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Employability of Australian-Educated Chinese Postgraduates in China: A Case Study of the University of Sydney

Jie Hao

A thesis submitted to the University of Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctoral of Philosophy Degree
II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
III. the thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.
IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.
V. this thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.
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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the large number of Chinese students who undertake postgraduate study overseas, this research aims to examine how Australian higher education shapes their career development in China with regard to their employment status and also the challenges that they experience on their return home.

A leading Australian university was chosen as the case study, and a mixed method approach was adopted. After sending an electronic format survey to more than 1,000 Chinese post-graduate alumni, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 graduates as well as relevant stakeholders in China, including both central and local government officials, and employers from different professional fields.

The research found that the majority of graduates who have acquired an Australian higher education are competitive in China's labour market. Compared to their local counterparts, most of the sampled returnees found jobs within a short time after returning home, and obtained high incomes. While factors like China's booming economy, liberalizing politics, and policies on recruiting international professionals/returnees all contributed to the above situation, this study argues that the different forms of capital, including human capital, cultural capital and social capital, acquired by these returnees during their international education period abroad, were also vital components. In particular, a post-graduate qualification from a well-known international university helped them to obtain more opportunities during the recruitment process, which supports the signaling model theory.

Re-embracing the home culture after spending several years overseas acquiring a higher education was found to be a major issue when international graduates return to their home society. China's fast changing environment acted as an extra barrier to the re-integration process, because the familiar home was no longer the same. Therefore, while re-integrating with the necessary traditional culture and practices, returnees also need to spend time and effort on learning to negotiate today's China.

As a longstanding issue for China (and the wider world), gender inequality was revealed and discussed in the context of issues between female and male returnees in
China’s work environment. While the new China has witnessed a great improvement in women’s social status and rights, particularly after Chairman Mao’s statement that ‘Women hold up half the sky’, discrimination against women still persists in the workplace. The study found that, even with the same education, culture and social background, male returnees were seen as more competitive than female ones. This finding applied not only to perceptions of ability and the length of time taken to find a job, but also to the level of position attained, annual income, promotion opportunities, retirement age, etc.

The study focused on Chinese students who had obtained a postgraduate qualification from a single elite Australian university, which limits its generalizability to all returnees in China. Further study in the area is needed, as it is important to examine international graduates’ employment issues in order to provide efficient feedback to the education institutions with regard to offering comprehensive services to international students. On the other hand, the result also helps the respective Chinese government bodies when reviewing their human resource development programs and talent recruitment plans, an important aspect of the national development strategy.
ABBREVIATIONS

AEI  Australian Education International
CCT  Cultural Capital Theory
CEO  Chief Executive Officer
DEEWR Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
FDI  Foreign Direct Investment
GATS General Agreement on Trade in Services
HCT  Human Capital Theory
HEI  Higher Education Institution
HRD  Human Resource Development
ICT  Information and Communication Technology
IMF  International Monetary Fund
MNC  Multinational Corporation
OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SCT  Social Capital Theory
Tsinghua Tsinghua University
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO  World Trade Organization
## CONTENTS

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION .......................................................................................... i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................... ii

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................. iii

ABBREVIATIONS ....................................................................................................... v

CONTENTS ................................................................................................................ vi

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................... x

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................. xii

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION ......................................................................... 1

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

The Phenomenon of Hai Gui ('Sea Turtles') ............................................................ 3

The Knowledge Economy and China’s Demand for Talent ................................. 8

Emerging Issues of Returnees’ Career Development ............................................. 11

Research Questions ............................................................................................... 13

The Significance of Studying ‘Hai gui’ from Australia ........................................ 13

Outline of the Chapters ......................................................................................... 14

Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 17

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................... 19

Introduction ............................................................................................................ 19

Globalisation ......................................................................................................... 19

Actors in globalisation .......................................................................................... 21

Implications of China’s Emerging Personnel Pool ............................................. 27

National medium-and-long-term plans to 2020 .................................................. 28

National key projects ........................................................................................... 36

Higher Education Internationalisation ................................................................. 38

Rationales ............................................................................................................. 39

Australian higher education and Chinese international students .................... 42

Gender .................................................................................................................... 45

Women and education ......................................................................................... 45

Women and work ................................................................................................. 49

Women and Chinese style child-care arrangements ......................................... 52

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 55

CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ....................................... 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-liberalism</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-liberal processes and China’s labour market</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the hukou system in China’s labour market</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subsequent reform of higher education and graduates’ employment</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of Capital</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human capital theory and Chinese students</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural capital and international education</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital, guanxi and alumni networks</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Signalling Model and its Implications in China</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational signalling</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender index</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key characteristics of the signalling model</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed research approach</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and generalisability</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population identification</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical strategy for the interview results</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative analysis</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative analysis</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Landscape</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Inequality Issues in China’s Professional Arena</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Modernization of Women and their Social Roles</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER NINE</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Higher Education Shapes Returnees’ Employment Trajectories</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Education and Forms of Capital</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-embracing the Home Society</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Inequality</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A. Ethical approval</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet, Survey</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet, Interview</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D. Participant consent form</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E. Survey questions</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F. Interview protocols, Graduates, English</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G. Interview protocols, Graduates, Chinese</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H. Interview protocols, Employers, English</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I. Interview protocols, Employers, Chinese</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Key indicators of national skilled professionals’ development ........................................ 32
Table 2.2 Target indicators of education development ................................................................. 36
Table 2.3 Target indicators of human resource development ......................................................... 36
Table 2.4 Number of female academics in Chinese HEIs ............................................................. 51
Table 3.1 Foreign direct investment (FDI) overview in China 1995-2009 ....................................... 62
Table 3.2 Numbers of domestic postgraduate students ............................................................... 92
Table 5.1 List of variables surveyed ............................................................................................. 132
Table 5.2 Classification of variables ............................................................................................ 134
Table 5.3 Overview of graduates’ gender ...................................................................................... 136
Table 5.4 Overview of graduates' age ............................................................................................ 137
Table 5.5 Overview of graduates' discipline .................................................................................. 137
Table 5.6 Surveyed returnees' graduating year ............................................................................ 138
Table 5.7 Intention to return ......................................................................................................... 139
Table 5.8 Employment status ....................................................................................................... 140
Table 5.9 Fields of employment .................................................................................................... 140
Table 5.10 Position overview ....................................................................................................... 142
Table 5.11 Income overview ........................................................................................................ 142
Table 5.12 Satisfaction level .......................................................................................................... 143
Table 5.13 Time taken to find 1st job ............................................................................................ 143
Table 5.14 Employing city overview ............................................................................................ 145
Table 5.15 Connection to the graduating university ...................................................................... 146
Table 5.16 Result of cross variable analysis .................................................................................. 147
Table 5.17 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and intention to return ....................................................... 148
Table 5.18 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and employment status ....................................................... 149
Table 5.19 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and professional field ......................................................... 150
Table 5.20 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and position ....................................................................... 152
Table 5.21 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and annual income ............................................................. 153
Table 5.22 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and satisfaction level ......................................................... 155
Table 5.23 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and time to find first job ................................................... 156
Table 5.24 Chi-Square Tests: Gender, positions, and time taken for first job ............................... 157
Table 5.25 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and employing city ............................................................. 158
Table 5.26 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and connection level ......................................................... 160
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1  Number of Chinese students returned (1978-2010) ........................................ 5
Figure 3.1  Demand for employees by different types of enterprise .............................. 63
Figure 4.1  Embedded case study design ................................................................. 105
Figure 4.2  Research strategies ............................................................................... 106
Figure 4.3  Influential factors on returnees' career development ............................. 107
Figure 4.4  Data source triangulation ..................................................................... 108
Figure 4.5  Data collection triangulation ............................................................... 109
Figure 5.1  Gender and intention to return ............................................................... 148
Figure 5.2  Gender and employment status .............................................................. 149
Figure 5.3  Gender ratios of the two cohorts ............................................................. 151
Figure 5.4  Gender and employment level ............................................................... 152
Figure 5.5  Gender and annual income ................................................................. 153
Figure 5.6  Gender and satisfaction level ............................................................... 154
Figure 5.7  Gender, level of positions, and time taken for first job ....................... 157
Figure 5.8  Gender and employing city ................................................................. 158
Figure 5.9  Gender and connection to overseas university ..................................... 159
Figure 5.10  Graduating year and intention to return ............................................. 161
Figure 5.11  Graduating year and career status ...................................................... 162
Figure 5.12  Graduating year and employment position ....................................... 164
Figure 5.13  Graduating year and annual income ...................................................... 165
Figure 5.14  Graduating year and satisfaction level ..................................................... 167
Figure 5.15  Graduating year and length of time on job seeking ......................... 168
Figure 5.16  Graduating year and employing city ..................................................... 169
Figure 5.17  Graduating year and connection to overseas university ...................... 170
Figure 5.18  Most influential factors ...................................................................... 172
Figure 5.19  Factors influencing career development .............................................. 173
Figure 5.20  Key re-integration problems .............................................................. 175
Figure 5.21  Gender and re-integration problems .................................................... 177
Figure 5.22  Graduating year and re-integration problems ....................................... 178
Figure 8.1  Gender and position ............................................................................ 253
Figure 8.2  Gender and annual income ................................................................. 254
Figure 8.3  Hierarchy of political bureau and Central committee ............................. 260
Figure 8.4  Ratio of job vacancies: male and female applicants .............................. 262
CHAPTER ONE  INTRODUCTION

Introduction

There is an increasing trend of international students and researchers earning multiple degrees overseas and considering returning to their home country for career development after many years of both international study and work experience. They strongly influence the people around them and encourage international interactions and cooperation, which further boosts the extensity and velocity of globalisation through utilising their knowledge.

English is China's most widely studied second language as part of its effort to enhance its participation in the global economy (Spring, 2006, p. 249). English-speaking Australia attracts a large number of Chinese students, similar to the US, UK and Canada. Its geographic position, multicultural environment and stable political relationship with China bring extra credit, and impact on Chinese students' decisions when choosing their study destinations. As the number of returnees is increasing rapidly, understanding their experiences of re-integrating into their fast-changing Motherland, professional trajectories and ongoing relationship with Australian education experiences can help to clarify the underlying issues related to international education. It is also interesting to investigate how Australia is linked with China through investigating the experiences of Chinese international students/graduates from an international higher education perspective.

Several studies have identified the factors that attract mainland Chinese students to Australia, which are: marketing in the field of international education, the effective management of international students, and their on-campus learning methodologies, capabilities, challenges, expectations, and social experiences (Cross, 2006; M. Li,
1999; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Other studies have outlined Chinese students’ learning attitudes and the outcomes of overseas’ experiences, including the facts that they are highly conscious of the learning context, very adaptable to the new style of teaching and learning in a second language environment (Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001; Wong, 2004), and often give an impression that they are comparatively more subjected to particularly intense social pressures to succeed and achieve (Volet & Ang, 1998). Little systematic research has been conducted, however, on the career paths of Australian-educated Chinese professionals after they return to China. As Bhandari and Blumenthal (2009) pointed out, the value of a degree or professional credential in a student’s future career is an important factor when he/she is considering embarking on an international education. This study aims to examine the value of an Australian higher education qualification by investigating the influential factors related to graduates’ professional development after returning home.

Although numerous studies related to Chinese returnees’ development in China have been produced by both international and domestic scholars (H. Chen, 2005; Ding, 2011; S. Guo, 2011; Organization Department of Central Committee, 2009; Saxenian, 2006; Zweig & Han, 2008), none of these has focussed specifically on young returnees from Australia. Saxenian (2006) mainly considered the career development of Taiwanese-origin Chinese who have studied and worked in Silicon Valley, United States. Zweig and Han’s (2008) research suggests that returnees are still regarded as quite valuable in general. By considering returnees from Japan and Canada located in Guangzhou, it was found that returnees do not face major a unemployment problem, as most of them were able to find a job within three months of returning. Guo’s (2011) work suggested that Chinese Canadians in Beijing helped to bring in foreign capital, transfer more goods and services, and introduce cutting-edge technology, which contributes to China’s booming economy. Domestic scholars, like Ding (2011) and Chen (2005), reviewed the re-integration challenges faced by many young returnees in today’s China, but the limitation of their studies is their small sample and insufficient evidence.
The current study will enhance research on young returnees through incorporating a specific focus on the foreign education provider (a leading international university in Australia) and using a relative larger sample of Chinese graduates. It aims to reveal how an Australian higher education shapes Chinese graduates' career development in China, and what are the key challenges that they face with regard to re-integrating into their motherland. In addition, with more female Chinese students enrolled in Australian higher education than male ones, there is significant potential to make improvements in gender equity (given the longstanding patriarchal traditions in China). Once again, these foreign educated women's professional life upon returning to China has not been systematically addressed in most of the existing literature. Hence, this research will also consider the implications within China of the existence of a pool of highly-skilled female graduates from Australia.

The rest of this chapter outlines the phenomenon of returnees in today's China and the local environment they face. This is followed by the specific research questions, the significance of the study, and an outline of the succeeding chapters.

The Phenomenon of *Hai Gui* ('Sea Turtles')

The transformation of the People's Republic of China has fundamentally been a global project (Guthrie, 2006). Starting from the late 1990s, when China's economy became comparatively stronger and more stable, those who had profited from the Open Door policy started to send their children abroad to study, most of whom were aged under 25; this marked the third wave of study abroad, which continues to date. Increasingly, those with sufficient means are able to study abroad according to their personal choice, without needing to engage in complicated procedures or obtain government approval.
China’s thriving economy, more liberalised polity and growing opportunities have encouraged foreign-educated professionals to return there (Zweig, 2006). Such factors as family, social connections, good living standards and better treatment may also have contributed to this group’s greater willingness to return. These factors may be particularly applicable to the current generation of study abroad students, as most of them were born under the one-child policy. Family ties and the existing social networks built by earlier generations have laid a solid foundation for their offsprings’ career development. Unlike 30 years ago, the current generation of Chinese international students tends to stem from families of higher economic status, and to be more aware of the rich social environment available to them in China. Most of them hold positive views about China’s development and are willing to return and play a role in such an active, changing society (Hoffman, 2006; Zweig, 2002). These young people are often less sensitive than an older generation to previous political events, like the culture revolution, etc., and more confident about China’s future development.

According to the Ministry of Education, a total of about two million people went abroad to study between the years 1978 and 2010, of whom 632,200 chose to return for the purposes of career development (Ministry of Education, 2011, March 2). The number of returnees started to increase rapidly from 2000. Such a high number of returnees, a large portion of whom are young people, is a new phenomenon in China. They are known as ‘haigui’ (sea turtles), a pun that is used to describe successful returnees from overseas, usually those who went abroad for educational purposes.
Ten years ago, when the first group of study abroad students returned to China, they transferred their first-hand knowledge, utilised international resources to enhance their work, created economic and professional opportunities, and local contacts (Saxenian, 2006), and succeeded in the then environment, relative to others who had not yet seen the world. Today, with tens of thousands of foreign-educated graduates eyeing the job prospects back home and flooding the Chinese labour market, an international educational qualification is no longer a guarantee of success back home. Highly-skilled university graduates who speak both Chinese and English and understand both Eastern and Western cultures now find they hold merely the basic requirements for obtaining a desirable job.

China’s labour market is already crowded with increasing numbers of local graduates, particularly since the massive expansion of higher education enrolments over the decade from 1999. What this means can be seen by referring to the international trends. According to some researchers, both the inputs and outputs of higher education have been transformed (Scott, 1998, p. 114). On the input side, students with lower entry scores are able to study at universities due to the less stringent requirements, although the competition remains fierce at the top-tier institutions. On
the output side, in addition to high-end scientists, doctors and lawyers, universities also produce many middle level administrative professionals. In China, one of the major results of this expansion is the rapid growth in the number of graduates, that has averaged 0.65 million per year since 2002. More than 5.5 million Chinese students graduated from university in 2008 – an increase of 0.64 million people compared with 2007 – and a million were unable to find jobs (Xinmin, 2008, December 11). In 2009, more than 6.1 million students graduated (Xinhua News Agency, 2009, June 15), most of whom are yet to find a job.

Chinese higher education internationalisation helps local graduates to strengthen their employment skills. For example, foreign language teaching on campus, gaining international accreditation, partnering with overseas HEIs and recruiting international lecturers/professors are now features of the major universities in China (Wu, 2007). In addition, these local graduates’ on-going experience and closer understanding of the constantly changing China are advantages when compared to their foreign-educated peers who have lived abroad for a long time (Hao & Welch, 2012).

At the same time, returnees who graduated from international universities often have unrealistic expectations about their potential salary and work environment, and only eye opportunities in the bigger cities. Many lack work experience, but still tend to aspire to higher positions because of their international education qualifications (Beijing Daily, 2007, January 11; X. Zhu, 2005). According to the Research and Development Centre of the State Council, in a study of 1,500 returnees’ career development, more than 35% experienced problems related to finding employment. This view is also supported by the 2006 CHR Career Consultants Group’s research in Beijing, who found only 52% of returnees are satisfied with their career development (X. Hu, 2008). All of the above contribute to the phenomenon of *haidai* (seaweed), another metaphor used to describe returned graduates who, like seaweed that is tossed on the shore, at the mercy of the waves and tides, cannot find a job, sometimes spending a considerable period unemployed.
In this era of ever-expanding and more commercialised higher education, mobility may be interpreted as a class-specific habitus, allowing the wealthier and middle classes to participate actively in a social process that involves distinguishing one student from another in a socially and culturally constructed fashion (Findlay, King, Stam, & Ruiz-Gelices, 2006). Despite the differences between international returnees and domestic graduates, they often group themselves with peers who share a similar background (R. Goodman, 1990). Returnees often divide themselves into smaller groups based on their shared study destination and, at the same time, their professional development and behaviour form an image that partially reflects the respective host countries’ education quality.

Equally, a country’s image that mainly reflects its political, cultural and economic power also influences returnees’ professional development in their country of origin. It is in this sense that Chinese perceptions of US returnees can be understood. Most Chinese expect the most advanced technologies, developed management, big financial projects or creative ideas to stem from the US. There are two major reasons for this; firstly, China’s long relationship with the US regarding international education, including the fact that China’s first group of international students was sent to the US by the Qing dynasty in the 19th Century (Yao, 2004) – a detailed discussion is provided in Chapter Two and Six. Today, too, America remains the largest destination for Chinese students abroad, and is perceived as the leading source of innovation and advanced technology. Secondly, successful US returnees in China are more numerous than those from any other country, and they cover all major professional areas. Amongst today’s returnees from all over the world, many US returnees possess not merely a solid education qualification, but also work experience with major research institutions or companies, which gives them extra credit when compared with hai gui from other countries. Therefore, to Chinese companies who aim to innovate, returnees from the US are often the preferred choice, especially in the technological field.
Australia is a new study destination for Chinese students, when compared with America, England, Japan, Russia, Belgium, France and Germany, mainly because the latter countries refunded some of the Boxer Indemnity to China in the early 1900s, which offered more financial support to Chinese overseas students there (Yao, 2004). Along with the globalization process, however, Australia’s open attitude towards international students, China’s rapidly increasing economic development after 1978, and the booming international education market have all contributed to the rapidly growing number of Chinese students who have become interested in Australia’s universities. By the end of 2011, there were 554,764 enrolments by full-fee paying international students in Australia on a student visa, with the higher education sector ranked first by volume of enrolments, compared to vocational education etc. The largest source country was China, with 40.2% of higher education enrolments (AEI, 2011a). As outlined earlier, a significant number of Chinese international students are returning home for purposes of career development after obtaining an international education qualification; by taking the University of Sydney as an example, this study will explore and analyse these highly-skilled Chinese graduates’ employment experiences and the issues that they face upon returning home.

The Knowledge Economy and China’s Demand for Talent

Globalisation gives particular visibility to higher education and raises the notion of the ‘knowledge society’, which emphasizes knowledge and skills over natural resources, material endowments, and capital (Stromquist, 2002). The emergence of a ‘knowledge-driven’ economy has been developing since the mid-20th century, with a shift from making a profit from producing manufactured goods to ideas and information or, as some have argued, from hands to head (Drucker, 1969). Within this construct, knowledge is seen as the key factor in a country’s international economic strength, and the foundation of the modern economy. Today, the growing codification of knowledge and its transmission through communications and
computer networks has led to the emerging information society (OECD, 1996). Clearly, education and training make an important contribution to this process. These concepts and similar ideologies could be seen or are reflected in some of China’s recent national reports and plans, for example the 12th Five-Year Plan, and the respective Medium-and-long-term plans in Education and Human Resource Development (State Council, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The Chinese President Hu Jintao’s notion of rejuvenating the country through science and education and strengthening the nation through trained personnel explicitly confirmed China’s determination to move towards a knowledge economy via advanced human resource development (J. Hu, 2007).

The knowledge economy gives a prominent place to higher education. Given this agenda, and the parallel changes in the economy, higher education is becoming increasingly important in terms of preparing a highly-skilled labour force, as the number of opportunities for unskilled manual workers decreases. The modern labour market now largely requires workers who are comfortable with the new technology, can acquire new skills and are able to work creatively (Giddens, 2006, p. 734). Therefore, higher education performs a role as an essential driver of a knowledge economy through creating graduates and undertaking research. Highly-skilled workers are an important element in converting knowledge into actual daily practice, inventing new technologies, and boosting productivity, to create higher value. A very important skill that quality higher education inculcates is effective learning, which enables students to acquire new skills efficiently and rapidly. Of course, international experience, modern communication and research skills, logical thinking, professional writing, respect for the culture and intellectual knowledge of others are also essential in a knowledge-based economy (Galama & Hosek, 2009).

It has been suggested that, in high-income economies, such as the OECD member states, the highest rates of return on education come from higher education graduates. On the other hand, in developing and middle-income economies, the highest
economic returns on education are usually generated from expenditure on levels below post-secondary education (DFAT, 2005). Some economists suggest that the cost of an overseas degree is adequately compensated for by the enhanced employment opportunities it provides (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). In general, there is a consensus among economists that higher education brings a significant rate of return to graduates. This recognition also helps to explain the moves made by agencies such as the World Bank and its regional counterpart, the Asian Development Bank, to accord support for higher education a greater priority in their agenda, after more than a decade of relative neglect.

In the contemporary world, global flows of information and data are an inherent feature of the emerging knowledge economy (Gibbons, 1998, p. 72). Both developed and developing countries accept that there are strong links between their productivity and the proportion of the population with high-level skills (DEEWR, 2008, December; World Bank, 1994). In China, this perspective has received official government backing and is also widely endorsed by the general public. The strategy of Rencai qiangguo (strengthening the national economy by developing human talent) is one of the country’s most important strategies as part of the wider strategy of Kejiao Xingguo (building China through science and education). This policy stresses the important role played in China’s development of nurturing professional talent and training knowledge workers. News headlines like *High-level skill talents are the foundation of an advanced country* often appear in the newspapers, on websites and in official reports (China Daily, 2008, May 17; Ministry of Education, 2008, November 19). In an award-winning Chinese film from 2004, *Tianxia Wuzei* (A World without Thieves), the famous actor, Ge You, leveraged his excellent acting skills and spread the following message among the general public. In playing a role as the best thief and also the head of a group of thieves, he asked his team at a meeting ‘What is the most important thing in the 21st century?’ Answering himself, he replies: ‘Human talent!’ This scene in the film is still widely known and acknowledged by people throughout China today, which reveals that not only did the Chinese government
understand the importance of human resource development, but also the general public and the respective industries.

Emerging Issues of Returnees’ Career Development

Western countries strongly influence developing, non-Western cultures and societies, although the latter have not been passively incorporated into a western hegemony but have actively engaged, through unique and particular local cultural, economic, and political contributions, in transforming Western influences into a global culture (Stromquist, 2002). As China becomes more exposed to the world, it is gradually adapting to the global norms and learning how to make a positive contribution to the global order. In terms of studying abroad, ideas and influences flow in both directions – while international students bring Chinese elements to western societies, their solid overseas experience, obtained though professional teaching and learning, certainly helps to shape their behaviour and mentalities upon returning home.

Florida (2005, p. 25) also pointed out that the world economy is morphing in new ways every day, from an older industrial system founded on raw materials to a creative economy bounded only by the limits of human talent and imagination. He emphasized that the fundamental shift in the way in which the economy is organized is also causing sweeping changes with regard to work style, life style and communication channels. In a related argument, many scholars have posited that a high quality international education empowers people’s capacity and productivity through enhancing their skills and knowledge, and so consequently changes their way of life when they return to their country of origin, including their financial, cultural and social perspectives (R. Goodman, Imoto, & Toivonen, 2011; Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Palifka, 2009; Saxenian, 2006).
Nevertheless, simply importing western knowledge and behaviour without considering the local environment would bring little benefit to returnees’ careers. Rather, as Ding (2011) suggested, a set of strategies should be incorporated when individuals seek to readapt to their home society. This includes psychological re-adjustment – acknowledging China’s environment and its differences from western countries, as well as the localization of life style and behaviour. It also encompasses following and showing respect for Chinese customs and life style, sensitive transnational applications of social capital, and the work involved in extending and deepening one’s social network (or guanxi). Further discussion of this issue is to be found in Chapter seven.

In addition to the re-integration issue, China’s fast-changing labour market also challenges young professionals through its crucial demands on their time, effort, patience, job-seeking and interview skills, ability to grasp good opportunities and, most importantly, capacity to manage the stress and disappointment when rejected – sometimes repeatedly. This element seems to contradict the earlier argument, which indicated that China welcomed highly-skilled returnees and international professionals, and urged its ministries and departments to create a receptive environment for them through introducing specific policies and plans (Cai 2012, Welch and Cai 2010) but, no matter how excellent these national polices and plans may be, when it comes to the micro level, effectively matching an individual’s skills with a job vacancy can pose a major problem for both employers and employees. Within China, hundreds of thousands of local students graduate every year, most of whom have worked hard at school, preparing to become skilled professionals. Analysts indicate there is an increasingly large gap between the kinds of jobs that are available in China and the skills and interests of the workers available to fill them, this being a particularly acute problem for college graduates (China Daily, 2010, March 5).
Despite the massive population of university graduates and professionals in all of China’s developed cities, which adds to the furious competition there, administrative issues like ‘hukou’ and cultural factors, such as gender, sometimes form further barriers to returnees’ career development – a detailed discussion on these topics is presented in Chapters Two, Three, Six and Eight. Consequently, it can be argued that, in today’s vibrant and competitive labour market, returnees need to overcome different kinds of barriers to their career path before ultimately achieving success.

Research Questions

The general research questions cluster around the following topics:

1. What are the principal employment outcomes of highly-skilled returnees from Australia, such as the average time it takes them to find employment, and the level and type of this employment?

2. What are the key factors and difficulties that highly-skilled returnees face in relation to finding employment in China? The topics addressed here include the appropriate professional skills, gender, and the extent and kinds of international experience, as well as issues of re-integration.

3. What is the relationship between highly-skilled returnees’ Australian education and career development upon their return to China? What kind of further support do returnees expect from the university, and what is provided?

The Significance of Studying ‘Hai gui’ from Australia

The significance of this research varies according to the constituency. For the Australian higher education providers and government, the research aims to help them to understand several key aspects: (a) international students’ professional development after they have obtained a higher education in Australia, and (b) the
capacity of Australian higher education to equip foreign students with the skills they need for successful trans-national re-integration into the Chinese context. Secondly, the research findings may also contribute to the development of knowledge on higher education internationalisation within the global context in terms of the following questions: How do Chinese graduate returnees benefit from international higher education? What kinds of new cultural elements do these young returnees bring back after having been exposed to an international education while relatively young? What impact, if any, do the host countries have on China through their graduates? Thirdly, the results may be of interest to the Chinese government, whose understanding of the professional development and performance of young graduates who return to China from Australia will be enhanced. Lastly, the findings of this research may benefit Chinese students who are considering embarking on an international education and their parents.

Outline of the Chapters

In this chapter, the social phenomenon of ‘Sea Turtles’ in China was described, especially the increasing pattern of international graduates with Australian higher education qualifications who are returning to China for the purposes of career development. This was followed by an introduction to the Chinese government’s evolving, positive stance towards recruiting overseas-educated professionals. The social phenomenon of increased mobility, including to Australia, together with China’s encouragement of this development, inspired my interest to investigate the actual life of these ‘sea turtles’, and pave a solid foundation for this research. An outline of the research questions and the significance of the research followed, which highlighted the purposes of the study. The remaining chapters of this thesis include a review of the relevant literature, an outline of the theories that support the study, the methodology that guided the research, the findings from the survey and interviews, a critical discussion of several issues, and the conclusion.
Chapter Two presents the literature review, starting with globalisation and the key actors in this process, including international organizations or agencies, the global labour market and commercial multinational companies, and global migration and brain circulation. It sketches the current world dynamics and outlines the fundamental need for international professionals. China, as an increasingly important member of the world community, has also recognized the significance of human resource development. In its national medium-and-long-term plans to 2020, notably including attracting international professionals and recruiting returnees was emphasized across the three plans: Science and Technology, Education Reform, and Human Resource Development. The implementation and progress of those plans are reviewed in the light of several national key projects that are discussed in the chapter. Facing the huge demand for international talented professionals, the international higher education institutions (HEIs) were seen as a major supplier or source of these. Higher education internationalisation is now a trend for many universities across the globe, with rationales that include the extension of political influence, economic development, academic power, and cultural impact. Nonetheless, preparing international skilled professionals is a major task for the international HEIs. A review of Australian higher education and Chinese international students is therefore included, as relevant to this research. Lastly, gender is discussed in relation to education, as well as career development. Women have traditionally been in a disadvantageous position when compared with men in Chinese society, so, with the establishment of the new China and the improving social status of women in Chinese society, this research also seeks to explore the differences between female and male returnees in terms of their career development, given they have enjoyed a similar international education experience.

Chapter Three draws upon relevant theories from the field of neo-liberalism, including theories of capital (particularly human, cultural and social capital), and signalling model theory in terms of seeking jobs in China. In the discussion of neo-liberalism, attention is paid to its free market ideology and influence on China’s
labour market. This is necessary because the vibrant labour market in today’s China forms the necessary focus of overseas-educated graduates’ career development search, and a knowledge of the reform progress helps to yield a better understanding of the development of the professions in modern China. A critical analysis of the relationships between human capital theory and Chinese international students, cultural capital and international education, and between social capital theory and the alumni network in China, follows. Each of the above discussions has a distinct focus, covering the solid period of international education experience and its implications for returning Chinese graduates. Lastly, the signalling model is highlighted because it reveals the power of certain signals in circumstances like recruitment or promotion, including the roles of educational certification, and gender.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological assumptions and the research process underlying this study. It begins with the research design, involving a mixed method approach, which is regarded as appropriate for addressing the research questions above. This is followed by a description of the research design and the participants, together with a discussion of the research strategy, triangulation, validity, limitations, generalisability, population identification, and sampling, and a detailed narration of the procedures of the data collection, including both the survey and interviews. Lastly, the analytical strategies for both the quantitative and qualitative data were addressed.

Chapter Five presents the results of the survey and the interviews. In the survey section, the quantitative data provide a helpful overview of returnees’ career status in China. Comparisons are made between female and male graduates in terms of their annual income, position, and the length of time it took them to find a job. Before reviewing these returnees’ re-integration issues, analysis was made of the factors that influenced the returnees’ career development, position and income, as well as the benefits brought by an Australia education. The interview result section provides in-depth data on the returnees’ lives and the stakeholders’ opinions. This rich information serves as a good supplement to the survey data, with vivid examples
drawn from face-to-face conversations. The feedback from the stakeholders, including employers from different types of enterprise and government officials from different levels, added a new layer of understanding about the returnees’ career path through different lenses. Lastly, the benefits of an Australian education, and the re-integration issues, were re-examined, in the light of the enhanced information garnered from the interviews.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight lay out the critical discussion and analysis of several key issues, including: people’s aspirations for an international education; re-integration issues for returning graduates; and their gender’s influence on international graduates’ career development. The concrete data, supported by the literature and theories separately argued in previous chapters, comprehensively illustrate the returnees’ career status, aspirations, achievements and limitations, grounded in the survey data, cases and theories.

Chapter Nine concludes the research by reviewing the main themes of this study. It demonstrates the key findings and their implications before presenting suggestions for future research.

**Conclusion**

China’s comprehensive integration into the global economy is having an immediate effect on many people’s lives, as evident from the ‘Made in China’ labels, available everywhere in the world. In January 2010, China surpassed Germany as the world’s top exporter, and overtook Japan to become the second largest economy in August 2010 (Bloomberg, 2010, August 16; G. Chen, 2010, January 29). In Leonard’s (2008) view, the changing China is a place where some city maps need to be rewritten every fortnight – a town the size of London shoots up in the Pearl River Delta every year, and it was able to construct enough new roads to circle the world four times in the
run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Leonard also noted the changes that have brought 300 million people from agricultural backwardness to modernity in just thirty years (a process of industrialization that took over 200 years in Europe); while 100 million people have joined the so-called middle class, 500,000 have become millionaires, and there is a new generation of Chinese companies, such as the computer giant, Lenovo, that has bought IBM, and entered the global corporate league.

Hayhoe once indicated that China is a nation whose rich cultural tradition has shaped a particular form of modernization in the past, and will continue to play a key role in the new century, through embracing skilled personnel internationally (Hayhoe, 1989a, p. 100). As outlined earlier, while human resource development has become a widely accepted concept in China, the government is now actively planning to harvest international talent (both Chinese and non-Chinese but, in practice, largely the former). They have been putting tremendous efforts into training talents by sending people abroad to study and then attracting them back home to contribute to the country’s development. China’s rapid economic growth has helped to reverse the brain drain situation considerably, and the government constantly offers great opportunities (Welch & Zhang, 2005). The productivity, efficiency, and work orientation of these skilled returnees, as well as their desire to contribute to the national development, clearly enhances China’s competitiveness in the international marketplace. This study examines this matter from a micro perspective by reviewing returnee’s employment situation and exploring issues related to their reintegration.
CHAPTER TWO    LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter integrates the theoretical background to this research with some of the existing literature in the field. It starts with an analysis of the different arguments about the phenomenon of globalisation, particularly the key actors. This relates to China’s increasing engagement in the global society. Given that this study focuses on overseas-educated Chinese graduates’ employment and career development in China, China’s Strategic Plans in the relevant areas of Education, Science and Technology, and Human Resource Development in the next decade are also reviewed. The scientific and technological development plan covers the period from 2006 to 2020, and each of the other two plans covers the years from 2010 to 2020. Additionally, higher education’s internationalisation is traced, including a detailed analysis of Australian higher education, particularly its relationship to Chinese international students. Lastly, gender’s role in globalisation and higher education is critically examined.

Globalisation

Globalisation refers to the fact that people increasingly live in one world, with major contributions from vast, and swift information flows, made possible by the rise of information and communications technology (ICT); transnational corporations; the electronic economy; and political activities (Giddens, 2006, p. 50). In general, international interaction and transactions have strengthened the global dimensions of the local economies, governance and culture, which used to be more distinctively localised and differentiated. The result has been to blur the previously clearer
distinctions between the international and the domestic spheres. The term ‘globalisation’ can be understood as an ongoing process of transformation, associated with new patterns of global stratification, in which some states, societies and communities are becoming increasingly enmeshed in the global order while others risk becoming increasingly marginalised (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Individuals from different locations around the world contribute to the progress of this massive process by working on their own tasks from different perspectives and with different objectives.

The volume of globalisation studies is now huge, in large part because it is a multi-domain, multi-level phenomenon. Given that this research aims to probe the links between international higher education, knowledge workers and the global labour market, it is appropriate to acknowledge the views of Sadlak (1998) on globalisation, who sees it as an expression of the ‘new geopolitics’, in which control of and access to all kinds of market holds greater importance than control over territory, particularly the ability to generate and use knowledge and the capacity to develop new technology and human resources. The broad economic, technological and scientific trends accompanying this phenomenon therefore directly affect higher education and are increasingly common, albeit to differing degrees, in the contemporary world (Altbach, 2006). Firstly, this is because the higher education institutions can produce high-quality graduates who subsequently become part of the contemporary knowledge economy, which requires internationalised actors to handle complex information, technologies, and innovations. Secondly, according to Gibbons (1998, p. 72), it is because universities have successfully styled themselves as the producers of ‘primary knowledge’ by undertaking research and development.
Actors in globalisation

As suggested earlier, globalisation is a complicated process with various dimensions. It is not the intention here to review all of the existing theories of globalisation, but rather to outline a few key issues connected to this research and to present a framework for how this study was approached.

International organizations

International organizations, like the OECD, World Bank, IMF and, to a lesser extent, UNESCO, are reinforcing the globalisation process. This section will briefly outline how this process occurs, taking the economic organisations of the OECD and the World Bank as examples; a detailed introduction to, and analysis of, each international agency is beyond the scope of the current paper.

The OECD has often been viewed as a globalising institution, as it shares expertise and exchanges views with more than 100 other countries. It focuses on linking the 34 member states, and fosters a closely inter-related relationship amongst the parties involved. For at least the last decade, it has also expressed increasing interest in non-member countries, notably China. The OECD provides a setting in which governments compare their policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify best practice and coordinate their domestic and international policies. For these reasons, it contributes to the trend towards a globally integrated economy. For example, almost all OECD member countries' economies were strongly affected by the financial crisis of 2008, albeit some more than others.
The OECD can also been seen as an independent policy actor, steered by its secretariat, and affected by globalising pressures (Lingard & Rizvi, 1998a). On the one hand, it undertakes research projects through leveraging resources from its own pool of consultants and government bodies. On the other hand, it liaises with the member countries, and encourages discussion and analysis that may aid governments in shaping policies, and influence other international organizations, like the World Bank, etc. Hence, it plays an active role in the globalisation process.

Whilst the OECD’s major concern is the economies of the wealthiest, most-developed member nations, the World Bank’s focus is on developing nations (Spring, 2009). The World Bank consists of two development institutions owned by 186 member countries: the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, and the International Development Association. Jones (2007) argued that the World Bank lies at the centre of the major changes happening in global education, and its financial power and influence have helped to shape the economic and social policies of many governments, even when the relationships have been acrimonious. Unlike the OECD, which currently consists of 34 members and mainly provides policy advice to these wealthy member countries, the World Bank provides loans to poor countries, loans that are often tied to the so-called Washington Consensus or/and structural adjustment reforms. This set of specific economic policy prescriptions forms a ‘standard’ reform package and serves as the conditions for obtaining loans. The reform generally implements ‘free market’ programs and policy, such as privatisation, decentralisation, deregulation and the reduction of trade barriers (Jones, 2007; Mundy, 2007, 2008). Since the private sector is now far more important as a source of funds for developing economies, its influence is increasing. Borrowing countries that fail to meet the reform schedule may be subject to severe fiscal discipline, which is a strategy that the World Bank employs to force those poor countries to comply. Nevertheless, the World Bank’s educational ideas are widely shared through its extensive global network of contacts, and its concepts often form part of the guidelines for loans to support schooling in developing countries; thus its influence is thereby embedded in
multiple networks of global and local institutions (Jones, 2007; Spring, 2009). Consequently, it is engaged in bringing disparate nation states into an integrated global arena.

International organizations work like co-ordinators in fostering the globalisation process, with each country being impacted in a different way and developing unique responses due to their different political regimes, culture, beliefs and priorities, via the flow of information, knowledge, labour, technology, values, ideas, capital, etc. (Jane Knight, 1997; Lingard & Rizvi, 1998b), but the systemic effects are so powerful that the higher education policies have converged, for instance, in such areas as education access, curricula, research, and autonomy for faculties and institutions (Slaughter, 1998, p. 47).

**Multinational companies and the global market**

Multinational companies are one of the major causes of the greater flow of trade and professional workers across borders. The development of ICT in the 21st century means that products can be broken down and manufactured in different locations, which creates an unprecedented global environment suffused with opportunities for both nations and individuals. However, these opportunities are unequally distributed, both for nations and individuals. As outlined earlier, globalisation is arguably deepening these inequalities, including within countries. For example, in 2010, rural residents in China earned an average of less than a third of the income of urban residents, and the rising costs of higher education are exacerbating rural-urban differences (Welch, 2012). A stereotypical model is when the product is standardised and the manufacturing process has become too expensive to be still located in developed industrial nations due to their high costs (including the costs of associated sophisticated skills, and research capabilities in a mature market); mass production is moved to lower cost locations, such as China, although it is now experiencing wage pressures, too (Saxenian, 2006).
A key change to note is that knowledge production is becoming less and less a self-contained activity (Gibbons, 1998, p. 76). It is not only about theories and models, but also about methods and techniques. The whole process has spread from scientists and academia to different kinds of knowledge contributor, and requires the continual combination and recombination of knowledge resources. Therefore, different types of knowledge worker are required at different levels, possibly at different locations. The need for international mobility among skilled professionals is rising.

Beginning in China, a decade or two ago, many multinational companies invested substantially in mass production that required no sophisticated skills or knowledge. Nowadays, they have shifted towards investing in Research and Development (R&D) centres or establishing headquarters that require indigenous knowledge workers. As a result, the methods of management and collaboration have become far more dynamic. Examples include staff exchanges between the China office and the U.S. head-office, the implementation of internationally standardised training and requirements, and the active utilisation of the China office's resources in global projects. In addition, many international companies have established partnerships with Chinese companies, and there has been an increase in the number of Chinese firms launching Internal Public Offerings (IPOs) in the overseas stock markets, and in international mergers and acquisitions.

This changing environment creates massive opportunities, and the further recruitment of labour is being strongly affected as a consequence of globalisation. This stimulates the demand for international, skilled talent because, as argued above, the requirements and training for workers have altered dramatically, and the need for internationally-competent highly-skilled workers has increased significantly. It requires knowledge workers to practise their talent, and to create far more complex, decentralised, multiple-way flows of skills, capital and technology (Saxenian, 2006, p. 6).
Global migration: brain circulation

The patterns of migration are becoming more complex in the 21st century as they combine physical movement by people with the impact of virtual mobility, in which ICTs are used to create dense interchanges between individuals in widely separated locations. These activities further enhance the globalisation process. With regard to physical movement, Castles and Miller (2003) suggested that it has changed in the following areas. Firstly, there is a massively increasing volume of people moving across borders by taking advantage of the global transport, travel systems and tourism opportunities. Secondly, there is no single form of immigration, such as labour immigration; rather most countries now receive immigrants driven by various motivations. Similarly, the movement is not only from south to north, as most countries are both the 'senders' and 'recipients' of migrants. Nonetheless, it remains largely the case that, in the global competition for highly-skilled labour, some countries are more equal than others. Lastly, the number of women primary migrants has increased. Notions of citizenship and national identity are being renegotiated in response to the current status of global migration (Held et al., 1999). These more complicated patterns relate to the intensifying communications between people in different locations via ICTs, which further strengthens the globalisation process.

It is now commonplace to see people who are physically based in their home country being vocationally located overseas because they are working for a foreign company via ICTs. At the same time, there are many migrants whose identities remain linked with their motherland, though they have physically migrated to another country. All types of migrant may act as intellectual bridges between nation states, and play an important role in the globalisation process by carrying intangible assets like knowledge, skills and information across borders.

Saxenian (2006) used the term 'new argonauts' to describe those highly-skilled immigrants who, temporarily or permanently, return home in order to make a
contribution after obtaining extensive work experience and strengthened capabilities overseas. She showed that these individuals have the knowledge that enables them quickly to identify promising new market opportunities, raise capital, build management teams, and establish partnerships with specialist producers located far away. She argues that knowledge is the modern form of the ‘Golden Fleece’ of ancient mythology – which can be understood as treasure. Broadly speaking, highly-skilled individuals who have gone aboard to strengthen their knowledge in a way that can result in a contribution to their home country are potential Argonauts in modern society. The concept of strengthening one’s knowledge abroad is not limited to education. It also refers to a comprehensive process including learning from work, social life, networking, foreign culture and complex affective communication. A long period of time is essential for such a process and for the proper maturing of these talents.

While the ‘Brain drain’, Brain gain’ and ‘diaspora’ are all familiar concepts, there is now a growing focus on ‘brain circulation’, whereby skilled and professional workers move between nations, or return to their homeland, after migrating to another country (Spring, 2009, p. 185). Much research shows that Chinese people who have adopted the life-style, languages and culture of the countries in which they settled, can successfully manage their relations with both their homeland and their host country (L.-c. Wang & Wang, 2003). Therefore, what was once seen as the brain drain in China now seems more like a long-term brain investment. Saxenian focuses on first-generation immigrants like the Chinese in Silicon Valley, who have the necessary language, cultural, and technical skills to function well in both America and China; she reveals how these commanding professional advantages can be extended through engagement with ethnic professional associations and networks, by enabling the swift identification of new well as established ventures and by building partnerships with distant suppliers and customers. Individuals who have gone abroad for education and chose to remain overseas rather than return home immediately on completing their studies are, in fact, valuable assets for China’s potential growth. Regardless of their
original intention or reason for staying overseas, or their physical or mental association with China’s development for whatever motive, they are indeed a huge resource for China (Welch & Zhang, 2007). In summary, what used to be categorised as a brain drain, brain gain and diaspora at different stages of development has eventually come full circle due to the complex economic and social dynamics triggered by globalisation and higher education’s internationalisation.

Implications of China’s Emerging Personnel Pool

China’s ‘open door’ policy triggered rapid economic growth, which has been an important stimulus to the growth of trade in education over the past quarter century. It is well recognised that China’s economy has performed extraordinarily, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaging a 10 per cent growth per annum since 1990 (World Bank, 2007a). On the whole, while growth has rarely been evenly distributed, hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty, having made a leap from having only adequate food and clothing to leading a more comfortable life, and have become far better integrated into the global economy (X. Zhang, 2006, p. 25). China has become a major destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) and a trading nation of global rank, with an increasing share of high-technology products in its export structure. In addition, there has been a significant and continuing increase in income per capita and an impressive reduction in poverty levels, implying a huge domestic demand for goods and services. Whilst China is not immune from the current global economic crisis, the World Bank has suggested that it is holding up better than most economies because of the huge fiscal stimulus injected early by the Chinese government, the strong banking sector and some growth in domestic demand (Davies, 2009, March 19). This has not merely helped to sustain the regional and other economies, including that of Australia, but has also created more opportunities for returnees. In January 2010, China overtook Germany to become the world’s third largest economy (Seager, 2010, January 14) and, more recently, Japan, to become the
world's second largest. This brings with it further opportunities for globalisation by encouraging international flows of capital, labour, information, goods and services.

Such success in a relatively short period of time also brings a massive pressure to maintain continuous economic growth and social development. The Chinese government has launched a national strategy to build an innovation-driven economy and society by 2020 but, as the OECD report pointed out, while impressive investment in resources has contributed significantly to China's rapid socioeconomic progress in the last decade, the human resources for science and technology and the related infrastructure have developed much more slowly. Some Chinese scholars have also pointed out that extra attention and efforts have been paid to the natural sciences and 'hard' skills, to the neglect of social science, traditional and 'soft' skills (Xie, Qi, & Han, 2006). Considering China's population, the key problem for its future development is still likely to be the shortage of specialised human resources needed for various stages of the innovation process (H. Cai, 2011; OECD, 2008, p. 17).

National medium-and-long-term plans to 2020

From a national perspective, the individual's human capital is a central element of the country's overall GDP, because investment in education increases an individual's productivity, hence assisting the national economic GDP as a whole. An important component of the Deng Xiaoping inspired change has been an official preference for those with expertise and talent, recasting the role of educated and talented personnel (Whyte, September 1993). The cultivation of talent has been the centrepiece of China's overall strategy since then. Talented employees, professionals and credentialized staff have thus become important actors in, and sites of, national development (Hoffman, 2006). In recent years, China has introduced a number of key plans that focus on improving the general development of highly-skilled talent. These plans are, respectively, the National Plan for Medium-and-long-term Scientific and
Technological Development (2006-2020); the National Plan for Medium-and-long-term Human Resources Development (2010-2020); and the National Plan for Medium-and-long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020). Notably, each of the above three big plans for China’s future development included bringing in international professionals and attracting returnees as important elements.


The national development plan for science and technology (2006 - 2020) is a very comprehensive document that covers a wide range of areas, including: Energy, Water and Mineral Resources, Environment, Agriculture, the Manufacturing Industry, Transportation Sector, Information Industry and Modern Service Industry, Population and Health, Urbanization and City Development, Public Security and National Defence. In addition, it outlines the key priorities for cutting-edge research, special projects, basic research issues, and recommendations regarding implementation. It includes a chapter on building up a talented workforce, noting that science and technology innovations are rooted in professional personnel, and that human resource development is a very important strategic area (State Council, 2006).

Advanced development in the field of science and technology cannot be separated from the development of talented people, and international highly-skilled professionals are an important resource. The plan thus featured the intensification of efforts to attract returnees and high-level international professionals. Such measures included [1] formulating and implementing programs to attract returnees to serve the country, prioritising the highly-skilled personnel and expertise that are in short supply. For example Project 111 and the Qianren Jihua, or Thousand-talents programs are typical schemes developed by the central government (Hao & Welch, 2011; Welch & Cai, 2011). Under central government guidance, the provincial and municipal governments have developed their own plans according to their specific
situation and needs. Despite their strengths, however, it has been argued that not all of the money has been well spent (H. Cai, 2011); but it will probably take a long time to measure the full outcome, since the projects are new, and rationale relates to personnel development. [2] Establishing diverse approaches to establishing human resource management mechanisms that are tailored to the characteristics of returnees, including groups of government officials and employers travelling abroad to recruit; [3] Enhancing financial mechanisms for highly-skilled returnees; [4] Strengthening the construction of pioneering centres; [5] Perfecting policies and measures that better meet returnees’ needs, like better settling-in arrangements according to individual needs; and [6] Creating more recruitment opportunities. For example, gradually opening up the recruitment to senior posts at the key national laboratories and major research institutes to international candidates (State Council, 2006, p. 65).

Project 111 and the ‘Thousand-talents’ programs are targeted at recruiting high-level overseas academics and researchers (particularly overseas Chinese) to work in China. Project 111 aims to gather around 1,000 overseas senior academics and talented researchers from the 100 top international universities or research institutes to work with their Chinese counterparts. Another goal is to establish around 100 world-class innovative research centres for research and development. The Thousand-talents program is the latest, highest level project of this kind to be well funded by the relevant government departments (H. Cai, 2011; Welch & Cai, 2011). It aims to attract about 1,000 high-level, foreign-educated, skilled Chinese or foreigners over the next five to ten years to develop innovative, mostly scientific projects, in China. These recruits are expected to work at the national research centres or laboratories, central government and state-owned financial enterprises, top scientific foundations and so on, leading innovative projects that will benefit China’s development. By July 2010, the Thousand-talents program had already recruited 622 highly-skilled international professionals (1000 plan, 2010, July). Of these, only 20 were foreign experts (non-Chinese), and the rest comprised Chinese returnees, of whom 448 held a foreign passport. Upon settling, the subsequent services and financial aid were made
available, with the employing institution or firm working with both the central and local government to arrange these matters. As the policy indicated, the respective government departments are continuing to perfect policies that will better cater to each individual’s needs.

Following the central government’s policies and the sample projects listed above, the provincial and municipal governments are also actively implementing and developing specific schemes to attract overseas talents, particularly returnees, and to help them to settle in successfully. In fact, the local government plays a key role in addressing and implementing the central government’s policies, with many of the wealthiest provinces and cities competing for the top talents, and introducing their own schemes (Welch & Hao 2012). Beijing, for example (the heart of China’s politics and culture and also one of the most preferred cities for returnees), has established a Service centre and subsequently a website to provide a platform for returnees seeking assistance with settling down and their career development. Along with the established returnees’ innovation parks and bases, a systematic returnees’ development network is emerging in Beijing. By the end of 2008, a total of 27 returnees’ innovation parks had attracted 1,641 enterprises that were registered by the returnees. The total registration capital was 2.63 billion RMB, the profit from the technology trade was 3.3 billion RMB, and applications had been made for 723 patents. In addition, Beijing is creating an environment that encourages returnees to innovate and establish businesses. The government provides funding for and awards to innovative technology projects: by May 2009, 630 returnees had obtained total support funding of 35 million RMB, and 37 outstanding returnees had received entrepreneurship awards (Beijing Municipal Government, 2009). Moreover, the Daxing district of Beijing and the Beijing Economic-Technological Development area are setting up a special fund of 100 million RMB to meet the needs of a talented workforce (Wang, 2010, December 22). Lastly, detailed living conditions support is also part of the services, including reduced tax when purchasing a car, and assistance for returnees’ children to attend local schools. Of course, there are many more
examples in different regions or cities, but all aim to build a strong, international talented workforce for China's science and technology development.

National Plan for medium-and-long-term human resources development (2010-2020)

The key messages delivered by the Human Resources Development Plan (2010-2020) include the active building up of skilled professionals, the development of the potential ability and value of each individual, and the promotion of people's all-round development. These objectives are aimed at building a powerful, developed labour force that provides intellectual support for China's modernization drive and realizes its transformation from a country rich in human resources to one with powerful human resources. The following table shows the long-term objectives and indicators which highlight that the Chinese government is not only aiming at improving the quantity of its skilled workforce, but also its quality (State Council, 2010a).

Table 2.1 Key indicators of national skilled professionals' development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total skilled professionals</td>
<td>113,850,000</td>
<td>156,250,000</td>
<td>180,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D professionals per 10,000 workers</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of highly-skilled professionals in the workforce</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of personnel with higher education</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in human resources against total GDP</td>
<td>10.75%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled professionals' contribution rate</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Council (2010a), p19

Actively developing international exchange and cooperation, and further investing in China's human resource development was emphasized in the Plan. Currently, China has existing cooperative relationships with many key international organizations or
agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and World Bank. Meanwhile, 25 international labour conventions have been ratified, including the *Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation*, *Convention on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment*, and the *Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women* (State Council, 2010a). Such international collaboration, and the effective implementation of the conventions above, will enhance China’s openness to international professionals and returnees.

Since the opening up policy was adopted three decades ago, China has gradually implemented policies that favour international professionals and returnees. In line with the current Human Resource Development Plan, encouraging people to study abroad and return home to work is emphasised. Such measures provide more opportunities for people to study abroad, and actively seek to attract talented people to return. In addition to the freedom of choosing to return home, these returnees would enjoy the necessary support in terms of employment and good working and living conditions. The Beijing case, discussed earlier, could be a prominent example. Some policies were introduced to provide a better service to these returnees, including tax, insurance, housing and opportunities to take leadership positions and participate in the national award system.

The national plan of human resources development has highlighted China’s competitive and vibrant labour market. By the end of 2009, China’s total population had reached 1.33 billion (excluding the Hong Kong and Macao Special administrative regions and Taiwan province), and it boasted a labour force of around 1 billion people. The number of employees had reached 779.95 million, of whom 311.2 million were urban employees. In 2008, the number of full-time R&D personnel nationwide numbered almost two million, around 1.6 million of whom were full-time scientists and engineers (State Council, 2010a). However, OECD (2008) indicated that the
quality of China’s R&D personnel remain to be improved. High-level, innovative people remain in short supply, hence those with professional knowledge or special skills who are willing to contribute to society through creative work and innovation are highly regarded in China. Therefore, although human resources development is challenging, and the labour market is crowded and tough, there are good opportunities for these highly-skilled professionals.


Since the inception of the opening up policy, the financial input into education has risen from 7.6 billion RMB to 1045 billion RMB and, in the past three years, the national financial input into education has increased by more than 23% per year (State Council, 2010b). The education plan outlined the strategy for the education reform over the next ten years. It covered a variety of topics related to education, and the respective aims, including the following four areas: [1] general goal and strategic theme; [2] development guidelines from pre-school education to higher and continuous education; [3] system reform; and [4] safeguards. However, the plan itself mainly concerns domestic Chinese education development, which subsequently strengthens the quality of the local workforce (see tables 2 and 3, below). Similar to the Science and Technology plan, although the Education Plan focuses on education reform, there are two substantial sections covering the increasing openness towards international resources: the system reform of the development of talented people section and the broaden education openness section.

In the former section, it was explained that there will not be one standard by which to measure individuals’ talents, which is a big step for China. An individual’s wishes and choices will be accepted and respected, and talented people will be encouraged to specialise in different areas rather than one. This means, for example, that children’s creative artwork will not be seen as strange, and this small-scale creativity might lead
to big innovations in the future. Secondly, creative ideas and innovative learning and teaching should be encouraged, because these are the foundation for the development of innovative talents. This is especially important, given both the domestic and international critiques that this is a weak point in the Chinese education system (Min & Wang, 2006; OECD, 2008). Lastly, the measurement of talented people and the determination of one's comprehensive skills and capabilities should be conducted on a scientific basis. For domestic students and graduates, their academic score is no longer the single measure, but rather their strengths in other areas will also be taken into account. For returnees who have studied abroad, their international qualification only provides an indication of their international education experience, and they need to take further measures to demonstrate their broad range of talents. In summary, this section illustrates that China no longer views talented people according to a single measure, but rather accepts alternative ideas and tolerates different concepts. The section on broadening educational openness stresses the need to attract high-level, international academic resources, by hiring highly-skilled international professionals from specialist fields, and improving the overall quality of the personnel. Of course, there are other dimensions to bringing in high-level international academic resources, such as engaging in joint ventures with overseas education institutions, developing research projects with overseas partners, and other kinds of international collaborative activities. What should be explicitly emphasized is that all international joint ventures or collaborative activities must include professionals from overseas as the foreign element, so international talented human resources are a key element. This was clearly addressed in the plan: ‘[1] Attract more world level experts and academics to China for teaching, researching and management work, and bring in top international talented people and teams with plans; [2] improve the ratio of foreign academics at Chinese universities and schools; and [3] attract overseas educated Chinese graduates.'
Table 2.2 Target indicators of education development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-school education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus children</td>
<td>26,580,000</td>
<td>34,000,000</td>
<td>40,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9 years' compulsory education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus students</td>
<td>157,720,000</td>
<td>161,000,000</td>
<td>165,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion rate</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High school education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus students</td>
<td>46,240,000</td>
<td>45,000,000</td>
<td>47,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocational education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Middle level) On-campus students</td>
<td>21,790,000</td>
<td>22,500,000</td>
<td>23,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Higher level) On-campus students</td>
<td>12,800,000</td>
<td>13,900,000</td>
<td>14,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total scale</td>
<td>29,790,000</td>
<td>33,500,000</td>
<td>35,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus students</td>
<td>28,260,000</td>
<td>30,800,000</td>
<td>33,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate students</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
<td>1,700,000</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross enrolment rate</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuing education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job trainees</td>
<td>166,000,000</td>
<td>290,000,000</td>
<td>350,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Council (2010b)

Table 2.3 Target indicators of human resource development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population obtaining higher education qualifications</strong></td>
<td>98,300,000</td>
<td>145,000,000</td>
<td>195,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average education length for major workforce</strong></td>
<td>9.5 Year</td>
<td>10.5 Year</td>
<td>11.2 Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including the higher education ratio</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average education length for workforce entrants</strong></td>
<td>12.4 Year</td>
<td>13.3 Year</td>
<td>13.5 Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including high school and above ratio</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Council (2010b)

**National key projects**

In addition to the key projects, like Project 111 and the Thousand-talents program, that targeted overseas talents, Project 985 and Project 211 are typical programs responding to the issue of the shortage of specialised human resources for higher
education. Both of these government initiatives aimed to increase the quality of Chinese higher education to an advanced international level. In the first phase of project 985, a billion RMB was allotted to each of the nine selected universities over a period of three years for academic exchange, allowing Chinese academics to participate in conferences abroad, and invite foreign lecturers to China. The second phase of this program was launched in 2004, and it has now reached almost 40 universities. Similarly, the earlier Project 211 aimed to cultivate a highly-skilled elite through the development of approximately 100 leading universities in the 21st century.

Another plank of the policy platform for upgrading manpower is the 5,000 and 1,000 Guojia Jianshe Gaoshuipin Daxue Gongpai Yanjiusheng Xiangmu (Young Scholars Study Abroad) program. Rather than raising the calibre of the Chinese universities (the aim of Project 985 and Project 211) or recruiting scholars worldwide (as in Project 111 and the Thousand-talents program), this program centres on cultivating indigenous Chinese talent by sending high-performing students to study abroad on government scholarships. The 5,000 program aims to send 5,000 Ph.D. students from designated Chinese universities to study at partner universities overseas each year. The tuition fees are waived by the partner universities, and the stipends and travel expenses are covered by the China Scholarships Council (CSC). Students conduct their research under the joint-supervision of their home and host university, with the goal of producing stronger outcomes. The 1,000 program is similar, but targeted at the Post-Doctoral level. Participants are required to return to China because they were selected and sent abroad for the purpose of strengthening the nation. Given that the study opportunity and major financial support flow from the Chinese government, economic penalties are applied to punish defaulters.

The fundamental goal of all of the above innovations is the development of more highly-skilled personnel. The mobility of the highly-skilled is clearly important in China. Chinese international students form the largest category of student engaged in
international education and, given the fact that the return rate is increasing, they are a critical source of the much-need skills that are imperative for China’s future development. Returnees link their country of origin to the outside world by utilising their knowledge and overseas experience. They are seen as improving the home country’s productivity and competitiveness through the direct transfer of knowledge and the indirect benefits brought by overseas professional and trade networks (Thorn & Holm-Nielsen, 2006; Welch & Zhang, 2005; World Bank, 2003; Zweig, 2006). As of 2008, there were two ministers holding overseas Ph.D.s, while perhaps 100 officials at the vice-governor level and above have spent at least a year studying or researching overseas (Zweig, 2008). Seventy-seven per cent of university presidents, 84% of academicians at the Chinese Academy of Science, 75% of academicians at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and 62% of Ph.D. supervisors had studied abroad (Meng, 2008). The Organization Department of the Central Committee of the CPC has also indicated that 72% of the national ‘key project’ leaders are returnees (Organization Department of Central Committee, 2009). The increasing importance of the highly educated is a further reflection of the shift towards a more knowledge based economy in China (Welch & Zhang, 2007).

**Higher Education Internationalisation**

Higher education internationalisation can be understood as a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education (Jane Knight, 2009). It enables scholars and students to contribute knowledge, exchange ideas and learn new things without boundaries. It is an important component for sharing knowledge, building intellectual capital and remaining competitive in a globalising world (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2009). Higher education is ultimately facing more challenges than opportunities under the influence of globalisation (R. Yang, 2002, p. 68). The prediction is that the number of students seeking to study abroad could rise to eight million – nearly three times the current
While such long-term projections can be seen as highly imprecise, and special situations and events often arise in today's globalised dynamic world, caused by a wide range of factors, including politics, epidemics, and economic growth or recession, such numbers are suggestive of a growing trend towards international higher education, raising the consequent issues of supply and demand.

In addition to the significant increase in demand for higher education, the number and types of new providers have grown under the stimulus of globalisation, and the delivery methods have become more diversified (De Wit, 2008). For-profit institutions and private universities are entering the higher education arena at the national level in many countries. Innovative delivery methods are emerging rapidly, including distance and online-learning, joint degree programs, and twinning arrangements. Higher education internationalisation is shaped according to the way in which a country responds to the impact of globalisation. The relationship is contradictory: on the one hand, it both helps to preserve and enlarge the national individuality though teaching and learning, and strengthen the indigenous cultures, resources, priorities, etc. but, at the same time, it has become an agent of globalisation, and an active player in the global arena, thus contributing to a degree of homogenisation (Agarwal, Said, Sehoole, Sirozi, & de Wit, 2007, p. 111; De Wit, 2008; Lingard & Rizvi, 1998a).

Rationales

The rationales for higher education internationalisation include the political, economic, academic, and cultural and social (Jane Knight, 1997, pp. 9-12). At the political level, the internationalisation of higher education serves as a diplomatic tool for promoting and strengthening the national identity, and resisting a total takeover due to globalisation. It can also build mutual understanding, promote goodwill
internationally, and become part of the ongoing diplomatic relations through active communication in the cultural, scientific and educational areas. For some, China's Confucius Institutes are typical of a political initiative being taken via an educational channel. Confucius Institutes are usually established at a foreign, higher education institution in partnership with a Chinese university and the Office of Chinese Language Council International (known as the Hanban), in order to provide training in Chinese language and culture, and build a bridge between China and the host country.

At the economic level, the process of higher education internationalisation can assist economic growth and increase competitiveness, as it can be an export commodity that benefits the international markets, develops a highly-skilled, knowledgeable workforce, and ultimately influences the labour market by allowing graduates to function in a more international work environment. Australia is often cited as an example, as international education has become one of its biggest export industries that has delivered solid growth to its economy, and its universities. In addition to the billions of dollars earned in tuition fees, there are even more lucrative benefits downstream from the students' stipends, accommodation, travel, etc. At the academic level, higher education internationalisation enhances the quality of teaching and learning, research and service; builds international academic standards; and helps institution building by strengthening the human, technical and management infrastructure systems.

Some new rationales for higher education internationalisation have emerged quickly, responding to the changing landscape in the international dimension of higher education around the world; these include international rankings and strategic alliances (De Wit, 2008; Jane Knight, 2009). Publications like the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and the *Shanghai Jiaotong Index*, are well known for reviewing and ranking the international universities on an annual basis. The various lists purport to give an objective assessment of the excellence of universities internationally, but at the same time, a high ranking somehow enhances the global
reputation of the listed universities, and empowers them with international credibility. Governments, education institutions, academics, students and the general public refer to these rankings to identify the top quality institutions. International networks in the field of higher education further link similar kinds of university together and provide platforms and opportunities to the member universities to become more internationalised. The Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), and Academic Consortium 21 (AC21) are good examples, each of which contains universities from both China and Australia.

The process of internationalisation is both dynamic and complex – it has often been carried out in universities in tangible activities, but under intangible infrastructure policies and governance. Knight (2006) describes two major components of this process as internationalisation at home and internationalisation abroad. The first term suggests activities that are held at universities’ home campuses to help students to develop an international understanding and multicultural skills, such as international language teaching or an international curriculum. The latter term refers to all forms of cross-border education; for example, a student or a scholar studying at or visiting an overseas university, joint degree programs that involve a group of students spending one or more semester overseas, or the creation of overseas campuses.

One of the major goals of higher education internationalisation is to prepare students to be active in a far more globalised world (Lingard & Rizvi, 1998a) and to be ready to assume the role of international knowledge workers. The talent-recruitment and knowledge-producing capacity of higher education has become a vital sign of a country’s capacity to participate in world science and the global economy (Hazelkorn, 2009, p. 79). Preparing skilled professionals who can adequately deploy their knowledge in productive arenas and meet the needs of today’s globalised world is a key objective for today’s internationalised universities. Eventually, however, most of these potential international talents, who have acquired an international higher education, either remain overseas (possibly moving to a new host country) for further
study or work, or return to their countries of origin for career development. For those who return, effective career development, including the appropriate use of their international knowledge and skills, seems the most important means of demonstrating that they are truly globalised professionals. In other words, successful career development in the mother country is an important channel for returning international students to show their credentials as internationally capable knowledge workers.

**Australian higher education and Chinese international students**

Australian higher education has moved towards an export model from the mid-1980s with the establishment of several Federal and State Government agencies that continue to provide promotion and marketing support (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Since 1982, education services exports have grown at an average annual rate of around 14 per cent in volume terms, with their share in the value of total exports increasing from less than one per cent to almost six per cent in 2007 (Reserve Bank of Australia, 2008, June). There was also a policy shift in Australian higher education away from a cluster of elite universities under the umbrella of limited state sponsorship towards a mass system under a more unified and interventionist government. It has been argued that Australia has operated a policy-combination that promotes the growth of market forces in the higher education sector plus strong state intervention, backing a neoliberal market ideology (Kell & Vogl, 2007). On the one hand, the federal government emphasises the diversity, choice and competitiveness of Australian higher education while, on the other, it also stresses its role as the steering agent internationally. This seemingly contradictory appearance probably represents Australia’s distinctive engagement with the neo-liberal economic rationality of globalisation. It has also been argued, however, that Australian higher education policy has misinterpreted the importance of engaging with the global higher education market, through exposing universities to competition and encouraging them to behave more like private corporations (Pick, 2006).
Agencies like the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP), Australian Education International (AEI) and the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) now actively market Australian education to the rest of the world. A strategic set of offshore network offices has been established to support the substantial development of the international education market. For example, IDP has 75 student offices across 29 countries (IDP, 2008), AEI has 23 offices, most of them associated with Australian diplomatic missions in Asia, Europe, North and South America, and AUSTRADE undertakes promotional and marketing activities in Europe on behalf of AEI with another additional 11 offices across the region (AEI, 2008b). The economic, social and cultural benefits brought by international education, particularly higher education, are enormous. Income reaped from overseas students, most of whom are from the region, ranks well ahead of many other traditional exports, especially if the major education-related income, like living expenses is included, but the cultural dimensions are at least equally important, particularly in terms of building stronger bridges between Australia and its neighbouring countries.

The Commonwealth’s higher education programme indicated its aim of meeting Australia’s social, cultural and economic demands for a more highly educated and skilled population (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998). However, its migration program also helps in achieving this objective by retaining highly-skilled international students. In general, nevertheless, the education sector navigates between globalisation and critical international market needs, as well as embracing internationalisation in an effort to develop an internationally competitive education system. There are now 37 public universities, two private universities and 150 or so other providers of higher education (DEEWR, 2008, December), and they are actively engaged with international education and seeking to meet the international demand for a more highly educated, skilled population in order to produce high-quality global citizens.
Australia is one of the five largest host countries that, collectively, account for 72% of the world’s tertiary-level, internationally-mobile students (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2009). With a purported AUD$15.5 billion generated in 2008, education is one of the top three largest export industries (Gilmore, 2009, March 19). Of the 450,000 full-fee international students studying in Australia, almost 40% are engaged in higher education (AEI, 2007).

In 2007, of a worldwide total of 657,200 Chinese international students, 10% studied in Australia. Yang’s (2007) finding suggested that Australian higher education is attractive to Chinese students because it offers migration opportunities, good-quality education, and lower tuition fees and living costs compared with the United States and United Kingdom, although the nexus between education and migration has recently been tightened. Within Australia, Chinese students comprise 27.4% of the total international enrolments in higher education (AEI, 2008) China has been and will continue to be a major market for Australian education. Even during the global economic crisis of 2008/9, Chinese students continued to bolster the Australian economy by constituting a quarter of the 298,462 full-fee international enrolments (Davies, 2009, March 19).

In late 2009, along with the sudden collapse of a (Chinese-owned) private education firm (Global Campus Management Group) in Australia, the reputation of Australia’s overseas education industry suffered a blow (Goswell, 2009, November 6; O’Malley, 2009, November 7). The Australian state and federal governments were quick to promise that affected students would be looked after, and several public universities kept emphasising that the collapsed vocational colleges were merely profit-driven groups rather than quality higher education institutions. Still, with some of the 1,200 Chinese students themselves stranded in Australia, the general public in China found this incident difficult to accept which, together with the high-priced Australian dollar,
and racist attacks on Indian students in 2009-10, could influence their decisions regarding international study destinations.

**Gender**

Gender is an important aspect of this research and, since it is included in the research question, it is a key factor that will be examined in relation to graduates’ employment in China. The fact that the number of Chinese female international students in Australia is higher than that of male students (AEI, 2008a), makes it all the more important for the study to explore gender equality issues amongst highly-skilled returnees.

**Women and education**

Women, in both China and the west, have struggled for centuries to gain access to education, especially higher education (Stiver Lie & O'Leary, 1990; Vickers, 2007; Yan, 2010). During the 19th century in the United States, *seminaries*, as forms of secular higher education, began to educate women for the only available socially acceptable occupation: teaching (Madigan, 2009). Nursing was the only other profession deemed respectable for middle class women at the time. In the early and mid-1800s, affiliations with universities such as Harvard, Columbia, and Brown allowed women to participate, in a limited fashion, and the female students were closely supervised and segregated from the men (Madigan, 2009). In Australia, the University of Sydney was the first university to be founded in 1850 and the University of Melbourne was proclaimed less than three years later, but neither of these universities produced a single female graduate for the first 30 years (Vickers, 2007). In 1883, Bella Guerin, who graduated from the University of Melbourne with a
Bachelor of Arts degree, became the first female university graduate in Australia (Selleck, 2003).

Apart from their far lower access to education, women were also not allowed to study certain subjects. One of the concepts that has dominated women’s participation in education is the Doctrine of Separate Spheres (Degan, 1986), which suggests that the role of women is to manage the home, emotions, culture, morality and children. On the other hand, men are expected to govern the economy and the large-scale social and political institutions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when western women were admitted to university, ‘women’s knowledge’ was deemed to be focused strongly on domesticity, the care of children, nutrition, and hygiene (Vickers, 2007). In today’s higher education system, many students may still choose which subject to study on the basis of its connections with the beliefs about ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ (Thomas, 1990). Most students develop a subject loyalty that can be challenged or reinforced by a student’s sense of gender identity.

Chinese women were denied access to education for a long period of time, based on Confucius’ saying, ‘Nuzi Wucai Bianshide’ (‘a woman’s virtue lies in her non-capability’) (Q. Guo, 2009). In the past, families generally viewed any investment in educating a woman as excessive, since there was little possibility of any kind of return from it, especially after she married and moved into her husband’s household. Only a few rich families give their female children access to basic education, which enabled them to enjoy an enhanced social status. Nonetheless, women in those times were forced to listen and yield to their father prior to marriage, and to their husband after marriage. As Li (2008, p. 188) pointed out, when there is absolute power/domination, there is also abuse of that power/domination. Since a wife was judged almost entirely on the basis of her relationship with her husband, and to serve and please her husband was her destined duty, her fate was determined.
In the late Qing Dynasty, together with all the Reform movements and eventually the Revolution of 1911, Chinese women began to gain access education of all levels (An, 2002). The liberation of Chinese women gradually started from there, and both Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen were key pioneers in women’s development and education (Q. Guo, 2009; Wei, 2010). Liang was a famous Chinese scholar, philosopher and reformist during the late Qing Dynasty and early Chinese Republic. His writings and reform movements, particularly his book entitled *On women’s education*, inspired Chinese scholars and contributed to women’s development in terms of education. He criticized feudalistic beliefs like ‘capable women are the source of evil’ and ‘women should be kept away from any knowledge of political and state affairs’. At the same time, he advocated ideas like ‘equal rights for both sexes’, ‘schools should enrol both male and female students’, and ‘women would be able to learn well all the subjects that men learn’. Liang argued that the failure to educate women is a core issue for a poor, weak nation, and that a well-educated woman would be able to get along well with her husband and educate her children; that is, she would benefit both her family and the whole society (Q. Guo, 2009). Compared to Liang’s ideas about education for women, Sun’s proposition was more direct. Instead of encouraging women to learn in order to support their husband and educate their children, Sun promoted the term *female nationals*, and urged women to access all professional fields just like men did (Wei, 2010).

During the same period, missionary schools and Christian colleges, mainly from the US, like the Methodist Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, also contributed to Chinese women’s education (Lutz, 1971). Many girls’ schools were established across different cities in China, and the first women’s university, Ginling College, was established in 1913 in Nanjing through the joint efforts of the respective American churches. In parallel with the development of female Christian colleges, women in the late Qing Dynasty gained not only access to higher education, but also study abroad opportunities. In 1881, about 35 years after the first group of three male students went to the US for international education (as
will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six), Jin Yamei went to study Medicine at the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, the first Chinese female to study abroad (Lee & Stefanowska, 1998). Other women students from the respective missionary schools, like Ke Jinying, Kang Aide and Shi Meiyu, went to the US subsequently to access higher education in the late 19th century.

Some have argued that the female students mentioned above could not represent China’s mainstream women’s movement due to their background; for example, they were financially supported by the church, and some were adopted by western missionaries (China News, 2010). By contrast, Yang Yinyu played a key role in women’s education and the revolution at that time. Yang was born into a well-educated family in 1884, the daughter of a lawyer. She was one of the few female students to study abroad in 1907 with Qing government support. During the Republican Era in the early 20th century, higher education became officially open to more women at the so-called ‘normal’ universities, a lower-level of college which aimed to train them as primary school teachers (Turner & Acker, 2002). Yang became China’s first female President, at Beijing Women’s Higher Normal College in 1924. During the Sino-Japanese War, China's Communist Party also established a Women’s University that aimed to develop female officials and leaders.

In the People’s Republic of China (PRC) era, following Sun’s concepts regarding women’s development, Mao Zedong contributed greatly to gender equality (An, 2002). Mao’s well-known saying, ‘Women hold up half the sky’, was so significant that it shook Chinese people’s thinking, and had a profound effect that is still influencing Chinese society today. Unlike the other pioneers, Mao’s powerful influence at that time literally enabled women to move out of the home, obtain equal pay for equal work, participate in political life, and enjoy equal rights with men in all aspects.
Deng Xiaoping’s introduction of reforms in 1978 further extended Chinese women’s rights and widened their access to education. In 1949, the female enrolment rate in higher education was only around 15 per cent, compared with 98.53 per cent in 2002 (Tan, 2006), while the China’s Women Development Outline (2011-2020) stated that the minimum completion rate of higher education should reach 95 per cent before 2020 (State Council, 2011). As the PRC reached its 60th anniversary in 2009, Chinese universities welcomed more women students (Sun, 2012). At the same time, the number of female international students and returnees had increased rapidly, though it remains true that many are from wealthier families, who have the means to support them.

This leads to the point that women are not a homogeneous group. Class differences exist between women within society, resulting from the different experiences of globalisation; however, all of them suffer from the legacy of patriarchy (Denis, 2003; Dhruvarajan, 2003). Whatever their ethnicity, upper-class women benefit from globalisation, as the members of affluent families. Access to education enables many women from middle- and upper-middle class families to obtain better paid jobs and join the ranks of those whose skills are relevant in the new economy (Dhruvarajan, 2003, p. 186).

**Women and work**

Untested assumptions of women’s low productivity and low motivation, due to being constrained by marriage, the household or the family, are persistent but, when examining women’s careers in all occupational spheres, attention should be paid to women’s individual dispositions and attributes (Toren, 1990). With the globalisation process, where profit is a core motive, women’s nurturing roles are often seen as a weakness in the competitive professional environment. It was argued that women control fewer economic resources than men, and that their economic status has
deteriorated during the present phase of globalised capitalism (Denis, 2003, p. 139). They often face inequalities at work, such as occupational segregation and wage gaps (Giddens, 2006, p. 756), and such segregation can be both vertical and horizontal in nature. Vertical segregation suggests that women rarely have any authority or occupy influential positions, and often have fewer opportunities for advancement than men. Horizontal segregation suggests that women are concentrated in 'feminine' type jobs, like nursing, childcare and acting as a personal assistant. The wage gaps mean that women earn less for doing the same work, compared with men.

However, in the educational context, it has been suggested that gender equity in professional development ought to be a common outcome of globalisation (Blackmore, 1999) but, in practice, female academics' value not do seem to be appropriately appreciated. They still face pressure from a rigid, prescribed hierarchical career structure, harsh competition and poor individual promotional prospects compared to men. Using in-depth analysis and a comparison of female academics' career development in nine regions across the world in the early 90s, Stiver Lie and O'Leary (1990) described the male-dominated system of academia as an invisible tower, in which gender inequality extends to rank, salary and reputation. In Australia, the heart of the problem lies in the disproportionate numbers of men and women across the various academic ranks (Bornholt, Poole, & Hattie, 2005), and the relative dominance of women at the lower levels, with far fewer among the higher ranks. In China, the ratio of female academics and general staff members to males seems more reasonable (see the table below) but, while the number of women professors and senior executives is far lower, it should be noted that female staff members must retire at 55, five years earlier than their male counterparts (Shi, 2010).
Table 2.4 Number of female academics in Chinese HEIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Female academics/general staff at All Levels &amp; Types of HEI</th>
<th>Total full-time academics</th>
<th>Female academics</th>
<th>Total staff members</th>
<th>Female staff members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Ratio %</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Ratio %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular HEIs</td>
<td>1,168,300</td>
<td>526,300</td>
<td>45.05</td>
<td>1,974,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEIs offering degree programs</td>
<td>717,200</td>
<td>311,500</td>
<td>43.43</td>
<td>1,292,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-university Tertiary</td>
<td>354,800</td>
<td>169,800</td>
<td>47.86</td>
<td>542,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other institutions</td>
<td>96,300</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>46.73</td>
<td>139,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult HEIs</td>
<td>80,200</td>
<td>38,200</td>
<td>47.63</td>
<td>136,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-state/private HEIs</td>
<td>20,600</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>46.12</td>
<td>43,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education (2009)

For female professionals holding a PhD, who generally start working at around age 28, retiring at 55 means that their professional life spans less than 30 years. This conflicts with the current national human resources development strategy. For the women themselves, as well as the country and the employing institutions, the fact that women stop paying their pension contributions and start enjoying their retirement pension five years earlier than men has made their investment cost higher than that of men. A detailed discussion on gender and human capital investment will be addressed in Chapter Eight based on the data from this research.

As noted in the previous section, today’s Chinese universities are gradually welcoming more female students, but the number of female scientists and high-level researchers remains very low. According to the survey report issued by the China Association for Science and Technology in 2009, the total number of female science and technology workers was about 14,370,000 in 2005, comprising 33% of all science and technology workers (CAST, 2009). For leadership positions, the situation is worse. At the very top level, a mere 8 of the 175 chief scientists in the National
Program on Key Basic Research Project – 973 Program, only 3.9% of the Cheung Kong Scholars, and none of the experts in the National High-tech R&D Program of China – 863 Program are female (Shi, 2012). In 2010, only 5% of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering were female, which is in fact a 0.6% decrease compared with 1978 (Shi, 2012). These data show that highly-skilled female professionals in China are in a disadvantaged position, due to both the unreasonable policies and the biased social assumptions.

Women and Chinese style child-care arrangements

In the commercial business area, companies may still avoid employing young, single women, due to a fear they may become pregnant, after marrying. Most women face the additional burden of looking after children after they marry, which generally requires them to leave work. Childcare has proved a particular problem for younger women, who are the most likely to have been continuously employed, due to women’s nurturing role as primary carers, especially during the nursery stage (Stiver Lie, 1990). Working women, therefore, too often find themselves sacrificing either their childbearing or career opportunities.

The extended family in China still often helps. Grandparents are usually willing to assist with caring for their grandchildren: on the one hand, they enjoy spending time with their young descendants, and on the other hand they see it as a way of reducing the burden on their own offspring and expressing their love. This is particularly so because of China’s cultural emphasis on ‘one big family’. In the past, and even today in some rural areas and cities, three generations often live together under one roof, and the older people stay at home with the children while the adults of both sexes go out to work. This is becoming less common now in the big cities, but many grandparents still tend to live in their children’s neighbourhood, so that can help to take care of their grandchildren. The tradition of grandparents assisting with childcare
applies to almost all Chinese. It is probably even more common in today’s Chinese society, as the generation born under the one child policy have now reached childbearing age. These sibling-free individuals grew up in the family spotlight and monopolized their parents’ resources. After marrying, their own child may find itself the focal point of six people’s care and attention, namely two grandparents on each side, and its own parents. In some cases, the grandparents then need to arrange shared care of the child. However, single-child parents (where both the mother and father are an only child), and ethnic minorities, are allowed to have two children under the regulations existing in most Chinese cities nowadays. Even so, the extended family still provides efficient support to them to reduce the barriers to their professional development arising from the need for childcare. Nevertheless, women are generally in charge of coordinating the family relationships, making the detailed daily arrangements and planning domestic matters.

In today’s China, people are gradually becoming more accepting of the female’s importance than the traditional conception of ‘Chuan zong jie dai’ (‘have a son to carry on the family name’). Such changed perceptions, particularly evident in the urban areas (F. Yang, 2007), were influenced by the new ideologies in the 21st century that emphasize gender equality and stress the areas of commonality between men and women (Bunch, Antrobus, Frost, & Reilly, 2001; Denis, 2003). In the early years of the New China, a woman who did not become pregnant within a year or two of marriage commonly faced suspicion and inquiries from her neighbours, colleagues, friends and family. Even the bosses in the female’s workplace would talk to her and treat such personal matters as though they were a business matter. In today’s China, at least in the major cities, most people, particularly those from the younger generation, would not question a married woman who has not had a baby, especially a female professional. This is reflective of the changing sex role ideology in China and shows that people recognise that women’s talents and value should be broadly developed, not just limited to bearing and rearing children.
In some developed cities, there seems to be a trend towards men taking more responsibility for domestic work. This takes the form of them doing some housework or listening to their wives’ suggestions about domestic management. This phenomenon is limited by regional and family background. It does little to change the inequity between men and women in terms of the time and effort put into domestic work. While it might be common to see men cooking, caring for a child, ironing shirts or grocery shopping in Shanghai, it remains rare in Northeast China, Shandong province and most rural areas. In some families, boys are not allowed to enter the kitchen or do housework, so strong is the traditional belief that housework is the domain of females. In general, there is still plenty of room for improvement in domestic burden sharing (Yang, 2007).

The argument here is that, even where men and women have equivalent education and skills, the latter are likely to remain disadvantaged. Women, regardless of their professional role and level, tend to fulfil dual roles because of prevailing gender conventions. Most professional women carry out domestic tasks, including the housework and childcare, while also working full-time outside the home. Although the first arena requires no less effort and energy than their professional work, it has often been ignored. However, while women’s participation in the paid labour force has risen more or less continuously over the last century, domestic work has remained largely ‘invisible’, the domain of women, whereas the realm of ‘real work’ outside the home is reserved for men by receiving a direct wage (Giddens, 2006, p. 742). Denis (2003) uses the concepts of ‘reproductive’, ‘nonmarket’ or ‘unpaid’ for the non-profit generating work provided by women. She argues that such jobs are typically done by women, and even when such tasks are paid and categorised as ‘service’ occupations, the wages are typically low, whether the employer is an individual, a business or the State.

In summary, Chinese women have experienced a dramatic change since the People’s Republic of China was formally established in 1949 in terms of equal rights,
particularly in the cities. Along with the rapid rise in Chinese women's social status and position within the family, dynamic socio-economic shifts have meant that more and more females have gained access to school and even foreign education, especially those from the younger generation. In this context, the gender equality issue for foreign-educated women in professional environments will be examined as an important dimension of the study.

Conclusion

Globalisation has entrenched a new world order through the growing transfer of goods, services, capital, labour, information, knowledge, ideas and power. It is the spread of worldwide practices, relations, consciousness, and the reorganization of social life which transforms people's lives (Ritzer, 2008, p. 573). In China, international students performed as a major dimension of the internationalisation process, triggered by globalisation. They have been playing an important role in China's modernisation and development, as they are the direct conduits for the transfer of knowledge, ideas, information, goods, services, capital, culture and labour. The ideology of international education is not new in China at all: it is arguably as old as Confucius, who toured various kingdoms expounding his political beliefs in 550 BC, and attracted people from different states to follow him. In more recent Chinese history, Lin Zexu, a Qing Dynasty official, advocated that the Chinese should 'learn from the westerners to become stronger and to strengthen our own country' (师夷长技已自强) (H. Yang, 2005). Lin's advice remains a well-known aphorism today. Famous, successful people who have had an overseas education can be easily found in China in all fields, though historically most of them gained their experience in Europe, the USA and Japan. Australia is a relatively recent destination, and often not well understood as an option for overseas study. Virtually all Chinese parents, officials and employers prefer the US as a study destination.
In today's dynamic world, higher education providers are challenged by the strong demand for highly-skilled labour. International higher education navigates between globalisation and internationalisation processes. On the one hand, higher education boosts society's progress through new inventions and ideas; it pursues knowledge enhancement, which can benefit the global society although, in practice, some countries (mostly OECD member states and English-language systems) gain far more than others. On the other hand, universities often act to preserve a country's intellectual characteristics and serve as a diplomatic tool for promoting a particular cultural identity. Through various internationalisation approaches, higher education plays a significant role in the development of the globalised world, particularly in producing internationally competent, highly-skilled knowledge workers. Pick and Taylor (2009) pointed out that higher education and employment appear to exist in a symbiotic relationship, as higher education feeds the job market with qualified, skilled people, while the job market feeds higher education with people wanting to 'upgrade' themselves with newer or higher qualifications. While globalisation appears as an inexorable phenomenon, its aggressive demands impinge on individuals in different ways.

In this context, international higher education offers far more than advanced knowledge, teaching and learning. It is the vehicle driving the underlying process of multicultural and economic development through producing graduates, especially for the newly emerging economies or developing nations like China, that suit the growing requirements of a global labour market centred on knowledge production. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are already joining the ranks of the world's 'global cities' as the headquarters of the large, transnational corporations with a superabundance of financial, technological and consulting services (Giddens, 2006, p. 923).
Politics have been inextricably linked with development throughout China’s history (Hayhoe, 1989a). This is still the case today. The Chinese government has explicitly and repeatedly underscored the importance of advanced international education for national, social and economic development. As mentioned above, a variety of policies have been promoted, some aimed at sending students abroad, and others designed to recruit international talent. In all of them, the key goal is to empower Chinese people with advanced international knowledge for China’s development. The current data show that there is a growing number of returnees, as more Chinese choose to return home, bringing their overseas degrees and skills with him. However, appropriate steps are needed to adapt to the massive flow of returnees and effectively utilize their value for China’s cultural, political and economic needs. This is crucial to the long-term success of these policies.

Finally, gender equality, as an important feature reflecting a country’s development, remains a key issue in China. While women in general were burdened by illiteracy for centuries, it took much longer for Chinese women to gain access to education and many social rights, compared to western women. The new China has indeed liberated women to a large extent, but some government regulations and people’s biased assumptions about women’s capacity in today’s society are still impeding women’s development, something which requires necessary, timely attention and improvement. Further discussion is to be found in Chapter Eight.
CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the rationale of and highlight the key theories relevant to this research. These important theoretical frameworks provide the intellectual foundation for the research.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to neo-liberalism. Through explaining the links between this ideology and China's human resource management reform, it elucidates the connection between today's vibrant labour market in China and the active flows of the workforce. Consequently, it forms a concrete base for people's awareness of investing in themselves through education. Although human capital theory has existed for a long period of time and provoked vigorous discussions in western countries in recent decades, it was only popularised in China in the late 1980s, in parallel with the introduction of the wider economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping. Cultural capital and social capital are also major forms of capital that result from international higher education, but these are often neglected in today's China. A critical analysis of the central aspects of these forms of capital is undertaken with reference to China, and its relationship with the phenomenon of returning international graduates in China is discussed. Lastly, the signalling model and its distinct implications in China are reviewed.

Neo-liberalism

The key purpose in referring to this theory is to sketch a background picture of today's vibrant labour market in China. It also lays a foundation for understanding
one of the major reasons why international graduates return home for career development, which is the focus of this study. Following Harvey’s (2005, p. 2) definition of neo-liberalism, the term is seen as: ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’.

While it is difficult to date its emergence precisely, the ideology of neo-liberalism was certainly rejuvenated when the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, adopted the principles into her policies in the late 1970s, followed by President Ronald Reagan in the United States in the early 1980s, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in Canada in the mid-1980s (Harvey, 2005; Stromquist, 2002, p. 19), and Australia, where it was termed economic rationalism, at much the same time (Pusey, 1991; Welch, 1996). Its principles were widely adopted, including in emerging countries, upon the advice of such influential international agencies as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Asian Development Bank (Kiely, 1998; World Bank, 1983, 1993). China’s current thriving economy after the opening up in 1978 cannot be separated from the increasingly incorporated neo-liberal elements. Harvey (2005) even argued that the spectacular emergence of China as a global economic power after 1980 was, in part, an unintended consequence of the neo-liberal turn in the advanced capitalist world.

In brief, neo-liberalism is a main theoretical engine, providing support for the economic globalisation process, and the structural adjustment of economies, through stressing free market mechanisms. It emphasizes the reduction of the role of the government by reducing public expenditure via privatisation, and implementing a process of decentralisation. That means, on the one hand, removing government interventions that might inhibit the free functioning of the market, and withdrawing state control over economic and financial transactions, including those related to goods and services. On the other hand, measures for increasing the role of the private
sector in business transactions and in providing goods and services are assumed to enable producers to identify more accurately the consumer needs in different contexts, and enable the buyers to express their preferences. A corollary process involved pressing the public sector agencies, including those related to education, to operate in similar ways (Altbach, 2007; Currie, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Welch, 1996).

Neo-liberal economic theory has seemingly cemented the link between knowledge workers and the new global economy (Held et al., 1999), based on the premise that fertile, active international interactions, unfettered by government intervention, yield a bigger increase in productivity and global output. This specific ideology or mentality postulates a particular relationship between individuals and their social institutions/communities, notably commending the working of the markets for providing solutions to social and economic problems, including those related to education (Dean, 1999; Harvey, 2005). A very simple example, which is commonly seen in modern societies, is individuals with innovative ideas and active minds, who are increasingly able to work on world level projects. If one’s entire life can be described as a show, then the stage can be enormous if one has an open mind filled with creative ideas. Talented people are able to pursue their success via modernized technologies and transportation systems, and the market will judge the result. The link between neo-liberalism and globalisation is that the flow of goods, services and personnel is no longer contained by national boundaries but is, in principle, global. Indeed, one aspect of the phenomenon is the increasing global competition for highly-skilled labour.

As an economic model, neo-liberalism holds the view that the market is the most effective way of determining production, and that satisfying people’s needs and the prices in a market economy provide the best possible information regarding the relative efficiency of many of the possible combinations of physical and human resources that affect the link between supply and demand (Stromquist, 2002). Competition is an essential element of the free-market paradigm, as part of which
market efficiency produces winners and losers. However, many have argued that the
direct global competition with millions of producers in other nations has widened the
gap between rich and poor, both within and between countries. This includes China,
where the gap between rich and poor has widened alarmingly over the last couple of
decades (D. Goodman, 2008b; Harvey, 2005; Reich, 2006). In 1978, China's Gini
Coefficient was 0.22, one of the most equal ever recorded (Adelmen & Sunding,
1987) but, by 2007, it had become one of the most unequal, with a Gini Coefficient of
0.47 (China Daily, 2010, May 12). Deng Xiaoping had argued, at the beginning of the
opening up reform, that individual and local initiatives should be unleashed in order
to increase productivity and spark economic growth, and that the inevitable inequality
that arose would need to be tolerated (Harvey, 2005). Today, after 30 years of reform,
this disregard for the effects of the increasing inequality is less stressed; instead, the
new emphasis is on allowing more people to enjoy the fruits that have followed the
opening up process, on reducing the income inequalities, particularly between rural
and urban residents, and on creating a more 'harmonious society' (J. Hu, 2011, April
15). Despite the evident imperfections, a relatively open, competitive paradigm is still
thought to encourage the formation of an active, dynamic market environment. Neo-
liberalism has underpinned the emergence of a vibrant global labour market in China,
in which the highly-skilled play a key role.

**Neo-liberal processes and China's labour market**

The transformation of China's labour market is a typical example of the neo-
liberalism process at work. The marketization of labour, calculative choice, and
fostering of a self-enterprising ethos are forms of the neo-liberal techniques of
emerging governance in China (Hoffman, 2006). Beginning in the late 1970s and
early 80s, human resource development (HRD) and the labour market have now
changed significantly, from a strictly government organized allocation system to a far
more open and free market allocation structure, particularly after China joined the
World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and adopted many of its neo-liberal rules on international trade. The rapidly increasing amount of foreign investments and international trade brings millions of extra job opportunities each year, and has also affected the structure of the labour market, notably for well-educated professionals and skilled workers, who now have much better employment opportunities (Wu, 2007).

Table 3.1 Foreign direct investment (FDI) overview of China 1995-2009
(In millions of dollars and percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FDI flows</th>
<th>1995-2005 (Annual average)</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>as a percentage of gross fixed capital formation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1995-2005 (Annual average) 2007 2008 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inward</td>
<td>48,833</td>
<td>72,715</td>
<td>83,521</td>
<td>108,312</td>
<td>95,000</td>
<td>10.1 6.0 5.3 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>3,820</td>
<td>21,160</td>
<td>22,469</td>
<td>52,150</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>0.8 1.6 2.6 2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FDI stocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>as % of gross fixed capital formation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inward</td>
<td>101,098</td>
<td>193,348</td>
<td>327,087</td>
<td>378,083</td>
<td>473,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>17,768</td>
<td>27,768</td>
<td>95,799</td>
<td>147,949</td>
<td>229,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The expansion of the private economy, the restructuring of the state-owned economy, including the privatisation of many state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and the end of the ‘iron rice bowl’ (‘life-long employment’) have contributed significantly to the altered labour market. According to the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (2011), by the end of 2010, only 122 SOEs were directly owned by the Central Government. Nationwide, including all SOEs owned by different levels of government, a reduction of 88,000 SOEs was effected between 1998 and 2003, constituting a progressive decrease of 7.2% on an annual base (Tong, Retrieved 2011, January 10). The number of employees working in SOEs decreased from 90.58 million to 64.20 million between 1998 and 2009. On the other hand, the number of employees working in limited liability companies increased from 8.94
million to 33.89 million, and those working in private entities or who were self-employed rose from 32.32 million to 97.98 million (The Information Office of the State Council, 2010, September). The following figure demonstrates the demand for employees by different types of enterprise.

Figure 3.1 Demand for employees by different types of enterprise

![Image of bar chart showing demand for employees by different types of enterprise]

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2010)

It is clear that the Chinese government has been making important efforts to foster and develop the human resources market. In the past three decades, along with the opening up policies and the improving economy, a multi-dimensional human resource market has been gradually formed. In effect, a transition from a planned to a market allocation of human resources, and from a permanent worker system, which was established under the planned economy, to a more market driven structure, has been implemented. It gives employers the right freely to choose their staff members and also, to some extent, allows the workers the right to choose their job. However, the
hukou system and other constraints (addressed in detail below), in effect, limit the freedom of certain workers to exercise this choice but, compared to the strictly controlled system in the past, workers increasingly have more freedom over their employment choice. Consequently, a new mode of labour relations is being formed, based on the principles of mutual choice, free consultation, and contract based arrangements. In the newly released *National Plan for Medium-and-long-term Human Resources Development* (2010-2020), the fundamental role of market allocation was clearly stated as a target of the plan. The government has indicated that they would further reduce its role in the allocation of human resources, and enable the market to play its due role.

In today's China, a fairly active, mature human resource service industry has been established with an increasing number of registered human resource services. These entities or agencies are commonly known as Talent Service Centres or 'Head Hunter' companies, and they often offer a range of career services to individuals with educational qualifications and marketable skills. In the early stage, recruitment was probably the major service offered by most human resource agencies, which centred on approaching professionals according to different job criteria, or helping individuals to find, and firms to allocate, appropriate jobs. Now, many of these agencies no longer offer services in a single format alone, but rather via a variety of activities and forms. The scope and content of these services have become more diverse, including both on-line and physical systems that cover training, employment guidance, professional assessment, career consultation, and follow up evaluation. In addition to hosting regular job fairs and providing computer database systems for employers and employees, some centres help professionals to manage their employment and insurance records outside their workplace (Hoffman, 2006). Consequently, a relatively complete service chain has emerged. In 2008, China had more than 49,000 agencies providing such human resources services, consisting of government-sponsored employment and personnel service agencies, private human resources service agencies and Chinese-foreign joint ventures specializing in human resources services.
services (The Information Office of the State Council, 2010, September). Since China's entry into the WTO in 2001, the number of foreign-invested human resources service agencies has grown significantly. In 2009, there were 160 Sino-foreign human resources service agencies in Chinese territory, compared to 30 in 2003 (The Information Office of the State Council, 2010, September). In 2009, 97 million workers were registered for employment with various human resources service agencies, while 36 million people succeeded in finding work or changing their job (The Information Office of the State Council, 2010, September).

The role of the hukou system in China's labour market

The hukou (household registration) system and its reform have long been important components of China's labour market. Together with the above reforms, the ongoing hukou reform has contributed to the gradual reduction in the traditional forms of labour segregation, which occurred against a history of a planned economy that restricted people's movement within China. After the hukou system was introduced in 1951, and subsequently separated into rural and urban categories in 1958, very strict restrictions were placed on villagers' movement to the urban areas (Chan, 2010). When the first hukou transfer regulation was released in 1964, many rural people wished to relocate to an urban hukou, mainly because life was better in China's cities: while, in the countryside, they had to rely on each year's harvest for sustenance, the cities were guaranteed sufficient food (Harvey, 2005). Now, however, this process has begun to reverse, since some of those who moved to the city now wish to reclaim their rural hukou in order to take advantage of the higher land values. Nonetheless, because of the quota, it is extremely difficult to transfer a hukou, even between the top tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai. As the economic reforms intensified and the labour surplus became more conspicuous in the rural sector, more and more farmers and people from small cities were forced to seek employment opportunities in the cities. These came to be known as migrant workers. In 1984, villagers, for the first
time, were allowed to find jobs in the cities, which induced about 10 million workers to migrate by 1988 (L. Chen & Hou, 2008). By 2009, the figure had increased by 14 times, reaching as high as 145 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009). At the same time, the long-term excessive labour surplus faced problems in the unregulated labour market. Chen and Hou argued that illegal employment under poor working conditions became endemic, and that such workers risked losing their basic rights and interests, including the right to schooling for their children, while also experiencing discrimination themselves. While the process affected both men and women, females often suffered particularly harsh forms of employment associated with the transition (Chang, 2008), as discussed in Chapter Two and will be further discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

It is clear that gaining a *hukou* in the city where one is employed conveys benefits in many areas. Segregation between the rural and urban areas has always been the most hotly debated issue with regard to the *hukou* system but, in fact, as indicated above, this system of household registration also strictly controls urban people’s movement across different cities, regardless of the subsequently released regulations on *hukou* transfer. Without *guanxi*, or contacts, it is almost impossible for normal university graduates to transfer their *hukou* to Beijing or Shanghai if they wish to work there, regardless of where they were born or what kind of *hukou* they hold, including the provincial capital cities or other wealthy cities like Suzhou or Hangzhou. This means that, even if those graduates are able to find jobs in Beijing and work there for many years, they never formally belong there, and hence cannot enjoy the welfare and educational entitlements provided by the Beijing government to those possessing local *hukou*.

The fact that one of the governments’ policies to attract highly-skilled workers and international professionals involves assistance with *hukou* transfer means that, comparatively, overseas graduates with international qualifications have far better access to well-paid jobs in desirable locations. This was discussed in the previous
chapter, where it was pointed out that overseas Chinese graduates have the advantage of being able to choose in which city to seek work on their return, and to transfer their hukou with the help of the respective government departments. However, different cities have their own measurements of highly-skilled international professionals. Market-competitive cities like Beijing and Shanghai, in effect, have a higher requirement but, beyond this special policy offered to returnees, the trend of reforming the hukou system is clear and definite, as expressed in the document entitled *The Opinion on Solving Several Problems Concerning Migrant Workers* by the State Council (2006).

**The subsequent reform of higher education and graduates’ employment**

As the economic sector has taken the lead in initiating reforms, followed by the significant changes in the human resource sector, the structural reform of higher education followed because of its importance as a site for the production of highly-skilled labour. Universities have also been learning how to guide graduates into appropriate positions and to help both students and the danwei (work unit) to become familiar with the new world of ‘demand-meet-supply’ exchange and ‘mutual choice’ (Hoffman, 2006). *Danwei* is a mode of work organization that is not only a place where workers produce goods or services, but also a social entity that caters for the economic, political, and social needs of its members (Schulte, 2003). From the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, until 1977, China’s higher education underwent a series of dramatic changes, which influenced graduates’ lives subsequently. It started in the 1950s with the reorganization and restructuring according to the Soviet model, based on the belief that the higher education system should be integrated with the economic base of the country (Min, 2004). Thousands of Soviet scholars and specialists came to teach at Chinese universities and colleges, while all of the higher education institutions were brought under government control. The Chinese higher education system became more departmentalised and segmented.
under different ministries, the higher education institutions became narrower and graduates came to represent products in a centrally planned economy. With the adoption of the Soviet model, the Chinese government formulated and implemented the First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (1953-1957), which triggered the so-called Great Leap Forward in all fields in China, including higher education. While a failure in many respects, the number of higher education institutions increased from 229 to 1,289 between 1957 and 1960, while the total enrolments more than doubled in the same period: from 441,181 to 961,623 (Min, 2004). Subsequent problems in the Sino-Soviet relationship, together with the serious economic austerity, meant that the number of institutions decreased from 1,289 to 407 between 1960 and 1963. Just a few years after the Chinese higher education system was put on track toward steady, relatively healthy development from 1963 to 1965, the Cultural Revolution negated almost everything, including the longstanding Chinese academic traditions, the western academic influences that had emerged before 1949, and the Soviet academic model. The universities and colleges were closed, and the national college entrance examinations were abolished (Min, 2004). An entire generation effectively missed out on the opportunity to acquire a higher education.

From 1977, after the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution, China’s higher education system resumed a regular order. The structure of higher education remained closely aligned with the central planned economy. The central government instituted the national socio-economic development plan and a corresponding manpower plan, according to which the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Education, jointly formulated a higher education development plan that included the number and types of institutions and students needed, as well as the distribution of student enrolments by field of study (Hayhoe, 1989b; Min, 2004; R. Yang, 2002). All university graduates were allocated to a particular danwei in line with the five-year plan. Graduates’ personal profiles were transferred to their indicated organizations before they physically relocated. Nonetheless, allocation to a danwei at that time
usually meant an *Iron Rice Bowl* – the provision of a wide range of welfare, education and pension benefits that, in effect, guaranteed one’s livelihood for life (Harvey, 2005). Almost regardless of their performance at work, the *danwei* had to provide a life-long salary and social pension to its employees, mainly in the public sector, especially the SOEs.

In parallel with the reform of the economy, notably the formation of a freer labour market, discussed above, the State Education Commission (the organisational antecedent of the Ministry of Education) initiated a series of reforms in the job allocation system in the early 1980s, followed by changes in the university enrolment policies and the curriculum (Hoffman, 2006). Together with the economic transition and the fast-growing market economy, the education reforms became linked with the new logics of supply and demand, and market competition. Some graduates began to find their own jobs upon graduating, although the majority still followed the government’s instructions at that early stage. The restructuring of the state-owned economy gave SOEs the flexibility to hire and fire workers, and to replace their lifetime employment systems with labour contract ones. While this marked the end of the *iron rice bowl*, resulting in large-scale retrenchments and the relocation of tens of millions of SOE workers (L. Chen & Hou, 2008), at the same time, it offered opportunities and freedom of career choice to university graduates (only some of whom took such opportunities). Nonetheless, the legacy of the Soviet model had far-reaching influences on the Chinese higher education system, such as departmentalisation, segmentation and overspecialisation, all of which, combined with the caution of many in the face of an unfamiliar set of choices, caused problems for graduates attempting to enter the labour market in a more dynamic market economy.

By the late 1990s, almost all graduates across the country starting seeking jobs by themselves. The labour market played a key role in determining the human resources development and allocation, and the higher education institutions had to gear their
programs to meet the human resource needs of the labour market (Min, 2004). On the one hand, companies and organizations now choose their employees through selection and interviews but, on the other hand, graduates are able to make their own choices about jobs. The increased number of private companies, foreign enterprises, or other types of work unit during this reform process meant that danwei and the iron rice bowl are becoming relatively unfamiliar terms, especially among the younger generation.

With the development of a market economy, many graduates often find jobs in completely unrelated fields through various labour market mechanisms. In terms of labour market performance, graduate employability becomes an indicator of popular university programs and enrolment policies. Students demand changes based on the feedback from previous graduates' performance in the labour market; that is, if graduates with certain types and levels of education cannot find jobs, then the enrolment in that field will decline. Nonetheless, the state still plays an important role in this market-oriented environment via different channels. The government can influence the needs of the labour market through setting the country's macroeconomic policies, or determining employment and wage policies in the public sector through defining the national priorities.

Taken together, the different types of reform of the SOEs, social security, job allocation system and household registration system, analysed above, have had a distinct impact on the emergence of a vibrant labour market, illustrating the major features of the contemporary environment that both local and international graduates are entering. The centrepiece of these reforms is the introduction of more market mechanisms and the increasing employment flexibility. Understanding these changes and development assists in understanding the current employment environment in China, and also helps to analyse the employment issues of overseas-educated graduates in China, which is a key issue of this research.
Forms of Capital

It is widely accepted that different forms of capital exist depending on the field in which it functions. In addition to economic or financial capital, human capital, cultural capital and social capital are the major forms coined and discussed amongst scholars (Becker, 1975; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001; Schultz, 1971). While these forms of capital stand out according to their distinct characteristics, they also share some similarities. In brief, human capital is created by investment in people that yields new skills and knowledge, allowing them to work in new ways and more productively; cultural capital can be described as the education or intellectual advantages of individuals, that are transmitted to their children (either consciously or unconsciously) in order to succeed in the current educational system; while the emphasis of social capital is on relationships of trust, co-operation and mutually supportive relations in communities and nations, that can facilitate a denser civil society. Putnam's (2001) bonding social capital concept is particularly relevant to this case, as it is inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities: graduates with international education from the same institution can be argued to form a typical model. From an eastern perspective, such alumni relationships or guanxi often provide solid intellectual resources that can help one's career, acting as a network of important contacts and resources.

These forms of capital are of interest to the present research because of the way in which they function for Chinese international graduates, particularly the advantages that an international education may confer. Notwithstanding the significant international tuition fees, a huge number of Chinese university students chose to study abroad for several years, and gain some international experience, before returning home for career development. Through devoting much time and concrete effort, these graduates gain human capital that makes them more competitive in the domestic Chinese labour market. In addition to acquiring high-level international qualifications,
they also obtain cultural capital, which will benefit their offspring subsequently. Furthermore, the increasing number of returnees and their relatively high social status in Chinese society strengthen the connections amongst these international graduates, which can subsequently become a form of social capital. The cost of acquiring an international higher education degree can be treated as an expense, whereas the major returns are intellectual benefits and non-financial social assets, respectively human capital, cultural capital and social capital. The following sections elaborate the above arguments with theories, debates and examples relating to China.

**Human capital theory and Chinese students**

Human capital has been commonly described as a stock of competences, knowledge and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform labour in order to produce economic value. It is an intangible asset that can be obtained in many forms by a person, rather than firms or companies, and it cannot be separated from one’s self, nor inherited. Nonetheless, while knowledge cannot be inherited, a family’s cultural influences and social networks and advantages can be passed on to the next generation, as will be further analysed in the following section on cultural and social capital theory. The model of human capital, as Belfield (2000, p. 16) suggested, can be regarded as the foundation linking education and the labour market. Education and training can be understood to be a form of capital, and their economic worth is typically calculated through measures of increased earnings or the more certain employment associated with greater human capital (Becker, 1975; Schultz, 1971). Based on an employment study of Chinese students with Master’s degrees versus those with post-secondary college degrees in 2006, the average monthly salary of the former group is evidently much higher than that of the latter group (B. Wang, 2010).
In modern societies, many individuals have advanced specialities in professional knowledge fields, like engineering, medicine and accounting. These people’s skills and knowledge allow them to perform actively in the labour market, and hence produce economic value and also earn more. Consequently, productivity is raised significantly, compared to traditional labour, which merely relies on lower level skills. It is important to note that these kinds of knowledge and skills did not come naturally, but were rather developed through personal and social investments in education and training.

Human Capital can be understood as the knowledge, information, ideas, skills and health of individuals, and the investment in human capital directly raises one’s productivity, which is a major contributory factor to the economy’s growth (Becker, 1975; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006; Schultz, 1971). Both Becker and Schultz have argued that one’s productivity can be enhanced by investing in learning new skills and knowledge, and that the earnings differentials parallel closely the corresponding differentials in education. Becker also outlined several types of investment in human capital, including on-the-job training, schooling, and other
knowledge. While each investment type differs, as a whole package, investment empowers an individual to perform better as a human being in today’s changing society, and to embrace the world with enhanced knowledge. The following section elaborates Becker’s various modes, explaining why they are relevant to this study and, in particular, how they relate to the phenomenon of overseas educated Chinese graduates returning to their home country for career development.

On-the-Job Training

On-the-job training lays emphasis on learning new skills and perfecting old ones while on the job, as well as the relationship between the employer and employee. It was presumed that productivity improvements could be costed, including the time and effort placed in trainees, the ‘teaching’ provided by other professionals, and the equipment or materials used. These costs could have been used to produce the current output if they had not had been used for raising future output, and such future output is usually expected to be far greater than the current one. Two major types of training are general training and specific training, both of which play a different role during a person’s career span.

General training means the useful skills and knowledge that can be brought from one’s previous company or firm. For example, a journalist may find his/her media knowledge very useful in a public relations company; an accountant trained by an international professional accounting agency might find his/her skills of value in another firm’s finance department. Most on-the-job training aims to increase one’s future productivity and bring benefits to the current firm, but the skills and knowledge obtained from general training are likely to stay with a person, which may benefit the receiving firm, together with the move of the individual. Therefore, in today’s competitive labour market, companies link general training with its attendant costs, unless there are conditions for minimizing the risk of the loss of investment. Employees may sometimes be willing to share the costs of professional general
training, since it raises their future wages and may benefit their future career. Some income-maximizing firms in highly competitive labour markets are unlikely to pay the cost of general training, and merely pay trained people the market wage. These trained workers may be enticed away by other firms, thereby increasing the productivity of the other firm rather than that of the one providing the training, in which case the original firm who paid for the training would suffer a 'capital loss'. Nonetheless, in some big companies or government bodies, general training may be offered, but this is mainly limited to long-term or stable employees, and often offered only to those with the potential to be developed for senior positions.

Specific training is different from general training in the sense that it aims to increase productivity more in the firms providing it, and may have no effect in other firms. For example, a professional astronaut who was trained for aerospace industry work may find his/her skills of little use in export industries. If the knowledge can be kept from other firms, any expenditure on increasing the knowledge of the employees is considered a specific investment. For example, teambuilding is often targeted to help employees to become familiar with each other and with their organization. The capital expenditure on specific training would be partly wasted if the trained employee leaves for another job, and no further return is collected. Similarly, an employee who is fired after s/he has paid for specific training would be unable to collect any further return and would suffer a capital loss (Becker, 1975, p. 29). Where possible, it is argued that firms that provide training should offer conditions conducive to the employee staying with the organization.

In many modern societies, labour recruitment is being strongly affected by globalisation. The requirements and training for workers have altered dramatically, and the needs for internationally trained, highly-skilled workers have increased significantly. Internationally reputable universities are expected to fulfil this need by producing quality international professionals. The core value of human capital theory is to increase one's productivity through investment in, and the improvement of,
knowledge and skills, and hence to become more competitive in the labour market. For most individuals, it takes time and money to pursue higher education, including tuition fees, stipends and the foregone earnings that might have accrued during the study period, but the skills and knowledge attained in higher education improve individuals’ human capital, and is likely to result in higher productivity, higher wages and better career prospects.

Schooling

An artefact of modern societies, schooling consists of an intensive process of institutionalised teaching and learning before entering the workforce. Becker suggested that training in a new industrial skill is usually first given on the job, since firms tend to be the first to be aware of its value but, as demand develops, some of the training shifts to schools. Programs in schools usually offer a complete set of training, from specialist skills to large, diverse and generic forms of knowledge. Universities are typical forms of this. One of schools’ key functions is to prepare professionals to meet the demands of industry, and supply a quality workforce for the labour market. The costs of schooling consist of both direct and indirect costs. For example, tuition fees, the purchase of books, and stationery supplies are typical direct costs for schooling; strictly speaking, any expenditure that is directly related to learning can be counted as a direct cost. On the other hand, indirect costs suggest the possible earnings that might have been expected to accrue during the study period. These are also called foregone earnings, which is an important but often neglected cost of investment in human capital. In fact, indirect costs should be treated in the same way as direct outlays. For example, a full-time university student could not be a full-time staff member of a company at the same time. When a student chooses to go to university, he/she loses the chance to be a full-time employee during those years, as well as other kinds of business opportunity. Consequently, the student foregoes the economic value that he/she might have potentially accrued over the same period. Generally speaking, the direct costs of tuition fees and forgone earnings are incurred
at the same time; however, the direct costs may be offset by scholarships, grants or part-time work. Although both direct and indirect costs are important contributions to the total costs, and sometimes the indirect part may encompass more value, since the direct cost is more obvious, it often attracts more attention and emphasis.

For Chinese students who choose international higher education in the form of on-the-job training or gaining degrees, the common purpose is to strengthen their knowledge, improve their skills, advance their abilities, develop their talents, gain experience, and consequently become more competitive in the labour market and enhance their value to society. Some working professionals choose to use their limited spare time to take a Master’s course at an international university via distance learning, and bear the costs of this themselves. During this learning period, they are required to work harder than their colleagues because, in addition to their normal nine to five business hours, they need to spend a lot of time and effort studying. Therefore, they must often sacrifice many leisure or family activities, or give up other career opportunities, with the longer term aim or expectation of an enhanced quality life, better career opportunities, and an enhanced income.

The advantage for this group of graduates is that they keep in close touch with their local society and stay on track with their work, so they should not have any problems with re-integration issues upon graduation. The most popular form of international education for the majority of Chinese students, however, remains that of physically travelling abroad to undertake full-time study. These individuals are prepared to spend a few years engaged in fulltime learning before entering the workforce although, in some systems, they are permitted to work for a few hours per week while studying. In Australia, for example, international students may work for up to twenty hours per week, while engaged in fulltime study. Pursuing this path is more expensive because, in addition to the expensive tuition fees, there are associated living costs, international airfares, etc. Most of these students do not have a stable income, but rather depend on their family or scholarships. The advantage is that students can
concentrate fulltime on their studies, absorbing and digesting the new knowledge. The solid period of time also allows the students intensively to develop innovative ideas, deepen their linguistic capacity, experience a foreign culture and develop independent thinking skills.

Other Knowledge

The term ‘other knowledge’ refers to the information that is not obtained via professional training, but rather gained from daily life. Such information can also increase one’s consumption and production possibilities. For example, practical information about real estate property prices could help a person to purchase a house more cheaply, or information about the annual income offered by different firms would enable a person to get a job with the firm paying the highest salary. This information comes at a price, however: that is the time, effort, and even money spent on research. In today’s society, it often takes time to search for jobs, effort to visit firms or prepare for interviews, and sometimes money to pay for specialized agencies to assist with one’s job search. Some people even need to move interstate or internationally for their career development. Until the commencement of the formal job, everything that has been put into the job search process seems like an investment. Alternatively, people may call these costs.

Mastering their career trajectory by utilising other knowledge is crucial and challenging for all graduates. Because of the information they have gained, the amount of time and money they invest in job searching will affect the job they choose significantly. This thesis seeks to explore that how does international education and several years’ independent living experience, perhaps together with some relevant work experience gained along the way, should enhance one’s general skills in obtaining other knowledge, and assist individuals to find what they want more efficiently upon their return home. Because of the systematic professional training gained at a foreign university and the multinational environment they have
experienced, international students have often learnt how to navigate modern society independently, by putting their knowledge into practice. For most international graduate returnees, their overseas learning and living experience underpins their general knowledge (other knowledge), subsequently influencing their career trajectory.

Cultural capital and international education

It is unsurprising that every institutionalised education system has specific structural characteristics that produce and reproduce specific institutional conditions, but the existence and self-reproduction of the system are important both in the exercise of its essential function of inculcation, and in the fulfilment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In other words, education does not simply teach students knowledge and skills, but the whole process also transmits the culture of a particular institution and the social system to which it is bound. The informational efficiency of pedagogic communication, in this theory, is the process of investment that reproduces a set of symbols and meanings that distinguish the dominant class. In addition, the action of inculcation tends to emphasise the sophisticated manipulation of words, especially for Arts faculties, since work is performed principally in and through the relation of communication.

In relation to this study, and in the context of the intellectual benefits of education and its influence on one’s life, it is necessary to examine Bourdieu’s argument of the Institutionalized State, as a form of cultural capital: this holds that academic qualifications serve as a certificate to prove one’s cultural competence, and perform as a magic wand to impose recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). For most overseas educated Chinese graduates, their several years of professional foreign education and possession of internationally recognized academic certificates have conferred upon them a distinctive position in modern Chinese society. Different from human capital
theory, the purpose of acquiring cultural capital does not directly concern higher productivity or better income, but rather lays emphasis on non-monetary values like ways of thinking, the appreciation of high culture and a worldview – that can however be transformed into material rewards.

Bourdieu classified cultural capital into three forms, which are: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986). Briefly, embodied capital is an integral part of an individual that is acquired, quite unconsciously, to a varying extent, depending on the period of learning, the society, and the social status. It lies embedded in one’s mind and behaviour, and presents itself through forms like the understanding of issues or an awareness of cultures. Similar to human capital, cultural capital takes time and effort to obtain, and dies with its bearer. Unlike human capital, however, the investment in cultural capital is not aimed at a conversion into economic value, but rather at cultural competence, including being able to appreciate different forms of art and ways of life, often what is deemed ‘high culture’ in that society. Although embodied cultural capital cannot be inherited, its hidden transmission power influences and affects the offspring of families with strong cultural capital. The parents’ cultural competence (such as educational credentials) and cultural goods (such as a well-stocked library at home) that belong to the childhood environment exert an educative effect by their mere existence (Bourdieu, 1986). For international students, travelling abroad and undertaking education program are forms of investment, and the intellectual benefits and experiences are types of cultural capital. According to this theory, then, the investment in international education by returnees to China should not only yield higher productivity at work and better jobs, but also enhance their cultural competence in ways that benefit their children.

The learning experience overseas not only enhances students’ knowledge, but also affects their psychographics, including their personality traits, values, beliefs, preferences and behavioural patterns (Taylor, 2001). This is obvious in young
international students, since most of them are more open to new ideas, accept new values more easily, and adapt better to new worldviews. Many young Chinese international students who undertake travel for the purpose of acquiring an international higher education also pursue a new life in a different environment. During the study and living period overseas, they are exposed to very different kinds of lifestyle, culture, belief, interpretations of happiness, and many different ideas that they had not experienced in China. The changed environment overseas encourages these young international students to adapt to these new things and, as time passes, gradually allows them to form an expanded worldview, with some changed values, and understanding of life. The intangible experiences, values, worldviews, understanding of life and happiness, ways of approaching problems and many other qualities are something that cannot be measured by economics.

The second form of cultural capital that Bourdieu indicated, the objectified state, refers to material objects and properties, with the emphasis on what constitutes the preconditions for specific appropriation; for example, the ability to appreciate a piece of material art. However, academic qualifications – as objectified object or artefact – are defined as a separate form of cultural capital, namely the institutionalized state because, while the certificate itself is an objective property, it is also attached to an individual agent, and declines and dies with one’s biological capacity and memory (Bourdieu, 1986). In other words, cultural capital shares some characteristics with both other forms, but is also different from each of them. Such forms of cultural capital are academically sanctioned through legally guaranteed qualifications, and the official academic certificate confers on its holder a conventional value. In a competitive recruitment environment, the education qualification performs as symbolic profit; it produces sharp, absolute, lasting differences amongst candidates, and imposes recognition. Ultimately, it makes possible the conversion between cultural capital and economic capital. At this point, it shares similarities with the signalling model, which is addressed in detail in the following section.
As a form of cultural capital, however, the worth of qualifications varies, according to people's perceptions (Bourdieu, 1999). Only people who perceive qualifications and perceive their worth make them exist, and appreciate their effects. Taking Chinese students studying abroad as an example, only those international graduates who have completed an overseas education program and understand the experience behind the qualification can appreciate the certificate, and hence the cultural capital it confers. If employers do not share this perception, then international cultural capital may be limited in effect. In other words, only in those people's eyes does that piece of paper (the education certificate) represent a range of things, including knowledge and skills, international experience, an awareness of global affairs and respect for foreign cultures. In addition, institutional hierarchies can make a difference to those people, and degrees from the more highly regarded international universities would count for more than those from less prestigious or less internationally recognised institutions.

Social capital, guanxi and alumni networks

The concept of social capital has risen to prominence over the last two decades, including in various sub-fields, such as sociology, political science, public health, public housing research, and education research (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). While there is no single definition of social capital, and the term is sometimes seen as somewhat elusive, it often tends to refer to the denser bonds among people and communities, notably relations of trust, cooperation and mutual support. Since this section pays attention to the existence of social capital amongst overseas-educated Chinese returnees and its implication for their careers, the concept refers to the connections among individuals or corporate actors, which often involve mutual obligations and can facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2001). It is the aggregate of actual or potential resources, which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). Similar to human capital and cultural capital, social
capital is not completely fungible, but may be very productive for specific issues; for example, making possible the achievement of certain ends that, in its absence, would be impossible (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam’s bonding social capital is particularly applicable here, as it emphasises homogeneous groups and tends to reinforce exclusive identities (Putnam, 2001). Taking the case of this study as an example, for the thousands of Chinese students from different social classes who have studied at the University of Sydney, the name and logo of the university on their graduation certificates indeed bonds them together. Different from Putnam’s bridging social capital, which is outward looking and better for linking external assets, bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. Consequently, it serves the need for cooperation and mutual benefit, and may also create a strong out-group impact by creating strong in-group loyalty. The university that these students attended strives to maximise the potential of its researchers and students, regardless of their social or cultural background (Sydney News, 2010, January 8), and given that the same study opportunities and academic courses were offered to those students during the period, positive consequences – trust, mutual support, institutional effectiveness, cooperation – emerge amongst them. While these overseas-educated graduates occupy senior and important positions in a range of professional fields in China and the number of returnees is increasing rapidly, the growing size of their network of connections eventually becomes their unique social capital, an instantiated norm promoting cooperation and mutual benefit (Fukuyama, 2000; Putnam, 2001). The principle lies in the connections and mutual relationships, which need to endure, via material or symbolic exchanges, to remain active.

The concept of guanxi (an embodied system of social connections and relationships) within Chinese society has been an arguable affinity here. The term can be simply translated as ‘relation’ or ‘relationship’ to describe one’s affiliation with another person or unit; for example, ‘mother and son guanxi’ or ‘partnership guanxi’. It is also
often used as a kind of social capital connection that can be developed and sustained through banquets, favours and gifts (Bian, 2008; M. Yang, 1994). While both guanxi and social capital involve social relations, it is important to appreciate that guanxi does not relate exclusively to social capital, nor is itself simply another term for social capital (Huang & Wang, 2011). Guanxi and social capital are similar concepts, but the latter is considered as attributes of both individuals and organizations. Thus, guanxi is distinctively about interpersonal relationships, which are often lost within the corporate environments of large organizations and, at the same time, they also involve interpersonal obligations that may conflict with other obligations that people have based on general or abstract moral considerations (Provis, 2007). As Buderi and Huang (2007) argued, there is no purely business relationship in China: people must blend formal relationships with personal networks, in order to be successful in business. Guanxi is the delicate art of building and nurturing such ties.

For both social capital and guanxi, each social actor has control over certain resources and interests in certain resources and events. Within Western social theory, social capital constitutes particular kinds of resource available to an actor (whether a person or corporate actor) and, consequently, consists of some aspects of social structures, facilitating certain actions of the actors within the structure (Coleman, 1988). Lin criticised this view as a tautology because he believed that social capital should not be limited or restrained by the effect, and argued that it is incorrect to allow the outcome variables to dictate the specification of the causal variable (Lin, 2001). For example, an actor’s (X) kin ties or contacts are social capital simply because these relationships can channel X to get a better job, while another actor’s (Y) kin ties or contacts are not social capital because these relationships do not channel Y to get a better job. So, put simply, Lin suggests that the accountability of one’s social capital should not be based on a direct causal relationship but, in reality and even in some scientific research, the outcome variables are often used to examine the causal variable.
In China, each person is born into a complex relationship with his/her parents and other family members which combines both sentiment and obligation (Liang, 1986). In fact, in many Chinese families, if a family member holds a senior position with rich social resources, or is even just doing relatively better than someone else, then the other family members naturally expect that individual to help them with their career, like introducing them to a good job or other powerful people, who may be able to assist them with jobs or similar benefits. Such an individual, then, is not merely a family member to the other family members, but also acts as a form of social capital. The possible practical returns to an individual (Z) could be: economic (e.g., a gift), physical and mental health (e.g., the beneficial family member contributes more to the family, thus reducing Z’s burden), and social (for example, one’s reputation for fulfilling one’s moral and ethical obligations to one’s family, also known as ‘mianzi’ in Chinese). Mianzi has been termed ‘face’ in many analyses (Aziz, 2005). It is a mark of personal pride, forming the basis of an individual’s social status: while face is a reputational commodity that can be lost or earned, giving someone face can also earn respect and loyalty, and assist social relations. Similar practices apply to other kinds of guanxi, such as between friends, schoolmates, etc., as well as to relationships that either directly or indirectly bring positive values to one’s career or life. Therefore, as explained earlier, guanxi or connections can be mere ‘contacts’, like a distant family member, a neighbour, or one of 200 schoolmates. The social capital level of the network would only become activated when mutual obligations are involved.

It is clear that social capital is created by changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. The key forms of social capital include [1] obligations, expectations, and the trustworthiness of the structure. It is built on the base of people doing something for each other, whereby they gradually build several elements: mutual trust and established obligations and expectations; [2] information channels, which means that social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations, especially in cases where providing a basis for action and the acquisition of useful information is costly; and [3] norms and effective sanctions, which aims at building a
friendly, effective environment for the social group or community (Coleman, 1988). In modern societies, however, particularly in professional fields, social capital can also be the elements of influence, social credentials, and reinforcement (Lin, 2001). For example, in a hiring or promotion situation, social ties may exert an influence on the decision makers, because the opinions of the important parties carry a certain weight in the decision-making process regarding an individual. Subsequently, the acknowledged relationships to the individual may be conceived by the organization as certifications of his/her social credentials, and such relations are expected to reinforce identity and recognition, so social capital may well pertain between Sydney returnees, even though they may have lost some local Chinese guanxi while away.

The Western Returned Scholars Association - the Chinese Overseas-educated Scholars' Association, is the key organization in China providing typical social capital to returnees. Highly-skilled, overseas-educated Chinese graduates qualify for membership of this group, which provides a range of support to its members with the backing of the collectively owned social capital, and a credential that entitles them to credit. The Western Returned Scholars Association was established in 1913 by famous people like Wellington Koo, Liang Dunyan, Jeme Tien Yow and Cai Yuanpei, who had studied in the US and Europe (WRSA-COSA, 2010). Its Chinese name is 'Oumei tongxuehui' (The Europe and US Alumni association). National leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao have paid close attention to this association, as it gathers outstanding returnees and acts as an important bridge linking Mainland China with overseas Chinese. The current Chairman is Han Qide, who is also the vice-president of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and chairman of the China Association for Science and Technology. Prominent members of this association include successful business leaders, senior government officials, famous scientists and artists. All of the above contributes to the unique social status of this group in China. With the rapid growth in the number of overseas-educated scholars joining this group since it resumed its official activities in
1982 (after closing due to a series of political events, including the Cultural Revolution), and their diversified study locations, the association amended its name in 2003 to the Western Returned Scholars Association - Chinese Overseas-educated Scholars Association. However, few people use the new, extended name, preferring to use 'Oumei tongxuehui', because its new name shrouds the historical path to its original form. To some extent, it also reflects the solid image of Europe and US education in China.

This association is a typical bonding social capital group (Putnam, 2001), because it is inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. People cannot simply choose to become a member, but rather must have international higher education qualifications, and be invited by an existing member. However, it also seems to have some bridging social capital characteristics, which are outward looking and generate broader identities and reciprocities. For example, it used to be an association solely for returnees from America and Europe, but has now been extended to include returnees from many other countries. Nonetheless, a basic requirement for membership of this association is the possession of a Bachelor's degree or above from an international higher education institution. Such bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue for the returnees, and provides crucial social and psychological support for the less fortunate members by furnishing start-up financing, markets, and reliable labour for local entrepreneurs (Putnam, 2001).

Because of its unique political background and huge network systems, many returnees are keen to join the association. Some members, consciously or unconsciously, aim to establish or reproduce social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term. The positive effects they anticipate from such social capital include making problems easier to resolve; helping to smooth and ease business transactions based on the trust of the members; improving the quality of the civic institutions, as it widens people's awareness of their mutual connectivity; facilitating the effective flow of information, which is another way to improve productivity; and even assisting
people's health and happiness through both psychological and biological processes which require human contact (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2001).

The debate continues in relation to unifying the measurement of social capital as assets in networks, because it is unlike economic capital that can be precisely counted in financial terms, human capital that can be estimated by skills and knowledge though investment in learning, or cultural capital that may be evaluated by one's understanding and acknowledgment of culture. The volume of one's social capital involves both an individual and a collective aspect, as is evident from the size of the network of connections that one can effectively mobilize, as well as the volume of the capital possessed by each connected person (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001). By accessing an enormous amount of data, covering from the number of social clubs to people's worldview and value, and by analysing a vast range of individual behaviour including voting, belonging to sororities, having family dinners, going on church outings, etc., Putnam's conclusion about the reduction in all forms of in-person social interactions in America since 1950 has evoked fierce debate.

Many scholars have criticised his findings, arguing that numbers alone cannot represent the reality of civic life, especially in complicated societies like America; while others have produced evidence to show that the number of social groups and their subsequent members have increased compared to the previous generation (Ladd, 1996; Schudson, 1996). While Fukuyama believes that social capital is essential for a strong social society, because a broader radius of trust will enable connections across borders of all sorts and serve as a basis for organizations, he also points out that social groups vary significantly, based on their mission, purpose and value. Lin (2001) stated that the measurement of social capital can be made relative to two frameworks. The first he named network resources, which indicate the resources represented in the network to which an individual has access. It includes the range of resources among the ties, from the highest to lowest valued, the best possible and reachable resources in the networks, the variety or heterogeneity of the resources in the networks, and the
composition of these resources. The second he named contact resources, suggesting the valued resources represented by contacts in specific actions. More explicitly, it means that the valued resources, like the wealth, power and status, of the contact are applied within the context of specific actions, such as job searches. In short, one's social capital cannot be simply calculated by the number of clubs with which one is registered or the time spent in the group, but also reflects the quality of the social group and the outcomes from participating in it.

The Signalling Model and its Implications in China

The preceding sections linked the key forms of capitals with international education, and sketched some of the consequences that these bring to Chinese international graduates. This section aims to connect these more closely to the issue of returnees' employment by reviewing signalling theory, which is differentiated from the above theories.

When faced with an enormous number of job applications, it is impossible for employers to meet everyone or investigate all of their skills. Employers cannot be certain about the productivity of an applicant during the job search or interview process, and often employers retain such uncertainties for a period after a person is hired (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2000; Spence, 1973). In this case, the employers usually rely on certain 'productivity' indicators when hiring workers. These include personal features that collectively constitute the image that the job applicant presents. Other common indicators that employers may consider are: age, gender, education, job experience, and so on. Although age and gender are increasingly banned from use in many OECD countries, as they are felt to be discriminatory, they remain key factors for China's work force. Values that can be acquired by individuals through investment in terms of time and money are called signals, like education and job experience. Other values, like age, gender and ethnicity, which are generally
considered to be unchangeable, are called indices (Spence, 1973). The analysis here focuses on the signalling aspect of formal international education, before turning to the gender index.

*Educational signalling*

Different levels of education and the subsequent certificates function as signals. An uneducated worker may have strong skills and may bring high productivity to a firm, but before the firm hires him/her, the education system often acts as an examiner to prove his/her ability. Workers with high ability are prepared to pay for such a signal, to indicate to firms that they are worthy of high wages (Belfield, 2000, p. 41). Based on their previous experience in the market, employers often make conditional probability assessments of the productive capacity of applicants, given the various combinations of signals and indices, and use these as a set of measurements when reviewing individual applicants (Spence, 1973). Thus, an individual applicant who has certain observable attributes that meet the employers' assessment needs would have a far higher opportunity to stand out. Education certificates then function as a tool representing the benefits associated with the reputation for signalling reliability acquired by those who are more prominent in the markets. In situations where such signals (certificates) are common, as is the case in top tier cities in contemporary China, premier education certificates from world-class universities stand out.

It should be clear by now that the informational feedback to the employer over time serves to adjust their beliefs regarding the employees' productivity, and hence forms a set of signals representing strong capabilities when facing a wave of applicants. For example, let us assume that we are dealing with a group of employees who have superior performance within a big company in China. All of them have international education experience in country A, and those who graduated from university B are especially outstanding. The employer would reasonably infer that there is a positive
correlation between high productivity, university B education and international education experience in country A. Therefore, an education certificate from university B and education experience in country A become key signals in a new round of hiring. New applicants who are graduates of University B would have top priority to be considered as potential employees, followed by those with international education experience in country A. On the other hand, if some employees perform extremely poorly and share some of the same educational characteristics, then those characteristics would become signals that employers would avoid in the future. After each round of hiring, new data will become available to the employer, and each cycle generates the next set of signals (Spence, 1973).

Educational signalling impacts on the wage schedule subsequently. Following the earlier assumption, it would be reasonable for an employer to believe that applicants with at least x* years of education beyond high school should have reached productivity level 2, while those with fewer than x* years will exhibit lower productivity. Hence, workers with less than x* years of education will be rejected from any job paying a wage above 1, while those with at least x* would find that the competition among the employers drives their wages up to 2 (illustrated below) (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2000; Spence, 1973).

Figure 3.3 The benefits to workers of educational signalling

![Figure 3.3](image)

Source: Spence (1973)
This process helps to fuel the fierce competition amongst skilled labour in China, especially in the first-tier cities since 2001. This is because, on the one hand, significantly more university graduates entered the labour market after the spiralling enrolments of the late 1990s, and on the other hand, the reform of the economy and *hukou* (as discussed earlier) brought huge number of workers from both the rural areas and SOEs into the wider labour market. Employers use education certificates as a key signal when recruiting employees, and are increasingly raising the education requirements but, as jobs depend increasingly on certificates, degrees and diplomas, the aims and motives of education are changing (Dore, 1976). As a result, more people take postgraduates courses to enhance their chances, and hope that higher academic degrees will help them to find a better job, but not everyone can succeed in such an extremely competitive market.

In China, a clear hierarchical structure of educational values has gradually emerged in the market, with postgraduate degrees from leading international universities like Harvard or Yale at the top, and undergraduate degrees from non-985 or non-211 domestic universities at the bottom. Lian (2009) found that a huge number of young university graduates were unable to find a good jobs or are forced to take very low-paid casual employment in the big cities in China. Ant Tribes - *Yizu*, as Lian termed them – are forced to live together in difficult circumstances, often with six or more people sharing a bedroom. Their educational qualifications are mostly from the lower level Chinese universities or colleges, which are of little or no help when competing for jobs with graduates from the leading domestic universities like Tsinghua and Beijing, or the top international universities.

### Table 3.2 Numbers of domestic postgraduate students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Master’s students</th>
<th>Ph.D. students</th>
<th>Total on-campus postgraduate students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>179,525</td>
<td>54,038</td>
<td>233,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,158,600</td>
<td>246,300</td>
<td>1,404,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to educational qualifications, gender is another major indicator in China’s labour market. The previous chapter argued that women control fewer economic resources than men for historical and biological reasons, but also demonstrated the progress achieved by Chinese women in entering education and employment. Here, Spence’s model aims to show that gender has an informational impact on the labour market as an index, through its interaction with the educational signalling mechanism.

According to Spence, the employer can make conditional probability assessments that depend upon gender as well as education. Similar to the earlier mechanism, the market data obtained by the employer from the previous employee group affect the hiring decisions and subsequent wages offered to a fresh group of applicants. At the beginning, the employer does not know whether gender will be correlated with workers’ productivity, though the market informational feedback mechanisms adjust the data sets, and this self-confirming process forms the employer’s beliefs. At some point, if men and women are not investing in education in the same ways, then the returns on education for them will differ in the next round, and consequently their opportunity sets will be different (Spence, 1973). Recent research conducted by Wang (2011) suggested that Chinese female graduates’ average monthly salary, for both Bachelor and Master’s degree holders, is generally lower than that for male graduates. For example, the average monthly income for female Bachelor degree holders is RMB 2,243, but RMB 2,573 for males. Female Master’s degree holders’ average monthly income is RMB 3,623, compared to RMB 4,438 for males, as illustrated in the following figure.
In this case, high-productivity women must spend more on their education or make more efforts to convince employers that they are in the high-productivity group. In China, the demand for male workers has been always higher than that for female workers. In the 1980s, when graduates’ employment still depended on the allocation system, many female university graduates were rejected by their *danwei* and returned to their home universities even after the official allocation (F. Yang, 2007, p. 37). The annual employment analysis reports issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security further verify this phenomenon. The 2010 report, again, shows that 65.8% of the employing organizations have specific requirements regarding the applicants’ gender, and the demand for male workers is higher (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2010). In this situation, as discussed in Chapter Two, many female graduates in China must work far harder and lower their career expectations including income, in order to remain competitive.

In the human capital theory context, there is evidence that earnings of women who work full-time all-year-round are lower than those of men of equivalent age and
education, and that women's earnings within each educational group rise less steeply with age (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2000). Much research on the employment opportunities of female university graduates in China has demonstrated that, with the same education qualification and personal skills, male graduates gain more employment opportunities, better choices of jobs that match their professional knowledge, and higher salaries (F. Yang, 2007; Ye, Liu, Xia, & Du, 2002). It was found that female graduates not only receive less payment for the same job, but also expect to earn a lower income than male graduates. This implies that female graduates are in a relatively disadvantaged position in the labour market, and that their income and level of appointment suffer accordingly.

As argued by Spence, people’s incentives to invest in education and training are an essential element of human capital analysis, and the expected economic returns on such investment are a critical point. Therefore, anything that reduces the expected returns is hypothesized to reduce the incentive for workers, as well as their employers, to invest in human capital. The previous chapter disclosed that the persistence of traditional conceptions, including women's biological role, have resulted in differences between men and women in the workplace, leading to major differences in the incentive of men and women to invest in their human capital. Consequently, human capital investment has become more expensive for women, since they generally earn less than men.

**Key characteristics of the signalling model**

It is clear that signalling theory can be particularly significant during the recruitment process, especially in an intensive labour market like China. A distinct feature of this model is that it mainly considers signals and indices. Unlike human capital theory, that pays attention to skills and abilities, cultural capital theory, that emphasises one's culture and embodied understanding of values, and social capital theory, that
examines the potential effect of relationships and connections, the signalling model can be considered a recruiting mechanism so, in general situations, educational qualifications can function as a means for knocking on employers' doors, hence leading to better interview or job opportunities. As argued earlier, this is probably a fast, easy way of filtering job applicants when a mass of people apply for the same position, although, in the case of women, *inter alia*, it can also be discriminatory.

While all of the above confirm the intuition that schooling has positive effects on one’s labour market outcomes (Becker, 1975; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Palifka, 2009; Schultz, 1971; Spence, 1973), each of these impact on one’s career development differently. From the detailed analysis and comparisons made between the different forms of capital in earlier sections, it is clear that human, cultural and social capital are intellectual assets that influence individuals’ productivity and career performance through enhancing their skills, abilities, knowledge, cultural understanding, networks and relationships. On the other hand, the signalling model highlights the role of educational credentials as a filter during the recruitment process.

Scholars like Bailly (2008) and Cai (2011) have argued that the employers’ beliefs and perceptions of each employee, rather than the job applicants’ signals, are important during the recruitment process. In other words, the hiring decisions could totally depend on an employer’s personal beliefs and perceptions of the job applicant, rather than being based on signals or indices, like educational background, gender or age but, in a mature labour market, like today’s China, and against the backdrop of its long-lasting value of education (Q. Guo, 2009), when hundreds of people often apply for one position, higher education qualifications from elite universities often yield a better chance in terms of getting an interview, and consequently obtaining a job (Min & Wang, 2006; B. Wang, 2010). As noted earlier, employers often do not have the time to get to know a large numbers of applicants; under such conditions, screening signals and indices form one of the most economic and effective methods.
Conclusion

This chapter has tied the phenomenon of overseas-educated Chinese international graduates to the theories of neo-liberalism, and the human, cultural and social capital theories, as well as signalling theory.

China’s human resource development has undergone major changes since the economic opening after 1978. The labour market has gradually formed to become a key element in modern Chinese society, and neo-liberal ideology has played a significant role in the entire change process. Under the planned system, labour power and skills were not ‘owned’ by the individual, but rather deemed national resources; career planning and skills development to fulfil an individual’s professional goals were politically unacceptable (Hoffman, 2006). After the reform era began, neo-liberal ideas placed the market mechanism at the forefront, and the process of recruiting talented people is now a site of potential growth for themselves, their family’s lifestyle, their employers, and also the nation (Hoffman, 2006).

Investing in education and training to build up personal assets does come at a cost, but in turn it helps to yield higher returns, based on future earnings. The costs of adding to one’s human capital can be summarised in three categories: direct expenditure on books and other supplies, forgone earnings during the investment period, and psychic loss, since learning is often difficult and tedious (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2000). Typical forms of human capital investment are on-the-job training, schooling, other knowledge, and psychological and physical health (Becker, 1975; Belfield, 2000). For many Chinese students, obtaining an international education is a way of investing more in their human capital, hence to become competitive in today’s labour market.

At the same time, both cultural and social capital form important components of international education outcomes, that should go hand in hand with human capital.
The benefit of a comprehensive quality higher education experience should not only pertain to advanced professional knowledge, but also in areas like cultural understanding and relationships. It has been argued that educated people often tend to be more health-conscious, more civic-minded, and have better ideas about enjoying life and contributing to society’s goals (Belfield, 2000). International education and experience can make a difference to graduates’ lifestyles and ways of consumption. During the overseas study period, for example in a multi-cultural, developed country like Australia, young international students are exposed to a different cultural environment. They learn how to communicate with people from different backgrounds and cultures, and see that life can be lived in different ways. Gradually, they establish new lifestyles and take them back to China along with their education certificates, which are key signals to the employers in China. Those signals not only affect the employers’ hiring decisions, but also the subsequent benefits package offered.

The theories addressed in this chapter and the subsequent critical issues form the skeleton of this research, providing a solid foundation for the questions and interpretations of the data. These will be used to generate comprehensive observations and analyses of returnees in the following chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR  METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Methodology

The rationale for this research is to investigate the interrelationships between Australian higher education and the career development of highly-skilled mainland Chinese graduates after their return to China, a cosmopolitan and changing environment which is challenging the existing power relations through its rapid economic growth. In 1978, the announcement of China's Open Door policy precipitated China's entry into the international educational market as it began sending students abroad. Since then, the number of returnees has grown rapidly. The phenomenon of foreign-educated graduates returning home to secure their career development has developed in parallel with China's economic boom.

As the number of Chinese students studying in Australia, then returning to China on graduating, has grown, and their career development has become one of the key issues that concerns the stakeholders, such as university staff and returnees' parents. This research aims to understand the main influences on returnees' career development, and applies the case study methodology by focusing on a leading Australian university, exploring how the university has shaped the capacities and capabilities of its Chinese graduates and hence influenced their professional trajectory when they return home.

It seeks to map the complex relationships between their career trajectory in China and the high fees they pay to acquire an international education in Australia. The conclusions of this study may contribute to a larger, mixed-method study in the future. The research, which lies at the intersection between the globalisation and
internationalisation of higher education, employs triangulation in order to increase its validity and reliability (Yin, 2009).

Mixed research approach

The research approach is a mixture of deduction and induction. As outlined in the literature review chapter, there are several existing studies of returnees’ career development in China, but the volume of research is relatively thin, and more focused on returnees from the US, Canada, Europe or Japan. This research intends to verify the general assumptions and discussion of returnees’ career development on the one hand and, on the other hand, also aims to find the patterns and generate the theoretical relationships between the Australian higher education experience and Chinese returnees’ career development, according to the concrete evidence/data collected from the work. This section explains why quantitative and qualitative methods are a good combination for fulfilling the purpose of this research, rather than a reliance on either one.

A quantitative approach is generally linked to a large population, data and numbers. It usually employs well-defined research questions and hypotheses, a strict framework, tight designs, and highly structured data collection methods, such as a survey, census, content analysis and secondary analysis. In this research, a survey was conducted to collect general information from all of the selected samples. It helps with gaining background information and obtaining a massive amount of data within a limited time. The researcher carefully prepared the survey questions after reviewing the existing literature. Since the general assumption is that returnees can find a job fairly quickly upon their return home, the quantitative part of this research investigates whether Australian returnees can secure a job soon after returning to China, and their career status. All of the collected data were transferred into a computer-readable format, and analysed with the support of computer software.
A distinct disadvantage of this approach is that, often, only a small portion of the variance with respect to a given outcome at a very general level is explained, which then has little to say about individual cases (Gerring, 2007, p. 49). For example, in this research, the key question is how far and in what ways the experience of Australian education assists highly-skilled returnees’ career development in China. The survey method alone would limit the participants’ answers and miss the opportunity to generate a deep understanding of their experience and perceptions of the phenomenon. Therefore, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews is a good compliment to the quantitative approach.

Qualitative approaches are commonly associated with an in-depth explanation and exploration via a comprehensive investigation. Rather than using statistical analysis, they attempt to capture detailed data by exploring individuals’ perceptions of social or human phenomena in depth. The previous chapter described the phenomenon of returnees and the increasing trend for international professionals to consider China for their career development. Australia is a relative newcomer as an international study destination for Chinese students, and also has its own special characteristics. Compared to the traditional study destinations of the US, UK, Europe and Japan, a significant number of Chinese students travel to Australia to acquire a higher education before returning to China. Hence, returnees from Australia form a big group in the returnees’ pool in China. The career status of this new group has not yet been studied in depth or fully acknowledged. Qualitative approaches are appropriate for exploring this group’s development in depth, as well as their perceptions.

In this approach, naturalistic data are the most important, and the data collection and analysis techniques are of primary concern (Punch, 2005). For example, in this research, face-to-face interviews with returnees and relevant government officials in China yielded rich information and inside knowledge. In addition, open-ended research questions were designed to gain an understanding and generate wide
information, without unduly constraining the content or pattern of replies. Lastly, analysis techniques like coding, pattern matching and explanation building also helped to excavate knowledge from the textual data that were transcribed from the interviews. Further details of the data analysis are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Research questions

With this key question in mind, the researcher is interested in exploring the key factors that exist related to this new phenomenon, including the key issues that the participants believe to affect their career development in China. This is another reason why the research method used should be qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, which often merely seeks a correlation between limited variables with a bounded inquiry range.

Understanding the participants' experiences involves exploring the chronologies and context rather than the causes and effects. After obtaining knowledge of the individual experience and the various key factors that affect each person's career trajectory, the research examined the returnees' perceptions and evaluation of the role of Australian education in their career development. The questions hinged around the following:

1. What are the principal dimensions of the employment situation of highly-skilled returnees from Australia, such as the average time it takes them to find employment, and the level of that employment? Subsequently, what are the major differences between the international group and their local counterparts (highly-skilled graduates from leading Chinese universities)? Secondly, what are the perceived differences (for employers and officials) compared with returnees from the US., UK, Europe, or Japan?
2. What are the key factors involved in returnees’ career development in China? The topics addressed here include appropriate professional skills, international experience and guanxi (i.e. connections). Secondly, does gender strongly influence female graduates’ career development, such as their position and income? Lastly, what are the main difficulties related to their re-integration?

3. What is the relationship between an Australian education and their career development for returnees upon returning to China? What kind of further support do returnees expect from the university, and what is provided?

Research Design

Case study analysis often allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real events, and be in a position to describe specific people and places with a sense of understanding about the general categories of the social world (Adler & Clark, 2008, p. 179; Yin, 2009). Therefore, with the aim of elucidating the features that influence the career development of highly-skilled Chinese returnees from Australia, a single case study is considered as the appropriate design for this research. In addition, given that no study on this particular topic with this specific focus has yet been conducted, a small scale case study is appropriate, as it offers a natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature (Gerring, 2007, p. 40; Punch, 2005).

There are different styles of single case study: diachronic analysis, synchronic analysis and both synchronic and diachronic analysis (Gerring, 2007, p. 28). Longitudinal analysis, via a diachronic single case study, in a vertical style, examines a single case over time. A synchronic single case study, in a horizontal style, explores the variation at a specific period of time within the case. Diachronic and synchronic single case study combines the above characteristics. Given the nature of this research
topic, a synchronic single case study design is appropriate, as the objective is to examine highly-skilled Chinese graduates’ career development after returning to China with an Australian higher education qualification. It is suitable for conducting research focusing on a single period of time in China with the selected subjects. Within a particular period, this design allows the researcher to accomplish the objectives in a practical way.

Although the research is defined as a synchronic single case study, since it examines a specific university’s post-graduates’ career development in China, on a small scale, and at one period of time, attention was also paid to the sub-units (see the following figure). In that sense, it can be called an embedded case study design (Yin, 2009, p. 50). In this instance, the participants were chosen from two different graduating years (2004 and 2009) in order to add another layer to the study, provide a comparative dimension, and gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon over time. Graduates were chosen from 2004 and 2009 because the first cohort consists of relatively mature alumni, given that it had been more than five years since their graduation when participating this study, so it was hypothesised that their career development should have developed to a certain stage. The latter cohort was very recent, although the time since their graduation was sufficient to assess their employability when the researcher collected the data in late 2010. They presented a useful point of comparison with the earlier group, allowing the time effects to be assessed. The focus was at both the sub-unit level and the larger unit of analysis; that is to say, the characteristics of the 2004 and 2009 graduates’ career development were examined separately first, followed by a comparative analysis to elicit the similarities and common features representing the whole group. As suggested by Gerring (2007, p. 20), the fewer cases there are and the more intensively they are studied, the more a work merits the appellation ‘case study’. This is particularly useful for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units.
Strategy

The research strategy was to divide the project into three main parts, over the three year period; each stage had a different emphasis, including preparation, data collection and conclusion/reporting. In the first year, the key tasks were obtaining rich knowledge in the research area through extensive reading and researching to be clear and accurate about the research questions, then designing the research methodology. In the second year, the focus was shifted to the data collection and analysis, followed by the detailed summary and conclusion stage in the third year. This general plan is demonstrated in Figure 4.2.
The main interests of this study were to chart and analyze the influential factors that may affect, or have affected, the career development of highly-skilled Mainland Chinese graduates. These might include factors that can be shaped by international education, such as professional knowledge, communication skills, learning abilities, teamwork and international experience, or factors that cannot be affected by education, such as gender, the labour market, family network, etc. Amongst these factors, special attention was paid to the factors related to international education, though the role of gender was closely monitored. The potential relationship between the various factors associated with the returnees' career development is shown in figure 4.3.
Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Model</th>
<th>Social Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Professional knowledge</td>
<td>• Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication skills</td>
<td>• Labour market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning abilities</td>
<td>• Family network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By using the above framework and purpose, the study aimed to build a rich description of:

- The perception of Australian higher education from a post-study perspective;
- The key factors that influence Australian-educated mainland Chinese graduates’ career development; and
- The fundamental issues related to achieving the goal of satisfactory, professional employment, and the degree of success in achieving aspirations, plus any mismatch between aspirations and achievement.

**Triangulation**

Several triangulation protocols were introduced into this research to provide greater confidence in the results and increase credence in the interpretation. They were applied to the sampling, data source and methodology.
For data source triangulation, the researcher aimed to see if the views of the phenomenon remain the same, as persons or groups interact differently, so the researcher interviewed highly-skilled Chinese returnees to learn about their employment status and the related issues. In addition, the researcher also interacted with Chinese government officials, and human resource managers or industry leaders relevant to the graduates, in order to learn their opinions. It was felt that they should be good judges of these returnees' professional performance, because of their position. Another data source was current news articles, and scholarly and other reports about the phenomenon, which represented the general public and specialists' view. These three different data sources contributed a solid, comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, consolidating a meaningful explanation through the analysis of their perceptions and comments. It would be mistaken to regard all of these views as consonant, because these perceptions differ, as Figure 4.4 illustrates.

Figure 4.4 Data source triangulation

The actual methodology for the data collection, consisting of a combination of a survey, interviews and content analysis, increased the confidence in the researcher's interpretation. While the survey gathered information for developing a better
understanding of the bigger picture, follow-up interviews allowed the researcher to collect more in-depth data by asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. While gaining primary information via survey and interview methods, a review of the existing literature in both Chinese and English about highly-skilled, Chinese returnees’ career development deepened the researcher’s knowledge of the phenomenon, assisting with framing the interview design and data analysis. A comprehensive understanding emerged from utilizing these three methods. Figure 4.5 presents the design.

Figure 4.5  Data collection triangulation

Validity

The term ‘validity’ is one of the most important principles of research design. Both the internal and external validity are usually discussed in parallel with qualitative and quantitative analysis. Internal validity refers to the reflection of the reality studied and the internal logic and consistency of the research (Punch, 2005, pp. 29, 254; Yin, 2009). As outlined earlier, there is a wide range of perceived factors influencing returnees’ career development, some of which are closely interrelated. The study
seeks to understand all of the relevant factors, together with their relationships, in order to detect meaningful patterns within this study.

Member checking was a key feature employed in this study to increase the internal validation and verification. It implied, first, checking with the interviewees that the information had been perceived or recoded correctly by the researcher. Secondly, particular information originally provided by the participants was rechecked with those involved before finalizing the thesis.

**Limitations and generalisability**

The contribution of qualitative inquiry to disciplined science is slow and usually tendentious, while the cost in terms of time and money is relatively high. It is often claimed to be subjective because it involves the researcher's personal understanding and interpretation. On the other hand, it is an essential element of the in-depth understanding of human behaviour and new phenomena.

It is worth alluding to the issues of reliability and validity regarding Chinese data sources. Due to the history of social science development in China, data collection is still often arduous; sometimes, it is difficult to determine the source of data, when they were produced, by whom, and how they were arrived at. Therefore, crosschecks were employed throughout, when using Chinese statistics. In the past, the statistics and figures released by the Chinese government and organizations depended, to a significant degree, on their purpose, particularly when related to sensitive political issues. Premier Chinese universities, for example, could became social science centres used by foreign organizations by anticipating and responding to their patronage, including producing statistics that were favourable to the patron (Chiang, 2001). The shortages of properly-qualified academics in many areas, uneven library resources,
and different kinds of data collection and analysis have created a big gap between Chinese and Western standards of social science (Yahuda, 1987).

It has been 63 years since 1949, and 34 years after the reform and opening up era began, and great improvements have been made through increasing the use of internal experts and external agencies like the OECD to improve the reliability of data. At the political level, the government must be faithful to the facts, particularly under the increased scrutiny made possible by the advanced, globalised media and communication technologies. Since the SARS outbreak in 2004, China’s government has become more responsive to issues that were formerly regarded as negative, and were previously undiscussed. The official reports of natural and man-made disasters, such as the earthquake in Szechuan in 2008 and the fire in the new CCTV building (a national property) in 2009, were both accurate and timely.

The issue of the generalisability of case study results is regularly debated in the research literature. Case study often takes the form of a synecdoche investigation by learning about the whole through focusing intensively on one of its parts. It aims to explain and explore a phenomenon or some aspect of human behaviour in a broader sense than when investigating a specific project. While case studies may seem to exhibit a poor level of generalisability, if a certain range of people and problems share particular similarities, it may be possible to draw only limited generalisations (Stake, 1995, pp. 7, 85). It has been argued that a case study is best defined as an intensive study of a single case on a small scale with the aim of generalising across a larger set of cases of the same general type (Gerring, 2007, p. 65). Granted, this research did not intend to generalise about all Australian-educated Chinese postgraduates. Nonetheless, as Berg (2009, p. 330) argued, a properly undertaken case study is generalisable to some extent, and the findings should not only fit the specific individual, group or event studied but also generally provide a better understanding of similar individuals, groups and events. Similarly, Punch (2005, p. 146) argued that the generalisability of a case is dependent upon its purpose and the way in which the data
are analysed. This single case study was an example of a larger phenomenon; in this case, the employment-related experiences of highly-skilled, Mainland Chinese returnees in the Chinese labour market.

If generalising were one side of the continuum of case study, then the other side would be particularising. It has been suggested that the choice between generalising or particularising depends on the investigator’s interests and analysis, as it is a matter of emphasis and interpretation (Gerring, 2007, pp. 76, 77). While some case study analysts may focus on 10 per cent of the variance across 100 cases, this research prefers to explain 90 per cent of the variance in a single case, seeking similarities and commonalities.

Participants

Population identification

Given that this research aimed to provide an understanding of a larger population through undertaking an in-depth study of a small number of subjects, it was necessary to select a well-balanced sample that represents major segments of the population, thus providing a sufficient and useful leverage for analysis.

When selecting the university, several criteria were applied. First of all, the university’s reputation and ranking were important. To identify an elite Australian university, it was decided to choose a member of the Group of Eight (Go8), a coalition of leading Australian universities that combine intensive research with comprehensive general and professional education. In this case, the University of Sydney was chosen, because of the convenience of the sampling, and the position of the researcher as a student of the university, which provided access to the key
databases. A second factor was the longstanding relationship between the selected university and China, which dates back to 1949, and increased in scope and complexity as early as 1972 (Holenbergh, 2002). As the first university to be established in Australia, Sydney is also a well-known higher education institution in China. By choosing a small number of subjects, both male and female graduates of the University of Sydney, the inference may be extendable to the other Go8 universities as well as to other rising quality universities in Australia. This logic is shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6  Population and samples

Sampling

In accordance with the single case study research design, non-probability purposive sampling techniques were deemed appropriate, as they aim to select information-rich cases for in-depth study. The objective of the sampling in this research was unconcerned with ensuring that the findings can be statistically generalised to the whole population; rather, it aimed to describe the processes involved in a phenomenon and identify a case that would provide a rich, comprehensive understanding of all aspects of that phenomenon, which may eventually allow the
researcher to generalise about the nature and interpretative processes involved in the experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 45), as discussed in the previous section, Generalisability.

This research combines three techniques to build a relatively representative, quality participant model within this sampling frame: purposive, criterion and convenience sampling. The former is an appropriate strategy for researchers who have a clear focus or purpose in mind, and for case studies (Punch, 2005, p. 187). It is appropriate in this instance, since the researcher had a clear vision of the number of subjects, the gender balance and the categories of degree studied. Criterion sampling is involved because a set of criteria need to be met in order to qualify as a subject; that is, the subjects need to be Chinese postgraduates, who have successfully obtained high-level university qualifications, and have returned to China for the purpose of career development. Therefore, the participants were carefully selected, so the case would provide detailed, rich data that are relevant to the research phenomenon. The researcher worked as the University of Sydney’s International Relations Manager for China, within the portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International), for four years. Therefore, convenience sampling techniques also played a role during the research in order to take advantage of the events, situations, access to databases and informants that lay close to hand (Punch, 2005). However, Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 48) suggested that this technique is often biased in systematic ways and tends to provide a homogeneous sample. In this case, however, the carefully chosen research design and triangulated sampling strategy helped to balance such disadvantages.

Of the slightly more than 1,000 Chinese postgraduate students who graduated between 2004 and 2009, 187 individuals effectively responded to the survey, and a total of ten postgraduate alumni were selected for interview. This comprised five per cent of the efficient sampling group, and one per cent of the total case population. The
selected interviewees were balanced in terms of gender, age, educational qualification, professional field, and employing city.

Sampling error is commonly associated with this non-probability sampling method, because differences might exist between the characteristics of the selected subjects and the population from which the sample is drawn. Such differences might include their family background, personality, or current employment situation. Coverage error was considered as if errors resulted from the differences between the sampling frame (the University of Sydney) and the target population (Chinese postgraduate returnees from elite Australian universities), but since the leading Australian universities are Go8 members, that share similar students admission requirements (a high standard) and standards of teaching and learning (high quality), this type of error is irrelevant here. Detailed concerns about bias in the subject sample are outlined in the section entitled Limitations.

Data Collection

Phase one

This research consists of three phases: the preliminary research, field investigation, and the publication of the results. Preliminary research, based at the University of Sydney, was conducted for ten months and involved reviewing the current literature on Australian higher education and Chinese highly-skilled graduates’ career development. For example, the literature sources of the journals devoted to Australian education, DEEWR, AEI and the ACER database on international education offered exceptional resources regarding Australian higher education and international students’ development. Overseas resources were also searched in relation to research-related investigations, and findings. The collaborative
relationships developed by the University of Sydney with Chinese educational organizations and government bodies, like the Ministry of Education, allowed the project to develop its comparative Australia-China dimension, particularly with regard to the issue of highly-skilled, Chinese graduates’ employment. Lastly, a thorough review of the Chinese language sources was also included.

Phase two

Phase two of the research (the field work mainly off-campus) was conducted in China for another ten months. Based on information from the university’s Alumni Office’s database, an on-line survey was emailed to Chinese alumni who had graduated between 2004 and 2009. It was in the form of a web page, using Survey Monkey. The questions (see Appendix E) were inspired by questionnaires developed by the Alumni Office and the Institute of Teaching and Learning of the University of Sydney. The main aim in using this technique was to obtain factual information like background and biographical information. In addition, the survey yielded the key reasons for the students returning to China, as well as their opinions of Australian higher education. Most of the questions were designed to be pre-coded, through using close-ended and multiple-choice questions. Therefore, a fixed range of responses was anticipated, which facilitated the comparison and analysis. Only the penultimate question was open-ended in style, as the researcher did not wish to limit the subjects’ ideas when responding to: What kind of support did you expect from the University of Sydney which might further your career development? It was expected that an open-ended item would be challenging, because it is not easy to predict in advance the kind of coding categories that can be employed. The benefit was that it was expected to yield fresh insights and personal opinions. In order to maximize the degree of participation, the number of questions was kept to about 20, since long surveys and excess questions lead to fewer responses. The survey was tested with a small group of five Chinese alumni with work experience first, and their feedback was incorporated into
the final survey draft. The survey was then sent to the selected participants, and the researcher allowed 15 days for the responses to be returned, as it was unlikely that people would complete an email questionnaire after a fortnight. The language used in the questionnaires was English, as all of the respondents were bilingual, and had obtained their highest education qualification in an English-speaking country.

After obtaining the data from the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected subjects. The interviewer asked the interviewees a series of questions related to the research topic. They aimed to elicit rich information from the respondents and also allowed for flexibility in the interview process according to the nature of the responses. The data collected from the interviews enhanced those collected from the survey and the current literature, providing an opportunity for the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of the responses to the research questions. In this research, the returnees’ career development experience and perceptions of Australian education were the focal points. The interview questions were comparatively more sophisticated, as they relate to individuals’ experiences and personal aspirations, which require the interviewer to develop, adapt, and generate questions, and follow-up responses appropriate to each given situation and the central purpose of the investigation (Berg, 2009, p. 106). In order to obtain richer information from these graduates regarding their career development and employability, semi-structured interviews were conducted with an additional 7 Chinese stakeholders, including colleagues from the relevant Chinese government departments, such as the Ministry of Education and Municipal Education Commissions, and Chinese employers or their human resources managers. Overall, a total of 17 interviews were conducted in this phase.
Rapport

The researcher acted as an interpreter in constructing new knowledge about this group of people through gaining an in-depth understanding as expressed by the respondents. The aim was to liberate the reader from simplistic views and help to extend the elegant intricacy of the understanding.

A positive rapport was established during each interview through the appropriate delivery of the questions, facial and body responses, and a consideration of cultural issues. Before commencing each interview, the research purpose and objective were explained to the participant in a professional manner. Eye contact was maintained, and encouraging facial and body expressions adopted, including nodding and smiling. The researcher’s mobile phone was turned off, introductions were kept short, and negative comments or personal views were avoided. All of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, even though the researcher and most of the interviewees were bilingual. In Chinese culture, it might have appeared awkward and strange if two China-born people conducted a normal, social conversation in China in another language. Moreover, linguistic and cultural familiarity facilitates the efficient flow of communication and is likely to yield deeper, richer thoughts and information.

Length of the interviews

The length of each interview was under one hour. In addition to exploring the subjects’ perceptions of Australian higher education, the researcher also aimed to learn their opinions about how, and to what extent, Australian education has facilitated their career development, as well as their expectations about what resources the university will provide to them as alumni. The researcher’s previous professional role at the University of Sydney and shared experience as a postgraduate international student at the university were felt to reduce the distance between the researcher as an interviewer and the graduate interviewees, thereby encouraging
active communication. All of the interviews were audio-recorded for reference purposes. Copies of the interview schedules are attached in the Appendix.

Throughout the fieldwork, the relevant statistics, texts, reports and analyses were collected and analysed, in order to build a rich database. Eventually, the entire data were merged together to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research phenomenon.

Phase three

Phase three was dedicated to writing up and publishing the research findings. Two initial publications were made with Higher Education Policy and Frontiers of Education in China. Further publications are expected in journals like Asia Pacific Education Review, International Education Journal, Comparative Education, etc. The findings will also be presented at national and international conferences and seminar programs during the final stage of the research.

Data Analysis

Analytical strategy for the interview results

The use of a single case study is often associated with multiple data collection techniques, and there is no strict limitation on which technique should be used with which kind of case study. These vary, from highly structured surveys to unstructured interviews, from secondary analysis to content analysis. Similarly, few rules are available regarding interpretation or strict interpretation with respect to factor identification. A particular human behaviour or phenomenon may be perceived and
interpreted in a variety of ways, according to the researcher’s background, experience, academic field, the purpose of the research, etc. As Gerring (2007, p. 70) suggested, any social scientific explanation involves assumptions regarding why people act as they do or think what they think, as it is a matter of intentions and motivations.

In this research, a major part of the data was collected through e-mail surveys and semi-structured interviews in China in a naturalistic environment. Both direct interpretation (understanding the answers from each survey and interview) and categorical aggregation (drawing similarities from those answers) were employed as a coding strategy, to gain a comprehensive understanding and draw commonalities and distinctions. When multiple data emerged in the final stage, data categorical aggregation provided a clearer understanding of the contexts and relationships in order to derive as full a picture as possible, which helped to probe the issues (Stake, 1995, p. 75). Consequently, the patterns were unveiled through successive interpretations of the data.

Computer-assisted data analysis served an important role in the final stage in various ways. For the quantitative analysis, Survey Monkey and SPSS assisted with the statistical analysis, ranging from the percentage calculation to the category division. It provided easier access to the numeric results, allowing the researcher to detect and describe the patterns amongst those numbers, eventually making them meaningful. N-Vivo is another key piece of software that supported the qualitative data analysis. Unlike the quantitative analysis procedure, the heart of making sense of qualitative data is to understand the meaning of the texts and to find the subsequent relationships between different ideas. This is still far beyond a computer’s reach, although software like N-Vivo is able to provide sufficient support in terms of data management. In this research, it functioned more like a strong database containing all of the qualitative data-related texts or documents. It enabled the researcher to keep good records of her ideas and searches, to access the massive amount of texts quickly, and to manage the large amounts of codes, memos and notes efficiently.
Pattern matching is one of the most useful techniques for case study analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 138), and was a major technique used in the analysis stage. Of all the factors associated with returnees' career development, two common key characteristics were international experience in an English-speaking country and educational qualifications from an elite Australian university but, on the other hand, they were differentiated by gender and year of graduation. How these fitted into each graduate's career development and the picture that emerged when the findings were combined are summarized in a table based on the research questions and literature review.

*Quantitative analysis*

Computer-assisted software performed a significant role during the quantitative analysis stage. Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, was first used to generate the results. The researcher used this product to create the survey using custom templates, and then sent the web link to the Sydney University Alumni office to email to the selected participants for them to complete. Survey Monkey automatically reports the results back to the researcher in the form of descriptive statistics or graphs, and some basic calculations and counting work were completed at this point. Because Survey Monkey is a commercial online product that specialises in data collection, its analysis function was at a very general level, and could not help the researcher to achieve her analysis objectives. Therefore another professional software package, SPSS, was used to process the complicated calculation and analysis. The complete results from Survey Monkey were downloaded onto a spreadsheet, and then transferred to SPSS for further analysis. This then enabled the analysis of how the independent and dependent variables impact on the final results, and the standard deviations. The details of the analysis procedures are outlined in the next Chapter – *the Results Chapter*.
Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis with an interpretative approach was applied to the data collected from the interviews, which formed the qualitative part of the mixed-methodology employed in this research. The focus on holism via investigation had consequences for the practical activities, because a proper understanding of people's verbal and non-verbal language can only be achieved if these are related to the wider context. Unlike quantitative analysis, the researcher did not feel constrained to preserve the analysis as a distinct phase of work following the data collection. Rather, some preliminary analysis and thinking paralleled the data collection and fieldwork stage. In addition to recording, direct notes on key issues were taken as soon as possible after the interview, involving some personal interpretation during the process. The researcher tried to keep the primary data as natural as possible by audio taping the interviews. In addition, interim analyses were made as soon as needed to avoid mislaying pertinent information.

One explicit purpose of analysing the collected interview results was to enhance the data and increase their complexity to excavate deep, meaningful information. Coding was used as a way of organizing and managing the data. N-Vivo software played a key role in attaching labels to chunks of text, and categorizing the large amounts of narrative text collected from open-ended interviews and documents. With all of the original data preserved in Chinese, summary transcriptions and preliminary analyses were made in English manually, and then codes were added to the English data. The software enabled the links between the codes and the coded texts to be maintained, so that full sentences could be displayed by retrieving the codes. Consequently, all of the data and messages were effectively organized and managed, which helped the researcher to develop ideas and construct the relationships between the different factors and terms. For example, once the textual data had been entered and the initial set of codes defined, N-Vivo readily located all of the words and phrases matching
those codes from the textual data, counted the incidence of the codes, and showed when and where multiple combinations occurred. All of the codes were clearly defined and closely linked with the research rationale. Chapter Five details the findings.
CHAPTER FIVE  CAREERS OF RETURNEES:  
FINDINGS AND EXPERIENCES

回乡偶书

贺知章（唐）

少小离家老大回，乡音不改鬓毛衰；

儿童相见不相识，笑问客从何处来。

Homecoming

I left home when young, now returned, I become old,
My accent as before, yet thin and grey grows my hair.
The children recognize me not when me they behold,
And inquire from where have I come, from where?

He Zhizhang (ca. 659-744)
Introduction

This chapter presents the rich empirical research data and provides a detailed analysis of the findings in relation to employment, re-integration, and gender equality issues. The chapter starts with a comprehensive results summary that reviews the key findings from both the survey and the interviews. This is followed by detailed information on both the survey and interview results. In the survey results section, a description and definition of the key variables are outlined at the beginning, which assists in understanding the patterns of correlations. The key factors that influenced the sample's career development, position and income are addressed before the benefits of an Australian education, as well as the returnees' re-integration issues, are reviewed. In the interview results analysis section, the feedback from the graduates is examined first, including how they perceive their international education has assisted their career development, and how they value alumni relationships. This is then followed by a review of the feedback from selected stakeholders with different professional backgrounds, including what they see as Australian graduates' strengths and weaknesses, their advice to young returnees, and their opinions on returnees' re-integration issues. Lastly, the conclusion summarises the key issues and findings from the data.

Results Summary

This section outlines the prominent results gathered from both the survey and interviews. The aim is to provide a landscape view of returnees' employment situation in China, and to serve as an introduction to the detailed analysis that follows.
Survey – key findings

An on-line survey was emailed to a total of 1,051 Chinese alumni who graduated from the university of Sydney in 2004 and 2009. There were 187 efficient responses collected from the sample, comprising 18% of the total. Most of the respondents were in their 20s or 30s, and more than half of them were female.

The majority of participants (82%) stated that, even before travelling abroad for study, they had planned to return to China for their career development. The result suggests that almost all were in full-time paid employment. The most popular professional fields for these graduates included [1] Finance, Banking and Insurance, and [2] Education and training. Around 40% of the graduates held the position of Manager, Senior Level Manager, Director-General or above, and most had gained several years' work experience after returning. Consequently, their average annual income was far higher than that of new returnees, although, in general, the graduates’ average annual income was quite high in relation to China’s modern labour market, with about 48% of them earning between RMB 36,000 and 120,000, and a similar ratio earning between RMB 120,000 and 960,000. The majority of the participants expressed positive attitudes towards their current job, with half indicating satisfaction or strong satisfaction with it. A substantial number of graduates was able to find their first job within three months after graduating overseas and returning to China, including a third who successfully secured a job within a month. Most of the respondents worked in China’s first tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou), while the rest were spread over the provincial capital cities, and the Yangze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions.

Many of the participants indicated that they actively participate in alumni activities, while others retained some sort of connection with their overseas university. However, all of them appeared willing to maintain a relationship with their former university
and to contribute to its development when needed. However, many suggested that the university should offer some kind of career support to fresh graduates, in the form of career guidance seminars, workshops about previous graduates’ career experiences, and internship opportunities.

In the graduates’ eyes, the following five factors have influenced their career development to a large degree: Communication skills, Foreign language ability, Learning ability, Professional knowledge and International experience. Within these, Professional knowledge and International experience had a distinct correlation with the graduates’ income. The majority of the graduates believed that international exposure, experience and social contact were the key aspects assisting their career development in China.

Major re-integration problems are related to mentality, particularly a different thinking style compared to their local colleagues and friends, reverse culture shock, and some hesitancy regarding the complicated networks of social relationships existing in China. However, about a third of the graduates stated that they had not experienced any problems with their re-integration, simply because China is where they were born and grew up. Regardless of the various kinds of re-integration problems or issues experienced by some graduates, they expressed a strong determination to develop their career in China. Most of them suggested that, if they could not get the job they want in China on their return, they would either take a job in the same industry with lower pay or any job with the same salary, while seeking a better job.

Interviews – sample and key findings

A total of 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2010, following the survey stage. In addition to the general information collected from the survey, which
sketched the bigger picture of young Australian returnees’ career status, the interview data provided rich information and explanations of returnees’ professional situation in China. Ten interviewees were returned graduates, chosen for their different characteristics: gender, graduating year, discipline studied, city of employment, and professional field. The other seven interviewees were significant stakeholders, including senior officials from both the Central and Municipal Governments, the heads of SOEs, Government affiliated Organizations, Public Hospitals, Private Companies, and the HR Director of a multinational firm. The purpose of having such a diversity of interviewees, with a wide professional range, was to enrich the research content and provide a multi-faceted perspective.

In general, the interview data corresponded to the survey results, enhancing the findings with more detailed information and personal examples. The information gathered from the ten graduate interviewees is highly consistent, regardless of their different situations. A similar situation applies to the stakeholder group, since the respective heads and leaders from very different backgrounds provided relatively comparable information. However, several key issues that were emphasised by the stakeholders were not mentioned by most of the graduates, including the participants in both the survey and the interviews.

Some of the graduate interviewees stated that they had acquired an international education in order to secure a better job, while others indicated that gaining international experience was their main motivation. For the majority, the centrepiece was their hope and belief that international education or experience could improve their situation through, for example, a better job, a strengthened mind, or a better life. After returning and reflecting on their international education, most of the interviewed graduates indicated that international exposure, an international qualification, overseas work experience, and professional knowledge were the key factors influencing their career development in China. This corresponds with the survey responses, although communication skills, foreign language skills and learning ability
were further factors outlined by the survey participants. This slight discrepancy is only to be expected, and does not mean that the interviewed graduates consider the latter three factors unimportant; it may merely indicate that the interviewed graduates think that communication skills, foreign language skills and learning ability are aspects of international exposure and professional knowledge (as reflected in the detailed analysis section entitled *International education and career development*). Unlike the survey participants, who responded to closed questions at their convenience, in their own time and in a comfortable place, the graduate interviewees were questioned in a semi-formal interview setting. Since there were no major differences, the researcher did not interrupt the interviewees but allowed their responses to flow naturally.

Regarding the graduates' relationship with their international university, the information collected from that interviewed graduates proved very similar to those obtained from the survey participants. The interviewees revealed a connection with their international university, stating that they would be happy to contribute to it financially if they could. However, many wished that the university would provide some kind of support for their career development prior to or shortly after their graduation, such as seminars on the current labour market, workshops regarding in which kinds of professional field they can best use their expertise, and internships, if possible. Despite this, most of them appeared willing to keep in touch with their former university. They felt that the most convenient ways to maintain such a connection were regular emails or e-newsletters, events with specific themes and for certain groups, and academic workshops or seminars whereby overseas professors visit China. Two of the graduate interviewees, one male and one female, suggested that they would seriously consider undertaking a Ph.D. if they received regular e-newsletters outlining the professors' research fields.

In the stakeholders' eyes, returnees from Australia have distinct strengths, but also obvious weaknesses. Of all highly-skilled graduates (of both international and
domestic universities), returnees from the US are the most sought-after. According to the collected data, postgraduate returnees from Australia are far more welcome than their counterparts from the UK, mainly because many Chinese students study only a one year Master’s program in the UK and return with little improvement but very high expectations about their salary and package. Compared to local graduates, Australian returnees’ key advantages are their international exposure, practical English language skills, and international professional knowledge. On the other hand, a lack of local contacts, networks and a limited understanding of the local society are the main disadvantages for returnees from overseas, including those from Australia.

The aspect that requires improvement on the part of most returnees, according to the interview with the respective employers and government officials, is their lack of a deep understanding of the swiftly changing China and Chinese culture. Louie’s (2006) study pointed out that many returnees see themselves as special and unique, believing that they have ‘seen the world’, but China is changing rapidly and, depending on how quickly things change, those who remained behind may laugh at returnees for being unable to make the necessary adjustment to survive in the brave new world (as in the poem by He Zhizhang, cited at the beginning of the chapter). This was stressed by all of the interviewed stakeholders, and it seems that they could not emphasize this issue enough. An understanding of the changing China does not simply refer to the opening-up process and increasing GDP, and similarly Chinese culture does not mean merely the superficial traditions. Rather, it refers to an in-depth knowledge of the Chinese ways of doing things, which relies on an understanding of both Chinese history and the current developments, including the regime and its economic thrust, its diverse nationalities, huge population, and changing education system, together with the subsequent influences of these elements. Consequently, young returnees require a comprehensive view of today’s China and its real demands. Merely applying what has been learnt overseas without local knowledge is the least effective approach.
Re-integration issues were also discussed during the interviews with both the graduate and stakeholder groups. Aligned with the survey results, the issue of a dual mentality, or differences in thinking style, was found to be the most obvious concern. The information collected from the graduate interviewees was similar to that obtained from the survey. Many participants felt that they had acquired a different mentality, diverse views and alternative ways of approaching problems, compared with their local colleagues. However, the stakeholders see both sides of this issue. On the one hand, they felt it beneficial to have a group of young international graduates who have broader views and fresh ideas, as this will help China to progress but, on the other hand, it may be a disaster if their innovative skills are unsuited to China’s needs, or their ideas are misused, without a mature understanding of China’s current status. The advice given by the senior stakeholders on the re-integration problem is that the returnees should be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and be clear about today’s China, including the crowded labour market. They should modestly re-learn the local culture and adapt to the indigenous environment, then deploy their international professional knowledge where appropriate. This recommendation was also confirmed by some of the interviewed graduates from the earlier batch of returnees, several of whom have been quite successful. Returning to their home country after experiencing several years of international education can be difficult, they argued, particularly when significant differences exist between the two societies involved but, if the decision is taken to return, then the graduates should try their very best to adjust to the changing China, and contribute to its further development.

Survey Results

The following 40 pages focus on the detailed survey analysis and results. It starts with a clear definition and description of the data, including the identification of the independent and dependent variables, and how they reflect the survey questions. Because one of the major concerns to explore to what degree ‘Gender’ and
'Graduating year' are factors that affect graduates' employment situation, a correlation analysis of each of these two independent variables and other dependent variables was conducted. The factors that influence career development and the key benefits of an Australian education were then examined, before outlining the major re-integration issues.

An online-based survey was conducted amongst Chinese postgraduate alumni from the University of Sydney. A total of 1,051 Chinese alumni who graduated between 2004 and 2009 were selected as the target group. The survey emails were sent out in mid-July 2010, and the researcher allowed 15 days for the data collection before closing the survey in early August. 1,006 emails were successfully delivered, and the remaining 45 were rejected due to disabled email addresses. Almost 30 per cent of the graduates opened the email message out of the total successful out-reaches and, of these, 73 per cent undertook the survey.

In total, 187 efficient responses were collected out of the entire sample pool, which comprised 18 per cent of the total target. A total of 26 variables were identified, as listed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Survey items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>From which faculty of the University of Sydney did you graduate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>In which year did you graduate from the University of Sydney?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to return</td>
<td>Did you intend to return to China subsequently before you came to Australia to study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>How would you describe your current employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>In which field (industry) do you currently work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>What is your current position in your company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>What is your current annual income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Are you satisfied with your current job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to find first job</td>
<td>How long did it take you to find your first job, if applicable, after you graduated from the University of Sydney and returned to China?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing city</td>
<td>In what city is your current company located?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International experience</td>
<td>Please rate the following factors (related to international education) that have influenced your career development in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High quality education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>In what way has an Australian education and experience assisted your career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEESC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>How connected do you still feel to the University of Sydney?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>If you don’t get the job you want in China, what will you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-integration problem</td>
<td>After you returned, what were the main problems regarding your re-adjustment/re-integration into Chinese society?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to produce a clear analysis, the above variables were classified into independent and dependent variables. In addition to these two categories, certain other
variables were labelled perceptions because the information mainly related to the graduates' personal views.

Table 5.2 Classification of variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Independent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to return</td>
<td>Dependent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to find first job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional knowledge</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High quality education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEESC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-integration problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the above variable classification, responses with insufficient values for either the independent or dependent variables were not analysed. Therefore, the final efficient sample size was 156.

Data description

This section outlines the detailed analysis of both the dependent and independent variables, laying the foundation for the later complex comparisons and cross-tabulations. Below are listed the meaning and explanation of the key indicators that appear in the analysis results:

- Frequency: the rate that occurred over the efficient sampling group, which also means the number of efficient sampling participants;
- Per cent: the ratio compared with the total sampling group;
- Valid per cent: the ratio after verification (in this project, no variation was found);
- Cumulative per cent: the accumulated percentage rate;
- Null: the number of participants who did not answer the question.

Independent variables

Independent variables are experimental variables that are manipulated in the experiment, in order to show their effect on the dependent variable. In this research, they are considered the participants' basic information. The aim was to determine how the different independent variables are associated with changes to the dependent variables. According to the classification made earlier, this section includes Gender, Age, Faculty/discipline/field, and Graduating year. The analysis follows.
Gender

Of the respondents, totalling 101 females and 55 males, there were almost twice as many female participants as males, at 64.7 and 35.3 per cent respectively. Since the sample university did not provide information on the graduates’ gender, it was impossible to establish the correspondence between this and the actual gender ratio of all graduates of the university, but possible reasons for the findings in the following table could be that more female graduates made the time for, and had more patience regarding, the survey, or that they valued such survey activity more than men, as a way of interacting with their alma mater, or perhaps in the hope that it might help them with their job search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 Overview of graduates’ gender

Age

Almost all of the participants were in their late-20s or early-30s, with a few in their 40s. The late-20s age group is slightly bigger than the early-30s age group, which accords with the fact that the number of 2008/9\(^1\) graduates is slightly higher than that for the 2004/5 group. It can be calculated that the majority of the respondents were

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\(^1\) Because Australia’s academic year usually ends in November, and graduates receive their graduation certificates in the following year, which made some graduate confused about their exact graduating time. For maximising the number of participants, 2008/9 and 2004/5 are used in the actual data collection and analysis stage.
born in the late 1970s and early 80s, when China had recently emerged from the devastating Cultural Revolution and entered the opening up era.

### Table 5.4 Overview of graduates' age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Graduating faculty

Amongst the participants, graduates from the Faculty of Economics and Business form the biggest group (71.8%), reflecting the fact that this is the most common subject studied by Chinese international students. The second biggest group, albeit far smaller, comprised graduates from the Faculty of Arts (10.9%), and the rest were from the following faculties: Education and Social Work, Science, Engineering and Information Technologies, Architecture, Design and Planning, Law, Medicine, Health Science, and Visual Arts. There were no respondents from the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, Dentistry, Nursing and Midwifery, Pharmacy, or Veterinary Science. While there is a slight possibility that this is due to sampling error, it surely reflects the fact that these disciplines were unpopular amongst Chinese mainland students (AEI, 2008a).

### Table 5.5 Overview of graduates' discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture, Design and Planning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Business</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduation year

This study selected graduates from two different cohorts, with 48.1% participants from the 2004/5 group and the remainder from 2008/9. The purpose was to establish the similarities and differences between these two cohorts, and use them to examine subsequent issues like Australian education quality and China’s labour market. In addition, studying two cohorts also increases the reliability of the research outcomes.

Table 5.6  Surveyed returnees' graduating year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-2006</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2009</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variables

The dependent variables are the response variables that are observed in the experiment, which would be affected by the independent variables. This section outlines the analysis of the following dependent variables: Intention to return, Status,
Field, Position, Income, Satisfaction, Time to find first job, Employing city and Connection.

**Intention to return**

Amongst the 156 responses, 128 people indicated their intention to return. This means that, even before travelling abroad for education, the large majority of participants had planned to return to China after completing their studies in Australia. This is a strong finding that shows a significant difference from the previous generations of Chinese international students who went abroad between the 1970s and 90s. As Zweig (2002) noted, China’s thriving economy, liberalized political environment and growing opportunities help in attracting people to return.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Career status**

More than 90% of the graduates were in full-time paid employment, and the majority of the remainder were self-employed. This is a very positive outcome, showing the strong employability of the respective graduates. However, of the total participants, a few of the more recent cohort (2009 graduates) indicated that they were still seeking work. Considering that the data were collected in July 2010 across the total study population, it is reasonable that a few graduates are either still looking for work or in the middle of a job transition.
Table 5.8 Employment status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time paid employment</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time paid employment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition between jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional field

Around a third of graduates worked in the Finance, Banking and Insurance industry, constituting the largest professional group. Other popular industry sectors included: Education & training; Manufacturing; Media, Advertising & PR; Information Technology; and Logistics and Transport. Again, this accords with their studied discipline, as outlined earlier.

Table 5.9 Fields of employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Employment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting Firm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic medical research</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Industry Consultancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural; Entertainment Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Consultancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education; training</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education; training Legal services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas and Water Supply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Banking and Insurance</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Admin</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Admin Legal services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Community Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and Transport</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and management consulting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media, Advertising; PR</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific; Technical services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level of Position**

In terms of the graduates’ position and level within their company, organization and department, the results show that more than half of them were at the sub-managerial level; around a third were at the Manager or similar level; and another 14 per cent were employed at the Senior Level Manager, Director General or above level. Considering the two different cohorts and their disciplines, such results reflected a reasonable employment status. Gender, as a factor, may also play a role in this distribution, as will be discussed in detail later.
Table 5.10 Position overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager or similar level</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Level Manager or similar level</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director General or equivalent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income

The most common annual income was between RMB 36,000 and 120,000 (RMB 3,000-10,000 per month). About a third of the graduates earned between RMB 120,000 and 360,000 per annum; a quarter earned over RMB 360,000 annually, including several graduates who earned more than a million RMB per year; and a very small percentage had an annual income of RMB 36,000 or below. Compared to the average income in China, even in the big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, these income figures are quite high. In a way, this supports the postulate of human capital theory, discussed in Chapter Three, that more investment in education results in higher economic returns for the labour force.

Table 5.11 Income overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 36,000 RMB</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36,000-120,000 RMB</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120,000-360,000 RMB</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360,000-960,000 RMB</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 960,000 RMB</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Job satisfaction

Half of the participants expressed satisfaction or strong satisfaction with their current job, while a further 41% exhibited a neutral attitude. A small number of respondents suggested that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their current job, mainly due to: the perception that they were underpaid; the fact that the job was insufficiently challenging or interesting; or that they had to work too much overtime.

Table 5.12 Satisfaction level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time to find first job

A substantial number of graduates were able to find their first job within three months of graduating from the overseas university and returning to China, including a third who succeeded in finding a job within a month. About a quarter of the graduates spent up to six months finding a job, while only two people indicated that it took them a year to find a job.

Table 5.13 Time taken to find 1st job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time taken</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A year and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employing city

The majority of the respondents worked in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, while the rest were mainly spread across the provincial capital cities, the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions. This phenomenon appears reasonable, because these are the more developed regions of China, their GDP growth is high and they also offer the most development opportunities. A few of the graduates were based in Hong Kong or overseas, which also makes sense when considering its ratio against the total population. They might be employed by a company in Mainland China, and then be sent to Hong Kong or overseas for specific projects.

According to the data collected, the graduates’ employing cities were categorised into four types, as shown in the following table: [1] first-tier cities, (Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou); [2] second-tier cities, including provincial capital cities and cities in the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions; [3] special regions like Hong Kong, Macau; and [4] overseas.

There was no graduate work in the third tier cities or countryside in China, probably due to the small number of opportunities for these highly-skilled international professionals, particularly in places where agriculture and manufacturing are the major industries. Therefore, these returnees’ professionalism and expertise in finance or the media were not in great demand in the rural areas. In addition, most of the international students were single children from the developed cities, so it is likely that many of their parents have long planned to assist their children’s career back at home in China, by utilising their existing connections (guanxi).
Table 5.14 Employing city overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-tier Cities</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-tier Cities</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Regions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ongoing connections with the graduating university

Most of the participants indicated that they felt an ongoing connection with the international university from which they had graduated. The data show that 46.8% of the graduates maintained communication with their international alumni office, including 14.7% who kept close contact with the University. However, a fifth of the graduates maintained only rare contact with their university, and many indicated that they had a neutral relationship with it, although this does not mean they do not feel respect for their alma mater in their heart. Confucius advocated 'becoming wise by learning (学而知之)' and, more particularly, 'one who is your teacher for one day is your father for your whole lifetime (一日为师终身为父)' (Guo, 2009, p61). These traditional concepts are rooted in every Chinese mind, especially amongst educated people. When opportunities arise, Chinese alumni are always willing to contribute to their alma mater. Chinese graduates’ donation of almost 9 million US dollars to Yale University in January 2010 is a good example of this (Hualong, 2010). Mr Lei Zhang, a 2002 MBA graduate of Yale University and founder of Capital Management Company, donated almost US$8.88 million to Yale, to help to construct its new SOM (Yale School of Management) campus. This caused great controversy in China, as some suggested that he should have donated the money to Renmin University, where
he completed his Master’s degree; but more than half of the people surveyed still supported what Zhang did for Yale.

Table 5.15 Connection with the graduating university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Connection</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strong</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation of ‘gender’ and ‘graduating year’ with the respective dependent variables

Gender was investigated, as a potential major factor influencing graduates’ careers. Similarly, graduating year was also examined to see if different cohorts have different career experiences. The following 20 pages provide a detailed analysis of how ‘gender’ and ‘graduating year’ correlate with the other variables.

By applying the Chi-Square and Likelihood ratio analysis, a summary of the overall results of the cross variable analyses can be viewed in the following table, and is followed by a detailed description of each variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Graduating year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to return</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Correlation: Male graduates enjoy more promotion opportunities than female graduates</td>
<td>Correlation: The 2004 graduates have higher positions than the 2009 graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Correlation: Male graduates’ average annual income is higher than that of female graduates</td>
<td>Correlation: The 2004 graduates’ average annual income is higher than that of the 2009 graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to find first job</td>
<td>Correlation; Female graduates spend less time finding a job compared to male graduates</td>
<td>Correlation; The 2009 graduates spend longer finding a job than the 2004 graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing city</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender and Intention to Return

The following Table illustrates the ratio of intention to return among male and female graduates, in order to establish whether one gender has a greater intention to remain abroad. The result of the Chi-square Test, presented below, reveal P-values of 0.955, which suggests that there is no evidence of a correlation between ‘Gender’ and ‘Intention to return’. Therefore, gender was not an issue influencing graduates’ intention to stay overseas or return home.

Table 5.17  Chi-Square Tests: Gender and intention to return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Degree of Freedom</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>.003a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Degree of freedom refers to the number of values unconstrained to vary (Agresti, 2007).

Figure 5.1  Gender and intention to return
 Likewise, the following figure shows the employment status of both the male and female graduates. A Pearson Chi-Square and Likelihood Ratio tests were applied, and the values of 0.686 and 0.644 indicate that there was no correlation between Gender and employment status. With the exception of the somewhat higher proportion of males than females who were self-employed, the majority of both male and female graduates were in full-time paid employment.

Figure 5.2  Gender and employment status

Table 5.18  Chi-Square Tests: Gender and employment status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Degree of Freedom</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.270a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>2.506</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 8 cells (80.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.
Gender and Field of Employment

The Chi-Square test suggests that female graduates were spread across a wider range of professional fields, with male graduates being limited to certain areas. The P-value shows only a weak correlation between Gender and Professional field. This may mean that the female graduates are somewhat more flexible in adapting their skills to suit a broader range of professional field due to the competitive labour market, or for other reasons, while more male graduates tend to stay in their priority profession (Amazan, 2011).

Table 5.19 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and professional field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>31.157a</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>38.924</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 50 cells (86.2%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.

Gender and Level of Employment

Figure 5.9 compares the level of position attained by males and females. For the positions of Director General or equivalent, Manager or equivalent, and Senior Manager or equivalent, the percentage of male graduates is somewhat higher than that of female graduates, suggesting that the males tend to have better or more promotion opportunities than the females. The females were significantly more likely to be employed at the lowest level (Employee), and hardly at all at the highest level (Director General). Although the percentage of female graduates in the 2009 group is much higher than that of males, and it often takes a few years for young graduates to establish their career, nevertheless, the gender differences at the various levels remain substantial.
The P-value also identifies a significant relationship between Gender and Position. Given the clear differences in the employment profiles of the male and female returnees, it can be argued that gender influences the graduates’ position level. A variety of factors place women in a disadvantaged position in the workplace, including China’s traditional culture and values, discrimination against women’s maternity leave at work, and the earlier retirement age for women. These factors not only limit women’s career potential, but also their ability to contribute fully to society, and their valuation by society. The All-China Women’s Federation has done a lot of work to promote the implementation of the basic State policy of equality between women and men, seeking to ensure, for example, an internal quota in the government leadership groups and the conducting of research and programs focused on women’s empowerment (All-China Women’s Federation, 2012), but the culture of ‘men’s superiority to women (男尊女卑)’ remains one of the centrepieces of the Chinese sage and man of virtue, Confucius, who has occupied an unshakeable status in the traditional society for a long time. Although Mao’s great efforts to improve women’s social status through his famous notion, ‘women hold up half the sky’, has certainly changed many people’s thinking, gender equality and women’s development still have a long way to go in China. A detailed discussion of this will be presented in the Gender Chapter.

Figure 5.3 Gender ratios of the two cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49)</td>
<td>(68)</td>
<td>(117)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Answered question | 87 | 96 | 183 |
Table 5.20  Chi-Square Tests: Gender and position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>13.955</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>13.880</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.12.

Gender and Income

The figure below illustrates the average annual income of the male and female graduates, again revealing a significantly different profile. The average annual income of the biggest female group is between RMB 36,000 and 120,000, while that of the largest male group is between RMB 120,000 and 360,000, which is a considerable difference. Similar to the explanations provided for Gender and Position, a large number of the 2009 graduates are female and so probably occupy lower employee positions, which may directly result in a lower income, although the difference in the higher-income levels is very pronounced.
In line with the above figure, the P-value shows a close relationship between Gender and Annual income, corresponding to the earlier data regarding the position attained. This implies that men are more favoured in terms of promotional opportunities and, perhaps even for the same type of work, the men are paid more than the women. As mentioned above, this is due to both social and cultural reasons, as well as Chinese policy levels, but since China is progressing towards becoming a modern society that is committed to strengthening the nation with talented personnel, then highly-skilled men and women should operate within the same working environment under equal conditions. Again, further discussion of this will be addressed in the Gender Chapter.

Table 5.21 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and annual income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>10.482*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>10.395</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.41.
Gender and Satisfaction Level

The following figure compares female and male graduates' satisfaction levels with their current jobs. 45.2% of female graduates chose Neutral, 41.7% chose Satisfied, around 9.6% chose Dissatisfied, 2.6% chose Very satisfied, and 0.9% chose Very Dissatisfied. Of male graduates, 9.1% chose Very satisfied, 50% chose Satisfied, around 33% chose Neutral, and 7.6% chose Dissatisfied and Very satisfied. No male graduate chose Very dissatisfied.

![Figure 5.6 Gender and satisfaction level](image)

Although far higher proportions of males than females pronounced themselves either Satisfied, or Very Satisfied, the P-value provides insufficient evidence to prove a correlation between Gender and Satisfaction level because the standard was set at 0.05, (although the tests results are very close to 0.05, with a Pearson Chi-Square result of 0.064, and a Likelihood Ratio of 0.054). This suggests that Gender and Satisfaction may be connected, but less clearly than in the other cases. It is difficult to infer much from these findings.
A possible explanation may relate to the fact that women with the same qualifications and experience as men, are more often employed at lower levels, and are perhaps dissatisfied with this result – especially if they have worked hard and gained experience overseas that is not being fully acknowledged. This will be discussed further in the interview results section below. Many studies show that individuals’ level of job satisfaction generally increases with seniority (Bornholt et al., 2005), and also that women tend to be less satisfied with their work, since gender discrimination means that many senior positions are held by men (Goh, 1991; Spence, 1973). Therefore, it is unsurprising that, in this study, more male graduates, who occupy higher positions, show higher satisfaction with their job than female graduates with the same educational qualifications. This subject is discussed further in Chapters Two and Eight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>8.900*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>9.288</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.

Gender and Time taken to find first job

The P-value identifies an obvious relationship between gender and the length of time taken to find one’s first job. It compared the female and male graduates in terms of how long it took them to find their first job after returning to China from Australia. The result shows that far more female graduates were able to find a job within three months of returning, although slightly more male graduates found a job within a month. While the female graduates tend to find jobs more quickly than the male graduates within the first three months of returning to China, the explanation of this
finding is complex. It could be related to the fact that the females’ jobs are at a lower level, for example. In other words, it is possible that the women graduates are more pragmatic or were willing to settle for a lower-level position, under pressure from the reality of gender discrimination, or they may simply have less guanxi, than their male peers.

Table 5.23 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and time taken to find first job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>11.818</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>12.531</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .71.

Gender, Position, and Time to find one’s first job

Below is a cross-tab analysis of gender, position, and time taken to find one’s first job, to see if gender makes a difference. The P-value shows no correlation between these variables. However, the figure below suggests that the male graduates who spent three months searching for a job were more likely to attain a higher position. In addition, the visual presentation of the data reveals substantial gender differences at the 3 and 12 months levels. Among those graduates who took 3 months to find their first job, the male graduates were able to obtain a much higher income than the females. As mentioned above, the women graduates may be more pragmatic and/or have lower expectations that their male counterparts. Nonetheless, having attained a similar education and skill sets, female professionals deserve equal treatment to their male peers. Just as professional women in western countries are fighting for their rights and equality (Hinze, 2000; Stiver Lie & O’Leary, 1990; Swiss & Walker, 1993), highly-skilled Chinese women should work hard to demand these also.
Table 5.24  Chi-Square Tests: Gender, position, and time taken to find one’s first job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Response</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.637a</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>9.784</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5.402b</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>6.666</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 11 cells (68.8%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.
b. 7 cells (58.3%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.27.

Figure 5.7  Gender, position, and time taken to find one’s first job

('Mode of Positions' means the level of positions; 1=Employee level, 2=Manager level, 3=Director level)

Gender and Employing City

In the variable description section, the employing cities were classified. The figure below shows that no substantial differences existed between the female and male graduates in terms of their employing city.
The $p$-value shows insufficient evidence of a correlation between Gender and Employing city, suggesting that, regardless of their gender, the majority of the graduates are employed in the first-tier cities in China, like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. This is understandable, given that these cities contain the largest pool of jobs for highly-skilled candidates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>3.302a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>3.474</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.

**Gender and Connection to the University**

The following figure compares of the female and male graduates’ connection levels to their overseas university. The rationale was to test for gender differences with regard to alumni activities. The $p$-value shows little evidence of significant gender
differences in international alumni activities, except for the fact that the majority of female graduates indicated they were quite connected to their former university while the male graduates indicated Neutral, although a far higher percentage of male graduates stated that they are Very much connected to the university than females. It is probably difficult to compare each individual’s measurement of connection level, but as noted in the explanation of the graduates’ general connection level with their alma mater overall, Chinese students often feel a special emotion towards their former university. When the majority of male graduates indicated that they were neutrally connected to the university, this does not necessarily mean that they felt little towards it. In the example provided earlier about the Chinese graduate from Yale, it was a male graduate who completed his MBA course in 2002 and made a 9 million US dollar donation in 2010. The point here is that Chinese graduates have their own ways of expressing their feelings or emotions towards their alma mater according to their personal characteristics and career situation. Some are direct and others indirect; some like to show it openly, while others keep it in their hearts.

Figure 5.9 Gender and connection to one’s overseas university
Table 5.26 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and connection level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>6.807a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>7.242</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .71.

Graduating year and Intention to return

The correlation analysis will now focus on the Graduating year and the respective dependent variables. The following figure shows the relationship between the two graduating years and the intention to return. In the Chi-Square tests, the P-value shows no evidence of a correlation between Graduating year and the Intention to return. In practice, for both the 2004/5 and the 2008/9 graduates, the majority intended to return. This supports the categorization of returnees that will be addressed in Chapter Six, arguing that international students who were born in the late 1970s and early 80s have distinct characteristics. Amongst their many differences from the previous generations of Chinese international students who went abroad in the early period of China’s opening up, their willingness to return after graduating is the prominent one. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, China’s stable political environment, thriving economic development, growing opportunities and positive attitudes toward highly-skilled professionals are the major factors attracting returnees.
Table 5.27 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and intention to return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.089</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>2.118</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduating year and Career status

The figure below compares the different cohorts’ career status, followed by the Chi-Square tests. Like the data in the figure, the P-value shows no correlation between Graduating year and Career status, as the majority of both cohorts was in full-time paid employment. The result affirms the sustainability of China’s labour market’s demand for highly-skilled, Australian-educated graduates, suggesting that Australian-educated Chinese graduates remained competitive in China’s labour market in the past decade, and also reflecting the quality of an Australian higher education.
Graduating year and Professional field

After comparing the 2004/5 graduates and the 2008/9 graduates in terms of their professional field, it seems that the earlier cohort is spread across more professional areas than the latter, possibly because, after a few years of work experience, those graduates have explored a wide range of professions in which they can utilize their skills. Nonetheless, the majority of each cohort is employed in the following professional fields: Finance, Business and Insurance, and Education and training.
Twice as many 2008/9 graduates work in the Information Technology field compared with the 2004/5 graduates; and three times as many in the Media, Advertising and Public Relations industry. Such data accord nicely with the graduates’ university discipline, which means that most of them were able to find work in areas in which they can match their knowledge with their job.

According to the Chi-Square tests, the P-value shows that there is no evidence of any correlation between Graduating year and Professional field, so the year in which the graduates completed their studies does not necessarily affect their choice of profession.

| Table 5.29 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and professional field |
|-----------------|-----|--------|
|                | Value | df   | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 29.368\(^a\) | 28   | .394 |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 37.228 | 28   | .114 |
| N of Valid Cases   | 156   |      |      |

\(^a\) 50 cells (86.2\%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.

**Graduating year and Position**

The figure below compares the 2004/5 graduates with the 2008/9 graduates in terms of their position, showing that the majority of the latter hold an employee position, and only around 20\% are at the manager or above level. Such data appear reasonable, because young graduates often need to start their career in an employee position. Some new graduates with previous work experience may be able to obtain higher positions after acquiring a Master’s degree overseas. Comparatively, the 2004/5 graduates are equally spread across employee, manager, senior manager, and Director General or equivalent positions.
The P-value verifies that position is positively correlated with the number of years since graduation, supporting the fact that far more 2004/5 graduates hold senior positions than 2008/9 graduates. Again, this proves that the additional years of work experience helps highly-skilled returnees to gain higher positions (Ding, 2011; Hao & Welch, 2012).

Table 5.30 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and employment position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>31.365*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>35.057</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.88.
Graduating year and Income

The following figure shows that the number of low income graduates decreases as the number of years since graduation increases; at the same time, the number of high income graduates increases. For the 2004/5 graduates, the majority’s average annual income was between RMB 120,000 and 360,000, whereas it was between RMB 36,000 and 120,000 for the 2008/9 graduates. In parallel with the outcome for Graduating year and Position, the same reason applies here. Work experience is important for university graduates’ careers, with regard to both their position and income. For returnees, a few years’ work experience not only helps them to put into practice their newly-acquired knowledge and skills from overseas, but also allows them to establish social connections and re-familiarise themselves with China’s professional environment.

Figure 5.13 Graduating year and annual income
The P-value verifies that there exists a correlation between Graduating year and average annual income, proving that, for international graduates, their average annual income rises significantly with the addition of a few years of local work experience.

Table 5.31 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and annual income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>21.596a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>23.062</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.92.

Graduating year and Satisfaction

The following figure illustrates the job satisfaction levels amongst the 2004/5 and 2008/9 graduates, respectively. It shows that the majority in both groups is either satisfied with their job or holds a neutral attitude. However, the number of 2008/9 graduates who chose unsatisfied is double that of the 2004/5 graduates, while some of the 2008/9 graduates showed a strong dissatisfaction with their job, but none of the 2004/5 graduates. This suggests that, in addition to having more time to find a satisfactory job, new returnees may have experienced certain re-integration problem after returning home, which has contributed to their dissatisfaction. Returnees with a few years of local experience have probably found ways of coping with or overcoming those re-integration issues. Further re-integration issues will be addressed later and discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.
Possibly because the majorities’ satisfaction level is similar, the P-value indicates that there is no correlation between graduating year and satisfaction level but, in the Re-integration problems analysis section, it was found that the 2008/9 graduates face more problems than the 2004/5 graduates, which helps to explain the increasing dissatisfaction level among the former.

Table 5.32 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and satisfaction level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>3.759*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>4.225</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.
Graduating years and Time taken to find one’s first job

The figure below shows that the number of 2008/9 graduates who were able to find their first job within a month of their return is almost equal to those who found a job within three months, as well as six months, while only one or two spent a year or more finding their first job. Comparatively, the majority of the 2004/5 graduates found their first jobs within three months of returning, including almost 30% of them who did so within a month; none of the 2004/5 graduates took a year or more to find a job. The global financial crisis that began in 2008/9 may explain this situation, although China’s policies to stimulate its domestic economy helped to avoid large-scale unemployment, compared to other economies (Dymski, 2005; Morrison, 2009). This also explains why most of the 2008/9 returnees were still able to find a job, even if it took six months after graduation.

The P-value verifies that there exists a correlation between Graduating year and Time taken to find one’s first job, which supports the description of the above picture,
indicating that the 2004/5 graduates took less time to find a job than the 2008/9 graduates.

Table 5.33 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and length of time spent job-seeking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>9.224*a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>10.166</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. 2 cells (25.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .96.

Graduating year and Employing city

The following figure compares the 2004/5 graduates and the 2008/9 graduates in terms of their employing cities. It shows that the majority of both cohorts are employed in the first-tier cities of China, and that the second biggest groups in both cohorts are employed in the provincial capital cities, the Yangze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions. This suggests that the more developed cities and regions are maintaining their leadership position in terms of attracting talents over time.

Figure 5.16  Graduating year and employing city
The P-value indicates that there exists no correlation between Graduating year and Employing city, which means that different graduating years do not affect the graduates’ decisions about where to work.

Table 5.34 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and employing city

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>3.873a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>4.286</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.

Graduating year and Connection

The chart below examines the difference between the two cohorts in terms of the level of connection that they feel towards their overseas alma mater. The data show that there is a very similar ratio between the two cohorts, except that more of the 2008/9 graduates feel Quite connected to their overseas university compared with the 2004/5 graduates.

Figure 5.17 Graduating year and connection to one’s overseas alma mater
The P-value indicates that there exists no correlation between graduating year and the level of connection felt towards one’s alma mater. This finding means that the number of years since graduating does not strongly affect the graduates’ willingness to become involved in alumni activities.

Table 5.35 Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and level of connection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>1.256a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>1.260</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .96.

Factors influencing career development

This section examines the key factors influencing returnees’ career development in China, and aims to establish to what extent these factors affect their employment potential based on their perceptions and experiences. From an analysis of the frequencies, the following five factors emerged as the most important perceived aspects influencing graduates’ career development: Communication skills, Foreign language ability, Learning ability, Professional knowledge and International experience. These are considered in order below, followed by an overview.
It is striking that Communication skills was rated as the most important factor influencing returnees’ career development, rather than Professional knowledge or international experience. It can be argued that returnees are aware of the importance of effective communication.

The result here suggests that the majority of returnees, from both cohorts, think that *guanxi* is more important for their career development than the other factors. Professional knowledge, a prominent feature representing human capital in this case, was listed fourth, followed by International experience, which is a distinct pathway to acquiring cultural capital, so it may be argued that *guanxi* or social capital is an important concept in Chinese everyday life and a significant aspect of success in organizational activities (Bernardes, 2010). It is rooted in most Chinese people’s minds, despite the academic degrees they may have acquired overseas.
The graduates broadly agreed about which factors had influenced their career development, except for gender. Only 10 per cent, most of whom were women, suggested that gender had strongly influenced their career development. About 58 per cent of the graduates felt that gender had had a minor or somewhat of an influence on their career development, and nearly 30 per cent suggested that it had had no influence at all. Again, gender stands out as an interesting issue. This may suggest that many of the young women have not realized that their gender has influenced their career in different ways. Given the fact that this factor is rarely discussed in China, it is likely that even women may not recognize discrimination, or may simply consider it to be normal. Together with other gender related issues, briefly outlined earlier, a detailed discussion is provided in Chapter Eight - Gender.

Key benefits of an Australian education

According to the statistical analysis of the 156 effective samples, the top three aspects of an Australian education that had assisted the graduates' career development were: [1] International exposure, experience and social contacts; [2] English language; and
[3] high quality education (teaching and learning). 129 participants stated that international experience, exposure and social contacts were very important in assisting them to succeed, 113 participants believed that English language was a major aspect assisting their career development, and 107 participants chose high quality education as a key factor assisting their career development. The frequencies of these respective aspects are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High quality education</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study environment</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International exposure, experience and social contacts</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In line with the analysis above, international exposure, experience and social contacts that reflect cultural and social capital were listed as the most important aspects assisting returnees’ career development, while a high quality education, which suggests academic programs, was ranked third. The reason for merging international experience and social contacts here is because both of them are intangibles that are difficult to measure. It is impossible to investigate each graduate’s experience abroad, the level and volume of their Australian contacts, and the extent to which this influence was visible. On the other hand, the quality of education can be generally measured by its international ranking, reputation, and the level of academic programs attended by the graduates. In addition, the key aim of this analysis was to find the graduates’ attitudes towards Australian higher education.
Re-integration problems and issues

Question 18 of the survey was an open-ended question that explored the participants' key problems and issues with re-integration. A total of 164 graduates participated in the survey. Their responses were sorted into the following four categories, and the numbers representing each category are used in the follow-up analysis.

1. No problem;
2. Mentality issues, like a different thinking style, reverse culture shock and hesitancy regarding complicated social relationships;
3. Issues with the living environment, like logistics and re-integrating into the fast-changing Chinese society; and
4. Specific career-related issues like long working hours, etc.

According to the above categorisation, about a third of the participants stated that they had experienced no problems with their re-integration, while the majority of the rest indicated that mentality issues were their main problem.

Figure 5.20  Key re-integration problems
As indicated at the beginning of the paper and elsewhere, Gender is a distinct independent variable in this study, and the aim was to determine its impact on the other variables, as well as its other effects. The following analysis examines how gender was associated with re-integration problems.

Figure 5.21 compares female and male graduates in terms of their re-integration problems. It shows that very similar patterns exist between the female and male groups in general. Both female and male returnees have the same peak points in category 2 on the following figure’s X-axis, which suggests that the majority of each group experienced re-integration problems related to mentality issues, like a different thinking style, reverse culture shock and hesitancy regarding complicated social relationships. It is worth noting that, compared with China’s business environment and social relationships (Bian, 2008; M. Yang, 1994), even though the majority of both the male and female returnees reported problems with their social relationships in China and so on, the intensity and level of those problems may vary significantly between individuals. Category 1 represents those who reported no re-integration problems: about 37% of the male returnees expressed that they had not experienced any re-integration problems compared with less than 30% of the female returnees. In other words, more female returnees experienced re-integration problems than their male counterparts. This was also shown by the higher female percentages in category 3, representing issues with the living environment, like logistics or the fast-changing Chinese society, and category 4, representing specific career-related issues, like long working hours, etc.

The result here aligns with the findings for Gender and work satisfaction level; that is, more female returnees experienced re-integration problems and were dissatisfied with their work. It also reflects other gender and work analyses. The pattern is that, while both the female and male returnees shared the same education, cultural and social
The females experienced more re-integration issues, occupied lower positions, had a lower annual income, and felt less satisfied with their work. The data do not allow it to be argued, for example, that male returnees simply work harder than their female peers, or are better able to overcome all kinds of re-integration problems. Rather, the findings suggest that the female returnees' high-level skills and knowledge were not appropriately or equally appreciated. It also could be postulated that women's experience of more liberal gender regimes abroad, may make it harder to re-adjust, upon return, than men.

Figure 5.21  Gender and re-integration problems

Note: Categorizations on the X-axis present the different types of re-integration problem, as classified at the beginning of the Re-integration section.

Nevertheless, the Chi-Square Tests showed no correlation between Gender and Re-integration problems, possibly because the general pattern is quite similar between the male and female returnees, suggesting that both groups experienced similar re-integration issues but, as mentioned above, the intensity and level of the re-integration problems may differ widely based on individual situations and working environments.
Table 5.37 Chi-Square Tests: Gender and re-integration problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>3.542a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>3.796</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .34.

Graduating year and Re-integration problems

Of the 164 returnees who answered the Re-integration question, 78 were 2004/5 graduates, and 86 were 2008/9 graduates. The following figure illustrates that a significant number of graduates who graduated in 2004 state that they experienced no problems with their re-integration. The later (2009) cohort reported more problems or issues related to their re-integration.

Figure 5.22 Graduating year and re-integration problems

Note: Categorizations on the X-axis present different types of re-integration problem, classified at the beginning of the Re-integration section.
Table 5.38  Chi-Square Tests: Graduating year and re-integration problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>14.253a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>15.148</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.

The p-value reveals a correlation between Graduating year and Re-integration problems, which supports the data shown in the above chart. It suggests that, compared to the 2004 graduates who returned several years ago, the 2009 cohort experienced more problems upon their return to China. This is likely to reflect the fact that many of the earlier returnees have grown re-accustomed to the local environment, after several years of local work experience.

Regardless of their re-integration problems or issues, these graduates expressed a strong determination to develop their domestic career; that is, they expressed a preference to remain in China. Most suggested that, if they could not obtain their ideal job in China after returning, they would either take a job in the same industry with lower pay, or take a job in any industry at the same salary while seeking a better one. Some of the graduates indicated that they would remain in China while awaiting the right job opportunity. Only a few suggested that they would return to Australia, or undertake further study abroad elsewhere.

**Interview Results**

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted after the survey stage. The responses from the survey sketched the bigger picture of the returnees’ career status and perceptions of the related factors, which helped the researcher to give a better
focus to the interviews. Seventeen interviews were conducted across different cities in China in 2011. The participants comprised ten graduate returnees and seven respective stakeholders from the government and enterprises. The interviewees from the graduate group were deliberately balanced in terms of gender, current employing city, graduating year, and discipline studied. The ‘stakeholder’ group was also a good mixture of key people from different fields, including senior officials from the central government, municipal government and a government associated education organization, as well as employers or human resource directors from an SOE, public hospital, multinational company, and private company. The following two tables provide an overview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Degree completed</th>
<th>Graduating year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Economics and Business</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Economics and Business</td>
<td>2004/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Engineering and Information Technologies</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Engineering and Information Technologies</td>
<td>2004/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>YJ</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Engineering and Information Technologies</td>
<td>2004/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Medicine (Sydney Medical School)</td>
<td>Other year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Other year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Economics and Business</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Medicine (Sydney Medical School)</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.40 Information on the interviewed stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization/Company Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Deputy Chairperson</td>
<td>Local government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary General</td>
<td>Government organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>SOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Multinational company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Public Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Private company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the analysis strategy of this study, the data obtained from the interviews were first transcribed into Word documents, then coded using the key terms and messages, followed by a cross tab review and analysis to establish the links between the different interviewees' responses. Eventually, the interrelationships appeared amongst those coded data. A detailed analysis and the results follow.

Feedback from the graduates

Following the revision of the initial, pilot set of interview questions, the key parts of the interview questions for the graduate returnees were classified into two categories: [1] International education and career development; and [2] International alumni relationship and career development. Reflections on the questions follow. It is striking that, for both issues, which are explored via a wide range of questions, the interviewees provided very similar answers and opinions, regardless of their different characteristics in terms of their gender, age, professional field and family status.
Table 5.41 Interview questions and issues-1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/ Issues</th>
<th>Actual interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. International education and career development</td>
<td>What was your main motivation for studying at the University of Sydney?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the key issues or factors that you think have impacted on your career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has an Australian education assisted your career development? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your perception of Australian higher education in general?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. International alumni relationship and career development</td>
<td>What kind of support did you expect from the university that might assist your further career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can a mutual, life-long relationship be established between yourself and the University of Sydney? How useful do you find the Alumni network?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflecting issue 1: International education and career development

The interviewed graduates stated that their main expectations and motivations related to acquiring an international education were to increase their personal skills and knowledge through following an advanced curriculum, and to obtain international experience via gaining a foreign education. Some of the interviewees were satisfied with their previous job, while others were not, but all of them regarded acquiring an international education as a tool for improving their personal skills, broadening their views, gaining advanced professional knowledge, experiencing a different culture, and consequently strengthening their human capital in order to become more competitive in the labour market. A male graduate, L, used to work in Tianjin as a chief accountant for a foreign bank, and was quite satisfied with that job, but he gave it up in order to study for a Master's degree abroad because he wanted to find a better job in a bigger city. He studied at the University of Sydney Business School for two years, and successfully found a good job in Beijing after graduating and returning to China. A female graduate, B, told a slightly different story. She had worked as an optician in Shanghai for several years, but was unhappy with her job. Because she had always wanted to study abroad and experience a different style of life, B undertook a
two-year Master's course in Public Health, which was not very closely related to her professional area. After she graduated and returned to China, she joined a Non-government Organization’s charity association in Shanghai as a senior manager. B said:

"...as I had wished, an international education had broadened my view and empowered me to do something different". (B9BF)

The above two cases differ in terms of the interviewees' gender, age, background, discipline studied, professional field and employing city, but they share a common expectation of an international education, which is, career-wise, to take them somewhere different from where they were before, and to enable them to better themselves. In a way, this strongly reflects human capital theory, which is that more investment in education results in higher, better returns in the employment stage (Becker, 1962, 2002).

All of the interviewees gave similar answers regarding the factors that influenced their career development. International experience or exposure was listed as the most important factor, followed by an international qualification, overseas work experience, professional knowledge, length of time spent abroad, and networking. It is worth emphasising that international experience or exposure constitute not merely the knowledge or information obtained from the university course, but also everything that happens outside: from finding accommodation to acquiring a driver's licence, and from participating in social activities to opening a bank account. Such things are more challenging than they seem for young international students, who are usually used to being the only 'prince' or 'princess' in the family back at home (H. Chen, 2005, p. 259). Taking accommodation as an example, after arriving in Australia, many of the graduates had to live in someone else's home, either as a home-stay or as a lodger in a friend's house. This forces them to experience life under someone else's roof, which can be difficult, regardless of how friendly the household is. Many then
spent several weeks or even months finding an appropriate place of their own to live, which involved searching, dealing with local estate agents, asking friends or schoolmates, visiting potential homes, applying via the required procedures, signing all of the legal documents, and physically moving in. Meanwhile, they must also consider travelling to university, purchasing the necessary furniture or daily essentials, connecting the telephone and Internet, and registering with the electricity, gas and water companies. All of these can prove very complicated tasks for young international students with little experience but, by doing these tasks, they learn about western culture and social systems, and enhance their communication skills and capabilities, which are important aspects of their international education (H. Chen, 2005; Zweig & Han, 2008). The above is just the simplest ordinary scenario related to the issue of accommodation. If they students encounter other problems, they must learn to overcome their fears, solve their problems, and manage conflict.

This result is slightly different from that gathered from the survey. For the same question, the survey result showed that communication skills, interpreted as social relationships, are a major influential factor. This may be because the small number of sample graduates caused a coverage error, or when the graduate interviewees met the researcher in person to discuss international education, they would naturally adjust their answers but, in general, the interview results and survey findings are quite consistent.

Most of the interviewees suggested that international qualifications played a vital role when applying for jobs, and that an international certificate worked like an entry ticket when knocking on an employer’s door, often enabling them to get a job with a higher starting salary compared to the locals. Palifka’s (2009, p. 87) research on the effect of studying abroad also supported this point. A male engineering and IT graduate, Y, who was born in Beijing and had worked there for a private company as an engineer before going to study in Australia, stated that an international qualification had helped him to find a good job in Beijing:
"... an Australian higher education certificate itself would give people a good impression. Firstly, it represents an overseas background, and the certificate holder is expected to have fluent English language skills and strong capabilities. Secondly, the global reputation of the university is also very important, and a certificate from a top ranking university brings extra credit. The image of a well-known university reflects the image of its graduates to some degree, especially a highly-ranked university that also has a positive, high status in China. Hence, graduates from such a well-known university are likely to have an advantage when being considered for a job." (B6YL)

This interviewee now works for Motorola China as the chief engineer in a team. A Business graduate, S, who works for a foreign medical company in Shanghai, made a very similar comment. He was appointed as a manager immediately on his return to China. Nonetheless, both Y and S agree that, although an international qualification helps in terms of obtaining a job, after starting the job, one’s professional knowledge and skills become more important. This was strongly echoed by M, another Business graduate, who works as a Marketing Manager for Siemens in Shanghai. Their comments and experiences support signalling theory, addressed in Chapter Three. In brief, the brand of the graduating university and the level of program that the graduate has completed have significant implications in China’s labour market.

It is clear that the international certificate itself represents overseas education experience and can prove that the respective graduate is qualified in certain professional skills and knowledge. While the possession of this piece of paper proves advantageous when applying for jobs, the skills and knowledge obtained overseas play a more important role in one’s career development after starting work. Many of the graduate interviewees stated that their advanced knowledge and international
standard professional information obtained while studying a Master’s program overseas helped them to be more efficient at work. Some said that the Master’s program that they followed was composed of independent project-work, teamwork, and presentations, which effectively combined practical problem-solving methods and theoretical knowledge, eventually shaping their mentality and way of thinking. L said:

“...the Master’s programme in Australia has progressively helped me to form an active mind, innovative spirit and professionalism.”

(B4LZ)

As an outcome of international education, this fits perfectly with China’s national strategies for human resource development, particularly the ‘National plan for medium-and-long-term human resources development (2010-2020)’ and the talent development section of the ‘12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015)’. If all returnees felt the same effect of their international education, and were able to make an actual contribution to Chinese society through innovation and professionalism, this would certainly speed up China’s modernization process.

A female Medicine graduate, B, also made a similar comment:

“...it is not just professional knowledge and foreign language skills that have assisted my career development, but also the learning process that taught me to think independently and critically.” (B9BF)

So, both male and female graduates perceived the same effect of international higher education. They obtained not only professional knowledge in their respective fields, but also an innovative spirit and independent thinking. Considering that they all possessed qualified graduation certificates, the above comments also suggest that the female graduates’ capacity and professionalism are no less than those of their male counterparts. However, the productivity of the former seemed to be restrained by China’s biased, traditional view of women’s talents.
As a complement and further background to the current research, the researcher interviewed one of the first nine Chinese graduates to study in Sydney in 1979 (known at the time as the ‘Gang of Nine’). They were selected by the Chinese government and sent to Australia to attend a Master’s course, shortly after China’s opening up in 1978. This graduate, named D, formerly an academic at a university in Nanjing, is now retired. Although the focus of the study was on recent graduates and their status, the researcher thought that it might prove helpful to obtain a response from a senior graduate with long-term experience of international education and career development in China. His response, although reflecting a period when such an experience was much rarer than today, tended to confirm the responses of the contemporary graduates:

“... from my point of view, an international education and qualification gave me great confidence at work. In addition, stronger professional skills, a better understanding of foreign culture and language are important elements that assisted my career. I’m now in my 60s. The international Master’s programme overseas provided me with a very valuable experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life.” (B10D)

Overall, the majority of the interviewees indicated a positive perception of Australian higher education in general. ‘Practical’ was a key word that was repeated by many of the interviewees who took different courses. L, a male Economics and Business graduate, said:

“... I felt very familiar with the professional terms when conversing with my international clients, because I studied those terms when I was in Sydney. Some of the taxation laws are quite different in China
but, as China is slowly integrating into the world economy, I felt that what I had learnt overseas would be very helpful...” (B4LZ)

Similarly, engineering graduate Y responded:

“… the advanced engineering software and techniques I learnt in Sydney are important factors that have made me distinct from my other colleagues in the company, and helped me to be promoted after I successfully demonstrated these skills.” (B6YL)

Arts graduate T, who worked for a top media agency as a senior journalist, also pointed to the practical skills acquired while undertaking his Australian degree:

“... I learnt ‘In-design’ as part of my academic program, which is the most popular type of software used by many media companies... I was able to get straight to work after getting the job.” (B8TZ)

In general, all of the graduates stated that they had gained advanced professional knowledge through following a world-leading curriculum. Most of them felt that the theory and practical knowledge were closely linked, and that the high standard academic programs and strict requirements also gave them a high quality learning experience.

Reflecting issue 2: The international alumni relationship and career development

In both the survey results and the interviews, the term ‘international’ was perceived to be an important aspect of the graduates’ career development. The outcome of international education should not be limited to the professional knowledge and experiences obtained during the learning period, but may also allow graduates to
deploy the international ties they developed and extended, long after the completion of their study period. Many data results of this research indicated that cultural capital and social capital are also extremely vital elements for success. As argued in Chapter Three, both of these forms of capital also require investment in time, effort and sometimes financial-input. Cultural capital’s implications for Chinese returnees’ careers were not limited to their education qualifications that represent a knowledge of western culture, but also extend to the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, which is also the most hidden form of the hereditary transmission of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As a result of gaining human and cultural capital from international education, social capital is acquired. Because those graduates are alumni of the University of Sydney, and such *guanxi* somehow binds them together based on mutual benefits, they are linked to a network that may benefit their career through actual connections and potential resources.

Alumni connections and relationships often link people together, as they share many intellectual affinities and interests (Finney & Pyke, 2008; WRSA-COSA, 2010). As reported above, the survey findings revealed that many graduates still feel connected in some way with their overseas alma mater. Their willingness to maintain a mutual, life-long relationship with their international university was confirmed during the interviews. All of the interviewed graduates expressed a strong interest in keeping in touch with their overseas university and other alumni, particularly those with a similar professional background. Chinese students usually feel special emotions towards their alma mater, partly due to the influence of a longstanding tradition that originated in Confucian theory, whereby a teacher should always be respected as a father (Bell, 2008; Creel, 1949, p. 75). Even today, the school from which one graduates is often referred to as one’s ‘Mother school’. Organisations such as the Western Returned Scholars Association arguably reflect this desire, even though its members do not stem from the same university -- as seen in Chapter Three.
There are two stages to the creation of such a relationship. The first stage is mainly about the continuing support offered by the university to their students after they graduate. This provides a foundation for the second stage, which involves the graduates’ strong willingness to give something back to their overseas university, as well as cherishing the valuable relationship with it. Most of the interviewees stated that they had hoped to receive some career support from their overseas university, such as career advice seminars, internship opportunities, newsletters relevant to their professional discipline, and approval to access library resources for a period after graduating. However, none of them complained much if this support was lacking, because they did not appear to expect their overseas university to assist with their career development to any great degree. The Chinese graduates did not think that the big international university where they had spent a few years would do much for them, or have the resources or capacity to help them, although several observed that they wished that their university would provide some kind of career guidance. An engineering graduate indicated:

“... it would be really great if my faculty sent me something about research to keep me updated in the field, like the interesting research carried out by the professors or famous international projects, etc...” (B6YL)

Quite a few graduates indicated that internships would be extremely helpful, such as Medicine graduate B:

“... some kind of career advice program would be very helpful to us. Letting us know in what kind of industry we could seek a job, and what are the trends in the labour market ... many new returnees don’t know where to start their career, so a workshop that invited some previous alumni to share their experiences would be fabulous...” (B9BF)
Some of the interviewees stated that they were happy to participate in this study, and would try their best to provide useful information and feedback. A female Engineering graduate, Q, who worked for a top 500 company in Beijing, stated that she would be happy to help her university to arrange internships with her company for current students or fresh graduates, and would also assist with their R&D collaboration in the relevant professional fields in China.

Strengthening the alumni network was a key element emphasised by all of the interviewees, which also corresponds with the survey findings above. They all stated that a strong alumni network would be very helpful for their career development. A female Engineering graduate, Q, stated:

"I think that the alumni network is very important, particularly for our professional fields. We always say: rely on one's parents at home and one's friends outside. It is very important to have a peer group for mutual benefit, so we can help each other. In my experience, graduates from Sydney often have high potential in both their career and life. A long term network would help us to be stronger in the future". (B5QG)

Typical ways of strengthening the alumni relationship suggested by the respective alumni included regular e-newsletters relevant to the graduates' professional field. For example, the latest information about financial issues should be regularly sent to Business graduates, whether regarding the world financial crises or articles by their former faculty's academics. Business graduates would be happy to hear from their university and receive international information in China. For the Australian university, this is also a channel for attracting potential Ph.D. students. Two interviewees, one male and one female, suggested that they were considering undertaking further study overseas, so it would be beneficial to know what their previous lecturers or professors were doing now. More focused activities with a more
focused group were also suggested. For example, Law graduates could gather for a
discussion of legal reforms, or a workshop could be held for both Law and Business
graduates on issues like mergers and acquisitions. Seminars could be run by the
Australian university’s academics visiting China. A common interest is important
when organizing such activities. The graduates would not only obtain the latest
information in their relevant field, but also get to know people working in the same
area, with a similar educational background to themselves. Networking was the
centre-piece of these concerns. Events related to general career issues were a third
issue raised by the graduate interviewees. For example, at the end of the Australian
academic semester, it would be extremely helpful to arrange workshops on the Dos
and Don’ts of applying for jobs in China, or the available local government policies
aimed at helping returning graduates to resettle. In sum, a strong desire was expressed
regarding the strengthening of the alumni network through regular communication,
both virtual and physical, in order to enhance the graduates’ careers.

Feedback from stakeholders

The five interview questions to the stakeholders reflect the following two issues: [1]
Australian graduates’ strengths and weaknesses, including comparisons with their
counterparts from the US, the UK, as well as local highly-skilled graduates; and [2]
stakeholders’ advice to Australian graduates in terms of improving their career
development in China (See table 5.42). The analysis of the stakeholders’ feedback is
also built around these two issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflecting issues</th>
<th>Actual Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, Australian graduates’ strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>How do you see their strengths and weaknesses in the following aspects: professional knowledge, communication skills, learning ability, international</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
experience and teamwork?

What is your perception of postgraduate returnees from Australian higher institutions, compared to those from the US and UK? Can you give examples of such differences?

How would you compare their strengths and weaknesses with those of highly qualified local graduates?

What would your advice be to University of Sydney graduates about the kinds of skills they need in order to succeed in China’s labour market?

Based on your experience, which, if any, qualities of such graduates could be strengthened/improved?

The responses by the government officials at different levels, employers or HR directors from a variety of types of enterprise, including a multinational company and an SOE, were highly consistent. They all held a fairly positive perception of Australian returnees, but believed that those from America are the strongest group amongst all hai gui (international returnees). Nonetheless, compared with returnees from the UK and graduates from the top Chinese universities, Australian graduates have distinct advantages. These stakeholders also had very similar advice and suggestions for young graduate returnees from Australia, which generally centred around the following five areas: [1] strive to gain a deep understanding of the Chinese culture, regime and labour market; [2] learn how to deploy the newly-learnt western knowledge in Chinese society; [3] do not consider only senior positions and higher salaries; [4] maintain international expertise; and [5] be innovative. Detailed information follows.
The outstanding strengths of Australian returnees are related to their international exposure, learning ability, and professional knowledge. Firstly, spending several years studying at a world-leading university in Sydney gives young Chinese students an excellent opportunity to gain international exposure. They see different cultures and ways of managing projects, and also learn international standard rules. A senior official from a government affiliated educational organization commented:

"In my experience, returnees from Australia seem to have a reasonably good sense and understanding of international culture, as well as ways of doing things. Whenever we organized big international events or forums, my colleagues who have returned from Australia performed very well, especially when dealing with international guests". (B5LJM)

A Vice-President from an SOE said:

"...international exposure is very important now, as China opens up to the world, because there is increasing interaction with international firms and foreigners. Returnees certainly have strengths when such opportunities arise, and returnees from Australia seem to settle easily into a regular working style and environment. The experience overseas also broadens their views, hence giving them a wider perspective..." (B6CHB)

Learning ability was the second major issue mentioned by a number of the interviewees. The HR Director of a multinational company suggested:
graduates with international experience and education generally have strong learning abilities and can learn new things quickly, especially western ideas and international systems…” (B7LW)

A strong learning ability is a vital skill that is required in most companies and organizations. As argued earlier, not only does the western academic curriculum educate them how to conduct research and think independently, but their foreign living experience also teaches them how to adapt well to new situations. The overseas environment forces international students to learn new things quickly. Consequently, their accumulated knowledge and experience helps these international graduates to take on new tasks more effectively. The last major strength mentioned was the graduates’ professional knowledge. However, this really depends on the companies’ needs. Some companies have very high requirements and demand that employees have a good level of professional knowledge, while others do not; all, however, agreed that quality returnees from Australia are generally strong in their professional field.

Two critical weaknesses of young returnees from Australia were expressed. First was their limited understanding of today’s China. While they were all born and grew up in China, most of them had not acquired much work experience or solid social experience before going to study abroad. Rather, they mainly travelled between their local school and home, and enjoyed comprehensive care from their parents. Therefore, many were felt to lack a mature, independent understanding of China’s development, social system, regime, government policies, or major historical events. Most of today’s international students were born after the 1980s: the generation who grew up during the opening up era. Unlike earlier generations, this gradual opening up of Chinese society and economic growth gave them opportunities that the older generation had not enjoyed. At the same time, they also had the chance to see the world while they were growing up; hence many of them neglected their concrete education in Chinese culture, history and regime.
The second weakness is related to their English language proficiency. Most returnees from Australia speak and write English fluently but, because Australia is an English-speaking country and they have obtained a higher education qualification from a leading university, they often face higher expectations and higher requirements. Given that the indigenous graduates' English language skills are much better than before, employers expect returnees to possess superior English language skills, better than those of indigenous graduates. When the returnees' performance in English language is poorer than expected, it becomes a weakness for them.

Highly consistent feedback was collected when comparing Australian returnees with their counterparts from the US, UK and the top local universities. Such a comparison was not made using sets of systematic indicators but was based on the stakeholders' perceptions and experience. All of the interviewees, who held senior positions in various fields, ranked international returnees from the US the highest amongst all graduates. A senior official from the Beijing municipal government stated that returnees from America seem more successful than those from elsewhere, and in fact America is a world leading country that is strong in many areas. An employer from a private company said: 'US returnees are the most competitive group, and most of them have broader international views and more practical experience'. The Vice-President of an SOE suggested that returnees from the US often give people the impression that they are keen to invest, do business and innovate, which is a spirit of striving for success. The HR Director of a multinational company indicated that most of the returnees from the US are more mature and often have had some work experience. They have clear minds, know what they want to achieve, and work very hard, which gives people the strong impression that they are prepared to undertake any task. A Vice-President of a public hospital stated that he felt that returnees from the US are far more active. He said that doctors who returned from America usually think of their future and do their best to win opportunities, while those from Australia often wait for opportunities to present themselves. All of the interviewees conveyed
the clear message that returnees from the US are the most outstanding group amongst returning graduates, and that America is the place to learn advance professional knowledge and technologies. As an official from the Ministry of Education indicated:

"America has a much longer history with China in the field of international education compared to any other western country, and China's first three international students, Rong Hong, Huang Kuan and Huang Sheng, were sent to the US by the Qing Government in the mid-1800s. Given that America has been a very strong country in many areas, and many successful Chinese have studied in the US, it is reasonable for people to favour US education. The perceptions of the returnees are always related to the image of the country where they studied". (B8YJ)

These interviewees expressed a preference for returnees from Australia, however, compared with those from the UK. The senior official from the government-affiliated education organization suggested that returnees from the few elite UK universities are still competitive, but that the overall quality seems to have dropped since 2000. A few other interviewees indicated that there are too many UK Master’s graduates in China, most of whom have only studied abroad a one-year Master’s program, which is too short a time in which to absorb solid professional knowledge and gain international experience. In some interviewees' experience, many UK Master's graduates did not display strong international skills, knowledge and abilities. Gradually, it seems, that the reputation of UK returnees is decreasing.

When compared with the highly-skilled, indigenous graduates, the outstanding advantage of Australian graduates is their international experience and exposure. They have a better understanding of international knowledge and culture, and that is what China needs and appreciates. Their experience overseas gives them greater confidence when communicating with foreigners, and they can speak with international guests on an equal basis. Their oral English skills are demonstrably
better than those of the indigenous graduates, simply because they have lived in an
international environment, where English is the lingua franca. Due to their very
independent living experience overseas, most international graduates are more mature
and able to manage various matters independently. International links are also key
features that give international graduates a distinct advantage when compared to
graduates of Chinese universities. On the other hand, their key disadvantages are their
thin local networks and disrupted understanding of the changing local environment,
which are the main advantages of indigenous graduates.

Reflecting issue 2: Advice to young returnees

There are five key pieces of advice that arose from the interviews with the respective
stakeholders:

1. to obtain an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture, the fast changing
   environment and labour market;
2. to deploy one’s overseas knowledge appropriately;
3. to adjust one’s attitude and positioning when returning to China;
4. to maintain one’s international strengths and links;
5. to be innovative.

The last point, to be innovative, was highly emphasised, and also a very important
issue raised in many national and international reports on China’s development
(OECD, 2008; State Council, 2010c). As briefly addressed earlier, the lack of a solid
understanding of Chinese culture is a weakness for many young returnees from
overseas, and a vital area requiring their attention. Culture here does not simply mean
setting off fireworks at the spring festival, eating moon cakes on August 15th for the
Chinese Lunar year, or attending the Lion Dance. Rather, it indicates a complete
understanding of Chinese history, government structure, economic growth, different
customs in different regions, and position in the world. As Welch argued:
Culture is not static, but changes according to socio-historical circumstances. Necessarily, then, culture is not abstract (restricted to the world of ideas, remote from people’s day-to-day lives and practices), but also includes the material (ways of making things, such as art, houses, or implements).


The new China was only established 60 years ago, in 1949, but its civilized history can be traced back over 2000 years. In the course of China’s historical development, famous philosophers and educators, ranging from Confucius to Zhu Xi and Wang Fuzhi, have embodied the spiritual outlook of their respective time, thus contributing to the evolution of Chinese culture (Q. Guo, 2009). After the opening-up, a mixture of eastern and western traditions and innovations has further shaped China’s culture, forming its unique style. While young international graduates embrace the new, western ideas and knowledge, the traditional eastern wisdom should not be neglected. As all of the interviewed stakeholders – representing a broad range of Chinese stakeholders – suggested, the concrete conditions in contemporary China should be taken as the basis or foundation for these innovations.

As noted above, China’s opening-up allowed people to see the outside world and welcome advanced international ideas and technologies. Effectively deploying what has been learnt abroad and appropriately contributing to Chinese society are essential steps. As the official from the Beijing municipal government put it:

“*They are returning to a complicated and competitive society, similar to where they went, and the major differences are the political environment and ways of doing things. However, these international graduates have a higher starting point than many local graduates, but simply speaking a foreign language and having some degree of international exposure will not help them to succeed. The ability to combine the theories with the*
reality, combine western and eastern wisdom, and consequently meet China's needs is important”.

Furthermore, all of the interviewed stakeholders suggested that the returnees’ personal attitude and self-positioning were very important for their career development. Young returnees should be modest and flexible about settling into their new environment, and should also lower their expectations about their salary and package. Especially at the beginning of their career, because there are lots of things to learn, having being overseas for several years, the young returnees’ expectations about their annual income and package should be reasonable and realistic. The HR Director of a multinational company responded:

“Calculating how much income they should earn based on their economic investment in international education is the worst thing to do, particularly talking about it during interviews. The companies who hired them do not intend to pay off their educational costs, especially as we have an endless choice of international applicants nowadays”. (B7LW)

Similar views were expressed by other interviewees, who all agree that there is an increasing number of talented people in China for their career development, which gives employers a wide choice when selecting potential employees. Returnees from Australia have a good platform, and they should appreciate this by starting at a reasonable level and making solid progress in order to succeed step by step.

Two other important pieces of advice were related to the returnees’ international strength and innovative spirit. International strength means an in-depth understanding of western culture and traditions in addition to academic knowledge, as well as maintaining international links. This implies that international students who study at the University of Sydney should not limit their learning to the academic programs, but also seek to absorb the unique culture, that is built on a variety of other cultures. For
example, Australia was colonised by the British at the end of the eighteenth century, then settled by Europeans, as well as Chinese, Afghans and others, followed by migrants from many other countries, so a mixed culture eventually formed (Pierce, 2009). Today’s Chinese international students who study in Australia are expected, at least, to know about these cultural elements, and to be able to deploy them effectively in the workplace.

The international relationships established during the study period overseas should be maintained, and transformed into advantages. Actively participating in international programs and events may provide returnees with a platform from which to embrace new ideas and encounter advanced international knowledge. Of course, academic programs and fluent English language are essential components. All of these should contribute to the returnees’ innovative spirit, and allow them to develop creative ideas.

**Summary of Australian educational benefits and re-integration issues**

The survey results on Australian education benefits and re-integration issues provide useful background information. Interviews with both female and male graduates from different professional fields and employing cities enriched the data with lived examples and explanations. Interviews with respective stakeholders from a wide range of areas further enhance the content from a different angle. After pattern matching and counting the key word frequencies in the data gathered from the survey, as well as the two groups of interviews, it was found that the following three aspects produced by an Australian education were seen to be of the greatest value:

1. International exposure and experience, including an understanding of a broad range of western culture;
2. Advanced professional knowledge, including proficient English language ability and a knowledge of the international rules in different professional fields; and
3. An innovative spirit.

The centrepiece of successful re-integration was seen as a deep understanding of today’s China, a matter that could not be emphasized enough by the stakeholders. As argued previously, this means not merely the general surface information, but also an in-depth understanding of the Chinese institutions, together with their historical development and values. As a big nation with several thousands of years of civilized history and very diverse nationalities, China has undergone unprecedented changes over the past 100 years, all of which help to form its unique position in today’s dynamic world. All of the stakeholders stated that, if young returnees adopt the Chinese style when returning home, and deploy their international knowledge where appropriate and necessary, then this will also smooth their re-integration process.

The two major re-integration issues highlighted by the survey results are, in order of importance: [1] mentality issues, like a different thinking style and reverse culture shock, and [2] issues with the fast-changing society. Some returnees also perceived these problems, as typical returnee survey responses included:

”Sometimes, I find it difficult to communicate with my colleagues due to their different approaches to understanding issues.” (BV65)

”The competitive environment in the workplace and even in general social settings at large, which is dramatically different from the mateship culture in Australia.” (BV86)

”Key re-integration issues are complex social networks and local traditional values.” (BV141)
"The main problem is networks, which is what I need for my job. I'm back in a country that seems familiar, but I just can't fit into it in some way. I believe it's mainly a cultural difference." (BV73)

"Fairness is what I've learnt in Australia but, in China, you're competing not just on your own ability; most of the time, it also needs guanxi (connections), and other factors." (BV88)

"To adapt to the fast living and working style in China is my re-integration issue." (BV163)

Similar messages emerged from the interviews. A male graduate working as a Brand Manager in Shanghai commented:

"I spent a week adjusting to the lifestyle in China, but it took almost a year to adapt to the Chinese style of life mentally. The rhythm in China is too fast, especially in cities like Shanghai. Australia is much more relaxed, and working overtime at weekends is very rare. Like now, most of my Saturdays and Sundays are scheduled for business matters. Many of my colleagues and friends are the same. The most important thing is that I need to understand the business operation process in China and in my field, in order to meet my clients' needs". (B12M)

Returning to one's home culture can be more complicated than moving to a new culture, but returnees should try to overcome these issues after making the decision to return. The interviewed stakeholders suggested that returnees should realize that it is normal to undergo some kind of re-adjustment process after living abroad for several years, especially since China is changing so quickly. It may be helpful to share their feelings with someone who has had a similar experience, and participate in activities
where they can use their new skills and knowledge. It is also important to know when to stop talking about their overseas experience, and to make an effort not to show off their ‘foreign behaviour’. In fact, all of the re-integration issues or problems were related to the returnees’ limited understanding and proper recognition of today’s China. It may be appropriate to share one graduate’s view here, who stated that:

“China is the place where most returnees were born and grew up, and the place where they choose to live. Returnees should understand the enormous changes that have happened in the past few decades. For example, during the few years I studied abroad alone, Shanghai has become very different.” (B9BF)

In reality, the development is moving towards a better rather than a worse order. This same interviewee believed that many international graduates still hesitated to return, and some who have returned decide to move abroad again, but it is a personal decision; where returnees choose to live depends on what they want. International graduates who chose to return should combine the Chinese tradition with their international knowledge, for their all-round career development.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an extensive, detailed analysis of the information collected from the survey and interviews. The rich data, gathered from 187 valid survey responses and 17 in-depth interviews, built a platform from which to gain a close understanding of Chinese graduates’ career status in China on their return from Australia. The analysis started with the survey data, presenting an overview based on numerous responses – it outlined the general information about the graduates’ status and perceptions. A detailed description and classification were provided of each of the dependent variables, including Intention to return, Career status, Professional Field,
Level of position, Annual income, Level of Satisfaction, Time to find first job, Employing city, and Connection with the international university, as well as to each of the independent variables, including Gender, Age, Discipline studied, and Graduating year.

A comparison between the female and male graduates based on each dependent variable found that distinct differences existed in terms of certain career aspects. For example, the male graduates tend to have a higher position and higher annual income than the females. In addition, male returnees seemed to be more satisfied with their work and experienced fewer re-integration problems than their female counterparts. All of the data results point to the issue of gender inequality, and a more detailed discussion of gender is addressed in Chapter Eight.

A comparison between the two cohorts based on each dependent variable also discovered obvious differences existing with regard to their career and re-integration experiences. For example, the 2004/5 graduates generally occupied more senior positions at work and earned a higher annual income. At the same time, they also experienced fewer re-integration problems now when compared to 2008/9 graduates. The major reason for this was time and their several years of local work experience.

According to the feedback provided by the survey participants, an analysis was also made of the factors influencing the returnees’ career development, the Benefits produced by an Australian education, and the Re-integration problems. It is unsurprising that several years of international higher education and foreign living experience shape the international students’ mentality. As many have suggested, education is often a key agent of change, including fostering values among young people (Welch, 2007). The professional knowledge and strong skills obtained overseas indeed brought advantages to the graduates, making them more competitive in China’s labour market, but the internationalised mind also yielded re-integration
problems. Information collected from the interviews with the graduates further verified this phenomenon.

An international education, then, can be a double-edged sword: an experience that has a positive impact, but also brings certain negative influences, without proper guidance. The Chinese government officials and other respective stakeholders were clearly aware of this situation, although they focused more on the positive aspects brought by the returnees. Nonetheless, they encouraged young returnees to recognize China’s current situation and to understand Chinese culture, together with its history, in-depth in order to form more mature attitudes with regard to re-integration.
CHAPTER SIX  
EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Introduction

The previous five chapters sketched a rich background picture of the situation regarding highly-skilled international graduate returnees, summarized the major literature and issues relating to the study, outlined the relevant theories underpinning the phenomenon, and identified the methodological approach of the present research, before revealing the findings. This and the following two chapters address the three key issues arising from the findings of this research, and provide a critical analysis respectively.

Firstly, in this chapter, the effects of international education will be discussed, particularly from the perspective of employment in the home country. A detailed discussion of the similarities and differences between returnees who went abroad at different times will be presented to assist our understanding of the distinct features of the current group of returnees. Then, a comparison will be made of overseas- and domestic-educated Chinese graduates in terms of their career development. The different forms of capital, discussed in previous chapters, will be re-examined in terms of their implications for the returnees' career development.

Chapter Seven then examines the second issue: the re-integration problems experienced by the returning graduates, notably the problems perceived and experienced by many young returning graduates, which reflect the key conflicting cultural issues between China and western countries. The increasing number of overseas-educated graduates returning to China is having a positive effect on China's
development but, at the same time, some of the new ideas and knowledge acquired overseas contradicts certain key aspects of China’s traditional culture, that represents the accretion of hundreds of years of key elements within the academic and research system.

The third issue, gender inequality at work, is being addressed in Chapter Eight. The issue of gender will be discussed in detail, as a factor that has a strong influence on highly-skilled female returnees’ career development. The chapter argues that a long-lasting inequality between male and female workers still exists in China, and continues to affect overseas-educated female graduates in today’s modern societies.

**Career Environment for the Current Young Returnees**

As noted earlier, this section discusses the main characteristics of returnees who went abroad for education at different stages of China’s development, and analyses the career environment faced by today’s young returnees.

The labour market in China, now influences the wage structure of graduates, particularly in terms of their level and type of education (Min, 2004, p. 65); quality international higher education from developed countries stands at the top end of the education chain. Employers and HR Directors unconsciously raise their expectations when interviewing international graduates, specifically in terms of their second language skills, international exposure, and professional knowledge. Of course, the beginning salary packages are subsequently expected to be higher than those for domestic graduates in general. However, unlike 30 years ago, when overseas-educated graduates were treated like national treasures on their return home, today’s labour market in China has a far more mature attitude towards recruiting international graduates. Nevertheless, quality international education is still positively influencing individuals’ career and life in China, and consequently affecting China’s development,
as the number of returnees increases rapidly and they emerge as a significant group in China.

Returnees were embraced differentially by Chinese society in the different eras and stages of development, and a clear line can be drawn by the establishment of the new China in 1949.

**International Students before 1949**

While China’s international education can be traced back to the spring and autumn periods when Confucius (551-479 BC) travelled through several kingdoms with his students (Welch & Cai, 2011), actual international education in Western countries began in 1847, when Rong Hong traveled to America accompanied by two brothers, Huang Kuan and Huang Sheng (Rhoads, 2011; H. Wang, 2009).

As previously indicated, many missionary schools were established in China in the late Qing dynasty. One of the earliest was named the Morrison Education Society School, founded by Western traders and missionaries and named in memory of Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, who died in 1834 (Rhoads, 2011). Rong studied there in Macau and later, after the First Opium War, in the new British colony of Hong Kong. In 1847, he followed the headmaster of the school to the US with two other pupils. Later, Rong enrolled at Yale College, graduating in 1854 with a B.A. degree. Rong’s returned to China after graduating from Yale, and contributed to the later developed Qing’s Educational Mission.

In Rhoads’ work, it was noted that Rong joined a powerful official, Zeng Guofan, who was a prime mover in the self-strengthening effort as well as the commander-in-chief of the campaign to suppress the Taiping Rebellion (Rhoads 2011, p. 9). Rhoads also shows that the Memorial, submitted to the emperor on August 18 1871 by Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, was largely based on Rong’s original idea. The joint
memorial called for 120 young boys – 30 a year for four years – to be sent to the US, where they were to study for fifteen years before returning to China – even though it came to an end in the summer of 1881, when the Guangxu Emperor issued an edict in response to the internal political struggle. Nevertheless, like other self-strengthening projects, the aim of the education mission was to learn from Western countries and master their technical skills, which is still the major purpose behind most of today’s international education.

Nonetheless, the above was on account of the so-called Burlingame Treaty that the Qing has signed with the US in 1868, that stated that ‘Citizens of the United States shall enjoy all the privileges of the public educational institutions under the control of the government of China, and reciprocally, Chinese subjects shall enjoy all the privileges of the public educational institutions under the control of the government of the United States, which are enjoyed in the respective countries by the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation …’ (Rhoad 2011, p. 10).

At the same time, there were other, smaller-scale study abroad programs to Europe organized by the Qing government’s reforming schools. For example, in 1875, the Fuzhou Navy Yard School sent three students to France and two to England, followed by another 14 to France and 12 to England in 1877. Similarly, in 1876, Governor-General Li Hongzhang in Tianjin sent a group of seven officers to Germany to study with the German army (Rhoads, 2011).

Chinese society throughout the late Qing and the Republican period was indeed in chaos. It is not difficult to imagine that the returning students, who had gone abroad at teenagers and returned as mature men, would encounter all kinds of problems. Despite finding ways to navigate through the fragile society and fierce political struggles, for some, even reading and writing Chinese was incredibly difficult (Rhoads, 2011). Nevertheless, some still achieved great success and contributed tremendously to the national development. For example, Zhan Tianyou, one of the first 30 boys who went
to the US in 1872, was the chief engineer responsible for the construction of the Imperial Peking-Kalgan Railway, the first railway built in China without foreign assistance.

In the Republican era, against the background of Japanese aggression and the competition for power between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, an increasing number of Chinese students went abroad to study advanced science knowledge and skills. Unlike during the late Qing period, the destinations for international education were not limited to America and Western Europe, and subsequently came to embrace Japan and Russia. Regardless of their political standing, famous figures who had influenced China’s development, like Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, all had had an international education (Crozier, 2010; Schiffrin, 2010; H. Wang, 2009). Among the few females who could access international education at that time, the Song sisters, Song Qingling – wife of Sun Yat-sen – and Song Meiling – wife of Chiang Kai-shek – are indeed extraordinary women who had an impact on China’s development (for a more detailed discussion on education and Chinese women, see Chapter Two).

International Students after 1949

After the 1949 revolution, the experience of overseas education can usefully be divided into three different waves that initially went to the former USSR, and to a lesser extent its eastern European satellites, in the initial decades of China’s establishment in 1949 (albeit with some interruptions); to the US Europe and Japan after the opening-up in 1978; and to a wide range of countries from around 2000 (Y. Chen, 2009; Shan, 2009; X. Wang, 2009). Chinese students who went overseas in these respective periods had distinct characteristics. They faced different environments in China upon their return, and subsequently had different experiences.
Between 1949 and 1966, the new China sent about 10,000 students abroad for education, and the former USSR was the major destination. China’s former President Jiang Zemin was an international student in Russia (Pan, Yang, & Chang, 2009). Since this marked the beginning of the new China, these people were selected by the central government to study abroad for the development of China’s socialism. The first group of international students in the new China were 35 people who were sent to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria on September 6 1950, to study language, history, industrial development and coal mining (Pan et al., 2009). Around 1960, as the new China started to established international relationships, students went abroad mainly to study foreign languages, and the number of study destinations increased to include Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, the UK, France, Germany, Spain, etc.

Education was paralysed during the catastrophic Cultural Revolution period that started in 1966, including international education. However, in 1970, the State Council resumed sending people abroad for education, although the number was very small – a total of about 2,000 students studied overseas between 1970 and 1978 (Miao, 2009).

The opening-up in 1978 sparked the second big wave of international education in China, and Deng Xiaoping wisely encouraged international communication, bridging the gap with western countries through international education (C. Chen, 2009; X. Yang & Feng, 2009). Up to July 1985, around 30,000 people had gone overseas to study under government sponsorship, and the number reached almost 60,000 by 1990. At the same time, self-sponsored students were also allowed to study abroad, and about 130,000 self-supported students went abroad between 1986 and 1990 (Pan et al., 2009).

Most of the returnees from the second wave of international education received government sponsorship. Many had stable jobs and the potential to grow in their professional field in China before they went overseas to study. This group of
international students was carefully selected for the purpose of assisting China's development. Having been isolated from the outside world for so many years, China was keen to learn advanced technologies from Western nations. Sending groups of young people abroad to study was an efficient, major channel for achieving this objective. Since the rationale of the initial group of international students was to bring international advanced knowledge to their own fields in the relatively undeveloped China of the time, it is unsurprising that most of them took up leading positions upon their return home.

Many of those with international education experience are very successful, and are spread across a wide range of fields, which is why they receive considerable attention in Chinese society. At the 16th National People’s Congress of CPC, held in 2003, about 6% of the alternate of the Central Committee members had international education experience. At the 17th Congress, held in 2007, this proportion had increased to around 10% (Xinhua News Agency, 2007, October 21). In contrast, at the 11th Congress, held in 1977 – a year before the opening up – only a few members, like Qian Xuesen, had international education experience amongst the 201 Central Committee members and 132 alternate members (Database for National People's Congress of CPC, 1977). This marks a big change in China’s political environment, as it not only signals positive international tolerance and the embracing of international experience, but also sets an example for the other professional fields across China. The rapid increase in the number of returnees has become a phenomenon in modern China, and their contribution to and influence in society are being increasingly recognized (Zweig, 2002).

The sample university selected for this research, the University of Sydney, famously accepted nine scholars in 1979 for the Master’s program, mostly young male

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2 Under the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau, led by the President, the members and alternate members of the Central Committee of CPC constitute one of the most senior government groups. They are elected at each five-year national congress of the CPC.
academics from Chinese universities. After spending two years studying in Australia, they returned home to take up senior administrative or academic positions at different universities in China. Some of them became university presidents, while others became national leading academics in their respective fields (Holenbergh, 2004). More explicitly, the initial group of international students was chosen to study at overseas universities in the expectation that they would take on official government duties upon their return. Because the higher education system in China underwent dramatic changes, along a tortuous and circuitous path of development between 1949 and 1978 – including the disastrous Cultural Revolution when China again turned inwards – people had to go abroad in order to learn advanced knowledge and skills in order to contribute to domestic development. One of the first nine Chinese people to study in Australia commented, during an interview:

"We went abroad with the mission of learning and deploying professional knowledge to China's development...we just followed the arrangement made by the government, and tried our best to do what we could" (B10Dù).

In other words, the high expectations of those international students after returning was determined by the government, as early as when they were selected to study abroad.

As noted briefly above, the barrier to self-funded students was gradually removed in the 1980s. The State Council issued a policy on Study Aboard Regulations in December 1986 through the then National Education Bureau, which became the first openly published government policy document about international education (State Council, 1986). It outlined that sending students abroad for education was a fundamental part of the national policy of opening-up, and was to be continued for a long time. In 1992, with the theme of 'zhichi liuxue, guli huiguo, laiqu ziyou – Support study abroad, encourage return, and free entry and exit to China', the government
further freed up the policies and regulations on international education. Together with the thriving economy and diverse reforms of the economic and education system in the 1980s and 90s, many young people chose to self-fund their studies abroad. Unlike the first wave of international students, who were chosen and sponsored by the government, the second wave, both government sponsored and self-funded, went abroad to study a variety of professional fields and disciplines. The major similarities between both waves are that most of them had a few years’ work experience, China’s development was not yet matured, and lacked many internationally experienced professionals, and that each era had clear objectives for their international education.

This also differentiates them from the third wave of international students, most of whom were single children from wealthier families, who were fully self-supported, with little work experience, who went overseas at a far younger age to study a wide range of courses and level of programs, from high school to Ph. D. At the same time, China was changing rapidly into a modern society with a free labour market, an increasing number of international companies and professionals, as well as higher quality indigenous talents due to its own improved higher education system – both public and private universities (Hayhoe & Lin, 2008).

However, a small number of the third wave of international students saw an international education qualification merely as a tool to obtain a good job and higher social status. Therefore, rather than spending several years abroad, learning advanced knowledge at quality higher education institutions, many of them undertook one-year education programs (lasting, strictly speaking, ten months) at third-tier colleges abroad, returning with an international education certificate that they thought would help them to find a good job and a high salary (H. Zhang & Zhou, 2009). The changed domestic reality proved them wrong. From 2000, the number of returnees increased rapidly, and a significant number could not find a job on their return to China, largely because many did not have the expected international skills, work experience and knowledge. In reality, they had changed little, apart from obtaining an international
education certificate. Gradually, Chinese employers came to doubt the returnees’ professional capabilities and the quality of international education because, in their experience, returnees should be excellent elites and all international education should provide world-class knowledge and skills.

This gave rise to the phenomenon known in China as *Hai Dai* (seaweed). ‘Seaweed’ is a metaphor used to describe international graduates who cannot find a job on their return to China, and so are simply stranded, flopping on the seashore. It was suggested that more than 35% of returnees faced problems finding employment, while around 40% of returnees felt that their current employment direction did not match their ideal professional plan (X. Zhu, 2005). Chinese academics summarised the following five issues that have caused the phenomenon of ‘seaweed’ (X. Zhu, 2005): [1] International graduates’ quality varies. Some Chinese students who cannot get into leading universities in China would rather choose lower-quality universities overseas. On the one hand, the limited higher education resources in China, that cannot cater for the spiralling demand, is forcing many young students to consider overseas higher education institutions; on the other hand, many international education institutions have lowered their entrance requirements to recruit high-fee-paying international students. Therefore, some Chinese students choose low-quality colleges overseas over non-first-tier universities in China, in the belief that international education is superior. [2] Many young returnees do not have work experience, while the quality of indigenous graduates is increasing rapidly. As the quality of China’s higher education rises, especially among the top-tier institutions (R. Yang, 2002; R. Yang & Welch, 2011), indigenous graduates from such universities have become popular in the labour market and, comparatively, appear to have greater loyalty than returnees. [3] The returnees often have unrealistic expectations. An international education background does not necessarily equate a high-paid job. Returnees should not expect the company that hires them to pay them a salary that will enable them to pay off their international education costs. [4] There is a mismatch between some international education models and the Chinese industry structure. Some returnees’ professional fields have large
discrepancies with regard to the available positions in China, which means that they cannot find matching employment. [5] Many returnees only focus on finding a job in the first-tier cities, like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, which makes the already crowded labour market in those cities even more competitive, thereby reducing the employment or promotional opportunities. Consequently, the labour market for the second wave of returnees has gradually shifted from a seller’s to a buyer’s market, with employers having far more power and choice in terms of finding overseas-educated workers.

After experiencing an extreme shortage of overseas-educated professionals, followed by an overwhelming increase in their number, both China’s labour market and the returnees are forming a relatively mature attitude towards each other (Zweig & Han, 2008). The enormous number of returnees, particularly in first-tier cities, means that employers look not only at job applicants’ international education background, but also many other factors, like their professional field, skills, work experience, etc. Increasingly, the third wave of returnees to China today has a rather realistic expectation about the type of work they can do and the benefits package that they can expect.

Under the economy and labour market reforms, as well as seeing different kinds of returnees, employers in China have gradually learnt that international graduates’ productivity and capability are linked to the different types and levels of international education. Hence, international education qualifications send a range of signals in the job market, according to the employers’ experience of the market (Y. Cai, 2011; Spence, 1973). To some extent, this is reflected in the signalling model, discussed in Chapter Three. It was argued that, on the basis of their previous experience of the labour market, that employers conditionally assess the probability of potential employees’ productive capacity, given the various combinations of signals (education) and indices (gender and age). When confronted with an individual applicant with certain observable attributes, the employer's subjective assessment of the ideal worker
with whom s/he is confronted is defined by these conditional probability distributions over productivity, given the new data (Spence, 1973). However, the employers’ beliefs, including their perceptions and expectations as well as the image that the individual presents, are also important factors which can govern their decisions about whether or not to hire job applicants (Bailly, 2008; Y. Cai, 2011). For professional and technical professionals, however, signals and indices like education, gender and age are far easier and more efficient in assisting employers to identify or predict applicants’ productivity. Furthermore, on the thousands of resumes, signals such as an elite international education qualification from an institution such as Harvard or Oxford often produce greater interview possibilities for applicants. These create valuable opportunities for both the applicants and potential employers to know more about each other, because clearly the employers do not have the time and effort to invest in interviewing every job applicant. In general, the scale of recruiting returnees has increased, and employers from different fields have gained more experience in terms of working with international graduates. Therefore, an international education no longer gives a simple signal but it rather one aspect of a potential employee. Nonetheless, a more sophisticated signalling model continues to have implications in China’s labour market.

Comparisons with Domestic Graduates

Increasing complexity is also evident in comparisons of domestic and international graduates. An increasing number of university graduates focus on self-development through career planning, assuming that they are responsible for their own choices. Both indigenous- and overseas-educated graduates are encouraged to view employment as a means of self-development (Hoffman, 2006). Understanding the differences between them, and the factors affecting their performance, are fundamental elements of this research. In the following section, selected employment issues for both international and domestic graduates in general, including the length of time it
takes them to find a job after graduation, their annual salary, and their employing city, are analyzed. Tsinghua University, a leading university in China (R. Yang & Welch, 2011), was selected as an example to compare the influential factors on career development with the sample university of this research, the University of Sydney.

As indicated in previous chapters, one of the effects of ending the practice of guaranteed employment in China, the 'iron rice bowl' (L. Chen & Hou, 2008), is that indigenous Chinese university graduates now face serious pressure when seeking employment. Before the 1980s, Chinese university graduates were assigned jobs upon graduation by the government in a top-down process, which determined where they were located and what work they did. With the economic transition, the government gradually reduced its control over graduates, pushing them to respond more to the needs of the rapidly changing labour market by finding a job by themselves (Hessler, 2001, 2006). While it has become difficult for some students to find a job upon graduating, especially those from local or overspecialised colleges, that are remnants from the centrally planned economy, the rapid expansion of the higher education system in 1998 places today's graduates in an extremely difficult situation with regard to finding a job (Min, 2004). Despite the robust economic growth of around ten per cent per annum since 1990 (Education Instituion of Beijing University, 2009), the production of graduates has outstripped this growth (World Bank, 2012), so the economy continues to fail to generate sufficient desirable professional jobs to absorb the influx of more than 3 million university graduates each year.

By contrast, less-educated migrant workers from rural locations are still in high demand as they can be hired on a far lower salary by factories making goods for worldwide export (BBC News, 2010, May 28; Chang, 2008; Shenzhen Post, 2010, May 27), a major component that drives China's rising economy. Although not direct competitors to the highly-skilled returnees in the labour market, and these two groups cannot be compared in the same occupational field, the less-educated migrant workers still occupy a big share of the labour market, since manufacturing is the biggest
industry sector in China (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2010). With the higher domestic and international pressure to increase wages and improve working conditions, particularly after the numerous worker suicides at Foxconn and similar episodes (Chang, 2008; Xinhua News Agency, 2010), the average starting salary for migrant labour grew by nearly 80 per cent between 2003 and 2009. As a result of the graduate glut, the starting salary for university graduates, by contrast, remained constant, indicating that their value has plunged significantly, especially when inflation is taken into account (New York Times, 2010, December 12).

As noted briefly in the Introduction Chapter, between 2004 and 2008, the annual total number of domestic university graduates, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students, rose each year, from 2.558 million, to 3.254 million, 4.076 million, 4.875 million and finally 5.594 million, respectively. The average annual increase over the period was 21.6%. As the table below indicates, during the same period, the employment rates for their first job were 77.5%, 72.8%, 78.8%, 78.1%, and 81.3% (Education Institution of Beijing University, 2009). It is worth noting that the definition of domestic graduates’ employment was the percentage of respondents who confirmed their danwei (work unit) at the time of graduating (or left their HEI), and employment also included further study. Hence, the employment rate remained relatively steady, even reflecting a slight increase. While the employment rate may have risen, however, the absolute number of graduate unemployed has also risen, since the overall number of graduates has continued to increase markedly. Taking 2008 as an example, although the employment rate seemingly increased by a few per cent compared to previous years, the total number of unemployed graduates, more than one million (Education Institution of Beijing University, 2009), was far higher than before.

Table 6.1 Overview of indigenous university graduates' employment status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of graduates (million)</td>
<td>2.558</td>
<td>3.254</td>
<td>4.076</td>
<td>4.875</td>
<td>5.594</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The experience differs, however. Amongst all of the domestic university graduates, especially those from the leading universities, enjoy certain advantages. According to research on undergraduate employment status in 2009, the employment rate for 211 university graduates was 91.2%, 87.4% for non-211 universities, and 82.8% for private higher education institutions (B. Wang, 2010). The type of graduating university affects not only the graduates’ employability but also their income, as indicated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of higher education institution</th>
<th>Employment rate</th>
<th>Annual salary (RMB)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Universities</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>28,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘985’ Universities</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>35,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘211’ Universities</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td>33,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>22,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>22,944</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chinese College Graduates’ Employment Annual Report, 2010

One measure of the growth of graduate unemployment has been the attention paid to it, both in the popular press and by researchers. A Chinese sociologist recently coined the term, ‘Yi Zu’ (Ant tribe) to describe young, educated people, mostly fresh-minted graduates, living in over-crowded conditions away from the flourishing city centres, and working for minimum wages that barely sustain their lifestyle (Lian, 2009; New York Times, 2010, December 12). Mainly in response to the glut of graduates, the desire to relocate to China’s major cities, and the difficulties that graduates of the second- or third-tier HEIs experience, ‘Ant tribes’ have proliferated in the major cities, largely in parallel with a city’s GDP growth or development level. Their average monthly income is about RMB 2,000, and their average monthly costs are around RMB 1,600 (Lian, 2009). These university or college educated graduates are mostly
from villages or small towns, and the only path to change their life and social status, as well as the best way to gain the benefits of living in one of China’s major cities, is to be outstanding in terms of their education. The reality, however, is often very different – leading to many broken dreams, because the world has now changed dramatically. Globalisation, the mass expansion of Chinese higher education, and higher education internationalisation has changed everything related to higher education significantly in China. ‘Ant tribes’, mostly graduates of the second or third-tier Chinese higher education institutions, are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with outstanding graduates from elite universities, both in China and overseas. As argued in the previous chapter, the labour market in today’s China, influenced by neo-liberal ideology, is so dynamic and crowded that it is attracting competitive workers from everywhere. Skilled, talented people who can also cater for the needs of society are able to find ways to succeed or assume higher positions in the labour force chain, while others must make major sacrifices simply in order to survive in the place where they wish to live.

It is already the case that many fresh graduates from the capital’s colleges are considering career opportunities in the smaller emerging cities, like Qingdao and Taiyuan. At a recruitment fair held at a leading university in Beijing, the University Deputy Party Secretary stated that about 35% of the 3,300 graduating students are expected to land a job in the so-called second- or third-tier cities, up from 20 percent in previous years (China Daily, 2011, March 14). Indigenous graduates realize that going to the smaller cities presents them with more opportunities for career development, particularly since more multinational firms are now moving to the second-tier cities in order to save costs, and many large companies in other provinces value graduates who have been educated in cities like Beijing.

As an example, the table below outlines annual rises in average annual income, both nationwide and in Beijing. The data listed below help to sketch a background picture
of people's life in China. The information about the GDP per capita shown here also helps us to obtain a basic knowledge about people's standard of living in China.

Table 6.3  GDP Per Capita, and Average Income, Nationwide and Beijing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP per capita (RMB/Person)</th>
<th>Average income of city residents (RMB)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7,858</td>
<td>24,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>8,622</td>
<td>26,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9,398</td>
<td>30,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10,542</td>
<td>34,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>12,336</td>
<td>40,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>14,185</td>
<td>45,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>52,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>20,169</td>
<td>61,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>23,708</td>
<td>66,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>25,575</td>
<td>70,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average rise 2000-9</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The national GDP (2005-2008) was amended according to the second economic census.
Source: People's Republic of China Yearbook 2010, p.117 (% increase added by author)

Comparatively, quality international graduates enjoy a much better status. Data from this research reveal that over 90% of overseas-educated young returnees are in full-time work, and that a substantial number found employment before or soon after their return. The majority of returnees work in China's first-tier cities, like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and the rest are mainly spread across the provincial capital cities or special economic regions, like the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta areas. In addition, nearly half earn RMB 36,000 to 120,000 per year, while a similar ratio revealed annual incomes of between RMB 120,000 and 960,000. Slightly over half of the graduates felt that their expectations about their job and salary were
realistic. Most of these people had realized that their limited work experience may be a problem when seeking a good job, so they lowered their expectations beforehand and put themselves on the same starting line as the local graduates, eventually finding reasonably good employment very quickly. This seemed more commonly the case among female returnees.

The results of this research reveal that internationally educated graduates' employment rate exceeds that of ordinary local graduates, and is similar to those from the top universities, like the ‘211’ and ‘985’ universities. However, with 47.4% of the returnees earning between RMB 36,000 and 120,000, and another 36.5% earning between RMB 120,000 and 360,000, the annual salary of highly-skilled returnees is much higher than that of the local graduates.

Relevance of Human Capital Theory

This is supported by the assumptions of human capital theory, which argue that individuals increase their productivity through investment in enhancing their personal skills, knowledge, information, and health, and thus consequently contribute to the economic growth (Becker, 1975; Lauder et al., 2006). Education, a typical form of investment in human capital, consists of an intensive process of institutionalised teaching and learning before entering the workforce, and aims to increase one’s productivity. At the cost of direct expenditure like time, effort and money, and indirect expenditure like foregone earnings, Chinese students undertake postgraduate education overseas in order to obtain international professional knowledge, skills and experience, and in turn most of them are rewarded with a good employment rate and relatively high payment. As Becker (1975, p. 245) pointed out, human capital theory has a wide variety of important applications, and helps to explain such diverse phenomena as interpersonal and inter-area differences in earnings. Some people earn more than others simply because they invest more in themselves. International education at well-known world universities certainly requires a much higher
investment compared to attending a domestic university in China, but at the same time the observed economic return is often higher. Further, the conventional practice of adding the returns to and subtracting the costs from the earnings serves to steepen the age-earnings profiles and increase their concavity as the investment in human capital increases.

*On-the-job training* and *other information* are two other types of human capital investment reflected in this research. Similar to schooling, on-the-job training indicates that individuals are learning new skills and perfecting old ones while on the job. Some of the individuals in this study undertook an international postgraduate program while they were also full-time employees. The result suggests that they gain new professional knowledge and skills though learning, and obtain a positive return afterwards, like promotion in their respective company or organization. A female graduate interviewee suggested that she did her Master’s program while a full-time staff member of a company, learned advanced international skills through the program, and obtained a promotion as she deployed that new knowledge. She indicated that she had to sacrifice a lot of personal time in order to complete her course on time, but that her new knowledge was really helpful in her work, which was a major factor contributing to her promotion. Schooling and on-the-job training not only enhance individuals’ professional knowledge and skills, but also influence the ways of obtaining general/other knowledge, which is a critical factor affecting one’s employment and life. Many of the participants in this study suggested that international higher education programs also enhance their research and learning ability, which allows them to access information at a much wider, broader level.

Consequently, highly-skilled returnees’ employment chances are significantly better than those of general university graduates and, from this perspective, human capital theory may be a major model for explaining this, particularly in terms of schooling, on-the-job training and other information. However, when compared with the employment situation of highly-skilled, indigenous graduates from elite local
universities, cultural capital theory can better address these issues, as will be discussed in the next section.

**Comparison with their Local Counterparts**

In order to make a comparison between the study group of this research and its counterpart in China clearer, some available information from Tsinghua University was reviewed. According to research on the employment status of Tsinghua’s postgraduates, between 2004 and 2006, an average of 95% of graduates either found employment or chose further study after graduation, while more than 80% of them gained employment in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, including an average of 65% who were employed in Beijing. The top three major professional fields for Tsinghua graduates are education and research institutions, IT and the telecommunications industry, and government departments. Graduates working in the banking, insurance and finance industry constituted 6.4%, as indicated in tables 6.4 and 6.5 (Yuan & Yang, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Further study (both overseas and at home)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Year 2004</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
<th>Year 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 Employment status of Tsinghua graduates

Table 6.5 Employing city

Very similar to Sydney graduates, Tsinghua graduates have a very high employment rate after graduation as well, and a significant number of them work in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Their educational background provides a solid foundation for the creation of strong skills and a high capacity for work. The respective danwei (work units) often have high expectations of the graduates’ professional knowledge and practical performance at work (Yuan & Yang, 2010).

Tsinghua graduates’ top three attributes that most satisfied employers were: professional knowledge, foreign language skills, and computing skills. At the same time, the employers also suggested that the following three areas should be improved by Tsinghua University graduates: communication skills, organizational ability, and job loyalty (Yuan & Yang, 2010). This finding accords with Yang and Welch’s (R. Yang & Welch, 2011, p. 9) point that Tsinghua’s students were far less active in class than their overseas peers. For example, 23% of Tsinghua undergraduates reported that they had not asked a single question or participated in class discussions, while 34.6% had never given a class presentation. In terms of seeking employment, their major disadvantages were their limited work experience, unclear employment position, high expectations, and undeveloped communication skills. In Yuan and Yang’s study, it was also pointed out that, from the perspective of the Tsinghua graduates, they felt that their institution and studies benefited them in the following ways: improved research ability, broadened professional knowledge, increased access to opportunities in society and enhanced social networks through channels like participating in research projects, developing dissertations, attending social activities, and following a professional curriculum.
In contrast, the graduates of Sydney University felt that the key benefits arising from their postgraduate programs were international exposure, experience and social contacts, followed by English language skills and high quality education, including research ability and professional knowledge. In terms of seeking employment, both the Sydney and Tsinghua graduates had limited work experience, and high expectations of their position and income; although communication skills were not listed as a problem for Sydney graduates. As pointed out previously, employers today have high expectations of highly-skilled returnees, particularly those from well-known international universities. A set of comprehensive requirements is often applied when reviewing overseas graduates, that includes advanced professional knowledge, good teamwork ability, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and practical working methods. A central aspect that needs to be improved and requires attention from overseas graduates is their in-depth understanding of the changing environment in China, not only the changing infrastructure, but also the changing and unchanging culture of China as it integrates quickly into the world economy (Ding, 2011).

Obviously, highly-skilled graduates from both Tsinghua University and Sydney University share distinct similarities and differences regarding employment issues. The major differences include the local graduates’ lack of international exposure, and overseas graduates’ lack of in-depth understanding about the changing Chinese culture. Almost all of the interviewed employers in this research indicated that there were no big differences between post-graduate students from Tsinghua and Sydney in terms of their advanced knowledge, professional knowledge, strong skills, etc., although the latter group has a more solid understanding of western culture and international practice, as well as the international network, which is something that is needed by today’s China.

Welch (2007, p. 157) indicated that culture is not static, but changes according to socio-historical circumstances. The process of education is a powerful channel for imposing and inculcating selected meanings to the dominant groups, consequently
reproducing cultural awareness (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Undertaking a solid post-graduate higher education program for several years either in China or overseas indeed meets the purpose of transmitting a certain ideology to young adults. In particular, the more traditional, prestigious universities, like Sydney and Tsinghua, bestow greater benefits on their students, due to their long history and elite characteristics.

Academic qualifications are a form of cultural capital, and certificates function as proof of cultural competence, conferring on the holder a conventional, legally-guaranteed value with respect to culture (Bourdieu, 1986). A qualification from an elite international or domestic university counts for more than one from one of their less famous counterparts, including upon return. Therefore, a university certificate itself not only signifies a reward for several years of study, but also confirms an individual’s mastery and understanding of knowledge and culture. More explicitly, Chinese graduates’ education certificate from the University of Sydney indicates not only their knowledge of the respective professional area, but also their familiarity with Australian culture and western experience. However, unlike other objectifications of cultural capital that merely appear as objectified states, academic qualifications are one way of neutralizing some of the properties that derive from being embodied, and have the same biological limits as its bearer. On the other hand, the influence they may pass on to their offspring is profound and enduring. In other words, while one’s education certificate cannot be passed on to the next generation, the spirit and disposition of a well-educated parent can often exert a strong influence on one’s children.

Due to the different academic programs and experiences, and the fact that education is delivered in different environments with different styles, academic qualifications from both Sydney and Tsinghua represent unique profiles. At the same time, the strengthened networks and relationships that were gained during the period of international education also contribute to the returnees’ intangible resources. The
international contacts, relationships and networks overseas mean that many returnees take up senior and important positions in a range of professional fields in China and, in addition, the growing size of the returnees’ network of international connections eventually becomes their unique social capital, an instantiated norm that promotes cooperation and mutual benefit (Fukuyama, 2000). As discussed in Chapters Three and Five, efficient social capital plays an economic role in the labour market, as it can contain elements of influence, social credentials and reinforcement (John Knight & Yueh, 2002; Lin, 2001), and benefits the returnees’ career development, even though they may have lost some local contacts during their absence from China.

The argument here is that cultural and social capital each play important roles in the returnees’ employment experience. As the quality of the Chinese higher education system has increased quickly (Hayhoe & Lin, 2008; R. Yang, 2002), particularly at the elite universities like Tsinghua (R. Yang & Welch, 2011; Yuan, 2009), graduates from the top local education institutions are acquiring strong human capital that is no less than that of the international graduates. Therefore, the cultural and social capital accumulated from international education became prominent characteristics when compared with their competitive, highly-skilled local counterparts in China’s modern labour market. Culture is a major component of education, and the understanding of western culture through a solid international education constitutes a key advantage for the Hai Gui (Hao and Welch 2012). Similar to social capital, it takes more than time and effort to build a solid relationship. Both cultural and social capital gradually attach to highly-skilled returnees as they pursue advanced international knowledge, forming an irreplaceable intangible asset for them, just like human capital. All of these factors play an important role in returnees’ career development, and are strong aspects when compared with competitive local graduates in the workplace.
Conclusion

Through the different development stages of China, especially since the reform and opening up of the new China, returnees have changed from being a small elite group selected by the government to study at selected top universities into a large, diverse dynamic group that includes anyone with sufficient means to study abroad. Paralleling this trend and the reforms in China, the returnees’ employment relationship with the labour market has changed as well, and the signalling model plays a key role. Today’s highly-skilled returnees have a better employment status than general indigenous university graduates, notably in terms of their employment rate, employing city and annual income. Human capital theory partly explains this situation, as it suggests that the economic success of individuals depends on how extensively and effectively they invest in themselves (Becker, 2002). By extension, it may well be that investment in international education constitutes an advantage over domestic investment. Rather than joining the workforce immediately after completing an undergraduate program, groups of Chinese students undertake postgraduate programs abroad in order to obtain further education that will enhance their knowledge, information, ideas and skills. Despite the cost in terms of time, energy, foregone earnings and economic expenditure, most highly educated students exhibit higher productivity, which becomes a major factor contributing to their high income in the labour market.

Compared with their top local counterparts, who have completed postgraduate programs at the leading Chinese universities, international exposure and an understanding of western culture are distinct features that benefit returnees’ career development in the labour market. As discussed more explicitly in previous chapters, since China is integrating into the world economy quickly, and both the inward and
outward investment is increasing rapidly, attracting highly-skilled returnees is a major task for different levels of government and different industry sectors, including higher education. Therefore, even though their local counterparts are strong in terms of their professional knowledge and skills, highly-skilled returnees’ international exposure and understanding of western culture become their unique advantages. This can also be called their cultural capital, which many of them have acquired during their long period of learning and living overseas. Familiarity with western lifestyles, the ability to read and understand English at a relatively high level, and a capacity to fit into an international environment are indicators of returnees’ cultural competence. In addition, their academic qualifications confer a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, especially when these were obtained from an elite institution.

The process of studying abroad changes each international student’s life. While being exposed to, and embraced by, western society, Chinese international students learn advanced skills, experience western culture, and form international networks. Quality international education brings advanced knowledge and skills to enrich their human capital, gives a concrete understanding of western culture to enhance their cultural capital, and provides opportunities for strengthening their social capital.
CHAPTER SEVEN  RE-INTEGRATION ISSUES

Introduction

Following the discussion of the effects of international education, this chapter focuses on returnees’ re-integration issues, a significant feature, given that it was noted by more than half of the returning graduates. It will also analyse the differences between the two cohorts of the study, one of which has had several years in which to re-acclimatise. It aims to outline the more common problems perceived by most returning professionals, then give a detailed analysis of those issues before providing suggestions. Different kinds of knowledge transfer and ways of re-embracing the home culture will be discussed, followed by an analysis of international graduates’ role in China’s social stratification paradigm, and its future influence. The central focus of this chapter is to examine how these highly-skilled returnees manage their eastern and western minds and effectively combine them for successful career development.

Re-integration Issues

From 1978 to the end of 2011, 2.25 million Chinese international students went abroad for education, including 1.43 million who are currently studying overseas (Ministry of Education, 2012, February 11). In 2011 alone, the total number of Chinese international students abroad reached 339,700, and the number of returnees was 186,200 (Ministry of Education, 2012, February 11). As argued in previous chapters, Chinese international students acquire human, cultural and social capital during their international education period, and they bring these forms of capital back with them.
when they return home. In China’s competitive labour market, international education has become a strong signal that helps returnees to obtain better employment or promotion opportunities, but it is not a master key that solves all problems. Louie (2006) suggested that returnees face the same sort of dilemmas that displaced peoples face at all times and in all places. Having been exposed to western countries, with a completely different culture, young returnees may come home believing that they have ‘seen the world’, but it is important to acknowledge that China is changing rapidly, and is no longer the same home that they left a few years ago. In a traditionally hierarchical society, where the competition for business and professional success is now very keen, Louie pointed out that, depending on how fast things change at home, these returning turtles may be mocked for not being able to make the necessary adjustments to survive in China’s brave new world.

Advanced academic knowledge, an understanding of western culture and an international alumni network are no longer sufficient to satisfy employers in today’s Chinese society. Rather, they should be complemented with communication skills, and an in-depth understanding of the local culture and business environment. Returnees, who spend some years abroad learning western knowledge and culture, often face issues when re-integrating into their home society. This can be all the more significant in East Asian contexts (R. Goodman, 1990; R. Goodman et al., 2011; Namgung, 2009). The result of this research confirms that two thirds of young returnees experience re-integration issues, mainly related to ideational matters, like different thinking styles compared to their local colleagues, reverse culture shock, and being hesitant regarding social relationships.

Based on an individual’s family, cultural and social background, the intensity, level and range of social adjustment can vary significantly. Returnees from families with strong cultural and social assets may find life easier than others but, in fact, while they may have a higher standard of living compared to others, they also struggle to adapt to the life that their parents paved for them in the swiftly changing Chinese society. For
example, after becoming familiar with the western lifestyle overseas on their own, it is not easy to live under their strong parents’ wings again, particularly to follow every instruction of their parents that is allegedly beneficial for their future or life. The family’s strong social network may help one’s career, but such a strictly monitored life can be problematic. While the returnees are trying to create their own success, they may well be limited, if this interferes with their family’s political or social success. So, these apparently ‘well-situated’ returnees are forced to undergo a double adjustment process: to both their own family, and to society. It is fair to argue that a powerful family background offers certain benefits and advantages to the respective returnees, but these are accompanied, in direct proportion, by responsibilities, pressures and tensions. Comparatively, returnees from ordinary families, without powerful cultural or social assets, face a different kind of re-integration adjustment, which is more directly related to the changing society, rather than tensions within the family. This will be further discussed below as a general re-integration issue.

According to the interviews conducted with respective senior employers and government officials, the universal view was that young returnees should modestly re-learn about Chinese society and values, which consist of a variety of elements, from people’s behavior to a city’s infrastructure system. Today’s China, as a giant modern nation, has an entirely new range of identities and ethics, which emerged during different historical eras and is often based on cultural, linguistic, religious and regional factors (Tu, 1994). As argued previously, the third wave of returnees have distinct characteristics, one of which is that most of them were born in the late 1970s or 80s – a very special period in China. On the one hand, the ten-year Cultural Revolution had just ended, which brought the destruction of much of the most important traditional ideologies, artifacts and literature, as well as interrupting higher education. On the other hand, it also marked the beginning of the opening up era, a time when China once more began receiving new ideas and things from the outside world. The generation of the 1970s and 80s had limited access to the works of Confucius, Mencius, and so on, because the CCP spent its first three decades in power trying to
extirpate every root and branch of Confucianism, regarding it as a feudal, reactionary worldview that hindered progress (Bell, 2008, p. 10). Ultimately, these young people developed an incomplete, narrow understanding of China’s past and its philosophy. Therefore, despite having spent their first ten or twenty years in China under an evolving Chinese-style socialism, their worldview and young minds were not fixed and still emerging but, having travelled abroad, they may find that the developed western societies still have significant differences from their previous world in China, in terms of thinking style, values, etc.

However, over the last decade or so, the teaching of the Confucian classics has been restored in mainstream society, and university courses on Confucianism are among the most popular (Bell, 2008, p. 12). In addition, there is a growing interest in this heritage, and how it can be adapted to provide a basis for the new China’s values, and used in different ways at different times, to serve different ends.

Nonetheless, third wave returnees’ partial knowledge of traditional Chinese culture is a factor that influences their current career development. Merely practising their international knowledge learnt from overseas will not help them to succeed in China. Although China is integrating itself into the global world, that contains many western theories and rules, it still retains its own distinct cultural features after a civilization of more than 2,000 years. Rather than performing and acting like a foreigner in China, returnees should best utilize their advantage to serve as a bridge between China and the rest of the world by quickly re-embracing their home culture, thereby contributing to society’s development via efficient knowledge transfer. The two different cohorts present different data with regard to their re-acclimatisation to their home society, and the next section provides further discussion of this.
Knowledge transfer and re-embracing the home-culture

It has been argued that the transfer of learning has three forms: positive, zero and negative transfer, and two dimensions: near (or specific) and far (or general) transfer (Macaulay, 2000; Werner & DeSimone, 2009). Near transfer involves the ability to implement and demonstrate what has been learnt with little adjustment or modification. Far transfer implies tasks that appear very different from one’s knowledge and experience, or using what was originally learnt in creative ways. Positive transfer means effectively transferring what was learnt to the job, in addition to improved job performance and ensuring that the learnt knowledge and skills have been efficiently used. Zero transfer suggests no change in job performance, and that the obtained knowledge was not practised or had no consequence for or influence on the work. For example, a medical graduate may find his professional knowledge and what was learnt at university to be of little use if he works as a manager of a grocery store. Negative transfer indicates that the outcome of a job performance worsens when practising one’s learning, which is in contrast to positive transfer, which occurs when learning in one context improves performance in another. Negative transfer occurs when previous learning and experience interfere with one’s performance in a new context. For example, graduates from the field of automotive engineering may encounter difficulties when working as engineers in the field of aerospace, because many key concepts are significantly different, or a more individual style of working or behaving may be inappropriate upon their return to China.

Hofstede (2001) argued that different values and practices are associated with different cultures, and that there is no universal solution for all management and organizational problems, because both theories and organizations are bound by national culture. Despite the criticism of scholars like Cray and Mallory (1998), Holden (2002), and
Kwek (2003) of Hofstede’s model, cross-national differences in the functioning of organizations and of the people in them are generally accepted. However, the core argument here is that cultural differences and the local environment are important elements that should be taken into account during the knowledge transfer process. As Hofstede indicated, organizations can be recognized as a market, in which the market conditions dictate what will happen.

One of the examples that Hofstede uses is broadly illustrative of the kinds of tension existing between Eastern and Western knowledge and values, which returnees confront upon negotiating the Chinese job market. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), one of the few people to study abroad in the late Qing dynasty, received a Western education in Hawaii and Hong Kong, and became a political revolutionary. He wanted to replace the ailing government of the emperors over a feudal society with a modern Chinese state, and eventually became, for a short period, the first president of the Chinese Republic. Rather than strictly adopting the West’s *trias politica*, including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, Sun’s design for a Chinese form of government represented an integration of Western and traditional Chinese elements (Hofstede, 2001, p. 379). Unlike the West, all three were placed under the authority of the president, and he added two more branches, both derived from the Chinese tradition, bringing the total to five: the examination branch (determining access to the civil service) and the control branch (supposed to audit the government). This is still reflected, to a degree, in Taiwan’s current government.

While a detailed discussion of the relationship between Sun’s government structure and today’s China is beyond the scope of this research, the above example emphasises that, when recognizing the importance of transferring advanced western knowledge to improve one’s career development in China, it is important to take careful note of China’s local environment. Effectively using the needed skills and knowledge to meet China’s current demands, in a dynamic environment, is important. In other words, no matter what kind of knowledge transfer, or the transfer of which kind of advanced
knowledge, they must cater to China's needs and match China's style. In the early 1990s, Deng Xiaoping made the following comment during his famous South China Tour: 'A cat who can catch mice is a good cat, regardless of whether it is black or white' (Kanamori & Zhao, 2004). Deng crafted this comment with the aim of accelerating the economic reform and the opening up the market to the outside world. In relation to this study, it can be understood as implying that, regardless of the ways of deploying advanced knowledge or professional skills, talented returnees who can make a positive contribution to China's development are good cats.

Consequently, re-embracing the home-culture is an essential step for many returnees in order to become 'good cats', and this is a key area that requires extra attention. Due to the physical distance from the motherland, re-integrating into society without making others feel uncomfortable is not easy. The result of this study showed that returnees who have had several years in which to re-acclimatise seem to be doing better than more recent returnees. As pointed out in Chapter Five, around 45 per cent of the 2004 graduates indicated that they experienced no problems with re-integration, while the majority of the rest suggested that they have different thinking styles and mentalities from the locals. In contrast, a fifth of the 2009 graduates claimed to have no problem with re-integration, while the rest reported various issues, predominantly mentality issues like different thinking style, reverse culture shock and hesitancy when faced with complicated social relationships.

Effective communication with respect to the Chinese tradition seems a major issue for many young recent returnees. For example, they may have become used to using certain English words or terms to express their ideas, or combine both English and Chinese when speaking, but if they are with local colleagues who do not have strong English skills, such a mode of communication will appear very rude. Moreover, the Chinese communication style is quite a difficult task for young returning graduates. A 2009 Economics and Business graduate make the point that a lack of local work
experience is like an ‘Achilles’ heel’, no matter what kind of high-quality education you have gained overseas:

“To understand the art of communication is a core task. Sometimes I need to humble myself to be welcomed by my colleagues, as teamwork is important for my job”. (69BV)

Another male graduate expressed a similar point, providing an example to illustrate the Chinese communication style with his boss:

“One day, in the company’s meeting room, my boss asked me where the quarterly business report was that I should have given him three days ago. I gently said with a smile: ‘I think I gave it to you on Monday in your office’. Actually, I was certain that I had handed the document to him in his office. Then, he said that he did not see the report, and I had to say: ‘OK, let me double check my office’. Even though I remembered clearly placing the report in his hand, and seeing him put the document aside, I still needed to make it look like my fault. If I insisted I was right, which I was, it would embarrass my boss in public and cause him to ‘lose face’ – a Chinese phase meaning humiliation. Two days later, I returned to my boss’ office and told him that I could not find the document in my office. I asked if it might be somewhere under the other documents on his desk, since I remembered giving it to him. Eventually he found it. It delayed the subsequent meeting slightly, but it helped to maintain good guanxi between my boss and me, which assisted our effective cooperation for future business”. (ZBLX)

After more than two thousand years, Confucius’ theory still forms the skeleton of Chinese culture, although it has been put to different uses over time (Bell, 2008; Tu,
One of the enduring essential concepts is showing respect to seniors in terms of both age and social level, and such a phenomenon can still be observed in most Chinese firms, organizations, and particularly government departments. Below are some select phrases from one of Confucius’ most famous works, ‘Di Zi Gui’ (Confucius, 2004), which reflect the culture of the work environment in China.

“Huoyinshi huozuo zhangzhexian youzhehou”
(When either dining or walking, seniors go first, followed by young persons) p. 29

“Chengzunzhang wuhuming duizunzhang wuxianneng”
(Don’t say seniors’ names directly; don’t show off skills in front of seniors) p. 29

“Zhangzheli youwuzuo zhangzhezuo mingnaizuo”
(Young persons should not sit down if their seniors are still standing; only after the seniors sit down, and invite them to sit) p. 35

“Zunzhangqian shengyaodi dibuwen quefeiyi”
(Young persons should soften their voices in the presence of their seniors, but not speak too softly to hear) p. 35

It is not the purpose here to encourage international graduates to adopt Confucius’ theories wholesale, but to outline that they represent a major, ongoing Chinese tradition that should be respected. As pointed out earlier, two other major components contribute to today’s China’s society: one was developed during the Mao Zedong era, with its main characteristics of striving for equality and justice, and the other was forged during the thirty years of the reform era – with the market at the centre, including a lesser role for the state and a greater measure of freedom and responsibility for families and individuals (Leonard, 2008). Bearing in mind these diverse, dynamic
Chinese traditions, and effectively connecting them to their advanced international knowledge, international graduates are able to perform better in China. At a press conference held during the 2011 NPC & CPPCC period, Premier Wen Jiabao also reinforced the importance of Chinese culture and its relationship to others, as a basis for progress:

“Culture and tradition are the soul of a country. China must fully carry forward its traditions while, at the same time, learning from other civilizations in the world. Only in this way can we further develop our culture and make our country stronger”. (China Daily, 2011, March 15)

Social Stratification

The 1992 policy on ‘zhichi liuxue, guli huiguo, laiqu ziyou (Support study abroad, encourage return, and free entry and exit to China) can be seen as a double-edged sword for China. On the one hand, young returnees bring back advanced international knowledge that caters for the need to build a knowledge economy. On the other hand, the opening-up has only witnessed 35 years of reform in China. While it brought a huge number of rural people out of poverty and made small groups of people very rich, the absence of a strong middle class is an aspect that requires attention. Therefore, adequately utilizing international graduates’ strengths and professional skills could indeed further strengthen China’s flourishing development. A large number of returnees, who are mostly in their 30s, embody the energy that can enlarge, and impart innovation to the Chinese middle class, which subsequently contributes to the development of China.

The definition of the middle class in China is hotly contested amongst scholars and the media both within and outside China. Unlike developed countries like the U.S., that defines its middle class as families that aspire to home ownership, a car, a college
education for their children, health and retirement security and occasional family 
vacations (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010, January), China has not yet achieved 
a clear definition of its middle class (Chunling Li, 2009, May 8). In fact, issues of 
definition and measurement, and the size of the middle class, have been the subjects of 
considerable speculation. While some scholars refrain from discussing the emergence 
of a middle class in China for historical and socio-economic reasons (A. Chen, 2002; 
D. Goodman, 2008a; Tsai, 2005), others offer greater support for the emergence of 
this growing group. Based on measurements of occupation, income, education and 
consumption, Li’s research indicated that China’s middle class constituted 4-7% of its 
total population (Chunling Li, 2002, December) by 2002. More recently, Li Peilin 
estimated it to be around 33% (P. Li, 2007). In 2009, the World Bank suggested that 
around 480 million Chinese people (about a third) had entered the developing 
country’s middle class since 2002. The middle class in developing countries is defined 
as those who are not poor when judged by the median poverty line of developing 
countries, but still poor by US standards (Ravallion, 2009, January). However, 
Chinese scholars have estimated that a third of the Chinese could join the middle class 

Without delving into the debate on the middle class’s definition, the term in this paper 
is understood to indicate a group of people with stable higher incomes and 
professional or managerial occupations, who are capable of purchasing private houses 
and cars, and who can afford to pay for good education and holidays (Cucco, 2008; 
Chunling Li, 2009, May 25; Lu, 2010). Chinese students who access elite international 
higher education have necessarily undergone a more stringent selection process, 
precisely in terms of the criteria of English language, academic competence and 
financial background. For each of the above criteria, the leading Australian 
universities share a similar assessment standard, that is an IELTS score of seven or 
above for English language, a credit and above for a Bachelor program, and being able 
to afford an average of AUD 25,000 for one year’s tuition fee (Austrade, 2011, May).
As this group returns to China and joins the workforce, there is no doubt that they could be good middle class representatives, with a stable higher income, professional occupation, high quality education, a healthy lifestyle, etc. The results of this study, as discussed in Chapter Five, support this, revealing that, for example, the majority of the returnees earn more than their local counterparts, and far above the national average wage; and that most of them work in professional fields that provide annual-leave, social insurance and other kinds of benefits that secure a good life in society.

**The rise of China's professional middle class**

China's professional middle class is not new, as it was part and parcel of state socialism, even if it is growing in size and variety (D. Goodman, 2008b). According to the formulation of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), the current system is the 'primary stage of socialism', meaning that it is a transitional phase to a higher, superior form of socialism (Bell, 2008, p. 4). Some existing imbalances in the economic foundation, along with the legal and political superstructure, are due to the uneven development; for example, while almost all have benefited from China's development, some areas have already reached the world's top levels while others remain much further behind, thus widening the gap between rich and poor (A. Chen, 2002; Guthrie, 2006; Zhou & Qin, 2010). The Chinese government itself is making efforts to enlarge the middle class and close the gaps, seeing the benefits of a middle class consumerist China for its own political role. This remains, however, a current debate at the heart of the current political uncertainty in the run-up to the 18th National Congress of the CPC.

Leonard (2008) argued that the Chinese government has been increasingly influenced by two political groups who associate themselves with the ideas of the 'New Left' and the 'New Right'. After Deng Xiaoping opened China's door and encouraged a small number of people to get rich first, Jiang Zemin went further with the accelerated
development of the coastal regions, further rapid increases in GDP, and raising the extent of privatisation and private entrepreneurship. China’s outstanding achievement surprised the world by raising more than 300 million people out of absolute poverty, bringing 200 million farmers to work in industry, enabling 100 million to join the so-called middle class and creating a significant number of billionaires. As a key figure of the ‘New Right’, Zhang Weiying encourages further privatisation and free market ideologies, despite the huge cost in terms of environmental and equality issues.

While recognising economic success, the ‘New Left’, led by Cui Zhiyuan and Hu Angang, pays attention to social issues and environmental problems, like the fact that around 75 per cent of China’s lakes are polluted, and millions of migrant workers have with minimum pay, and lack rights or social protection in return for their great contribution to China’s industrialization and urbanization. The blueprints of a ‘Harmonious Society’, ‘putting people first’ and ‘Scientific Development’, announced by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao at the 11th Five-Year plan in 2006, then reemphasized in the 12th Five-Year plan in 2011, arguably indicate that the balance of power was subtly shifting towards the Left – in the sense of an acknowledgement that the increasing imbalances between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ are prominent problems, as well as the moves towards more, better health schemes, social insurance, etc. Nevertheless, the stepping-down of Bo Xilai and the associated issues related to Chongqing show that a major turn to the Left is unacceptable (New York Times, 2012, May 20; The Wall Street Journal, 2012, May 17).

Social stability and the growth of the middle class were listed among the most important issues on Premier Wen Jiabao’s next five years’ agenda, including urbanization, and bridging the gap between the urban and rural areas and between rich and poor (China Daily, 2011, March 15; State Council, 2010c). Expediting the transformation of the country’s economic growth model is a prime task of the 12th Five-Year plan (2011-2015), and ‘People’s livelihood’ is a key phrase mentioned at the annual sessions of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s
Political Consultative Conference National Committee (State Council, 2010c). The central government is paying close attention to the development imbalance between the country’s developed eastern regions and the less developed central and western areas, and also between ordinary people’s productivity and labour remuneration. The growth target is set at an average of 7% for the next five years, which marks a decline from the double-digit growth in almost every year during the past few decades since the reform and opening-up (China Daily, 2011, March 18), although how to balance this growth remains a significant issue.

Against the backdrop of the general development trend and the above priorities, the rise of professionals is a major issue. A large number of professionals are located in an interstitial position between the local levels of the state, the private business sector and the various hybrid organizations that participate with different functions in the implementation of local development policies (Cucco, 2008). In addition, they have modes of organization and places in the economic hierarchy that deliver markedly more autonomy, and could provide a mechanism for bridging the public-private divide. Rather than focusing on income issues, Cucco has identified the economic and institutional structure of the professionals, which are important factors shaping the emergence of the middle class.

The rapidly increasing number of returnees can serve as a strong stream of new blood that is capable of positively contributing to China’s future development and adequately leveraging these returnees’ strengths and skills will contribute to the growth of the middle class. The 2010-2011 World Investment Prospects survey released by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2009) suggested that China is likely to remain the largest FDI destination worldwide for the next two years from 2009, and is likely to emerge as the second largest country for outbound direct investment, after the US. Huo Jianguo, director of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce, also indicated that more foreign-funded companies will be tapping into
China's wave of industrial upgrading over the next few years, as the transformation has become the new driver of the national economy (China Daily, 2011, March 16; Ministry of Commerce, 2011, June; UNCTAD, 2010). In addition, the service sector investment is also significant; for example, banking, finance, insurance and education. On the one hand, the increased concentration of foreign-invested R&D activities is, in itself, a consequence of the growing middle-class consumer space, particularly since China is gradually coming to be perceived as a mature, receptive market for high-end products (Cucco, 2008). On the other hand, the rapidly rising number of highly-skilled returnees consolidates the development in China though bringing in international funds, and new ideas and technologies, and may often also squeeze out Chinese-made goods and services (Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Saxenian, 2006; Zweig & Han, 2008). The interaction between foreign and Chinese firms increases the use of meritocratic hiring and promotional practices, that involves paying high wages to attract well-educated, young talented workers, so professionals have become an important factor contributing to the growth of the middle class.

Conclusion

Most of today's international students were born after the 1980s, thus forming the generation that grew up after the commencement of the opening up. Unlike their parents’ generation, the gradual opening up of China's society and economic system gave them an opportunity to glimpse the world when they were children. This glimpse implies gaining an understanding of the outside world; however, the information they could possibly get from China was still under the government’s strict control and management. Lacking a solid base of learning rooted in the traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, these young students nonetheless go abroad to learn international knowledge and culture, mostly in western developed countries. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that some of them experience certain re-integration problems on their return. Recognizing those issues and effectively turning them into constructive
development will contribute to China’s modernization and international integration, something that requires effort from the returnees, employers and the Chinese government.

Some returnees struggle with the choice over whether to work in state, private or foreign enterprises, or to start their own business. They also fluctuate between wanting to fulfil their individual dreams, confronting the reality of possible unemployment, managing their family pressure and duties, and meeting their sense of social responsibility, such as supporting the nation. Hoffman (2006) argued that young Chinese professionals harbour neo-liberal ideas of self-development as well as late-socialist patriotism. One can sip a Starbucks latte and work for a foreign company, while also being Chinese and standing up for China in the world. The notion of patriotic professionalism that Hoffman developed allows us to see how ideas of autonomous self-development and patriotism are being incorporated into a single subject position. It was suggested that the emergence of patriotic professionalism is a reflection of the desire for talented workers in the transnational labour markets, the autonomization of subject hood in modern China, and the particularities of the neo-liberal governmental reforms in a late-socialist context. This appeared among the returnees in this research who were all keen to contribute to their society, and other studies on the Chinese diaspora make a similar point about patriotic professionalism (Welch & Zhang, 2007, 2008).

While spending several years gaining an international education abroad, students gradually become used to a more independent lifestyle that is often associated with Western values and practices. After returning to China – both a familiar place but quite different from their freshly acquired experiences overseas – a smooth re-integration is a challenging issue for most returnees. The difficulties may be particularly obvious for returnees who work in SOEs or government-affiliated organizations. For returnees, international education experience should be an advantage, and they should understand how to leverage this advantage to bring value to their company. In order to do so
effectively, gaining a deep understanding of the company is essential. They were not hired to change the entire company’s system to suit themselves, but rather to serve as new blood that will assist the company to move forwards. An interviewed employer suggested that:

“... returnees should be performing like a medicine or vitamin that is coated with sugar; that is, to help the body’s system to get better without tasting the bitterness”. (B6CHB)

Similarly, it is a good sign if returnees notice areas that can be improved in their work environment, because this means that they can contribute to the area, but it is extremely important that they use the means and methods appropriate to the Chinese context to provide suggestions, because they were not hired to sit around criticizing everything, especially from a Western standpoint. A dialogue between the two worlds, while difficult to achieve, has much to offer.
CHAPTER EIGHT  GENDER

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the current employment environment for well-educated young women in China. It reviews the relative progress of women's development in China, but also outlines how gender as a factor is still influencing women's career development. The long-lasting inequality problem between male and female workers lies at the heart of China's labour market, and affects the prospects for, and job-seeking experience of, returning overseas-educated female graduates in today's China. The chapter argues that equal work opportunities should be given to women with the same education, social and culture background as men. More importantly, women's professional knowledge, skills and capacities should be key features to consider in the professional arena.

Current Landscape

This section focuses on the employment situation of female international graduates in today's changing China. As argued in previous chapters, Chinese women have obtained unprecedented rights in many fields since the 20th century, particularly after the new China was established in 1949. From Mao's well-known phrase of 1968, that 'women hold up half the sky', to Deng's opening-up policy of 1978, until today's modernizing China, Chinese women's participation in the workplace has increased significantly compared to the past. In the globalisation process, that involves the impoverishment and disenfranchisement of many hundreds of millions of people, the expansion of the service sector increasingly draws on women's labour (Hisenstein, 2009, p. 18).
At the same time in China, the ‘One child’ policy, launched in the late 1970s, further empowered many females to both devote themselves to their family, while freeing up women to work. The policy also allowed many female children without siblings to receive the full attention of their parents, just like the other male children of the household but, at the same time, there is evidence that, in the context of the one child policy, increasing numbers of women are ‘choosing’ to have a boy and aborting female foetuses (CNN World, 2010, January 11; W. Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009). Among other factors, there is an increasing gender imbalance among the Chinese population. As of 2010, the male: female ratio was 51.27:48.73% — relative to a female baseline of 100, males numbered 105.20 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). This suggests that, while more people are gradually giving more attention and equal care to females, against a context including government policy restrictions, social promotion, civil development and so on, a preference for boys is still deep-rooted in society.

Of all of the Chinese international students in Australia, more than half are female (AEI, 2007), and most of them are only children. Beyond biological differences, young women who grew up as an only child at home do not see much difference between themselves and their male counterparts. The results of this research show that most highly-skilled, modern young women, who study overseas for several years, do not think that gender is a factor influencing their career development. Many believe that they are as competitive as their male counterparts, yet the fact exists that obvious differences were found with regard to the respective career status of male and female graduates.

A significant finding was that 90.7% of all returned graduates were in full-time paid employment, of which the percentage for females and males was similar, at 91.5% and 89.2%, respectively. The key difference, however, lay in the remaining 10% of graduates who are not in full-time paid employment. 8.5% of the female graduates
who were not in full-time paid employment were spread evenly across part-time paid employment, self-employment, unemployment, still seeking and in transition between jobs; while most of the 10.8% of male graduates were self-employed. Looking at the self-employed section alone, the number of male graduates was nearly double that of the females. Such a big difference here seems to imply that highly-skilled male graduates have a stronger entrepreneurial spirit, reflected by the fact that only 20% of the entrepreneurs in China are women (Xinhua News Agency, 2009, May 12). It may be another result of the biased social assumption that often leads people to assume that men are good at new venture creations, and subsequently influence the next generation, particularly male children (Kirkwood, 2007).

Chapter Two outlined the inequalities that women face at work, such as vertical and horizontal occupational segregation (Giddens, 2006, p. 756). They not only access fewer resources and opportunities, but are also limited in terms of high-end industries and power. Of the 20% of enterprises owned by female entrepreneurs, 95% are in the low-end manufacturing and services industries (Xinhua News Agency, 2009, May 12). There is no doubt that these professional women entrepreneurs are highly-skilled but, in the tough business market, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men according to the occupation business segmentation.

Persistent pay gaps are not new issues to well-educated, highly-skilled women professionals in both Western countries and China (Chinese Women's Research Network, 2012, April 5; Farley, 1990; Whitehouse & Frino, 2003). While women are making headway in professional and paraprofessional jobs, they are still the poor relatives when it comes to the high-paying sectors (Hall, 2012). As the following figures indicate, the majority of female graduates’ current positions, and modal annual income, were significantly lower than those of their male counterparts in the same age group and with the same education background. Differences were also evident in terms of their current employment status and satisfaction level with their current job.
Of all graduates with a job or in some form of employment, the number of female graduate employees (that is, at the lower end of the job spectrum) was far greater than that of the male graduates. At the top end, the number of male graduates holding the position of Director General or equivalent is clearly higher than that of female graduates. This difference between male and female graduates reflects the general difference in their annual income. The majority of female graduates' earned between RMB 36,000 and 120,000 annually, while the majority of male graduates earned between RMB 120,000 and 360,000. Of the graduates earning RMB 360,000 to 960,000, the percentage of male graduates was four times higher than that of female ones. Clearly, these differences between men and women with a similar high-level education background cannot be ascribed to chance, and reflect wider gender regimes in Chinese society.

Figure 8.1  Gender and position
Both human capital theory and the signalling model, discussed in previous chapters, can account for the above situation, but from slightly different perspectives. Under human capital theory, it was argued that women spend less time in the labour force than men in general, and therefore there is less incentive for them to invest in market skills (Becker, 1962). The assumption is that the labour force participation of married women will be relatively lower than that of men in middle age, since child rearing is time-intensive for them. From the market perspective, it was suggested that women’s total productivity is generally lower than that of men, since employers often believe that, even if female participation in the workforce is high when they are younger or older (Becker, 1962, p. 39; Y. Zhang, Hannum, & Wang, 2008), their home and family responsibilities make them less productive, and maternity benefits make female employees too expensive; hence it is more reasonable to invest in highly productive male workers (Becker, 1962, p. 39; Y. Zhang et al., 2008).

Such a paradigm is changing, as childcare and pre-schools are becoming more common, thus freeing up women to play a wider role in the workforce. In China, while childcare for children under three years old is less common, the extended family often means that grandparents or domestic workers may perform the same function.
Therefore, wealthier women or women with extended family support gradually face less pressure to devote considerable time to childcare, and so can pay more attention to their work (further details were provided in Chapter Two). In this kind of circumstance, Becker's human capital theory seems insufficient to explain differentials in women's human capital investment, relative to men with the same education.

For highly-skilled female returnees, most of whom are middle aged or of childbearing age, taking time out to have and rear a child may be seen by employers as reducing their productivity and expected economic return. From another point of view, it makes their investment in international education more expensive than that of male returnees. Moreover, China's current regulation on women's retirement age (as discussed in Chapter Two) further widens the gender differences in this context. For example, a female professional with an international PhD qualification, without any work experience, is often around 28-years-old by the time she completes her education. If she retires at 55, based on the current Chinese regulation on women's retirement, although she will be in a greatly-disadvantaged position for any senior promotion opportunities at age 45-50, her total career would span about 27 years. If another year or two are devoted to childrearing, then this female international PhD graduate's professional lifespan is only about 25 years. This is unfair to her at a personal level, as well as to the government, not only because they must pay her retirement pension five years earlier than men, but also because they lose an experienced, highly-skilled professional.

This issue was reported to the National People's Congress by a few people's representatives in 2011 (China Daily, 2011, March 24), but only as a sign of change on this front, as no follow-up actions were taken. The regulation on the official retirement age, which specifies age 60 for men, 50 for ordinary woman workers and 55 for senior woman officials, was issued in 1978. The Chinese scholar, Liu Minghui, suggested that women in the 1970s were less well educated, and many of them started work at an early age and had to endure a tough working life, so early retirement came as a relief.
to them, since the average life expectancy was about 60 years at that time (China Daily, 2011, March 24); but the role of today's women in China has changed significantly compared to 30 years ago. They are better educated and have a longer life expectancy than ever before. According to statistics released by the World Health Organization in 2008, the average life expectancy of Chinese women is now 76, compared to 72 for men (World Health Organization, 2008). The Ministry of Education also indicated a rapidly increasing female student enrolment rate (Ministry of Education, 1997, 2009). Moreover, as argued earlier, their social roles are gradually changing, together with the on-going economic and social development. Therefore, women's career life should not be limited by policies that no longer serve their overall economic productivity and social rights.

In reality, employers often tend to make conditional probability assessments of job applicants depending on certain indicators including education, and their own assumptions regarding gender (Y. Cai, 2011). Given the educational signalling mechanism that was discussed in Chapters Two and Six, gender often acts on the labour market as an index (Bon, 2009; Spence, 1973). That means that the market data obtained by the employers from the previous employee group, or even their own beliefs, often affects the hiring decision and the wages subsequently offered to the new group in the job market. Many Chinese employers would equate female Master's graduates and male Bachelor graduates, and female PhD graduates and male Master's graduates, which is another way of depreciating women's human capital investment (Yan, 2010, p. 203). Even when female graduates 'luckily' find a job, their professional role is often influenced by the traditional Chinese family model – 'male dominates, female supports' (Yan, 2010, p. 203).

In other words, the employer does not know whether gender will be correlated with workers' productivity, though market informational feedback mechanisms help to form the employer's beliefs. For example, when an employer recruits highly-skilled returnees, including both males and females, if he finds that some women request paid
maternity leave after a year or two at work, he may well reduce the recruitment of middle-aged female returnees in the future as a way to reduce labour costs. Similarly, when promotional opportunities arise between middle-aged male and female workers from a similar education background, the employer may prefer the male worker, as his previous data set made him believe that male workers exhibit higher productivity. Since such practices are discriminatory, they have mostly been banned in Western countries. Indeed, there is an extensive body of research that indicates a significant correlation between gender equality and the level of economic and social development of a country (Bon, 2009; OECD, 2003).

China seems aware of the gender equality issue, as it has a kind of quota for women at certain levels of government leadership groups; for example, there are 670 female mayors/vice-mayors in more than 600 cities, with an average of one female mayor per city (Xinhua News Agency, 2011), but each city would normally have one mayor and about 7 vice-mayors, which suggest that women participate in politics far less than men. While the government is launching different sets of programs related to talent recruitment and human resource internationalization, it should pay more attention and give more opportunities to highly-skilled female workers, who account for half of the international student population, according to Australia’s data on Chinese international students. In the labour market, the measurement of productivity should be based on an assessment of the individual, rather than gender.

Gender Inequality Issues in China’s Professional Arena

The domination of men over women seems to be one of the defining characteristics of Confucian theory and practice (Bell, 2008, p. 164), and has been influencing Chinese women’s development significantly. Neglecting the importance of women and the equal cooperation between men and women, the Confucian concepts traditionally outweigh men’s power, something which has been argued to be a negative aspect of
the theory (Du & Yue, 1992, p. 368). As Wang (2000, p. 62) indicated, women are often disadvantaged explicitly, just because they are women. For example, female workers in the former SOEs were often the first to be laid off as a result of economic restructuring and downsizing, on the ground that a woman should not be regarded as the principal income-earner of a family (Yan, 2010, p. 203). Until the early 1990s, the absence of state protection for Chinese women in the economic domain, and the withdrawal of affirmative action supporting their participation in politics resulted in lower incomes, the loss of any substantive share in the positions of formal political power, and poorer employment conditions (D. Goodman, 2002).

There is no doubt that Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping greatly helped to boost Chinese women’s social status and achieve greater equity in the new China (some discussion and data on such progress, as well as the traditional Chinese values regarding women and their talents, can be found in Chapter Two) but, as argued in previous sections, some traditional concepts and Confucian theories are in people’s blood. In effect, these form greater barriers to today’s female professionals, including returnees, relative to men.

It requires a lot of consistent effort if Chinese women are to make progress against the traditional values and Confucian concepts. As feminists, and their supporters, succeeded in getting women’s issues onto the international agenda, notably via the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) following the 1975 UN Women’s Conference, major social changes have seen the social roles played by women alter dramatically in most Western nations and some Asian ones. Firstly, it is often now illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender, at least publicly. Secondly, occupations and freedoms previously denied to women have been opened up. In September 1995, Beijing hosted the fourth UN World Women’s Conference, under the theme of Action for Equality, Development and Peace. The issues discussed at the conference included poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, economic roles, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for advancement, human
rights, the media, the environment and the position of female children (Mayo, 2005, p. 132; UNWomen, 1995). While some criticized this as a Chinese government showcase seeking to display the achievements of women's liberation in socialist China (United Nations, 2009), the unprecedented shift in Chinese women’s workforce participation over the last four decades is a fact, fundamentally underpinning the greater opportunities now available to women in China. Nevertheless, progress remains to be achieved in securing full equality of wages, and in women gaining leadership positions in society.

The Communist Party is always considered as the most powerful stream within China’s political system, within which the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau is the most senior group led by the President, followed by the Central Committee group. Women are now included in those groups, which is a big step forward compared with Chinese society in the past but, by examining the data below, there remains room for further improvement (National People's Congress, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007). For example, the number of female members remains very low – averaging 6.3%, despite a slight increase in the alternate members’ group from 11.9% in 1979 to 14.4% in 2007. For the average 20 person Political Bureau, only one or two female members were included in different terms, and sometimes none – as in the 11th, 13th and 14th National People’s Congress of the CPC. There has never been a female appointed to the most senior level – the standing committee of the Political Bureau. A very famous Chinese female sociologist, Li Yinghe (2003), pointed out the following pattern of Chinese women in leadership positions: firstly, the number of females decreases as the seniority level rises; secondly, that there are more female leaders in operational and functional departments, and fewer in Party leadership positions where most of the strategic development decisions are made; and, thirdly, amongst the leadership groups, women often appear as members rather than in leading positions.
### Table 8.1 Number of women in the Central Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>National People's Congress of the CPC</th>
<th>Number of members</th>
<th>Female members</th>
<th>Number of alternate members</th>
<th>Female alternate members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>17th</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>13 (6.4%)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>24 (14.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>22 (13.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>8 (4.1%)</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>17 (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>12 (6.3%)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>12 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>13th</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>10 (5.7%)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>12 (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>14 (6.6%)</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>13 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>14 (6.9%)</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>24 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>20 (10.3%)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>21 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>13 (7.6%)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>13 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


![Hierarchy of political bureau and Central committee](image)

In the business domain, Goodman's (2002, p. 347) research suggested that, in most types of new enterprise generated by the reform, but particularly so in private sector enterprises, where it was the norm for the husband to become the operations manager
and the wife to become the business manager, women often take leading positions and make valuable contributions. Chen’s (M. Chen, 2008) work also supported this point. She outlined that, despite female entrepreneurs’ significant personal wealth, the roles that these new rich women play in their enterprises still appear to be determined by the traditional gendered division of labour, with ‘men outside, women inside’ (of the family). Women still largely have to bear the burden of the household responsibilities, even though wealthier women are increasingly employing other women, thus lessening their own confinement to domestic roles.

While, structurally, many women may have held positions of leadership, often there were no symbolic recognition of their role. Many private businesswomen and family-oriented female entrepreneurs often position themselves as wives or helpers (D. Goodman, 2002). Chin et al.’s work (Chin, Ian, & Fan, 2009) also showed that many Chinese women themselves promoted an anti-feminist ideology – suggesting that men were (naturally) superior at performing certain core managerial tasks. However, the report on gender equality and women’s development in China (1995-2005) showed a different result. It pointed out that 66% of women hold views opposed to the statement that ‘men’s ability is naturally stronger than women’s’; moreover, about 82% of women feel confident in their abilities (Tan, 2006, p. 104). The same report revealed somewhat contradictory views, however: about 50% of both women and men agree with the ‘men outside, women inside’ concept; in 2003, the percentage of full-time female professionals in Beijing was 34.6% compared with 65.4% male ones; and 76.4% of women and 71.2% of men thought that married women should not inherit equally with their male siblings.

Clearly, Chinese women’s gender equality needs to be further improved, and Chinese women themselves need to acknowledge and fight for this. Apparent contradictions were also evident in this study: for example, a significant number of female returnees expressed that gender, as a factor, is not an issue affecting their career development but the data show that, given the same education, social and culture background,
female returnees were paid less, and held lower-level positions, than their male counterparts. It can be argued that Chinese society and political authority have been traditionally controlled by men in ways that still continue to guide people’s minds, and reflect the interests of men (Chin et al., 2009).

Obvious differences between males and females exist in China. According to statistics released by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China (2010), overall, around 65% of *danwei* (work units) have specific requirements regarding the applicants’ gender; effectively a preference for males. In the following figure, the ratio of job vacancies for male applicants is 0.99, and 1.03 for females. This suggests that the supply of female workers outstrips the demand, and that the labour market is seeking more male workers.

![Figure 8.2 Ratio of job vacancies: male and female applicants](image)

Amongst the small portion of returnees who indicated an awareness of gender, a senior female graduate, for example, stated that:

"... gender is an important factor affecting women’s career development, particularly for women of child bearing age. Male workers are often preferred in the competitive labour market in
China, and among women, highly-skilled female who are married and have children are more competitive”. (B9BF)

Another male graduate interviewee complained during the interview that:

“... amongst the three female staff members in my team, one is on maternity leave after she joined us a year ago, two of them rang me this morning and asked for a day’s leave (one is ill and the other one said she’s not feeling well)...now their tasks are unattended and the deadline for the project is approaching ...” (ZBLX)

A male employer interviewed said:

“...to be honest, I’d prefer male workers, because, in addition to business operations, male workers are more focused on work and able to take on any given task, like unplanned business trips or long working hours ...” (B6CHB)

The above comments indicate that it is not women’s talent or professional knowledge causing a barrier to their career but merely their gender, probably due to China’s long-lasting traditional values, social attitudes and practices, which influence people’s views on what women should or should not do. Employers’ inappropriate perceptions and biased judgments about women often place female employees at a disadvantage. Systematic gender discrimination still exists in the workforce and holds back the fuller development of society (OECD, 2003), as it acts to prevent women from gaining more leadership posts or from having their qualities accessed on merit, rather than on gender.
The modernization of women is considered an important indicator of a country's progress in the international economy (OECD, 2003; State Council, 2011). As noted in the World Bank's *Global Monitoring Report* (World Bank, 2007b), increased gender equality in households, the markets, and society is closely related to poverty reduction and economic growth. The report argued that women's better access to markets, education and health, and decisions in the household would result in their increased labour force participation, productivity and earnings, as well as improved children's well-being, consequently contributing towards poverty reduction and economic growth, but the cultural norms and traditions are usually at the core of gender disparities and of women's low level of empowerment in developing countries (Szekely, 2008, p. 302), which indeed applies to China.

Discrimination against women was often inherent in the cultural norms and traditions, confining women to certain activities and restricting their development potential. As noted in Chapter Two and earlier, Confucianism has long lain at the centre of Chinese society and traditions, including its failure to value women equally. However, changed social expectations in the new China have significantly reduced the proportion of women who are traditional homemakers. The idea that skilled women, both married and single, would spend most of their lives working outside the home has become normative, but they are still not treated equally to males with the same background in terms of age, education, or experience.

The results of this study show that, given the same background with regard to age and education, highly-skilled, Chinese, female returnees generally hold lower positions than their male counterparts, and subsequently earn significantly less. According to the interviews and analysis, one of the actual barriers and excuses is the social perception of women's biological role with regard to child bearing. Many highly-skilled female
professionals indicate that having children and the subsequent family matters are major issues for their career development, which do not affect their husbands' career in a similar way, although, in principle, fathers are just as responsible for their children as mothers.

Western professional women experience such problems too. For hundreds of Harvard female professionals in the US, who rank high in terms of their earning power, ambition, independence, and professional achievement, women’s definition as 'having it all – careers and children' differs sharply from the way in which their husbands, fathers, and male colleagues combine their professional and family life (Swiss & Walker, 1993, p. 47). However, without suffering Confucius’ concepts on women, that have influenced Chinese society for thousands of years, western women seem to have progressed further in overcoming such discrimination.

From a social perspective, taking time out to have children or to take care of domestic matters is an extremely important contribution to society as a whole. It is sad that people often neglect women’s roles and value from the social perspective. For highly-skilled women, who are able to contribute to society in the professional arena equally to men, their extra contribution to society should be particularly cherished and respected. One of the China’s National Natural Science Foundation’s recent changes sparked hope for China’s future gender development, particularly on this matter. It has changed its age requirement for female applicants: for the Young Scientists’ Fund applications, a five-year extension was given to female applicants, while the age for men stays at 35 (Science Times, 2012, March 8). By so doing, it has obviously taken women’s social role into consideration, and the age extension will ultimately encourage women scientists’ development in their respective career but, as Madam Chen Zhili, President of the All-China Women's Federation and Vice Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, once said during a casual workshop, this kind of regulation is not a special favour to women, but reasonable compensation.
Despite women’s many other values, it was argued that increased gender equality brings broader benefits to society through providing a better education for their children and the better management of their families (Carneiro, Meghir, & Parey, 2006; Q. Guo, 2009; World Bank, 2007b). Hence, employers need to eliminate assumptions based on gender, rather should pay more attention to women’s knowledge and skills. The respective work units should recognize female professionals’ value and contribution to society, and ensure that women’s biological roles should not become a disadvantage.

Hofstede (2001) once argued that women always attach great importance to social goals by nature, while men attach more importance to ego goals, such as career and money but, on the whole, they keep a good balance in society and social development. Without diving into the verification of men and women’s attachment issues, men and women’s equal contribution to society was supported. The Chinese ‘Yin and Yang’ concept vividly expresses this idea, as it describes how polar or seemingly contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other in turn. The words originally referred to two natural physical phenomena, that is, clouds shading the sun and the sun shining respectively, which can also be taken to mean that there are feminine qualities in males and vice versa. Yet, such important idea was not reflected in the current society and employers’ minds.

Conclusion

Women usually have fewer employment opportunities (OECD, 2011), and generally earn less than men with the same education – as seen in this research result and other literature (Hughes & Lowe, 1993; Y. Zhang et al., 2008). Of course, being paid less in the work place does not make women less worthy, but is rather a reflection of the prevailing social practices that prevent women from rising as easily as men. Together
with the research data, and the contemporary literature and analysis on gender, discussed in previous chapters, this chapter provided a detailed discussion of professional women’s employment issues, and pointed out several critical issues. Firstly, Chinese female professionals still face inequality in today’s labour market. Evident in the much earlier retirement age than men, overseas-educated, highly-skilled female graduates were also revealed to be paid less than their male counterparts in China’s labour market, while the majority of the positions they held were at a lower level than those of the majority of male returnees. Such situations were reflected in both human capital theory and the signalling model, and have been discussed in detail, although neither of these theories does anything to oppose discrimination against women. Indeed, arguably, the reverse is true.

Secondly, many young female returnees do not realize that gender is a factor influencing their career development. This blindness arises from the increasing social status of Chinese women over the past half-century, the well-off family environment of most female international graduates, and the lack of knowledge about the real barriers that women face in the workplace. Whatever the reason, however, it is an interesting finding that young professional women do not seem overly concerned about gender as an issue for their career development. The research results clearly show, however, that it is a major factor when compared with men with the same educational and social background. Nonetheless, when compared with domestic graduates, highly-skilled, overseas-educated women are far more competitive in the workplace. The data seem to show that, although progress has been made, the full deployment of the talents and experience of these young women remains unfulfilled in contemporary China, and that work remains to be done, not merely to contribute to women’s development, but also to develop more fully their contribution to social development overall. The unwillingness or incapacity fully to exploit the talents of this important sub-group of highly-skilled workers represents a failure of both social justice and economic efficiency, undermining the force of Mao’s dictum that ‘women hold up half the sky’.
CHAPTER NINE    CONCLUSION

Introduction

As the number of Chinese students undertaking higher education abroad and subsequently returning increases rapidly, public interest in the issue of returnees’ career development and their contribution to China’s development has risen. Research shows that international education has generally positive effects on one’s career development (Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Saxenian, 2006), including one’s level of job and level of earnings (Palifka, 2009). It is also widely accepted that China’s flourishing development is closely related to returnees and its diaspora network (Hayhoe, 1989a; Welch & Zhang, 2007; WRSA-COSA, 2010). Many of China’s policies are creating a welcome environment for international professionals, so more and more returnees are demonstrating their advantages in the local labour market (Zweig, 2002, 2006, 2008). However, like their domestic colleagues, some young returnees have been exposed to the problems of unemployment and re-integration, which are now more under the public spotlight (Beijing Daily, 2007, January 11; CCTV, 2006, January 9; H. Chen, 2005).

Since Australia has become a major study destination for Chinese international students over the last decade, this study examined how Australian higher education shapes Chinese graduates’ career development once they return to their country of origin. In addition to reviewing their employment status in China in contrast to that of their domestic counterparts, the study also focused on their re-integration problems, as well as gender equality issues.

A mixed method was adopted, because the study aimed to review graduates’ overall employment status, and also to explore the in-depth issues linked to re-integration.
The study surveyed returnees who had graduated from a leading research university located in Sydney, Australia, and interviewed both returnees and Chinese employers from a wide range of professional backgrounds. A total of 187 survey responses were collected from 1,051 electronic surveys, which forming a fair representation of Chinese alumni in general. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten returnees who had participated in the survey and seven Chinese employers who represented different professional fields. The outcomes of the study present a spectrum of issues related to young returnees’ career development in China: for example, employment, re-integration and gender equality.

The previous chapters reported the findings on Australian-educated returnees’ career development and related issues in China. The survey and interview results suggested that most returnees obtained a solid employment status with relative high positions and income; however, their re-integration into China’s fast changing society, and the gender inequality for highly-skilled women, were major problems for many returnees (see Chapter Five). Compared to domestic graduates, returnees had distinct strengths that helped them obtain high level positions and income in China’s labour market; for example, a quality international education qualification is also a strong signal representing international professional knowledge, western cultural understanding, and international network (see Chapters Three and Six). As elaborated in detail in Chapter Six, returnees’ strengths vary slightly compared to those of the domestic graduates. For example, compared to non-985 or 211 university/college graduates, returnees’ human, cultural and social capital are all outstanding advantages. Compared to elite Chinese university graduates, like those from Tsinghua University, who also have high-quality professional knowledge, returnees’ advantages were revealed in the areas of international exposure, the understanding and experience of western culture, communication and international networking. However, while all graduates lack work experience, their deficient local market knowledge and limited guanxi constitute the returnees’ key weaknesses.
Re-embracing the home society was found to be a major issue for most returnees as they navigated globalisation and higher education internationalization overseas. Facing China's vibrant labour market and fast growing business sector, effectively transferring one's international knowledge to the workplace with respect to the Chinese style professional protocols is often a challenge. Nevertheless, with the government's policies and projects for assisting international professionals' career development, managing returnees' strengths well was argued to be an important driving engine for China's social stratification (see Chapters Two and Seven).

This research also examined the gender equality issue, particularly in the area of highly-skilled professional women's career development. While Chinese women's social, economic and political empowerment over recent decades was acknowledged, it was argued that the persistence of the traditional values and culture, that developed in China for almost 2,000 years, was found to be a key barrier to women's development (see Chapters Two and Eight).

The purpose of this chapter is to review the presented findings with implications and suggestions for policy reform in an explicit format, and indicate areas for future research.

**Australian Higher Education Shapes Returnees' Employment Trajectories**

The development of technologies, including information technologies, has dramatically affected the global system. Flights, the Internet, telephones and credit cards have ultimately increased the dynamics of people's mobility and broadened international students' circulation. While international education is not a new concept in China, indeed it can be traced back to Confucius' era (Q. Guo, 2009), the opening
up of the new China has certainly produced an unprecedented phenomenon, with more than two million students studying overseas (Ministry of Education, 2012, February 11).

Australia, a member of the OECD countries located in the Asia Pacific region, has become a new, popular study destination for many Chinese students. In early 2010, the Council of Australian Governments released a five-year International Students Strategy plan (2010-2014) covering a range of issues, including students’ wellbeing, quality education, consumer protection and improved information for international students (Council of Australian Governments, 2010). In response to the changing education market, all international education providers need to re-register under the tighter, new regulatory criteria by December 2010. In 2011, there were over 126,000 Chinese students in Australia, comprising 26% of all of the international students there (AEI, 2011a). At the same time, many Australian education institutions provide specific policies and a wide range of cross border activities and programs to enhance their internationalization, including enrolling international students and teaching international curricula on campus, offering courses overseas or via distance learning, creating joint research programmes, and arranging international workshops and conferences, both on campus and abroad. As a consequence, the international education sector generated more than $18.6 billion in 2010 and supported approximately 125,000 jobs (Council of Australian Governments, 2010).

Along with the liberalized political environment, the thriving economy and increasingly mature labour market in China, a rising number and proportion of Chinese students are choosing to return there, having completed their international education (Zweig, 2002). This research found the same outcome; however, it explored the details of the returnees’ career development and the respective social issues. The study found that most respondents found a job within three months of returning, and nearly all of these returnees worked in China’s major cities. A small number expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs, the main reasons being the fast lifestyle, long
working hours and complicated social relationships. More than 90% of the graduates were in full-time paid employment, and the majority of the remainder were self-employed. While around a third of graduates worked in the Finance, Banking and Insurance industry, others were spread across industries like Education & training; Manufacturing; Media, Advertising & PR; Information Technology; and Logistics and Transport. More than half of them were at the sub-managerial level; around a third were at the Manager or similar level; and another quarter were employed as Senior Level Manager, Director General or above. This also reflected their high incomes. The modal annual income was between RMB 36,000 and 120,000 (RMB 3,000-10,000 per month). About a third of the graduates earned between RMB 120,000 and 360,000 per annum, and a quarter earned above RMB 360,000 annually, including several graduates who earned more than a million RMB per year. There were far more males than females in this latter group.

It is apparent that Australian higher education enhanced graduates’ knowledge, skills and capabilities, which subsequently increases their employability and earnings, and shapes their career trajectories once they return to China. Of course, there may or may not be a specific relationship between the labour markets in China and Australia. The next stage for this research strand would be to explore the impact of returnees who have studied in other countries. It would be reasonable to expect that returnees from non-English speaking countries would both have different expectations and different experiences to those returning from studying in English speaking countries.

**International Education and Forms of Capital**

Professional and specific skills were listed as the first priorities when Australian employers recruit international graduates (DEEWR, 2009, April). Similarly, these priorities were found to be key recruitment requirements for Chinese employers also. Aspects like understanding the local and international culture, as well as social
relations, were indicated to be vital, just like professional knowledge. In other words, it may be argued that, in the more competitive labour market in China, highly qualified overseas returnees must relearn things about the society that kept changing while they were away.

As argued in detail (see Chapters Three and Five), international students accumulate different forms of capital through their overseas education experience. For example, their human capital was strengthened through taking intensive professional university courses. At the same time, their cultural capital was intensified via their overseas education and living experiences and, by being an alumnus of an elite international university or a member of a returnees' association, their potential social capital was increased. All of these assisted the returnees' career development in China, and those individuals' productivity will indeed contribute to China's development. However, limitations also arise with the different forms of capital. For example, under the same education investment, female returnees generally accept a lower level position and earn less than their male counterparts, which suggested that the human capital theory fails to consider female human capital sufficiently (see Chapters Two and Eight). While an individual's family background is a very important factor for one's social and cultural capital, the different levels of engagement in international social and cultural activities are also key variables.

In general, however, the highly-skilled returnees' social status and income are quite high, which explains why such a large number of Chinese students study abroad. As one graduate interviewee (B4L) commented: "... the reason why I gave up my previous, stable, highly-paid job in Tianjin to study business in Sydney was to get a higher-paid job in Beijing..."

Western experience and cultural capital greatly influenced the graduates' ways of life. The findings from both the survey and interviews show that most returnees saw things differently from their local colleagues, and maintained certain aspects of their western
lifestyle. In addition, while the embodied cultural experience cannot be inherited, its hidden transmission power can be expected to influence and affect the offspring of those families with strong cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This implies that the returnees' cultural competence (such as their educational credentials) and cultural goods (such as a well-stocked library at home), that belong to their children's childhood environment, exert an educative effect by their mere existence. As most highly-skilled returnees obtained additional language skills, rich knowledge and learning ability in general, they will either consciously or unconsciously, transmit those skills or knowledge to their children through talking to them in English, taking them to museums, and showing them how to learn new knowledge. Ultimately, compared to children who do not have this kind of input in their daily life, highly-skilled returnees' children would have a stronger ability in learning and better understanding of the social world. Moreover, returnees may be expected to have developed social networks amongst both their Chinese and foreign friends and associates that will be of value in their future career. While the scope of the present project has necessarily been limited, this finding suggests the utility of a future longitudinal study of returnees over five, ten and twenty years to examine the longer term effects of their study period abroad on both themselves and their families.

As discussed (see Chapters Three and Six), social capital is an important aspect for both Chinese employers and employee, and may be very productive for specific issues (Coleman, 1988). For example, guanxi or special relationships can make possible the achievement of certain ends that, in their absence, would be impossible. The concept of social capital often refers to the connections among individuals or corporate actors, which usually involve mutual obligations and facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2001). It exists as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). For Chinese returnees, being a member of the Western Returned Scholars Association - Chinese overseas-educated Scholars Association would signify their social status, level and
influential power (see Chapter Three). The network is also a source for exploring more cooperation opportunities and extending their career path. For example, returnees who are also members of the association often share a mutual trust of each other enjoy a common understanding of social issues; they talk about business opportunities and share their experiences during social gatherings. Consequently, they develop partnerships and ways to help each other, a key aspect of social capital theory.

In the end, an international education qualification has become a strong signal in the labour market of advanced skills, international exposure and linkages. The major differences between returnees and their local counterparts were their levels of professional knowledge, international experience, communication skills, and international exposure (see Chapter Six). Consideration of their career status, performance at work, and feedback from employers has also been demonstrated.

**Re-embracing the Home Society**

Education is also a powerful site of cultural transmission, given that identity, difference, and culture are important issues within the education arena (Welch, 2007) so, in the process of being exposed to international higher education in the southern hemisphere, young Chinese students also undergo a process of cultural selection and omission, as well as the fundamental transformation of their knowledge base. Therefore, when these changed students return to the fast changing society in China, some adjustment is usually needed.

Many scholars have pointed out that returnees often experience problems when re-integrating into their home society (Ding, 2011; R. Goodman et al., 2011). This study has found the same problems affect Chinese returnees who have studied in Australia. It was found that the majority of returnees experience re-integration problems,
notably complicated social relationships and connections, the fast changing environment and lifestyle, and long working hours. Many of them failed to notice that during their absence, China has been changing rapidly, with swift domestic development and international collaborations, while at the same time, it is integrating and consolidating information and technology from other countries like the US, Europe and Japan. According to the information collected from the survey and interviews, many returnees indicated that they had already become familiar with the Australian lifestyle, and that it was not easy to readapt to the changing society back home. As Louie (2006) once argued, having been exposed to western countries, with a completely different culture, young returnees may come home believing that they have ‘seen the world’, but depending on how fast things change at home, they may be mocked for not being able to make the necessary adjustments to survive in China’s brave new world.

Despite the reasons for the returnees coming home or to what extent they like the western life style, adjusting themselves to fit into China’s society is a good solid path towards starting, or resuming, their career, but on the other hand, the world is now very different from the past due to the globalisation process. The People’s Republic of China is also very different from the previous feudal society. As the new China has integrated into the world rapidly since 1978, it has become more tolerant of new ideas, technologies and cultures. Therefore, China will keep changing due to the innovations and ideas brought back by the returnees. However, modestly re-embracing the home culture remains vital for successfully integrating these newly learnt skills and knowledge into the environment there. As detailed in Chapter Seven, it may be useful for young returnees to re-learn some of the traditional Chinese theories, which they might have missed at school due to the influence of the Cultural Revolution because as mentioned above, the centrepiece of China’s development and the Chinese way of life is always closely related to its traditional philosophy.
Many Chinese scholars have suggested that returnees should obtain accurate information about the labour market and demand in China, and urged that employers should not underestimate the returnees’ potential (X. Zhu, 2005). In addition, the government is encouraging both the work unit and the returnees to devote time and effort to finding the most appropriate match. This is clearly an area where Australian universities can work with their alumni to the benefit of the university, the graduates and the host society. As addressed in previous chapters, the knowledge required by society today is far more complex than in the past, not only broader but also far deeper. Companies, government bodies and organizations, as the key drivers of the economy, must employ competent workers to meet the aggressive demand presented by today’s dynamic and globalised world.

The thesis has demonstrated that Chinese students travelling overseas to study face problems on returning home, like students all over the world. They find it difficult to settle back into their previous patterns and modes of social interaction, and their local colleagues find it difficult to absorb them in the same way. Although this issue seems more apparent for returnees in Confucian societies (R. Goodman, 1990; Hao & Welch, 2012; Namgung, 2009) than in other western countries (Findlay et al., 2006; Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Palifka, 2009), a comparative study of graduates from different study destinations would be able to demonstrate or at least explore the common and unique aspects of the experience.

**Gender Inequality**

While Chinese women’s social status has been steadily improving, 66% of general working women believe that men were favoured with regard to promotion and pay increases, regardless of the fact that they might have the same capability for the same work (Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security, 2010). It was noted that
Chinese women who work full-time longed not only for greater economic independence, but also for a sense of job satisfaction and fulfilment.

This research has found that highly-skilled female returnees were disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. The majority of male returnees’ positions and modal annual income were significantly higher than those of their female counterparts, even though they had the same education, and belonged to the same age group. This reflects China’s gender inequality issues in general in the labour market, which suggests that further improvement is needed in this area.

As the Chinese government wants talent for its modernization development, equal opportunities for highly-skilled women will enlarge the talent pool, and ultimately assist its innovation and productivity. Specific policy reform in this area can be achieved through, but is not limited to, the following ways: [1] giving highly-skilled women an option to work until age 60 or more, just like their male counterparts; [2] setting a quota for all decision making positions where women can make their voice heard; [3] pushing for the stronger implementation of the maternity leave policies and regulations, and encouraging a better social understanding of women’s reproductive role and relationship to social development.

A rather surprising finding related to gender was that many female returnees did not recognize gender as a factor affecting their career. It was probably because, when under actual life pressures, women professionals often unconsciously lowered their expectations regarding their levels of position and income, which eventually leads to a lower social status. Perhaps, for many young women who grew up in a society that always emphasised male power, a lack of gender equality awareness is a key problem. Further research on highly-skilled women’s awareness with regard to gender equality and aspirations in women’s empowerment might explore the reason for this.
Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest the need for further studies. First, additional research into a wider range of Australian universities is needed. As a stable phenomenon and future trend, an increasing number of Chinese students are undertaking higher education programs in Australia every year, spread across a variety of institutions and different levels of university. Therefore, a topic like ‘How do different Australian universities/institutions shape Chinese international students’ career trajectories back home?’ may provide a basis for interesting research. Moreover, more comparative cases using China’s local counterparts would be useful. This will provide a clear contrast between international and local education in terms of graduates’ employability and career development. For example, this research studied an elite Australian university that is a leading member of Australia’s Group of Eight universities, and conducted a comparative study with another elite Chinese university that is a leading member of China’s 211 Project universities, so, further research might cover some non-Group of Eight universities in Australia, and non-211 Project universities in China to yield a deeper understanding of higher education internationalization and the different forms of intellectual capital, including human, cultural and social capital.

Second, additional background information about the returnees’ employment status should be collected in future studies; for example, the type of their employing company or organization, like government departments, SOEs, foreign-owned firms, private companies, joint ventures and so on. The current study had already covered a wide range of returnees’ background information, like the type of work, industry, city of employment, position, income, satisfaction level, etc., but it would be interesting to discover if western-educated people perform better in certain types of company or organization, whether Chinese government departments, foreign-owned firms, SOEs,
or others. These results would help us to explore issues like re-integration, knowledge transfer, and even social stratification.

Third, as mentioned earlier, a longitudinal study of the same group of returnees would help reveal Australian education’s effect in the long term. The research should not only examine the impact on the students in terms of their career and social development, but also the subsequent influence of their studying abroad on their children. For example, if a longitudinal study took place over five or ten years, while some questions could be focused on the those students’ career path and social development as a follow up to the previous study, another part of the question sets could be designed to explore the graduates’ children’s social and cultural development by evaluating those children’s English language skills, school performance, and international cultural awareness. The results would provide a better examination of cultural capital theory in terms of cultural transmission and inheritance.

Fourth, comparative studies on returnees from other major study destinations would be useful, like the US, Canada, the UK, and Japan. As noted in previous sections, a significant number of Chinese students were returning home for career development. It would be valuable to explore the similarities and differences between these returnees, and hence find the unique characteristics and impact that they take away from their respective host counties, consequently mapping out the influence on China’s future development of these returnees’ performance.

Finally, gender inequality in China’s professional arena requires greater attention with studies of different groups of women. It is clearly unfair to both the individuals and the country if highly educated and skilled women, are treated unequally; for example, unequal treatment in terms of position level and salary, earlier retirement age, exclusion from political and decision making groups, and sacking pregnant female employees or rejecting female applicants simply because they are of childbearing age.
As noted above, it is worth exploring the fundamental reasons beneath the surface of gender inequality, such as traditional Chinese ideology, today’s fast growing economy and life pressure, the inadequate policies and regulations, and the insufficient social guidance.

Closing Remarks

This research on international higher education and graduates’ career development investigated a distinctive feature: Chinese postgraduate students who chose to return home for employment. Many Chinese students undertake international education in order to acquire new knowledge and skills, see a different world and culture, and build international links. When they make the decision to return to China for career development, many want to utilize their capabilities to the utmost, live and work with dignity, improve their quality of life, and make wiser decisions, since this process and its consequences affect every individual’s life and, as a whole group, even influences the country’s development. It is recommended that young returnees should modestly re-learn about China’s fast changing situation and re-embrace its traditional culture to ensure their smoother re-integration. However, the government bodies, employers, and the general public should be more tolerant of these ‘little sea-turtles’, allow them to retain their western characteristics and international spirit and importantly, encourage them to be creative, so both sides need to march forward in step. Otherwise, tensions between returnees who want to be innovative and contribute to the development of their homeland, and the persistent traditional Chinese value system and behaviour, will largely reduce the effectiveness of studying abroad.

The process of recruiting international professionals is crucial for both employers and returnees. Obtaining the required information is often difficult and time consuming, when both sides have a free choice to select each other in the labour market. The massive flows of information from everywhere, and crowded labour market, form
extra barriers. As argued and analysed in this study, the returnees bring a positive spin to China's development and modernization, and they are bridges to the world, which both China and the global society need. The international talents' demand and management is indeed a core factor in determining whether China will flourish or deteriorate; hence the returnees' performance should be a major focus of attention.

As a case study, this research is limited in terms of its applicability to all returnees. However, with an in-depth, multi-faceted investigation of young graduates from an elite international university, and a cross analysis of the findings from both returnees and Chinese stakeholders, it has identified some of their key features and characteristics, as well as the major issues related to re-integration. It is hoped that these research findings will prove a valuable resource for future research on returnees and how international higher education shapes graduates' career development.

This project has been necessarily limited in scope and scale. It has, however, though demonstrated the need for public policy awareness of the problems caused by the large numbers of returning students, and the need for both further research and programs of reintegration. Further research needs to place this study and its findings in a wider series of contexts. There is a tendency to consider Chinese students exceptional, but this may not be the case. Likewise, there is a tendency to assume that all returnees face similar problems regardless of their location and industry, but again this may not be the case. Longitudinal and comparative studies would be of inestimable value to the Chinese government as it seeks to manage the consequences of rapid economic growth, in which Hai Gui can be a major asset in attaining the goal of an innovation society.
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299


APPENDIX

A. Ethical approval
B. Participant Information Sheet, Survey
C. Participant Information Sheet, Interview
D. Participant consent form
E. Survey questions
F. Interview protocols, Graduates, English
G. Interview protocols, Graduates, Chinese
H. Interview protocols, Employers, English
I. Interview protocols, Employers, Chinese
Appendix A. Ethical approval

RESEARCH INTEGRITY
Human Research Ethics Committee
Web: http://sydney.edu.au/ethics/
Email: ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au

Address for all correspondence:
Level 6, Jane Foss Russell Building - G02
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

Ref: IM/RW
24 January 2011

Professor Anthony Welch
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Education Building – A35
The University of Sydney
Email: anthony.welch@sydney.edu.au

Dear Professor Welch

Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

Protocol No: 12691

Thank you for providing the translated documents for the above-mentioned protocol.

I am pleased to advise that our requirements have been satisfied, and that the protocol has been approved. Additional documents have been filed with your original application.

You are referred to the responsibilities of the Chief Investigator / Supervisor as outlined in our previous letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

SURVEY

Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

(1) What is the study about?
This is a case study about the Australian higher education and the career development of highly-skilled Chinese international graduates. The concept of career development refers to employment situation, professional trajectories and satisfactory level of the current job. Highly-skilled refers to graduates who obtained international postgraduate degrees. The rationale for doing this research is to explore the career development of Chinese postgraduates alumni in China, and also reflects how far Australian higher education facilitates international graduates to find jobs in their country of origin.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?
The study is being conducted by Jie Hao, the former International Relations Manager (China), Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International), the University of Sydney. This study will form the basis for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Anthony Welch, Professor of Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, and Professor John Hearn, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International).

(3) What does the study involve?
The study involves a web-based survey and selected taped interviews.
(4) How much time will the study take?
The survey will take approximately 10 minutes.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?
Being in this study is completely voluntary – you are not under any obligation to consent to complete the survey. Submitting a completed survey is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. You can withdraw any time prior to submitting your completed survey. Once you have submitted your survey, your responses cannot be withdrawn.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?
It is hoped that in this study, issues related to international alumni's career development will be addressed. By sharing the results with the education provider, possible assistance may be provided in the future.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?
You can tell other people about this study. When you have read this information, Jie Hao will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(9) What if I require further information?
If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Jie Hao, on +66 13810394581 or e-mail at jhao@uni.sydney.edu.au

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?
Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

INTERVIEW

Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

(1) What is the study about?
This is a case study of the Australian higher education and the career development of highly-skilled Chinese international graduates. The concept of career development refers to employment situation, professional trajectories and satisfactory level of the current job. Highly-skilled refers to graduates who obtained international postgraduate degrees. The rationale for doing this research is to explore the career development of Chinese postgraduates alumni in China, and also reflects how far Australian higher education facilitates international graduates to find jobs in their country of origin.

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(3) What does the study involve?
The study involves a web-based survey and selected taped interviews.

(4) How much time will the study take?

Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney
The survey will take approximately 10 minutes, and the possible interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary – you are not under any obligation to consent and – if you do consent, you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the University of Sydney now and the future.

If you do not wish to continue, you may stop the interview at any time, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?
It is hoped that in this study, issues that relate to international alumni’s career development will be addressed. By sharing the results with the education provider, possible assistance may be provided in the future.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?
You can tell other people about this study. When you have read this information, Jie Hao will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

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If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Jie Hao, on +86 13810394581 or e-mail at jhao@uni.sydney.edu.au

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Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ____________________________, give consent to my participation in the research project.

Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.
6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7. I consent to:
   i. Audio-taping  YES □  NO □
   ii. Receiving Feedback  YES □  NO □

   If you answered YES to the “Receiving Feedback Question (ii)”, please provide your details i.e. mailing address, email address.

   Feedback Option
   Address: __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   Email: __________________________________________________________

Signed:
Name:
Date:

Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China: A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney
Version 3, 16/4/10
Page 2 of 2
Dear fellow Alumni

The University of Sydney runs a range of events and activities, offering all alumni the opportunity to maintain a lifelong relationship with the University of Sydney, and continue to develop their social and professional networks after graduation.

The information you provide will help the University of Sydney to ensure that our international activities continue to be relevant to your needs, and to plan our future schedule. It will also help us find out more about our alumni and the professional paths they have taken since graduation.

Survey results will be shared within the International Institute and the Alumni Office, but individual answers and comments will remain confidential. If you have any queries about the survey, please feel free to contact the researcher at jhao@uni.sydney.edu.au Thank you for taking the time to complete this important survey.

1. Family name:___________ Given name: ___________

2. Contact information:
   Telephone:___________________
   E-mail:______________________
   Mobile:______________________

3. Gender
   ☐ Male ☐ Female

4. Age
   ☐ 20s ☐ 30s ☐ 40s ☐ 50s and above

5. From which school(s) /department(s) did you graduate from the University of Sydney?

6. Which year did you graduate?
7. Did you intend to return to China before you come to Australia to study?
   □ Yes  □ No

8. How would you describe your current employment status:
   □ Full-time paid employment
   □ Part-time paid employment
   □ Self-employed
   □ Volunteer work
   □ Unemployed (Go to Question 15)
   □ Still seeking job (Go to Question 16)
   □ Transition between jobs
   □ Other, please specify

9. The field (industry) in which you currently work:
   □ Accommodation and Restaurants
   □ Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
   □ Charitable organisation
   □ Construction & engineering
   □ Cultural & Entertainment Services
   □ Education & training
   □ Electricity, Gas and Water Supply
   □ Finance, Banking and Insurance
   □ Government Admin
   □ Health and Community Services
   □ Information Technology
   □ Legal services
   □ Manufacturing
   □ Mining
   □ Media, Advertising & PR
   □ Property and Business Services
   □ Retail Trade
   □ Scientific & Technical services
   □ Sport & Recreation
   □ Logistics and Transport
10. What is your current position in the company:
   - Director General or equivalent
   - Senior Manager or similar levels
   - Manager or similar levels
   - Employee

11. What is your current annual income:
   - Below 36,000 RMB
   - 36,000 – 120,000 RMB
   - 120,000 – 360,000 RMB
   - 360,000 – 960,000 RMB
   - Above 960,000 RMB

12. Are you satisfied with your current job?
   - Very satisfied
   - Satisfied
   - OK
   - Unsatisfied; please explain why
   - Very unsatisfied; please explain why

13. How long did it take to find employment, if applicable, after you graduated from Sydney and returned to China?
   - 1 month
   - 6 months
   - 3 months
   - 12 months and above

   Looking back, do you think your expectations of job and salary was realistic? Why/ Why not?

14. In what city is your current employing company located? (Go to question 17)
15. If still unemployed, how long have you been seeking a job
   □ 1-3 months
   □ 3-6 months
   □ 6-12 months
   □ more than 12 months

16. If you are still seeking a job, what are the reasons?
   □ Have not had any offers yet
   □ Have not had the right offer yet
   □ No opportunities in my field
   □ My degree did not give me the right blend of skills
   □ Other – please specify.

17. Please identify the top 3 key factors (relate to international education) that have
e influenced your career development in China:
   □ Professional knowledge
   □ Communication skills
   □ Learning abilities
   □ International experience
   □ Teamwork
   □ Gender
   □ Foreign Language ability
   □ Other, please specify ________________________________

18. In what way has Australian education and experience assisted your career development?
   □ High quality education (teaching & learning)
   □ English language
   □ Study environment
   □ International exposure, experience and social contacts
   □ Other, please specify__________________________

19. After you returned, what have been the main problems with re-adjustment/re-integration
 into Chinese society?
20. After you graduated, what kind of career development support did you expect from the University of Sydney? Are you getting it?

21. If you don’t get the job you want in China, what will you do?

☐ Take a job in the same industry with lower payment
☐ Take any job with the same salary expectation
☐ Waiting for the opportunities
☐ Return to Australia
☐ Study abroad again in other countries

- End -
Appendix F. Interview protocols, Graduates, English

Interview schedule 1

Interviewees:
Selected Sydney University postgraduate alumni

Project Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China:
A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

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<th>Name</th>
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Introduction

Establish rapport: My name is Hao Jie, a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of education and Social Work, the University of Sydney. Thank you for accepting this interview. Your personal information will be kept confidential, and will not be identified in the research result. The interview is likely to take 30 – 40 minutes, please let me know if you need to reschedule the interview or withdraw at anytime during the process.

Outline purpose: This research aims to find out the extent to which, if at all, Australian higher education assists the career development of Chinese international students, particularly postgraduates, as well as key factors and difficulties in relation to employment, and what kind of further support returnees expect from the University. This research will provide direct feedback to the University of Sydney and may have wider implications for similar education providers. It will also provide a clear vision to the Australian government about
the capacity of Australian higher education to equip foreign students with the skills they need for successful international re-integration.

Questions
1. What was the last occupation you had, before undertaking postgraduate study at the University of Sydney?

2. Were you satisfied with this job?

3. What is your current employment situation and position?

4. What were your main motivations for studying at the University of Sydney?

5. How long did it take to find employment after you returned to China with an Australian higher education qualification?

6. Given your Australia higher education experience, what are the key issues or factors that you think has impacted on your career development? What role has an international qualification played? Work experience overseas? Length of stay in overseas? Gender? Age? Salary? Job location? Guanxi etc.

7. In your experience, did Australian education assist your career development? If so, how?

8. What kind of support did you expect from the university that might assist your further career development?

9. How can a mutual life-long relationship be established between you and the University of Sydney? How useful do you find the Alumni network?

10. What is your perception of Australian higher education in general?

Closing
Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Your contribution will assist this study greatly; please feel free to contact me if you want any further information.
Appendix G. Interview protocols, Graduates, Chinese

采访 1

采访对象：

部分选择的悉尼大学研究毕业生

项目主题： 海外留学回国人才在中国的职业发展：悉尼大学案例分析

| 姓名 | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| 性别 | 年龄 |
| 职业状况 | 职位 |
| 日期 | 地点 |
| 开始时间 | 结束时间 |

简介：

我叫郝洁，目前就读于悉尼大学教育与社会工作系，教育学博士研究生。

感谢您接受这次采访。您的个人信息是保密的，并且不会在研究结果里辨认出来。这次采访大概有 30－40 分钟，如果您需要改时间或在采访过程中退出请随时告诉我。

这项研究的目标是找出在有可能的情况下，澳大利亚高等教育从哪些方面以及如何帮助中国留学生的事业发展，尤其是针对毕业的研究生们，与就业相关的主要因素和困难。回国后，还需要大学继续给他们哪些支持和帮助。该研究将为悉尼大学提供一个直接的反馈，并有可能对其他类似院校
有所帮助。同时，就将国际留学生培养成国际型人才的问题上为澳大利亚
政府提供一些参考。

问题：

1. 在你读悉尼大学研究生之前，最后一份工作是什么?

2. 你对那份工作满意吗?

3. 你现在在哪里就业，担任什么职位?

4. 你去悉尼大学读书的初衷是什么?

5. 获得了澳大利亚高等教育学位，回国后多长时间找到工作?

6. 根据你在澳大利亚留学的经验，你认为哪些因素影响你的职业发展?

（海外工作经验、留学时间长短、性别、年龄、薪酬、工作地点、人际关系等）。国际文凭起着什么样的作用?

7. 根据你的经验，在澳大利亚所受的教育对你的职业发展有帮助吗？表现在哪些方面?

8. 大学可以在哪些方面可以帮助你的职业发展，你曾有哪些期待?

9. 悉尼大学如何才能和你建立一个永久的和谐关系？你对校友网络的重要性怎么看?

10. 总体来说，你对澳大利亚高等教育怎么看?

感谢您介绍这次采访，您的参与既是为这项研究的大力支持。如果您希
望了解更多关于该研究的信息，请及时与我联系。
Appendix H. Interview protocols, Employers, English

Interview schedule 2

Interviewees:
Chinese government officials at both central and local level (For example, Ministry of Education, Beijing Education Commission)
Executives and Human Resource Managers at key Universities (For example, Tsinghua)
Employers and Human Resource Managers at major firms where Sydney graduates currently employed

Project Title: Career Development of Highly-skilled Graduate Returnees in China:
A case study of graduates from the University of Sydney

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Introduction

Establish rapport: [smile and shake hands] My name is Hao Jie, a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of education and Social Work, the University of Sydney. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Your personal information will be kept confidential, and will not be identified in the research result. The interview is likely to take 30 – 40 minutes, please let me know if you need to reschedule the interview or withdraw at anytime during the process.

Outline purpose: This research aims to find out the extent to which, if at all, Australian higher education assists the career development of Chinese international students, particularly postgraduates, key factors and difficulties in relation to employment, and what kind of further support do returnees expect from the University. This research will provide direct feedback to the University
of Sydney and wider implications for other similar education providers. It will also provide a clear vision to the Australian government about the capacity of Australian higher education to equip foreign students with the skills they need for successful international re-integration. The result may be of interest to the Chinese government, whose understanding of the professional development and performance of young graduates who returned to China from Australia would be enhanced. The Ministries and local governments could potentially refer to the outcomes of this research to adjust its selection process for sponsoring enrolment in Australia programs.

Questions
1. What is your perception of postgraduate returnees from Australian higher institutions, compared to returnees from the U.S. and UK? Can you give examples of such differences?

2. How do you see their strengths and weaknesses in the following aspects: professional knowledge, communication skills, learning abilities, international experience and teamwork?

3. What would your advice be to the University of Sydney graduates about the kinds of skills they need in order to succeed in China’s labour market?

4. Based on your experience what, if any, qualities of such graduates could be strengthened/improved?

5. How could you compare their strengths & weaknesses with highly qualified local graduates?

Closing
Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Your contribution will assist this study greatly; please feel free to contact me if you want any further information.
Appendix I. Interview protocols, Employers, Chinese

访问2

访问对象:

中国中央政府及地方政府公务员

大学行政领导及人事部门领导

悉尼大学毕业生目前就业的公司领导或人事部门领导

项目主题：海外留学回国人才在中国的职业发展：悉尼大学案例分析

| 姓名 |
| 性别 | 年龄 |
| 职业状况 | 职位 |
| 日期 | 地点 |
| 开始时间 | 结束时间 |

简介:

我叫郝洁，目前就读于悉尼大学教育与社会工作系，教育学博士研究生。

感谢您接受这次采访。您的个人信息是保密的，并且不会在研究结果里辨认出来。这次采访大概有30－40分钟，如果您需要改时间或在采访过程中退出，请告诉我。

这项研究的目标是找出在有可能的情况下，澳大利亚高等教育从哪些方面以及如何帮助中国留学生的事业发展，尤其是针对毕业的研究生们，与就业相关的主要因素和困难。回国后，还需要大学继续给他们哪些支持和帮
助。该研究将为悉尼大学提供一个直接的反馈，并有可能对其他类似院校有所影响。同时，就将国际留学生培养成国际型人才的问题上为澳大利亚政府提供一些参考。

该研究结果也可供中国政府部门参考采用，加深对从澳大利亚留学回国人员职业发展的了解。为相关部委和地方政府部门在调整选派赴澳留学项目时提供参考。

问题：

1. 与从美国，英国的回国的硕士／博士研究生相比，您对在澳大利亚受过高等教育的回国人才的有什么看法？能举例吗？

2. 就专业知识、语言和沟通能力、学习能力、国际视野以及团队精神方面，您认为他们的优势和不足在哪？

3. 对于悉尼大学的毕业生，您认为他们需要具备哪些技能才能在中国人才市场有出色表现，对他们回国发展有什么建议？

4. 根据您的经验，这些毕业生的哪些方面有待进一步提高？

5. 与国内的毕业生相比，您认为他们的优势和不足在哪里？

感谢您接受这次采访，您的参与既是对这项研究的大力支持。如果您希望了解更多关于该研究的信息，请及时与我联系。