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Reverse Culture Shock in the Age of Social Media

A Study on Whether Microblogging Has a Positive Effect on Reduction of Reverse Culture Shock: A Weibo Case

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Master of Communication Thesis

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Abstract

When sojourners come back to their home country, they have to suffer a certain degree of symptoms such as feelings of alienation, discomfort and abnormality. This phenomenon is called "reverse culture shock". However in the last decade the industry of social media has been growing rapidly, including microblog such as China's Weibo. Microblogging has a positive effect on building common ground and mutual understanding, enhancing feelings of intimacy and connectedness with others. Thanks to social media sojourners have a bridge connecting themselves and their home countries and close people there. So this study aims to figure out whether these benefits of social media play a role in reducing sojourners' sense of reverse culture shock.

Keywords

Content

Introduction

As a student studying abroad for almost one and a half year, I have gained a lot of unique experience that apart me from my family and friends in my home country. When I returned to China after studying in Sweden for one year last summer, I realized how much I had changed because of such experience. I suffered from what I had changed for several days after I returned back home and had no idea how to readapt back to home quickly. But as time went on everything seemed back to normal. Through my classmates and some Chinese friends who have lived abroad for a long period of time, I found that many of them have similar experience when they come back.

However, during my stay in Sweden, I was not totally isolated from what happened in China. Thanks to Weibo, the most popular kind of social media having been growing rapidly in the last five years in China, I can easily keep up-to-date with what's going on in my home country and keep in touch with family and friends there, so even if I live thousands of kilometers away from my family and friends, there is still spiritual connection between us through communication on social media. However, even so, I still felt difficult in readjusting myself back home upon return.

According to Koester (1984), for returnees, it's critical to have communication with family and friends during their transition back home. While based on previous studies, Zhao & Rosson (2009) suggests that informal communication through computer-mediated communication technologies (CMC) helps build perception of others, develop mutual understanding about a fact and enhance feelings of intimacy and connectedness with others, and that contributes to better communication between returnees and their family and friends.

So based on my experience as well as previous research in this area, I came up with a research idea: since I still felt difficult to readapt to home culture even if I am a constant user of social media, which connects me and my family and friends in China, then due to limited development of communication technology decades ago, when those who lived abroad without using social media had little alternative ways of keeping up-to-date with current issues in their home country and keeping in touch with family and friends except making long-distance telephone call, did they experience more severe difficulty than we nowadays do in terms of readjusting to home culture when returning home?

So, specific to this study, I am interested in whether there is different re-entry experience between those who are constant users of social media when abroad and those who are not, and which side experiences more difficult readjustment process.

The Aim of The Study

In the age of social media, people living abroad can keep up-to-date with what's going on in their home country and keep in touch with family and friends much easier and faster than it used to be decades ago. Through social media, people living abroad have spiritual connection between themselves and their family and friends in their home countries. Here China's Weibo will be used as an example, trying to figure out whether people's sense of reverse culture shock after coming back from abroad has been decreasing in the age of social media. The theoretical frameworks in the field of culture shock, reverse culture shock, social media and microblogging will be used to guide this study.

Hypothesis:

By using microblog when living abroad, people's difficulty of readjusting to home culture when coming back to their home country is reduced. Constant use of microblog when abroad contributes to returnees' easier readaptation to their home culture and reduced severity of reverse culture shock.

Theoretical Background

1. Culture Shock

Macionis, John and Gerber (2010) define culture shock as "the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to immigration or a visit to a new country, or to a move between social environments, also a simple travel to another type of life". Culture shock is "consistently associated with a series of symptoms of discomfort, dislocation, and abnormality" (Lin, 2006, p.119), such as sense of alienation, anxiety, homesickness, loneliness and loss of familiarity. Culture shock occurs when "unpredictable cues are thrown at a person and that individual does not know how to respond" (Gaw, 2000). When one arrives in a new country, he/she has to adjust to new environment and experience some of these symptoms. Rohrlich & Martin (1991) claim that many problems of adjustment are caused by the cultural distance between the host and sojourner. 15% to 25% of all sojourners suffer severe culture shock (Mooradian B., 2004), the more ethnocentric a person is, the harder process of adjustment to a new culture he/she will face (Church 1982). Therefore, communication plays a critical role in helping new comers adapt to new cultures. Sojourners who actively interact and communicate with host suffer less difficulty of adaptation and enjoy more satisfaction (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Another important factor affecting adaptation is personality. Adjustment is not as difficult if the sojourner's personality fits in with the host cultural norms (Mooradian B., 2004) as well as be open enough and willing to interact with their host.

2. Reverse Culture Shock

When sojourners return home, they may experience the similar process of culture shock in readjusting to their home country. This phenomenon is called reverse culture shock (or re-entry shock). Reverse culture shock is defined as "an individual's difficulties and stressors in adjustment back to his or her home culture after completing an experience abroad" (Martin, 1993). Reverse culture shock results from "the psychosomatic and psychological consequences of the readjustment process to the primary culture" (Huff & Jennifer, 2001). Similar to the symptoms of culture shock, returnees suffering reverse culture shock also experience sense of alienation, anxiety, rejection and loss of familiarity. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) were among the first who look at the process of readjustment back home, claiming that "the only difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock is that the latter is not expected" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). One reason resulting in returnees' re-entry anxiety is that they have changed when abroad,

but family and friends around do not expect them to change (Martin, 1993). Many returnees are reported feeling alienated in their home countries because of their new cultural identity (Gaw, 2000). Interestingly, according to Koester (1984), those who are more successful in adjusting to another culture suffer more difficulty in readjusting back home.

Another reason resulting in reverse culture shock is that many people make preparations for the potential difficulties they may face when abroad, but they do not often prepare for the changes of their home when they return. (Sussman, 1986). Many sojourners believe that their home would not change while abroad, so when they return, they become out-of-date with what's going on in their home countries, including family and friends there, and that results in sense of alienation from people around and re-entry anxiety. They don't understand what people are talking about, why others react like this or that. The fact is that when sojourners are abroad, people and places in home countries are also changing (Sussman, 1986). So before sojourners return, it's important for them to be prepared for the change taking place at home, keep up-to-date with current issues there, and be aware of their own cultural change when abroad at the same time.

Another problem concerning the violation of returnees' expectation is that many people are not interested in listening to returnees' experience abroad, because some people might feel threatened or jealous of the returnee (Storti, 2001), others may think that the sojourner is showing off his/her experience, and that would annoy them. People in home country may not have the same enthusiasm concerning sojourners' experience abroad (Siebender, 1998). Lack of social support from home society may lead to more anxiety, loneliness, and feeling of loss (Mooradian B., 2004).

However, reverse culture shock is not always negative, it has some positive advantages (Uehara, 1986). Since returnees have gained many characteristics of another culture, including interpersonal (language, behavior, gesture) and physical (dressing, hairstyle) attributes, "their identity and 'self' become more unique in their home country" (Koester, 1984). They can "identify more than one culture and gain a new perspective" (Koester, 1984) towards their home society.

3. Models of Culture Shock & Reverse Culture Shock
It was early in 1960s when the term "culture shock" became popular through Canadian

anthropologist Kalervo Oberg's research. He elaborated the culture shock as an inevitable process that people go through when facing a new culture. Besides, he proposed a four-stage process of culture shock, also known as the U-curve model. The first stage is the honeymoon stage. At this stage, people feel extremely excited and curious about new environment, as well as have high expectations about what they might face. But not long after that, the novelty gradually dies away, the crisis stage takes place instead. At this stage, people feel frustrated, confused, anxious, lonely and unable to function normally due to the inadaptation to new cultural environment. The third stage is the recovery stage, during which things seem start to turn better. People start to make sense of rules, values, and norms of the new culture, and feel more comfortable in and appreciate the new culture. The fourth stage is called adjustment stage, at this stage people has completely integrated into new culture and environment and are able to function smoothly.

However, it is noteworthy that Oberg's identification of the U-curve is an extension of the four-stage culture shock hypothesis proposed by a Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955. Lysgaard proposed the hypothesis through a study on a group of Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. Lysgaard (1955) proposed that:

"Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community."

Lysgaard did not develop a diagram for illustration of his hypothesis though, Oberg's extension made the hypothesis more intuitive and straightforward.

The proposition of the U-curve hypothesis led to scholars' strong enthusiasm in the study of culture shock. As an extension of the U-curve model, Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) proposed a W-curve model by adding stages of reverse culture shock into the U-curve. The W-curve hypothesis claims that people go through the same stages (honeymoon, crisis, recovery, adjustment) when returning back to their home culture.

The W-curve: stages of adjustment and readjustment:

Based on Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn & Gallahorn (1963)

Picture from:

http://myerasmusblog.blogspot.se/2009/08/international-culture-communication.html

In addition to the U-curve and the W-curve stage models, there are other stage theories of culture shock as well (Pederson, 1995, p.3). Lesser & Peter (1957) proposed a three-stage process of culture shock, with first, spectator stage when sojourners arrive in a new culture; then second, involvement stage; and finally third, coming-to-terms stage, in which sojourners are integrated in the new culture. Torbiorn (1982) proposed his four-stage model of culture shock, including the first, the tourist stage; the second, the culture shock stage; the third, the conformist stage; and the fourth, the assimilation stage.

Along with the emergence of the U-curve and the W-curve model, critique of them occurs. Furnham and Bochner (1986) identified some problems in the U-curve model. First, there should be many dependent elements taken into account that affect the process of adjustment, such as homesickness, loneliness, depression and other attitude. Second, different individuals may start the adjustment process from different levels and change at different rates. Besides, not everyone experience the culture shock in a same way, different individual may have different reactions towards it depending on the new environmental factors as well as their personal factors and experience. Some might have high degree of anxiety, others not.

According to Pederson (1995), the most serious weakness of the U-curve and the W-curve model "is the implication of a smooth linear adaptive process" (Pederson, 1995), which is quite different from reality. Transition process goes on through a series of irregular and erratic change (Pederson, 1995). Part of this process is unconscious and another part is conscious since the new comers try to seek great success in the new environment. Also, the U-curve and the W-curve model fail to give reasons of why culture shock occurs, and they fail give suggestions on how to minimize its negative

effect.

Due to such fact that the results of research in this area are disconnected and quite contradictory, Kim (2005) suggests that it is difficult for individual researcher to get a clear objective of previous studies. Anyway, although study results in the field of culture shock vary a lot, there is no doubt that people experience difficulties and challenges in pursuing their goals when abroad and back home. Each individual may experience different degree of hardship though, it is important to make preparation for what might happen before departure abroad or home.

4. Social Media

According to Ahlqvist, Toni; Bäck, A., Halonen, M., Heinonen, S (2008), social media is defined as "the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks". Based on mobile and web-based technologies, social media provides a highly interactive means for individuals and organizations to share information and communicate. It has brought us revolutionary change in communication field.

In Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media is classified into six types:

1) Collaborative projects, e.g. Wikipedia;

2) Blogs & microblogs, e.g. Twitter;

3) Content communities, e.g. Youtube;

4) Social networking sites, e.g. Facebook;

5) Virtual game worlds, e.g. World of Warcraft;

6) Virtual social worlds, e.g. Second Life application (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), among which microblog is the focus of this paper by using China's Weibo as an example.

The difference between social media and traditional media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, books, broadcast, cable television and etc.) mainly lies in quality, frequency, reach, accessibility, usability, immediacy and permanence (Morgan; Jones; Hodges, 2012). To be specific:

1) Quality: social media is facing a challenge that the quality of content varies a lot, ranging from high-quality news to low-quality abusive language; while publications from traditional media often require a process of revision;

2) Frequency: a message may be posted and reposted several times on social media

without limit of time;

3) Reach: social media reaches audience in a less hierarchical, more decentralized way than traditional media;

4) Accessibility: the way of production of social media is more casual and accessible for the public than traditional media;

5) Usability: production of social media requires less specialized skills and knowledge than traditional media;

6) Immediacy: the time lag between communications produced by traditional media can be much longer (days, weeks, months) than those produced by social media. (Morgan; Jones; Hodges, 2012);

7) Permanence: messages produced by social media can be modified or deleted as the author wish, while in traditional media it is not possible once an article has been published.

Above contents are summarized from Morgan; Jones; Hodges (2012)

In a word, social media provides individuals and communities with a comparatively less costly and more accessible way of getting, publishing and sharing information in real time. People can feel free to exchange information without any specialized skills and knowledge. While for traditional media, before an article could be published, for instance, it always has to go through some revisions.

However, along with the growing popularity of social media, criticisms have been appearing. For instance, Nicholas (2012) argues that social media "chips away capacity for concentration and contemplation" in deep reading. In need of convenience, we would not choose non-rapid way of reading. (Nicholas, 2012). Aniket & Bongowon (2008) claims that the content on social media has a mixture of various information, some are true, others are not. Rumors frequently emerge due to "lack of available information for judging trustworthiness" (Aniket & Bongowon, 2008). Other controversies include how to prevent privacy rights from being captured by strangers without users' consent through social media, how to resist personal attack through comments and private messages in social media. There seems to be a correlation between the use of social media and cyber bullying, also such media has a negative impact especially on children and juveniles in relation to too much exposure of cigarettes, alcohols, drugs and sex. Supervision of information on social media is becoming essential.

5. Microblogging

As a new type of social media having been growing rapidly in the last decade, microblogging is another type of blogging that allows people to share small content such as short paragraphs, sentences, pictures and videos. Microblogging refers to "the activity that users broadcast brief text updated about small little things in their daily life and work activities" (McFedries, 2007). However, in reality, there are not only brief texts about small things in microblog, also many organizations, companies and even governmental agencies open accounts in microblog aiming at marketing and building public relations. Microblogging has the potential to become a platform for collaborative work between organizations (Zhao, et al, 2011). So this definition is questionable. Microblogging is used for various social purposes and has quickly become a popular means of online social networking. On Twitter, launched in 2006 and one of the most visited websites in the world, people update their information about families, friends, daily lives, and share information and opinions with each other (Java, Song, Finin, Tseng, 2007), and "seek knowledge and expertise in public tweets" (McFedries, 2007).

According to Java, Song, Finin, Tseng (2007), people's intentions of using Twitter are mainly the following:
1) Chatting with friends and family about what they are currently doing;
2) Sharing interesting or relevant information with friends and colleagues;
3) Reporting updated news and events;
4) Seeking relevant information for personal or professional use.
Above contents are summarized from Java, Song, Finin, Tseng (2007)

Similarly, Zhao & Rosson (2009) reported that the purposes of using Twitter varies a lot, ranging from keeping in touch with friends and colleagues, seeking interesting and useful information for one's career goal to looking for helps, opinions and releasing emotional stress (Zhao & Rosson, 2009).

Through the interview with 11 participants, Zhao & Rosson (2009) also summarized some benefits of microblogging and why people like to use it, they are:
1) Microblogging is viewed as an easy, convenient and less-costly way of sharing interesting things in daily lives;
2) Microblogging helps people keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues especially who are not in our life circle, maintain social relations with people who we

don't often see;

3) Real-time information is more valuable and useful than outdated information. When you don't see others, you can easily know what others are thinking about right now; Real-time information also helps arouse follow-up conversation with those live outside our life circle;

4) People can seek and gather information relevant for their personal or professional purpose, they follow those who share similar interests and values;

5) People tend to tweet when they think their update might be useful or interesting for others

6) Since there is a limitation of 140 characters in each message, users make minimal effort to share information and ideas; brevity also helps make each message succinct so that it is efficient for users to read huge amounts of information in a short amount of time;

7) Microblogging helps build perception of others so as to "reduce social cognitive cost in interaction" (Zhao & Rosson, 2009); relatively, the real-time messages helps maintain the feeling of proximity with friends, family and colleagues, including what they are doing, what they are thinking about in real-time, and makes it possible to build intimacy, professional relations, mutual understanding and common ground for future interaction.

Above contents are summarized from Zhao & Rosson (2009)

So this paper aims to find out whether such benefits of microblogging (building intimacy, mutual understanding, common ground and maintaining relationship with others) play a role in reducing sojourners' reverse culture shock.

However it should be noted that, due to the fact that microblogging is a fairly new kind of communication mode, no large scale studies have been done on this form of communication and information sharing (Java, Song, Finin, Tseng, 2007). So limited academic literature can be found as the reference for this section of the paper.

6. Weibo

Weibo (微博) is the Chinese word for "microblog". Weibo functions similarly to Twitter, including real-time information sharing and social chat sites. Users can post updates about daily life within 140 characters, share pictures and videos with others in real-time. By 2012, there have been over 309 million microbloggers in China

(http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sci/2013-01/15/c_132104473.htm). Nowadays there are mainly two Weibo websites in China, Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo, with the former more visited than the latter. Sina Weibo has gained 56.5% of all China's microbloggers by 2011 (http://www.resonancechina.com/2011/03/30/sina-commands-56-of-chinas-microblog-market/). Because of Sina Weibo's dominant role and popularity in microblogging industry in China, the word "Weibo" often refers only to Sina Weibo.

Sina Weibo was launched by Sina Corporation on August 14th, 2009 (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/02/content_12099500.htm) and has soon become one of the most popular websites in China, with 368 million registered users by mid 2012 (Millward, S. , 2012) and 30% of Internet users visited everyday (Rapoza & Kenneth, 2011). On Sina Weibo around 100 million updates are posted every day (Cao & Belinda, 2012).

Recently, Sina and Tencent Weibo have been improving its marketing strategy by welcoming well-known foreign celebrities with international influence to open accounts. For example, NBA star Kobe Bryant, English soccer player Michael Owen, Hollywood star Tom Cruise and Head of IMF Christine Lagarde have opened accounts on Sina Weibo one after another, while Argentine famous footballer Lionel Messi, Canadian pop singer Avril Lavigne have their accounts on Tencent Weibo. This new marketing strategy helps expand China's Weibo business and influence into the whole world.

7. Summary

Many studies are linking culture shock to other communication variables, but reverse culture shock is far behind in the research. (Mooradian B., 2004) Few studies focus on whether communication technology (especially social media in 21st century) has influence on people's feeling of reverse culture shock. Since the use of microblog has a positive effect on building mutual understanding, common ground, feeling of proximity and intimacy with people living distant from us, then is it possible that these benefits of microblogging help sojourners living abroad maintain intimate relationships with family, friends and colleagues, so that their feeling of reverse culture shock can be reduced when coming back? There is a lot of room for research in this field, and this study aims to make such contribution.

Methodology

A structured questionnaire is used as methodology of this study. The target is 10 Chinese people who have experience abroad for a continuous period of longer than one year, with 5 being constant Weibo users when abroad, and with another 5 non-users of Weibo when abroad. Then the comparison is made in relation to their experience after coming back to China, whether they have different feelings of readjustment to home culture. If so, which side of the respondents suffers more difficult process of readjustment than the other side. The questionnaire is conducted anonymously in Chinese. The answers were then translated into English and presented in the next section.

The questionnaire consists of 52 questions distributed in 7 parts:

Part 1: Basic personal information

Part 2: Your experience abroad

Part 3: Your experience upon return to China (1)

Part 4: Your experience upon return to China (2)

Part 5: Use of social media abroad

Part 6: General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad

Part 7: Other comments (Any comments concerning your Weibo use abroad, your readjustment experience, etc.)

(*For full version of the questionnaire, please see Appendix*)

The reason why the anonymous questionnaire is used as methodology is that the feedback is more fair and objective in this way, while the weakness is that the data collected may be superficial without going deep enough. So that's why the phrases like "Please elaborate in detail" or "Give examples" are stated in the open questions, so as to minimize the weakness caused by the nature of such methodology. In addition, Likert-scale is used to investigate their readjustment experience (Part 4), for it is easier and more straightforward for readers to perceive the result by comparing the scores given. The 52 questions cover a wide variety of topics aiming to get an overall view in relation to respondents' readjustment experience as well as whether the use of microblog when abroad has an effect on reduction of their reverse culture shock.

The reason why I place a part "General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad" is that, for instance, if a person does not use Weibo when abroad, but he/she reads a lot about China and home town from Internet, he/she may not experience severe reverse

culture shock when back home. It doesn't mean that Weibo doesn't tend to reduce reverse culture shock, but general use of Internet can have the same effect. So here I add this part, trying to figure out that, if one is an active Internet user (without Weibo), whether he/she still have to suffer more severe reverse culture shock than those who constantly use both Internet and Weibo abroad.

Presentation of The Results

In this section the replies of the respondents from both sides are presented respectively. Since the questionnaire is conducted anonymously, the letter A, B, C etc. will be used to present each respondent.

1. Results of Non-users of Weibo When Abroad

Part 1: Basic personal information

1. Your gender

   A: female B: female C: male D: female E: male

2. Your birthday (year, month)

   A: Aug. 1979 B: Mar. 1978 C: May. 1986 D: Feb. 1959 E: Aug. 1983

Part 2: Your experience abroad

3. You spent your lifetime abroad from (year, month) to (year, month) in (country).

   A: 09/1997-08/2004 USA

   B: 02/2000-06/2005 The Netherlands

   C: 10/2004-08/2010 Sweden

   D: 01/1983-present Sweden

   E: 08/2010-Apr. 2013 Sweden

4. In what way did you keep in touch with your family members when living abroad? How often?

   A: e-mail and telephone, once a week

   B: At first, telephone, monthly; later, instant messenger QQ and e-mail, about once a week

   C: e-mail, text message, Skype, once a week

   D: QQ, email, everyday

   E: Skype, QQ, 3-5 days a week

5. In what way did you keep in touch with your friends in China when living abroad? How often?

   A: e-mail, once a week

   B: QQ and email, monthly

   C: e-mail, text message, Skype, once a week

D: QQ, email, everyday

E: QQ, everyday

6. In what way did you get access to latest news and information of China? How often?

    A: Internet, everyday

    B: Local news, Internet, almost everyday

    C: Internet, everyday

    D: QQ, Internet, everyday

    E: Internet, everyday

Part 3: Your experience upon return to China (1)

7. Describe how it was when you came home from abroad. Give examples of how you felt and how your transition back home was like. Was it difficult or easy? Please elaborate in detail.

    A: "*It was not until about one month later after return that I felt big difference between American and Chinese culture, including language, lifestyle and organizational culture. It took about 1 year to readapt back home. For me it was quite difficult at that time.*"

    B: "*In the first several days everything seemed fine, I was excited to be back home and meet dear parents again. But not long after that I met something that was not how I expected. For instance, I had to readapt to the wet weather, the traffic jam and the way people socialize in my home town. And the relationship between strangers seemed impassive, they don't say hello or smile when meeting in the lift. But that was not so difficult for me. I got used to it quite soon.*"

    C: "*It was a bit difficult because I had to adapt to a new way of life and how people around me think and behave, which are quite different from Sweden.*"

    D: "*A little bit difficult, especially I couldn't bear so many people and polluted air.*"

    E: "*I can't say it was difficult, because I had more good friends in China……*"

8. Give examples of interactions that you found particularly difficult/challenging upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

    A: "*I always added English words when I speak, and that was not appreciated by most Chinese people. They thought you were showing off your overseas experience. Besides, after coming back, I became less modest and more direct in many people's eyes. When others praise you, you should say 'thank you' in return in America, while*

in China it's impolite if you reply like this. I seemed forgot our own traditional way of interaction."

B: *"What people were talking about was so strange to me, for instance, who married with whom, who found a job somewhere, the prices of vegetables has risen…..It seemed that I had entered a new world, because everything they said was beyond my understanding."*

C: *"The most challenging issue would be psychological status. During the first days when back home, when I just wake up, I still felt like I was in Sweden until I saw people with Chinese face, speaking dialect of my home town, and so many people on the street, then I started to realize that I was not in Sweden any more. The psychological status took a long time to change back."*

D: *"Since the Internet was not popular at all 20 years ago in China, so there was big gap between us concerning what we see and learn. There is no common language with those who didn't use the Internet. "*

E: *"During my stay abroad I lost contact with some friends, so it was difficult to rebuild the close relationship with them."*

9. Give examples of interactions that you found easy upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

    A: *"It was comparatively easy to communicate with parents, but generally, all that happened around me were more or less challenging to me."*

    B: *"With my overseas experience, I successfully found a job in China. Because many companies treasure those who have experience abroad."*

    C: *"Easy? Seemed my parents and relatives were proud of me in relation to my overseas experience."*

    D: *"It's easier to communicate with young people than with elder ones, because young people are more willing to accept new and fashionable things."*

    E: *"People would love to ask about my experience abroad."*

10. Did you think your experience abroad had changed you? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail in what way.

    A: *"Definitely, in terms of lifestyle and way of thinking."*

    B: *"Of course, …I became less timid and more confident in dealing with tough issues independently."*

    C: *"Yes, I became more independent."*

D: *"Yes, I have become more willing to accept new things."*

E: *"Yes, I changed my way of study, improved my English proficiency and had many different experiences."*

11. How was your relationship with your family members and friends when you returned? Is there any difference from how it used to be before you left China? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail.

A: *"The relationship with family is ok, but with friends er…Sometimes I couldn't understand many words my friends say when we get together. There seemed many new words appeared during my stay abroad. Besides, since I have spent 7 years abroad, so I always say something about my experience abroad, while they are only interested in what happened in China, so we didn't share a common language."*

B: *"After coming back I found many close friends were beyond my life circle, everyone was struggling for their own career, we had less time to meet each other. My parents and relatives were all urging me to get married as soon as possible, that was quite annoying. But the relationship generally is ok, no big difference from how it used to be."*

C: *"The relationship with them has no difference, it's quite fine. It's always happy to be with family. Although the contact with friends were less often, I don't think our relationship became less close."*

D: *"Yes it was a bit strange to me, because we had different experience, so we don't have common interest."*

E: *"We haven't contacted for a long time, I felt I lost some friends."*

12. Describe your communication with your family and friends when you came back. Was it more difficult or easier than it used to be? Was it how you expected to be? Why/ why not?

A: *"The same as above. With family is ok, but there were problems when interacting with friends who haven't been abroad."*

B: *"I felt I had less common language with friends when gathering together, as I said above, they and I seemed from different world."*

C: *"The same as above……Except the fact that sometimes I couldn't quite understand what they were talking about, our communication is fine."*

D: *"It was more difficult."*

E: *"It was more difficult to communicate with them, that was not what I expected."*

Part 4: Your experience upon return to China (2)

Please specify using number 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree)

13. I felt the relationship with my parents was not so intimate as it used to be before I left China.

    A: 3 B: 2 C: 2 D: 4 E: 4 Average score: 3

14. I felt the relationship with my friends was not so close as it used to be before I left China.

    A: 5 B: 5 C: 2 D: 4 E: 5 Average score: 4.2

15. I felt I lost some friends when I came back.

    A: 5 B: 5 C: 3 D: 5 E: 5 Average score: 4.6

16. I felt more depressed and less happy than I used to be before I left China.

    A: 4 B: 3 C: 2 D: 3 E: 2 (*I had lots of achievements*.) Average score: 2.8

17. Sometimes I couldn't quite understand what my family members and friends are talking about, though I know every word they say.

    A: 5 B: 5 C: 4 D: 4 E: 2 Average score: 4

18. I often felt alienated from old friends and family members when I came back.

    A: 5 B: 4 C: 3 D: 4 E: 4 Average score: 4

19. I felt I had no common language on many issues with my parents and friends when coming back, and that was not how it used to be before I left China.

    A: 4 B: 5 C: 3 D: 5 E: 5 Average score: 4.4

20. I felt everything happened around me (people, traffic, operation of society, etc.) were very strange to me when I came back.

    A: 4 B: 4 C: 4 D: 5 E: 4 Average score: 4.2

21. I felt it difficult to readjust to my home culture and lifestyle after coming back.

    A: 5 B: 3 C: 4 D: 3 E: 4 Average score: 3.8

22. Since my return, it was not until (e.g. one week, one month….) later that I felt my feeling of inadaptation, such as these symptoms above (Q. 13-21), seemed start to disappear and everything seemed back to normal.

A: about 1 year B: about 3 weeks   C: 1 month D: 2 weeks E: 3 weeks

Part 5: Use of social media abroad

23. Did you use Weibo when living abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 6)

A: no B: no C: no D: no E: no

(Questions 24-43 do not apply to these respondents.)

Part 6: General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad

44. Did you use Internet when abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 7)

A: yes B: yes C: yes D: yes E: yes

45. How many hours per day did you use Internet?

A: 2 hours B: 1-2 hours except for work use C: 2 hours (except for study use)

D: 1-2 hours E: 8 hours

46. What was your purpose of using Internet?

A: Mainly for work, reading news

B: Reading news

C: Reading news, searching for information for study

D: Contacting friends, watching movies for entertainment

E: For study and communicate with classmates

47. Did you think using Internet is part of your daily activity?

A: no B: not really C: no D: yes E: yes

48. Did you feel out of touch if you hadn't used Internet?

A: no B: if only one day, no C: not really D: It depends on my need E: yes

49. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep in touch with your family members and friends in China? If so, to what extent? Please

specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

A: 3 B: 4 C: 2 D: 4 E: 3 Average score: 3.2

50. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep up-to-date with what's going on in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

A: 3 B: 4 C: 3 D: 5 E: 4 Average score: 3.8

51. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps build common language and mutual understanding between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

A: 3 B: 3 C: 2 D: 3 E: 4 Average score: 3

52. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps maintain relationship between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

A: 2 B: 3 C: 1 D: 4 E: 5 Average score: 3

Part 7: Other comments (Any comments concerning your Weibo use abroad, your readjustment experience, etc.)

2. Results of Constant Users of Weibo When Abroad

Part 1: Basic personal information

1. Your gender

   F: female G: male H: female K: female M: male

2. Your birthday (year, month)

   F: Feb. 1981 G: Feb. 1980 H: Jan. 1989 K: Apr. 1990 M: Oct. 1966

Part 2: Your experience abroad

3. You spent your lifetime abroad from (year, month) to (year, month) in (country).

   F: 12/1999 - 03/2003 Malaysia; 06/2009 – present (2013) USA

   G: 08/2002-03/2012 Sweden

   H: 08/2010-06/2012 Sweden

K: 2008-present (2013) Sweden

M: 05/2009-04/2013 Sweden

4. In what way did you keep in touch with your family members when living abroad? How often?

    F: Use instant messengers weekly, such as QQ, Skype; use e-mail biweekly or monthly only for very important matters.

    G: QQ and telephone, 3-5 times per week.

    H: QQ, WeChat, Weibo and Facetime, everyday.

    K: QQ, WeChat, Skype, 1-2 times a week

    M: Skype, 2 times a week. Sometimes QQ or MSN

5. In what way did you keep in touch with your friends in China when living abroad? How often?

    F: Facebook and Sina Weibo, almost everyday.

    G: QQ and Weibo about once a week.

    H: WeChat, irregularly from weekly to monthly.

    K: Weibo, QQ, WeChat and Skype, not often, occasionally

    M: QQ, WeChat and MSN, everyday

6. In what way did you get access to latest news and information of China? How often?

    F: Through *Weibo.sina.com*, *sohu.com*, and *sina.com.cn* almost everyday.

    G: Internet, everyday.

    H: Weibo, everyday.

    K: Weibo, Internet, Facebook, almost everyday

    M: Internet, TV, everyday

Part 3: Your experience upon return to China (1)

7. Describe how it was when you came home from abroad. Give examples of how you felt and how your transition back home was like. Was it difficult or easy? Please elaborate in detail.

    F: "*I was not quite happy about the air pollution. Also, since I stayed in big cities back in China, it was difficult for me to adapt to the noisy environment. It also took my a few weeks to speak Mandarin Chinese like Chinese in China without adding too many English words.*"

G: "*I didn't experience much difficulties, except the different traffic rules and queuing discipline.*"

H: "*At first I had a feeling of inadaptation in relation to lifestyle and huge amount of population in the city, but soon everything became fine, after all it's my home. Besides the prices in China are much cheaper than in Sweden, that was very nice for me.*"

K: "*……seemed so many people suddenly appeared in front of me……and the air was polluted, not as in Sweden. But I don't think the transition was difficult……*"

M: "*There are cultural difference, for instance, when you go out by bus, people speak loudly and often quite noisy……*"

8. Give examples of interactions that you found particularly difficult/challenging upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

F: "*Language differences came first. Sometimes they used words created on Internet. Then the way to understand a problem is the second challenge. We learned how to analyze and criticize a problem from both negative and positive point of views, which might be a bit different from how people really did in China. ……*"

G: "*It was not difficult to communicate with friends, but sometimes when I met a guy for the first time, the way of greeting seemed strange to others.*"

H: "*Well, the most challenging thing would be the huge amount of people. It was crowded everywhere, all the streets were full of vehicles moving slowly……so the environment was very noisy.*"

K: "*Sometimes others don't understand what I was talking about. For instance, when talking about writing thesis, they couldn't understand why it should take so long time to write it. From their point of view, writing a thesis is just a case of copying some paragraphs from Internet and combine them together.*"

M: "*Adults' attitude towards the education and cultivation for children. In my eyes Chinese students have no recreation at all, just study all the time. Chinese people have different value toward the education.* "

9. Give examples of interactions that you found easy upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

F: "*It seemed to me that people worship those who studied overseas in China. Also it's easier to communicate with them if you know a lot of words and news from the Chinese social network pages. ……*"

G: *"It's always easy to interact with those who have similar interests. It has nothing to do with if you have been abroad or not."*

H: *"Communication with family and relatives was nothing difficult, as it used to be."*

K: *"My friends were curious about my experience abroad, including study and traveling. It was easy to communicate."*

M: *"We share the same language and culture."*

10. Did you think your experience abroad had changed you? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail in what way.

F: *"The overseas experience definitely changed me. Firstly my English language abilities had been greatly improved. Secondly I found myself treasure more about traditional Chinese culture. As well, I became more confident in my social life."*

G: *"Definitely, especially in relation to daily lifestyle."*

H: *"I felt I had grown up and have the ability to live independently."*

K: *"It changed me. I had matured a lot and became more considerate. Many issues should be handled myself, for instance, looking for an apartment and cooking. Without the help of parents, I had become more iron."*

M: *"Yes. After I had studied the sociology courses in Sweden, I find that I have changed my attitudes toward democracy and freedom."*

11. How was your relationship with your family members and friends when you returned? Is there any difference from how it used to be before you left China? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail.

F: *"I was never close to my family because my parents always wanted me to move abroad and be independent. They also didn't maintain very close relationship with other relatives. I just felt my parents started to listen to my opinions after I went back home……Unfortunately when I went back home from Malaysia, I lost contact with almost all of my friends. They either went to college in different cities or they just didn't want to be in touch…… I don't think our relationship became closer because they had their own families and social lives. All we could do is just chatting online from time to time."*

G: *"The relationship with them is always fine! "*

H: *"As I said, the communication with family was not difficult at all, the same as how it used to be before I left China. However, I felt some difficulties when gathering together with friends, because sometimes I didn't understand what they were talking*

about. But the relationship is generally fine."

K: *"Seemed the relationship with old friends was not so close as it used to be, we had less common language. The relationship with family was always fine."*

M: *"The relationship with them hasn't changed a lot. If you often keep in contact with them, the relationship would be fine."*

12. Describe your communication with your family and friends when you came back. Was it more difficult or easier than it used to be? Was it how you expected to be? Why/ why not?

F: *"It was easier for me to communicate with my family especially my mother because they realized that I am a grown-up. I guess one of the reasons could also be they "worship" people coming back from abroad. This is not what I expected to be, because I want to have real communication with them while not just giving commands……I felt I didn't have common interests with my friends after I went back home. We didn't have topics to talk about when gathering together."*

G: *"There is no difference from how it used to be, generally it's fine."*

H: *"The same as Q. 11…"*

K: *"There was barrier between friends and me, I didn't know many things they said, because we had different experience……The communication with family was always fine. "*

M: *"The communication has become easier! With the growth of age, I treasure my family more than ever……That is what I expected."*

Part 4: Your experience upon return to China (2)

Please specify using number 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree)

13. I felt the relationship with my parents was not so intimate as it used to be before I left China.

F: 3 G: 1 H: 1 K: 1 M: 1 Average score: 1.4

14. I felt the relationship with my friends was not so close as it used to be before I left China.

F: 5 G: 1 H: 2 K: 3 M: 2 Average score: 2.6

15. I felt I lost some friends when I came back.

F: 5 G: 2 H: 1 K: 4 M: 3 Average score: 3

16. I felt more depressed and less happy than I used to be before I left China.

    F: 3 G: 2 H: 1 K: 3 M: 3 Average score: 2.4

17. Sometimes I couldn't quite understand what my family members and friends are talking about, though I know every word they say.

    F: 1 G: 3 H: 3 K: 3 M: 1 Average score: 2.2

18. I often felt alienated from old friends and family members when I came back.

    F: 3 G: 1 H: 2 K: 3 M: 1 Average score: 2

19. I felt I had no common language on many issues with my parents and friends when coming back, and that was not how it used to be before I left China.

    F: 3 G: 1 H: 2 K: 3 M: 1 Average score: 2

20. I felt everything happened around me (people, traffic, operation of society, etc.) were very strange to me when I came back.

    F: 3 G: 2 H: 2 K: 2 M: 2 Average score: 2.2

21. I felt it difficult to readjust to my home culture and lifestyle after coming back.

    F: 1 G: 2 H: 1 K: 2 M: 3 Average score: 1.8

22. Since my return, it was not until (e.g. one week, one month….) later that I felt my feeling of inadaptation, such as these symptoms above (Q. 13-21), seemed start to disappear and everything seemed back to normal.

    F: about 1 month G: about 3 weeks H: 1-2 weeks K: 2-3 weeks M: 3 weeks

Part 5: Use of social media abroad

23. Did you use Weibo when living abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 6)

    F: yes G: yes H: yes K: yes, and often M: yes

24. How many hours per day did you use Weibo abroad?

    F: 2-3 hours G: 1 hour H: I hour or more K: 1-2 hours

    M: no everyday, but sometimes

25. Did you think using Weibo is part of your daily activity?

    F: yes G: yes H: yes K: yes M: not really

26. Did you feel out of touch if you hadn't logged onto Weibo?

    F: yes G: sometimes yes H: no K: not really M: no

27. On average, how many updates did you post every day?

    F: 5 G: 2 H: not everyday, but about twice a week

    K: 1-2 updates in 2-3 days M: not always

28. On average, how often did you give comment to other people's post?

    F: everyday G: once a week H: hard to say, it depends on my interest

    K: it depends on my mood and interest

    M: occasionally I will comment on those post I am interested in

29. On average, how often were you given comment by other people?

    F: almost everyday G: often H: irregular from weekly to monthly

    K: each of my updates would be commented

    M: hard to say, because I don't often post updates

30. On average, how often did you send private messages?

    F: weekly G: very seldom H: irregular from weekly to monthly

    K: when I have something important, irregularly

    M: everyday, with friends

31. To whom (which group of people) did you send private messages most frequently?

    (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

    F: friends G: friends and strangers H: friends K: family and friends

    M: family and friends, sometimes classmates

32. On average, how often did you receive private messages?

    F: weekly G: once a month H: once every 2-3 days K: it depends

    M: everyday

33. From whom (which group of people) did you receive private messages most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

F: friends G: strangers asking about studies abroad H: friends K: friends

M: family and friends

34. On average, how often did you tag people on Weibo?

F: almost everyday G: once a month H: once a week

K: hard to say, sometimes everyday, sometimes 2-3 times per week

M: irregular, sometimes more, sometimes less

35. Whom (which group of people) did you tag most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

F: friends G: organizations or strangers H: friends K: friends

M: family and friends

36. On average, how often were you tagged by others on Weibo?

F: almost everyday G: often H: irregular, it's hard to say K: quite often

M: not often

37. By whom (which group of people) were you tagged most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

F: friends G: friends H: friends K: friends M: friends and classmates

38. For what purpose did you use Weibo? (e.g. contact friends and family, keep up-to-date with latest news, etc)

F: Contacting friends and reading news

G: Contacting friends in China

H: Keeping up-to-date with interesting issues happening, expressing myself, contacting friends and family, reading latest news in China

K: Reading news, interesting issues, and renew acquaintance with friends

M: Keeping in touch with family and friends

39. From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps you keep in touch with your family members and friends in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

F: 3 G: 4 H: 4 K: 4 M: 3 Average score: 3.6

40. From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps you keep up-to-date with what's going on in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 5 G: 4 H: 5 K: 3 M: 3 Average score: 4

41. From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps build common language and mutual understanding between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 3 G: 3 H: 5 K: 3 M: 3 Average score: 3.4

42. From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps maintain relationship between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 3 G: 3 H: 3 K: 3 M: 3 Average score: 3

43. Do you like Weibo? Why/why not?

    F: "*Yes. It's considered as the Chinese Facebook or Twitter. Besides reading news, I could also get to know what people react to what happened daily.*"

    G: "*Yes, I like it.*"

    H:"*Yes.*"

    K: "*Yes, but not so addicted to it as several years ago when Weibo just began to become popular.*"

    M: "*Yes, but it's not a must to use Weibo.*"

Part 6: General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad

44. Did you use Internet when abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 7)

    F: yes G: yes H: yes K: yes M: yes

45. How many hours per day did you use Internet?

    F: 5 hours G: more than 1 hour H: 12 hours K: 8 hours M: 4 hours or more

46. What was your purpose of using Internet?

    F: For working and entertaining

    G: Reading news

    H: Sending e-mail, searching for information relevant for study, using social media such as Weibo and Facebook

    K: Searching for information for study, Facebook with classmates, watching movie and TV series

    M: Reading news, searching information I need

47. Did you think using Internet is part of your daily activity?

    F: yes G: yes H: yes K: yes M: yes

48. Did you feel out of touch if you hadn't used Internet?

    F: yes G: no H: yes K: sometimes yes M: yes

49. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep in touch with your family members and friends in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 3 G: 5 H: 5 K: 3 M: 5 Average score: 4.2

50. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep up-to-date with what's going on in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 5 G: 5 H: 5 K: 4 M: 5 Average score: 4.8

51. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps build common language and mutual understanding between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 5 G: 5 H: 5 K: 4 M: 4 Average score: 4.6

52. From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps maintain relationship between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

    F: 3 G: 5 H: 3 K: 5 M: 4 Average score: 4

Part 7: Other comments (Any comments concerning your Weibo use abroad, your readjustment experience, etc.)

M: In China I can easily know the latest policies concerning job hunting, medical service and etc.

Comparison/Analysis of The Results of Users And Non-Users of Weibo

In this section the comparison of the replies in each part of the questionnaire from both sides is made, so as to see the difference in terms of their readjustment experience. Here "Group I" represents the respondents who did not use Weibo when abroad, while "Group II" represents the respondents who were constant Weibo users when abroad.

In Part 1 of the questionnaire, both Group I and II are composed of 2 male and 3 female respondents. Gender distribution is fairly even in both Groups.

In Part 2, which focuses on the experience the respondents had abroad, the majority of the respondents (7 people) had experience in Sweden, then 1 in USA, 1 in the Netherlands and another 1 had experience in both USA and Malaysia. This distribution of location concentrates mainly in Europe and western world though, these countries have big cultural differences with China, so it can also be an advantage to investigate the real effect of how their host culture has changed them. All the respondents have overseas experience for a continuous period of more than 1 year. The respondents from Group I mainly use, according to frequency of mentions by the respondents, QQ, e-mail and Skype as a means of contacting family and friends in China at least once a week (except B who contacts friends with QQ and e-mail monthly), and at the same time keep-up-to date with current issues in China mainly through Internet almost everyday.

The Weibo users from Group II mainly use QQ, WeChat, Weibo and Skype to contact friends and family in China at least once a week (except K who contacts friends only occasionally). Meanwhile the Internet, Weibo and Facebook are mainly used by Group II participants to read about news in China almost everyday. The only difference between the two sides in terms of the selection of communication means is that the respondents from Group I use e-mail as one of the main ways of contacting people in China, while for Weibo users from Group II, e-mail is not preferred or only used for very important issues. The reason for that might be the fact that, as Wikipedia claims, in the age of new media, e-mail has become a slower and less efficient communication technology compared to other modes such as Facebook, WeChat and Skype.

In Part 3, which focuses on the respondents' experience upon return to China, it is obvious that respondents from both Groups had more or less difficulties of readjustment when coming back from abroad, except M who found the communication with family

has become easier than how it used to be because with the growth of age, he/she has realized the importance of treasuring family. The most frequently mentioned difficulties of readjustment the respondents have experienced include discomfort from huge amounts of people, failure to understand new words and expressions, people's loud voice of speech, loss of common language with friends and different way people socialize. However, from this part, there is no obvious evidence showing that those who use Weibo when abroad had less serious symptoms than the other side.

The results in Part 4 can best embody the different readjustment experience of the two sides. Part 4 mainly investigates the respondents' difficulty of readjustment experience upon back home by Likert-scale. Although it's hard to say which side suffers more difficult readjustment than the other side from Part 3, but in this part, on average, the respondents from Group I score at least 1.6 points higher in each question (Q. 13-21) than those from Group II (except Q.16 with only 0.4 points higher), it indicates that those who don't use Weibo when abroad suffer more severe symptoms of reverse culture shock than those who use Weibo when abroad. However, according to the reply of Q.22, it is noteworthy that there is no obvious difference regarding the length of time the respondents from both Groups suffer difficulty of readjustment. Generally it takes 2 weeks to 1 month for the respondents to go through the symptoms of reverse culture shock, except respondent A who had suffered it for about one year.

Part 5 is only filled in by Group II. The respondents are all active Weibo users who post updates, make comments, tag others or send private messages quite often. The group of people with whom they communicate most frequently are friends, family members and classmates. The purpose of using Weibo is mainly reading news, contacting friends, searching interesting or work-related information and expressing themselves. According to the scores given in Q. 39-42, all of them agree that Weibo has a positive effect on helping them contact friends and family in China, reading news about China, build mutual understanding and common language and maintain relationship with people in China to a fairly large extent (the average scores of Q.39-42 are all above 3).

The reason why I place Part 6 "General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad" is to try to figure out that, if one is an active Internet user (without Weibo), whether he/she still have to suffer more severe reverse culture shock than those who constantly use both Internet and Weibo abroad. According to the feedback of Part 4 and Part 6, although the

respondents from both Group I and Group II accept the fact that Internet use (without Weibo) helps build common language and mutual understanding with people in China to a fairly large extent (according to the scores given in Q.49-52, the average scores of all questions are above 3), respondents from Group II had less difficulty in readjustment process than those from Group I (according to the comparison of the scores given by Group I and II in Q. 13-21 of Part 4). It indicates that, even if one is an active Internet user (without using Weibo) who reads a lot about China on Internet, he/she still suffers more severe reverse culture shock than those who constantly use both Internet and Weibo abroad. The positive effect Weibo has on building mutual understanding, common language and maintaining relationship with people can not be replaced by general use of Internet and should not be ignored.

Discussion of The Results

Although according to the feedback of Part 3 of the questionnaire, all the respondents suffer various degrees of difficulties of readjustment-- regardless if they are Weibo users or not, however according to the feedback in Part 4 of the questionnaire, there is a tendency that those who actively keep up-to-date with news and information of their home country and keep in contact with family and friends via Weibo when living abroad may suffer less severity of reverse culture shock than those who don't use Weibo abroad. Weibo has a positive effect on helping people abroad keep in touch with family and friends, keep up-to-date with latest news, fashion and what's going on in their home country, therefore people's feeling of alienation when coming back to their home country is weakened, and that helps reduce severity of reverse culture shock. However it is noteworthy that there is no obvious difference regarding the length of time the two sides suffer difficulty of readjustment.

The replies of Part 4 and Part 6 also indicates that, even if one reads a lot about China and contacts friends and family on Internet (without using Weibo), he/she still suffers more severe reverse culture shock than those who constantly use both Internet and Weibo abroad. The positive effect Weibo has on building mutual understanding, common language and maintaining relationship with people can not be replaced by general use of Internet and should not be ignored.

So all in all, the result supports the hypothesis of this paper: by using microblog when abroad, people's difficulty of readjusting to home culture when coming back to their home country is reduced. Constant use of microblog when living abroad contributes to returnees' easier re-adaptation to their home culture and reduced severity of reverse culture shock.

Besides, this study also suggests that there is connection between the effect of mocroblogging and reduction of reverse culture shock. Since Zhao & Rosson (2009) proposes that microblogging has benefits in building intimacy, mutual understanding, common ground between people, this study helps the research in this area one step forward, suggesting that such benefits of microblogging play a role in reducing sojourners' reverse culture shock.

In the age of social media, people living abroad can keep up-to-date with what's going on

in their home country and keep in touch with family and friends much easier and faster than it used to be. Even if they live abroad, social media plays a role of a bridge connecting sojourners and their home country and close people. When they get back to home country, the feeling of reverse culture shock has become less severe than it used to be before social media gets popular. The positive effect social media has on building mutual understanding, common language and maintaining relationship with people who we don't often see, which help reduce sojourners' reverse culture shock, should not be ignored. Sojourners should take full advantage of such benefits of social media, so that the readjustment process becomes less difficult.

In addition, one main difference between China's Weibo and other international social media sites e.g. Twitter or Facebook is that Twitter and Facebook are used globally without being specific to any country or culture, while Weibo is specific to Chinese citizens and communities. The information it provides are all about what is currently happening in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hongkong, where people share the same language and culture. So in my opinion, the effect the use of Weibo has on reducing Chinese people's reverse culture shock is more explicit than that Twitter or Facebook has on reducing non-Chinese's reverse culture shock. It is just a personal assumption, though few literatures can be found so far to demonstrate it. But it can be an interesting topic for further study.

Limitation

Although this paper supports the hypothesis that constantly using microblog abroad has a positive effect on reducing sojourners' reverse culture shock, however there is still lack of qualitative research concerning to what extent the severity of reverse culture shock can be reduced through microblogging.

Besides, there are many social, cultural and personal variables affecting returnees' sense of reverse culture shock, such as personality, distance of the two cultures the sojourners are in, level of development of society in each country etc. For this reason, the sample in this paper is too small to investigate whether the effect the social media has on reducing reverse culture shock applies to any individual coming back from any country. For instance, a study abroad student coming back to China from Japan (which has a similar culture to that of China) might feel less difficulty in readjustment even if he/she doesn't use social media when in Japan, than those who are active users of social media coming back from America (which has a much bigger cultural difference). In a word, the result of this paper is not supposed to be generalized to a large extent and say that all those who use microblog abroad suffer less difficult re-entry experience than all those who don't use it due to the limitation of the sample. If further and deeper qualitative research in this area is made in the future, then more amount of sample is definitely needed.

Be that as it may, so far there are few studies in the field of reverse culture shock, social media and the relations obtaining between them – unlike the field of culture shock and traditional media in general. There are many blank spaces in these fields waiting for researchers to fulfill in the future.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

您好：

我是瑞典哥德堡大学传播学硕士专业的学生。最近正在写毕业论文，是关于社交媒体与反文化冲突之间的关系。现在需要以问卷调查的方式得到研究数据。本次调查对象为若干有连续一年（或以上）国外经历、且在国外期间常用微博（或不用微博）的中国籍人士或海外华人。由于您的经历符合此项研究对参与者的要求，因此本次研究邀请您作为调查对象。请您花 15-20 分钟填写以下问卷。答案越详细越好，您的回答对这项研究很重要。提前感谢您能抽出时间帮助我完成这项研究。

本次问卷调查是以匿名的方式进行，请勿在回答中透露您的真实姓名。若对本项研究有任何疑义，请拨打+46760683921 或发送邮件至 zhengchaoran1020@sina.com 联系郑超然。

（注："反文化冲突"指一个旅居国外多年的人，已经完全适应了东道主国家的文化。当他/她重返祖国、家乡后会感受到同样的文化冲突，包括发现自己变成了熟悉的陌生人、曾近熟悉的人和事发生了变化、听不懂家人朋友的讨论话题等一系列不适应感）

此致，

郑超然
瑞典哥德堡大学应用信息技术学院
传播学硕士专业

<div align="center">

问 卷

Questionnaire

</div>

第一部分：基本个人信息
Part 1: Basic personal information
1. 您的性别：

Your gender:

2. 您的生日（年，月）：

Your birthday (year, month)

第二部分：您的国外经历

Part 2: Your experience abroad

3. 您在（年，月）到（年，月）期间在（哪个国家）度过。

You spent your lifetime abroad from (year, month) to (year, month) in (country).

4. 在国外期间您用何种方式与国内的家人联系？多久联系一次？

In what way did you keep in touch with your family members when living abroad? How often?

5. 在国外期间您用何种方式与国内的朋友联系？多久联系一次？

In what way did you keep in touch with your friends in China when living abroad? How often?

6. 在国外期间您用何种方式了解发生在中国的最新信息？多久了解一次？

In what way did you get access to latest news and information of China? How often?

第三部分：您回国后的经历（1）

Part 3: Your experience upon return to China (1)

7. 请描述您回国后的亲身经历。举例描述您刚回国后的感受以及您由"国外"向"家"的过渡期如何。这段时间感觉困难吗？请详细描述

Describe how it was when you came home from abroad. Give examples of how you felt and how your transition back home was like. Was it difficult or easy? Please elaborate in detail.

8. 请举例详细描述您回国后感觉与人沟通特别困难的地方在哪儿

Give examples of interactions that you found particularly difficult/challenging upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

9. 请举例详细描述您回国后感觉与人沟通比较容易的地方在哪儿

   Give examples of interactions that you found easy upon your return back home. Please elaborate in detail.

10. 您认为你的出国经历是否改变了你？若是，请举例详细描述这段经历如何/在哪方面改变了你

    Did you think your experience abroad had changed you? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail in what way.

11. 您认为回国后您与家人和朋友的关系如何？与您出国前相比是否有所不同？若是，请举例说明

    How was your relationship with your family members and friends when you returned? Is there any difference from how it used to be before you left China? If so, give examples to illustrate in detail.

12. 请描述您回国后与家人朋友的沟通状况。您感觉你们之间的沟通比您出国前更困难了还是更容易了？这是否符合您的期望？为什么（不是）？

    Describe your communication with your family and friends when you came back. Was it more difficult or easier than it used to be? Was it how you expected to be? Why/ why not?

第四部分：您回国后的经历（2）
请用数字 1（完全不同意）到 5（完全同意）表示
Part 4: Your experience upon return to China (2)
Please specify using number 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree)
13. 我感觉我与父母间的关系不像我出国前那么亲密了

    I felt the relationship with my parents was not so intimate as it used to be before I left China.

14. 我感觉我与朋友间的关系不像我出国前那么亲近了

    I felt the relationship with my friends was not so close as it used to be before I left China.

15. 我感觉我回国后失去了一些朋友

    I felt I lost some friends when I came back.

16. 我感觉回国后比出国前有更多沮丧和不愉快的感觉

    I felt more depressed and less happy than I used to be before I left China.

17. 有时我听不太懂家人或朋友在讨论什么，即使我知道他们说的每个字

    Sometimes I couldn't quite understand what my family members or friends are talking about, though I know every word they say.

18. 我回国后时常感觉我与家人/朋友之间有隔阂

    I often felt alienated from old friends and family members when I came back.

19. 我回国后感觉我与家人/朋友在许多话题上都没有共同语言，而出国前不是这样的

    I felt I had no common language on many issues with my parents and friends when coming back, and that was not how it used to be before I left China.

20. 我回国后感觉周围发生的一切（人，交通，社会运作...）都很陌生

    I felt everything happened around me (people, traffic, operation of society, etc.) were very strange to me when I came back.

21. 我回国后感觉很难重新适应家乡的文化和生活方式

    I felt it difficult to readjust to my home culture and lifestyle after coming back.

22. 从我回国开始算起，直到（例：一周， 一个月.....）后我才感觉不适应感（如 13 到 21 题提到的症状）开始逐渐消失，一切开始恢复正常

    Since my return, it was not until (e.g. one week, one month….) later that I felt my feeling of inadaptation, such as these symptoms above (Q. 13-21), seemed start to disappear and everything seemed back to normal.

第五部分：在国外期间社交媒体的使用情况

Part 5: Use of social media abroad

23. 您在国外期间使用微博吗？（若是，请继续；若否，请跳至第六部分）

    Did you use Weibo when living abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 6)

24. 您在国外期间每天花几小时上微博？

    How many hours per day did you use Weibo abroad?

25. 您在国外期间认为上微博是日常生活的一部分吗？

    Did you think using Weibo is part of your daily activity when abroad?

26. 若不上微博您是否感觉无法跟上潮流？

    Did you feel out of touch if you hadn't logged onto Weibo?

27. 您平均每天发几条微博？

    On average, how many updates did you post every day?

28. 您平均多久在别人的微博留一次言？

    On average, how often did you give comment to other people's post?

29. 您平均多久被别人留一次言？

    On average, how often were you given comment by other people?

30. 您平均多久给别人发一次私信？

    On average, how often did you send private messages?

31. 您发私信给谁（哪个群体）最频繁？（如朋友、同学、家人、同事等）

    To whom (which group of people) did you send private messages most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

32. 您平均多久收到一次私信？

    On average, how often did you receive private messages?

33. 谁（哪个群体）给您发私信最频繁？（如朋友、同学、家人、同事等）

From whom (which group of people) did you receive private messages most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

34. 您平均多久圈（@）别人一次？

On average, how often did you tag people on Weibo?

35. 您圈谁（哪个群体）最频繁？（如朋友、同学、家人、同事等）

Whom (which group of people) did you tag most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

36. 您平均多久被别人圈（@）一次？

On average, how often were you tagged by others on Weibo?

37. 您被谁（哪个群体）圈得最频繁？（如朋友、同学、家人、同事等）

By whom (which group of people) were you tagged most frequently? (e.g. friends, classmates, family members, colleagues, etc)

38. 您使用微博的目的是？（如与家人/朋友联系，了解最新资讯等）

For what purpose did you use Weibo? (e.g. contact friends and family, keep up-to-date with latest news, etc)

39. 根据您的经验，您认为经常使用微博是否能帮助您与在国内的家人朋友沟通交流？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps you keep in touch with your family members and friends in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

40. 根据您的经验，您认为经常使用微博是否能帮助您了解在中国发生的最新资讯？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps you keep up-to-date with what's going on in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

41. 根据您的经验，您认为经常使用微博是否能帮助您与国内的家人朋友间建立共同语言及互相理解？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps build common language and mutual understanding between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

42. 根据您的经验，您认为经常使用微博是否能帮助您维系与国内的家人朋友间的关系？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Weibo frequently helps maintain relationship between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

43. 你喜欢用微博吗？为什么（不）？

Do you like Weibo? Why/why not?

第六部分：在国外期间因特网的使用情况（不包括微博）
Part 6: General use of Internet (without Weibo) when abroad

44. 您在国外期间上网吗？（若是，请继续；若否，请跳至第七部分）

Did you use Internet when abroad? (If yes, please continue; if no, please skip to Part 7)

45. 您每天上几个小时的网？

How many hours per day did you use Internet?

46. 您上网的目的是…?

What was your purpose of using Internet?:

47. 您认为上网是您日常生活的一部分吗？

Did you think using Internet is part of your daily activity?

48. 若您不上网是否感觉无法跟上潮流？

Did you feel out of touch if you hadn't used Internet?

49. 根据您的经验，您认为经常上网是否能帮助您与在国内的家人朋友沟通交流？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep in touch with your family members and friends in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

50. 根据您的经验，您认为经常上网是否能帮助您了解在中国发生的最新资讯？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps you keep up-to-date with what's going on in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

51. 根据您的经验，您认为经常上网是否能帮助您与国内的家人朋友间建立共同语言及互相理解？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps build common language and mutual understanding between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

52. 根据您的经验，您认为经常上网是否能帮助您维系与国内的家人朋友间的关系？若是，在多大程度上帮助了你？请用数字 1（很小程度）到 5（很大程度）表示

From your experience, would you say that using Internet frequently helps maintain relationship between you and your friends/family in China? If so, to what extent? Please specify using number 1 (little extent) to 5 (large extent).

第七部分：其它（任何关于您在国外期间的微博使用情况、您重新适应国内生活的经历等）

Part 7: Other comments (Any comments concerning your Weibo use abroad, your readjustment experience, etc.)

完成后，请将此问卷以 word 格式发送至邮箱：zhengchaoran1020@sina.com。

最后，再次感谢您花时间参与此研究！