

Chinese Around the World: New-generation Chinese's Culture, Aspiration, and Effects on International Society

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Abstract: Under the policy of reform and opening up supervised by Deng Xiaoping, Chinese people have undergone strong cultural shock in the daily permeation resulting from the dominance of Euro-American culture. Under the influence, Chinese people have started a new trend of sending their children to study abroad. However, behind the scenes of the contemporary background, a huge social impact is imposed, and new industries arise. This paper mainly discusses Chinese international students studying abroad, aims to investigate the multiple impacts this phenomenon has and its fundamental reason. Chinese international students have impacted not only international society, but also the domestic China. The new generation is illusively ambitious and restricted by the rooted values of western fantasy. Despite the occurrence of new problems, through adjustment of policy and development of conventional ideas, some problems arising can be fixed. This paper helps general audiences understand the essence of seeming decent abroad studying and give up the illusive ambition of face-making.

Keywords: International students, social mobility, aspiration.

1. Introduction

Since 2000, China has entered a new era of intense economic and social mobility [1]. Within this tide of rapid changes and economic development, new-generation Chinese are encountering unprecedented questions in history. As a result of the financial situation, young people in China have developed a new “fashion” for studying abroad [2]. Globally, this latest trend has pushed Chinese all around the world. Other than the advantages of cultural diffusion and social harmony as a whole, Chinese international students and the social effects they imposed on the globe cause new industrial chains and cultural identity fading.

Under Deng Xiaoping's policy of “reform and open up,” early exposure to western culture brought tremendous changes to Chinese people's conventions and also mindsets [3]. Although this diffusion of cultures and ideologies is inevitable for China's development and engagement in the world, Chinese people, on a micro level, are overwhelmed yet reminded that abandoning the old, conventional ways of living is possible. Consequently, people who were oppressed long enough made the first step out. Although the initial intentions of the earliest Chinese immigrants were not “elite education” but rather survival [4], those immigrants have raised an unprecedented possibility in Chinese people's minds of living somewhere outside of China. The disparity of economic and political power constructed a sense of inferiority against westerners among the Chinese.

New-generation Chinese, also known as the “Gen Z” group, comprise around 20% of the entire population in China [5]. However, the Gen Z group displays a noticeable difference in not only their behaviors but also their mindsets of life different from the past generations [6]. This disparity includes their attitudes towards degrees and the education system in China. Since the Chinese population remains one of the world's largest, education has been the most crucial question in the spotlight based on the fundamental Chinese idea of “continuity.” As a result of the public awareness of the asymmetry of educational resources [7], students are pushed hard to study every day to earn a degree. The concept of “rat racing” reveals the status quo of the harsh situation children are in now.

With these driving forces, in present days, Chinese international students are all around the world [5]. Along with the social and economic capital they bring to their respective countries, they also imposed great changes on local immigrant communities and impacted many industries. This paper will extend on the current research basis on the Chinese international students around the world, and further explore the fundamental reasoning behind this question and how it influences the international and domestic society.

This research investigates the discussion within the academic field of the topic of “Chinese international students studying abroad”. The author gained context and logic from past research papers and academic progress, but beyond the papers published and the literature review, the author further concludes the reasoning behind the abroad studying hot trend. Meanwhile, this paper also includes the aspects of society that have been impacted by this abroad-studying fever lately. This paper is written based on the standard of timeliness and comprehensiveness. The author also utilized data reports from multiple databases to further support the summary made in the paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Macro Theory and Ideology

The theories existing explain this phenomenon in an abstract but reasonable way. Through the lens of labor In Neoclassical economic theory, Becker points out that with more productive and educated laborers, society can be better functioning [8]. In other words, the development of society is positively correlated with the “quality” of laborers. In current China, the enforcement and emphasis of nine-year compulsory education also reveal Chinese authorities’ willingness to solidify the basis of the quality of Chinese labor. The starting point of this policy aims to further develop society as a whole, but it foresees the micro-level willingness of every individual within this system.

2.2. System and Mindsets

2.2.1. Education in China

There are many discussions in the academic domain about the education system in China, its flaws, and ways to improve it. Some of the researchers focus their paper through the lens of international study. Zhang argues that the level of economic development is not consistent with that of education in China [8]. The quality and ideology of education are no longer appropriate or adequate for the economy in China. Despite the economic downturn, people are even more likely to study abroad, which reveals their lack of confidence in the education system in China as a whole.

Cheng, on the other hand, argues that the tide of studying abroad is a market ploy [8]. Propaganda about the “successful abroad-studying” myth set up a dream for Chinese parents and young people. He also argued that it is the educational capital that created the myth of studying abroad in the educational market. The illusion of a successful future after studying abroad is nothing but a market ploy.

Noticeably, Chinese researchers tend to feel insecure about the education themselves. The famous scholar and principal of the Southern University of Science and Technology, Qingshi Zhu, argues that China hasn't fostered excellent talents for thirty years. This argument reveals the common phenomenon that not only the researchers but, more importantly, the parents themselves start to question the system. The World Journal quoted Zhu's argument and pointed out that Chinese students need their diplomas [9]. This presents the world's consciousness of the Chinese rush to study abroad, which encourages Chinese parents back and increases their confidence about abroad.

2.2.2. Psychology of Family and Individuals

Cheng argues that Chinese parents have been haunted by the "myth" of studying abroad, which is the fundamental reason why so many parents choose to send their kids abroad [8]. This kind of mindset is undoubtedly not rare among Chinese parents in current China. As a result of the overly advertising and commercial packing of the industry abroad, the general audience tends to believe that studying abroad is the easiest and most glamorous way to success. Meanwhile, he argues that this mindset is easily formed generally because of the human nature of being vain. Cheng also mentions that, as a result of the false propaganda, which echoes back to the commercial ploy of the agency industry for studying abroad, Chinese parents and even the students themselves tend to attribute their failures in studying and working to the flaws of the "institution".

Considering the timeliness of COVID-19, many scholars noticed how much COVID-19 and its corresponding policies have impacted Chinese families' choices of education. For example, Zhang pointed out that the economic downturn imposed by COVID-19 not only didn't strike the abroad studying industry but rather helped it increase to a larger level [7].

3. Analysis

3.1. Inferiority and Self-confidence

3.1.1. Systematic Differences

Since the outburst of the Chinese population in the second half of the 20th century, the selection of excellent students has been troublesome to the government. Yet despite the obvious flaws that occur as soon as the Gaokao system is developed, there's not much the government can do considering the tremendous number of the population and the examinees each year. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the college application system in America is relatively more dependent on students' family backgrounds.

There's a difference between these educational systems' focus and aim. The Chinese educational system is transparent and completely fair to everyone, while the American educational system emphasizes "elite education", which gives the parents more space to help and raise their children.

3.1.2. Cultural "Hedge" and Rivalry

As a result of the solid basis constructed by economic advantage and political dominance, European and American cultures have permeated into and deeply affected many cultures, including China. And this kind of permeation can be found in all aspects of people's lives.

The writer believes that this ideology comes from the fundamental discontent with the status quo of an individual's life. The exposure to the outside world starting in the 20th century started to lead Chinese people onto a "blaming" psychology. This "blaming" psychology will redirect the essential reason for the problems in people's lives into discontent towards the government and the institution, which will further grow into a solid belief that "elsewhere" is better.

One other primary reason is the result of the rivalry between the two cultures. In this hedge of two cultures, the dominant culture wins, and accordingly, the dominant culture permeates into another culture. But this “hedge” can be affected by many factors as well. One powerful influencing factor will be the micro-economy. On the macro aspect, a strong economy might not pose any positive effects on people’s day-to-day lives intuitively. But on a micro level, people are living a different life from those in countries with a different level of economic development. A “superior” culture gives out the vibe of a “fancier” life and an easier way of living, all of which derives from the economy.

3.2. Aspiration and Illusions

3.2.1. Degree Inflation

Based on government reports, the registration number of the college entrance examination in Gaokao has created a new peak in the history of Gaokao. The coming effect of this peak is the inflation of degrees in China. As a result of the tremendously homogeneous degrees in the labor market, the value of an equal degree is depreciating at a rapid pace [10]. The colleges and education system are creating redundantly more educated laborers than the labor market requires. Consequently, the labor market subsequently modified and raised its standards for employing workers in all industries, which essentially increases the difficulty and the competition just to seek a job for the young generation in China [11].

This degree of inflation accordingly grows into a social phenomenon of “waithood” and unemployment for the younger generation. The boundary to their adulthood is artificially delayed by the social status quo in the labor market. Thus, the graduating students who fail to get a job will have to either continue their studies in their majors and earn an even higher degree or seek job opportunities that require a standard lower than the education they acquired [12]. Both of the two choices will lead to social questions. The former will deteriorate the degree of inflation and even raise it to a higher level, to the master’s degree, or even higher. The latter will force more and more students to reluctantly choose their jobs lower than their normal standards.

3.2.2. Right to the City

Remarkably, along with the illusive ambition among the new generation Chinese on education, future, and degree, there is a certain tendency for which they gather in certain cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, etc. Such cities are the center of high-quality personnel because of their unique role in the national economy and the advantageous policies of financial and political support [13]. These cities are hoped to develop innovative new industries and solid old industries. Thus, people have faith in such cities to have a perfect variety of opportunities for them to develop their careers and make money easily [14].

In these cities where most young people are longing, people all have a high degree of education or even an international degree. Because of the illusive aspirations of developing in such cities, people wish to have the same education experiences people in these cities have [15]. This in a way also stimulates the wave of studying abroad. But most parents and students themselves do not realize that such a degree or experience of studying abroad cannot necessarily earn the “right” to such cities, but more importantly, their abilities and initiatives will decide it.

4. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the fundamental reasons and implicit impact behind the phenomenon of the “abroad-studying” trend of Chinese students. Two major reasons were concluded: cultural and economic inferiority and illusive ambitions. Both resulted from some historical context and posed

different impacts on people's social lives. These reasons are the remaining historical issues, and they are all a historical necessity. Students and families should be clear about their goals instead of being haunted by the illusion of the "face" of a family or the conventional blaming culture in any discontent emotions. However, this paper did not include many discussions about specific policies and the political framework of this general trend, which is also an integral and essential part of the entire picture. Personal living standards are affected by the economic situation. The economic situation is affected by the political standpoint and its specific policies. The new orientation in this research will be to include the policy part and how it affects social mobility as a whole. Different policies in all major industries should be considered, such as the integration of AI in different industries and how it affects the employment and economic power of individuals as a whole. One other issue that could be addressed is the potential solution to the future problems that may occur based on this phenomenon, such as unemployment, brain drain, and so on. But giving a solution to such a broad social issue is hard because, other than the macro factors, the micro factors pointing to the individuals are more flexible and impossible to monitor.

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