were run and staffed by Chinese, who then employed Chinese students aged between 18-24 to offer cheap sex to Pakeha customers (Tan & Middleton, 2006).

Saphira and Wang (2004), researching Chinese students working as sex workers in Auckland and Manukau, found that money was a major motivator. They were mainly students from non-wealthy families who had to find a quick way to earn money to pay for their tuition fees and living expenses, or students from wealthy families who faced financial pressure after losing their money gambling.

Sexual diseases and unsafe sex have become a serious issue to these sexually active Chinese students. They have to return to China to seek medical treatment once they have contracted such diseases (Xi & Ning, 2006) as they rarely access health services in New Zealand. A lack of knowledge of how to access health services and counselling, as well as cultural values and sensitivities such as the fear of "losing face"
are considered major factors contributing to difficulties with the health consultation process (Omura & Hills, 2003).

Road safety

Cars are an important form of transport in New Zealand where the public transport system is often not very convenient. Unlike China, where students live in dormitories on the campus, students in New Zealand often live far away from the campus and therefore driving becomes a necessity. In addition, cheap car prices in New Zealand create a desire for students to buy cars and learn to drive. As a result, road safety becomes an urgent issue.

Road accidents and traffic offences in relation to Chinese students’ driving in New Zealand have been extensively reported by the media (Boyce, 2005; Collins, 2006). The People’s Daily described Chinese students’ driving in New Zealand and Australia as follows:

> In the recent two years, there is an upward tendency in the immoral behaviours and the vicious cases incurred by Chinese international students in Australia and New Zealand. Traffic offences were common, often entailing serious accidents. (W. Liu, 2003, para. 9)

According to Stirling’s (2003) survey in Auckland, 35 percent of traffic accidents involved international students. Some Chinese students were charged with dangerous driving or speeding, some with driving without licence or on a fake licence; these practices put themselves and others at risk.

One of the tragedies occurred in April 2004. Jiangkai Liao, 20, a student in an Auckland language school, was charged with dangerous driving, causing the death of a 63-year-old woman (“Unlicensed”, 2004). One of the worst cases of dangerous driving was the killing of a four-year-old Georgia McCarten-Graham by 19-year-old Dingyan Zhao. Zhao was driving without a licence on February 20, 2003, a month after his arrival in Auckland as a student at a language school. He was jailed for two years but the sentence was halved when he paid $40,000 in reparation. This sparked a big debate in New Zealand about whether justice could be bought (Bingham & Gardiner, 2003).
Media reports fuelled public concern about Asian students’ poor driving. Middlebrook claimed:

Most of them come out here with enormous, frightening amounts of money, and the first thing they want to do is buy a flash car, regardless of whether they can drive. (Middlebrook, 2001, para. 9)

There is no substantial evidence to support such a claim. Certain individual Chinese students from wealthy families can afford expensive cars but to state “most of them” is a generalisation. Such exaggerations appeared not only in the New Zealand media but also in the Chinese media. An online article in china.com (2005), titled “New Zealanders shocked at Chinese students’ flash cars,” attributed New Zealand thriving car business to the arrival of the wealthy Chinese students who could afford the most expensive cars that dealers could offer: Ferrari, Porsche, Mercedes, and Rolls-Royce. A small proportion of Chinese students had more than one car. When a Chinese TV reporter asked a student from Beijing why he had bought three expensive cars, he replied,

I love all sorts of expensive cars. I am addicted to them. In addition, girls are very realistic. They like to date with boys with expensive cars. A boy from Shenzhen [a city in China] bought a BMW. Therefore, I bought three to outnumber him although I can drive only one at a time. (china.com, 2005, para. 5, my translation)

Ignorance of the risks involved was considered as one of the causes for Chinese students’ traffic infringements. Some Chinese students often ignored road rules and regulations and found their road accident stories “humorous” (Stirling, 2003, para. 8). A 17-year-old Massey High School student in Auckland kept driving without a licence, despite police warnings. When police impounded his car, he bought another.

To raise the Chinese students’ awareness of road safety, the Chinese Embassy, has published some guidelines on its own web site and in Chinese newspapers in New Zealand, advising Chinese students to take extra precautions when driving:

Do not drive without a valid licence. Do not speed. Do not drink and drive. It is illegal to drive on a fake licence. Once caught, you have to bear all legal responsibilities. Vehicles are man-eating tigers that can harm yourself and others. Do not defy the law. (Chinese Embassy, 2004. para. 6, my translation)
Stirling (2003, para. 16) found the Chinese Embassy quite anxious to cooperate “because they see the lives of Chinese citizens and New Zealand citizens put at risk”.

To sum up, there is a concern for Chinese students’ road safety. Lack of understanding of the road codes, unawareness of the potential risks to themselves and to others, and a desire to look good to others were all viewed as contributing factors.

**Racial discrimination**

Racial discrimination against Asians has become a social and cultural issue in New Zealand (“NZ First”, 2008). Chinese students, like other Asian immigrants, have to face the possibility of being discriminated against in an unsafe environment.

The findings from *The Press* survey of 800 residents (500 in Christchurch and 300 in Auckland) in 2004 revealed that more than half those surveyed in both cities “did not think their city was a better place to live because of the increase in the number of Asians living there” and most Christchurch residents believed that racism was a serious problem in their city (Spratt, 2004, para. 1 & 10). In his investigation, McCrone (2007, para. 5) revealed the anti-Asian sentiments held by the local residents:

> And the other neighbour whose first welcoming words were thank goodness you are not Chinese or Korean. Down at the golf club, the same remark – because, you see, we are being over-run and the Asians just don't mix.

Such sentiments, fuelled by negative media reports on Chinese international students’ problems, have largely contributed to New Zealanders’ negative perceptions of Chinese students and local residents’ unfriendly and racially hostile attitudes towards them (Li, Hodgetts & Ho, 2006; Kenny, 2006; Yang, 2008).

Sobrun-Maharaj’s (2006) interviews with Chinese and Indian students studying in New Zealand show that these Chinese students had a strong need for acceptance, but most felt unaccepted. Forty-three percent of Sobrun-Maharaj’s surveyed respondents reported ethnic intimidation, such as racist name-calling, racial taunts and comments. Fifty-three percent of the surveyed teachers acknowledged that ethnic intimidation was an issue in their schools. Sobrun-Maharaj maintains that racism, discrimination
and ethnic intimidation “make a large proportion of Asian people feel unaccepted” (p. 135). Associated with ethnic intimidation, Sobrun-Maharaj asserts, are Asian students’ experiences of frustration, anger, retaliation, exclusion, isolation, alienation, lack of sense of belonging, uncertainty, fear, disappointment, disillusionment, lowered self-esteem, anxiety and depression, and suicidal tendencies.

John McKinnon, New Zealand Ambassador to China, assured the Chinese government that all international students were guests in New Zealand and “we want them treated well while they are in New Zealand” (“New Zealand pledges,” 2003, para. 13). However, while in New Zealand many Chinese students do not feel that they are being treated as “guests”. Some Chinese students have been booed, bullied, scoffed at, verbally abused, physically attacked, bombarded with eggs and water balls, and told to “go home” (Kiong, 2006). Tan (2006b, para. 8) points out that “The colour of your skin was enough to make someone hit you”. He wondered, “Is this Kiwi hospitality now a thing of the past because our Asian student population has grown?” (para. 9). One Chinese student was brutally attacked in his rented property in Christchurch in 2007 by three white men (Mckenzie-McLean, 2007).

Asian students are not seen as decent human beings entitled to a certain degree of human rights, but as “economic objects” and dollar signs that can invigorate the country’s economy (Collins, 2006). Their presence is regarded as a “cultural invasion” (Rotherham, 2003, para. 1) and a “disgrace” to the country:

You Asians are a disgrace, bringing your crimes with you. Go home. We don’t need more criminals to stretch our police resources further. (Tan, 2006c, para. 1)

Asian students are attributed with animalistic features. An example is the publication of the April 24 issue of Salient, a Victoria University student newspaper which ranked the Chinese fourth in the list of “Top five species we should be wary of” (Cheng, 2006). The Chinese were put between penguins and very poisonous snakes.

Racism and discrimination are strongly reflected in Foreign Minister Winston Peters’ speeches on different occasions. He insisted that Chinese students were responsible for “theft, fraud, fighting, assault, intimidation, vehicle crashes, disorder, domestic stabbings and a sideline of extortion and weapon carrying” (Coddington, 2005,
para.12). He urged the government to stop “importing” Chinese students to the country:

> The government should stop this idiocy and educate our own people and stop trying to make out that this level of imported students is some sort of salvation for New Zealand’s economy. (Coddington, 2005, para. 14).

He is very much concerned about this “Asianisation by stealth”:

> We have reached the point where you wander down Queen Street in Auckland and wonder if you are still in New Zealand or some other country.” (Thomson, 2005, para. 5)

These statements are a stark contrast to his political rhetoric. When he assured the Chinese government in Beijing in 2007 that the New Zealand government would look after Chinese students 24-7 (“Peters,” 2007), he blamed the “irresponsible side of capitalism” and the failure of language schools for the declining number of Chinese students (Llewellyn, 2005, para.5).

In sum, there is an anti-Asian sentiment among white New Zealanders, from the grass-root level to ministerial level. Studying in such an environment, Chinese students face varied degrees of racial discrimination and prejudice.

**Discussion and recommendations**

The foregoing discussion has highlighted six major safety issues facing Chinese international students in New Zealand. Identifying the exact causes of these problems is unrealistic. Many factors, personal and social, may have contributed to these problems. Personal factors include Chinese students’ age, their motivation and expectations, goals, needs, language skills, ability to control themselves and live independently, emotion (loneliness and depression), intercultural and interpersonal communication skills, study management skills, and social and cultural adaptation competence (Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Ho, Li, Cooper, & Holmes, 2007; Li, Baker & Marshall, 2002; Ward, 2006). Social factors involve host institutions’ pastoral care, helpfulness of learning and social environments, monitoring schemes, services, and attitudes towards Chinese students from the host institution and the receiving country. Closer examination suggests that many of these identified problems could have been prevented by effective pastoral care, rigorous implementation of the Code,
the provision of sufficient information, education, orientation, quality services, the establishment of a monitoring system, and the creation of a favourable learning and social environment.

The media’s wide coverage of the prevalence of Asian students’ crimes gives the public a perception that Asian students are trouble-makers. In Entman (2003) view, “journalists may follow the rules for ‘objective’ reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents audience members from making a balanced assessment of a situation” (p. 397). Media biases are apparently reflected in their exaggeration of Asian crime rates based on isolated events (M. Li, 2007). Police crime statistics shows that “offences committed by Asians make up significantly fewer than those committed by non-Asian” (Asia:New Zealand Foundation, 2007, para. 11). Over 30 percent of Asians live in Auckland, but only 6 percent of the crime is committed by Asians (Asia:New Zealand Foundation, 2006). The Asian crime wave has been overrated and over-represented. Such a media over-presentation can create tension between Chinese students and the local population (Huo, 2007). It also damages the Chinese students’ image and the reputation of the New Zealand export industry (M. Li, 2007). Consequently, Chinese students have an image crisis while New Zealand has an issue of credibility. This is unfair to a majority of good and hardworking Chinese students and to good and caring host institutions (Huo, 2007; Kenny, 2006).

To address the safety issues discussed in this paper, a systematic approach is required to take into consideration each of these factors. Problems can occur when any one of these issues upsets the systematic balance. Educational providers and operators are ethically responsible and are legally bound by the Code to look after international students’ welfare, including language acquisition and proficiency, safety, mental health, social and economic security, and social and cultural integration (Deumert et al, 2005; Pan, 2006). They also have moral obligations to deliver high-quality education rather than “cowboy practice” and “ghetto education” (Huo, 2007, para. 3). Chinese students need effective and proactive pastoral care in a cross-cultural context.
It is accepted that there is no easy solution to these safety problems as managing international education and students is an evolving rather than a fixed process and it is difficult to anticipate what is going to happen to these students in terms of safety and security (Pan, 2006). Some proactive measures, however, can be taken to ensure the safety and security of Chinese students:

- Develop an intensive, comprehensive and compulsory safety educational programme in all host institutions, language schools in particular, focusing on:
  - the risks of gambling and drug trafficking, road safety, road rules, sex education, and potential risks of cohabitation
  - awareness of the risk and consequences of violence, kidnapping, extortions and murders
  - relationship-building skills, interpersonal and intercultural communication skills
  - strategies to safeguard personal safety and security
  - time management, budget management
  - students’ rights and obligations
  - access to support and counselling.

- Establish a monitoring system to detect any unhealthy signs at an early stage and take measures to address the issue before it escalates to an uncontrollable extent. Absenteeism and failure to complete assignments are signs, for instance, that the student is at risk of dropping out and failing.

- Train teachers, academics and administrators to become aware of the safety issues facing international students. Use the Code as a guideline to discuss these issues and strategies with students in groups in class or at meetings.

Although education providers are ethically and morally responsible for Chinese students’ welfare and safety, Chinese students themselves should take more responsibilities for their own safety and security. They should develop cultural sensitivity, self-management skills, the ability to adapt in a new culture, and awareness of safety, security and sexual health. Similarly, parents are also responsible for their children’s welfare and safety. Their role in pastoral care is equally as important as that of the education providers.
The significance of international students’ safety can never be under-estimated. New Zealand export education industry will thrive when international students feel safe. New Zealand higher education enjoys a very good reputation. It can be envisioned that with the signing of the Free Trade Agreement, more Chinese students will choose to come to New Zealand. New Zealand can reclaim its share by doing its homework well.

**Conclusions**

This paper, based largely on reviews of news reports, research publications, and government documents in China and New Zealand, has highlighted six significant safety issues challenging Chinese students and education providers in New Zealand. These issues – the risks of Chinese students as victims and perpetrators in gang-related activities, drug trafficking, problem gambling, sexual health issues, road safety and racial discrimination – have put Chinese students’ welfare and safety at risk. Media over-representations of these problems have seriously affected Chinese students’ reputation and tarnished the image of the New Zealand export education industry. These safety issues involving personal and social dimensions need to be addressed through a proactive approach. This article suggests that education providers are ethically responsible for the welfare and safety of international students and for the provision of a safe learning and living environment.

**Acknowledgements:** I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers; and to Alan Samson, Jacqui Campbell and Trish Baker for their valuable comments.
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