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MIREM Project

MIGRATION DE RETOUR AU MAGHREB

Analytical Report, MIREM-AR 2008/06

*Made in France? Chinese Student Return
Migration from French Business Schools*

Wei Shen



**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

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CHINESE STUDENT RETURN MIGRATION FROM
FRENCH BUSINESS SCHOOLS**

Wei Shen

**MIREM
COLLECTIVE ACTION TO SUPPORT THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURN MIGRANTS IN
THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN/ ACTION COLLECTIVE DE SOUTIEN A LA
REINTEGRATION DES MIGRANTS DE RETOUR DANS LEUR PAYS D'ORIGINE
ANALYTICAL REPORT/ RAPPORT D'ANALYSE MIREM-AR 2008/06
BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO DI FIESOLE (FI)**

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Published in Italy in 2008
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/>
<http://www.mirem.eu>

MIREM

Le projet MIREM, ou «Action collective de soutien à la réintégration des migrants de retour dans leur pays d'origine», a été lancé en décembre 2005, grâce au concours financier de l'Union Européenne et de l'Institut Universitaire Européen. Il est hébergé au sein du Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (Florence, Italie). L'objectif majeur du projet MIREM vise à assurer une meilleure prise en compte des enjeux propres à la migration de retour et à mieux en valoriser l'impact à des fins de développement. Il s'agit, en premier lieu, de produire des outils d'analyse et de compréhension du phénomène de la migration de retour vers les pays du Maghreb (Algérie, Maroc, Tunisie) et, en second lieu, de rendre librement accessibles l'ensemble des informations produites.

* * *

The 'Collective Action to Support the Reintegration of Return Migrants in their Country of Origin', henceforth the MIREM project, was created in December 2005, thanks to the financial support of the European Union and the European University Institute. It is hosted at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (Florence, Italy). The main objective of the MIREM project lies in better taking into consideration the challenges linked to return migration as well as its impact on development. Analytical tools will be provided to better understand the impact of return migration on the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). All the data produced will be made freely accessible to stimulate a constructive debate on this issue.

MIREM PROJECT

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Abstract

Chinese migration to France is not a new phenomenon; however, France has seen rapid growth of migration from China in the past decade. Among the increasingly diverse migratory flow, a prominent group is Chinese students. As in many European countries, more and more Chinese students are now studying in France, at universities, *grandes écoles* and language schools etc... There is limited research focusing on this group of migrants. Therefore, this paper will analyse the circular migration of Chinese students between China and France by focusing on the return migration from elite French business schools. It illustrates the importance of prior experiences and pre-acquisition of academic and professional capital on their choice to migrate to France. At the same time, this paper investigates how family ties with China and institutional agents (private and public sectors) and the multiple-layers of forces (national and supranational) behind Chinese student return migration. This paper argues that the strong family relations and contacts, career strategy and prospects for returnees and confidence in the Chinese economy are significant return factors. Returnees' academic, professional and social experiences in France are also important in their decision. In addition, it shows how these talents are integrated in the skilled labour market and how they maintain connections with France. The return migration of Chinese students from France is a unique link and network, which needs cooperation from both parties to ensure a win-win brains circulation.

Introduction – Chinese Migration to France

Quartiers chinois (Chinatown in French) in France are now among the largest ones in Europe, with its most famous one located in the 13th arrondissement (XIII arrondissement) in Paris. Arcade Huang, or Huang Jialü in Chinese were the first recorded Chinese to settle in France in the late 17th century.¹ It was not until the early twentieth century when more visible migration began from China to France after the First World War. Wang (2000) defined three types of Chinese migrants in the early decades of the 20th century. Firstly, in 1917, some 2,000 Chinese went to Europe to support the Allied Power (France, the United Kingdom et al) in the battlefield. Following that, an additional 140,000 Chinese labourers were recruited by France under a special agreement with the Chinese Government at that time². Many of them died during the war and it is estimated that around 3,000 of them stayed in France after the war (Wang 2000).

The second group refers to those Chinese ‘gold-diggers’ who went to France hoping to make money between end the of the 1920s and the 1930s. This migratory flow was interrupted and dramatically decreased due to the Japanese invasion in China. Finally, another category pertains to Chinese student migration to France, on which this chapter focuses. Levine (1993) described the Chinese work-study (*qingong jianxue*) movement in France in the 1920s and 30s.

Archaimbault (1952) documented the emergence of Chinese *quartiers* in Paris. Because of World War II, travel between China and Europe was blocked. This prevented those Chinese living in France from going back to China (although they were given the option to stay or return) and at the same time, very few people from China managed to migrate to France in the same period. As Chinese migrants started to adapt to the local environment in France and their settlement became more permanent, they started to facilitate and help their families, relatives and hometown people to come to make a new life in France. Gradually, a migration network was developed between Wenzhou (where the majority of early Chinese migrants came from) and France. Wang (2004) compared this migratory process with the Mexican migrants to the United States of America, arguing that although these two migration patterns differ greatly, they both shifted from temporary labour migration to long term or permanent settlement in France and the USA respectively. This gradual process of migration is regarded as the cumulative causation (Massey et al 1993) or the ‘northernisation’ of migration (Alarcon 1992), migrant syndrome (Myrdal 1957) and summarised as a migration system by Castles and Miller (2003).

During the three decades between the 1930s-1950s, because of World War II and consequent government and political changes, most Chinese migrants who went to France were war refugees. In 1949, the People’s Republic of China was established and France was the first Western country to recognise the status of ‘New China’. At the same time, post-war construction in France required vast foreign labour for the growing economic development. Thus the combination of a good diplomatic relationship and demand for labour paved the way for labour migration and family reunification for Chinese migration to France. This trend has continued until now with the booming outbound migration from China after the economic reform under the ‘open-door’ policy. The de-regulation of Central Government on migration policy resulted in the waves of Chinese migrants that flocked abroad, both legally and illegally, from Wenzhou and other Chinese towns and cities in France.

¹ Details of Arcade Huang can be found: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcade_Huang.

² Both Agreements during and after the World War I, was signed by the Beiyang Government, a which refers to a series of military regimes that ruled from Beijing from 1912 to 1928.

1. Contemporary Chinese Student Migration to France

As shown, Chinese migration to France has not been a straightforward process and this also applies to the migration of Chinese students. More than one and a half centuries ago, Yung Wing, a native of Canton left China to study in the United States of America at the age of 19. That was in 1847 and the Qing Dynasty had started to fall apart. Yung Wing nevertheless returned to China after graduating from Yale College in 1854³ and consequently persuaded the Qing Government to send 120 young Chinese students to study in America beginning in 1872. The departure of Yung Wing and his fellow compatriots started the movement to study abroad in contemporary Chinese history.

Wang (2005) categorised five broader waves of student migration from China and commented on their differing roles:

- 1st Wave: 1872-1900: young Chinese students and navy students – among those returned, railway specialists, diplomats, journalists and navy officers, the backbone for the ‘*Self-Strengthening Movement*’ in China
- 2nd Wave: 1900-1927: Chinese students to Japan and France, and the first group the USSR – those revolutionists who brought back the ‘*New Cultural Movement*’
- 3rd Wave: 1927-1949: Chinese students to Europe and USA – among them were Nobel Prize Winners as well as missile & satellite experts
- 4th Wave: 1949-1965: Destinations USSR and socialist countries in Eastern Europe – trained as the core of the Chinese Communist Party
- 5th Wave: 1978 – present: the largest wave of student migrants spread around the world, overtook the total of the previous four – the vital source for China’s progress towards modernisation

It is clear that Chinese students played important roles in the history of Chinese development and their outbound migration is strongly associated with the international relations and political economy of China and the rest of the world. For example, after the establishment of New China in 1949, China set up a number of student exchange programmes with the USSR and Eastern European (socialist) countries, such as Eastern Germany (DDR), Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, only a very small number of students were sent to Western Europe and other Asian countries. In 1956 this ‘Eastern wave’ reached its peak and with the deterioration of Sino-USSR relations in the 1960s, the outbound Chinese student migration to the USSR almost ceased but was diverted to other Western countries (Song 2003, Wang 2005).

There was substantial movement of Chinese students to France in the first half of the 20th Century. The most prominent flow occurred within the second wave of student migration between the 1910s and 1920s (Wang 2005). A group of Chinese student returnees from abroad (mainly from France, Japan and Germany) encouraged Chinese to ‘*work hard and save for studies*’ to learn from the West. They established various associations in Lyon, Beijing and other places to recruit young Chinese to study in France. ‘Craftsman School’ was also set up in Hebei Province to provide necessary job (employment skills) training for those intending to go to France. In 1920, there were already around 1,600 Chinese students who went to France and this wave of Chinese student migration lasted around 20 years, many of the national icons in sciences, arts and music benefited from their stays in France, where they studied and worked (Wang 2005). Their achievement is regarded as ‘even more

³ For more details about Yung Wing: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yung_Wing

outstanding' compared to other student movements in the early 20th Century by Wu Jian-Ming⁴ in a recent address to the Forum of Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2004⁵.

Chinese student migration was also interrupted by World War II and the Anti-Japan War, between 1938 and 1941, only around 300 students went to study abroad. Shortly after the Sino-Japan war, a regulation on 'self-financing students' was initiated by the Chinese Government at that time to encourage more students to learn and update knowledge for the industrialisation in China. By 1950, there were around 5,000 Chinese students and scholars abroad, among them, France has 197, just behind the USA, Japan, UK, Germany, before Denmark and Canada, according to the former Higher Education Department Statistics in China (Li 2000). After the 'New China' was founded and during the 10 turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, there was a decade of almost zero student migration or exchange between China and the outside world. China's re-entry into the United Nations in 1971 not only recognised China's legal status but also gave the opportunity for Chinese students to study abroad. France was among the first three countries to receive Chinese students to study languages – 20 Chinese students went to study French in France and another 16 studied English in the UK, and an extra few went to study in Japan.

Under Deng Xiao-Ping's 'Open-Door Policy' for economic reform, the new era of student migration was unveiled as Chinese government started to establish agreements with foreign countries for student exchanges. France was again one of the first Western countries to open its door of education to Chinese students in 1981. In this Chapter, I focus on the latest waves of the Chinese student migration to France, i.e. the post 1978 period. I think it is possible to divide it into several sub-groups:

- **1980-1989: Post-Cultural Revolution**

Historical situation: The restarting of Higher Education in China leads to a number of government sponsored programmes to go to study in France (such as by the Ministry of Trade)

Student Profile: most of the Chinese students in this period studied French purely by chance, i.e. by either university or government arrangements.

- **1989/1990-2000: Post Tian An Men**

The majority of students are still being sponsored by the Chinese government but the deregulation of the Chinese government on entry-exit of students resulted in the start of self-financed students going to study in France.

During the early part of the 1990s, many students regarded their decision to go abroad as a 'breathe fresh new air' or to 'taste the freedom.' France was an ideal place because of its fame for students' revolution and spirit of liberty. On the contrary, the self-financed or half-self-financed are more interested in their career development and prospects from their studies in France.

This period was viewed as a 'golden age' by many of the interviewees because of the opening up and growth of China's new market economy and healthy French economy. This decade provided many excellent opportunities to Chinese students to work in France or in China to develop economic ties between these two countries. Many of them have now become key managerial staff in multinationals or started their own business.

⁴ Wu Jian-Ming: President of Bureau International des Expositions (International Exhibitions Bureau) in Paris and China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing; former Chinese Ambassador to the Netherlands, Switzerland and France.

⁵ Detailed text is available on the website of Chinese Academy of Sciences (in Chinese language): <http://www.cas.ac.cn/html/Dir/2005/12/15/6693.htm> .

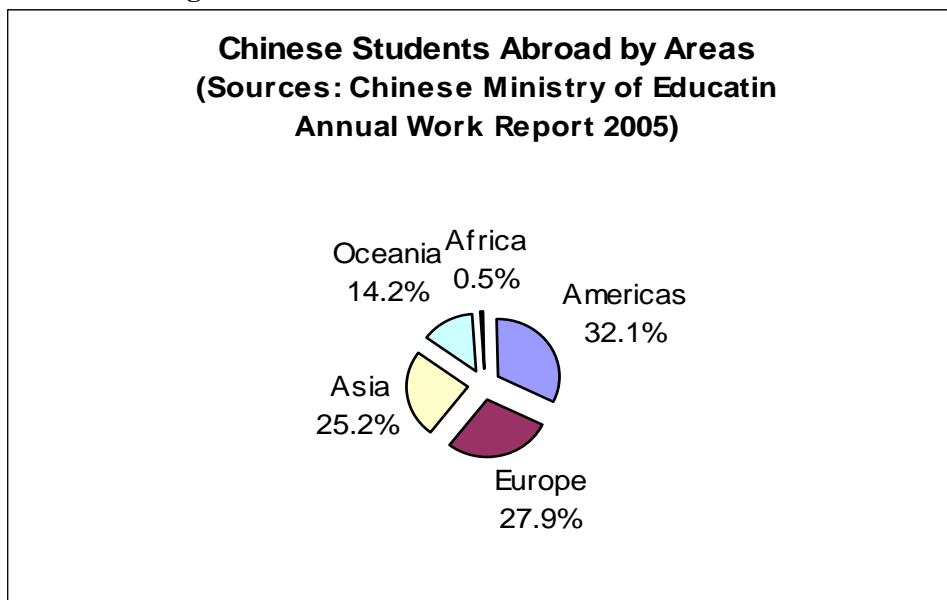
- **2000 and after 9/11**

The major wave of outbound Chinese students to France started at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium. Most of the students are now financing their studies by themselves. Many of them have strong ties and previous links with France – having either studied French or worked in a French company (except INSEAD students). Chinese students also show more international mobility in studies and work by participating in school exchanges or traineeships abroad.

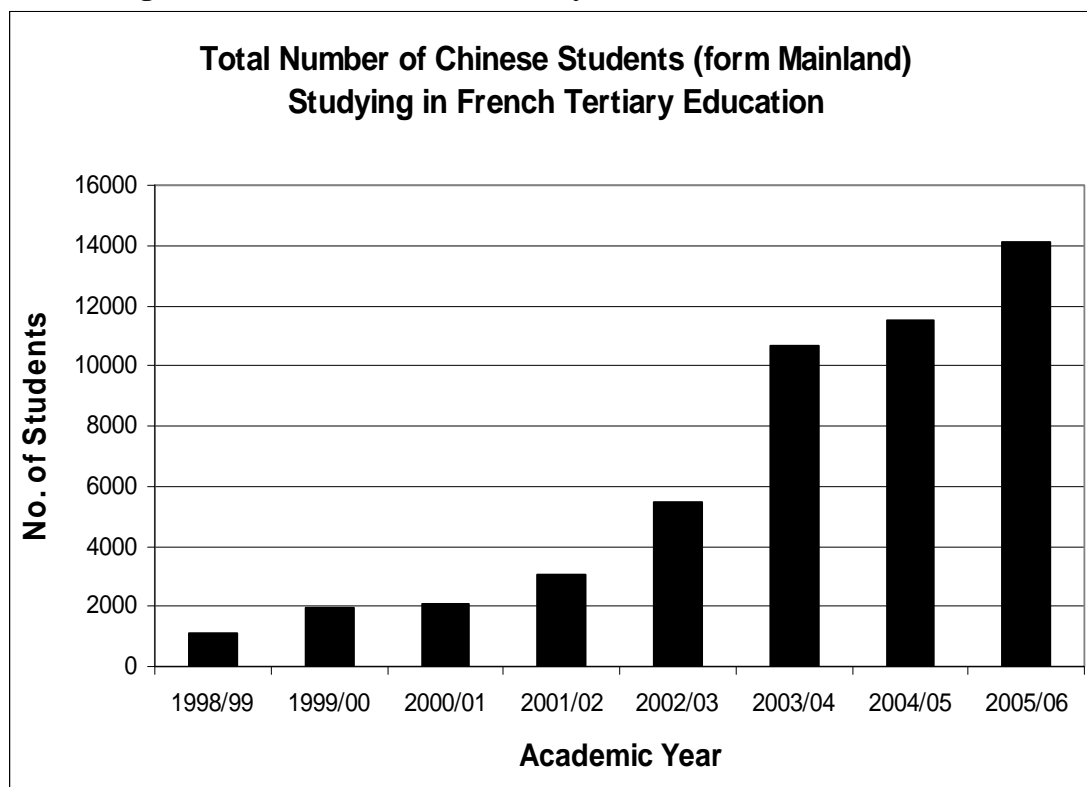
The tragic terrorist attack in New York in 2001 seems to be a definitive turning point for many Chinese students. Their career plans had to be changed because of the economic depression following the global terrorist alerts. Some Chinese students were faced with a tough labour market and therefore decided to return to China willingly or unwillingly. However, the economic prosperity back at home also resulted in the return of Chinese students. They feel their skills and knowledge can be used to the maximum in China rather than in France thus it would be easier and quicker for them to reach a higher level on the career ladder.

After more than one and a half centuries of pursuing education and learning abroad, more than 460,000 Chinese students could be found in 103 countries across the world in 2002. North America was still the preferred destination for Chinese students followed by Europe and Asia. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Distribution of Chinese students in the world



The number of Chinese students has grown tremendously in the past decade. Figure 2 illustrates this rapid influx of Chinese students. France is now the country with the third largest population of Chinese students following the United Kingdom and Germany. There can be many explanations for the popularity of the French education sector. There is the obvious financial reason for Chinese students to choose to study in France. Compared to the UK, France has relatively cheap tuition fees for tertiary education and there are no differences in fees between home (French and EU students) and overseas students. This makes France a much more affordable study option for many Chinese students than the UK. However, both Germany and some Scandinavian countries also offer very modest tuition fees, what then makes France unique and who in fact goes to study in France? To answer these questions, a qualitative inquiry is needed. Over 60 interviews with Chinese graduates, alumni, current students or young professional graduates from French *grandes écoles* and universities (mainly business schools and MBA institutes) were made in Shanghai and Paris to analyse the pre- and post- return conditions and factors shaping Chinese return students' patterns of reintegration in their home country.

Figure 2: Chinese Students in tertiary education in France (1999-2004)

Sources: OECD Education Database (1999-2006) French Ministry of Education (2007)

2. Going French – Decision Factors

Migration is a complex process and there are many reasons for people to go abroad and where. This also applies to student migration, as the choice of location needs to be made and there are various rationales behind this, professional, personal and language issues just to name a few. Here are some factors that influence Chinese students' decisions as to whether they choose to study in France or not.

Educational Background and Languages

Most students that are interviewed for this research study either languages or business and economics subjects but there are also a few students from engineering and science backgrounds (such as computing and automation). A few students study French as their major at the university because of the romanticised image of France, its culture, language and linguistics. French is also seen as helpful for the future job market as English is widely taught in China from primary school and throughout university education. Fluency in the French language is a very important factor for studying in France as many programmes are taught solely in French. Also, as some students mentioned during the interviews, language competency allows them to adapt easily to life in France, in terms of day to day living and making new friends. Educational background in business studies is also a factor for interviewees to choose to study in France, as Paris has some of the best management schools in Europe. These schools are ranked highly in international newspapers such as the Financial Times.⁶

⁶ There are 7 French business schools listed in the Financial Times' latest ranking of Top 10 (among them 4 are in Paris) Masters in Management programmes in Europe. For full details: <http://rankings.ft.com/masters-in-management>

Professional Background

Most interviewees worked for MNCs upon their graduation from their undergraduate degrees in China. For those who have studied French language as a college major, many had the opportunities to intern for French companies and organisations (including L’Oreal, French Embassy and Le Monde etc.). Most of them then continue to work for French companies after their studies. For non-French major students, they usually embark on their career in their specialised fields with Multinational Companies (MNCs). These international business experiences within the domestic context of China also resulted later in the decision of student migrants to expand their global exposure by studying abroad. Many interviewees have indicated they have either had French clients or other business and personal contacts before they went to France. Hence, France is the eminent choice for those who have worked for or with French enterprises. It is seen as an important step to gain knowledge of French society and language for those who plan to continue working for French companies in the future.

Other Reasons

In addition, the length of programmes and tuition and living costs are both important factors for Chinese students when choosing a Business school. Management degree programmes at the postgraduate level in France are generally shorter than in the United Kingdom or the United States. For example, many business schools offer one year Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees compared to the two year programmes in the UK/US. The programme tuition and living costs are also cheaper in France. Besides these, the location of France is also appealing for Chinese students. They can travel to within the continent visa free compared to the visa restrictions and formalities they will face if they choose to study in the UK.

France’s strong agricultural economy and trade in luxury products are additional selling points. Business schools often provide specialised MBAs or masters’ programmes in agricultural business and luxury industry. These unique programmes are also attractive to students from these backgrounds or who have interests in these sectors. Last but not least, for many people, France (Paris in particular) remains an exciting place to study and live although this is not the main criteria. Being in the capital of fashion, cuisine and arts, there are more opportunities to network and look for jobs and obtain interviews.

Interestingly, many student returnees stress their intention of returning to China prior to going to study in France. They are aware of the legislative restrictions on labour migration and the difficulty of getting a work permit. In fact, the migration policy of the host country is seen as an important criterion for Chinese students for overseas studies. For those who chose France, studying and living in France is part of their overall career strategy to accumulate personal capital, i.e. knowledge, professional contacts and networks, improvement of language as well as experiences and exposure to different cultures, rather than permanent migration, as one student returnee commented:

‘I planned to return to China when I finish the MBA. That is also why I chose to study in Europe, because as far as I am concerned, if you go to study in USA you would have more local employment opportunities there. But in Europe, most people (Chinese students) will come back. So before I went abroad, I have the plan to return, thus my choice for studying in Europe. If I am someone who is determined to work and live abroad I would probably have chosen to study in USA.’

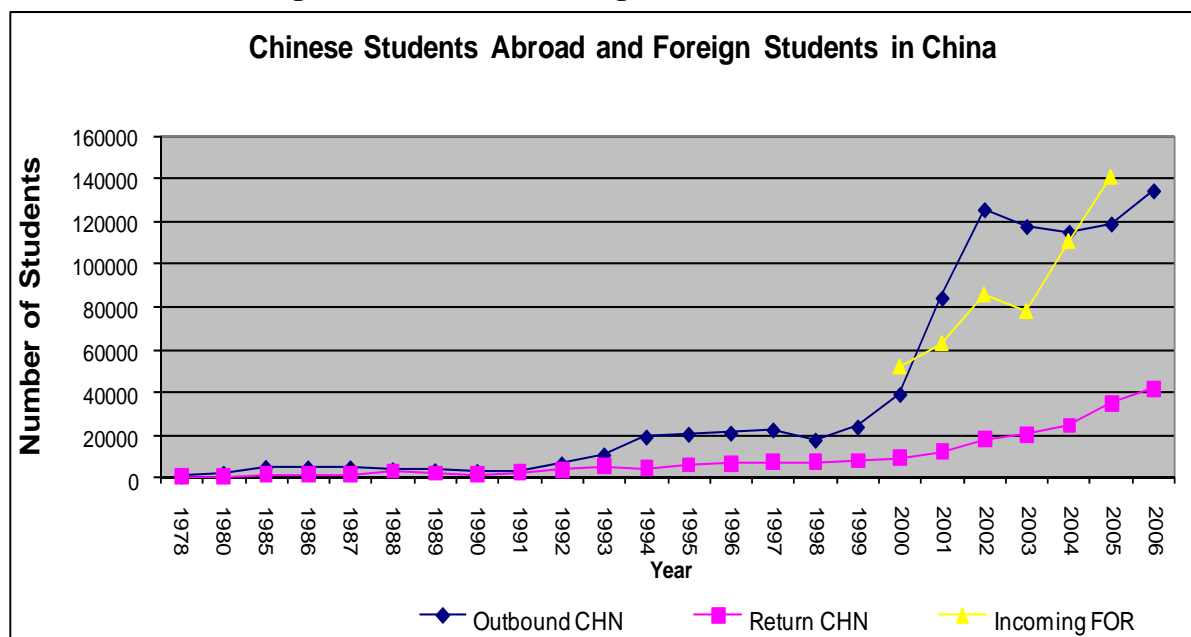
A female MBA graduate from INSEAD Business School.

3. 'Sea-turtles' Returning Home

Since 1978 when China kicked off economic reform, more than 1 million Chinese have gone abroad to pursue academic studies and research. One must wonder among them, how many actually have returned to China? In the latest publication from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences – 'Global Political and Security Report 2007' – it stated that China has the biggest diaspora community and the greatest number of scholars abroad, which may pose a serious threat of 'brain-drain'. Indeed, since China's deregulation of 'exit-entry immigration policies', thousands of Chinese students have left China to go abroad.

As the sending country, China is concerned about the enormous outflow of students, which could result in huge potential outflows, in terms of both financial and human capital. Statistics show that only a quarter of these students have returned, however, the number is on the rise (see Figure 3) as the return speed is increasing by 13 to 15 per cent each year. These returnees are given a nick name - *Hai Gui* or in English, "Sea Turtles". What are the reasons for more and more Chinese students coming home after their studies or being willing to give up highly paid jobs abroad? There are various ways to understand and theorise about return migration (Cassarino 2004) Hereby attempts are made to understand the rationale behind this metaphor:

Figure 3 : Student Migration in and out of China (1978-2006)



Source: China National Statistics Bureau 2000 2006

'China is changing, it is changing so fast, but I am outside! I am very frustrated, I do not want to be an outsider, I want to be part of this history, and I want to join the revolution!'
A female graduate from Sciences Po de Paris.

The quotation from a Chinese student who studied communications at one of the elitist schools in France gives the best summary of the key reason for the majority of the returnees coming back to China. From the world factory to a growing economic giant, China's economy growing by double-digits not only caught the eye of foreign investors but also drew the attention of Chinese students and professionals abroad. A sense of confidence in China's future was very evident during the interviews with returnees. To them, China is said to be the country full of opportunities and with room for career development, often labelled as 'the place to be' in the 21st century. It is also the place where returnees feel their values and cross-cultural competences can be maximised, because they can combine Chinese

traditions and Western business practices. One returnee said:

‘Without doubt, the world is looking at China right now. Even more and more foreigners are willing to work in Shanghai at local terms of contracts. For us, born and bred here, we have solid local knowledge and we also have the education from both China and Europe. Comparing to local staff and expatriates, we have the right knowledge and experiences between the East and West. Therefore, I did not hesitate when I graduated and choose to come back immediately. China is the place actions take place and for us, as young careerist, you ought to be here.’

A male graduate from Insead Business School.

As seen above, ‘intercultural or East-West Bridge’ is the common phrase used by returnees to stress their cross cultural competences and transnational experiences thanks to their studies and work between the two continents. They do not portray return as the failure of the migration experience as suggested by neo-classical economics but rather as part of the successful migration circle and planning of their career trajectory. We saw earlier that Chinese students already intend to return back home to China after their studies even before they arrive in France, hence the return is an integral part of the migration project, seen as the ‘calculated strategy’ of migrants (Stark 1996). As the literature of new economics of labour migration suggested, in the Chinese case, once knowledge accumulation has taken place in the destination country (i.e. Chinese students’ studies and work in France), student migrants return to the country of origin to use their acquired skills to enhance career development and maximise the benefits of their migration experience abroad.

The Chinese Government is increasingly aware of the importance of its students abroad. The low return rate of students in the late 1980s and 1990s has raised serious concerns among the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party worrying that the most talented and educated Chinese students migrated abroad permanently after pursuing studies at foreign institutions. The relationship between the Chinese state and its overseas student population is a very tacit matter, as Xiang (2007) suggested the Chinese Government is confronted with a tough task in dealing with these students who were earlier labelled as ‘betrayers’ because they chose to live abroad rather than ‘coming home to modernise their motherland’. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government has gradually changed their political attitude and propaganda towards Chinese students and other overseas Chinese professionals. This political shift was formally institutionalised through a special circular from the State Council in 1992 to welcome all Chinese students abroad to return home regardless of their past political attitudes or other ‘incorrect activities’. Furthermore, the Government stressed the importance of free movement of students, no matter whether going to study abroad or to return home after studies. The key Government policy can be summarised as ‘supporting overseas study, encouragement of return migration, and the guarantee of free movement’.

The role of returnees has been praised by various Chinese leaders, from Deng Xiaoping in the 1990s to President Hu who talked of their ‘Outstanding historical role’ and Vice Premier Zeng said they were ‘Irreplaceable’. This welcoming climate for returnees is no doubt a pragmatic response of the Chinese Government and Communist Party to address the reality of ‘brain drain’, a problematic issue for sustainability of the Chinese economy. The political willingness of the Chinese Communist Party resulted in the development of various measures to reverse the ‘brain drain’ to promote return migration. For example, in order to attract high level scientists and scholars, initiatives like the One Hundred Talent Programme of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; the National Natural Science Foundation of China – National Science Funds for Outstanding Young Scholars Programme; the Ministry of Education’s Cheung Kong Scholar Programme; as well as other programmes from the Ministry of Personnel among other governmental agencies have mushroomed from the mid-1990s. However, the effectiveness of these measures is questioned as Cao (2007) indicated that first rate Chinese academics are still remaining abroad despite these new programmes. He argued this is because the academic environment in China is still less favourable even not fair since political affiliation often plays a more important role than academic merit.

In addition to the different policy at national level from the central government, efforts are also made at the municipal and local level. Incentives were given from central to local government to returnees, such as financial, tax and administrative support. Cities now formulate their own strategy in getting both Chinese and foreign talents outside China. For example, Shanghai has set up overseas recruitment agencies and programmes targeted at highly skilled returnees. In this case, although there was no significant reference to these local efforts as the key contributing factor for returning home, it is clear there is awareness of these programmes as one interviewee said:

‘I have certainly heard about these programmes. But for me, the most important thing is not tax break, or the possibility to import car or electronics. I am more interested in the career prospect in China. As the market is booming, that is the reason why I am here, here is full of opportunities.’

A male graduate from HEC.

Compared to academic returnees, student returnees interviewed for this paper emphasised strongly the economic opportunities as the most important reason for coming home, since most of them plan to work in the private sector. For them, as seen above, career advancement and the nature of work is more important than government regulations. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government has now lifted the emphasis on long term or permanent return to encourage shorter or circular migration of students. Cao (2007) for example, noted that the Government shifted from ‘returning and serving the country’ to ‘serving the country’, meaning students/scholars and talents can contribute to the development in China without leaving their jobs or studies abroad to come back to China for good. Nevertheless, the Government’s preferential strategies do attract some returnees who in fact already hold overseas nationalities. One returnee responded to the policy saying:

‘Well, it is good to see their new developments in the policy for returnees. I have noticed there has been discussion on dual citizenship for Chinese nationals. That would be a great leap forward. Also now in Shanghai, the municipal government is giving long term residence, the ‘Shanghai Green Card’ for overseas talents and returnees. This is a good step, especially for those who have lived long time abroad, most likely already have family and children. We have more to consider when deciding whether to come back or not. These changes will certainly enable us to make up our mind easier.’

A male HEC Graduate.

Besides the personal career strategies and influence of policy changes from the Chinese Government, there are a number of other external factors which contribute to the decision of returnees.

One of them is the issue of family and intergenerational relations. Though the Chinese impressive economic development and opportunities may seem to be by far the most important pulling factor for attracting Chinese students, as suggested earlier by some returnees, to return home, family factors also play an important role for many returnees when it comes to balancing the pros and cons of return. It is often associated with the feeling of guilt and sense of responsibility for parents and other family members.

One returnee from ESCP-EAP Business School in Paris commented:

‘As a son, if you cannot be with your father when he is in the emergency room, it is a very shameful thing! And that was how I felt when my father was in hospital while I was in Paris.’

A male graduate of ESCP-EAP Business School.

Family ties and kinship are central to Chinese culture and traditional values. Paying respect and taking care of parents are the essential moral obligations for children. Therefore this explains the guilty feeling expressed by the above interviewee. This guilty feeling is also naturally linked with responsibilities of children in Chinese society. As said earlier, it is the undeniable duty of the children to be responsible for their elderly parents. This responsibility is even greater nowadays, as many families in China only have one child because of the population control in China since the late 1970s.

The pressure is high on these single children and they now face greater responsibilities, for example, a married couple need to take care of up to 8 elder family members (parents and grandparents from both sides of the couple). Many returnees expressed that the more time they lived abroad, the more they realised how much sacrifice their parents have made to make their overseas studies possible, hence motivating them to go back to take up their duties towards their parents.

In addition to the reason of parents, family reunification for married couples and people in long term relationships are also important. Some returnees already had family in China before they went to study in Paris. Sometimes their family members follow and accompany the students in Paris but most cannot do so because of work in China. To be united with family once studies or work is finished is a personal decision on the balance between family and career. One returnee chose her family over job possibilities in Paris, saying:

‘I waited for some interviews for a while in France. However, I feel (to find a job) I must learn and improve my French for at least half a year and wait for job opportunities like some other people. On the other side, all of my European and American classmates brought their families to Paris except my Singaporean friend and myself, I hope to return home immediately because my daughter needs me most. I think China has a lot of development potentials and I saw a lot of opportunities in China and don’t feel I have to stay in Europe.’

A female graduate from ESSEC in Shanghai.

This is even true for those who have relocated more than once in their studies abroad, and despite living in Singapore, with closer proximity to Shanghai than Paris, Mr T still decided to go back to China after studies and work in both Asia and Europe:

‘I quite like the city (Singapore) and in fact I also found a job there. But when I thought about my family, whether my wife would be able to find a job, it will be too complicated for family. I found Singapore a good place to live. After four months in Singapore, I returned to finish my studies in Paris and came back to Shanghai in January 2005 to work for my current job.’

A male graduate from INSEAD in Shanghai.

From these personal experiences, we can say that family is a very important factor effecting returnees’ decision. It even involves personal sacrifice for the parents, loved ones and other family members.

In the case of return migration of Chinese students, it is not just the Chinese Government policy which matters but the policy of the host country also has an impact. The slowing down of the economy, high employment, even higher employment for young people all contributes not only to tightening the job market and creates more competition for jobs, it has also had an impact on the immigration policy in France, especially with regards to Third Country Nationals. Getting a work permit and find a company to sponsor your application is harder. A career and alumni officer from a prestigious business school in Paris explained the difficulty of going through these bureaucratic processes. She also mentioned that the restrictive procedure for labour migration and work permits in Europe also limit employment of Chinese graduates in Europe. The economic slowdown and deterioration after 9/11 are also said to have had a profound effect on Chinese students, as a returnee shared her own post 9/11 experience:

‘You know, 9/11 incident happened when I was in France, so you simply could not imagine or plan everything. Certainly, I and my Singaporean and other classmates had thought about working for Danone or others, but later we feel things have changed a lot (after 9/11). This is especially true for the students of MBA LUXE (Luxury Brand Management) and greater impact for MBA IMHI (International Hospitality Management) because they are related to hotel industry.’

A Female graduate from ESSEC.

While most countries in Europe including France and the UK are on the one hand tightening migration control it is important to point out that on the other hand, there have been active recruitment and retention policies of Western governments to lure and keep foreign students / talents after their studies, among them the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) from the UK Government – top MBA graduates can get extra points to secure a work permit after their studies; the newly announced Talent Migration Pact of Sarkozy's French Government and highly debated 'Blue Card' scheme of the European Union. Hence, we can see there are both push and pull factors for student returnees, the difficulty of getting a work permit is pushing Chinese students to return while the attractive new programmes are pulling more students to study and work in the hosting countries.

Last but not least, private sectors are now also starting to be keen on facilitating firstly the overseas studies and the later return of Chinese students. Human resource is vital for a successful business therefore corporations are working hard to keep an adequate supply of educated talents. Many companies are now sponsoring overseas studies for Chinese students, like the N+I scheme of major French corporations working with universities / colleges in France to offer integral study and training programmes for foreign students. Also for example, Thales Group's Thales Academia programme sponsored 7 Chinese talents to study business & engineering subjects at elite French schools in 2007.

As McKinsey (2005) warned China's 'looming talent shortage' – lack of qualified workers with international exposure, more companies are investing in setting up specialised programmes to attract Chinese students abroad to take up managerial and other key role functions to manage business in China (Shen 2005, 2008). Among them are the Rolls- Royce China Programme on Purchasing and McKinsey's Asia House in Frankfurt and Paris. The majority of INSEAD graduates found their jobs through the on-campus recruitment. When top consultancy and banking firms come to INSEAD or LBS or elsewhere, they all have the global recruitment strategy and plans for their individual offices. This certainly includes the increasing demands from the booming China region.

One of the Chinese graduates from INSEAD got her job with the Boston Consulting Group during a campus event and she commented:

'When BCG comes to INSEAD, they have recruitment plans for their offices. Greater China Office is of course focused on Chinese students and has a quota for that.'

Her INSEAD colleague shares similar thoughts about her offer from A.T. Kearney:

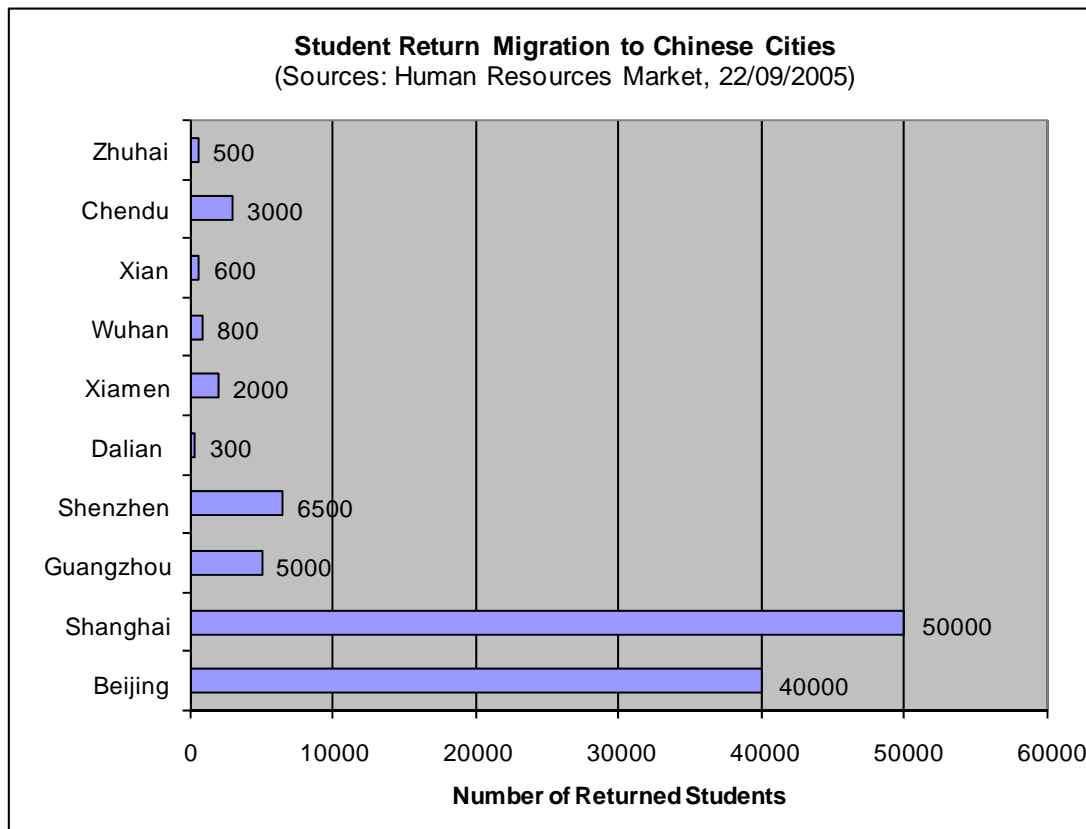
'AT Kearny's requirement is similar to Accenture but even higher, i.e. analytical and logical thinking plus communication abilities. At campus recruitment they compare more personal qualities rather than qualifications; I may have different ideas basing on my experiences in China and France.'

She also pointed out the emerging of cosmopolitan Chinese cities and its impact on the choice of location for returnees from France:

'I came back to Shanghai in 2005. In the Greater China Region, BCG (Boston Consulting Group) has offices in Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai. I think Hong Kong is a bit old-fashioned so it is really between Beijing and Shanghai. Since my hometown is Shanghai, Beijing does not have any other advantages for me to choose. I have all my friends and family there and it is much easier for me to integrate and get on my work'

From the quotes above, it is worthwhile to note the advantage of 'being back at hometown' where there are existing networks and contacts before the departure for overseas studies. These networks and contacts are important for business returnees as China has a high context society, where *Guangxi*, or connections in English, are crucial. Returnees are more likely to go to their home town or where they have worked and lived. Big cities with striving business opportunities are therefore becoming the hotspots for returnees (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Chinese Returnees in Major Cities



In fact, among major Chinese cities, all returnees interviewed agree Shanghai is the commercial centre for China while Beijing is the administrative capital. Certain sectors are also concentrated in Shanghai, such as the luxury products, consultancy, advertising and other advanced producer services. Chinese cities are both sending and now receiving hubs for student migrants. The fact that most of the returnees interviewed in this research either originally came from Shanghai or have studied or worked in Shanghai made the city a favourable destination. A female INSEAD graduate now works for a major consultancy firm in Shanghai commented on her decision for Shanghai:

‘Beijing is an interesting place with a deep cultural base. But Beijing’s main function is China’s political and cultural capital, while Shanghai is a better choice for the business world. A lot of companies have their headquarters in Shanghai and its financial service is also better developed. BCG does not have a China HQ and all employees are cross-staffing and it does not matter where you are based’.

A female graduate from INSEAD.

Shanghai is also said to be closer to the standard of a global city which meets the demanding business environment and cosmopolitan staff as suggested by another graduate:

‘I came to Shanghai as soon as I am back in China. As you could see, I like to work in different cities, including Beijing, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Paris in the past. I prefer Shanghai as a city. None of my family is in Shanghai. My husband was working for many years in Hong Kong and now has company in Shanghai. I think in terms of living environment, Shanghai is closer to a global city, based on its history, people and other factors, much better than Beijing or Shenzhen.

People here also show more respect to returnees and foreigners. Beijing is ‘on the footstep of the imperial palace’ – the capital, people are quite arrogant, but in fact it (living life) is far from international standard.’

A female ESSEC Graduate.

Another returnee from ESCP-EAP also confirms Shanghai’s advantage over Beijing and uses her company as a good example to illustrate the better business environment in Shanghai:

‘I had been in Shanghai for a long time and had not been home for a while. I was already in Shanghai before I went abroad. The project from Saint-Gobain was in Shanghai because of the real estate market in Shanghai is important for building materials company like Saint-Gobain. Although the Representative Office was in Beijing but most businesses were done in the Eastern China region. In terms of *économie financière* (financial economy), Shanghai is much better than Beijing. When we choose a place, we want a place where our suppliers and clients are, Shanghai is more prosperous and has a better real estate market.’

A female returnee from ESCP-EAP.

Furthermore interviews carried out with returnees allow four categories to be identified:

Globalist:

This is mainly the case of INSEAD graduates, who do not limit themselves to French companies. They are concentrated in consultancy and banking sectors as well as in other industries. French language is not important for them but they do have a certain attachment to France. They also meet up frequently in smaller groups.

French relic:

This group mainly comes from *grandes écoles* who studied French before and continue to work for French companies and use French and English as working languages. The interviewees frequently made references in French and still maintain close links with France as well as keeping French lifestyles in Shanghai.

They are also usually the activities for French activities and alumni organisation.

Localised:

The majority of these people only spent a relatively a small part of time in France and / or have limited French language skills. They are now fully integrated in local life and have few contacts with alumni or the French lifestyle.

French Families:

Here are the spouses of French expatriates or who are naturalised as French and currently working and living in Shanghai. They have strong links with France and the French community in China. (Attn: some are more localised – the older generation and some are more westernised – the younger couples)

Figure 5: ESSCA alumni in Beijing by their employment sector

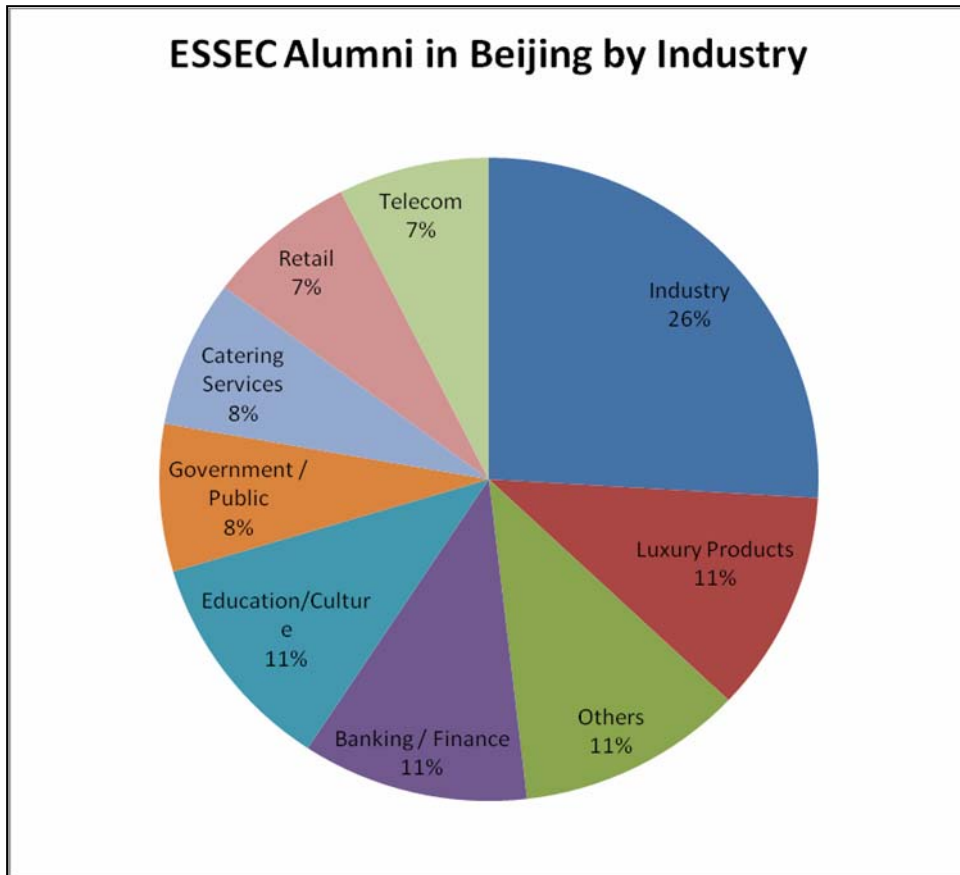
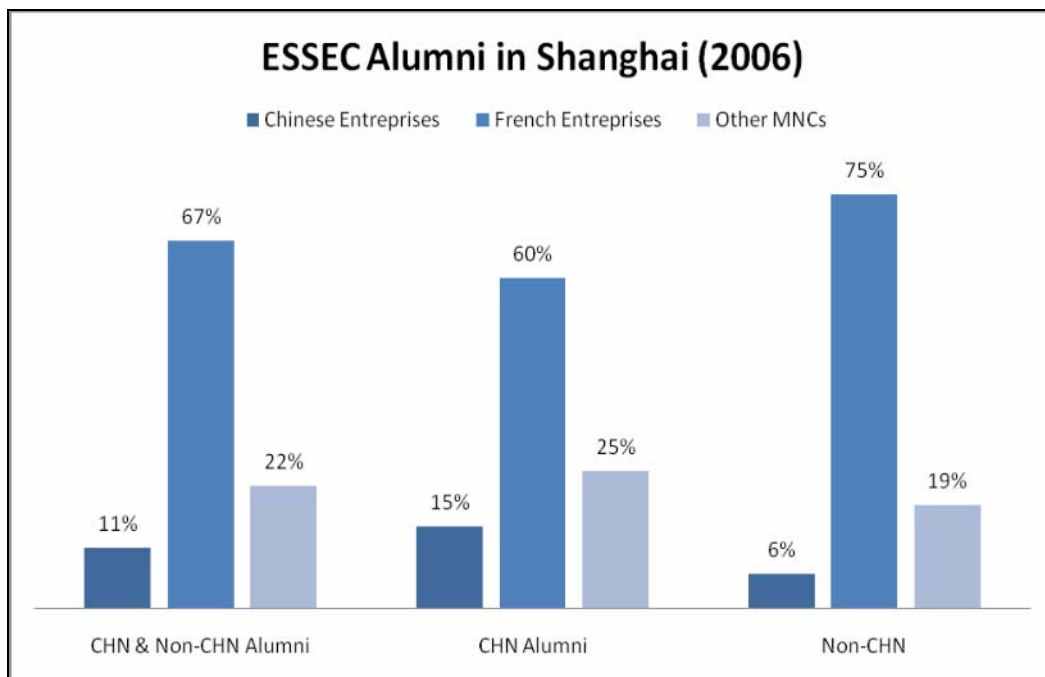


Figure 6: ESSCA alumni in Shanghai by types employers



The above two Charts revealed the career patterns of returnees from ESSEC, a renowned French business school. It is clear that Chinese returnees from ESSEC are very much concentrated in French companies followed by other MNCs and then local Chinese companies. This French connection is also obvious in the sectors where returnees are working. Luxury products, industry and construction firms where major French corporations are significant players have a high percentage of Chinese returnees. One returnee explained that French companies favour returnees from France and it is where their transnational capital can be most utilised:

‘My school, HEC has a very good reputation in France. For me, it is relatively easy to secure a job with any French companies. My diploma from HEC is the key to open the door of career opportunities. If I want to apply for a job with an American or business company, it probably will take me ‘half a day’ to explain about my school and its credentials. Also working for French companies means that both my French and Chinese language skills and experiences in both countries can play a great role in my work. I am competent in understanding the business culture better and enjoy more the work.’

An HEC graduate.

This is not the case of ESSEC graduates alone. The majority of interviewees share the same belief with the exception of INSEAD. Only one INSEAD graduate among all interviewed returnees works for a French company (the same one she worked before she left China). The reason behind this can be explained by the factor that INSEAD is not among the traditional *grande école* system, but rather an international business school. The other schools like HEC, ESSEC and ESCP-EAP are all 100% French home grown educational establishments with wide alumni presence in different sectors of French business, in and outside France. These transnational networks naturally help newer graduates to enter French companies. Almost all returnees from these schools expressed their appreciation of the extensive alumni resources of their respective schools and stressed the importance of it when it comes to job hunting. In contrast, students and faculty members of INSEAD are more diverse, and as one Chinese alumni said ‘INSEAD just happened to be in France’. Therefore, the choice of school is also a factor in shaping the career trajectory of student migrants.

Lastly, most returnees express a certain level of cultural shocks when they first return to Shanghai and the majority of them adapted easily. The major complaints are the noise, pollution, traffic, urban planning and above all, people’s qualities and politeness. Returnees have at least tried to influence other people by their own actions. One returnee said:

‘When I first came back to Shanghai, I realised the sky here is not as blue as in Paris! The air quality is much worse. People are also in hurry when crossing the roads, even in red light. Some drivers are also not friendly to pedestrians. In France, most drivers will wait for you to cross road. Here, even with green lights, you sometimes must wait for cars to go first. What I dislike most is littering on the street, and during my first month back in Shanghai, I always corrected people and asked them not to do so. But later I found out my own individual power is not enough to stop this, but nevertheless I told myself at least I can make a good example myself.’

- A returnee from University of Paris 5

4. Conclusion

Walking on Champs-Élysées, one can see Chinese tourists flocking into one of the glamorous boutiques buy lots of expensive clothes and gifts. However, business schools are also indeed experiencing a large increase in Chinese students. One concern for China is the ‘negative brain drain’ however, it is shown through interviews and the review of quantitative research, that neither France nor China should worry too much about this student migration, as we can see that the return rate of Chinese students is increasing day by day. For France, Chinese students are both consumers and help for the conference local/national economy.

The research also illustrates that the importance of previous work, education, language for the determination of study abroad and the location of the host country. These experiences are also important decision making factors for the return of 'sea-turtles' as the previous working experiences and internships in France also influenced their career mobility and strategy. For example, Shanghai students are more likely to return to Shanghai, rather than elsewhere. The Chinese Government is more and more keen on bringing young talents from the USA and UK, with various incentives such as tax exemption for 'sea-turtles' and returnees financial services. To summarise, strong family relations and contacts, career strategy and prospects for returnees and confidence in the Chinese economy are significant return factors for Chinese students. In addition, family relationships, kinship as well as private sector also play important roles for returnees.

Student migration is often argued to be the precursor of highly skilled migration (Skeldon 1992) based on case studies from Australia, USA, and Canada. The return migration of Chinese students from France is not a migration failure, but rather a unique link and network which needs cooperation from both parties to ensure a win-win brain circulation. To maximise the mutual benefits China and France need to develop a more coherent and pro-active scheme and work with different stakeholders such as the universities and private sector. For China, student return migration has become a 'calculated strategy' [by the national and local governments as well as students and their families to accumulate skills, knowledge, network and financial resources abroad. Growing student migration from China will certainly affect China's ability to integrate into global markets.

Interviews with returnees from French business schools do show the strong French connection in their career trajectory in China after the studies in France. They are not simply alumni 'made in France', but belong to the growing transnational work force, a possible 'joint venture' of Chinese and western education, with cultural competences and skills across geographical boundaries that China desperately needs. Although a short period of cultural shock does exist when they come back, returnees have soon adapted to local life again. Some of them in fact stressed it is one of the reasons for which they came home, saying this is the 'real life in Shanghai, in China' and even calling a busy and sometimes stressful living environment 'the excitement and dynamics they miss' when living abroad – 'that is what home is about!' just as one returnee nicely summarised.

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