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Chances and Challenges to personal and professional development in Chinese higher education institutions: Perspectives of Chinese returnee lecturers who have overseas learning experiences

Under the joint action of internal (people's growing requirement for intellectual satisfaction) and external (rapid economic development calls for increasing populace's education) causes, there is a sharp increase in demand for the expansion of higher education in China. As a result, there is an increasing need for higher education educators in China which may have implications for the quality of higher educators. Returning students with high-intensity but short-duration tertiary overseas education experience are considered to be an excellent choice to fill this gap. Statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education show that China is experiencing the third "return tide" of overseas-educated Chinese – 432,500 in 2016 returning to work, an increase of 58.48% over 2012 (Xinhuanet Reporter,2017). And among them, 47% have achieved Masters, PhD and Post-Doctor degrees whose main employment goals and intentions are higher education institutions, research institutions and National Public institutions.

The rapid economic and political development in China has not only affected the country's need for higher education, but also significantly improved the quantity and quality of available career opportunities for returnees. Besides, Chinese government is committed to providing sustained preferential policies to attract overseas-educated students returning to China. At meantime, higher education institutions also improve benefits provided to international returnees. As a result, data shows that more than 80% of the overseas-educated Chinese are willing to return to China for development after they finish their studies (Xinhuanet Reporter,2017). However, what come together with these opportunities are higher requirements and pressure. Increasingly stringent standards are used to measure the value of the returnees: ranking of graduated institutions, number of articles published, research direction, ability to attract research funds and so on. Therefore, perspectives of Chinese returnee lecturers who have overseas learning experiences are very valuable for students who have taken Chinese higher education institutions as their career goals and peers in the overseas students group who are seeking higher education jobs.

However, according to Gu & Schweifurth (2015), there is still a lack of empirical evidence and conceptual exploration of overseas-education experiences' instant and lasting influence on identity, values and behaviors in the context of returning to home country. Quite a number of current studies on international study experiences focus on international students group without taking account of their demographic backgrounds and few consider the perspectives of overseas-educated higher education lecturers. My research will contribute to filling the gap with a focus on in-depth exploration of how overseas experiences continue to impact identity, values and behaviors of the returnees who work in Chinese higher education institutions after they finished their studies abroad when constructing or reconstructing their lives and careers 'at home'.

The research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do they characterise their international learning (or teaching, if applicable) experiences?
2. What experiences do they draw on during the period they work in a university at 'home'(Chances and Challenges)?
3. To what extent they think their international learning (and teaching, if applicable) experiences impact on their further career development?

The research is designed to be a qualitative case study involving the following approaches to

answering these questions:

Semi-structured interviews focusing on their international learning (and teaching, if applicable) experiences: a 45-minute interview will be conducted following an interview guideline.

Photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) about the experiences after their return and beginning to work within a higher education context at 'home': Participants will be encouraged to take or select 8 photographs to represent the opportunities and challenges during their work in a Chinese higher education institution in the face-to-face interviews. This will give the participants a chance to have a voice and express their experiences through their own eyes, which will improve the authenticity of the data.

Documentary analysis: To look into and capture a wider group of overseas 'returnees' perspectives by exploring material posted on social media and already in the public domain.

The semi-structure interviews will be conducted prior to the photo-elicitation interviews. The reason for this order is that I expect to increase familiarity through the first interviews which will enhance the trust of interviewers and build a stronger relationship between us. As a result, the interviewers may choose photos that reflect inner and deeper issues in the second phase photo- elicitation interviews in which they can take the initiative.

Gu, Q. and Schweifurth, M. (2015) Transnational Connections, Competences and identities: experiences of Chinese international students after their return 'home'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(6), pp. 947-970.(doi:[10.1002/berj.3175](https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3175))