The Use of WeChat by International Students in China from an Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract: *Along with the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (2012), international students in China become more diverse in nationalities. During this period, the rise of social media in China represented by Weibo and WeChat has changed the communication landscape of Chinese society. The usage of social media affects the intercultural psychological adaptation of international students variously. This research combines the use and satisfaction theory in communication with the study of intercultural adaptation in psychology, investigates the use statistics of WeChat by foreign students from two analytical frames including information acquisition and interpersonal communication. Research has found that the use of WeChat by international students in China is mainly based on information acquisition, and there is a slight correlation between interpersonal communication (emotional function) and psychological adaptation. In the era of social media, the intercultural adaptation of international students in China is under polarization development, one is positively active integration, and the other is constructing an "echo chamber" which is negatively.*

Keywords: *International students; The use of WeChat; Intercultural adaptation; Echo chamber effect*

Introduction

Over the last five years, with the continuing progress of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (2013), the group of international students in China has undergone a structural change. An increasing number of foreigners are opting to study in China. Based on the data reported by China's official media Xinhua Net, there were 492,200 international students from 196 countries and regions had come to study in China in 2018, Including 260,600 ones from 64 countries along the "Belt and Road", which took 52.95% of the total number (Xinhua Net, 2019).

At the same time, there was a more profound "communication revolution" undergoing at an unprecedented speed in China, the communication format transformed from traditional media centered to a social media centered one. For example, Weibo (the Chinese version of twitter) was born in 2010 and WeChat was initiated 2012. The emergence of social media improved the drawbacks of mass communication such as unit-direction and the lack of real-time interaction. It has the benefits of point-to-point interpersonal communication, like strong interaction, flexibility and a distinct individual style. Meanwhile, Chinese scholars has great expectation with social media due to their sociability, and they are considered to have the capacity to break the traditional "differential pattern" of social relations in Chinese society (Zhang, 2016).

The intercultural psychological adaptation of international students has always been the focus of research with educational psychology and intercultural adaptation study. The American anthropologist Kalvero Oberg (1995) put forward the concept of culture shock when analyzing the psychological process of intercultural sojourners, inspiring this fields of research to prosper. Interpersonal communication researcher William B. Gudykunst believes that anxiety and uncertainty are the most important features in the process of interaction with strangers, once enter a new environment, you will immediately experience the issue of lack of psychological security.

The trouble of identity recognition in the new situation, uncertainty to the near future and inability to behave properly can raise insecurities among the sojourners. To deal with this ambiguity, people need to acquire information (to reduce uncertainty) to relieve inner stress (anxiety). Thus, the management of uncertainty and anxiety has become the essential part to communicate with strangers (Gudykunst, 1995). This demonstrates the importance of information acquisition in the process of intercultural adaptation.

As a platform for information dissemination and interpersonal communication, WeChat has been continually discussed by researchers from various perspectives on its influence on interpersonal communication. WeChat is a rich media that uses various forms such as text, images, audio and video to disseminate information. During that process, WeChat also exerts the function of interpersonal communication. Many researchers have carried out in-depth research into WeChat's information dissemination and interpersonal communication functions. At the same time, the era of social media brought new context and themes to the study of international students' cultural adaptation. A thorough analysis of the relationship between the cultural adaptation and the use of new media by international students in China can help them overcome their psychological discomfort and improve the pertinence and effectiveness of cultural adaptation.

This research takes an intercultural communication psychology study method. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews are used to study media use and cultural adaptation among international students in China. Combining relevant literature, this research is aimed at examining the psychological impact of the use of social media (WeChat) by international students in China, based on psychological adaptation, and complemented by social adaptation,

Literature Review

Research on the Psychology of Intercultural Adaption

The definition of intercultural adaptation currently acknowledged by the academic community was first proposed by American anthropologists Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovitz. They believe that intercultural adaptation is the changes in two cultural patterns brought about by groups of individuals with two different cultures in the process of continuous contact (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1963).

Communication researcher Charles Berger suggested that there are two types of uncertainty experienced by sojourners in the culture shock process: behavioral and cognitive. William B. Gudykunst considered uncertainty and anxiety management to be the two keys to overcoming culture shock. Uncertainty lies on the cog-

nitive level and anxiety on the emotional level. The human psychological process ranges from the cognition to emotion, and finally manifests itself as behavior. As a result, the psychology of culture shock is hierarchical. Ward integrated previous research results, divided intercultural adaptation into two types: psychological adaptation and social adaptation, and proposed the ABC level of individual psychology in cultural shock: Affection, Behavior, and Cognition. Psychological adaptation refers to the psychological well-being and satisfaction of international students in an intercultural context. Social adaptation refers to the overall perception of international students of the local social environment, and whether they can effectively communicate with local people in a new cultural environment (Ward, 1996). Traditional schools mainly adopt quantitative research strategies, which is functionalist standpoint.

Based on this school of intercultural adaptation perspective, Chinese researchers have also conducted extensive research in recent years, including two aspects:

(1) Using quantitative research to explore the psychological variables that influence international students' intercultural adaptation. For instance, Huang Fei and others selected 373 international students from 6 universities in one central Chinese city to conduct psychological surveys. Their research focuses the level of psychological distress, cultural adaptation pressure and cultural adaptation strategies of international students. On this basis, the relevant analysis of each factor is conducted to find the relationship between the time international students have stayed in China and the pressure of cultural adaptation, strategies for cultural adjustment of international students in China (Huang Fei et al. 2019). However, in general, there is less systematic research on the intercultural psychology of international students from the perspective of psychological indicators.

(2) Studying the intercultural social adaptation of international students from the levels of social support, social integration, cultural distance, and social interaction. Wen Wen (2014) and others started from social interaction (level of interaction with Chinese people), and the background of international students in China (such as language, nationality, length of study in China), analyzed the social adaptation among international students from four latitudes, such as the level of interpersonal interaction, Chinese proficiency and the time stayed in China, cultural distance, satisfaction. Yang Yang (2018) researched living satisfaction, cultural distance, cultural integration strategies, social and cultural adaptation, and social support for 65 international students from the International Education College at universities in Hangzhou. According to the survey, living satisfaction of international students in China has a direct effect on social and cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation, and that social and cultural adaptation played an intermediary role; living satisfaction on social and cultural adaptation was influenced by both cultural integration strategies and cultural distance; the influence of socio-cultural adaptation on psychological adaptation was regulated by social support.

Research on Social Media Use and Intercultural Adaptation among International Students

Around 2010, the emergence of several social networking (SNS, social networks), such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and WhatsApp brought new hot spots to the study of intercultural adaptation of international students. In 2016, after analyzing 63 papers related to Informit, SAGE, Proquest, and Google Scholar's social

media use research by international students in the past decade, Sliman believed that research in this field mainly focused on two aspects: the first is that the use of social media facilitates international students' individual cultural adaptation, the second is the use of social media can promote the participation in teaching (Sleeman, Lang & Lemon, 2016).

At the level of individual cultural adaptation, many studies have shown that social media can play a role of "bridging space" in the cultural adaptation of international students and addresses their attachment needs. ① Numerous studies show that most international students use social media to help them keep in contact with their friends and family in their home countries (Krause, 2006; Wood, Barnes, Vivian, Scutter, & Stokes-Thompsom, 2010; Sandel, 2014; Lin et al, 2012). In a survey of Chinese students studying in Singapore, the researchers found that international students are still seeking information, affection and social support by establishing contact with people of their own country (Cheng & Yang, 2015); ② Additionally, social media is also an important tool for international students to establish cultural ties with their host country and is an important indicator in judging the cultural adaptation of international students. Li and Chen (2014) surveyed the use of social media by Chinese students studying in the United States and found that Chinese students use both Chinese social media (such as Renren) and American social media (Facebook). The use of host country's social media can help increasing connection with local people, and more contacts with people in the host country can increase the opportunities for international students to adapt to culture (Li & Chen, 2014); there are also studies found that the use of social media helps international students realize language adaptation in the process of cultural integration. A three-month follow-up survey on international students in the US showed that the use of digital media helped international students increase their confidence in learning the host country's language and had played a significant role in language adaptation (Qiu, 2011).

International students use social media to connect with friends and family in their home countries, meanwhile it is also building a virtual boundary (Lee, Lee & Jang, 2011; Lee & Ranta, 2014; Mikal et al, 2015; Olding, 2013; Rahman, 2014; Tian, 2015). Odin (2013) studied how international students use Facebook at Australian universities. It turns out that international students always enjoy interacting with people from the same or similar cultural circles, especially Chinese students. Odin pointed out that for some international students, communicating with people from the same ethnic group via social media constitutes a cultural barrier, and international students may isolate themselves from the host country's culture (Olding, 2013). A survey on Chinese students studying in Korea by Li et al (2011) shows that the use of social media in their home country (China) has a negative impact on their integration into Korean culture. The phenomenon of building cultural barriers through social media can be seen from the diverse use of social platforms. While Facebook is the most widely used social media in the world, it is not the most popular platform for international students to use (Lee & Jang, 2011). Research have shown that Chinese students are more likely to use Chinese social media. A survey carried out by Shao et al. (2013) among Chinese students at Australian universities found that all Chinese students have Facebook accounts, 12% have never actually used the platform, and 50% of them prefer to use Qzone, 70 % of Chinese international students use Renren (Saw, Abbott, Donaghey & McDonald, 2013). This trend of Chinese students using social media has also been confirmed in other studies (Gomes et al, 2014; N. Park et al, 2014; Rahman, 2014; Tian, 2015).

With the introduction of the new media environment, the study of intercultural adaptation gave rise to a new interpretational paradigm--the paradigm of constructivism.

The use of social media breaks down geographic boundaries, reduces the distance between different cultural spaces, and gives international students with a new model of identity. The theory is based on the changes in the identity of international students, which caused by the shifts in the concept of time and space brought about by social media. The analysis of the use of social media by international students through the relationship between media use, identity, and cultural adaptation, can have a considerable explanatory power. Martin and Lizwei's studies (2014) about Chinese and Indian students at Australian universities shows that when students from these two countries use social media, they create a hybrid social space between their home country and the host country, which effectively contributed to cultural adaptation. Social media has created a complexly syncretic sense of place. The use of media is a fusion of in place and habitation. International students use laptops and smart phones to deliver content from their home country ("back home") to the host country ("out here"), thus "back home" becomes an integral part of "out here". At the same time, "back home" and "out here" are fragmented and reterritorialized, and finally blended. In other words, to international students in Melbourne, the construction of Melbourne's "out here" is mixed with the country of the motherland "back home", and the latter "Melbourne" is a scene with fusion characteristics. In an age of social media, intercultural adaptation of international students is no longer a passive process, but a process of being in close touch with the friends and family of international students. The medium has changed time and space, creating translocality, and individual foreign students have translocal subjectivity (Martin & Rizvi, 2014). Kim et al. (2009) believed that this type of mixture "offers the possibility of reinterpret cultural differences through negotiation without conflict".

Research on the Use of WeChat by Foreign Students in China

Communication researchers in China have also carried out numerous useful exploratory studies on the phenomenon of intercultural adaptation achieved using WeChat by international students in China. The most innovative and representative ones are: Researcher Kuang Wenbo and Wu Xiaoli (2019) analyzed and studied the WeChat usage behavior and influence factors of foreign students in China, constructed a intercultural adaptation model for the use of WeChat from the perspective of new media usage. Researcher Ma Hong and Liu Wei (2018) elaborated on the technology and culture of new media, they introduced the positive impact of new media technologies on the cultural adaptation of international students in detail. Researcher Ha Jiaying (2017) analyzed the online social supporting status of foreign students in China using WeChat, and believed that WeChat had played a positive role in rebuilding the interpersonal network and improving the Chinese skill of international students in the host country. Researcher Jin Hengjiang and Zhang Guoliang (2017) examined the impact of new media on international students coming to China from the perspective of social integration, and found that the use of WeChat has a positive impact on improving the Chinese social identity and social relationship of foreign students in China.

Researches on the use of social platforms and intercultural psychological adaptation of overseas students mainly focused on quantitative surveys, and were based on the specific model relationship, they explored the relationship between media use, identity, and cultural adaptation. Most of the concerned groups are international students who go to the US, Australia and other countries, especially Chinese students. There is little research on the usage of WeChat platform by foreign students in China.

There has been a trend towards a profound cross-integration of communication and psychology in intercul-

tural adaptation research across the country, using paradigms and scales of research on mature psychology (education psychology) to conduct research based on the presentation of data on individual psychological conditions, which overcoming the shortage that the traditional study of the "use and satisfaction" theory, that not be able to focus on gaps in micro-psychology, and has a positive exploratory meaning.

In studying the relationship between social media (WeChat) and intercultural adaptability, Chinese domestic research starts primarily from the perspective of foreign students using WeChat. From a functional perspective, international students use a certain function of social media (WeChat) to achieve their objectives. The research still follows the tradition of the "use and satisfaction" theory in communication, ignoring the discussion of the relationship between media use, identity, and cultural adaptation.

Research Questions

International students who come to China will feel a psychological distress when they enter a new environment. Acquiring information is an effective way of reducing uncertainty and alleviating internal stress (anxiety) (Gudykunst, 1995). The biggest difference between the social platform represented by WeChat and the mass media is that the social platform itself is an information and interpersonal communication platform. The influence of WeChat on the intercultural adaptation of international students in China can be developed from two dimensions: the acquisition of information (distribution of information) and emotional function (interpersonal communication).

This paper follows the theoretical distinction of Ward (1996). The intercultural adaptation of foreign students in Chinese is divided into two parts: social adaptation and psychological adaptation, primarily from the point of view of the psychological adaptation of international students, considering social adaptation, and focusing on three aspects:

(1) The use of WeChat by international students (such as the frequency of use of WeChat, the WeChat features used, the purpose of using WeChat, etc.).

(2) The relationship between the information acquisition function used by WeChat and the psychological adaptation of foreign students.

(3) The relationship between the interpersonal communication function (emotional function) of WeChat and the psychological adaptation of international students.

Research Methods

In terms of research methods, domestic and foreign research tends to combine questionnaire surveys with in-depth interviews, and mutual complementation between quantitative and qualitative research. The number of overseas students coming to China has dropped sharply due to the Covid-19 epidemic, so the sample of this research had forced to confine to the South Asian students who stayed in China, which limited the size of the survey sample. However, the researchers of this paper teach in a Chinese-based university for overseas

students, which makes it possible to deliver communication classes to the international students. With this advantage in research, in terms of methods, the researchers tried to use media usage logs (in the form of international students submitting relevant classroom assignments) to increase research reliability. The duration of the research is one semester (half a year).

The content of the questionnaire of the Media (WeChat) Use and the Intercultural Adaptation Scale involves: ① demographic indicators of international students in China; ② survey of WeChat usage; ③ survey of the psychological state of international students, which used three major psychological scales for reference: the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI-18), the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students and the Cultural of Coping Inventory, which incorporates the markers of the psychological state of the international students (psychological adaptation), the degree of integration of foreign students into Chinese society and the degree of perception of Chinese culture (social adaptation) have been appropriately modified.

Basic Data

Demographic Information of Survey Subjects

This study examined international students in the 2018 South Asian class at a university in Peking, used questionnaire to collect basic data by supplemented media usage logs (such as written questions on "What to do with WeChat", "My WeChat friends" et al) and in-depth interviews, combining qualitative research with quantitative research, and adopting a small sample to improve the reliability of the research. A total of 34 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 34 were retrieved, with 33 valid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 97%.

Table 1. Demographic information of survey subjects

		(N=33)%
Gender	Male	63.3%
	Female	36.4%
Age	18-23	42.4%
	24-29	54.2%
	30-35	3%
Chinese Proficiency	Intermediate	24.2%
	Advanced	75.8%
Time of Stay in China	12-24 mouths	3%
	24-36 mouths	18.2%
	More than 36 mouths	78.8%
Education Level	Middle school student	6.1%
	Undergraduate	90.9%
	Master student	3%

Table 1 presents basic information on survey subjects. Because it was the junior year, the students in this class had generally spent more than three years in China, and their Chinese proficiency was relatively high (76% of

the students have reached the advanced level). The students in this class were rather old, but it was found that many students had intercultural experiences before coming to China. This type of intercultural experience allowed them to adjust psychologically after arriving in China.

The Use Status of WeChat by International Students

Table 2. The use of WeChat by international students

	Options	Percentage (N=33)%
Have you ever used WeChat before studying in China	Yes	63.3%
	No	36.4%
How do you add friends (multiple choice)	Wechat number	90.9%
	Phone number	84.8%
	Check out people nearby	6.1%
	Scan QR code	93.9%
	Drift bottle	3.0%
The main purpose of using WeChat (multiple choice)	Information exchange	90.9%
	Keep in touch with acquaintances	81.8%
	Make new people	51.5%
	Pass the time: trivial talk	9.1%
Why do you choose WeChat (multiple choice)	Facilitate communication	90.9%
	People around use it	39.4%
	Less charge	12.1%
	Use easily	36.4%
	Unique function	45.5%
	Expand the social circle	3.0%
Frequency of using WeChat	More than 20 times a day	21.2%
	10-20 times a day	6.1%
	5-10 times	0%
	Less than 5 times	3%
	Never counted, but used frequently	69.7%

Basic content for the WeChat use survey includes whether you have used WeChat before coming to China, the method to add friends, the main ways of using WeChat, why you choose WeChat, and the number of times you open WeChat (daily average).

WeChat is the most widely used social media in China. However, before arriving in China, international students used their home country's social media platforms mostly. The poll found that 63.6% of international students in China have had used WeChat before coming to China, showing that WeChat already had a relatively strong influence and had launched in many countries and regions. According to the "WeChat 2018 Impact Report", the current use of WeChat accounts for 34% of China Mobile's data traffic, while Facebook accounts for just 14.1% of mobile data traffic in North America (WeChat 2018 Impact Report).

As for the number of daily uses of WeChat, 69.7% of international students believe that WeChat is used frequently, 21.2% of international students open WeChat more than 20 times a day, and 9.1% of international students open WeChat less than 20 times a day. It is not difficult to find that nearly 70% of international students have used WeChat as their main information communication tool. It should be noted here that students who do not use WeChat frequently have needs to communicate with others, but they insist on using social media platforms commonly used in their countries of origin.

Research by Sinanan and Gomes (2020) found that Korean students tend to use the Korean Kakao Talking platform to communicate with family and old friends. For international students, the social platform from their home plays a more significant role in maintaining the information connection and cultural identity with the country of origin.

> *I usually use WeChat. I think he (it) is convenient. You don't need to look for money to buy things normally. In addition, I can contact teachers and classmates. If I don't know how to work, I can directly find your classmates. It can be quite convenient to asking for leave when you are sick. I can use WeChat to submit my homework... But I use WeChat for video with relatives, and to connect with my friends in India. We contacted each day (using WeChat) because they have not installed WeChat...WeChat is what I contacted with my classmates and friends in China...*
>
> *("What do I do with WeChat" small homework, Indian student "Modi" [No. YDM02] Interview Record)*

As for “Why do you use WeChat”, 90.9% of international students believe WeChat is convenient for communication, 45.5% of international students consider WeChat has unique functions, and 39.4% of international students use WeChat because everyone around them uses it. In terms of low costs and expanding the social circle, they have little impact on choosing WeChat for international students.

In terms of “the main purpose of using WeChat”, 90.9% of international students use WeChat to exchange information, 81.8% of international students believe that WeChat can keep in touch with acquaintances, and 50.1% of international students believe that WeChat can make new friends and only 9.1% of international students use WeChat for trivial talk.

It should be noted that in the questionnaire of this research, an open question of “the five WeChat friends I recently contacted” was set up, involving the name, the nationality, location, the relationship between the friend and subjects, and the topic of communication between the friend and subjects. The results of the analysis show that most of the WeChat friends of international students are from their classmates (one of the reasons is that WeChat groups have become an important tool for class management), followed by other domestic students in their school, and thirdly are the teachers, academic staff and Chinese students in student clubs (Chinese and Foreign Students Exchange Meeting).

A Pakistani student provided the researchers with a list of all her WeChat friends. Through interviews, the researcher found that her 72 WeChat friends are all in Peking, and 43 of her friends are classmates. Teachers, faculties and Chinese students accounted for 16 people. The remaining 13 are all Pakistani students she can contact at school.

I will ask them (Pakistani students in school) where they can print and where they can find the teacher's mailbox to hand in my homework. In addition, we will also talk about the fun places in Peking and where delicious restaurants are located. We'll go to the mall together... Of course, when you're in trouble in Peking, the first thing I think about is reaching out to them for help.

(Interview with Pakistani girl [No. BJSTF01] on the afternoon of December 3, 2019)

Lin Jih-Hsuan et al. (2011) believe that social media has two major functions: to maintain existing social relationships and to create new social ties. The social relations of international students in the host country can be divided into three types: contact with friends in their home country, contact with international students from other countries studying in the host country, and contact with people from the host country. Sinanan and Gomes (2020) believe that digital media (social media) provides international students with the possibility of identity recognition, as well as instrumental support (life, economic, and psychological). In the research of the two scholars on international students in Australia and Singapore, they have found international students like to seek help from friends who are in a common situation in addition to their families. To make friends with locals of the host country allows them to rediscover a sense of psychological belonging and to begin to build a new identity in the new environment. From this perspective, the use of social media solves identity anxiety in intercultural adaptation and has a positive impact on adaptation.

After examining WeChat using logs and in-depth interviews, the researchers have found the main usage of WeChat lies in daily communication for international students in China, such as communicate with teachers and classmates, ask questions about class, homework, help the students to contact teachers, ask their classmates for advice and electronic payment. Many international students in China choose to install WeChat due to group pressure (teachers and Chinese students use it). Based on the results of the two surveys of “Use of WeChat” and “Main Purpose”, it is not difficult to find that compared to the WeChat platform, which has continuously expanded its functions and increased applications, its appeals to international students in China is actually the simplest and most basic applications. International students pay no attention to the various functions developed by the APP (such as walkie-talkie, shaking, nearby people, etc.) and will use them in no other way than to meet the information needs. However, in the in-depth investigation, international students generally believe that their Chinese level has been improved by using WeChat, which can provide them with the function of language communication.

Intercultural Psychology of International Students

In order to better understand the intercultural psychological status of international students, this study draws on the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI-18), the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students and the Cultural of Coping Inventory. Studies have been carried out on the psychological symptoms, pressure, cultural adaptation pressure, physical symptoms and other factors of international students in China.

The results of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI-18, Table 3) indicate that most international students experience varying degrees of anxiety; while the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students (Table 4) shows that international students are generally psychologically sensitive (perceived discrimination) and homesick in the intercultural context. In terms of cultural coping strategies, through the COPE survey and

daily interviews for international students in China, it can be found that most international students adopt a positive response when facing intercultural pressure.

Table 3. Result of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI-18)

Variable	x±s	Cronbach α
Somatization	0.57±1.24	0.85
Melancholy	0.67±1.09	0.76
Anxiety	0.83±1.50	0.84
BSI-18total score	0.74±1.15	0.96

Table 4. Result of the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students

Variable	Average	Cronbach α total co-efficient is 0.87
Perceived Discrimination	2.7188	0.79
Homesick	3.0000	0.70
Perceived resentment	2.3152	0.73
Frightened	1.8258	0.63

When I first got off the plane and arrived at school, I felt very helpless. I don't know anyone, and I don't know anyone to turn to for help. Although I had learned some Chinese in my own country before, but I didn't dare to ask for help... Sitting in the taxi coming to the school, the driver kept talking. I didn't understand a word. However, I kept nodding and pretended that I could understand...Apart from going to class and interacting with my classmates, I rarely go out...Although the teacher encourages us to have "language partners" with Chinese people, we should associate more with Chinese people, and Chinese people are also very friendly to us. But it's just "fear"... I don't know if I will say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. Teacher, I am very upset.

When I am free, I feel very lonely and often miss home. Fortunately, the mobile phone is very convenient now, I let my family and best friends also install the WeChat APP. WeChat is very convenient. We do video-chat for a while every day, and then I will browse their WeChat moments to see what's new and leave a comment. I will update my own moments, and I hope they will leave a message.

I will also check WeChat moments of my Chinese friends. By the way, why don't you open your moments, teacher? I am very interested in the life of Chinese friends.
I like to watch TV series and cartoons to pass the time... I love to watch Chinese cartoons, such as "Xiong Da and Xiong Er" ("Boonies Bears"), and I also watched "Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf" before... I think the cartoons are very interesting ...Because their Chinese is relatively simple and the content is more interesting, so I can watch the animation and learn Chinese at the same time.

(From the assignment of the "Little Prince" of Pakistan [No. BJSTM01])

The "little prince" (the nickname I gave him) from Pakistan is a very introverted, the kind of a shy boy who blushes when answering questions in class. However, he took the initiative to talk to the teacher about his inner anxiety and panic, and the embarrassment that had happened to him through his homework. It can be seen that faced with intercultural pressure, he has adopted a proactive strategy to portray himself as a "bystander". Actually, it also has "proactive" efforts, such as "Moments of Brushing", pay attention to Chinese friends, and even ask teachers to update Moments.

(From the lecture observation log of the instructor)

Research Findings

After grasping the basic situation of international students' WeChat use and their psychological conditions, to further explore the relation between the use of WeChat and intercultural adaptation by intercultural students, this study uses SPSS to carry out statistical processing such as factor analysis and regression analysis with relevant data. By integrating the use of WeChat, the Brief Symptom Inventory, the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students and the Cultural of Coping Inventory, the study summarizes the sociocultural adaptation of international students in four dimensions: communicative willingness, cultural learning, communicative activity, and cultural understanding.

Table 5. Factor analysis of the social and sociocultural adaptation items

Variable	Communicative willingness	Cultural learning	Communicative activity	Cultural understanding
Want to make friends with Chinese	0.724			
Let Chinese friends know me	0.801			
Understand local values	0.837			
I miss my family and hometown		-0.771		
I learn courses about Chinese culture		0.733		
I watch Chinese movies and listen to the news		0.539		
I participate in activities orga-nized by Chinese students			0.821	
I will travel when I have time			-0.694	
I can face those who stare at me			0.541	
Understand the true feelings of the Chinese			0.849	
Understand Chinese jokes and humor			0.693	

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: maximum variance and Kaiser normalization; rotation fusion for 5 iterations; only load factor >0.5 is reported.

Table 6. Results of multiple linear regression between the use of WeChat and sociocultural adaptation by international students

Variable	Willingness to communicate	Cultural learning	Communicative activity	Cultural understanding
Information acquisition	-.377*	-0.241	-.377*	-0.143
Interpersonal communication	0.147	-0.322	0.065	0.141

The result of factor analysis (Cronbach α=0.67) shows that the social behavior of international students is strongly related to their intercultural adaptation. Regression analysis using WeChat's informational acquisition and interpersonal communication functions as variables (Table 6) found that interpersonal communication is not strongly related with the four factors, but it has a strong correlation with three questions: "I want to be friends with Chinese people"(B=0.397, P <0.05) "I watch Chinese movies and listen to the news" (B=-0.410, P <0.05) and "I will travel when I have time" (B=-0.526, P <0.05). This shows that in the process of intercultural adaptation of international students in China, the application function of social media represented by WeChat is still limited to the level of information transmission. The "emotional function" of social media has not been effectively reflected.

In the surveys, use logs and in-depth interviews of international students in China, the researchers have found that in the process of interacting with Chinese, the use of WeChat remains more at fuctional and instrumental level. Making it easier to communicate with teachers and classmates from China (asking for leave, asking questions, learning about classwork and other academic aspects), obtaining Chinese test information, and getting life assistance (WeChat payment) ...

Judging from Table 4 " Results of the Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) "for international students in China, the greatest stress on acculturation still comes from emotional support like "Homesick". In the 2012 intercultural Adaptation Survey of International Students by the researcher of this article, when subjects answer "Whom to ask for help when you are experiencing difficulties", they responded: ask classmates from their home country for help(31%), turn to their family (27%), and turn to students from different countries in the school (21%) and ask for help from Chinese students (21%). In this survey (2019), the results obtained are as follows: ask for help from classmates from home country (44%), ask for help from family (16%), ask for help from classmates in different countries in the school (24%) and ask for help from Chinese classmates (16%). The rise of WeChat didn't change the source of emotional support and assistance to international students.

Analysis and Discussion

Active Avoidance: The "Echo Chamber" in the Field of Intercultural Adaptation

Through data analysis, it can be found that international students in China use WeChat as an information acquisition platform and social platform. WeChat helps international students in their intercultural psychological adaptation. The use of WeChat by international students is mainly for information acquisition, but in terms of interpersonal communication (emotional function), the convenience of the platform provided by WeChat has resulted in a heightened alienation of interpersonal relationships between international students in China and their Chinese classmates and friends. The "information cocoon" and the "echo chamber" at the level of interpersonal communication on social networks are apparent in the field of intercultural adaptation of international students.

Bochner classified the types of international students' friends from the perspective of social psychology, and divided the interpersonal networks of international students into mono-cultural, bi-cultural, and multi-cultur-

al, and he thought different kinds of cultural circles have different effects on the intercultural adaptation of international students. The survey shows that international students can make new friends by using WeChat, which plays an important role in expanding the cultural circle of international students. Many studies have shown that the establishment of connection between foreign students and their host country classmates was helpful to the psychosocial adaptation of foreign students (Yang, 2009). However, after a diachronic study, comparing the data of 2012 (WeChat was not been popularized yet) with this research (WeChat has already been popularized), it is found that the emergence of WeChat has also reduced the choice of "seeking help from family in their mother country" (from 27% in 2012 to 16% in 2019) and "seeking help from Chinese friends" (from 21% in 2012 to 16% in 2019), but greatly increased the choice of "seeking help from students from home country" (from 31% in 2012 to 44% in 2019). The phenomenon of "grouping" and "getting together" in the social behavior of international students based on country is becoming more and more prominent.

Kuang Wenbo's investigation found that if there was not a strong desire to practice Chinese and understand Chinese culture, international students would not be motivated to interact with Chinese students, nor would they have Chinese friends. Interviewees said that they feel psychologically alone in a foreign country and mainly rely on online chat to relieve pressure. However, due to language problems, they had few local friends, and they mainly chatted with friends from their home country. Long-term depending on network communication and lacking face-to-face interpersonal communication will impair their psychological intercultural adaptation in a way. As for the number of WeChat friends of international students, 42.05% of international students have less than 50 WeChat friends, and the number of Chinese friends is less than 10%, accounting for 43.18%. It can be seen that the number of WeChat friends of foreign students is relatively small, and the proportion of Chinese friends is even smaller (Kuang & Wu, 2019).

Social media is generally convenient for international students to make friends with people from the same hometown in the host country, coming from the same culture and having the same experience of living in the host country has become a great motivation for their communications. However, Sinanan and Gomes (2020) have found in the surveys in Australia and Singapore that none of the international students used Facebook to make new friends. Everyone uses social media to connect with old friends in their own country.

Judging from the data in Table 9 "The use of WeChat is correlated with the results of the COPE test", the use of WeChat by international students in China is a strategy to actively respond to intercultural pressure. However, through the investigation of their social adaptation, the researchers have found that the active use of social media such as WeChat has become a measure to "help" international students escape the pressure of living in China and build their own "information cocoons", which is a negative measure to deal with pressure.

The concept of "Information Cocoons" was proposed in the book "Information Utopia" (2006) by American law professor Keith Sunstein. He pointed out that in the Internet age, with the development of network technology and the rapid expansion of information, everyone can freely choose the topic of concern and can create a personal daily newspaper according to their own preferences, but the information selection behavior will lead to the formation of the "Information Cocoon". When an individual only pays attention to self-selected content or content that can be pleasing himself, and reduces contact with other information, they will gradually become chained in the self-woven "cocoon room" like a silkworm over time. Sunstein believes that

this will lead to a narrow vision and closed or even polarized thinking, which in turn strengthen prejudice and create irrational extremism.

In communication studies, the tendency of social media is named the "echo chamber ". Most of the current research focus on the impact of social networks on the audience's news information reception (Flaxman, Goel & Rao, 2016; Fletcher & Nielsen: 2018), and there is little attention to the phenomenon of "echo chamber" in the interpersonal communication of international students. Due to the uniqueness of the intercultural context and identity of the international student, the features of the use of information in the era of social media have become more evident.

Therefore, considering the two dimensions of intercultural adaptation and social adaptation of international students in China, it is not difficult to find that when faced with intercultural pressure, most international students will use positive coping methods, such as Using WeChat to resolve their psychological problems. To a certain extent, the use of WeChat to communicate with Chinese people meets its utilitarian purpose, it can indeed help "improve Chinese language skills" and "understand Chinese culture." However, when face with the "emotional" needs of social adaptation, social media such as WeChat is likely to transform into a way of "actively evasion" and become a tool for international students to "build a psychological line of defense", which on the contrary leads to greater tension in intercultural psychology.

Shortcomings of the Study

Due to the epidemic, the scale of international students coming to China has been greatly affected since 2020, resulting in a serious shortage of samples in this study and the universality of research conclusions being affected. After the restoration of Chinese and foreign exchanges, it is still necessary to continue conducting large-scale sample research.

The "echo chamber" in the intercultural adaptation of international students in the social media era discovered in this study is only presented through statistical data relationships. To further demonstrate this phenomenon, it is necessary to use technologies such as network tracking. This point still needs to be improved in the future under the technical conditions allowance.

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