



An Analysis of Chinese Overseas Students' Cultural Shock Under Covid-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Stereotype

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Abstract. Nowadays, although confronting the sudden outbreak of Covid-19, the number of Chinese overseas students is still growing gradually. Cultural shock is one of the main factors which generate negative effects on the physical and mental state of overseas students. Therefore, it is quintessential to conduct research on overseas students' condition in terms of cultural shock. Meanwhile, it is significant to know why cultural shock is produced. According to the previous research, stereotype contributes massively to cultural shock. Questionnaires were produced to explore overseas students' cultural shock under Covid-19 epidemic from the perspective of stereotype. The final result showed how stereotype have relation with cultural shock under Covid-19.

Keywords: cultural shock · Covid-19 · overseas students · stereotype

1 Introduction

With the increasing tendency of globalization, the number of Chinese overseas students ranks the first globally and cross-cultural communication is no longer a new notion for Chinese people. The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 has seriously influenced overseas students' daily life. They will confront with some difficulties in intercultural communication undoubtedly. The topic of Chinese overseas students' cross-cultural communication has always been heatedly discussed and researched, for example like Zhu (2007) [18], Yang & Liu (2009) [16], and Sun (2010) [14]. Meanwhile foreign students' cultural shock has been studies too, for example like Lin (2016) [9] and Qiao (2016) [12]. But few articles focus on overseas students' cultural shock under Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is still ambiguous about how seriously Covid-19 has impacted upon overseas students' cultural shock.

Therefore, in this paper, how Covid-19 has influenced overseas students' cultural shock from the perspective of stereotype will be discussed. A relevant questionnaire about this topic was produced to carry out the research.

2 Theoretical Framework

According to Oberg (1960), culture shock tends to be an occupational disease of people who have suddenly moved abroad [3, 5 6]. He points out that cultural shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Furthermore, Oberg believes that experiencing cultural shock is an unavoidable phase in cross-cultural communication [11].

Also, from the perspective of psychology, stereotype is a critical factor in causing cultural shock [7].

2.1 Stereotype

Stereotype is a complicated type of over-generalizations that psychologically guides people's behaviors and forms people's image toward a particular group of people. According to psychologists Abbate, Boca and Bocchiaro, 'A stereotype is a cognitive structure containing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human social groups.' [4].

Stereotypes are not absolutely positive or negative [10]. However, since stereotypes narrow people's perceptions, they usually jeopardize intercultural communication and take on a negative one.

2.2 Relation of Cultural Shock with Stereotype

According to Zhu (2007) and Zhang & Hao (2017), stereotype is a critical factor that leads to cultural shock [8, 17].

Sun (2013) holds the view that although people are not in contact with a certain culture, they may already have a preconceived impression of it [15].

Zhu believes that people tend to notice phenomena consistent with their stereotypes and ignore others which are inconsistent. Thus, it forbids people having international communication with those who do not share a same cultural context with them.

2.3 Purpose of the Research

Previous research seldom focuses on overseas students' cultural shock under extreme situations (e.g. pandemic). Additionally, relevant research lacks sufficient statistics.

By this paper, the current situation of stereotype among overseas students can be better understood. In the future, especially under the pandemic like Covid-19, more research concerning international students' cross-cultural communication can be conducted based on this paper.

3 Method

3.1 Research Question

The main question is in the following: what is the impact of Covid-19 and restrictions against it on overseas students' stereotypes on the culture where they stay?

3.2 Research Subjects

There are 19 subjects in the research. All the subjects are Chinese overseas students, ranging from 18 to 25 years old, who are studying in foreign countries or regions outside mainland China. They all possess the experience studying abroad more than one year.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

In this paper, there are two parts in the questionnaire carried out by an online website called Wenjuanxing.

The first part is about basic information and subject's general feelings about cultural shock. Attributes concerning stereotype are listed in the second part, which is a 3-point scale.

Subjects were asked to choose the best answer among the choices in accordance with their own situation and experience in the communication with the locals. Their thoughts could show their tendency of behaviors and thoughts towards particular people and contexts, which could reflect overseas students' general condition of cultural shock from the perspective of stereotype under Covid-19 pandemic.

4 Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Basic Information of the Subjects

In this part, basic information, such as gender, age, countries, or regions where the subjects are, local restrictions against Covid-19, etc. is collected.

Most of subjects are now studying in the United Kingdom with the number of 7. In Canada and Japan, the number of subjects is both 3. Additionally, there are 2 subjects studying in Germany. The numbers of subjects who are now studying in South Korea, the U.S.A., Hong Kong, and Malaysia are the least, only 1 respectively.

As for language, according to the statistics, most of the subjects have medium mastery of local language. Therefore, it is believed that language is not the main cause of the subjects' stereotype.

4.2 Analysis about Stereotype

15 questions in Part 2 focus on overseas students' stereotype on the local people and local culture compared with their attitudes before the outbreak of Covid-19. In Table 1 and Table 2, some attributes in the tables are modified from Chen [1].

4.2.1 Ways Overseas Students Learn about Stereotype

Questions 7–11 are designed to ask the ways that overseas students learn about stereotype. Normally, people learn stereotype via various ways like social media and personal experience. Nevertheless, during the pandemic period, it is difficult for overseas students to have many travelling experiences.

Table 1. Results of Questions 7–12 [1]

Questions	Percentage of choosing a (%)	Percentage of choosing b (%)	Percentage of choosing c (%)
7. How much do you learn local people or culture from your own experience during pandemic?	36.84	52.63	10.53
8. How much do you learn local people or culture from social media during pandemic?	47.37	47.37	5.26
9. How much do you learn local people or culture from local people during pandemic?	26.32	63.16	10.53
10. How much do you learn local people or culture from overseas Chinese during pandemic?	47.37	26.32	26.32
11. How much do you learn local people or culture from other channels during pandemic?	21.05	63.16	15.79
12. Have you ever doubted authenticity of what you have learned?	15.79	63.16	21.05

The answers to Question 7 display that 63.16% of subjects learned a little or hardly never learn stereotype from personal experience like travelling. Only 36.84% of subjects learned a large part of stereotype from personal experience. The answers to this question roughly coincide with the estimation. Under the background of Covid-19, overseas students possess rare opportunities to travel due to the local restrictions against Covid-19.

By contrast, social media like the Internet and television programs play a key role in contributing to overseas students' understanding towards the host culture during pandemic period. 47.37% of subjects believed that they learned a large part of stereotype from social media. The percentage of subjects learning a small part of stereotype from social media is the same. Hardly are there any subjects choosing c. almost none in the survey. Thus, during Covid-19 pandemic, social media is one of the main ways for them to learn stereotype.

Question 9 and Question 10 are similar. Subjects were asked how much they learned stereotype from contacting with local people in Question 9 while from contacting Chinese people in Question 10. Only 26.32% of subjects learned local culture mainly from local people while that from Chinese people is 47.37%. The percentage of subjects who

chose b. small part is 63.16% in Question 9 and 26.32% in Question 10. Only 10.53% of subjects chose c. almost none in Question 9. To ease the negative consequences brought by cultural shock, overseas students tend to socialize with people who share the same culture with them. Also, owing to the restrictions against Covid-19, and discrimination against Asians brought by the pandemic, Chinese overseas students thus are more likely to contact with Chinese people. As a result, the chances communicating with local people diminish. To some degree, their channels to integrate with local culture are cut off, which may even intensify their cultural shock. In Question 11, the majority (63.16%) said they learned little stereotype from other ways.

To summarize, social media and Chinese people are still major ways for them to learn stereotype during the pandemic period. However, the way of personal experience is not mainstream to learn stereotype.

Table 2. Results of Questions 13–20 [1]

Questions	Percentage of choosing a (%)	Percentage of choosing b (%)	Percentage of choosing c (%)
13. Can you have a clearer image of local people?	31.58	68.42	0
14. Are local people more in line with your image?	26.32	63.16	10.53
15. Will you be exclusive if local people contradict with your image?	10.53	26.32	63.16
16. Do you have a positive or negative image of local people?	31.58	68.42	0
17. Are you more likely to use characteristics of local people to describe a stranger?	10.53	36.84	52.63
18. Will you think someone is odd if he/she contradict with your image?	0	10.53	89.47
19. Will you make anticipation before socializing with local people?	47.37	26.32	26.32
20. Have you ever realized that the image is stereotypical?	31.58	42.11	26.32

In Question 12, subjects were testified their response to the knowledge obtained in these ways which are mentioned above. Sometimes, the knowledge they obtain is paradoxical with the actual situation in daily life. For instance, one of the subjects, Mr. Mi, from the U.K., said that the image of British men is different from people's normal stereotype, because they are inclined to be rude occasionally instead of being gentlemen. Compared with their own situation before the pandemic, 63.16% of subjects possibly doubted the reality of the information they have and 15.79% hardly never doubted the reality. Even these subjects have already spent more than 1 year studying abroad, an overall and objective image of local culture and local people are still not completely formed due to their limited life experience. If overseas students can be more alert rather than directly accept the information, their stereotype is likely to decline, then their cultural shock would be eased.

4.2.2 Image of Local People

Questions 13–20 are to discuss the image of local people, and subjects were asked by comparing with the situation before Covid-19 in the following questions.

Question 13 is designed to testify whether overseas students are able to have a clearer image of local people after experiencing Covid-19. Compared with their own situation before Covid-19, a minority of overseas students said they had a clearer image of local people.

Question 14 is to measure the subjectivity of stereotype. Most of subjects felt ambiguous towards this question. Although many of overseas students knew that foreigners particularly those from western nations were eager for freedom, news during pandemic period related to their so-called liberty like rejecting wearing masks is presumably paradoxical to the formed images in their minds. It may be hard for the subjects to distinguish these two kinds of "freedom", whereupon most of them were uncertain in answering this question.

Question 15 is designed to testify subjects' attitudes towards local people who do not conform to the image. Nearly two thirds (63.16%) said that they did not have bias against local people when facing the foregoing situation. Hence, international students are likely to accept stereotype-inconsistent information. Even though restrictions against Covid-19 cause fewer opportunities to personally learn more about local culture and residents, they keep a relatively neutral attitude towards local people. This may be because during pandemic, they have received massive information about local people's stereotype-inconsistent behaviors from sources like social media.

Question 16 is to ask about overseas students' overall impressions on natives. 6 of 19 subjects believed that their overall impressions were much positive compared with that before pandemic and the rest of them all chose b. Owing to the outbreak of Covid-19, international students' overall impressions are mixed. According to the theory of cultural adaptation, people are inclined to regard local culture and residents much more positive after enduring frustration. Since all the subjects have more than 1 years' experience studying abroad, they are gradually accustomed to the local culture, so their cultural shock is eased. By contrast, negative news related to local people like the protest of anti-mask is always reported during pandemic. International students thus may doubt the positive impression as a result of cultural adaptation.

As for Question 17, it focuses on overseas students' perception of local people's characteristics. More subjects deemed that they preferred not using group attributes to judge a local and the percentage of them is 52.63%, 5 times higher than those who choose a. yes. Overseas students, after experiencing Covid-19, have a deeper perception of locals from various dimensions and perspectives. For example, before the pandemic period, they had a stereotyping idea that local people did believe in science. Since many locals showed a cynical attitude towards vaccination, the subjects were more cautious when answering this question.

In Question 18, the subjects are asked whether they will think someone is odd when they meet someone who is inconsistent with stereotype, the result of which shows that approximately 90% of subjects did not esteem that individual as an exception.

In cross-cultural communication, it is normal for international students to tend to predict local people's behaviors. A good illustration is in Question 19, there are 47.37% of subjects choosing a. yes, meaning that they would tend to make prediction of local people's behavior in communication.

Question 20 assessed subjects' awareness of stereotype in cross-cultural communication. 42.11% of them thought they were unsure whether they could handle complex intercultural communication by utilizing their stereotype. Only 31.58% admitted that by using their current stereotype knowledge they could handle cross-cultural communication. Thus, it is further verified that they are ambiguous to local culture during the pandemic period. Although most of the overseas students have already formed the basic stereotype towards local culture and residents, Covid-19 made them marginalized locally due to the epidemic prevention measures. In other words, the social circumstances are different from those before Covid-19, which contradicts their already formed stereotype.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the main goal of this paper was to determine whether Covid-19 had an adverse impact on Chinese overseas students' cultural shock from the perspective of stereotype. According to the statistics from the questionnaire, Covid-19 exacerbated international students' stereotype, however, the degree is not as serious as estimated.

Firstly, ways for overseas students to learn stereotype are diverse, ranging from local people to media [2]. Secondly, compared with the situation before pandemic, although this research has identified that epidemic prevention measures would affect stereotype, the impact is not as serious as expected. Most students still prefer socializing with native people despite stereotype [13].

Due to the limited number of subjects, an overall understanding of this topic cannot be constructed. A better understanding on overseas students' cultural shock could be obtained based on an enriched research on stereotype. Additionally, it is feasible to do research on international students' mental diseases under the background of pandemic.

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