The Challenges Faced by Chinese Students Pursuing Education in the United States in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract. The issue of Chinese students studying in the United States has received widespread attention, but there are still significant shortcomings. This article analyzes the recovery of international educational exchanges in the post-pandemic era and discovers that Chinese students studying in the US still face multiple difficulties, including language, cultural differences, and issues related to learning. The demand for studying in the United States from China remains strong. China has been the top source country of international students for the United States for many consecutive years. Based on this, this article holds that the country should attach importance to the export and introduction of international students, improve the relevant policies for studying abroad, and reduce the ambiguity of the policies. Students need to learn to regulate their psychological pressure, promptly relieve their anxious emotions, and avoid getting trapped in their own internal conflicts. During class, it is necessary to engage in active academic communication with the professor, proactively raise questions and provide feedback, and cultivate one's own critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Post-Pandemic Era, International Education Exchange, Cross-Cultural Communication.

1. Introduction

As the global epidemic situation gradually comes under control, various countries have gradually relaxed their entry restrictions, and international tourism is gradually returning to normal. This provides very convenient conditions for Chinese students to study in the United States. In the context of globalization, international educational exchanges and cooperation have been continuously strengthened, and at the same time, global education has undergone significant changes. As a significant destination for global higher education, the United States is also the top choice for international students. Its educational status worldwide is unparalleled, and it holds an important position. It attracts many international students to come. It is the starting point for students to pursue their dreams. They are happy to be able to study in the United States for further education. At the same time, they hope to gain a broader international perspective and better career development opportunities.

Due to factors such as the impact of the pandemic and restrictions on visa issuance, according to some public data, the number of people traveling abroad dropped to 450,900 in 2020, rebounded to 523,700 in 2021, and further increased to 661,200 in 2022. Although the number of overseas students in 2022 did not return to the level of 2019, China has been the top source country for international students in the United States for 15 consecutive years. From 2022 to 2023, there were 289,000 Chinese students studying in the United States [1]. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China mentioned the need to "strengthen international exchanges of talents", which sent out a positive signal for overseas studies. From this, the demand for overseas studies among Chinese students remains strong. According to the latest data from UNESCO, the top two destinations for Chinese students' overseas studies are the United States (accounting for 28.92%) and the United Kingdom (accounting for 14.27%) [1]. After the pandemic, the US government made friendly adjustments to the visa policies for international students to facilitate the economic recovery as soon as possible and to maintain its leading positions in areas such as technology and innovation. They hoped to attract more international students through more friendly approaches and measures. Meanwhile, to attract more high-quality talent, American universities have all rapidly adjusted their admission strategies. Among these adjustments, there has been an increased emphasis on promoting

the recruitment of Chinese students, and they have also offered many more flexible and more suitable courses for Chinese international students [2].

Some scholars, through empirical analysis using cross-national data, have argued that the core driving force behind the choice of studying abroad has shifted from the traditional perspective of enhancing academic qualifications to a dual consideration of the compatibility with career development and the quality of academic resources. Additionally, some other scholars have focused on the issue of cross-cultural adaptation among the study-abroad population and have proposed that the perception of cultural distance and the social support network play a key role in the study-abroad experience. Most research results focus on the global phenomenon of studying abroad from a broad macro perspective or analyze the trend of studying abroad by concentrating on a specific regional context [3,4]. However, in the post-pandemic era, especially in the context of the continuous development of international education at present, it is relatively feasible to focus on a specific country and explore its impact on international education. There is a certain research space for this. Therefore, this paper focuses on the United States as a specific destination for studying abroad, concentrating on core issues such as the policy paths of studying abroad and the effectiveness of international students' development, to fill the research gap in this area and provide some targeted suggestions for studying abroad policies and international education cooperation.

Therefore, this paper aims to conduct specific analyses in the areas of policy, teaching methods, psychological issues, cultural differences, and regional differences. It is hoped that it can fill some gaps in international educational exchanges between China and the United States in the post-pandemic era, regarding the exchanges for Chinese students. It can also provide some support for cross-cultural social interactions. At the same time, it is hoped that it can deeply analyse some specific difficulties that Chinese students encounter during their studies abroad and explore the underlying reasons behind them. It is also hoped that solutions can be proposed to form a complete research loop.

2. Problem

2.1. Complex Process

By reviewing the history of Chinese students' overseas studies, the willingness of Chinese students to study in the United States is closely related to the immigration policies of the United States at different times. The uncertainty of the US policies will, to a certain extent, increase the cost of study, psychological pressure, academic difficulty, and the complexity of career planning for Chinese students, and may even lead them to consider studying in other countries instead. These are all the uncertain factors regarding their future study in the United States. Chinese students studying abroad are a huge consumer group globally. Therefore, some uncertainties in the US policies are obstacles to international educational exchanges between China and the United States. At the same time, they increase the uncertainty for Chinese students about the future, causing their psychological stress to rise. International students face a complex combination of issues such as self-identity, social pressure, and anxiety about the future during the process of cultural adaptation. This back-and-forth psychological struggle may eventually lead to a disbalance in cognition and emotions [5]. Furthermore, international students constantly adjust themselves between the local cultural norms and their own inherent habits. However, when this adjustment is accompanied by their lack of proficiency or insufficient cultural understanding, it will lead to deliberate but awkward situations, or even the opposite effect of attempting to integrate. Under the combined influence of these two factors, the difficulty of adaptation has been further exacerbated.

2.2. Language

In terms of language, the core issue lies in the deficiency of academic language skills and the weak ability to adapt to daily communication. This predicament not only affects the progress of learning but also hinders the integration into social activities. Basic communication involves two thresholds: from the transmission of information to the comprehension of meaning. A lack of language skills can

lead to failure in communication with others and hinder the transmission of daily information. The "inaccurate expression of meaning" in language can lead to greater differences in values, which in turn will exacerbate the communication gap [6].

The absence of a cultural context leads to some misunderstandings in certain language environments. Even if one has a basic vocabulary, due to the lack of understanding of some cultural references or colloquial expressions, incorrect comprehension occurs, which can still result in communication breakdown. Or, if one is not familiar with the local expressions and communication logic, they might mistakenly interpret the other person's openness and sincerity as "unfriendly", thereby damaging the basic interaction atmosphere. The influence of language on the development of interpersonal relationships has transformed into a crucial factor that bridges the gap between superficial interaction and deep connection. The language barrier limits the breadth of the interpersonal circle, causing international students to become overly dependent on their comfort zone. They believe that they will feel secure within this circle, which is what people commonly refer to as active avoidance of social interaction.

2.3. Culture Difference

Cultural differences will indirectly affect the integration of international students into the social circle of local students. Due to these cultural differences, international students and local students will have significant differences in terms of entertainment and hobbies, making it difficult for them to find common topics and engage in social interaction in these areas. Also, due to the language barrier, it has hindered their communication with local students. However, if one wants to establish a long-term and stable friendship, participating in the core scenes of the local culture and gaining a sense of cultural belonging are very difficult tasks. The difficulty of these is much greater than what was mentioned earlier [7].

When international students lack cultural awareness, even when they can manage the most basic communication, there will still be significant deviations in expressing their intentions and receiving the corresponding responses. This directly leads to a decline in communication efficiency. This is what is commonly referred to as the misunderstanding caused by "inability to express precisely". During the process of adapting to the cultural environment, international students may suffer from the double blow of "neither being accepted by the local culture nor having developed some new understandings of their own culture", thereby confusing their sense of identity. After mastering English proficiently and adapting to American culture, international students may feel confused between "Chinese traditional culture" and "American culture", which is a lack of cultural identity [8]. In the long run, Chinese students studying abroad will tend to rely on the local Chinese community. However, if they stay in this community for a long time, it will lead to a shortage of capital in the local society, making it difficult for them to enter fields that rely on interpersonal relationships later, and increasing the employment pressure [9].

2.4. Environmental Adaptation

In their studies, local American students are accustomed to immediately presenting their own different suggestions and ideas. For instance, in some group discussions, they would directly express their opinions and challenge the viewpoints of their group members. Their thinking pattern tends to be more "critical thinking", but Chinese international students have a different thinking mode. In group discussions, they will first listen carefully and then offer a gentle suggestion. During the process of suggesting, they would become even more concerned about whether this rebuttal would affect the harmony of the group. However, this situation has become particularly prominent after the pandemic [10].

The habits of students in the United States are to actively engage in learning, asking questions, and providing feedback. For instance, they would ask their professors questions they don't understand after class and seek clarification from their professors on some knowledge that wasn't covered in class. These are all examples of how American students are actively pursuing their learning. In the

professor's view, this kind of relationship is more like an "equal communication". Students can address the professor by his or her name directly, and they can also communicate some life-related issues via email after class. Their interaction pattern is more like that of friends.

However, Chinese international students are influenced by the Chinese culture of "respecting teachers and valuing education". Chinese international students tend to learn passively. For instance, they take detailed notes in class and pay close attention to the lectures. They consider not interrupting the professor during the class as a sign of politeness.

However, in American classrooms, it is emphasized that an immediate response is required. At the same time, during the initial stage for international students, students may be reluctant to initiate communication with the professor due to some "awe and respect" towards the professor. As a result, they may miss out on a lot of academic support from the professor. Before the pandemic, there had already been a situation where there was less interaction during classes. After the pandemic, due to the reasons of online teaching, this problem has become even more severe [11]. Such a negative perception has led to the situation where professors might misunderstand Chinese international students, thinking that they are not interested in the course. Meanwhile, students miss out on a lot of knowledge they didn't understand at the time because they are too afraid to speak up, thus creating a mutual misunderstanding.

3. Suggest

3.1. The Top-Level Design Level

Under the current trend of popularity in the field of international education, the country should attach importance to the output and introduction of international students. On this basis, it should continuously improve relevant policies and establish a sound service system for international students, so that students can have a clearer understanding and avoid a series of problems, such as psychological anxiety caused by excessive procedures in the above-mentioned aspects. Emphasizing the output and citation of international students is of great strategic significance for the development of the country. The improvement of policies is like paving the way for the overseas study journey of Chinese students. The multi-dimensional optimization and improvement of policies are not only a guarantee for the rights and interests of international students, but also a way to solve problems for their overseas studies. With the improvement of the policies, it is also indirectly helping international students to alleviate their psychological anxiety and protect their mental health. It sincerely hopes that all parties can join hands and make joint efforts to promote the development of the international student cause.

3.2. Student Level

Students need to be prepared to understand cultural differences in advance, make long-term plans, enhance their language skills, and develop comprehensive qualities. They should also improve their competitiveness by actively learning about American social customs and culture, enhancing their ability to communicate across cultures, and respecting local culture. They should also acquire knowledge about cultural backgrounds, thereby gaining a better understanding and respect for local culture, and learn to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Actively integrate into the local social circle. During classes, have the idea of actively participating in academic activities. Encourage international students to actively engage in classroom activities and have more communication with professors, establishing a good interactive relationship. Enhance the language skills of international students, attempting to achieve seamless communication. Improve the comprehensive quality of international students, actively alleviate their own pressure, avoid internal conflicts, fully utilize local resources to enhance themselves, and lay a solid foundation for future development.

3.3. The School and Teacher Levels

Some professional guidance can be provided, such as based on the characteristics of both parties' education and the needs of the students, jointly designing courses and teaching methods, strengthening cooperation between the school and American universities, or jointly guiding students to complete research projects, broadening their horizons, cultivating international talents, and enhancing cultural exchanges and integration, as well as conducting some humanistic care and the like. The school can organize various cultural exchange activities to enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and American students, promote cross-cultural integration, and the development of cross-cultural communication skills. The cooperation between China and the United States will have a profound impact on educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

4. Conclusion

This study conducted a thorough analysis of the current situation of Chinese students studying in the United States after the pandemic, as well as the problems they are facing. Through the analysis of each situation and some measures. The research shows that although the pandemic had a significant impact on international studies, as various countries relaxed their entry restrictions, the United States adjusted its policies for international students. As a result, the number of Chinese students studying in the US has gradually increased, and the choices of majors have also become more diverse.

However, Chinese international students also encounter more challenges during their studies in the United States, such as language, cultural differences, learning, and language proficiency and cultural differences causing difficulty in integrating into the local society. In the absence of adequate language skills, it leads to communication problems in daily life, making it hard for them to establish good interpersonal relationships in the local area. This also brings many inconveniences to their daily lives, affecting their overall study experience and personal development.

The country should improve the policies for studying abroad and establish a sound service system for international students; students should make adequate preparations in terms of language and culture in advance, enhance their comprehensive qualities and actively integrate into the local society; schools and teachers should strengthen cooperation with international education institutions, provide professional guidance and cultural exchange activities, to help international students solve their problems and promote cultural integration.

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