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The Outcomes of Chinese Visiting Scholars' Experiences at Canadian Universities: Implications for Faculty Development at Chinese Universities

Abstract This article examines the outcomes of the overseas experiences of Chinese visiting scholars and the implications of visiting scholar programs for faculty development at Chinese universities. On the basis of semi-structured interviews with 17 returned Chinese visiting scholars who spent six to 12 months in a faculty of education at one of five Canadian universities, the following significant aspects of their experiences and related outcomes were highlighted: The cycle of overseas experiences and associated outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars, factors influencing the outcomes of their overseas experiences, visiting scholar programs as a type of faculty development, and China-Canada academic collaboration through visiting scholar programs. The findings support the literature-based conceptual model for investigating the experiences and outcomes of visiting scholars. In the new era of sending university faculty abroad, we suggest that visiting scholar programs should be treated as an important approach to professional development for faculty and be incorporated into a comprehensive faculty development package for Chinese university faculty.

Keywords Chinese visiting scholars, overseas experiences, outcomes, faculty development

Introduction

The Chinese government began to fund university faculty to study abroad in

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1955, with only 33 faculty members having the opportunity at the time (Chen, 2004). December 1986 witnessed the release of the first national policy regarding studying abroad personnel as China opened itself to the outside world. This policy established a mechanism that required the dispatched faculty to sign an agreement to returning home on schedule. The China Scholarship Council (CSC) was established in 1996 to take responsibility for merit-based selection and funding of Chinese citizens who studied abroad. In 2014, the CSC planned to fund 21,350 people to study abroad, of whom more than 36% would be faculty members in higher education institutions. The faculty can be funded through visiting scholar and senior visiting scholar programs or programs for young “backbone” university faculty or faculty at universities of the West region of China (CSC, 2013).

Two related top-down factors have provided incentives for motivating Chinese university faculty to pursue opportunities for studying abroad. One is the internationalization drive in higher education in China, which necessitates internationalization of faculty members to help align the curriculum and research with international academic standards (Liu & Dai, 2012). One way of expanding faculty engagement internationally is to send scholars overseas for some time as visiting scholars. The other factor is the Chinese government’s quest to build world-class universities through national initiatives such as Projects 985 and 211¹. To raise the institutional profile, many universities under Projects 985 and 211 have begun to formulate institutional policies that expect faculty members to have overseas academic experiences before professional promotion to full professorship. Thus, an increasing number of Chinese universities are following suit. Consequently, some faculty members are extrinsically under pressure to seek overseas opportunities. In addition to the national-level funding from CSC, Chinese faculty have access to province-based, locally-based or institution-based funding sources for studying abroad. Some faculty are also willing to fund themselves for short-term overseas experiences. Some international funding opportunities, such as the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program, are open to

¹ Project 211 is the Chinese government’s national initiative that aims to strengthen approximately 100 institutions of higher education and prioritize their development for the 21st century. There are a total of 112 institutions under the project. Project 985 was an endeavour to build top-tiered Chinese higher education institutions into world-class universities. It was launched on May 4, 1998 by then President Jiang Zemin, and has a total of 39 universities, which are also part of Project 211.

Chinese faculty too. Overall, Chinese university faculty are not nowadays short of opportunities and resources if they would like to gain academic experiences abroad.

In that context, the goal of this paper is to better understand the overseas experiences of Chinese university faculty as visiting scholars at universities in North America (Canada specifically), related outcomes, and the significance of visiting scholar programs to faculty development at Chinese universities. For that purpose, the focus is on the outcomes of the experiences of Chinese visiting scholars at faculties of education of some Canadian universities. Canada was chosen for the study as it is one of the major receiving countries for Chinese visiting scholars and has a long-term academic collaborative relationship with China (Hayhoe, Pan, & Zha, 2013). Due to its Canadian context, the paper also aims to add insights to one aspect of the on-going academic linkage building between the two countries, that is, through visiting scholar programs. Thus, the following questions have guided the inquiry in this paper:

- What were the major experiences and resulting outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars at faculties of education of Canadian universities?
- How have those outcomes contributed to faculty development at Chinese universities?
- How have visiting scholar programs impacted China-Canada academic collaboration?

Literature Review: Outcomes of Chinese Visiting Scholars' Overseas Academic Experiences

The experiences and outcomes of some Chinese scholars who returned in the early 1990s are presented in Hayhoe's (1996) documentation of her visit to nearly 40 Chinese universities in the Central South and Northwest regions. The outcome can be summarized on both organizational and individual levels. On the organizational level, returned visiting scholars brought in international collaboration opportunities that made a lasting impact on reshaping the whole academic program of the sending university or enhancing the knowledge and skills of personnel within local units. On the individual level, the experience of studying abroad was a significant turning point in the professional lives of the visiting scholars. Some also expressed frustration about constraints within their

own university environments on their pedagogical experimentation and productivity in research. Others noted the difficulty of continuing with significant cooperation with colleagues abroad due to lack of travel funding.

Recent Chinese literature on Chinese faculty studying abroad consists largely of discussions of policies and management issues (e.g., Jing & Zhang, 2014; Wang, 2010; Zhao, An, & Xu, 2014). Outcomes reported by individual returned visiting scholars are anecdotally given as personal profiles in some journals (e.g., Editorial, 2013). Overall, empirical studies on experiences and outcomes of returned Chinese visiting scholars are rarely seen. Out of the very few, Chen (2004) documented some results from a survey that was conducted in 2001 to more than 5,000 publicly-funded faculty members or researchers at more than 100 Chinese universities and research institutes. The results showed that the studying abroad experiences were highly rewarding in areas of improving foreign languages, enhancing academic capabilities, updating knowledge, increasing international academic exchanges, and uplifting judgment and problem-solving skills. The rewards were not only on the individual level but also on the societal level.

Several case studies that Robert Rhoads recently conducted (Rhoads & Chang, 2014; Rhoads & Hu, 2012; Rhoads & Liang, 2006) about the changes in Chinese universities have revealed the positive impacts of Chinese faculty's overseas experiences on their academic work in the context of internationalization. They have made pedagogical changes in their existing courses, opened bilingual courses, learned to adapt to international scholarship standards, and sought collaboration and funding opportunities from outside China.

Overall, there is a lack of systematic investigation into the gains Chinese visiting scholars obtained and the challenges they encountered during and after international exposure in recent years, in the context of massification and internationalization of Chinese higher education, and particularly studies taking account of disciplinary effects on visiting scholars' experiences and outcomes. This paper attempts to fill this literature gap.

Conceptual Framework

To examine the experiences and outcomes of visiting scholars, this paper has drawn upon four areas of literature for its conceptual framework: outcomes

assessment, international faculty mobility, intercultural learning, and transformative learning.

Given the nature of the outcomes assessment of this research, its conceptual framework was first informed by groundwork for assessing outcomes of learning in higher education institutions. A premise for the outcomes assessment is framed in Astin's (1991, 1993) I(Input)-E(Environment)-O(Output) model, which has laid a conceptual and methodological foundation for the vast literature of what is called "college impact" research in the United States (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Basically, the sociological model argues that assessment of student outcomes requires three types of information: students' characteristics at the point of entry into higher education (i.e., Input), data representing their educational experiences (i.e., Environment), and data describing the characteristics of the students after their exposure to the institutional environment (i.e., Output; Astin, 1993). The model suggests that students' outcomes are affected by both their entry characteristics and learning experiences under a certain institutional environment. In light of this framework, we make the proposition that the outcomes of Chinese faculty's overseas academic experiences are influenced by their personal traits when they first entered the foreign country on one hand, and by the social and academic experiences they later encountered on the other hand.

Second, international faculty mobility is of relevance to this study that examines academic sojourn of Chinese faculty. In particular, van de Bunt-Kokhuis' (1996) framework suggests that there are three phases in the process of motivation to participate in international mobility. In Phase 1, the initial motivation comes from individual, economic, and job determinants. In Phase 2, when an opportunity has become available, internal and external triggers and barriers negotiate with each other in the decision-making process. In Phase 3, the faculty member weighs up the realistic options and makes the decision to participate in international mobility. In light of this framework, part of our goal is to examine the motivation of Chinese visiting scholars who chose Canada as their destination for overseas academic experiences.

Last but not the least, intercultural learning and transformative learning literature also shed much light on this study. According to Immelman and Schneider's (1998) conceptual framework for assessing student learning in study-abroad programs, intercultural learning can occur in four domains:

cognitive (knowledge acquisition, including subject matter knowledge and intercultural knowledge), behavioral (skills acquisition, including academic skills, social skills or leadership skills), affective (attitudinal development, including new values or self-esteem), and social (personal and interpersonal development, including self-awareness or changes in life goals or career goals).

As a result of intercultural learning, intercultural competence will develop. Deardorff (2006) delineates a process of developing intercultural competence into four steps. The process starts with a set of attitudes: openness, respect, curiosity, and discovery. When exposed to an intercultural environment, learners have developed knowledge, skills, and attitudes that reflect some elements in the new environment. As a result, their informed frame of reference has shifted, leading to internal outcomes, such as adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy, and external outcomes, such as effective and appropriate communication, when interacting in an intercultural situation. The external outcomes, finally, are linked with attitudes, the starting point, thus closing the loop for a new cycle of intercultural competence development. This competence development process in an intercultural environment is applicable to the experiences of Chinese visiting scholars in a Western country although the elements in the process may not be exactly the same.

Learning that occurs in an intercultural environment can be further corroborated by transformative learning theories. Specifically, Mezirow (1991), and Mezirow and Associates (2000) outline a process of perspective transformation, which starts with a disorienting dilemma (i.e., an incongruent experience) and ends with a building of competence and self-confidence, and a reintegration into one's life. *Perspective transformation* involves the transformation of *a meaning perspective*, which is a set of habitual expectation, and thus entails a process of being critically aware of the constraints of the existing meaning perspectives, changing them "to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective," and finally taking action in new understandings (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167).

The transformative learning framework is found helpful to investigate sojourn experiences (Gill, 2007; Martin & Griffiths, 2014; Taylor, 1994). Connecting Mezirow's perspective transformation with the process of intercultural competency, Taylor (1994) has rephrased an intercultural learning process into three components: the catalyst for change, the process, and the outcome. The

catalyst for change for intercultural learners is the “cultural disequilibrium,” or periods of dissonance that may cause stress and intense emotions (Hamel, Chikamori, Ono, & Williams, 2010; Taylor, 1994).

Based upon these four interrelated theoretical perspectives, we have conceptualized the experiences and outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars as an intercultural and transformative learning process that starts with certain motivations, plans, and attitudes; undergoes academic and social experiences at the host university in the host country; and then leads to internal (i.e., cognitive and affective), external (i.e., behavioral), and long-term outcomes (see Fig. 1). Their learning experiences are influenced by the social environment and the institutional environment in which visiting scholars live and learn. Their outcomes of learning have cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social dimensions.

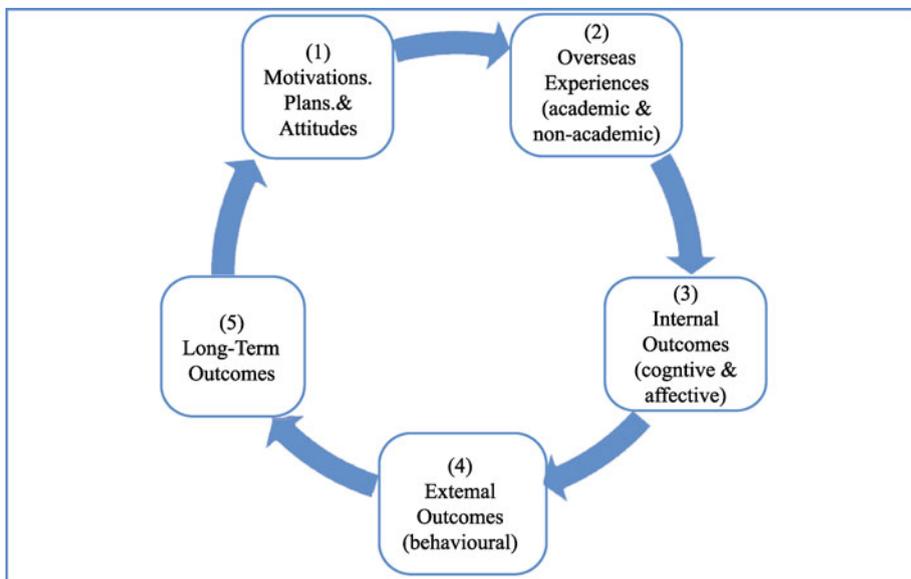


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework for Studying the Outcomes of Overseas Experiences of Chinese Visiting Scholars

Research Methods

This study has adopted what Maxwell (2013) calls an interactive approach to qualitative research design, where the different components of a design—goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity—“form an

integrated and interacting whole, with each component closely tied to several others” (p. 4). This means that even though this paper is written in a linear sequence of goals, research questions, conceptual framework and research methods, the thinking is holistic in that the initial goals, research questions and conceptual framework went through some modifications after data collection to achieve coherence of all the components.

The target population for this study was Chinese university faculty who had spent a period of time (typically six to 12 months) in Canada as visiting scholars and had returned to China for at least four months (or an academic term). We also intended to limit our investigation to those visiting experiences in the past decade, and focus on the experiences and outcomes of visiting scholars in education-related disciplines, that is, those at hosting faculties of education of Canadian universities during their visiting period.

It is important to note that Chinese visiting scholars staying at faculties of education in Canada can have diverse academic backgrounds in liberal arts or social sciences due to diverse fields of study that are usually housed in the faculties of education at Canadian universities. Despite the diversity of their academic backgrounds, these visiting scholars share a common research interest in education-related issues. This has given some advantage to the our investigation because on one hand, the informants to this paper represent cases in multiple academic areas and, on the other, those visiting scholars are probably more interested in making educational innovations than their peers with other disciplinary backgrounds due to their intrinsic concern for educational issues.

This study’s data source primarily stems from semi-structured interviews with 17 returned visiting scholars, and is supplemented by some web information about the interviewees and institutional policies on hosting visiting scholars. The use of the web information was mainly for better understanding the professional background of the interviewees and the institutional support for visiting scholars. The semi-structured interview technique allowed us to probe deeper into the motivations, experiences, and outcomes of the informants, and therefore, was appropriate for the purposes of our study.

We employed a purposeful sampling strategy and intended to include visiting scholars who were at various Canadian universities and had come from various Chinese universities. We conducted the interviews via phone, Skype or QQ²

² An online tool similar to Skype, widely used in China.

from January to August 2014. Most of the interviews were one to two hours in duration. The interview questions were mainly concerned with five areas: (1) interviewees' plans prior to arriving in Canada; (2) their academic and non-academic experiences in Canada; (3) their perceived gains as a result of those experiences; (4) the changes in their teaching, research or administrative activities after returning to their home universities in China; and (5) their insights on the impact of visiting scholar programs on faculty development in Chinese universities. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and recorded with the interviewees' permission.

The profile of our interviewees varies by multiple indicators. The interviewees were affiliated with different Chinese universities, about half of which are institutions under Projects 985 or 211. They each spent six to 12 months as a visiting scholar at the faculty of education of five receiving Canadian universities at different times between 2002 and 2014. Of the 17 interviewees, eight were female, 10 were associate professors or equivalent, four were instructors, and three were professors during their visit to Canada. They were social science scholars in education-related fields of study, representing various specialties (including four in higher education, three in educational technology, three in second language acquisition) and a wide range of research areas (including policy and administration, comparative education, citizenship education, faculty development, curriculum and instruction, and educational psychology). In terms of funding sources, six were funded by the Canada-China Scholars' Exchange Program (CCSEP)³, two by regional funding programs, and the remaining by the CSC visiting scholar programs. In terms of prior overseas experience, five had another one-year academic experience abroad as a visiting scholar in another country whereas for others, the overseas experience in Canada was their very first one. In terms of educational background, two did not have a doctoral degree before their visit to Canada, two had earned their Ph.D. in Hong Kong, and the rest had earned their Ph.D. in the Chinese Mainland.

We transcribed interview recordings into texts, and then coded the data on the basis of the components in our conceptual framework. We compared emerging

³ The CCSEP was established in 1973 and is an exchange program based on the reciprocal agreements between the Canadian and Chinese governments. A scholarship is provided to successful applicants for studies and research for four to 12 months. The program can be found on the website of the International Scholarships Program: <http://www.scholarships-bourses.gc.ca/>, or <http://www.educationtoronto.org/publish/portal46/tab3213/info69445.htm>

themes from the data of each interviewee to identify common themes, which we have used to inform our findings.

It should be acknowledged that a small proportion of the interviewees are friends of one author of this paper and the other author was a visiting scholar herself during the data collection period. Mindful of our own experiential knowledge about the topic for this paper, we exercised “critical subjectivity” (Reason, 1994) in our processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Findings

We have organized our findings from the thematic analysis into four areas:

- 1) The cycle of overseas experiences and associated outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars;
- 2) Factors influencing the experiences and outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars’ overseas experiences;
- 3) Visiting scholar programs as a type of faculty development; and
- 4) China-Canada academic collaboration through visiting scholar programs.

The Cycle of Overseas Experiences and Associated Outcomes of Chinese Visiting Scholars

Motivations, Plans, and Attitudes

Visiting scholars arrived in Canada with an open mind for learning, as demonstrated by repeated comments made by interviewees that they had wanted to “go out and take a look.” Their prior plans were largely in two areas: (1) enhancing knowledge and skills in their own specialty through attending classes and conducting research; and (2) getting to know about Canadian society and culture. Although all the interviewees had to state specific plans in their funding applications, some had greater expectations of themselves than stated in their applications and were more determined to fulfill those plans than others. For example, one scholar shared that he had one single goal for the whole year: To learn how to produce English publications as this had been a conundrum of his for many years.

A differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for the pursuit of

the overseas academic experiences was noted. An important organizational trigger is that an increasing number of Chinese universities have started to require faculty members to have at least one year of overseas experience before they can be promoted to an associate or full professor. This pressure is higher in universities under Projects 985 and 211. For some scholars, at least part of their motivation was to meet such a requirement. For others, their motivation came from their disciplinary interest. A professor in second language acquisition teaching English commented, "How can you not have overseas experience? If you don't, you are not qualified to teach English."

Overseas Experiences

Interviewees' overseas experiences mainly unfolded in three areas: course learning, research, and social and cultural life.

All the interviewees audited graduate courses offered by their host advisor or other professors in their hosting department. Most interviewees who stayed for one year audited four, and those courses provided them with opportunities to expand their knowledge in the subjects of their interest in a systematic way as well as to observe the instructional modes of Canadian professors. Many attended one-off seminars offered in the department. A few attended academic conferences hosted locally or nationally, whereas some indicated that they did not because their stipend did not cover those conference expenses. Many shared that they had collected a great amount of academic materials in English, which became a very important resource for their research.

In their spare time, many scholars were active observers of Canadian society, on and off campus. They participated in community activities and did a lot of sightseeing in the city and elsewhere in Canada as they saw getting to know more about Canada as part of their goals. This social life benefited some scholars in their professional work too. As one interviewee who taught English in China commented, "What is most helpful for enriching my teaching is my life there and what I learned from my interactions with local people. This may be related to my field: English teaching."

Internal Outcomes

Internal outcomes are reflected in the cognitive and affective domains. In the

cognitive domain, almost all our interviewees commented that their specialty-related knowledge had been greatly enriched and expanded. Some learned new concepts and theories about the subject matters of their interest and others deepened their prior understandings as a result of their academic experiences in Canada. Many noted being impressed by the large amount of course material and student-centered teaching methods used in Canadian classrooms.

Some also observed the different ways in which Chinese and Canadian scholars conduct academic research. An interviewee who stayed in Canada for six months explained that,

The experiences had significant impact on my use of research methods and selection of research topics. In China, the topics tend to be broad whereas in Canada, they do something very specific and the output is substantive, there is no empty talk, and research methods are more stringently and properly used, including the interviewee recruitment, questionnaire, and data processing. They do more empirical research in Canada whereas in China we do a lot of literature-to-literature conceptual work.

In addition to academic work, Chinese visiting scholars developed a much better understanding of myriad aspects of Canadian culture and society. One interviewee kept a blog that documented his major experiences during his one-year stay in Canada. Another interviewee commented,

The visiting period expanded my horizons. I was always making comparisons, consciously or unconsciously, between China and Canada, in terms of the contemporary higher education system and the on-going educational reforms. These changes are indirect but they are gradually taking place.

Attitudinal changes occurred for some interviewees. One was impressed by the global perspective she had observed that many faculty and students used in their academic work and reflected,

My biggest gain was change in perspectives, the depth and breadth of thinking about educational issues. Since I returned home, all my research projects have been locally based. However, when I was conceptualizing them, I tended to take a global perspective

and think how those questions would be approached in Canada.

Another interviewee found that one of her greatest gains was increased tolerance and acceptance toward different cultures, and still another found that a significant gain for her was enhanced independence and self-confidence. Repeated comments included increased critical thinking, which affected their later professional work, and high appreciation for many Canadian professors' dedication to work and professionalism.

External Outcomes

When the cognitive and affective outcomes were internalized, they were translated into more manifest behavioral outcomes when visiting scholars returned home and had opportunities to implement some changes in teaching and research.

In teaching, many shared that they added more materials to their courses and adjusted their teaching approach. A professor who returned home in 2010 commented that,

I made a lot of adjustments in teaching after I came back. Now my teaching is quite similar to the delivery approach in Canada. I have increased reading materials for my students, tried to foster their own motivation for learning, added in-class discussions and debates, and engaged students to reflect upon and make synthesis of educational issues.

In research, some made adjustments in their research areas or the orientation of their research methods. One scholar, who was very inspired to see how closely Canadian schools connect with local communities, began to investigate the relationship between school and society, a new area for him, and successfully obtained national funding for his research projects. Another scholar gained more expertise in using qualitative research methodology while she was in Canada and felt more confident in supervising her graduate students after returning to her home university. Another one adjusted his research focus and commented that,

After I came back, I stopped writing purely theoretical articles and those that aim to discuss short-term results from experiments. Now all my projects are long-term

empirical studies. I also require my students to do empirical studies for specific research questions.

The overseas academic experience opened up opportunities for some visiting scholars to participate in international academic communities. After returning to China, they began to attend international conferences on a regular basis and make presentations in English although some had to go through a process of getting their Chinese draft translated into English. For many, the overseas experience laid a good foundation for their future academic exchanges. Some returned scholars later invited their Canadian colleagues for a visit to China. One of them, for example, selected an elementary school in China to model a technology-based learning environment he had learned in Canada for pedagogical innovation, and was later asked by his Canadian hosting advisor to join in a large international project.

Long-Term Outcomes

Some visiting scholars indicated that the overseas academic experiences had exerted a lasting, transformative impact on their growth as a person. One interviewee who experienced overseas academic life twice put it this way, “It is more about changes in the internal working mode, which will become manifest in teaching and research. The experiences are like a life-long stamp, which cannot be erased. This is the long-term impact.”

A younger scholar, who completed his doctoral degree a few years after he returned to China and was planning his second period of academic life overseas at the time of our interview, shared that,

It was the change in my attitudes. I accepted fresh ideas. I was motivated for life-long learning. Professional development is my own thing. Conducting academic work is not for a higher professional title. These changed attitudes are very helpful to my personal growth as a university academic.

Some interviewees indicated that they were very excited to make changes in the first few months after returning home; however, as time passed by, the enthusiasm faded away and everything went back to what it had been before.

The long-term outcomes appear to be more on the affective level than on the cognitive level, and may not be so palpable as immediate outcomes such as changed teaching and research practices. As one interviewee who had been back home for almost 10 years commented,

The influence of the returned Chinese scholars may not be seen so obviously but it is penetrating gradually. Their impact on internationalization is definitely positive, because they have an open mind. I unyieldingly support those in my department who would like to study abroad.

There was evidence to support that the positive outcomes of the first overseas experience had led to some scholars' pursuit of another visiting opportunity a few years later. Five out of the 17 interviewees had two rounds of international academic experiences as a visiting scholar, including one who expressed interest in going abroad again in a few years. Also, a few others had other opportunities to travel abroad for short-term stays. It appears that the funded overseas experiences have brought forth a cycle of international mobility for many Chinese faculty.

Factors Influencing the Outcomes of Chinese Visiting Scholars' Overseas Experiences

Factors within the Input Domain

In light of the I-E-O model in our conceptual framework, we found several factors in both the Input and the Environment domains that had influenced the outcomes of Chinese visiting scholars' overseas experiences. Within the Input domain, individual scholars' English proficiency, motivations, and plans, and prior overseas experiences played a prominent role in affecting the outcomes of their overseas academic life.

Difficulty in using the English language was identified as a major challenge by most interviewees. The problem was more significant in listening and speaking than reading. The inadequacy limited their class participation and significantly constrained their engagement with the academic community of the hosting department. Some felt lonely because their English language was not good

enough for their social involvement. Many experienced a period of adaptation in the first few months of their stay but the language problem still lingered in the later stage. One interviewee commented that “it was difficult to have a conversation on a deeper level” and another scholar who taught English in China found it difficult to catch up with the pace in conversations. One interviewee shared that he had been asked to make a presentation at the host department so he did it in Chinese with a translator.

In contrast, those scholars with better English proficiency were more involved with local people and communities and enjoyed their life more than others whose English was not as fluent. One interviewee in the field of second language acquisition shared that “The reason I was pretty happy there was that I didn’t have problems with my English.” Another person who commented that “there was no problem in the daily conversation [in English],” made many friends, including local people, and felt that he somehow had been integrated into the local community.

Some interviewees noted that many visiting scholars pursued the opportunity mainly to meet the requirements of professional promotion at their home university; this often led to a mismatch between their research interest and that of their Canadian advisors, which impeded the achievement of desirable outcomes. As one interviewee commented,

Some visiting scholars I knew did not achieve their goals. They found their research areas had little to do with the research interests of their receiving department. Many scholars were merely satisfied with the acceptance of the foreign receiving university and didn’t think much about whether their own research would fit with the interests of the foreign university or not. Now the visiting scholar programs are basically out of a governmental action so they are in a top-down modality. It would produce better results if faculty members pursued such an opportunity out of their own needs, rather than out of meeting an external requirement.

In contrast, the experiences of some interviewees show that a good match in research interests with the host advisor did enhance visiting scholars’ research productivity during and after their visits to Canada. During their visits, two of the interviewees collaborated with their host advisors in writing up English academic articles on the basis of their prior research that had been almost completed; and

two others were involved in research projects sponsored by their host advisors. After returning to China, another three interviewees carried out collaborative projects with their host advisors. All these collaborative efforts were built upon shared research interests between Canadian and Chinese scholars.

Clearer goals for academic visits were also found to be helpful for better outcomes. Several interviewees made the suggestion that visiting scholars have specific plans and goals in mind during their overseas visit. For some visiting scholars, formulation of clearer goals was enhanced by their second overseas academic experiences. Two interviewees who had prior overseas academic experience shared that they found their first overseas experience more exploratory and lacking in clear directions whereas for the second one, they had more specific goals. By the time of their second overseas experience, they had been better established as a scholar prior to their departure; and they felt more self-confident and more capable to share their own academic work with the Canadian community during their second visit. One of them illustrated this well by saying, "The first time, I went there with an empty bag to take things. There was nothing to give to them. The second time, it was different."

Indeed, it is a challenge for first-time abroad goers to know what to expect and some of them therefore did not set up high expectations of themselves. One interviewee shared that she was unsure whether the working environment would fit well with her needs and chose to be in Canada for only six months. Some commented that they found their original research agenda unrealistic upon their arrival at the hosting Canadian department so they had to adjust their plans to the actual circumstances and make them more feasible. An example repeatedly mentioned by interviewees was their observation of the difference in research protocol followed in Canada from that in China, which made it challenging for some Chinese scholars seeking to fulfill their original research agenda. As an interviewee explained,

My original plan was to do research on organizational culture of Canadian universities, data collection, on-site observations, interviewing, just to continue with the research approaches and methods I had used in China. After I arrived, I found that people would have to be very careful to do interviews. It requires ethics review. That would not be easy. So, I had to adjust my research plans. Although I didn't complete my original plans, it was for realistic reasons and due to the differences between China and Canada. It was

not because of me.

Another interviewee shared that he had originally planned to compile a book on Canadian contemporary scholars who are influential in the field of education. However, he later found it too difficult to follow the plan due to the requirement of ethics review for conducting interviews and his challenge in English proficiency.

Interestingly, we did not find evident gender difference in the experiences and outcomes of our interviewees. Nevertheless, professional titles did seem to make a difference: All three professors at the time of their overseas experiences received national research grants after returning to China whereas the research achievements of the five instructors were not that significant. In addition, all the interviewed professors were affiliated with universities under Project 985.

Factors within the Environment Domain

Within the Environment domain, both Canadian and Chinese institutional environments were found to play a role in affecting the outcomes of visiting scholars' overseas experiences. On the Canadian side, all the Canadian hosting universities gave visiting scholars access to their libraries and opened up courses to them for auditing for free. Interviewees considered the accessibility to these resources as the greatest support that the hosting university provided. Some hosting departments also provided an office space to visiting scholars.

The host advisor was the primary contact person for a visiting scholar. Interviewees all regarded their advisors highly but their interactions with the advisor varied from person to person. One interviewee shared that he met his advisor almost every other week to discuss the progress of his research. In contrast, another one indicated that he barely had a rich academic conversation with his advisor during his stay but he later had more frequent communications after he returned home and started his own project under his advisor's academic framework. In the former case, the advisor had personal connections with the visiting scholar before his arrival and therefore knew his academic work whereas this personal relationship took longer to build in the latter case. Therefore, the existence of a common ground that had been built through academic work seems to contribute directly to a collegial, collaborative relationship between the

Chinese visiting scholar and the Canadian advisor.

On the Chinese side, fulfillment of the external outcomes of the visiting experiences was constrained by many environmental factors. Quite a few interviewees noted that they were very enthusiastic to experiment with some changes in their teaching but it was not easy. An interviewee shared that her motivation for teaching reforms receded gradually when she found that the student-centered approach was not well received by her students and there was no incentive at her university for curricular innovation or starting new courses. Another interviewee confided that his teaching reform in the first year resulted in his record low scores of instructor evaluation and he had to use a "mixed" approach in the second year. Still another expressed frustration about the difficulty in continuing the collaboration she had started with her Canadian colleague due to lack of financial support.

In contrast, other scholars seemed to be in a better position to carry forward their ideas more consistently. Some observations one interviewee made about teaching and learning in the graduate courses he had audited inspired him to investigate problems in doctoral education in China. Later on, that intellectual seed grew into a research project and then a book that critiques the quality of doctoral education in China. Another returned scholar incorporated what she learned in Canada about curricula in public schools into a revised standard that guides curricula in China's public schools.

Those contrasting cases suggest that the achievement of returned Chinese scholars depended, to a large extent, on the support and resources they were able to access when they initiated and implemented educational changes in China. Those resources may be easier to obtain in some Chinese universities than others.

Visiting Scholar Programs as a Type of Faculty Development

Regarding whether visiting scholar programs represent a type of academic exchange, the interviewees had mixed opinions. Some provided positive comments. One considered it as a way of "going out to invite in." Others stated that visiting scholar programs offered an opportunity mainly for learning rather than for academic exchange. As one explained,

I see it more as of a way for learning, rather than academic exchanges, because I really didn't bring anything good to the university. I didn't present anything as I couldn't

express myself well in English. I just learned something myself and obtained some materials. So it is merely a learning mode. My role was to carry back something I had learned there. I believe exchanges should be two-way.

However, most interviewees agreed that visiting scholar program was an effective approach to their own faculty development and a helpful way for enhancing the ability of Chinese university faculty. The following two comments were insightful.

I think it is a very important means to faculty development, especially in the context of internationalization. You can't do things with a closed door and you have to know what your international colleagues are doing and how they are doing it... Compared with other type of academic exchange, visiting scholar program can help faculty members build a more solid and more lasting relationship with foreign scholars.

It [the visiting scholar program] is very meaningful. The utility of taking courses is limited to improve teaching practice. Making reflections through overseas experiences and reformulating teaching beliefs after a process of experiencing, observing and understanding give rise to a kind of fuzzy knowledge, and a kind of practice-based knowledge and personalized knowledge. Visiting scholar programs have provided such a life experience. I think its value is big.

Some interviewees provided critical insights regarding the features of visiting scholar programs associated with faculty development. One commented that "although it is necessary and helpful to faculty development, it is not a must; the key is the attitudes of faculty members themselves toward teaching and their own academic qualities." Another observed that it was an in-depth approach to faculty development but it was very expensive and involved tremendous costs. Two interviewees believed that there were opportunity costs involved and not everyone would gain from it, depending on individual circumstances and disciplines.

China-Canada Academic Collaboration through Visiting Scholar Programs

The visiting scholar programs serve as an incubator for academic collaboration between the sending and receiving countries, in this case, China and Canada.

In order to make a successful application to a visiting scholar program, a Chinese scholar has to make personal connections with a Canadian scholar. Of our 17 interviewees, seven had prior personal connections with their host advisor, and another five had read the publications by their advisor whereas others found out about their host advisors via online searches or referral by friends. The six to 12 months of Canadian experience provided an excellent opportunity for them to establish or strengthen the academic relationship between the Chinese and Canadian sides.

All the interviewees indicated that they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences in Canada, including those whose original plans were not fulfilled for some reasons. One interviewee explained that her high satisfaction stemmed from the significant learning she had acquired, in both academic work and various aspects of Canadian society.

An important outcome of visiting scholar programs was that they brought Chinese scholars into a closer relationship with Canada. All our interviewees had left Canada with positive impressions about the country: Canadian people struck them as nice and friendly and the country as orderly and safe. One interviewee told us about a sense of emotional affinity he had developed with the hosting faculty of the Canadian university he visited eight years ago.

Returned visiting scholars became a “mouthpiece” for Canada, so to speak. They often shared their stories and observations in Canada with their students and other colleagues upon returning home. A Canadian studies center was later established at one interviewee’s home university. Another scholar commented that she considered Canada as a country of her investigation when applying for research grants because she had been to Canada. An interviewee confidently commented that she was now in a better position to comment on topics related to Canada. Another interviewee who returned in 2005 shared,

In my teaching, I may use something I saw in Canada as an example whereas before I wouldn't. This happens nowadays too, I'll intentionally or unintentionally say something about Canada, including education and life in general... I feel as a [returned] visiting scholar to Canada, I have contributed to Sino-Canada educational cooperation.

Discussion

This paper has proposed a literature-based model for examining the outcomes of

Chinese visiting scholars' experiences, as presented earlier in Fig. 1. The data supports the conceptual model which suggests that the experiences and outcomes of visiting scholars occur in a generally linear but also circular fashion. Chinese visiting scholars arrived in Canada with their personal traits (such as English language proficiency, prior academic work, and overseas experiences), motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic), and plans (general or specific). They went through various academic experiences, such as auditing courses, conducting research, and engaging in academic collaboration with their Canadian hosts, as well as social experiences, such as community participation and sightseeing, while they were in Canada. As a result, the internal outcomes were cognitively reflected in their better understandings of Canadian faculty's work in terms of teaching and research practices as well as Canadian culture and society. Affectively, some scholars experienced changes in values and perspectives, or perspective transformation in Mezirow's (1991) term. Upon returning home, many of them drew upon their Canadian experiences to make adjustments in their teaching, initiate new research projects and produce more publications, which represent the external outcomes of their overseas experiences. The overseas experience also exerted a lasting impact on some visiting scholars' long-term personal and professional growth. With an open mind and changed meaning perspectives, some visiting scholars pursued or will pursue another round of international experiences. We hope that the model will be useful for other similar studies.

This study has verified the relationship between the Input and Environment domains and the Output domain proposed in Astin's (1993) I-E-O outcomes assessment model. Chinese visiting scholars' experiences and gains were to a great extent determined by their personal traits, motivations, and plans, and enhanced or constrained by the two institutional environments related to them, the sending and hosting universities. In this study, we have found that the Canadian side—the five universities and the affiliated faculties of education—welcome visiting scholars and provide them with such resources as libraries, courses, and office space. The personal support that visiting scholars received from host advisors varied, to a large extent depending on the overlap of their research interests. Within their home universities, visiting scholars encountered various challenges when they tried to implement some initiatives in their teaching and research as the implementation was confined by the

characteristics of their students, university policies, and the availability of resources. Universities under Projects 985 and 211 have greater advantage in this regard although our data did not directly speak to the difference.

Our findings show that participation in visiting scholar programs has enriched Chinese faculty's academic and life experiences, and contributed to both their academic work and their personal development. Our interviewees also confirmed to us that on the organizational level, the sending academic unit and university were beneficiaries as well. As international experience is becoming increasingly important in the context of internationalization of higher education in China, visiting scholar programs play a crucial role in raising the profile of the academic unit and the university in terms of faculty internationalization. Literature suggests that the most effective approach to improving the level of faculty internationalization is on-site learning and cultural immersion (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Hadis, 2005; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007), which is exactly what visiting scholars experienced. The returned visiting scholars brought back new ideas for teaching and research, and potential opportunities for international collaboration. All these help raise the quality of academic work by Chinese university faculty and close the gap between Chinese scholarship and that of the international academic community.

Many Chinese visiting scholars experienced cultural disequilibrium, which is not uncommon for international faculty exchange experiences (McNamee & Faulkner, 2001). Cultural disequilibrium can be intensified by variations in personal traits (marital status, gender, and race), and muted by higher degrees of host language competency, and experiences in the host culture (Taylor, 1994). Our findings show that inadequate English proficiency for academic communications and unfamiliarity with some norms for academic work in the hosting country exacerbated the experienced cultural disequilibrium and negatively affected the achievement of desired outcomes. These challenges are of concern and demand immediate attention for change, given the fact that the participants in visiting scholar programs had all passed certain evaluation requirements for English language proficiency and academic qualifications, and were presumably better at English and had higher academic achievement than their peers before their departure to the hosting country. Organizations that prepare visiting scholar candidates for overseas experiences should address those issues by strengthening their English training curriculum and adding norms of

academic practice in Western countries to their training modules.

Visiting scholar programs are an important means to faculty development. All our interviewees in this study shared this perspective. Faculty development is considered to be “any planned activity designed to improve an individual’s knowledge and skills in areas considered essential to the performance of a faculty member”; and these areas include teaching skills and research skills (Sheets & Schwenk, 1990, p. 141). Our data show that visiting scholar programs, indeed, foster changes in those areas. Faculty development also involve improving practice and managing change (Bligh, 2005); and effective faculty development should be focused not only on the individual level but also on the group and organizational level (McLean, Gilliers, & van Wyk, 2008). Visiting scholars’ overseas experiences mainly represent a self-directed learning initiative; however, coping with changed perspectives should not be solely left to individuals. Chinese universities need to be proactive in capitalizing on individual faculty members’ international experiences so that the knowledge and skills individual faculty acquired overseas can be translated into changes in the organizational practice to improve teaching and learning, research productivity, and overall performance of the whole academic unit.

Proper evaluation of visiting scholar programs will help achieve the goal of effective faculty development. Currently, the main concern of evaluation still focuses on ensuring the return of dispatched scholars on time. The target for evaluation is at the individual level and the main criterion is based on research output whereas little attention is given to other areas of outcomes. The complexity of individuals’ circumstances is not reflected in any evaluation. This situation can be improved by shifting the focus of evaluation from individual faculty to the visiting scholar program itself. Other evaluation models should be considered. For example, Stufflebeam’s (1974) CIPP⁴ model would provide a comprehensive approach to evaluating visiting scholar programs; and Kirkpatrick’s (1994) model of educational outcomes⁵ would help faculty

⁴ In CIPP model, program evaluation takes place on four levels: the project objectives and the basis for those objectives (**C**ontext); the educational strategies (**I**nput); the actual implementation and how it compares with planned activities (**P**rocess); and how well the needs of the target population are met (**P**roduct).

⁵ Model of educational outcomes evaluates four levels of outcomes: reaction (participants’ satisfaction), learning (change in knowledge, skills, and attitudes), behavior (change in behaviors), and results (change in organizational practice).

development evaluation delve into the complexity of various outcome domains. Thus, faculty development can be evaluated in multiple dimensions on the individual level as well as collectively on the organizational level.

We also find that the experiences of government-funded Chinese visiting scholars are very different from those of visiting scholars in many other jurisdictions. Literature shows that visiting scholars typically engage in teaching or guest lectures, and collaborative research and scholarship in some cases, at host institutions (Court et al., 1998; Dahl, Ford, & Whiting, 2013; Heinz & Lewis, 2009; Haussler, Paavilainen, & Astedt-Kurki, 2003). In contrast, the roles of Chinese visiting scholars at their host universities appear, in many ways, similar to those of international graduate students. They attend classes, but not for credits; they seek collaborative research opportunities, which often are not fulfilled during their visiting period; they typically do not involve themselves in teaching nor give guest lectures. Nevertheless, many of them are knowledgeable, insightful thinkers. A significant barrier to their participation is insufficient English proficiency for presenting sophisticated ideas in teaching. Another obstacle probably lies in the gaps between Chinese and foreign scholars in terms of pedagogy and approaches to research. Many of our interviewees found the teaching and research methods their Canadian colleagues utilize novel, and only began to use them when they had returned home. Further, from the policy perspective, the CSC under the Chinese government has positioned the purpose of the overseas experiences as “studying abroad” (*chuguo liuxue*), or a learning opportunity. This learning mode began when the Chinese government first dispatched university faculty abroad in the 1950s, and is probably engrained in Chinese faculty’s mind when they are abroad nowadays. The learning model may also be associated with the interactions between the visiting scholars and their host advisors, which is very much based on their shared research interests. When a mismatch happens, as some of our interviewees noted, it is harder to build a common ground for collegial collaboration. All these issues suggest that Chinese faculty’s overseas experiences are limited by the traditional learning mode and their self-image of being a “learner” that an international opportunity typically involved in the past decades. Arguably, there are still some gaps to fill before Chinese scholars can work alongside their international counterparts in a truly collegial mode of academic exchange. On the Canadian side, hosting academic units may not be proactive enough in granting opportunities to visiting scholars to enable in-depth academic exchange.

Finally, although some of our interviewees considered their experiences mainly as a one-way learning process for themselves, those opportunities *de facto* contribute to academic exchanges between China and Canada. Unlike the earlier Canadian large-scale development assistance projects to Chinese higher education, as documented by Leng and Pan (2013), and the growing number of direct university linkages between the two countries (Klabunde, 2009), the visiting scholar programs have planted seeds for people-to-people exchange between China and Canada. The interviewed Chinese scholars were attracted to the host universities mainly by the prominent work of Canadian scholars. The returned visiting scholars have become a conduit for disseminating their knowledge about Canada to a wider Chinese community. Although only a minority of them launched collaborative projects during or after their sojourn in Canada, their Canadian experiences provided them with academic and social opportunities that will increase the likelihood of academic collaboration in the future. Relationship building of this kind is significant to establishing sustainable institutional partnerships (Leng, 2014).

Implications for the Development of Chinese University Faculty

We would like to conclude this article with several observations about the development of Chinese university faculty in the current context of higher education massification and internationalization. Those observations may have extended applications beyond the scope of this study.

First of all, this study has provided empirical evidence for a new stage in the history of using government funding to dispatch Chinese students and visiting scholars abroad in the 21st century (Cheng, 2009). With the intensified process of internationalization and the expanded opportunities granted to Chinese university faculty for overseas experiences, opportunities for studying abroad are no longer for elitists, and exposure to international academic experience is no longer considered as a way of “gilding gold.” This is quite different from the scenario of going abroad decades ago although many outcomes of the overseas experiences are similar, as documented by Hayhoe (1996). In the new era, visiting scholar programs should be treated as an important approach to professional development of Chinese university faculty that features intercultural and potentially transformative learning, a high level of commitment and

self-management, but incurs high costs. The opportunity will no longer be once in a lifetime but can be pursued multiple times for those who would like to, thus forming a cycle of international mobility.

Major approaches to faculty development at Chinese universities have been identified as conducting academic research, engaging in further studies for a higher credential, completing teaching practice, and developing international educational collaboration (Zhang, 2007). In 2012, the central Chinese government approved the establishment of faculty development centers at 30 top Chinese universities. With those centers in place, Chinese faculty will have more opportunities to enhance their professionalism and approaches to faculty development will become diversified. This may provide a propitious opportunity for those universities to ponder over how to create a comprehensive faculty development mechanism that empowers faculty members to excel and create vibrant academic communities (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). A significant component of the mechanism can be visiting scholar programs to promote faculty's international mobility. In addition, it is equally important to note that as implementation of those initiatives typically starts with top-notch higher education institutions (such as those under Projects 211 and 985), it may take other institutions a longer time and extra resources to establish a mechanism with the same capacity.

Challenges exist for participants in visiting scholar programs, including inadequate English proficiency, mismatched research interests with hosting advisors, and inequality between Chinese visiting scholars and hosting professors in terms of academic exchange. To take better advantage of visiting scholar programs, participants should be better prepared in both language skills and academic work before departure; and returned visiting scholars should be utilized as resources to help build the capacity for upgrading the educational quality of the whole university. Those who have spent some time at faculties of education of overseas hosting universities may possess greater advantages than those in other disciplines to learn about student-centered pedagogy and experiment with instructional innovation. This speculation needs to be examined in future research on visiting scholars in other disciplines. We are hopeful that any institutional-level initiative on Chinese university campuses—the faculty development center, for example—will cultivate an institutional environment where the experiences and associated outcomes of individual returned visiting

scholars could be translated into improved organizational practice. This may also alleviate frustration that some returned faculty have encountered when trying to implement instructional changes.

Historically, visiting faculty programs are often designed to achieve some social functions. Government-funded visiting scholar programs are of no exception. The CSC plays an important role in implementing the national strategy of “invigorating the country through promoting science and education and strengthening the country through cultivating talents” (CSC, 2014) in the context of globalization. Without a doubt, visiting scholar programs, from their inception, have played an important role in fostering China’s modernization and integration to the rest of the world. This social function has bestowed significant social value to visiting scholar programs, a vehicle to faculty development.

Government-funded visiting faculty programs have been in place for decades in China. Generations of visiting Chinese faculty have returned. In the current context of massification and internationalization in China’s higher education, there is growing pressure to use international standards to evaluate teaching and research. With an increasing number of Chinese faculty members who have significant exposure to international academic experiences, an accumulative outcome will be shifted norms of academic work and a new, open working mode that can penetrate into various aspects of the lives of Chinese faculty. Although we have observed challenges in implementing effective faculty development through visiting scholar programs, we are optimistic that Chinese university faculty members are on their way to a higher level of overseas experiences, one characterized by a greater participation in international academic mobility. At that time, Chinese scholars will be truly on equal terms with their peers in academic exchanges.

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