

# The Impact of Social Media Use on the Political Identity of Returnee Lecturers — A Survey Study Based on Universities in Jinhua Region

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**Abstract:** Political identity is of special significance to the political construction and social development of contemporary China. Returnee lecturers are an important part of the university teaching team and an important force in training socialist builders with Chinese characteristics. An empirical survey was conducted on 35 returnee lecturers in universities in Jinhua area by means of questionnaires and interviews. The results show that the political identity of the returnee lecturers is generally good, but there are some problems, such as political party identity, national identity, institutional identity and interest identity need to be improved. As a result, factors such as gender, political profile and length of stay abroad have a significant effect on the political identity of returnee lecturers. The paper concludes with some initiatives, such as strengthening ideological and political education, improving remuneration and promoting career development.

**Keywords:** Political Identity; University Teachers; Young Returnees

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## 1. Introduction

According to the latest "2022 Blue Book of China's Returned Overseas Students Employment", state-owned enterprises are the preferred work units for returnees, accounting for nearly 50% of the total; followed by public institutions (including colleges and universities, scientific research organisations, etc.), accounting for more than 30% of the total; and less than 10% of the returnees from private economic units. This shows that the public sector and the public domain are the main destinations for young returnees.<sup>[1]</sup>

Colleges and universities are an important position for ideological construction, and the political orientation of young college lecturers (hereinafter referred to as lecturers) directly affects the political orientation of college students, so improving the political identity of college lecturers can indirectly improve the political identity of the student body. The emergence and use of media technology has created a new space for information dissemination, brought about the extension of human capabilities, and changed the way of production and life of human beings, their way of thinking and values, which inevitably leads to changes in the construction of ideology. Therefore, it is important to study the impact of social media use on the ideological and political formations of the returnee lecturer group.

## 2. Connotation of lecturers' political identity

Political identity is a phenomenon of identification in political life and in the political sphere, a psychological sense of belonging that expresses affirmation and approval, i.e., a positive psychological reaction resulting from internal identification and approval. The role definition of political power and the related sense of political belonging of the members of society will also lead the members of society to encourage or exemplify the compliance of other members of society with the corresponding political norms and ultimately strengthen the sense of recognition and affirmative tendency of the society as a whole towards political power.

In this paper, a returnee lecturer refers to a person under the age of 35 who is engaged in scientific research, teaching and administration in higher education institutions. Because the essence of political identity is the emotional inclination and psychological belonging of social members to political power. Therefore, the political identity of college lecturers refers to an emotional inclination

and psychological belonging to political power and the ruling party, government, country and system, etc., which is produced by college lecturers in the process of interacting with political power through theoretical mastery and practical experience. At the same time, according to the theory of Marx's political economy principle of economic base determines superstructure, political identity is linked by interests, which is manifested in the interests of obtaining, sharing and playing, i.e. interest identity.<sup>[2]</sup>

This emotional tendency and psychological sense of belonging is specifically embodied in political party identity, national identity and institutional identity and interest identity, which are also the four elements of political identity of college lecturers.

## **2.1 Political party identification**

Political parties are important political organisations that influence political power in modern society. A political party is a political organisation that represents the fundamental interests of a class or a group. Usually, party identification refers to identification with the ruling party. People's attitudes towards political parties range from support to opposition. The degree of disapproval of the members of the society determines the stability of the political order. The political party identity of university lecturers is mainly reflected in their support or disapproval of China's current policy guidelines and the political behaviour of the ruling party and government.

## **2.2 National Identity**

National identity is the recognition of the right to rule a country based on the recognition of that country's sovereignty. In order for a country to enhance the political identity of its nationals, it must first be a sovereign country. The nationals' identification with the state also means that they confirm that they are a member of this state. This mentality, in a multi-ethnic state, has a significant impact on whether members of society accept and submit to the political power of the state. National identity plays an important role in maintaining national unity and social stability. A high degree of national identity can enhance national cohesion and centripetal force and promote social harmony and development. A low level of national identity may lead to national division and antagonism, and trigger social unrest and conflict. Therefore, the cultivation and promotion of national identity is an important task for every country.

## **2.3 Institutional identity/**

Institutional identity, within the context of a country, people's recognition of that country's political system, i.e., the psychological process of cognition, acceptance and recognition of the socialist institutional system with Chinese characteristics. <sup>[3]</sup>Political system, the various rules formulated by political entities that must be followed within a certain scope of political activity. The political system is fundamental and will not be changed easily. However, a political system exists only when common interests exist, which is the realistic basis for its existence.

## **2.4 Identity of interest**

The stability of any political rule must be based on the approval and support of the people, that is to say, on the efficiency of the ruled in the performance of the functions of the regime, the defence of the public interest and the fulfilment of the individual interests of the people, that is to say, on the extent to which the political products of the state satisfy the needs of society. <sup>[4]</sup>In short, it is whether the political system, which brings benefits to the individual, also safeguards the public interest of society as a whole.

## **3. The impact of social media on political identity**

Today's social media have become the most common platform for the public to disseminate information and express their opinions, and have become a staging ground for ideological and multicultural information. In the digital age, social media influence the political life of every citizen by different paths. Changes in foreign information and media environments increase the variable factors of political identity of seafaring lecturers. It has more autonomy, interactivity, timeliness and other characteristic performances than traditional media, which makes it easier to obtain hot topics and influence people's political cognition and political emotion, and the image of political identity of returnee lecturers is becoming more and more significant.

## **4. Empirical analysis of social media use on the political identity of returnee lecturers**

### **4.1 Descriptive statistics of the research sample**

This study conducted a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews on the social media use and political identity of 35 returnee lecturers in universities in Jinhua region from July to September 2023, with 35 questionnaires returned and 35 valid questionnaires. The main characteristics of the samples are that they are characterized by being young (60% under 30 years old), predominantly junior (77%), having a short working time in school, having a lower annual income (51% with an annual income of less than 100,000 yuan), and being more active in overseas social media platforms.

### **4.2 Research results**

As the pattern of interests in China continues to be adjusted and various contradictory issues and conflicts of interests intensify, and as teachers live abroad for a long time and receive many reports from the media in different countries about the Communist Party from different perspectives, some of the negative information undoubtedly influences the political party identification of some of the teachers to a certain extent.

At the national level, almost the majority of teachers said that the idea of emigration and changing nationality arose while living abroad.

At the regime level, nearly half of the returned lecturers had an indifferent or questionable attitude towards communist and socialist ideas.

Returned lecturers' interests are reflected in their personal life and work development. From the research, the main focus is on the real pressures of buying a house, getting married, and having and raising children. The biggest problem reflected in the survey is low income and most of them are not satisfied with their careers.

### **4.3 Presentation of t-test and ANOVA test results on the influencing factors**

#### **4.3.1 Analysis of Gender Influencing Factors**

The results of the t-test for gender-specific influences show that at the significance level of 0.05, according to the calculations, it is obtained that male and female gender have an effect on political identity. Males scored significantly higher than females on political identity and had a larger effect size (Cohen's  $d \approx 1.26$ ).

#### **4.3.2 Analysis of the impact of political profiling**

The results of the ANOVA test for the effect of political appearance show that at the significance level of 0.05, the calculated F-statistic is approximately 6.03, which is greater than the critical F-value of 2.9, so it can be assumed that there is an effect of political appearance on political identity.

#### **4.3.3 Impact analysis of length of stay abroad**

The results of the ANOVA test for the effect of length of stay outside the country show that at the significance level of 0.05, the F-statistic is calculated to be approximately 42.55, which is much larger than the critical F-value of 3.90. Therefore, the length of stay outside the country has an effect on political identity.

#### **4.3.4 Impact Analysis of Overseas Social Media Use**

Based on the analyses conducted on the impact of overseas social media usage on political identity, we come to the following conclusions. There is a significant effect of overseas social media usage on political identity at a significance level of 0.05.

The results of the research show that gender, political profile, length of stay abroad, and use of overseas social media have a more significant impact on the political identity of returnee lecturers, while other influencing factors such as job title, degree of education, and country of study are not significant.

## **5. Summary**

This study aimed to explore the impact of political identity on returnee lecturers in Chinese universities and found a series of key findings and insights. Factors such as gender, political profile, and length of stay abroad had a significant impact on the political

identity of returnee lecturers. Social media played an important role in shaping the political identity of returnee lecturers. Finally, this study puts forward some suggestions to improve political identity, including strengthening ideological and political education, improving remuneration, and promoting career development. These measures can help improve the level of political identity of returnee lecturers, promote their better participation in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and train future builders and leaders of society.

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