

Comparison on the Developmental Trends Between Chinese Students Studying Abroad and Foreign Students Studying in China

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Abstract

China has been undergoing a new period of political stability, cultural prosperity, and social harmony since its reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. At the same time, the number of Chinese students studying abroad (CSSA) and foreign students studying in China (FSSC) has grown rapidly and steadily in the past three decades. With China's participation in globalization, CSSA and FSSC are a significant part of China's potential international human capital and, as such, CSSA and FSSC are in great need. Data of CSSA and FSSC in the past 34 years are collected and examined in this article, and the historical trends are depicted and compared. Relationships between the developments of CSSA and FSSC and the development of China's economy can be validated and compared by regression analysis. The number of CSSA and FSSC in the next 10 years can be predicted by predicting China's GDP in the same period, and the future parameters of CSSA and FSSC can be depicted and compared. The trends between CSSA and FSSC follow roughly similar trajectories in both absolute and relative growth.

Keywords: international students; mobility trends; study abroad strategy; educational comparison; China

Chinese students studying abroad (CSSA) can be traced back to 1872 when 120 children were recruited and sent to study in the United States of America by the Qing Government (Zhang, 2010). After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the host countries of CSSA were mainly the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe between 1949 and 1965, and most projects and activities of CSSA were suspended during the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 (Cheng & Miao, 2010; Zhang, 2010). A new period of CSSA started with China's reform and opening-up in late 1970s, and CSSA has grown rapidly and steadily in the past three decades (Chen & Su, 2004; Cheng & Miao, 2010; Zhang, 2010).

With the rapid growth of numbers of CSSA, scholars have analyzed, reviewed and discussed the policies, problems, and trends of CSSA after the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially since its reform and opening-up (Chen & Su, 2004; Liu, 2009; Cheng & Miao, 2010; Zhang, 2010; Su, Hu, & Zhang, 2011). However, Cheng & Miao (2010) indicate that it is difficult to precisely describe the 60-year history of CSSA because CSSA was understood differently by

different government agencies, and even the same agency in different periods, and data of CSSA from different sources are sometimes inconsistent.

In ancient times, foreign students studying in China (FSSC) started in the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Periods (770 BC – 256 BC) and reached its zenith in the Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD). These periods can be regarded as periods of international cultural exchange (Cui, 2006). In Chinese literature, the modern history of FSSC is regarded to start from the founding of the People's Republic of China. The home countries of FSSC were mainly the 12 socialist countries whose students composed 90.8% of FSSC in 1950-1966, whereas, most projects and activities of FSSC were suspended during the Cultural Revolution between 1966 to 1976 (Cui, 2006; Cheng & Hu, 2009). Just like CSSA, a new period of FSSC started with China's reform and opening-up in late 1970s, and FSSC has grown rapidly and steadily in the past three decades (Cui, 2006; Cheng & Hu, 2009; Yu, 2009; Yang, 2009).

The trends, the underlying driving forces, and other issues of FSSC have been reviewed, analyzed, and discussed to facilitate the growth of FSSC. Chen & Cheng (2012) indicate that economic development, political stability, social harmony, and cultural prosperity are the prerequisites for the growth of FSSC. Cheng & Hu (2009) comment that economic growth is the fundamental factor driving the growth of FSSC, and Cui (2006) also argues that the great opportunity provided by China's rapid economic growth is one of the main reasons for the growth of FSSC.

As globalization steadily accelerates, international exchange and cooperation also increases. International human capital, which develops as the result of exchange and cooperation between cultures, accordingly serves the larger society by bringing together common languages, cultures, and historical understanding. Thus, demands for international students, the potential vessels of international human capital, become more and more important for state planners and governments. In order to gain advantages in the competitive economy, politics, culture, and other areas, attracting international students is becoming a strategic choice in many countries. China's participation in globalization demands large numbers of international students. At the same time, China's rapid economic and social development provides great opportunities for international students to develop in their careers and to help realize their dreams and values. CSSA and FSSC, and their potential international human capital, are in great need in China.

Although reviews, analyses, and discussions about the trends of CSSA and FSSC can be found in the literature, credible data are lacking to form complete historical trends of CSSA and FSSC. Likewise the relationships between the development of China's economy and the developments of CSSA and FSSC are still to be confirmed by empirical study, and the future trends of CSSA and FSSC are yet to be depicted in empirical research. Nevertheless, it is necessary for policy-makers, educators, and practitioners to have a clear understanding of the trends of CSSA and FSSC.

Therefore, questions considered with regard to the trends of CSSA and FSSC are:

1. What are the historical trends and characteristics of CSSA and FSSC since China's reform and opening-up?
2. Is the development of China's economy correlated to the developments of CSSA and FSSC?
3. If the answer to Question 2 is "yes", what do regression equations predict about the future trends of CSSA and FSSC?

Methodology

The main strategy adopted for this research is based on statistical methods. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data form the core of this study. The data of CSSA and FSSC since China's reform and opening-up were collected from authoritative sources and carefully checked and vetted to advance the understanding of historical trends of CSSA and FSSC. The data of China's GDP were extracted from the database of UNCTADSTAT measured in U.S. dollars at constant prices and constant exchange rates in 2005 in order to be comparable across years. Regression analyses were conducted to explore relationships between the developments of CSSA and FSSC and the development of China's economy. Predictions of future trends of CSSA and FSSC were made by regression modeling of the relationship between China's economy and these trends. In addition, a statistic R, the ratio of the number of CSSA to that of FSSC, was constructed to depict the relative relationship of CSSA to FSSC.

Data

Since opening-up, data of CSSA and FSSC were widely collected and carefully examined. These data laid a reliable foundation for research. Data of CSSA came from three sources. The first one was the China Statistical Yearbook 2011, which was compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics of China and contained the total number of CSSA in 1978, 1980, and 1985-2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). The second one was the 2006 China Medical Statistics Yearbook, which was compiled by the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China, and contained the total number of CSSA in 1978-2003 (Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China, 2006). The third one was the website of Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, which issued the total number of CSSA in 2011 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012a).

Data of FSSC came from four sources. The first one was the website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, which issued the total number of FSSC in 2000-2001 and 2003-2011 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2005; 2008; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011; 2012b). The second one was the website of Xinhua News Agency, which reported the total number of FSSC in 2002 according to data published by the China Scholarship Council (China Scholarship Council, 2003). The third one was the website of China Association for International Education from which the total number of FSSC in 1999-2011 was collected (China Association for International Education, 2012). The fourth one was Fuzeng Yu's (2009) *30-Year Education for Foreign Students Studying in China Since its Reform and Opening-up*, which contained the total number of FSSC in 1978-2007.

Absolute Trends

In order to compare the historical trends of CSSA and FSSC after China's reform and opening-up, the numbers of CSSA and FSSC in 1978-2011 are plotted in Figure 1. In the 34 years after China's reform and opening-up, the cumulative number of CSSA reached 2.09 million, and the cumulative number of FSSC reached 2.25 million. The sum of the two reached 4.34 million. These data mean that CSSA and FSSC have constituted a huge international human resource for China in the modern era of globalization. From the trajectory of CSSA data, the number of CSSA grew slowly over the 20 years after China's reform and opening-up, but the number of CSSA has accelerated since 2001. It is notable that the trajectory of FSSC neatly resembles that of CSSA, although with a smoother slope.

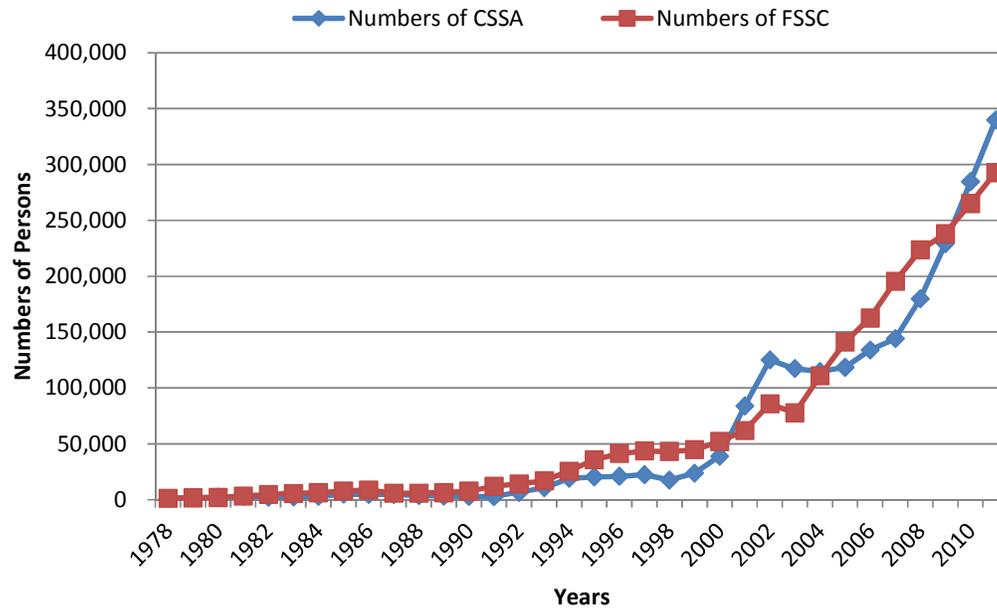


Figure 1. The Numbers of CSSA and FSSC in 1978-2011

Relative Trend

Do more Chinese students study abroad (CSSA), or do more foreign students study in China (FSSC)? The relative trend of CSSA and FSSC can be seen when the annual totals of CSSA and FSSC are plotted together. The ratio of the number of CSSA to that of FSSC is calculated to represent the relative size between CSSA and FSSC. The ratio is expressed as R in this article. When $R > 1$, the number of CSSA is greater than that of FSSC. When $R < 1$, the number of CSSA is smaller than that of FSSC. The ratios of the number of CSSA to FSSC from 1978 to 2011 are plotted in Figure 2.

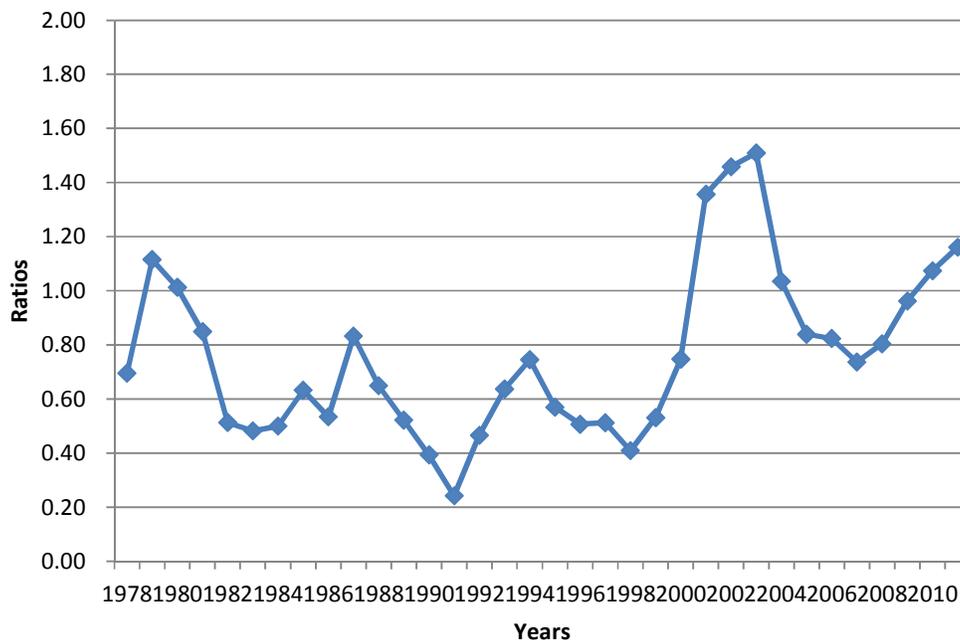


Figure 2. The Ratios of the numbers of CSSA to FSSC in 1978-2011

In the 34 years after China's reform and opening-up, the trajectory of the relative trend between CSSA and FSSC has been going up and down along the line $R = 1$. The number of CSSA was greater than those of FSSC in 1979-1980, 2001-2004, and 2010-2011 when $R > 1$. The number of CSSA was smaller than those of FSSC in 1978, 1981-2000, and 2005-2009 when $R < 1$.

Relationships between Developments of CSSA and FSSC and Development of China's Economy

Economic development can be measured by gross domestic product (GDP), which is the market value of all officially recognized final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. China's GDP is chosen as the statistic of its annual economic development in this article. In this article, China's GDP in 1978-2010 is extracted from the database of UNCTADSTAT which was released by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on February 29, 2012. In order to compare these historical GDP data, they are measured in constant prices and exchange rates of U.S. dollars in 2005 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2012a).

China's GDPs in 1978-2010

In order to depict the trend of the economy after China's reform and opening-up, its GDP in 1978-2010 is plotted in Figure 3.

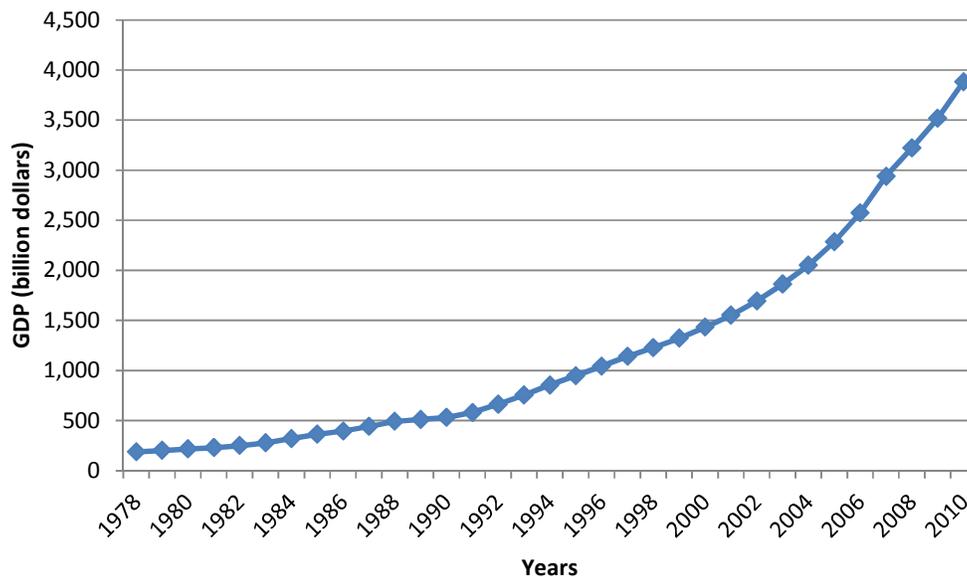


Figure 3. China's GDPs in 1978-2010

In the 33 years after China's reform and opening-up, the economy has grown rapidly and persistently with its GDP going from 189 billion dollars in 1978 to 3.88 trillion dollars in 2010, a twenty-fold increase. At the same time, the global GDP—excluding China—has grown from 20.86 trillion dollars in 1978 to 47.16 trillion dollars in 2010, more than doubling in size but almost ten times less than the growth of China's GDP.

Relationship between Numbers of CSSA and China's GDPs

Are there any relationships between the rapid development of China's economy and the developments of CSSA and FSSC? The number of CSSA in 2011 was available; however, the GDP in 2011 was missing. Therefore, the data of CSSA and GDP in 1978-2010 were analyzed. The correlation coefficient between CSSA and GDP was calculated with the value of 0.96, which shows a very strong correlation relationship between the number of CSSA and China's GDPs.

Regression analysis was made to further explore the relationship between CSSA and GDP. In order to gain a better regression equation, linear regression and non-linear regressions (i.e., exponential, logarithmic, polynomial, and power regressions) were calculated and compared. The polynomial regression was chosen as the best representation of the data. Results are plotted in Figure 4. The regression equation is: $y = 0.010977701x^2 + 29.77540742x - 10731.70658$ (Equation 1), $R^2 = 0.9523$, and adjusted $R^2 = 0.9491$.

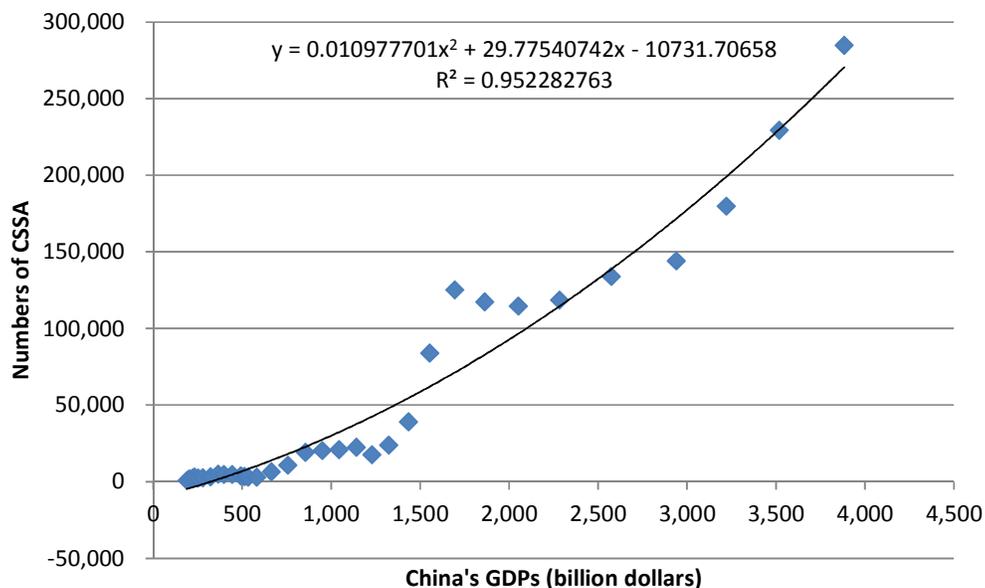


Figure 4. Regression Analysis Results between Numbers of CSSA and China's GDPs

The regression effect is very strong. Analysis of variance shows that $F(299.35)$ is much greater than the significance $F(1.51E-20)$. This means that the regression equation is significant, and the p-values of coefficients of independent variables are much smaller than the significance level ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, GDP correlates with the number of CSSA.

Relationship between Numbers of FSSC and China's GDPs

The number of FSSC in 2011 was available; however, the GDP in 2011 was missing. Therefore, the data of FSSC and GDP in 1978-2010 were analyzed. The correlation coefficient between FSSC and GDP was calculated with the value of 0.98, which also shows a very strong correlation relationship between the number of FSSC and China's GDP.

Regression analysis was made to further explore the relationship between FSSC and GDP. In order to gain a better regression equation, linear regression and non-linear regressions (i.e., exponential, logarithmic, polynomial, and power regressions) were calculated and compared, and the polynomial regression was chosen as the best representation of these data. Results are plotted in Figure 5.

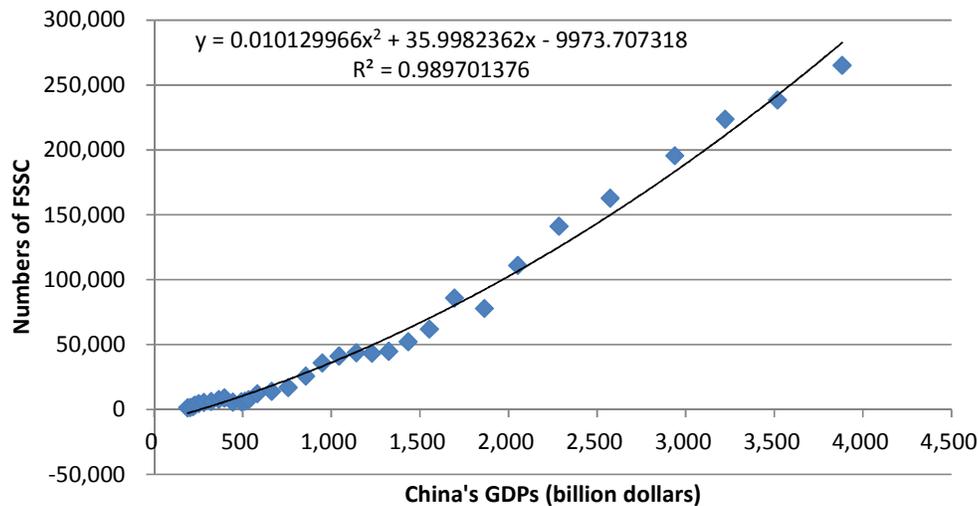


Figure 5. Regression Analysis Results between Numbers of FSSC and China's GDPs

The regression equation is: $y = 0.010129966x^2 + 35.9982362x - 9973.707318$ (Equation 2), $R^2=0.9897$, and adjusted $R^2=0.9890$.

The regression effect is very strong. Analysis of variance shows that $F(1441.51)$ is much greater than the significance $F(1.55E-30)$. This means that the regression equation is significant, and that the p-values of coefficients of independent variables are much smaller than the significance level ($p < 0.01$), and therefore GDP correlates with the number of FSSC.

Future Trends in 2011-2020

Regression analysis shows that the numbers of CSSA and FSSC are significantly correlated with China's GDP, and thus, the future trends of CSSA and FSSC can be predicted on the basis of these regression equations.

Prediction of China's GDPs in 2011-2020

In order to predict CSSA and FSSC, China's GDP in 2011-2020 need to be predicted. According to the prediction of the growth of China's economy by the National Development and Reform Commission of China, the high, medium, and low growth rates in 2011-2015 will be 9.0%, 8.5%, 7.5% respectively. Growth rates in 2016-2020 will be 8.0%, 7.0%, and 6.0% respectively (Research Group of the National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2011). Table 1 displays the high, medium, and low GDP predictions for the period of 2011-2020.

GDP per capita is often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living. Based on China's total population in 2011-2020 (UNCTADSTAT database), released by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on March 8 2012 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2012b), the high, medium, and low GDP per capita of China in 2011-2020 can be calculated by dividing the total GDP by total population. Table 1 displays the predicated GDP Per Capita of China in 2011-2020.

Table 1. *The Predicted GDP of China in 2011-2020*, Unit: billion dollars

Years	High	Medium	Low
2011	4233.04	4213.62	4174.79
2012	4614.01	4571.78	4487.90
2013	5029.27	4960.38	4824.49
2014	5481.91	5382.01	5186.32
2015	5975.28	5839.48	5575.30
2016	6453.30	6248.25	5909.82
2017	6969.57	6685.62	6264.40
2018	7527.13	7153.62	6640.27
2019	8129.30	7654.37	7038.69
2020	8779.65	8190.18	7461.01

China's GDP will reach between 7.46 trillion dollars and 8.78 trillion dollars in 2020.

Table 2. *The Predicted GDP Per Capita of China in 2011-2020*, Unit: dollar

Years	High	Medium	Low
2011	3141.25	3126.84	3098.02
2012	3408.70	3377.49	3315.52
2013	3699.71	3649.03	3549.07
2014	4016.72	3943.52	3800.14
2015	4362.34	4263.20	4070.33
2016	4695.88	4546.67	4300.40
2017	5056.66	4850.65	4545.04
2018	5446.99	5176.70	4805.22
2019	5869.33	5526.43	5081.91
2020	6326.34	5901.59	5376.17

China's GDP per capita will reach between 5376 dollars and 6326 dollars in 2020.

Absolute Trends

On the basis of the regression equation of the number of CSSA and China's GDP (Equation 1), the high, medium, and low number of CSSA in 2011-2020 can be predicted given the high, medium, and low predictions of GDP in 2011-2020.

Table 3. *The Predicted Numbers of CSSA in 2011-2020*, Unit: person

Years	High	Medium	Low
2011	312,014	309,635	304,903
2012	360,358	354,842	344,001
2013	416,682	407,076	388,433
2014	482,389	467,501	438,971
2015	559,132	537,476	496,505
2016	638,586	603,888	548,642
2017	730,030	679,012	606,589
2018	835,363	764,046	671,027
2019	956,789	860,357	742,717
2020	1,096,871	969,508	822,514

With the high, medium, and low GDP, we can get the high, medium, and low prediction of the number of CSSA. The annual number of CSSA in 2020 will reach between 0.82 million to 1.1 million, and the cumulative number of CSSA in the period of 2011-2020 will reach between 5.36 million to 6.39 million.

On the basis of the regression equation of the number of FSSC and China's GDP (Equation 2), the high, medium, and low number of FSSC in 2011-2020 can be predicted given the high, medium, and low predictions of GDP in 2011-2020.

Table 4. *The Predicted Numbers of FSSC in 2011-2020, Unit: person*

Years	High	Medium	Low
2011	323,923	321,563	316,865
2012	371,781	366,330	355,612
2013	427,295	417,843	399,481
2014	491,784	477,194	449,200
2015	566,806	545,665	505,607
2016	644,197	610,432	556,568
2017	732,980	683,482	613,062
2018	834,930	765,937	675,727
2019	952,111	859,079	745,276
2020	1,086,918	964,366	822,510

With the high, medium, and low GDP, we can get the high, medium, and low prediction of the number of FSSC. The annual number of FSSC in 2020 will reach between 0.82 million to 1.09 million, and the cumulative number of FSSC in the period of 2011-2020 will reach between 5.44 million to 6.43 million.

The predicted number of CSSA and FSSC in 2011-2020 is plotted in Figure 6.

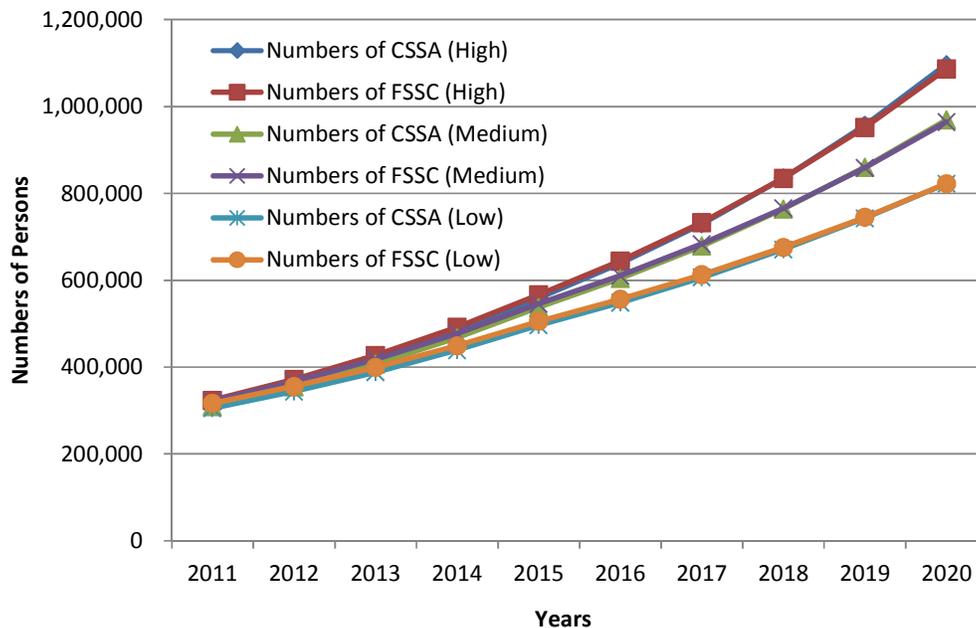


Figure 6. The Predicted Numbers of CSSA and FSSC in 2011-2020. As China's economy grows in the next 10 years, the number of CSSA and FSSC will continue to grow.

The annual number of CSSA and FSSC in 2020 will reach between 1.64 million to 2.19 million. The cumulative number of CSSA and FSSC in the period of 2011-2020 will reach between 10.80 million to 12.82 million. The cumulative number of CSSA and FSSC over the next 10 years is about 3 times greater than that of the 33 years after China's reform and opening-up.

Relative Trend

The relative size of CSSA to FSSC can be represented by the statistic R, the ratio of the number of CSSA to that of FSSC. The high, medium, and low ratios of the number of CSSA to FSSC in 2011-2020 can be calculated given the predicted high, medium, and low numbers of CSSA and FSSC in 2011-2020. This relationship depicts the relative trend of CSSA to FSSC. The predicted ratios are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. *The Predicted Ratios of the Numbers of CSSA to FSSC in 2011-2020*

Years	High	Medium	Low
2011	0.96	0.96	0.96
2012	0.97	0.97	0.97
2013	0.98	0.97	0.97
2014	0.98	0.98	0.98
2015	0.99	0.98	0.98
2016	0.99	0.99	0.99
2017	1.00	0.99	0.99
2018	1.00	1.00	0.99
2019	1.00	1.00	1.00
2020	1.01	1.01	1.00

The predicted ratios of the numbers of CSSA to FSSC in 2011-2020 are plotted in Figure 7.

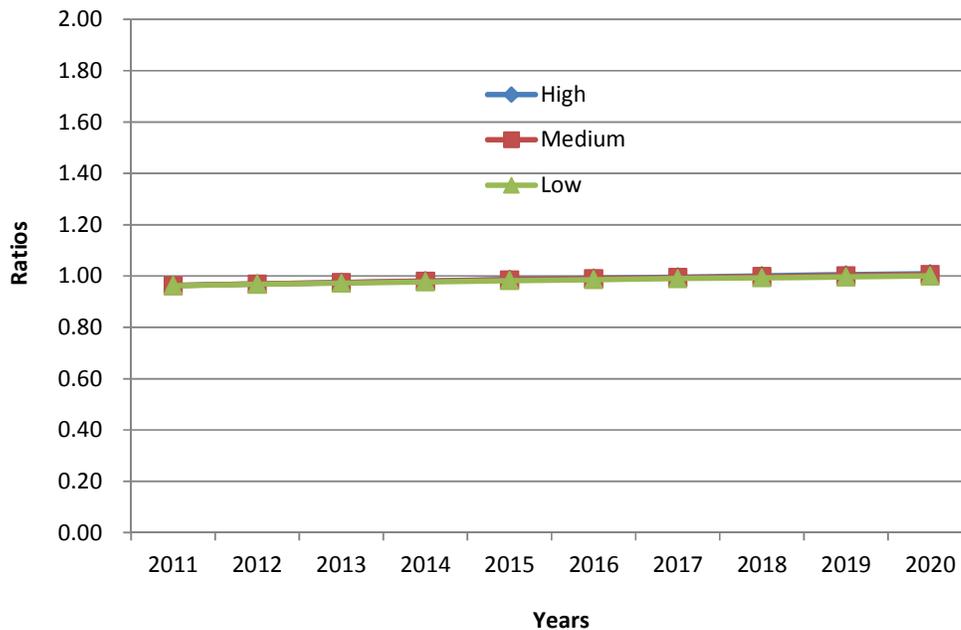


Figure 7. *The Predicted Ratios of the Number of CSSA to FSSC in 2011-2020*

In the next 10 years of 2011-2020, the three lines of high, medium, and low ratios overlap each other, which means that the high, medium, and low relative trends between CSSA to FSSC are almost the same. All the lines go up slightly across the years, and the lines nearly flat around the line $R = 1$. This means that the ratios between the number of CSSA to FSSC grow very slowly. However, the ratio is very close to 1, which means the number of CSSA and FSSC are about the same.

Discussion

Developments of CSSA and FSSC are related to economic and social factors. Similar conclusions are found in discussions and arguments in historical literature (Cui, 2006; Cheng & Hu, 2009; Chen & Cheng, 2012), but these haven't been validated by empirical study. Quantitative research in this article proves that significant regression relationships exist between the number of CSSA, FSSC, and China's GDP and that these relationships predict future trends of CSSA and FSSC.

Relationships between Developments of CSSA and FSSC and Development of China's Economy

In the regression analysis of the relationship between the number of CSSA and FSSC and China's GDP, every R^2 reaches or exceeds 0.95. This means that 95% of the variation in the number of CSSA and FSSC can be explained by China's GDP. Thus, the development of China's economy is one main factor influencing the development of CSSA and FSSC.

CSSA and FSSC are complicated economic and social phenomena, and they are affected by various economic and social factors. Thus, they cannot be explained by one single factor. In the regression equations, China's GDP is the independent variable and the numbers of CSSA and FSSC are the dependent variables. Thus, the relationship between China's GDP and the number of CSSA and FSSC are assumed—and treated as—cause and effect. Can 95% of variation in the numbers of CSSA and FSSC be explained by China's GDP? How about the influence of other social factors?

The history of CSSA and FSSC before China's reform and opening-up were severely affected by political, cultural, and other social factors. As outlined earlier, the host and home countries of CSSA and FSSC were mainly socialist countries in 1949-1965, and most projects and activities of CSSA and FSSC were suspended and stopped in the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1976 (Cui, 2006; Cheng & Hu, 2009; Cheng & Miao, 2010; Zhang, 2010). After China's reform and opening-up, China has been undergoing a period of economic development, political stability, cultural prosperity, and social harmony which provide prerequisites for the development of FSSC (Chen & Cheng, 2012). The influences of political, cultural and other social factors on the developments of CSSA and FSSC after China's reform and opening-up are very stable when compared to those before its opening-up. Therefore, in the regression analysis, political, cultural, and other social factors can be summed up as environmental factors. It can be assumed that the influences of these environmental factors are stable. Thus, their effect on number of CSSA and FSSC can be excluded from the regression equations. To reiterate, the environmental factors that influence the development of CSSA and FSSC are uniform across history; thus, they can be excluded from the establishment of the regression equations because a stable, uniform environment is a prerequisite of the regression analysis. If significant changes take place in environmental factors, and the influences of environmental factors are not stable, then the prerequisite of the regression equations disappears. Thus, the regression equations are not valid, and the predictions based on regression equations are likewise not valid either.

In the regression analysis, for convenience sake, it is assumed that some cause-effect relationship exists between China's GDP and the number of CSSA and FSSC. In reality, relationships between CSSA and FSSC and GDP are two-way, interactive relationships that take place in society. The developments of CSSA and FSSC are influenced by various economic and social factors; and, in turn, CSSA and FSSC have influence in society's economic and social development.

From the regression analysis results, it can be concluded that the influence of economic factors are significant, assuming that environmental factors influence developments of CSSA and FSSC uniformly. It can be learned that economic factors are a core issue, and economic factors are crucial to maintain and grow the number of CSSA and FSSC to keep the economy growing rapidly and persistently. Therefore, economic factors should be prioritized in making policies about CSSA and FSSC.

At the same time, it should be noted that China's society will be influenced by the developments of CSSA and FSSC. As the number of CSSA and FSSC grows rapidly, changes in social hierarchy will take place. This will promote China's economic and social developments, especially in constructing a harmonious environment for China's international developments and its deepening globalization.

Absolute Trend and Relative Trend

Both absolute and relative trends of CSSA and FSSC are analyzed and compared in this article in order to present a comprehensive picture of their developments. In respect to the absolute trends of CSSA and FSSC, the numbers increase both in the past and in the future. A huge overseas talent reservoir consisting of CSSA and FSSC is growing and will continue to provide a pool of talented international human capital for China's economic and social development.

In respect to the relative trend, the ratios of CSSA to FSSC have fluctuated within the range of 0.2 to 1.6, and the cumulative number of CSSA (1.75 million) was slightly smaller than that of FSSC (1.96 million) in the past 33 years. The ratios will continue to be close to 1 with a very narrow range of fluctuation, and the cumulative number of CSSA (5.36-6.39 million) and FSSC (5.44-6.43 million) approach each other in the next 10 years.

Conclusion

In this article, the number of CSSA and FSSC in the past 34 years are carefully collected and examined, and the historical trends are depicted and compared. Since its reform and opening-up, China's political stability, cultural prosperity, and social harmony not only provide a good environment, but also become prerequisites for the development of CSSA and FSSC, currently in their unprecedented rapid-growth phase.

Based on a stable political, cultural, and social environment, regression analyses between the number of CSSA and FSSC and China's GDP shows that a significant relationship exists between the developments of CSSA and FSSC and the development of China's economy, and this indicates that China's economy is a main factor influencing CSSA and FSSC. Lastly, through regression equations between the number of CSSA and FSSC and China's GDP, the number of CSSA and FSSC in the next 10 years is predicted.

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