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学 位 論 文 題 名/Title of Dissertation

A case study of social ties among Chinese overseas through social media in the digital age
(デジタル時代におけるソーシャルメディアを介した中国在外居住者の社会的結びつきに関する事例研究)

With the normalization of cross-border mobility, sojourners, defined in this study as individuals who reside in host countries for medium to long periods and establish their everyday life there, have become a stable and enduring part of contemporary urban populations, including international students and transnational professionals. Driven by the widespread adoption of social media, sojourners' social ties are no longer shaped solely by geographical proximity. Instead, they are formed and maintained through the interplay of online and offline interactions. Much of the existing research on digital technologies and social ties emerged during earlier stages when social media had not yet become deeply embedded in everyday life, and greater attention was paid to social ties within host countries, particularly those with host-nationals. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how social media reshapes sojourners' overall social relationship patterns when existing ties persist.

This study aims to explore how sojourners reconstruct their social ties in the digital age, the mechanisms by which this reconstruction operates, and how this process relates to cross-cultural adaptation and QoL. To address these questions, this study adopts both group-level and individual-level analyses. At the group level, Chapter Two examines an online group with ethnic characteristics named "Hokkaido Huaren zhi Jia" (hereafter HHZJ) as a case study. It focuses on the sojourner's connection with co-nationals. At the individual level, Chapter Three takes Chinese international students as the object, incorporating homeland friendship networks into co-national, host-national, and multi-national friendship networks to reflect a more comprehensive view of sojourners' social ties in contemporary contexts.

Specifically, Chapter Two examines HHZJ, an online group that means "the House of Chinese overseas in Hokkaido," as a case study. Drawing on Lasswell's communication model (Lasswell, 1948) and social capital theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), this chapter analyzes the operational patterns and functional characteristics of HHZJ-type groups mediated by social media and considers how such groups can be situated within existing theoretical frameworks. To achieve this aim, a mixed methods approach was employed between 2021 and 2023, incorporating participant observation, questionnaire surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that conceptualized through the key dual dimensions of "ethnicity" and "online connectivity" within

existing theoretical frameworks, HHZJ-type groups exhibit a social structure that blends characteristics of both online communities and ethnic communities (Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 1998; Nakano & Imazu, 1993; Kajita, 1994).

Importantly, the analysis indicates that these communities have also exhibited novel characteristics that extend beyond the earlier definitions of online communities and ethnic communities. As Wellman (2001) argues, communities have evolved from bounded neighborhood groups into social network relationships. Beyond fixed boundaries and membership criteria, social media-based ties transcend temporal and spatial constraints, making social ties more fluid and adaptable. While such communities are formed by shared cultural identities and online interactions, they differ from the exclusivity of traditional ethnic communities and the purely digital nature of online communities. In this sense, online and ethnic dimensions serve primarily as structural rather than defining attributes. This perspective helps clarify how digital diaspora groups mobilize resources through virtual spaces and how these practices are associated with cross-cultural adaptation and QoL in an era when geographical clustering is no longer dominant. This chapter illustrates how sojourners in the digital age sustain and mobilize co-national social ties across distance through social media.

Chapter Three examines the friendship networks of international students and their associations with QoL, measured using the WHOQOL-BREF scale. The survey was conducted from January 7 to April 7, 2025, yielding 637 valid responses from Chinese students across 38 countries and regions. The findings indicate that despite cross-border mobility becoming more flexible and social media being widely used among international students, the sizes and functional roles of friendship networks in the host country have not significantly deviated from previous research. Consistent with previous research based on single-country or single-institution samples, foreign friends, especially host-national friendship networks, are associated with higher levels of well-being among international students (Geeraert et al., 2014; Liu & Shirley, 2021). Moreover, individual characteristics, including age, duration of stay, language proficiency, and migration intentions (Poyrazli et al., 2010; Geeraert et al., 2014; Hendrickson et al., 2011), are also confirmed from an international questionnaire survey conducted in 38 countries and regions, suggesting these established findings possess considerable universality.

Notably, Chapter Three extends existing analytical frameworks by incorporating homeland friends as a distinct category among friendship networks of international students in the digital age. The analysis demonstrates that, as the widespread use of social media has enabled communication to transcend temporal and spatial constraints, homeland friends are more than sources of emotional or psychological support, as earlier studies have emphasized (Neri & Ville, 2008). Instead, they have become a significant component of international students' social ties, playing roles similar to those of co-national friends in the host country. Therefore, this chapter supplements the functional model of international student friendship networks proposed by Bochner et al. (1977) in the digital age. It also proposes an analytical framework that captures the process of friendship selection tendencies by tracking changes in individual characteristics, such as language proficiency and duration of stay, thereby visualizing the configuration of social ties.

This study demonstrates that when digital technologies are deeply embedded in everyday life, sojourners' social ties are neither entirely severed nor reconstructed in the host country. Instead, mediated by social media, existing social ties can be continuously maintained across geographical distance while new ties are

simultaneously formed and expanded. In particular, ties associated with the homeland remain actively involved in sojourners' everyday lives through social media, while social ties formed in the host country, such as co-national ties, are shaped by existing social capital, including shared language and cultural identity. In this sense, the cross-cultural adaptation is not limited to learning from the host society or forming relationships with host-nationals but also involves maintaining and reorganizing existing social resources.

Taken together, these findings illustrate how diverse social ties coexist and operate online and offline in the digital age and how they are associated with sojourners' QoL and cross-cultural adaptation. By focusing on the ways in which social ties are maintained and mobilized both online and offline, this study contributes to research on cross-cultural adaptation by offering a more grounded framework for understanding the social support systems of sojourners in the digital age.