Globalisation and Chinese Knowledge Diaspora: An Australian Case Study

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Abstract

In a context of intensified globalisation, knowledge diaspora as "trans-national human capital" have become increasingly valuable to society. With an awareness of a need for more empirical studies especially in Australia, this article concentrates on a group of academics who were working at a major university in Australia and came originally from the Chinese mainland. The study explores their life, work and international research collaborations, using a case study approach with semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. The study found that while globalisation shapes the work and the contributions to Australia, by academics from China, they exert their initiatives to respond to and further reshape globalisation. Equipped with their Chinese cultural and educational backgrounds, academic experience in the West, and active membership in the international knowledge system, the Chinese knowledge diaspora are a modern kind of cosmopolitan literati. They are aware of the impact of globalisation and contribute actively to higher education internationalisation in both Australia and China, have maintained their cultural identity and made good use of their Chinese educational background. Their international collaborations, however, are more likely to be with the scholars from Western countries due to some difficulties they have experienced in China and Australia, and to the current setup of the global knowledge system.

Introduction

Knowledge diaspora is not a new phenomenon. Global knowledge diasporas, however, are a newer phenomenon sustained by both increases in global migration flows, and the rise and increasing ubiquity and density of information and communication technologies (Welch & Zhang, 2007). As a transnational human capital

in this new millennium, they become more valuable in a context of fast-increasing geographical mobility and worldwide communication linked to globalisation (Zweig, Chen & Rosen, 2004). There is an urgent need to examine the contributions made to both the homeland and the new land, and to explore the factors that influence the knowledge work of the academic diaspora.

Universities provide cross-border educational services and embed themselves deeply in cross-border flows of knowledge workers. The new global cultural economy is a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order (Appadurai, 2001), with flows of cultures hardly bounded with nation-states but moving across national boundaries to the global. Within these processes, transnationalism emerges amongst diasporic networks of ethnically and culturally distinctive peoples (Vertovec, 2004). The knowledge diaspora is able to interrogate the global through the local and contribute to the creation of "in-between" cultural spaces above the boundary of nation-states (Rizvi, 2000). Universities as a transnational platform where knowledge diaspora work are an essential organisation that creates, transmits, reproduces and receives cultural messages or practices to support the mobility and deployment of the cultural power. While rooted in their own cultures and affected by national realities, they are parts of an international knowledge system, and interact with institutions and ideas from abroad.

As knowledge carriers and producers, mobile global talent is a valuable human capital that has become a priority and a target for national policies. This is because the increase in the stock of brainpower could sustain and increase national economic competency in the knowledge-based economies (Kuptsch & Pang, 2006). The Chinese knowledge diaspora is an important asset to both Australia and China. Australia is peripheral to the global economy, due to its relatively isolated geographical location, its historical reliance on Britain as a colonial nation and its low population (Hugo, 2006). It needs to place stronger emphasis on Asian neighbours. In particular, China is a strong counterpart or partner to provide extraordinary opportunities for Australia (Sutter, 2005). Australia's Chinese knowledge diaspora are the most useful and direct human capital for this purpose. However, there has been little research on this group, especially in local contexts and in relation to broader axes of spatial relations in state and society (Cartier, 2003).

For China, deploying the diaspora option is now a priority, representing a more nuanced response to issues of brain drain (Zweig, 2006). From 1978 to 2006, 1,076,000 Chinese students travelled abroad for study purposes. Of these, only 275,000 have returned. While the latest return rate has increased as more opportunities open up in a dynamic China, many are still abroad (Cao, 2004). They, however, can be seen as a key potential resource, rather than an instance of brain drain. Looking back to China's dramatic development since 1978, the role of Chinese business diaspora has been vital

to effectively boost China's economy. In a context of globalisation and modern knowledge-based economy, Chinese knowledge diaspora, as a key and underexploited resource (Welch & Zhang, 2007), will play a vital role in China's next stage of development, and accelerate the integration of the Chinese academy into the international knowledge system.

By situating the Chinese knowledge diaspora in a specific local context to investigate their living and working experience, this study aims to reveal how globalisation has shaped the nature of the Chinese knowledge diaspora and their academic contributions to Australia and China, and globally, and how these knowledge diaspora as the subjects of globalisation have exerted their subjective initiatives to respond to and further reshape globalisation. The issues and frustrations confronted by them will be enlightening for a further understanding of the more general situation of the global Chinese knowledge diaspora.

Globalisation, Higher Education and the Chinese Knowledge Diaspora

Globalisation is a powerful transformative force. It accelerates cross-border mobility of people, capital and knowledge. These population movements are guided by the market value and by "global profitability" (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 9), and influenced by international hierarchies and power relations. In higher education, the global flows between different nations and institutions are sometimes asymmetrically two-way, sometimes unidirectional (Marginson, 2006). The "brain drain" from poorer countries to the leading institutions in the wealthiest nations certifies that the flow is primarily steered by the economic strength and the capacity of educational and scientific systems.

There exists a powerful yet unequal international knowledge system (Altbach, 1998), featured by North-South disparities. Within its structure, a few countries are the centre retaining extraordinary academic power, while the rest are the periphery and semi-periphery. The lack of well trained academic personnel is a major factor for the peripheral countries' failure to move closer to the centre. The system reveals the stratified nature among cultures, which underlines the fact that flows of intellectuals are still very largely from the South to the North. The existing global inequality of knowledge creation and application is being exacerbated, as wealthy countries of the global North compete to attract research talents from poorer countries of the South (Solimano, 2002), whose best and brightest then consolidate the already-strong knowledge base in the former (Hugo, 2002), at the cost of the latter.

Nevertheless, the non-unilateral, complex, overlapping and unpredictable characteristics of globalisation indicate that the distribution of power is fluid and changing. People who are influenced by globalisation could have both positive and negative impacts on the process, depending on their recognition of globalisation, in what respects and on whose terms (Burbules & Torres, 2000). The international flows of highly educated people form an increasingly important part of the global knowledge system could not only consolidate host countries' research hegemony, but also modify global asymmetries and unidirectional transformations (Marginson, 2006). The hierarchical structure in knowledge distribution and dissemination has become less fixed, as the *loci* of power and growth are becoming multiple, and more dispersed (Meyer, Kaplan, & Caran, 2001). The diaspora could be instrumental in narrowing the North-South scientific gap (Meyer & Brown, 1999).

The word diaspora originated from the Greek verb *diasperein*, meaning to sow or scatter about, and the Greek preposition *dia* means through or over. The ancient Greeks used it to describe the colonisation of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period (800-600 BC; Reis, 2004). Diaspora was later used to denote the dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the 6th century BC, when the Jews were exiled to Babylonia. The word thus connotes the loss of homeland, uprootedness, expulsion, oppression, moral degradation, a collective memory of the homeland and a strong desire to return to it one day. With intensified globalisation, the elements such as the loss of homeland, a collective memory of oppression and the gnawing desire for return have been suppressed, while the positive connotations of diasporas such as super-mobility and flexible identities on the part of transmigrants as well as multiculturalism and transnational flows of capital have been elevated. They now maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that cross borders (Ma & Cartier, 2003).

The language of diaspora not only advocates the importance of homeland, but also entails fluidity, transnationality and economic-driven characteristics that emphasise the equal importance of hostland and the social transactions between homeland and hostland. The term goes beyond the restriction of narrow and simple identification of persons by traditional ways, which usually refer to nation-state to define people's self-recognition (Wong, 2006). Based on the geographic origins and socioeconomic features of diaspora, we define our research subjects as Chinese knowledge diaspora. The addition of "knowledge" indicates that these diaspora not only have been highly educated with at least an undergraduate degree from mainland China before they went overseas, but also are employed currently as knowledge workers and agents of knowledge transfer at university level.

Methodological Considerations

In social science, reality comes to be understood to human beings only in the form in which it is perceived (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). All knowledge is socially constructed. Human social life is the aggregate reflection of the ideas, beliefs, and perceptions that people hold about reality, which are continuously constructed, created, tested, reinforced, and developed through social interaction and response. Research findings are the outcomes produced along with the process by which the investigation proceeds. In order to understand the cultural practice and the meanings assigned to our research subjects, the best way is through their own eyes to open up a range of possible subjects of inquiry (Neuman, 2004). The qualitative inquiry allows both our research subjects and us–the researchers–to access the thick descriptions of social life, detailed explanations of social processes, and the generation of theory on both micro and macro levels of analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

A case study approach has been chosen firstly because it allows us to gain an in-depth understanding of the situations and meanings for those involved (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), locating our target group in their social environment. Secondly, case studies are featured as phenomenon-oriented rather than method-oriented, providing us with flexibility in using various approaches. A case study approach could open the way for us to move towards both meta and micro level investigations, and provide the means for more holistic multidimensional analyses. While this case study is not to develop generalisations, but to seek the particular more than the ordinary (Stake, 2005), we hope that the analysis of this case sheds light on the general scenario of the Chinese knowledge diaspora around the world.

Redbrick University (a pseudonym) was selected due to a number of academic staff members who are originally from China and who have been working there for more than eight years. Our sampling started with a provisional list of Redbrick University's mainland Chinese academic staff made after sending a global email to invite their expression of interest in participating in this research. We elaborated the eligibility criteria that the participants must be originally from China's mainland usually with an undergraduate degree from there, and a minimum of eight years of living overseas. Based on various variables including disciplines, professional ranks, gender and age groups to guarantee less biased and more representative views and perspectives, 15 academics were selected for interviews. Among them, 6 were from economics-related subjects (including business, management, finance and accounting), 5 from science and engineering, and one each from the humanities and social sciences. This is in line with the general disciplinary distribution of the Chinese knowledge diaspora: most of them are in science and technology, while in the social sciences they tend to concentrate in economics-related fields.

In terms of gender, although we attempted to include more female participants, we only secured 4 women. This, again, echoes the general scenario of the Chinese knowledge diaspora which has been dominated by men. Among the 15 participants, 2 were in their 30s, 9 in their 40s, and 4 in their 50s. As for their academic ranks, two of them were at level B (lecturer), 6 at level C (senior lecturer), 5 at level D (associate professor) and 2 at level E (full professor). Ten of them obtained their doctorates from Australian universities, while 4 from British universities and one from France. Their length of stay in Australia varied, with the longest of 20 years, the shortest of 8 years, and an average of 14.4 years. Politically, 14 of them were Australian citizens, and the other one was holding Australian permanent residency.

Our data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews which allowed us to enter into the interviewees' "inner perspectives" (Patton, 2002, p. 341), and provided us with opportunities to interactively link with them to make sense of what they reflected on in relation to their feelings, thoughts, intentions and behaviours. An example of the questions used during interviews includes: What influence do the collaborative projects have on your personal life and on your work at this university? What influence does your employment at this university have on acquiring and conducting these projects? This type of interview also allowed us to observe interviewees actions and facial expressions.

Fifteen interviews were conducted. Except for one interview, all were tape-recorded. As to the one that was not tape-recorded, we asked for permission to take notes. The length of the interviews was flexible depending on the extent of exploration the interviewee engaged in, with an average of 50 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Chinese Mandarin. The use of mother tongue could eliminate misunderstandings to the greatest extent and deepen the comprehension of issues because language is more than a means of communication about reality. Indeed, it is a tool for constructing reality (Spradley, 1979).

After conducting interviews, the tape-recorded individual interviews and notes were transcribed and categorised according to our research questions, such as: How do members of the diaspora identify themselves as knowledge workers? What role does cultural background play in how they work within higher education? The draft "analytical categories" with detailed descriptions were the basis for coding. Grounded theory was applied. Based on the "material" (Schmidt, 2004), the concepts and themes and how they were linked to each other and to the existent knowledge were identified successively.

Discussion

A variety of themes were identified. As space is limited here, in consideration of the unique features of the Chinese knowledge diaspora and based on the data we collected from our interviews, we present the following findings with a particular focus on their identity and related issues.

Self Identity

Recent accounts of diaspora identities have spawned a huge literature. They are closely allied to studies of the hybridity of cultural identity. Identities are not pure. Instead, they are socially bestowed, sustained and transformed, as a product of mixing and fusion (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Our study confirms the central thrust of contemporary discussions of identity that challenges essentialist understandings of the concept that assumes a unique core or essence to identity that is coherent and remains more or less the same throughout life. Our respondents reported the invented and constructed character of their identities. Many characteristics of diasporas such as dispersion, super-mobility and memories of the homeland were mentioned by the participants, while political exile was strongly rejected.

In terms of how they identify themselves and how their self-identity affects their life and work at the university and their international collaboration especially with China, there was a clear agreement among the participants that mainland Chinese remained as part of their self-identity. The high degree of such recognition among the respondents at Redbrick University contrasts sharply with Welch and Yang's (2009) assertion that those who left China during their school age demonstrated a substantially weaker sense of Chinese cultural identity. Meanwhile, the sense of recognition among the participants at Redbrick University varied for a number of reasons, from the time spent in China and Australia, family and children to the intensity of connecting to China. It seems that overall female respondents appeared to be more willingly to adapt to their new socio-cultural environment. For instance, one female senior economist who had married a Caucasian Australian academic for 13 years with three children expressed that she did not experience much difficulty in her integration with the local society even though she started her professional career from a provincial university at a small town in regional Australia.

The mainland Chinese knowledge diaspora in Australia felt cultural integration was the most difficult for them, and did not think they had been fully integrated into the so-called Australian mainstream society. Meanwhile, they felt comfortable and confident at work. One participant who was a young lecturer of information technology even insisted that full integration was impossible. Another lecturer of finance cited his son's experience and guessed the possibility for the third-generation. Often they used the

term Australian mainstream society (*zhuliu shehui* in Chinese), although we are aware that the concept itself is highly debatable. Indeed, two respondents went further by questioning the meaning of the term, and emphasised their positions in a multicultural Australia. Overall, they admitted that they were partially integrated. Although occasionally they complained about their work and life in Australia, they were generally happy and comfortable with their current situation, and did not think the issue of integration was significant enough to affect their living and working.

Australia's multicultural social environment provides possibilities for the participants. The diverse ethnic communities moderate the hegemonic Anglo-Australian impression in people's minds. With the expanding Chinese population in Australia, although they do not necessarily perceive that they have been fully accepted by the society, other people view their scholars' social status as a sign of being part of the mainstream, as mentioned by a respondent who is an established economist. Meanwhile, as modern professionals with sufficient English competency, they are networking with both Chinese and non-Chinese. As expressed by one interviewee who is a scientist by training with a senior administrative position at the university, "I did not pay attention to this issue because I have both Chinese and non-Chinese friends."

The Chinese knowledge diaspora at Redbrick University have developed their ways to balance identity and membership that do not require an either/or choice between their homeland and host nation. Their responses challenge the notion that migrants from China are not able to embrace an alternative environment, due to their lack of genuine interest in Australia and the totalitarian Chinese society (Gilbert, Khoo, & Lo, 2000). The feeling of alienation in the host country was not particularly significant among our participants. In contrast, after living and working overseas for years, with knowledge acquired from both Chinese and Western societies, they have created ways to enact individualism and combine Chinese spiritual tradition with secular Western knowledge (Wang, 2001), and have become a modern kind of cosmopolitan literati that have a great deal to offer to Australia, China and the world.

Influences of Chinese Background

Except for one participant who had only his first year of tertiary education in China before going overseas, the others all completed their undergraduate education in China, several went overseas after obtaining their Master's degrees. They identified both advantages and disadvantages caused by their Chinese educational background. Two considered their Chinese education background as a disadvantage, and thought it might have contributed to their relatively low academic rank at the university. Others, however, viewed it as beneficial to their work and believed that it helped them with their job acquisition and professional development. As one interviewee in the field of accounting illustrated, her Chinese background placed her in a wining

position when she competed with others for her post at the university. Our only participant from the humanities even detailed how his Chinese connections facilitated him to build up in-country programs with China, which brought both financial and social benefits to his department. Five of the participants, ranging from economics and engineering to medicine, all at the level of senior lecturer and above including one full professor, acknowledged implicitly the contribution of their previous learning and working experience in China to their innovative thinking. Based on our small data size, we find that the more successful career they have, the more positive attitude they have demonstrated toward their Chinese educational background.

China's recent development brings benefits to them, especially those in economics and management. As one respondent, a senior lecturer herself from the faculty of business and economics explained, the advancement of Chinese economy has made many China-related economic issues more interesting and relevant to the international community. Even in engineering, one interviewee noted the increasing attention paid by the university to developing collaborative programs with China because of China's development. With the number of international students from Chinese cultural background fast increasing at Redbrick University, some participants mentioned they were better placed to communicate with such students than their colleagues from non-Chinese backgrounds.

It is interesting to note that some personal virtues that took the participants many years to foster during their time in China and are highly valued in Chinese societies, such as having persistence in the face of adversity and striving for a juste-milieu, are regarded as a double-edged sword: while being hardworking and bearing tough times motivated them to achieve academic success, they contradict with some values that have long been influential in Australia, such as enjoying life and projecting oneself. It is necessary to point out, however, that the comments made by our respondents support Ryan and Louie's (2007) claim that Chinese and Western values, education systems and scholarship should not be positioned in terms of binary opposites. Indeed, the successful stories of the Chinese knowledge diaspora indicate that there are many shared elements between the Chinese and Western traditions.

There are some perceived disadvantages, including weak English proficiency, inadequate knowledge of local culture and customs, and difficulties in networking in the international Western-dominated academic community. The lack of English proficiency was mentioned by every interviewee, as English dominates the global academy. Compared with native English speakers, the Chinese knowledge diaspora often struggle with the language and its related culture, although the threat is much less for those in hard sciences.

Research Collaborations with China

Previous studies have shown that cultural and linguistic backgrounds contribute to closer scholarly communications (Meyer et al., 2001). In addition to intense homeland loyalties and the weight of nostalgia, knowledge diaspora have a sense of obligation to the institutions that educated them. When, on the basis of that education, they achieve their status at the host land, they seek to repay the debt in various forms including transferring information and technology and even participating directly in some programs in their home land (Saxenian, 1999, 2002; Vertovec, 2004). There is a strong sentiment among this group regarding a willingness to cooperate with the home country. For example, Choi (1995) observes that many academics in American higher education from Asian cultural backgrounds keep close contact with their countries of origin, maintaining scientific and academic relationships with colleagues and institutions at home. Considering their Chinese background and their social and academic networks in China, one general assumption is that Chinese knowledge diaspora would work particularly well in their research collaboration with China.

Our research, however, has found that although all the participants expressed their strong interest in research collaboration with China and have maintained contacts with their friends, family and colleagues there, real collaboration in research and teaching has been limited. Among the 15 interviewees, 4 had no concrete research collaboration; 8 had less than half of their collaborative research projects with China; only 3 had formal and concrete collaborative research programs with China. The intensity, frequency, consistency and effectiveness of collaborations with China were not significant. The establishment of research collaboration with China requires more than passion and is dependent on various factors at multiple levels, which are often out of the control of individual academics.

The three participants with substantial research collaborations with China shared some common features including a clear awareness of the importance and benefit of such collaborations, great passion for China, and strong eagerness to contribute to its development. One of this group, a senior medical scientist, for example, was driven solely by his passion for China to start his first collaboration with his Alma Mater. He has since won a project funded by the prestigious Chinese Natural Science Foundation (NSF), and has now snowballed his collaboration. The story of another one of the three, an internationally established engineer, is very similar. He expressed his satisfaction with his achievements in this regard: "The outcomes after a five-year 'incubation' were fruitful and beyond my expectation. Since then, my research collaboration with China has been well developed". Although the third respondent had just been employed by Redbrick University, he had started collaborations with a Chinese university to compile a textbook for Chinese undergraduate students, with an application for a NSF project high on his agenda.

Their previous academic networks in China could have an effective role to play in stimulating research collaborations, especially since the 1990s when China started to accelerate the integration of its scholarly circle into the international community. The Chinese intellectual diaspora are an ideal agent to liaison Chinese and Western academic communities, and assist mainland China scholars to enter into the global knowledge system by joint projects and publications in international mainstream journals. This was repeatedly confirmed by a number of participants generally, and by one interviewee who is a highly established engineer in particular. Such knowledge bridges are in part responsible for China's rapidly rising scientific stature (Li, 2005).

As more and more Chinese students enrol in higher degrees at Australian universities, the diaspora have extended their collaboration from their former teachers and fellow students in China to the returned students they have worked with overseas. One interviewee from the social sciences, for example, was collaborating with his former students who returned to China and later became established scholars there. Their collaborations had been strongly supported by the respondent's former schoolmates who became senior university administrators. Another participant from information technology also illustrated this using his own experience as an example.

Some participants started their collaborative research projects as the result of the internationalisation of their faculties or the university. For instance, an interviewee from the faculty of business and economics had a few China-related research projects which were parts of a much larger project of her faculty. Another participant also benefited from the existing scholar exchange program run at the same faculty. She had been working collaboratively with some visiting scholars from China. The stories of these participants confirm Redbrick University's commitment to internationalisation, and illustrate that the diaspora could act as an agent to create new and different forms of international education in the globalisation of higher education. Both they and their university benefit from each other in such activities.

The picture, however, is not always positive. While every participant expressed his/her interest in conducting collaborative research with China, a number of factors were reported to restrict the fulfilment of such good will. The most prominent was financial difficulties on both sides, which was illustrated by a senior lecturer at the faculty of arts. Other restrictive factors included heavy workloads, excessive accountability, and divergent research priorities in the two countries that had made some participants flinch from developing research collaborations with China. Two respondents respectively from economics and information technology remarked that they did not want to add anything more to their workload. Other respondents such as an associate professor in medicine and a senior lecturer in Chinese studies felt that Redbrick

University did not regard them highly as a reliable agent or strength in the promotion of internationalisation, although they were aware of the university's emphasis on collaboration with China.

Differences between Collaborations with Chinese and Other Partners

Interestingly, the Chinese knowledge diaspora at Redbrick University reported that they had collaborated more with scholars from countries other than China. Their partners were more likely to be from the West and from a few well developed other Asian countries. A number of reasons were listed by our participants, all of which were related to the differences between collaborating with Chinese and other partners. In terms of their means and measures of communication and collaboration, there was not much difference between those with Chinese and those with other partners. The difference lay in the emotional aspect of the knowledge diaspora who often felt closer to other Chinese scholars. Their collaborations with the Chinese colleagues therefore included cultural elements. Much of such collaboration had been deeply rooted in personal relationships.

However, our participants suggested that personal friendships (*guanxi* in Chinese) could also be developed through longstanding collaboration with the scholars from non-Chinese cultures. For example, one respondent who is a senior lecturer of economics pointed out that guanxi was important almost everywhere, and scholars from other societies emphasised *guanxi* as well. Another participant from the social sciences background agreed, and went further by saying:

> Westerners also considered guanxi a lot, but their guanxi is different. Chinese guanxi emphasises self-interest. In order to build up guanxi in China, you need to deliver almost instant benefits or gifts. In contrast, building up guanxi and mutual trust with Westerners is often through collaborative work and common research interests.

One common difficulty expressed by this group in their collaboration with China was the lack of funding. While two respondents from engineering and one from health sciences expressed this somewhat differently by saying that it was much easier for them to gain funding from industrialised Western countries, every other participant reported that insufficient funding from the Chinese side was a common issue that had affected their collaboration with China. It is interesting to point out that this situation of insufficient funding from the Chinese side was reported more in the areas of information technology, engineering, health and medical sciences. This has affected collaboration. For example, although two respondents acknowledged their willingness to contribute to China unconditionally, others stressed mutual benefits as the most important factor for their collaboration.

Furthermore, our participants at Redbrick University highlighted the fact that their Chinese partners emphasised personal gains to such an extent that their collaboration in basic research had been limited. A professor of engineering recalled his experience of collaboration and remarked: "We must invest money and let [the Chinese collaborators] see the benefits. The tendency of earning money is becoming stronger and stronger. Everything is for money." With the central focus on financial gains, there is a striking shortage of genuine motivation among Chinese academics for research. As mentioned by one of our respondents who had been invited some years ago by a top Chinese university to lecture there for three weeks, "The professors especially the established ones were not interested in research at all. They were so busy with participating in profit-making activities". Such an observation concurs with the findings of other studies (see, for example, Yang, 2005).

In addition to funding, unavailability of important research data was reported to be another major difficulty experienced by our participants at Redbrick University in their collaboration with China. Some participants reported their difficulties in obtaining data from China. This is a particularly serious problem for those in the social sciences. A senior, female economist said she could not conduct any China-related research without sufficient data support. She complained that very often some data were not released publicly in China.

The quality of their Chinese partners was also mentioned as an important factor that affected their collaboration with China. More than half of our participants reported the weak quality of their Chinese partners. The most frequently listed limitations included insufficient English proficiency, poor research training, limited knowledge of the international literature, and lack of familiarity with the international practice in the scholarly community such as the commonly accepted codes of conduct.

Despite all the aforementioned difficulties, it remained a common understanding among our participants that collaboration with China was not only what they wanted but also what they needed. As one of them acknowledged, collaboration with China had broadened his perspective. Indeed, they had all benefited from this, as knowledge workers in Australia. The collaboration not only met their personal emotional needs, but was also politically and economically necessary for their institutions and for their own professional career. Indeed, there has appeared to be an international competition for Western universities to work with China. Several interviewees expressed that they had found it increasingly hard to conduct research collaborations with China. As a senior lecturer of accounting said, "In the early 1990s, any overseas scholars were welcomed unconditionally. Now, China's standards for choosing overseas partners have become higher and higher."

Conclusions

The knowledge diaspora and the transnational networks they establish, as part of the wider phenomenon of increased global mobility undergirded by greater density and diffusion of information technology, could tilt the balance towards countries such as China and create far more complex and decentralised, two-way flows of knowledge. The exodus of the highly skilled people could be both a loss and a potential gain for the country of origin (Lowell & Gerova, 2006; Wickramasekara, 2002). Our examination of the Chinese knowledge diaspora and their research collaborations in a context of globalisation at the specific setting of Redbrick University shows that are also initiators of, and active participants in, the university's internationalisation programs with China. Originally from mainland China with posts in a system that is better positioned in the global network (Altbach, 1998), they are China's brain power stored overseas. They could not only help Chinese mainland scholars enter into the international knowledge system, but also maintain broad contacts with other scholars in the world and conduct various international research collaborations, linking China more closely to the international scholarly community. It is in this sense that their stories endorse Chinese current policy to encourage free movement of the knowledge diaspora to and from China to serve China's development in various ways.

There are, however, a number of restrictions at different levels that counteract the effects of their research collaboration with China ranging from their daily heavy workload, excessive accountability system, to difficulties in gaining funding from both Australia and China. Despite these difficulties, the belief in the significance of such collaborations remains, even further enhanced by the Chinese knowledge diaspora's strong passion for China and by the fact that China is emerging as a global power. Our case study confirms the value of these diaspora scholars as a particularly important asset within a context of intensified globalisation. Our findings also show that instead of a zero-sum game, international migration of the highly skilled people could be transformed into a 'win-win' process if sending and receiving governments would take active steps in organising it as a managed knowledge-transfer programme.

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Appendix: Interview Schedule for a Case Study of Mainland Chinese Diaspora at an Australian University

(A Chinese translation was also provided)

Faculty/School/Department (Name):

Interviewee (Name):

Date of interview:

Interview length (time):

Step 1: Greetings

Step 2: Brief introduction to this research project. (Refer to Subject Information Statement, Consent Form etc).

Step 3: Explanation that the interview is not at all a comment on the interviewee's ideas or on her/his school/faculty, but is to elicit the state of selected interviewees as mainland Chinese knowledge diaspora, as well as their perceptions of their importance, rationale etc.

Step 4: Confirmation of personal details of interviewees including name, age, academic rank, place/institution of study in China, speciality, the highest degree and the length of stay in overseas and Australia, immigration status, followed by the following questions:

Q1: Could you generally talk about your working experience? What factors made you finally decide to work as an academic at this University in Australia?

Q2: Do you think 'Mainland Chinese knowledge diaspora' can best describe your current identity?

If yes, why?

If not, how do you identify yourself?

Q3: What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages as a mainland Chinese knowledge diaspora?

Q4: Do you feel that you can mix together with the mainstream of Australian society? Is it important for you to achieve this? Why?

Q5: What do you feel about working at this University? Has this University provided sufficient opportunities and space for you to achieve your academic success?

Q6: As a person originated from mainland China, do you conduct collaborative research projects with academics in mainland China?

If yes, what triggered such cooperation? Who initiated that? and from when? (Go to Q7)

If not, please explain the reasons and whether or not you prepare to build up such collaborative research relationship with colleagues in mainland China in the future? (Go to Q10)

Q7: How do you conduct your collaborative academic research projects? What outcomes have you achieved?

Q8. What changes have you ever experienced in scientific communication with Chinese counterparts, it could be explored from the perspectives of policy, information obtainment and so on. Why those changes happen?

Q9: What are the differences and similarities of scientific research and teaching between this University and the universities in mainland China? What factors accelerated or hindered your collaborative projects? Please think from both aspects of China and Australia.

Q10: What influences do the collaborative projects have on your personal life and on your work at this University? What influences does your employment at this University have on acquiring and conducting those projects?

Q11: Except for interactions with scholars in mainland China, who else have you contacted with for doing collaborative academic research projects? Do you have other Chinese knowledge diaspora or non-Chinese as research partners? How do you build up such academic relationship with them?

Q12: Compared with other international collaborative academic projects, what differences have you found about those with mainland Chinese academics?

Q13: Of your overall international communication and cooperation, how much would you estimate is specific to mainland China (e.g. 30%, 60%, none, most etc)?

Q14: According to current situation, which country, China, Australia or any other country, would be the best place for your personal development? Why?

Q15: Any further comments on your linkage with Chinese scientific communities in China and/or elsewhere and/or on this project.

Thank you for your assistance!