
From Studying Abroad to Immigration-Chinese Students

From Studying Abroad to Immigration-Chinese Students Who Came to Singapore for Further Studying after the Reform and Opening-Up Policy Since the Reform and Opening-Up Policy, the Chinese government has gradually relaxed its study-abroad policy and started dispatching its students abroad to study. According to statistics, up to now, the total population of Chinese students studying abroad has exceeded 900,000.

What accompanies the large-scale studying abroad tide is the changes in the local identity of international students - the students are converted into new immigrants. This paper elaborates on the situation of Chinese students who have immigrated to overseas since the Reform and Opening-Up Policy. In addition, based on the case study of Singapore, the reason, current situation and immigration reason of overseas students are discussed and analyzed in order to reflect the immigration situation of Chinese overseas students.

1. Overview of local settlement of Chinese overseas students since the Reform and Opening-Up Policy In the two decades from 1978 to 1999, the population of overseas students who studied abroad reached about 320,000.

The distribution of these overseas students is characteristic of large-scale decentralization and small-scale concentration. In other words, the overseas students are widely distributed in 103 countries and regions in the world, and 90% are concentrated in developed countries, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada and Western Europe. In recent years, some Asian countries, including Singapore, South Korea, and Malaysia, have also gradually attracted a large number of Chinese students with their unique advantages. With the deepening of globalization, the population of Chinese overseas students continues to rise. From 1999 to now, the total population of Chinese students studying abroad has increased by more than 600,000 and the proportion of students settling in the countries where they study has also been growing.

2. Reason for Chinese students to study in Singapore In addition to the beautiful environment, suitable climate, easy visa application and stable economic development situation, Singapore attracts Chinese students with other unique advantages. First of all, Singapore has a well-established education system and maintains a high education level, which has been widely recognized by the world. Singapore adheres to the British education system and aims to cultivate the elite talents. In the meanwhile, Singapore provides a balanced education for everyone and tries its best to fully develop students' potentials and thinking abilities. In addition, Singaporean education possesses a unique bilingual teaching mode, which is dominated by English teaching and supplemented by Chinese teaching, thus strengthening the English

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proficiency and application capability of Chinese students and lifting the concern that some students cannot communicate successfully upon arrival in foreign countries because of language barriers. Secondly, Singapore is an immigrant country in which the Chinese are the main body.

Therefore, it has ingrained historical and cultural inheritance relationships with China, which avoids the huge psychological gap of Chinese overseas students due to the great differences in social awareness and cultural values. Thirdly, Singapore government adopts the idea of “building a nation based on talents” as its main development strategy. In order to attract Chinese talents and open up the overseas student market in China, Singapore government has launched a series of international student programs including the Education Honorary Partnership Program, Education Boarding Program, Mother Companionship Studying Program, Overseas Student Financial Assistance Plans, etc. The introduction of these policies has provided a safe and stable study environment for overseas students and has relieved the students and their parents from many worries.

3. Current situation of Chinese overseas students in Singapore

3.1 Population and scale of Chinese overseas students in Singapore at present, Singapore receives the applications of about 4,000 Chinese students every year. With the development of economic globalization and the improvement of living standards in China, this number will keep increasing in the coming years. Of the 60,000 international students studying in Singapore in 2004, Chinese students accounted for 50%, as many as 30,000, and the population keeps rising.

According to the internal documents of the Singapore Economic Development Board, the total population of Chinese students in Singapore is more than 30,000, of which nearly 10,000 are from government university institutions (3,500 in National University of Singapore, 2,300 in Nanyang Technological University, 50 in Singapore Management University, 300 in Singapore Polytechnic, 400 in Temasek Polytechnic, 800 in Ngee Ann Polytechnic, 500 Nanyang Polytechnic and 80 in Republic Polytechnic. Approximately 10,000 students are in governmental primary and secondary schools in Singapore. The rest 10,000 students are distributed in nearly 100 private schools.

3.2 Types of Chinese overseas students in China and the current situation and tendency of Singapore immigration.

a. Graduates of Chinese universities who come to Singapore for long-term study and obtain the academic certificate. These overseas students mainly include students who study at various colleges, departments and graduate schools of National University of Singapore, Nanyang

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Technological University, and Singapore Management University, who study in private English schools and computer schools, and who study in the Singaporean schools of Australian and UK universities. These universities have a high admission threshold, and so all these Chinese students who come to study in Singapore are highly qualified and talented people who have a high comprehensive quality in Chinese universities. In the case of the National University of Singapore, students must have a TOEFL score of 600 or above and an IELTS score of 6.5 or above in order to be enrolled. The students study diligently in Singaporean universities and become the most popular overseas student group in Singapore. Therefore, they are also the main force for conversion of overseas students to new immigrants.

b. Short-term training students. The students mainly include some officials and business executives who come to Singapore to study English and management methods. Most of them come to Singapore for short-term training and hold key positions in Chinese government institutions, state-owned and private-owned companies, some of whom are also the CEOs of listed companies. These students are less likely to immigrate to Singapore because they have a better working environment and higher social status in China. They come to study in Singapore with the sole intention to improve their professional quality.

c. Study visits and overseas training. The personnel is mainly deployed by schools and public institutions to study and exchange in the corresponding institutions in Singapore for a certain period of time. The personnel mainly include visiting scholars or senior visiting scholars and students in cooperative research, study or training, visiting professors and cooperative exchange students. These students are all sent by national institutions or agencies and have close ties with the original institutions and schools. Therefore, their rate of returning to China is high, and it is very unlikely that they will settle in the country.

d. Overseas students in secondary and primary schools, the population of whom has shown a rising trend in recent years in Singapore. According to statistics, since the Reform and Opening-Up Policy, about 20,000 to 30,000 people each year have come to study abroad at their own expenses, of which primary and secondary school students account for 50%.

Because of their younger age, they are more receptive to the new environment and they spend longer time on studying in Singapore (4-5 years in secondary schools and 3-4 years in universities). Therefore, in the future, they are very likely to become new immigrants. Although it is difficult to have exact statistics concerning Chinese students who settle in Singapore, based on the statistics of some overseas students, we can estimate the tendency of students who convert into new immigrants. In 2002, Singapore's Lianhe Zaobao and Chinese overseas student website "Huaxinwang" jointly conducted a survey on Chinese students who received scholarships. A total of 105 individuals were surveyed, all of whom were the winners of the first scholarships. These individuals have completed undergraduate programs at Singaporean

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universities and are currently executing the contract for six-year local employment. 51% of surveyed respondents said they plan to remain in Singapore within three to five years while 30% said they are ready to return to China, and the rest 19% said they are interested in seeking further development in other countries. In this survey, more than half of the students chose to immigrate to Singapore. According to statistics, in every nine students on average who graduate from the National University of Singapore, three will stay in Singapore, three will choose to return to their home countries and the remaining three will go to the United States for further studies.

It can be estimated that among the 30,000 Chinese overseas students in Singapore, at least 10,000 students will immigrate to become permanent residents of Singapore. As Chinese students keep coming to study in Singapore, the group of overseas students who become new immigrants will also grow larger and larger.

4. Reasons for Chinese overseas students to immigrate to Singapore From the above analysis, we can see that there are many reasons why Chinese students come to study in Singapore. Many people do not aim to immigrate before leaving China However, what motivate them to settle in Singapore?

4.1 Talent attraction policy of Singapore government rapid economic development of Singapore requires a large number of talents from all industries. However, due to the lack of domestic human resources, Singapore government has turned its focus to foreign countries and actively attracted overseas talents. At present, Singapore has adopted the talent attraction policy as its basic national policy. Former Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong proposed to make Singapore a powerful magnet for attracting talents, ideas, aptitude, concepts, and knowledge. The incumbent Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also proposed that Singapore should be built into a place which is full of hope, suitable for people's life, work, and leisure, and makes foreigners feel at home. It is precise because the government insists on giving full play to the role of talents and creating a favorable environment for its talents from the perspective of macroeconomic policies that Singapore attracts a large number of talents to gather in Singapore and lays an excellent foundation for the economic growth of Singapore. In recent years, Singapore has innovated a series of talent policies and incentive mechanisms, such as the Singapore Scholarship Program, the Overseas Talent Residency Program, and the Arrival Permanent Resident Program, etc.

4.2 Excellent employment prospect of Singapore Singapore has become one of the countries with the fastest economic growth and highest affluence in the world in recent years and has become one of the Four Asian Tigers. In recent years, the government has also been actively developing information technology industries such as high-density and large-volume semiconductor chips and biotechnology as the driving force for the future economic

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development and technology based on the existing advantageous industries, such as entrepot trade, freight transport, manufacturing and financial services. As the economy of Singapore has maintained rapid growth for the recent two decades, it has provided massive employment opportunities. Concerning the specific needs, marketing talents are the most urgently needed, followed by engineering, operations and technical talents, especially engineers, software architects, outsourcing project managers and systems management professionals. The majority of Chinese students who come to Singapore for study are majoring in engineering, life sciences, and English, whom Singapore is lacking and vigorously attracting.

4.3 Easy integration of local society by Chinese overseas students Singapore is a multi-ethnic country dominated by the Chinese descendants, who still maintain the fine traditions of national culture and receive the bilingual education in both English and Chinese. Therefore, studying in Singapore has reduced racial, cultural and linguistic barriers and relieved the feeling of loneliness and strangeness. In this way, the students can quickly integrate into the local society. Singapore has a unique bilingual environment, and the daily conversation and various texts Singaporeans are basically based in English. In this environment, overseas students can achieve giant leaps in their own English proficiency in a short-term, thus becoming proficient in English. Most Chinese in Singapore have also studied Chinese, and Chinese students who come to Singapore will not have difficulty in communication due to poor English speaking ability. Therefore, in such a bilingual environment, students arriving in Singapore will not have the same huge cultural and linguistic impact as they will in Europe and the United States.

With the deepened development of economic globalization, all countries have begun to capture talents. As the representatives of excellent talents and elite talents, overseas students have drawn much attention and competition from many countries. Many countries have introduced preferential policies in order to attract foreign students to settle. Chinese students have always been the new force in the study-abroad tide. As of today, the momentum for Chinese students to study abroad is still strong. However, since the Reform and Opening-Up Policy, less than one-third of the 900,000 overseas students have returned to China, and more than 600,000 students have settled where they study abroad, which converts studying abroad to settlement and has become an important way to immigrate to other countries. This has caused a certain loss of talents in China.

To this end, China must pay great attention to this phenomenon and conduct in-depth understanding and research. Through a case study of Chinese students who come to Singapore for study, it is easy to find that the Singapore government has adopted the strategic thinking of "building the nation with talents" and formulated a series of strategies and mechanisms for attracting overseas talents. This is the most important reason for attracting the talents. Secondly, Singapore also creates excellent employment and living environment for overseas students. All of these experiences are worth learning from. In short, the conversion

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from studying abroad to immigration is the general trend of the current international talent flow and is the result of economic globalization. Faced with a large population of Chinese students who have settled overseas, on one hand, China should make full use of its overseas resources to build a bridge between China and the settlement countries. On the other hand, China should formulate corresponding policies of attracting students to return to China and create a good environment for the overseas students in the domestic development.

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