

The Impact of Social Media on the “Upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese” Groups of Overseas Chinese Students

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Abstract: In the 21st century, more and more Chinese students choose to go abroad and study overseas; studying abroad is gradually no longer a small option but gradually, like Postgraduate examinations and Civil service examinations, becoming a significant choice for college students to continue their studies. However, in addition to paying attention to the material life of international students, more and more attention has begun to focus on the spiritual life of international students in recent years. As an international student with a unique cross-cultural identity, what kind of change of thinking will occur after accepting the media context of their ethnic media and overseas social media has become the focus of attention. This paper uses the theories of self-classification, social identity, and belief theory to conduct research to explore how social media affects changing the thinking of international students in today's highly-developed world. This paper adopts the research method of in-depth interviews, with interviews 20 international students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and other countries to obtain first-hand information for research, and analyzes that People born in 95 - 00 years (contemporary international students) are keen to use social media and social media accounts for a high proportion of their lives. At the same time, it is concluded that most contemporary international students are relatively rational and objective and have high patriotic enthusiasm. still there are also very obvious “upper Chinese” and “patriotic Chinese” groups. But the “upper Chinese” group is not welcome among overseas students. In general, contemporary international students have high patriotic feelings and good critical thinking skills. They can think about problems from multiple angles, and international students can be used as a bridge for cultural exchanges. In that case, China can go more to the world and the world can know more about China.

Keywords: social media, overseas students, upper Chinese, patriotic Chinese

1. Introduction

With the development of the economy and society, more and more Chinese students have started to study abroad, and the group of international students is gradually no longer a niche group. Studying abroad has become an option for students' future development, alongside employment and master's Exam. While studying abroad has trained a large number of talents for the development of the country, the complicated social media environment abroad has also profoundly influenced the minds of young students in many ways. Although the number of Chinese students who study aboard has decreased in recent years due to epidemics and other reasons, studying abroad is a popular choice. According to

the blue paper “China Study Abroad Development Report (2020-2021), jointly researched and compiled by the Globalization Think Tank (CCG) and the Development Research Institute of Southwest University of Finance and Economics, along with the economic Development, the destinations of Chinese students have shown diversified characteristics. The number of international students who are pursuing higher education in the U.S.; for the 2019-2020 academic year is 1,075,496, down 1.8 percent from the 2018-2019 academic year and is the first decline in the number of students studying in the U.S.; since the economic crisis of 2008. The decline of the international students are inextricably linked to policies introduced under Trump to discourage international students from studying in the U.S.; as well as security concerns. The number of Chinese students in other parts of the world, such as UK and Canada, is rising.

International students living abroad will use local social media as an essential part of their integration into local life. This paper focuses on two major overseas social media platforms, Twitter and ins, and examines the changes in the mindset of Chinese students using these two social media platforms.

Twitter, an American micro-blogging and social networking service platform, was founded by Jack Dorsey in March 2006 and headquartered in San Francisco, USA. Twitter is similar to China’s Weibo, where you send tweets to express your views and opinions. Twitter has a lot of political figures representing their views, and this is one of the features of Twitter. Instagram is a social app that runs on mobile, and shares ready-to-snap images with each other in a fast, fabulous and fun way. Instagram provides such a smooth operation process: take a photo - filter effects (11 kinds of photo effects mainly in Lomo style) - add a description/add location - share. At the same time, Instagram has built a micro-community based on these photos, where people can interact with other users by following, commenting, liking. Along with Chinese students going abroad, the “upper Chinese” of overseas students has gradually appeared on the Internet in recent years. This group is the sophisticated egoists of Chinese ethnicity in North America and Europe, jokingly called “upper Chinese.” Along with the gradual increase in the number of overseas students, many young students from the “upper Chinese” community have taken to the Internet to rail against the countries they have lived in, displaying conversion fervor. In contrast, there is a “Patriotic Chinese” group that has grown up who love their country more and defend it after studying abroad.

The earliest group of “upper Chinese” came from the early nationals who went to foreign countries to survive. Since the reform and opening up in 1978, many students went abroad for further studies, forming the so-called “study abroad fever.” The phenomenon of some international students staying abroad after completing their studies has also contributed to the further expansion of the “upper Chinese” group. It is worth noting that at this time, the “upper Chinese” group is still an elite group compared to the domestic, compared to the domestic masses. They have more and better resources, have better development prospects, but also have a more excellent voice. They have a strong influence on the direction of public views in the country, and some of them have become “publicists” and have influenced the thinking of some people in the country while expressing their own opinions. They are pushing for more and more people to join the “upper Chinese” group. Because they have lived overseas for a long time and lack a sense of Chinese identity, “upper Chinese” use violence and verbal abuse as a symbol of their “superiority” and think of critical thinking as simply being against. It is easy to see that the “upper Chinese” have a certain amount of convert fervor rather than a healthy cross-cultural communication mindset. However, along with China’s development, Chinese students studying abroad have evolved into a “Patriotic Chinese” group, a group that loves the motherland more than the average Chinese, including but not limited to confronting “upper Chinese” and China haters abroad. They held signs against Western countries infringing on China’s rights and interests, sang the national anthem in the streets, etc. These students have been praised for their strong defense of China’s national claims as well as its image overseas. There are still many significant events in

which “upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese” are seen in opposition to each other. This study is based on self-categorization, social identity, and belief theory doctrines, and explores the role of social media in the formation of “upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese.”

2. Literature Review

As the fever of overseas study in China continues to rise, research on the changing mindset of overseas students has also increased, and social media plays an irreplaceable role in this. As Ren Yan mentioned in her study, since most international students are the natives of the Internet era, social media occupies a very prominent position in the lives of international students, not only for information exchange and interpersonal communication, but also as a window for international students to learn more about the larger world and more information [1]. It has also become an essential tool for international students to reduce “cultural vertigo” in the process of “cultural migration.” While reducing “cultural vertigo,” the pervasiveness and reach of social media have also profoundly influenced the minds of young students. In the study, Ren Yan pointed out that nearly half of the respondents said they would engage in an “amphibious” social software life, while 60% of the respondents said their reliance on social media had significantly increased after going abroad, so it is easy to see the importance of social media in the daily life of overseas students [1].

Compared with domestic social media, overseas students are more likely to act as recipients in overseas social media due to language and other reasons, i.e., they choose to receive information rather than deliver it, so they are more likely to have a “crystallization” effect, or even a reversal. That is, they change their previous opinions about things.

As Ding Lu mentioned in her study, Chinese students will use overseas social media more for social activities in order to integrate into the local living environment. Students who use overseas social media more intensely are more likely to form a more remarkable ideological shift and are more inclined to adopt an integrated approach to communicate with foreign cultures and societies [2].

It is undoubtedly that cross-border learning exchanges and the use of different social media are affecting individuals implicitly over time. Yang Yu and Cheng Yutong believe that international students’ recognition of information about China on overseas social media is relatively low. In contrast, overseas students generally have a higher sense of identification with their motherlands [3]. The ethnic identity focuses more on shared descent and common cultural heritage, and while doing so, it continues to strengthen the related understanding. At the same time, Feng Gao also believes that in studying and living abroad, Chinese students can think more critically and eventually build a complete self-identity, and in the process, they can continuously integrate with the host country’s culture to form a new “cross-cultural” identity [4]. However, despite forming a “cross-cultural” identity, Chinese students still have a relatively high sense of identification with their home country, and their national pride has risen compared to their domestic period. It is noteworthy that the overseas Chinese nationalism that emerged in the early 20th century, as mentioned in Liu Hong’s study, has not died out over time, but has become more assertive in recent years, and this is because more and more Chinese students choose to study overseas. Some of them choose to stay and live overseas [5]. Therefore, when interacting with students from the host country online and offline, Chinese students tend to show intense hostility and turn into “Patriotic Chinese” because of the host country students’ wrong and radical views on current Chinese affairs. In sensitive areas, Chinese students often take a variety of approaches to speak out for their country.

In Andrea Louie’s study, modern Chinese students’ increased sense of identity with their motherland also comes from the holding of many cultural activities, such as youth summer camps, which enhance the relationship between mainland students and overseas Chinese and, while enhancing contemporary Chinese students’ identity and feelings toward their motherland, are more conducive to shaping a unified national identity as well as cultural identity, and contemporary Chinese

around the world more widely present a sense of Greater China [6], thus it can be concluded that the nation-state and a shared cultural background are still strong glue for identity.

In Todd Sandel's study, it is easy to see that social media plays an essential role in the lives of international students, and that individuals use social media to connect with a new society and form a new cross-cultural identity by reorganizing themselves. However, it is worth noting that those who have lived in the U.S. for a short period, and have great social difficulties are more dependent on social media. At the same time, most contemporary international students choose to go abroad to complete their master's degree and a few choose to complete their doctoral degree, staying abroad for a relatively short period, compared to overseas immigrants. Therefore, a significant number of overseas students prefer to stay in their comfort zone (Chinese community) and choose to use social software to communicate with foreigners, so they are more likely to be influenced by social media to form a cross-cultural identity and enhance their identity with their home country [7].

Compared with domestic social media, overseas students often act as recipients in overseas social media due to language and other reasons, i.e., they choose to receive information rather than deliver it, and some students may not be able to incorporate into the local learning environment, as Kiyotani mentioned in his study that both Chinese students and foreign educational institutions have the stereotype that Asian students do not integrate and communicate well [8]. Therefore, international students are more likely to experience a "crystallization" effect or even a reversal, i.e., to change their previous opinions about things. According to Wang Wenhui's study, it is easy to find that there is a positive relationship between social media and overseas students' patriotism, and the more developed the social media is, the more patriotic the overseas students are [9]. However, in addition to the role of social media for international students, Jiang Nan mentioned in her study that international students, as subjects with the ability to make their own choices, also publish relevant content on overseas social media to spread their own opinions, thus forming a specific public opinion power to defend the image of their home countries overseas [10].

It is noteworthy that in Henry Zhao's study, overseas students, due to their unique intercultural identity, show strong compassion and empathy while defending their social and cultural identities in the process of intermingling with overseas cultures. For example, they can understand a certain extent the unrealistic accusations of foreign students against China for religious reasons [11].

Compared with previous studies on traditional media, this study is more cutting-edge and novel. In contrast, earlier studies on international students mainly focus on the fields of psychology and sociology, and there are few studies combine social media, a new form of media communication, with the state of mind of international students. This study will analyze the reasons for the difference between "upper Chinese" and "patriotic Chinese" by comparing the use of overseas social networking software by the new generation of overseas students with the first-hand data obtained from in-depth interviews. The study also fills the gap in this field in China through primary data and comparative analysis. This study focuses on the younger generation of overseas students, such as the post-95 and post-00 age, who generally love to communicate and are creative, and have a natural affinity for social media. As natives of the Internet era, their attitudes are even more worthy of study. This study uses in-depth interviews to gain insight into the social media use of international students from different countries and the before-and-after comparison of the change in their thinking. The innovation of this study is that it does not regard the audience, as a disadvantaged audience, but as mature behavioral individuals who have the right to make their own choices and strong self-boundary soild. This study explores the influence of social media on the change of audience's attitudes in the Internet era from the perspective of a distinct group of international students, which demonstrates to a certain extent the innovation and topicality of this study. Although this study is innovative and cutting-edge, is limited by the absence of African and South American students in the sample, but

hope that this study will draw the attention of the academic community to the role of social media in changing minds.

3. Methodology

The author asked for private letters through emerging online platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu. By working tirelessly on different platforms, the author found a total of 20 international students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada and three other continents for in-depth interviews. There were fifteen undergraduates, three masters and two PhDs, with six students from the UK covering the four regions of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. All 20 students were interviewed by telephone, and since the participants were all Chinese students, the author conducted the interviews in Chinese, and the average length of each interview was about one hour, with the most extended interview lasting two and a half hours. Afterward, the author categorized and integrated the data according to the research direction and got preliminary conclusions.

4. Results

The study found that all 20 international students use foreign social networking software for daily friendships and social activities. 12 of them use Twitter as their first choice of overseas social networking software, and six use Ins as their first choice of software. In addition, a doctoral student from the United States used Facebook as the number one overseas social networking app, while a doctoral student from Japan used Line as the number one social networking app due to geographical reasons. In the course of the in-depth interviews, the authors obtained the following results first of all, all respondents said that their thinking has changed to different degrees after going abroad, and the degree and direction of the change varies. Eighteen of them said that their thinking changed from antipathy to objectivity to support for the motherland. All of them mentioned that social media plays a vital in the change of thinking. Despite this shift in thinking, half of the respondents identified themselves as belonging to the “Patriotic Chinese” group, with six of them mentioning that they had spoken out for China on overseas social media during the COVID-19 epidemic. In contrast the other half did not see themselves as having an obvious preference. In the interviews, all interviewees mentioned that there are obvious “upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese” groups around them, which manifest themselves by bashing China, or not recognizing their Chinese identity at certain times or standing up for China, and firmly defending China overseas. They also stand up for China and protect China’s national interests overseas. Half of the respondents said they had searched for China individually on Twitter or ins for various reasons, such as curiosity or wanting to learn more about China. “At first, I just was to understand how foreign countries see us, but then the more I saw, the angrier I became, until finally I felt accustomed to it, and the prejudice was always there and could not be removed.” One-third of the respondents shared these views and opinions and were disappointed with the perception of China in foreign social media, and all of them said they did not understand the behavior of “upper Chinese.” It is worth noting that all interviewees mentioned their unique intercultural backgrounds of themselves, which brings international students a more tolerant perspective compared to purely domestic Chinese educational experience. “Some of the things that I used to find very unbearable at home are now acceptable, and some of them are taken for granted.”

5. Discussion

First of all, due to the social media and the change of natural life environment, overseas students will go through more or few differences in their thinking after going abroad, and most of them will go through the process of resenting their motherland then looking at it objectively and finally defending it. The development of social media has led to the development of almost everything on social media,

whether it is politics, economy and culture, or the most popular entertainment topics among international students, all of which have become the position of public opinion propaganda in various countries, and the dominant Western countries in the world discourse system dominate the social media discourse. In addition to normal news, the media in Western countries are mostly commercialized, so the output of ideas and ideological content is more varied. When overseas students are just exposed to overseas social media that are entirely different from their own media contexts, they will briefly fall into the situation of antipathy toward their homeland, and this reflects that Chinese media are not smooth in the process of going abroad and cannot form a more robust media context, resulting in international students quickly entering the western media context after going abroad. However, from a long-term perspective, Chinese international students will have a pronounced tendency to group direction. According to the social classification and belief theory, the tendency of patriotism and love for China will gradually prevail in the small groups of international students. Once the small groups are formed, the influence of the real life environment on international students will gradually become more significant, and the influence of social media on international students will gradually diminish. As international students adapt processively to the overseas communication situation, their social identity for their home country will prevail processively, and they will regain their love for their home country. Notably, half of the respondents said they had searched for China on overseas social media and were outraged. As a particular group, international students need to re-establish links with the surrounding society and culture after going abroad. While using social software to make friends, international students so that cultural outsiders, are eager to know what foreign countries think about their home countries, so they will search on different social media platforms, and the expressions from different perspectives in different cultural backgrounds will have a tremendous cultural impact, which in turn will cause certain resentment among international students, and from another side, it also shows that contemporary Chinese international students have a stronger sense of identity with their home countries.

According to the interviews, it is easy to see that contemporary overseas students have a high recognition of China and can defend China's interests and dignity with reasons and evidence in some special cases (epidemic), but half of them still maintain a neutral and objective attitude in certain situations due to multiple considerations such as protecting themselves in a foreign country. As China is increasingly at the center of the world stage, China should also enhance the security of overseas Chinese and international students, so that they can also feel the care of the motherland overseas, and thus reward their high patriotism. It is worth noting that although many international students recognize their own country as well as their emotions, half of the interviewees revealed that a significant portion of the international students around them choose to stay and live and work in developed Western countries, resulting in a brain drain from many developing countries, including China. According to the international division of labor system, set Western countries occupy the top of the world production chain and the right to speak. In contrast most developing countries occupy the middle and low end. As a group with relatively good family conditions, international students are easily influenced by the social media context and the relatively comfortable living environment in developed Western countries to choose to stay in local life after going abroad. To protect their talents, the majority of developing countries, including China, should continue to improve their international competitiveness while defending the patriotic enthusiasm of overseas expatriates, so that people can vote with their feet to promote the return of talent.

In addition to the high level of patriotism among the international students interviewed, all of the interviewees also indicated that there is a clear presence of "upper Chinese" and "Patriotic Chinese" around them. This proves that this phenomenon is not uncommon, because overseas students bring their own inherent Chinese cultural background to communicate with overseas cultures, and in a cross-cultural situation, international students who have not yet gone through social experience are

suddenly exposed to a completely different social media context and social living environment, which will inevitably lead to a certain degree of ideological transformation, and then divide into “upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese” and a large number of intermediate groups. At the same time, according to the information cocoon effect, most of the time, people will browse or listen to the ideas, and articles they are interested in or have already identified, so part of “upper Chinese” and “Patriotic Chinese” The author of this article believes that the essence of education should be to cultivate students with a love for knowledge, a healthy outlook and a good personality, rather than a political machine with a soild ideological orientation. While it is understandable that the “Patriotic Chinese” group is more radical than ordinary Chinese people because their culture and national identity are more strongly stimulated overseas, the “upper Chinese” group has a peculiar sense of superiority, insulting and denigrating their home country on the Chinese Internet or other platforms, which will lower their value and also attract the rejection of the Chinese cultural circle, a person who does not identify with their own race and culture will not be respected anywhere.

What is noteworthy in the interview is that although overseas students do not recognize “upper Chinese,” due to their unique cross-cultural background and their long experience of living abroad, they have developed two very different but compatible ways of thinking. The fusion of the two ways of thinking has helped them to have a more comprehensive perspective and communication style, and to develop critical thinking skills, which are to a certain extent different from students who simply receive education in China. They are relatively more comprehensive when faced with some issues. The view is more objective, but due to their Chinese cultural background and ethnicity, most respondents still have a high sense of identification with their home country. International students, as a particular group, can assume the role of a bridge to spread Chinese culture to the outside world in the new age, and show the world a decent image of young Chinese people in the new era who are not subservient, have cultural confidence and national identity, but also have excellent critical thinking skills, let China go to the world, and let the world understand China.

6. Conclusion

All in all, international students use overseas social software for socializing and understanding the local culture, and overseas social software plays a vital role in the life of international students and has a profound influence on the change of their thinking. Half of the overseas students in this study had a clear tendency to be “Patriotic Chinese,” while the other half did not have a clear tendency. All of the respondents expressed a lack of understanding and aversion to “upper Chinese.” The new generation of Chinese students has a higher recognition of their home country, but due to their cross-cultural background, they are more objective and critical in their thinking. They can look at some phenomena in China more objectively and calmly. Chinese students in the new era can serve as a bridge for the spread of Chinese culture. While inheriting and promoting their own cultures, they can actively communicate with foreign cultures, so that China can go global and the world can listen to the voice of China.

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