

Research on the Causes and Countermeasures of Safety Issues of Chinese Overseas Students

Xianping Yin

Zhejiang College of Security Technology , Wenzhou, China 325000

Abstract: Chinese overseas students have been widely concerned by the public, known as the “overseas talents”. However, in recent years, the media have been repeatedly putting “Students from China became the victims”, “committed crimes” as their headlines. The physical and mental situations of these students frequently go wrong throughout the world--whether in Brazil, Thailand and other politically unstable developing countries, or in Britain, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and other respectively safe developed countries where there are various kinds of problems that the safety of Chinese students is threatened and infringed or even some choose to revenge and become the offenders. Therefore, overseas students are currently thought as “overseas trash” to the mass. Targeted at this issue, the paper firstly gives a brief introduction of Chinese overseas students’ current situation, then classifies the related cases in recent years and analyzes the causes and reasons behind. Finally, it gives several constructive countermeasures for the relevant departments to research and consult.

Keywords: Chinese overseas students; Safety issue; Countermeasure

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education of China, since 2009, China has surpassed India to become the largest exporter of overseas students globally. However, in recent years, some Chinese overseas students have been expelled from their schools or had their student status revoked for various reasons. The number of cases involving criminal issues has also been rising. Especially the case of a twenty-four-year-old Chinese female undergraduate student being killed in USA February 2025 has drawn widespread attention from the public regarding the mental and physical health development status of Chinese overseas students and related safety issues. Therefore, it is necessary for us to conduct in-depth analysis and research on the causes of this frequent occurrence, and on this basis, propose some feasible countermeasures to reduce and prevent safety problems for overseas students.

1. The Current Status of Chinese overseas Students

With the acceleration of globalization, international educational exchanges have become increasingly frequent, leading many students, especially from China, to leave their home countries to study abroad. They are required to make huge steps in adapting to a new learning, living and linguistic environment. With the Reform and Opening up in 1978, the Chinese government began to gradually relax the relevant domestic and foreign policies for sending students abroad for study. Particularly after implementing the “Supporting Study Abroad, Encouraging Returning Home, Freedom of Movement” policy in 1993, a large number of young students flocked to study abroad. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education in China, as of early 2024, the total number of Chinese students studying overseas has exceeded 8 million.

Authoritative institutions such as the IELTS and the American Institute of International Education (IIE) point out in their annual reports that the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom are still the main countries for Chinese students to study abroad, and China undoubtedly remains the world’s largest source of international students.

However, from the overseas safety issues reflected in the recent cases involving Chinese students, we can clearly feel that the overseas safety issues of them also have a global trend. Whether in Brazil and Thailand which are politically unstable, or in countries with relatively good security such as Canada and Australia, there are problems such as Chinese students’ safety being violated and even turning to violence and going down the path of illegal crimes.

2. Types of Cases related to Chinese Overseas Students

2.1 Economic cases

As the number of Chinese students studying abroad continues to increase, the study-abroad industry has emerged - ranging from language training, background enhancement to school selection, house renting and so on. Various agencies take advantage of parents and students' "poor understanding" and "hoped-for" aspects regarding study-abroad matters and conduct multiple businesses. However, the country's supervision in this field is still in the exploratory stage, thus providing opportunities for lawbreakers to take advantage. To make huge profits, they resort to any means necessary. Unscrupulous study-abroad agencies either charge parents service fees that are far higher than the actual cost, often amounting to tens of thousands of yuan, and induce them to sign "tyrannical" contracts. Once the application is successful, they can also receive considerable commissions from overseas schools; if unsuccessful, they keep the consumer's deposit or even form a complete "fake university" and "fake diploma" industrial chain without intermediary agency's proxy right with overseas prestigious schools. Once the fees are defrauded, the agents disappear.

2.2 Psychological and emotional imbalance

Mental instability is another problem that overseas students are often faced with. Firstly, due to cultural differences and language barriers, students tend to isolate themselves and develop feelings of inferiority. When confronted with diverse interpersonal relationships and social situations, it is difficult for them to integrate into the local mainstream culture. Especially in recent years, there has been a trend of "childhood onset" among overseas students, lacking a sound legal awareness, making poor decisions, and having a sensitive, suspicious and irritable personality, which easily leads to an anti-social personality orientation.

2.3 Racial discrimination

In some countries and regions, extremist elements and anti-Chinese groups have increasingly carried out attacks targeting foreigners and Chinese people. For example, on April 23, 2014, two Chinese overseas students in Sydney were openly robbed and beaten up by a group of local Australians. They were also verbally abused with racist language. Unfortunately, no one on the train attempted to stop them.

2.4 Accident

When studying abroad, international students may encounter terrorist attacks or natural disasters. However, their self-rescue capabilities are often poor. Moreover, they lack strong safety awareness and do not have a clear understanding of the necessary local survival methods. As a result, they miss the opportunity to survive. For example, in September 2008, a female Chinese student called Tian Yuan was stabbed to death in her apartment in Toronto, Canada. The case remains unsolved to this day.

3. Analysis of the Causes

3.1 Internal Factors

3.1.1 Personality Traits

Among the numerous Chinese overseas students, different individuals have different personalities, and students with different personalities will encounter different difficulties during their studies abroad.

Those who are overly sensitive and introverted tend to experience anxiety and homesickness in new environments. Some Chinese students with relatively sensitive and introverted personalities may suffer from insomnia and headaches if they often remain in such emotional states during their studies abroad. Some may develop communication barriers, become addicted to the Internet, and the possibility of their own physical and mental safety being threatened increases significantly. On the contrary, students with more extroverted personalities will experience less emotional stress in this regard.

3.1.2 Learning Ability

Each international student grows up in a different educational environment, attending different schools and having parents with varying levels of education. These complex factors result in students with different learning abilities. Some students, when studying in China, are only accustomed to rote learning in a very passive way. They are not good at self-directed learning. All learning activities must be arranged by the teacher before they can be carried out in a step-by-step manner. Therefore, when these students go abroad for study, the drawback of lacking self-directed learning ability becomes apparent. When they find that the teacher does not provide specific steps or assign memorized content, but requires them to read independently and then write their own opinions, their mental and physical stress will multiply.

3.2 External Factors

3.2.1 Legal Factors

(1) Differences in Legal Systems

In China, incidents of campus fights and brawls are often downplayed or ignored. In the U.S., the impact of such incidents is so significant that they go beyond the issue of campus violence constituting a crime.

(2) Lack of Legal Knowledge

In recent years, the reasons for Chinese students to go abroad have greatly differed from those in the early days of the Reform and Opening up. The convenience of the application process for studying abroad, the reduction of study costs, and the generous treatment for returning students have made it possible for Chinese students to study abroad as long as they have the conditions and hope. However, when students go to the destination country for study, they can only consider the most basic issues such as money and language. They often overlook the differences in legal culture between the studying country and China. Even a small oversight can lead to deportation in the destination country, or even constitute a criminal offense.

3.2.2 Social Environment Factors

The economic crisis is the greatest risk for Chinese overseas students who resort to taking illegal and criminal actions. For example, in Japan, where the number of cases involving Chinese students has increased sharply, tuition fees have become the biggest obstacle for them. Apart from economic hardships, the discrimination against Chinese students by the local has also exacerbated the extreme behaviors of Chinese students.

4. Countermeasures

In terms of strategies for correctly facing and addressing the above threats, the following aspects need to be achieved: For individual students: (1) Clearly define the purpose of studying abroad, carefully select the destination, stay away from high-risk countries and regions, avoid detours and save energy, effort and money. (2) Strive to improve English proficiency, conduct comprehensive practice in listening, speaking, reading and writing, lay a solid foundation for language communication and remove obstacles for language exchange. (3) Familiarize with the studying environment, master various emergency contact methods and make emergency preparations. For the government: (1) Further transform the current educational system and educational concepts and strengthen the cultivation of psychological qualities. (2) Strengthen international cooperation among countries, adopt a two-pronged approach to address both symptoms and root causes. (3) Change the mindset, develop cooperative entrepreneurship education between China and foreign countries, cultivate entrepreneurial international talents, and enhance the attractiveness of domestic education. (4) Establish strict economic guarantee systems. (5) Implement and improve the loan and guardian system for overseas students. (6) Actively conduct knowledge and skills training for studying abroad, and increase the intensity of external communication.

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About the author:

Xianping Yin, 1994.12, female, Han, Hubei,China, Master degree, Teaching Assistant, Public Security Management, Security Precaution, International Policing