

Chinese Trumpists: How Donald Trump finds his populist ground in China

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Abstract

Although the 2020 US presidential election has ended with the victory of the Democrat candidate Joe Biden, the right-wing populist wave brought by Trump has never ceased. In China, interestingly, there are not a few people who support Trump since the 2016 election. Despite Trump's provocative discourse and actions against China, many Chinese fans still stood by his side in the latest election. In this paper, I will explore the phenomenon of Chinese Trumpism by studying qualitative data from Zhihu (知乎), a Chinese online Q&A community whose users are mostly highly educated and more actively engaged in political discussion than in general. Responses of questions about Donald Trump from 2016 to 2021 will be selected and analyzed. Based on the literature review and previous observations of the platform, it is assumed that, firstly, Trump's conservative values indeed meet those of Chinese netizens, since most of them bear antagonist sentiments against western liberal doctrine. Secondly, populist figure of Trump has appealed to Chinese netizens who consider him as an honest, straightforward and courageous politician different from the 'hypocritical' liberal elites. Thirdly, some people believe that Trump's being president of the US might be more advantageous for China, while reasons given are divided. This study is aimed at contributing to studies of Chinese public opinion and China-US relations with a focus on social media discourse.

Key words: China, public opinion, China-US relations, Trumpism, right-wing populism