

In the post-epidemic era, research on the new cross-cultural adaptation mode and countermeasures of Chinese students studying in the UK

Qianying Ma^{1,a}

¹Sino-UK College of Fashion & Design, Zhejiang Fashion Institute of Technology, Ningbo, China

^azjsnbsmqy123@163.com

Abstract: *In the post-epidemic era, there has been a recovery trend of Chinese students studying in the UK. The emergence of new characteristics of cross-cultural adaptation brings opportunities and challenges to international students. At present, the overseas study mode is mainly based on online teaching, and the proportion of Chinese students in British classes has greatly increased, which reduces the language and cultural exchanges with local students in the UK and hinders social communication to some degree, which leads to a relatively conservative stage of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students. At the same time, Sino-UK cooperation institutions and the development of new media have brought convenience to cross-cultural adaptation. Therefore, how to have a great cross-cultural adaptation is an important issue for Chinese students who will and are studying abroad in the post-epidemic era.*

Keywords: *Post-epidemic era; UK overseas study; Cross-cultural adaptation*

1. Introduction

The post-epidemic era means the epidemic is still breaking out throughout the whole world, and the epidemic prevention and control in China have entered the era of normalization. Although the epidemic is not completely over, education and production have gradually returned to their pre-epidemic state. Studying abroad, which was affected by the outbreak, is also gradually picking up, and Chinese students who are going to study in the UK or currently staying in the UK are entering a post-epidemic era. At the same time, international student education programs such as Sino-UK co-operative education are developing and growing, and the boom in the study in the UK has become increasingly popular. More and more families who have certain financial backgrounds are choosing to send their children abroad for further study. In recent years, the number of overseas Chinese students has been at the top of the world. According to the UK Student Visa Statistics Report released on the official website of the UK government on 25 November 2021, the UK issued the highest number of student visas to mainland Chinese nationals among all countries as of September 2021, about 135,000, an increase of 13% over the "pre-epidemic" over the same period, an increase of 13%, accounting for 32% of all UK student visas issued, and 28,490 applications from mainland Chinese undergraduate students. The UK study market in 2021 has fully surpassed the pre-epidemic level, with an increase of 16.6% over the same period in 2020. This shows that the number of Chinese students going to study in the UK remains high, even more than the number before the outbreak, despite the impact of round after round of the new epidemic.

2. Reasons For the Craze of Studying Abroad in the UK in the Post-epidemic Era

2.1 Internal Factors for Chinese Students

The impact of the epidemic has delayed the entry of many Chinese students in 2020 by several months or even half a year, and some students who had planned to enter in 2020 have deferred their entry to 2021, resulting in a much higher number of UK visas being issued in 2021 than before the epidemic. At the same time, although the epidemic is an unpredictable and unknown presence and has impacted the international student market in China to some extent, for most families in China, studying abroad has long been part of family planning and may not be easily changed.

The interest and trust of Chinese students in the global QS rankings is also an important reason why

the number of students staying in the UK remains high. The annual QS ranking of global universities tends to compare academic quality and post-graduation employer satisfaction more than other rankings, and graduates from the top 200 QS ranked universities are more recognized when they return home to find work. According to the 2021 QS rankings, the UK has 27 universities in the QS top 200 rankings, a relatively high proportion, giving international students a wider range of choices.

2.2 External Factors Created by UK Universities and the Government

In the post-epidemic era, the development of new teaching modes in the UK is widely popular and supported by Chinese international students. Schools in the UK have gradually started to undertake joint models of online and offline teaching[1]. The impact of the new outbreak of Omicron has led some schools in the UK to move their courses online, particularly lectures for a wide range of students, while laboratory and practical classes will continue to be taught offline as much as possible. This allows international students to benefit from high-quality teaching resources while maintaining their safety. This mode of teaching has also gone some way to addressing the lack of sense of study abroad atmosphere and hands-on practice.

Secondly, the introduction of the UK government's employment policies for international students, including the new provision of a two-year work visa upon graduation from the study in the UK has attracted a large number of prospective students.

3. The Necessity for Research on Cross-Cultural Adaptation

3.1 What is the Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-Cultural Adaptation is the change in the way an individual thinks, feels, and behaves after continuous contact between one cultural group and another. The deeper meaning of this lies in the changes in perceptions, attitudes, and values of the person. There are two dimensions of intercultural adaptation: retaining one's identity with one's own culture and figuring out how to get along with the local cultural group. These two dimensions are integrated to form four attitudes to intercultural adaptation: those who consider it equally important to maintain their own culture and to relate to the local social group is called the attitude of integration; those who only maintain their own culture and do not value their relationship with the local social and cultural group is called the attitude of separation; those who value their relationship with the local social and cultural group without considering maintaining their own culture is called the attitude of blend in; and finally, those who neither maintain their own culture nor value their relationship with the local social and cultural group is called have an attitude toward marginalization strategies [3].

Under the influence of cultural self-confidence and cultural consciousness, Chinese students in the UK usually adopt the strategy of 'integration', which has the least impact on them. Therefore, this essay investigates the changes in the intercultural adaptation of Chinese students in the UK under the influence of the "integration" strategy.

3.2 Why study Cross-Cultural Adaptation

International students have to adapt to different cultural backgrounds, values, habits of thought, and even religious beliefs in different countries, so international students generally face the problem of cultural adaptation. Whether overseas Chinese students can complete their studies and serve their country with what they have learned is closely related to their ability to complete cross-cultural adaptation[2]. Therefore, studying the intercultural adaptation and coping strategies of overseas Chinese students in the post-epidemic era not only has practical significance for enhancing the intercultural adaptation ability of international students but also contributes to the education and cultivation of Chinese talents.

In the post-epidemic era, the emergence of online teaching and co-operative education for the consideration of epidemic prevention has enriched the definition of traditional study abroad, and the gains and effects of intercultural adaptation based on the online study abroad model are still being tested over time. The study of the intercultural adaptation of Chinese students in the UK in this new era is not only to provide reference and guidance for students who wish to study abroad but also to provide a new direction for the development of studying abroad.

4. The Common Problems of Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Chinese Students in UK

4.1 Adaptation to language

The language barrier is the main problem for Chinese students to understand the local culture and integrate into the local study life in the UK. Chinese and English are two completely different language systems, and the teaching of English on paper in China brings challenges to the oral communication of Chinese students. Due to the lack of proficiency in the English language, most Chinese students are only able to communicate with local students on a superficial level when they first arrive in the UK and are limited in their ability to communicate at a deeper level due to their infancy of the English language. This lack of language fluency, combined with differences in language habits and ways of thinking, leads to inevitable negative emotions such as anxiety, isolation, and fear in the early stages of study [2]. Scholars have found that international students with a good command of English adapt relatively well to cross-cultural situations, excluding factors such as gender, personality, and religious beliefs [8].

4.2 Adaptation to Teaching Modes

The different teaching modes of China and the West are also important influencing factors in the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students. The real-life research shows that the teaching style of teachers and the mode of teacher-student interaction under the British teaching mode can also cause difficulties for international students in intercultural academic adaptation. Unlike the lecture-based teaching in China, the UK teaching style tends to incorporate more student-oriented teaching modes such as "Seminar" and "Tutorial", and teachers tend to teach in a guided rather than an indoctrination style. Therefore, at the beginning of their studies, Chinese students lack knowledge of the teaching styles in unfamiliar academic systems and lack guidance in adapting to the different teaching styles in unfamiliar educational models and therefore have difficulties in completing various learning tasks such as group work and group discussions. Many Chinese students choose not to participate in classroom activities to avoid risk and embarrassment due to the influence of long-standing Confucianism in China, where teachers are seen as authorities and transiently unable to adapt to the multi-interactive learning mode of the classroom.

4.3 Adaptation to Individual life

Individual Chinese students' factors including family social background, perception of cultural differences between China and Britain, and personal psychological quality are also essential factors affecting their cross-cultural adaptation. The common problem is that each international student needs to complete the procedures necessary for studying in the UK within a short period, and at the same time, they need to find out about their daily lifestyle, which will make Chinese students feel more uncomfortable in a foreign country if they cannot live independently. As Chinese students are generally conservative and have little knowledge of British history, culture, and values before they go abroad, their values are still in an unformed stage of transformation. They have heard about British customs and culture and education styles but do not have the corresponding countermeasures to deal with them.

5. New features of cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese students in the post-epidemic era

According to UKCISA (2021) and HESAI (2021), the number of Chinese students in the UK has been steadily increasing over the last decade and the number of Chinese students far exceeds that of any other nationality. China is the only country to see a significant increase in student numbers in the 2020-2021 academic year. The number of Chinese students in the UK has grown at an average annual rate of around 9% over the decade 2010-2021, representing around 20% of all international students. This means that one in five international students is Chinese. Therefore, in the post-epidemic era when the number of Chinese students has increased dramatically, and with the combination of online and offline study models, the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in the UK has quietly undergone some contemporary changes amid the commonalities, with a gradual and widespread emergence of an 'integrated' cross-cultural adaptation.

5.1 The New State of 'Separate' Intercultural Adaptation

5.1.1 'Separate' adaptation to the English language

When studying in the UK, fluency in English can be seen as a form of cultural capital that plays an important role in everyday communication and relationship building. One of the attractions and challenges of studying in the UK for Chinese students is that they can improve their English in a short period through immersion in the English language, gaining confidence, and faster integration into UK life.

However, the lack of diversity in the admissions structure of some schools in the UK over the past few years has resulted in a high proportion of Chinese students in one major or in one class, which can hinder the normal communication between Chinese students and native British students or even students from other countries to a certain extent. Furthermore, in the early stages of intercultural adjustment, Chinese students instinctively prefer to 'huddle' and are unable to overcome their fears and give up practicing the English language. The lack of English communication in intercultural communication is one of the major reasons why Chinese students are unable to make the appropriate intercultural adjustment [7]. Under the influence of the epidemic, the large number of online classes has reduced the communication between Chinese students and British students, resulting in a further reduction in language practice.

5.1.2 Interpersonal 'Separation' Adaptation

Relationships with others are a very important part of meeting one's emotional needs. Poor language expression and communication also directly limit the social situation of Chinese students in the UK. The lack of deep surface-level communication prevents Chinese students from developing cultural and internal communication with native British students. Some survey also found that students from Asian countries, which are more influenced by collective culture, tend to have a harder time making friends than their European counterparts. Most Chinese students have difficulty reaching out to non-Chinese students, and most do not have non-Chinese friends. When the original classrooms and campus clubs provide opportunities for interaction between students, they provide an effective opportunity to build friendships. Previously, students also felt that these 'contact conditions' allowed them to benefit from shared learning, however, in the post-epidemic era, the large number of online courses and self-segregation of students has forced Chinese students to reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction and cultural integration with local UK students. Some Chinese students began to approach socializing with local students negatively and instead stayed in their comfort zone of Chinese students [6].

5.2 A new state of 'integrated' intercultural adaptation

5.2.1 Sino-UK Co-operative Education Stimulates 'Integrated' Adaptation

As an important development in China's talent development, more and more Sino-UK co-operative education programs are moving to a hybrid online and offline talent development model in the post-epidemic era. In China, students to be abroad are allowed to carry out simulated practical applications, learn about British history and culture, engage in real-life emotional experiences and behavioral learning, and carry out cross-cultural competence enhancement learning in an all-round way, which to a certain extent helps to enhance students' cultural and psychological adaptation and social adjustment ability[4].

At the same time, the Sino-UK cooperation is not only about learning the British teaching model, but also about combining Chinese characteristics to make more international students aware of their cultural imprint, so that they can seek common ground while reserving differences and promoting 'integrated' cross-cultural adaptation. For international students, they can selectively adopt and integrate the excellent culture of the host country while preserving their own original culture, to become international talents with an international perspective, while observing the rules and regulations of the host country.

5.2.2 Social media helps to 'integrate' adaptation

With social media becoming an integral part of international students' social life, Chinese students use social networks in China to contact their relatives and friends from their home country to reduce the pressure of living in the language. At the same time, due to the uncertainty and anxiety that comes with the external environment of studying abroad, international students often turn to the media to meet their growing information needs, such as catching up on current news and learning about local customs and traditions. The media becomes an intermediary for international students to maintain old social feelings

and quickly establish new social relationships. At the same time, an increasing number of international students are creating self-published media to share their lives and insights about studying abroad, to inform and help prepare subsequent international students.

However, it is worth noting that social media is not always a positive aid to the international student community[5] and that over-reliance on local social networks consumes a lot of time and energy and can hurt offline social relationships. Over-reliance on the home country's social media can lead to cultural shock in terms of cross-cultural adaptation, and differences in social media usage habits can instead deepen the perception of cultural differences among international students. The emergence of more social accounts about the British Red Scarf, British Smarties, etc. hinders international students' potential for self-exploration and creates the undesirable phenomenon of seeing things in the UK from a Chinese perspective.

6. How to improve the cross-cultural adaptation ability of Chinese international students in the post-epidemic era

6.1 Preparing international students for their stay in the UK

In today's era of globalization and rapid media development, international students can learn about the common problems they may encounter in the process of studying abroad through different books, media, and from their friends before they go abroad, and make plans to solve and cope with them in advance. Pre-study preparation is about forming effective psychological expectations and establishing coping mechanisms in advance so that students are prepared for the real social situations they will encounter when they arrive in the UK.

6.2 Schools develop appropriate early warning mechanisms for cross-cultural adaptation risks

In the post-epidemic era, schools can set up an early warning mechanism for intercultural adaptation risks, i.e. using new media to set up an online intercultural adaptation service platform, so that they can understand the intercultural adaptation situation of overseas students for the first time, and also let international students have a place to look for solutions in a time when they need help.

At the same time, the cross-cultural adaptation risk warning mechanism can also help to establish cross-cultural adaptation profiles of Chinese students in the UK in each school, conduct a psychological assessment of students before studying abroad, and take targeted preventive measures for students with adverse trends to prevent adverse events from occurring. Secondly, we will keep abreast of the psychological health of students in the early stages of their studies and provide appropriate assistance and response measures.

In the process of helping international students to adapt to cross-culture, schools should generally do a good job of prevention in the early stage, participate in the process and summarize and generalize at the later stage, and summarize and generalize and apply the experience of Chinese international students' mental health and issues related to cross-cultural adaptation.

6.3 Improving Cultural Self-awareness and Cultural Self-confidence

During the process of cross-cultural adaptation, it is important to strengthen the cultivation of cultural self-awareness and cultural self-confidence, and emphasize the importance of seeking common ground while reserving differences. Cultural self-confidence is not a matter of eating the past, nor is it a matter of blind xenophobia. It is about not being arrogant about one's own culture or blindly admiring foreign cultures, and maintaining cultural certainty. The cultural imprint of each individual is a fact that cannot be erased. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, in the culture and customs of each nation. Only by improving your cultural communication skills, putting yourself in their place, broadening your horizons, and enhancing your tolerance in the process of cultural exchange can you greatly speed up the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Studying abroad is not only about learning foreign knowledge and improving one's competitiveness, but also about linking the dream of studying abroad to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, showing Chinese wisdom and Chinese values while integrating the best of Western culture, achieving innovation and progress, and contributing to the building of a community of human destiny.

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