



How Can the Chinese Government Promote the Return of Talent?

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Abstract. Nowadays, talent is one of the most important resources in the competition between countries. China, as a developing country, is at a relative disadvantage position in the international talent competition. This paper explores policy options for attracting Chinese students to return home. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews. In this article, a number of international students from middle-class families in urban areas were interviewed about their thoughts and aspirations when they face the problem of whether to stay or leave after studying abroad. Through the interviews, this research found out the commonalities in the purpose, stage, advantages and career choices of these international students, as well as the financial difficulties they generally face before returning to China, and the government can provide financial support and subsidies in various ways to solve their difficulties and attract them to return to China to participate in socialist modernization.

Keywords: Talent management · International students · Middle-class families · Policy option

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

In the 21st century, mankind has entered an era dominated by knowledge and talent. The competition and development of countries in the future will not only depend on material resources and monetary capital but also on the development of human resources. As the political, economic, military and cultural spheres more and more rely on human resources, human capital development has become one of the most important parts of national development. As a result, the talent competition has become increasingly fierce, with countries introducing policies to attract talent and promote the return of their talent. According to Long Yinggui, the term brain drain first appeared in 1958 to refer to the phenomenon of British academics and scientists migrating to the United States and has since been widely used to describe the international transfer of human resources, that is, the migration of skilled labour (such as scientists, engineers, senior skilled workers, etc.) from one country to another [1]. In the international transfer of human resources, developed countries, with their advanced level of development of science and technology,

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advanced level of economic development, and relatively more mature human resources policies, continue to attract skilled labour from all over the world, which translates into economic productivity and effective solutions to social problems.

Developing countries, however, are facing a serious brain drain problem due to their economic and social problems. Since China's reform and opening up, the Chinese government has supported and encouraged students to go abroad for further studies. The international students returning from their studies not only bring advanced science and technology, knowledge and experience to the country, but also different ideas and concepts. They play an irreplaceable role in scientific and technological research, development, and Sino-foreign communications. However, students who studied abroad bear an inescapable responsibility to their families and need to develop themselves. Due to several practical factors that cannot be ignored, some international students choose to stay in their country of study, resulting in a brain drain from China. To seize the opportunity in the international competition for talents, the government should provide a favourable environment for returnees from a macro perspective. Through in-depth interviews with Chinese overseas students, this paper explores the characteristics of international students from middle-class families, and the problems they faced in staying or leaving their countries of study and thus explores what feasible policy options are available for developing countries in the face of the brain drain problem.

1.2 Literature Review

There is much previous literature that provides advice on the development of China's overall talent policy. For example, in the article on the three-stage model of talent policy development and China's talent policy, [1] the paper summarises three characteristics of talent policy development: temporal, spatial and historical, divide talent policies into four categories: attraction and protection policies, cultivation and development policies, management and maintenance policies and evaluation and assessment policies, and builds a three-stage model of talent policy development on this basis. The model is validated by using the development of talent policies in China from 2000 to 2018. Finally, it is suggested that talent policymakers should understand the talent needs of their regions, and the stages of talent policy development, and pay attention to the effectiveness and efficiency of talent policies as well as a reasonable mix of talent policies. With China's modernisation and economic development, large numbers of students have gone abroad to study, and numerous papers have explored the wave of study abroad in China and the return and employment of overseas students, an article on the current situation of career development of returnees from overseas and reflections on countermeasures [2]. On the one hand, it describes the number of overseas students, their age, the countries they have travelled to and their majors, and on the other hand, it describes the number and levels of returnees, analyses the needs of the state for returnees, and introduces the preferential policies enacted by the state to attract overseas students. It also analyses the difficulties and obstacles encountered by returnees in terms of their career development, cultural adaptation and the satisfaction of needs, and thus analyses some common problems encountered by the targeted group of returnees. The study also proposes corresponding countermeasures from both the domestic environment and the returnees themselves. The

analysis of the characteristics of the international student community is more often categorised by countries, as in the article “British students and contemporary China”. Some articles have also analysed the brain drain situation in developing countries in the face of international competition for talents, such as the article on brain drain and related factors in China and the article on brain drain phenomena and trends worldwide. However, there are several shortcomings in the analysis of the international student community in the previous literature. Studying abroad as an educational investment entails a monetary cost for families, and families in different walks of life produce international students with different traits and tendencies to face choices that have been little studied in the literature.

2 Methods

2.1 Data Collection

This study applied a methodology of in-depth interviews to extract narratives of Chinese students studying abroad. The purposive sampling criteria included: 1) The age group of interviewees: 22–26 years old. 2) Background of guardians: health care workers, lecturers and professors (universities or research institutes), civil servants, managers and directors in private enterprises, small businesses etc. (Family annual income: 150,000–70,000 RMB) 3) Stage of study abroad: undergraduate (18+, entering the commonwealth educational system since undergraduate degree. 4) Country of study: UK, Australia, Malaysia and other Commonwealth countries. 5) Type of institution: Top universities in their country of study. 6) Major: Engineering, Arts, Business, Art (Architecture).

A total of 4 interviews were conducted between April and May 2022. Participants’ consent was obtained before each interview. During the one-to-one interviews, participants were asked to share their family economic and social background, purpose and intention of studying abroad, stage of studying abroad, country of study, major and field of study, career expectations and employment options and willingness to come back to their home country (China), etc.

2.2 Data Analysis

The interviews were first recorded via zoom or iPhone screen recording. Then being transformed into words. The author conducted the interviews and coding independently and then analysed and compared the results.

3 Results

Data analysis revealed 4 main themes: employment options, career planning, financial situation and intention of serving the home country.

3.1 Employment Options

The interviewees' majors are only available in first-tier and some of the new first-tier cities in terms of employment options (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen). As interviewee 3 mentioned,

“The problem is only first-tier cities and some provincial capitals on the south-east coast of China have conferences which need simultaneous and consecutive interpreters. I planned to go to Beijing after graduation.” Interviewee 2's targets occupations such as positions in investment banks, and consulting companies, most of which are located in first-tier cities. The most desirable career such as lecturers and professors in universities and researchers in scientific institutes, most of which are also located in first-tier cities. The same applies to the architectural design institute where interviewee 1 worked.

3.2 Career Planning

In terms of career planning, in the short term, they would like to work in a job with a high starting salary to earn or recoup their tuition fees and living expenses during their studies, and in the long term, their desire for realizing self-worth weighed more than the desire of earning the money. As interviewee2 mentioned,

“Most ideally, I need a position that can achieve my full potential and if lucky enough, contribute to society. After finishing my master's degree, there was a suitable position for me at an investment bank in London in which I can recoup my tuition fees and living expenses. After receiving the scholarship, I chose to continue my research in the related field.”

3.3 Financial Situation

Their family can afford expenses for higher education in commonwealth countries from the undergraduate level. However, participants admitted that they have financial difficulties affording more than 4 years of tuition fees and living costs of studying in the commonwealth countries. As there are inner differences in tuition fees among the commonwealth countries, for example, relatively financially advanced families can choose the UK from the undergraduate level. However, for the targeted group in all, if both undergraduate and master's degrees are pursued in the UK, it will bring some financial pressure on the family. Though they have the channel to acquire information regarding disparate educational systems other than Chinese, they cannot afford to choose various educational systems at high school freely nor did the students attending international schools in Chinese territory. Some have taken the domestic college entrance examination.

3.4 Intention of Serving the Home Country

As their family's financial situation is tight after finishing undergraduate and postgraduate studying abroad. All participants confirmed that they are willing to come back to China and serve the country, however, participants sometimes struggled with the intent to

serve their country and the high price of housing in Chinese major cities. They need state scholarships such as CSC and are emotionally willing to accept the service in their home country since they are already adults when they left their home country, the emotional bond between the students and their home country is very tight. Under the covid-19, there are cases where the students even spent most of their college time in their home country and attended online classes during the years. As a result, they have a relatively little problem with cultural identity, as interviewee3 mentioned,

“I spend the last two years of my undergraduate in China because of Covid-19, almost half of my college time.”

Interviewee1 mentioned, “I am more comfortable with the Chinese cultural environment and since I have a home in Beijing, I would love to return to China.”

4 Discussion

4.1 The Advantage and Value of the Targeted Group of Chinese Students Who Studied Abroad

In addition to the common advantages of international students, such as a broad international outlook and the ability to communicate across cultures, these students generally have scarce skills and knowledge of the superstructure of the country in which they are studying, a relatively high degree of commitment to their home country and the willingness to serve socialist modernization.

4.2 The Difficulties Faced by These Students

However, due to the relative lack of family savings, their families face financial pressure at the end of their studies and their choices are constrained by the cost of living regarding career, country or city, which needs to be attracted and supported by preferential policies, as shown in Table 1.

4.3 How Can the Chinese Government Continue to Promote the Return of the Targeted Talents

The state can attract talented people to return to their home countries by granting national scholarships with regulations to serve the country after graduation and at the same time setting up rental subsidies in first-tier cities for such students, to prevent students who have no plans to emigrate from choosing to work or even emigrate in their country of study due to practical factors, such as more attractive salaries, better housing conditions and positions where they can better realize their self-worth.

5 Conclusion

This paper is a useful reference for the study of the Chinese overseas student community and the return of Chinese talent. The key aspect of this paper is the classification of the international student community and the discussion of the dilemmas faced by middle-class international students and their need for policy support, which is of some relevance. The main research work of this paper is as follows, classifying overseas students and using in-depth interviews to collect information on several international students who have studied or completed their studies in Commonwealth countries. This paper found that, in addition to being concerned about settling in a first-tier city, these students generally need a job with a higher starting salary due to the financial pressure their families face at the end of their studies. They also need some scholarships at the end of their studies, and a rental subsidy in a first-tier city when they return home. The government can provide temporary financial subsidies in a variety of ways, grant national scholarships, and target a select group of highly qualified people from prestigious overseas universities for one-to-one assistance.

Appendix

See Table 1.

Table 1. Preferential policies for international students in four major cities

	Beijing	Shanghai	Guangzhou	Shenzhen
Reward	Up to \$1 million rewards for outstanding talent	Pujiang Talent Programme: up to RMB 500,000 government funding is available		
Business start-up subsidy	100,000 from the government for business start-up costs	Starting a business in Pudong: you can apply for 150,000 RMB start-up capital	Subsidised interest on small secured loans, up to RMB200,000 for individuals	
Accommodation	Provision of short-term swing accommodation			Can apply for renting the housing and international student flats provided by the municipal/regional government.
Car purchase	One tax-free car can be purchased.	One tax-free car can be purchased.	One tax-free car can be purchased.	One tax-free car can be purchased.
Other awards and subsidy	A person who has been awarded the title of "Specially Appointed Expert" in Beijing can receive an award of RMB 1 million			access to a living allowance in Shenzhen: RMB 15,000 per undergraduate, RMB 25,000 per master and RMB 30,000 per doctor.

Source: Online Service Hall of Study Abroad Service Centre, Ministry of Education

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