The Impacts of COVID-19 on Chinese Students Studying Abroad

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sharp deterioration of Chinese international students' social and psychological environment. Social isolation, public media opinion, school blockades, and social unrest have brought huge psychological impacts to Chinese students. Moreover, the education sector has unaddressed the difficulties and worries faced by Chinese students considering learning overseas during the pandemic. Chinese students are prone to homesickness and loneliness since they spend much time alone living and studying abroad in a completely foreign cultural setting. In addition, in the context of COVID-19. In the psychological response, many international students follow the social isolation policy, take classes at home, and reduce travel. Physical isolation and reduction of social interaction aggravate psychological loneliness. Against this background, from the viewpoint of actor networks, this study investigates the network of issues and challenges encountered by Chinese students who desire to go abroad for academic learning. The findings suggest that Chinese international students have heightened psychological anxiety during Covid-19 and are worried about their future development. Therefore, future research should combine large-scale questionnaire surveys, detailed behavioral experiments, in-depth case analysis, and effective online intervention to explore theoretical models and intervention plans for overseas students' mental health to improve Chinese students' mental health: cultural adaptation and stress resilience of groups.

Keywords: Chinese students · Concerns · Cross-cultural adaptation · Covid-19

1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been an increase in demand for Western higher education in China because it can be used to build cultural capital, as payment for admission to prestigious Chinese universities, to increase employability. While the COVID-19 pandemic has spread worldwide and shows little sign of abating, many different actors, including students, academic staff, institutes, and others, are dealing with various challenges. Much attention is given to the decline in international student mobility from a global standpoint. Universities now prioritize creating virtual learning environments, making it difficult for international students who are inclined to immerse in a foreign culture fully. However, the location-specific and multifaceted nature of international students' research during COVID-19 necessitates academic study.

Numerous problems and difficulties arise, particularly for Chinese students inclined to learn overseas during the pandemic. Chinese students, for instance, may be worried about the safety of studying in the UK and the evolving visa application policy. There may also be issues with Chinese people being subjected to racial discrimination in the United States. Additionally, studies have recently focused on the emotional involvement of Chinese parents in promoting the well-being of their children studying overseas. These studies, however, largely disregard that web of connections between the study abroad actors.

This study aims to fill in this gap in the literature by tying together the human and material actors that have contributed to a range of concerns and problems related to study abroad choices. Based on this research, it's clear that students' decisions significantly affect a specific group of people, for example, the student's home universities, parents, friends, higher education organizations, and the receiving institutes abroad. The literature that specifically examines the impact of the pandemic on Chinese decisions to study overseas may overlook some of the study's higher education agents, such as familial ties, engagement of the higher education agency in promoting widespread use, or the China labor market's competitiveness. The cast of people and issues that empirical research has uncovered are presented in this study.

This study aims to shed light on the difficulties and issues faced by Chinese international students during the pandemic and the complexity and influence of numerous actors on students' decisions to pursue their studies overseas.

2   The Impact on the Learning Progress of Students

2.1   The Impact of Graduation Time on Graduates

The pandemic has adversely affected the education sector because of restrictions and controls. The continuing Covid-19 is having an impact on every element of our society and everyday life. However, it is yet unclear how the pandemic will ultimately develop and the efficiency and drawbacks of these management methods. Estimates from the United Nations indicate that 188 nations have implemented national school closures [1], keeping more than 90% of registered homes instead of attending classes. Students' education, psychological health, and overall well-being are predicted to be significantly impacted by school closure, isolation, and fear of infection. According to epidemiological data, between 5 and 12% of persons who experience a traumatic incident may acquire post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Due to concerns about health, University suspension, and travel restrictions, many students cannot attend offline classes for a long time, resulting in delays in students' graduation and completion of their studies within the expected time. Many students cannot study or go out for recreational activities, resulting in psychological problems, which will cause psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety, and delay their learning progress. For example, they are forced to have a compartment to delay graduation, and fresh graduates cannot find jobs or go to graduate school in time.

2.2   Effects on Current Students' Progress in Their Studies in the Course

It is implied that the authority-led power accountable for the stigma by labeling the Chinese as "the coronavirus carrier" is at fault for connecting Sino-US tension to the alleged suffering of Chinese students. The public did not view their mask-wearing behavior as "normal" before the epidemic hit the United States. To avoid embarrassment and prejudice, some Chinese students decided to skip class. Chinese students studying abroad are impacted by various variables, including the government, their peers, and even their professors. The Coronavirus illustrates the neoliberal paradigm of global higher education's political and economic uncertainty. Three elements form the foundation of the argument. In the first place, the travel bans limit students' freedom of movement while colleges receive government funding. Second, because of the more tense political ties between China and the West, access to overseas education for Chinese students is coming under closer scrutiny. Third, Chinese students have begun to question the value of a Western education due to paying high tuition for an overseas education while having little control over the school's services. Students were not only forced to switch to online learning on concise notice but also received very little emotional and financial support from the school. The deglobalization and rising nationalism, in Wang's opinion [2], are to blame for the historically significant barriers that Chinese students face. Young Chinese people might become trapped by Western and Chinese ideologies. International students' presence is crucial because it links to their global identity building via cross-cultural relationships, which this relationship is conflicted with their native identification. Due to the university's teachers' essential role, transferrable skills, and regular interactions with students, teachers rank among the crucial inclusionists in education. With the enhancement of online distance learning, the teachers of online class have played an important role by helping students solve the COVID-19 conundrum. The fact that teachers and school administrators are most likely to be familiar with students' families further suggests that they could be crucial in reaching the most vulnerable kids and sustaining parental interest in their education.

2.3   Study Plan Delays and Doubts for Students Planning to Study Abroad

The researchers [3] thoroughly examined the worries and purpose of Chinese students studying in the UK for the 2021/22 school year. According to 35 Chinese higher education consultants and agencies, the general concerns of Chinese applicants are varied and include safety in the UK, course structure, a hazy schedule for pre-sessional classes and language tests, whether the procedure for applying for visas would alter, and whether tuition costs might be modified. However, although students are concerned about this issue, they still insist that they want to enroll in UK universities. The epidemic will finally be controlled, the Chinese candidates' contentment with the institutions' open lines of contact, and the reasons cited are the standard and perceived high quality of learning and living environments in the UK. In other words, the students expect a face-to-face manner of course delivery. According to the research, two key players organize student intentions to study in the UK. The first one is the Chinese higher education agent market, which serves as a conduit for information between educational institutions and students and a source of advice for those students. The other one is the parent, who actively participates

in conversations with the agent and collaborates with the students in decision-making because they are concerned about the atmosphere and safety of their kids' schools. This is especially pertinent to our research since it tries to show how various actors shape their decision-making processes.

Research interest is piqued by how the pandemic epidemic has affected or will affect Chinese students' ability to travel abroad, given that the higher education market in several Western countries has grown more dependent on the Chinese market. Between March and April 2020, the British Council polled 11,000 Chinese students. The results showed that 22% of respondents were inclined to alter their study plans, while 39% were unsure. In a smaller-scale academic survey performed in May 2020, inquiries on their interest in studying abroad after the pandemic were made to 1267 students from the Mainland of China, and 91 percent of them gave a negative response [4]. The authors also claim that Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan will overtake traditional Western nations like the USA and the UK as the preferred locations for postgraduate study. But according to the UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, a record-breaking 12,000 Chinese students have received academic offers for studying abroad in 2020, up 22% from 2019. Given that the final numbers of Mainland Chinese students admitted to UK higher education for the academic year 2020–21 have not yet been made public, it is challenging to tell whether the survey above results are a reflection of the applicants' anxiety following the reports of high pandemic death tolls and confirmed cases in Europe and the United States or whether these students had already applied for postgraduate study before taking the survey.

3 The Impact on the Learning Quality of Students Change in Teaching Methods

3.1 Changes in Teaching Methods

During the pandemic, the traditional teaching mode cannot be carried out, and the primary teaching method is now online instruction, which is a new challenge for students and teachers. After the epidemic, online teaching mode should be normalized. The rapid development of educational informatization has provided strong technical support for improving the teaching opening rate and quality of various school disciplines [5]. Learning is no longer confined to a classroom because of the increased resources provided by online learning. Teachers and students can obtain more learning resources in the broad field of the Internet and realize space-time autonomy; Online classes make learning and teaching more active. Live playback allows students to review in time, check deficiencies, and make up omissions. Teachers can also find problems with playback to improve teaching quality better. Teachers can quickly send the latest issues to each student through online classes, which is difficult for offline teaching [6]; Online learning seems to increase the spatial distance between teachers and students, but it makes the distance between teachers and students' hearts quickly narrow. In online classes, students can speak freely and timely publish their views and doubts in learning online courses. When offline courses, teachers and students often find it challenging to have such effective and timely communication. Through online and timely participation in

course discussions, Students get a sense of pleasure and achievement, stimulate their interest in learning, and enable teachers to receive teaching feedback in time [7]. Online teaching is a very effective teaching mode, and online teaching should continue to realize normalization. It can be seen that online teaching is an important opportunity for the transformation of teaching methods in the anti-epidemic situation, and it is also an active response of the education system to the epidemic. Online teaching is not only a beneficial attempt to innovate the teaching mode during the epidemic but also laid the foundation and accumulated experience for educators to deal with similar crises in the future.

3.2 Teacher-Student Communication is Limited

Changes in how instructors connect with their students have resulted from shutting school facilities and the shift to virtual learning during the COVID-19 issue this spring, and that's no little matter [8]. In many schools, pupils depend on their professors for more than academics, including a feeling of security and comfort. However, when communication between students and instructors must rely on technology, the relationship changes in ways that some teachers find unsettling.

However, parents who are busy or are unable to use the site because they misinterpreted or lost instructions can lose out on such conversations. In these challenging times, teachers in the lower grades have been advised that it is unfair to hold parents and students liable for every single task [8].

Forcing a revaluation of expectations without daily check-ins and in-person engagement, the coronavirus has in many ways evolved into an unparalleled test for teacher-student interactions. Of course, instructors want their pupils to be proficient in the material they are teaching, to enjoy studying, and to advance to the next grade. But these educators are also aware that building successful partnerships takes time.

The actor-network theory provides an analytical framework for comprehending how non-human thinking has invaded cross-cultural and educational environments due to the intricate worldwide connections created by human activities during the pandemic outbreak. The pandemic result has a material component. For instance, they are holding a Zoom lesson in a city on lockdown. Controlling the experience and movement of overseas students has included top-down interventions. A network develops when each player completes its role in the established interactions with other actors and then introduces additional environmental modifications. These changes might create problems and worries not just for people who are adjusting to a new political and cultural environment but also for those who are arranging for future Chinese citizens to study overseas to build up their social and cultural capital. We investigate these concerns utilizing qualitative research techniques.

3.3 Classmates' Cooperative Learning Faces Difficulties

Classmates' cooperative learning has many advantages, such as improving students' learning efficiency, improving students' communication and emotion, and improving students' ability to autonomous learning. But it also has some disadvantages. For example, cooperative learning is challenging to meet the needs of distance learning. Since

students come from all over the country, they can conduct collaborative learning when they are in school [9]. However, when COVID-19 is rampant and students cannot return to campus, practical learning tasks will be at a standstill. Traditional collaborative learning is wholly based on the condition that the instructor and students should be in the same place. Once there is a spatial distance, teaching cannot be carried out smoothly. At the beginning of 2020, when the epidemic suddenly struck, the disadvantages of cooperative learning were infinitely amplified. During the epidemic period, online teaching was implemented in theoretical education, and teaching methods have been developed, but the same way cannot be achieved in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning focuses on cultivating students' communication and thinking innovation ability [10]. The teaching purpose cannot be achieved if face-to-face communication is not carried out.

On the other hand, in the context of COVID-19, students' teaching and discussion links are completed online, while students with weak self-control are difficulty achieving long-term self-discipline. However, online teaching lacks standardized management like school teaching, which leads to students' learning and discussion process being quickly interrupted by external interference, resulting in poor learning effects [11]. And students with limited self-control face the teaching content displayed by their classmates and teachers on the screen, lack face-to-face communication between teachers and students, and it is challenging to achieve physical and mental investment.

4 Psychological Impacts of Covid-19 on Students Studying Overseas

4.1 Health Anxiety Among Students Studying Abroad

The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2), the COVID-19 illness cases emerging from it, and the next pandemic have placed significant emotional, physical, and psychological problems on communities worldwide [12]. The tense condition faced by Chinese overseas students (COSs) has been especially extreme. With this cohort as the focus, the present research investigated the psychological status of COSs overseas during the beginning stages of the epidemic. Participants (N = 182) were invited to take an online survey (between April 7–14, 2020) examining their physical and social situations and feeling of well-being. Results indicated COSs faced significant levels of anxiety mainly resulting from prejudice from the media, dread of COVID-19, and confusing signals from their social ties. They felt ensnared in a double bind circumstance with their close relatives' significantly elevated anxiety. Perceived social support was negatively linked with stress, and individuals experiencing a double bind reported the highest tension, especially those unable to discern the competing signals [13].

4.2 Academic Pressure on Students Studying Abroad

According to education experts in China and the US [14], Chinese students studying abroad may resort to cheating and plagiarism to succeed academically and due to pressure from their families. Their comments in interviews with China Daily were in response to

information that surfaced last week that claimed 8,000 Chinese students were expelled from US high schools and colleges last year, with 23% of those expelled for plagiarism and cheating. According to a study by Holistic Education, a US-based company that provides services to Chinese students, that was the second most common reason for dismissal after poor academic performance, which was the cause of 57 percent of the releases. A sample of 1,657 Chinese children expelled from schools of all levels in the US between 2013 and 2015 was evaluated by the team.

According to Andrew H. Chen, chief development officer of Holistic Education, plagiarism and cheating frequently occur among Chinese students who have a strong desire to achieve success [15], and occasionally due to the influence of individuals who have cheated or plagiarized. The Chinese Ministry of Education reports that as of 2014, 459,800 Chinese students were studying overseas. The president of Vision Overseas, a Beijing-based study consultancy affiliated with the New Oriental Education & Technology Group, Zhou Chenggang, claims that while plagiarism and cheating happen in China and the US, the US penalizes such violations of academic integrity much more severely than China. In an interview, he continued that while plagiarism is considered as 'none of a serious issue among many Chinese students, leading to at most a verbal warning, it is more of a crime that occasionally results in academic termination in the US.

Many Chinese students studying abroad seek to cut corners and graduate as quickly as possible with a degree and a job offer [16]. But he added that when a child becomes overly fixated on the results, he may do whatever is necessary to pursue his goal, disregarding rules and consequences. Zhou continued that the simplest way to catch up in grades when Chinese students can hardly keep up with their Western counterparts in a short time is by cheating and plagiarism. According to the WholeRen study, many Chinese students in the US copy and paste research done by others, resulting in plagiarism because the Chinese educational system places little emphasis on teaching students how to reference other people's academic work.

Many Chinese parents [17] have an elite-school complex, which results in their kids being under much academic pressure. Instead of pursuing their children's hearts and passions, parents frequently choose majors, typically those with outstanding prospects like finance and accounting degrees. Instead of forcing a child into an exclusive school where he would hardly fit in, consulting companies aim to find the most appropriate school. While Chinese students are more likely to cheat on exams for undergraduate and doctoral degrees, youngsters in high school are more likely to be expelled due to attendance issues, a lack of self-control, and inappropriate behavior [18].

"High schools in the US have three to four hours fewer of class time than high schools in China, but that doesn't mean that there is less of a push to study than there is in China," she told China Daily. "Since homework assignments typically require much time spent completing the independent study, it simply means that students need to improve their ability to manage their study time. Students who don't make a proactive effort to prepare their work may find themselves scrambling at the last minute and may turn to cheat if they fall short of the deadline."

4.3   Loneliness of Life of Students Studying Abroad

The current research investigates the impact of various forms of social support on reducing international students' loneliness using data from a recent survey on Chinese international students at Thai institutions [19]. We discovered through robust estimation of logistic models that co-national ties between Chinese students are more effective at reducing loneliness when they perceive a strong sense of cohesiveness among the Chinese student body at their university. The research also discovered that romantic relationships reduce the likelihood of reporting loneliness when the romantic partners are both in the host country. Lastly, having Thai friends locally does not affect all students in the same way; somewhat, it decreases the likelihood of experiencing loneliness only for those who are engaged in the host community. According to the study, it is best to consider both social support and the requirements of acculturating people to forecast the outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation.

It would appear that less well-off Chinese families may find studying in Thailand very alluring due to its proximity and lower cost; in fact, most Chinese students are from the economically underdeveloped Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China [19]. Higher education seems to be a preferred Thai export for Chinese consumers above the rice. A brave choice is to pursue a degree abroad. To communicate effectively with locals, international students may need to rebuild their identities or critically reflect on the new culture they are experiencing. They must also overcome psychological stress, learn about local culture, and adapt to social norms.

Notably, a person's loneliness may result from a lack of social connections. According to research, loneliness is hazardous for international students and has been widely acknowledged as a drawback of studying abroad. For international students, loneliness has been linked to various psychological distress, such as emotional disturbance, a lower level of life satisfaction, and a lower level of satisfaction with one's coping skills. The path from loneliness to anxiety, depression, or even mental illness is not particularly long for international students. Through this study, we seek to understand how various social support and acculturation attitudes can help international students experiencing loneliness [20]. We specifically hope to gain a better understanding of the nuanced ways that multiple forms of social support available to international students with varying social and psychological needs function in the host country, with a focus on whether or not there are any interactions between social support and acculturation attitudes. Data from a recent survey of Chinese international students in Thailand were used for analysis and hypothesis testing.

5   Conclusion

The actor-network mediating the decisions about a group of Chinese students who are inclined to study overseas during the pandemic disruption is shown in this study using network-actor theory. Students were asked to calculate favorable factors (such as the opportunity to experience the host country's culture, the safety of vaccinations, and advancement in the challenging academic environment of China) and negative factors (Health risks from COVID and opposition to online instruction). The study results show

that Chinese international students have psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and homesickness. These psychological crisis symptoms were mainly caused by academic factors, prejudice and discrimination, intercultural adaptation, social media use, and social support.

This research can help educators and parents of international students enhance their comments and suggestions on mental health intervention programs for studying in China. It has guiding value for psychological treatment and intervention for international students during the pandemic.

Future research should combine large-scale questionnaire surveys, detailed behavioral experiments, in-depth case analysis, and effective online interventions to explore theoretical models and intervention plans for overseas students' mental health to improve the mental health of Chinese students: academic achievement, social inclusion, mental health, acculturation, and subjective well-being. Hope this paper can provide a scientific basis with a reference value for academic research and practical application in this field.

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