

Research on the Identity Reconstruction and Adaptation Strategies of Chinese Students Overseas in a Cross-Cultural Context

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Abstract: The "Blue Book Report on China's Overseas Study Development 2023-2024" shows that, according to UNESCO's latest data, there were 1.021 million Chinese students studying at overseas higher education institutions in 2021, ranking first globally. Cross-cultural communication among students abroad was an important topic of globalization. This paper looks at Chinese students' identity and how they adapt to cross-cultural talks abroad. With globalization, more Chinese students paper overseas, facing both challenges and chances. Using quality research, it analyzes their mental changes, ways to adapt, and how these affect their studies, social life, and plans. It finds that by joining in studies, socializing, and cultural events, Chinese students slowly change how they see themselves and their place in society and culture. Differences in culture, language trouble, social help, relationships, and plans all shape their adaptation. The paper shows that being open, learning languages, making friends, setting clear goals, and being good at cross-cultural talks help Chinese students deal with challenges and form a strong sense of who they are.

Keywords: Chinese students, intercultural communication, identity, Adapt, Strategy research.

1. Introduction

The "Blue Book Report on China's Overseas Study Development 2023-2024" shows that, according to UNESCO's latest data, there were 1.021 million Chinese students studying at overseas higher education institutions in 2021, ranking first globally. This large group and its diverse trends make a special scene in international education. Cross-cultural communication among students abroad is now an important topic of globalization.

In China's cross-cultural studies, scholars like Zhang Changjun and Li Chao discussed new media in Chinese international education. They found it helps solve cross-cultural barriers and improves education quality [1]. Shi Xingsong stressed the importance of adding cross-cultural content to foreign language textbooks to enhance students' language and cross-cultural skills [2]. Xu Ziyang and Gu Xiaoying analyzed cultural output in a global context, highlighting the need to tailor cultural dissemination based on new media and audience traits [3]. These studies form the background of cross-cultural research on Chinese students abroad, pointing out that when entering a new culture, students face challenges like cultural differences, language barriers, and social isolation. Their adaptation and psychological mechanisms are core topics.

Globally, cross-cultural communication impacts international students, especially Chinese ones. With globalization and the knowledge economy, their cross-cultural skills are under the spotlight [4]. Foreign studies focus on bilingual education in China to enhance ASEAN students' cross-cultural adaptation and delve into the psychological pressure and social difficulties international students face. On one hand, this paper focuses on how bilingual ed is used in "China Panorama Courses". Studies show it helps with class work and culture swaps, but mental challenges and social limits are big issues for ASEAN students to adapt [5]. This trend shows that cross-cultural research is focusing on globalization, digital technology, and cultural adaptation challenges, aiming to analyze and find solutions to improve students' cross-cultural communication and adaptation. It also provides a rich theoretical and practical foundation for Chinese students' cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the need to explore strategies for addressing cultural differences and balancing cultural diversity in future research.

This paper focuses on Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation and identity-building during their overseas studies. Using qualitative research, it deeply analyzes their cultural adaptation strategies and psychological changes, and how these affect their academic success, social networks, and future career plans. Depth interviews will be used to capture students' diverse experiences and deep feelings. After reviewing relevant theories and research, the paper design, data collection, and analysis will be presented. Finally, the findings will be discussed, and targeted suggestions will be made to enhance Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation, strengthen international education cooperation and exchange, and showcase China's open image and international soft power.

2. Methods

This paper aims to explore the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students abroad, based on a large and diverse group of them. Though there are many studies on cross-cultural adaptation, there's less on the status and impact of Chinese students' adaptation after the pandemic, and strategies to support them. So, using cultural dimension, identity, and communication adaptation theories, this research interviewed 10 students online after the pandemic. Questions focused on psychological, academic, and socio-cultural adaptation to understand their changes and challenges. This paper studies their adaptation process over time and tries to give suggestions. The following are the research hypotheses of this paper.

H1: Students' overall cross-cultural adaptation decreased.

H2: Academic adaptation is more challenging than psychological and socio-cultural.

H3: The pandemic increased cultural shock for Chinese students.

H4: Language barriers are still a challenge in socio-cultural adaptation.

H5: Chinese students want more help from local universities and supervisors.

For depth and accuracy, all interviews were one-on-one, mainly in Chinese, recorded both verbally and in writing, and then translated for analysis. No material incentives were given; it was based on volunteers' support.

To improve sample representativeness and objectivity, this paper included Chinese students from different countries in recent years. They're from universities in the USA, UK, Australia, and Singapore. There were 10 participants: 3 undergraduates, 5 master's, and 2 Ph.D. students, aged 19-30 (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Detailed information of respondents.

Number	Interviewees	Education Level	Age	Study Abroad	Cultural Adaptation Issues
1	Interviewee A	bachelor degree	19	U.S	Psychological adaptation after the pandemic
2	Interviewee B	master's degree	22	U.K	Challenges of academic adaptation
3	Interviewee C	doctor degree	28	Australia	Sociocultural adaptation and language barriers
4	Interviewee D	bachelor degree	20	U.S	The impact of the pandemic on intercultural adaptation
5	Interviewee E	master's degree	24	U.S	Expect help from the university and tutors
6	Interviewee F	master's degree	26	Australia	A temporal perspective of the process of intercultural adaptation
7	Interviewee G	bachelor degree	21	Singapore	Changes in the overall intercultural adaptability of international students
8	Interviewee H	doctor degree	30	Singapore	Comparison of academic adaptation versus psychological adaptation
9	Interviewee I	master's degree	23	U.S	The intensification of culture shock
10	Interviewee J	master's degree	25	U.K	Difficulties and challenges in sociocultural adaptation

Due to time limits, this paper mainly used two methods: document analysis and interviews, to look into how Chinese students adapt abroad. This paper compared and analyzed their experiences with past cross-cultural adaptation data of students. Through deep talks with interviewees, this paper got a better idea of the cross-cultural challenges they faced during this special time. It also learned more about their mental feedback in cross-cultural life. This helped people understand the process and status of their cross-cultural adaptation.

3. Results

3.1. Identity Analysis

When looking deep into how Chinese students adapt and grow in cross-cultural settings, this section focuses on identity. It shows changes in self-awareness, social integration, and cultural preservation. Identity, as a bridge between individuals and society/culture, greatly affects students' mental health, academic success, and global perspective. Here are the findings from three angles: self-identity, social identity, and cultural identity.

3.1.1. Self-Identity

Interviews show that students often reshape their self-identity in cross-cultural settings. At first, they may feel lost and unsure due to the new culture, doubting their abilities and worth. But as time goes on, by joining academic activities, socializing, and experiencing the culture, they find their place and

gain confidence. Interviewee I said, "When I first arrived in the US, I felt like a lost time traveler, unsure of my role in this new culture. But later, by joining school research and club activities, I found my place and gained confidence." In this process, their hobbies, skills, and language abilities become important for building self-identity.

3.1.2. Social Identity

In cross-cultural settings, students' social identity also changes a lot. They need to adapt to new social rules and relationships and find a sense of belonging in the new culture. Interviewee J mentioned, "I joined the school's international student group, made friends from different countries, and did local volunteer work. This made me feel part of the community." By joining groups, participating in activities, and making cross-cultural friends, students gradually integrate into the local society and form a diverse social identity. They also realize their identity as "Chinese students" and seek a balance between cultural identity and national pride.

3.1.3. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is one of the biggest challenges for students in cross-cultural adaptation. They need to keep their cultural roots in a new environment while accepting and integrating into the new culture. Interviewee A said, "Though I'm in the US, I celebrate Chinese traditions like Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival every year, which keeps me connected to Chinese culture. At the same time, I try to learn American customs, like Thanksgiving and Christmas." Interviews show that students maintain their cultural identity by celebrating traditions, joining cultural activities, and staying in touch with compatriots. They also form a cross-cultural identity by learning about the local culture and participating in cross-cultural exchanges, achieving a diverse cultural identity.

3.2. Factors Affecting Identity

Cultural differences and language barriers are key factors affecting interviewees' identity. In a foreign culture, Chinese students face different values, behaviors, and social ways, making them feel confused and uncomfortable at first. Language barriers add to their difficulties in academics and socializing, affecting their confidence and sense of belonging. Interviewee B said, "Initially, I found British class discussions strange and their social habits hard to adapt to. But through language courses and talking with classmates, I gradually overcame these barriers." As they learn more about the local culture and improve their language skills, they overcome these barriers and form a more stable and diverse identity.

Social support and relationships greatly impact interviewees' identity. Abroad, they want support and care from family, friends, and mentors. They also build a wide social network by interacting with local and other international students. Interviewee C mentioned, "I'm very thankful for my mentors and classmates. They gave me a lot of help and support when I faced difficulties. This made me feel warm and a sense of belonging in a foreign land." These relationships not only provide emotional comfort but also help them better adapt to the cross-cultural environment and build their identity.

Academic and career development are important parts of the interviewees' identity. While studying abroad, Chinese students face academic pressure, career uncertainty, and fierce competition in the job market. These factors greatly affect their confidence and sense of belonging. Interviewee D said, "By joining lab research projects and internships, I clarified my academic interests and career goals. This made me confident and excited about my future." By actively participating in academic research, internships, and career planning activities, Chinese students gradually clarify their academic interests and career goals, enhancing their self-identity and sense of achievement.

4. Discussion

When looking at Chinese students' overseas cross-cultural adaptation, people need to deeply analyze the challenges they face and how to overcome them with effective strategies. This helps them build and reshape their identity [6].

4.1. Exploring Identity in Psychological Change

Chinese students should have an open and inclusive mindset. They should respect and accept foreign cultures, improve their language skills, and seek cross-cultural adaptation counseling. This helps them deal with cultural differences and language barriers, promoting identity building. Cultural differences and language barriers are two major challenges for Chinese students when they first arrive in a foreign country [7]. Especially after the pandemic, Chinese students face a more complex cultural environment, which places higher demands on their cross-cultural adaptation abilities and cultural identity [8]. Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede proposed the cultural dimension theory. It reveals that cultural differences are not single but consist of multiple intertwined dimensions. These dimensions shape the rich diversity of people's values and behaviors in different cultures. To effectively face challenges, Chinese students first need an open and inclusive mindset. They should correctly handle conflicts caused by different cultural backgrounds. This means respecting and accepting foreign cultures, and actively learning about local customs, values, and social rules [9]. Language is crucial for communication. So, facing communication difficulties, and improving language skills are key for Chinese students to adapt to life in a foreign country. Seeking professional cross-cultural adaptation counseling or attending related training is also an effective way to enhance cross-cultural adaptation abilities. Many universities have cross-cultural communication centers, providing targeted counseling and training for international students to help them better integrate into foreign cultures.

4.2. Using Identity Theory to Guide Practice

Students should use identity theory. They can build social support, keep in touch with family and friends, and set clear academic goals. This helps strengthen their self and social identity, promoting mental health and academic success. Building-wide social support and relationships is crucial for students' mental health and academic success. This matches the findings of Atri et al. [10]. By joining the school's international student groups and doing volunteer work, interviewees gain a sense of belonging and achievement. Keeping in touch with family and friends is also important for emotional support. Technology, video calls, and social media make long-distance communication easier. Chinese students can share experiences and feelings with loved ones anytime. Asking for help from mentors and schools is also effective in solving academic and life problems. During overseas study, clear academic and career goals are crucial for future planning. Actively participating in academic research projects enhances academic adaptability and boosts self-identity for Chinese students [11].

The above can be explained by identity theory. It mainly includes self-identity and social identity theory. Self-identity theory shows how individuals think in social interactions. From Allport's self-development theory to Erikson's self-identity theory, and Mead's symbolic interaction theory, they reveal how individuals understand and improve themselves, forming unique self-awareness and values. Social identity theory opens the door to group belonging. From Tajfel's social identity theory to racial identity theory, they show how individuals build self-identity through social categorization and group belonging. This creates deep emotions for the in-group and unique views of the out-group. These two theories outline the complexity and diversity of identity and its important role in social behavior. They also mean that during overseas study, Chinese students experience deep and subtle psychological changes in the complex interplay of group and individual identity.

4.3. Broaden Views and Strengthen Cross-cultural Skills

Students need to develop cross-cultural skills. They should learn to listen and understand different cultural views, adjust communication strategies, and actively join cross-cultural teamwork and exchange activities. This helps increase understanding and acceptance of different cultures. In cross-cultural settings, having cross-cultural communication and cooperation skills is essential for Chinese students [12]. It means learning to listen and understand people from different cultures, and respecting and accepting diversity. Gary Pane, an American psychologist, proposed the Communication Adaptation Theory. Its core idea is that effective communication isn't fixed. It requires individuals to flexibly adjust strategies and behaviors based on situations, people, and cultural backgrounds. This theory includes listening skills, nonverbal communication, context sensitivity, and cultural adaptability. Together, they form a rich toolbox for communication adaptation. The theory also emphasizes the need to constantly perceive, understand, and respond in communication for the best results. By actively participating in cross-cultural team discussions and cooperation, Chinese students can improve communication and expression skills. They also learn to think from different cultural perspectives, enhancing understanding and broadening cultural identity [13]. Joining cross-cultural exchange activities is also effective for understanding different cultures. Many universities have cross-cultural exchange programs, like international cultural festivals and language exchange events. These create more spaces and opportunities for Chinese students to interact with people from different cultures.

5. Conclusion

This paper finds that Chinese students in cross-cultural settings often reshape their identity. This includes self, social, and cultural identity. At first, they feel lost due to cultural differences and language barriers. But by joining academic, social, and cultural events, they find their place and gain confidence. For social identity, they join student groups and community activities to fit into the local society. For cultural identity, they keep their roots and accept new cultures, achieving diversity. Factors affecting identity include cultural differences, language barriers, social support, relationships, and academic and career development. By being open, improving language, building networks, setting clear goals, and developing cross-cultural skills, students overcome challenges and build stable, diverse identities.

Cross-cultural life offers Chinese students a valuable path. It helps them develop communication skills, broaden global views, and deepen self-identity. It also highlights their unique cultural features and rich heritage.

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