Chinese returnees’ conceptions of positive career outcomes after graduating from Australian universities – quantitative findings

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Abstract
This paper reports the quantitative findings of a study on conceptions of positive career outcomes held by Chinese students who returned home to work after gaining higher education qualifications in Australia. The study explores what positive career outcomes mean to Chinese returnees, the actual positive career outcomes Chinese returnees have experienced and contributing factors to the positive career outcomes achieved. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used and here the analysis of the quantitative findings is presented. The survey data show that Chinese returnees assign greater importance to ‘soft outcomes’ relating to personal and life fulfilment than ‘hard outcomes’ such as employment results. Also, the discrepancy between the returnees’ ideal and actual outcomes is greater in the soft outcomes than the hard outcomes. Statistical analysis indicates three emergent, distinct groups of conceptions of positive career outcomes. The qualitative findings will be presented separately.

Keywords
Chinese returnee, career outcome, Chinese students, international student, employability, Australian higher education, student outcome, graduate outcome, Chinese graduate, overseas student

Introduction
Twenty-five per cent of tertiary students in Australia are international students. Of which, students from China are the single largest group contributing to the international student number and remain a particularly strong cohort in the international student market (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The research snapshot released by Australian Education International (AEI) shows that China alone (not including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) accounts for 39.9% of all international student enrolment in Australian higher education (AEI, 2014a). The latest AEI August 2014 enrolment number indicates that there are currently around 90,000 students from China in Australian higher education (AEI, 2014b).

The latest full year statistics available show that there were 94,782 students in total from China (excluding SARs and Taiwan) in 2013 (Department of Education and Training, 2014b).

From 2010 to 2014, approximately 40,000–46,000 visas each year were granted to Chinese international students studying in higher education (excluding non-awards) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2014). But only around 11,000 Chinese applicants in 2012–13 were granted permanent residency through points tested skilled migration and permanent employer sponsored migration (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014), some of whom were former Chinese international students. This suggests that the main option for most Chinese overseas students after studying in Australia is not...
migrating to Australia but most likely returning home, which coincides with a global trend of Chinese students returning home after studying overseas. According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in China, the number of Chinese overseas students returning home to work is growing drastically, with the number rising from 69,300 in 2008 to over 300,000 in 2013 (People’s Daily, 26 February 2014; Xinhua, 21 February 2014). Government statistics from Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange shows that since 1970s, more than 72% of overseas students have returned home to China after studying abroad (China Daily, 19 November 2012). The 2012 survey of EIC, one of the largest international education agencies in China also shows that more than 70% of Chinese overseas students returned home after studying abroad (Xinhua, 17 October 2013).

With the significant presence of Chinese students in Australian universities and their growing home-bound mobility, an understanding of the perceived value and career outcomes of studying in Australia is necessary for the design and continuous improvement of career support for this major cohort of university students. Surprisingly there is a significant lack of research on what constitutes good results and the enabling factors for Chinese international students.

Positive career outcomes
It is known that Chinese students share great concern over career development (Hou, Leung, Li, Li, & Xu, 2012). From a consumer value’s standpoint, the functional, pragmatic value (usefulness of a degree in securing employment) of a degree has been found to play a critical role in Chinese students’ choice of degree programs (Lai, To, Lung, & Lai, 2012). From other social, contextual and cultural standpoints, cultural values and parental expectation are found to associate with Chinese students’ career decision making (Leung, Hou, Gati, & Li, 2011). However, it is unclear how these factors influence Chinese students who study abroad, particularly in Australian higher education. After all, there is a very wide range of motivations for Chinese students to study in Australia (Yang, 2007; Yao, 2004). Given the lack of investigation on this cohort, it is necessary to explore their career needs by first looking at their broad conceptions of expectations and outcomes.

Career outcomes in general have been loosely discussed by researchers in areas such as vocational psychology, career development, higher education, economics, human resource, business and management. Although the term was never specifically defined, discussions on this subject have referred to career outcomes as occupational status (Keane & Wolpin, 1997; Roksa & Levey, 2010), promotion (Forret & Dougerty, 2004; Gong, Chen, & Yang, 2014), compensation (Forret & Dougerty, 2004), educational continuation (Kean & Wolpin, 1997), job satisfaction (Gong et al., 2014), etc. In Australian higher education, career outcomes are commonly expressed as work and study outcomes (Graduate Careers Australia, 2015). Up to 2014, graduate outcomes have exclusively been reported through Graduate Destination Survey, Postgraduate Destination Survey and Beyond Graduation Survey, in which the specific outcomes reported are predominantly objective outcomes of work or study situation, industry, occupation and salary. While this reflects the status quo of employability exemplifying graduate outcomes of Australian universities, some other studies are found to have addressed graduate career outcomes more comprehensively. This is achieved, for example, by differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic, or subjective and objective outcomes (Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013), thus allowing conceptual diversity. This is also achieved by including less tangible outcomes in the discussion of outcomes, such as non-monetary rewards as well as the accumulation of cultural and social capitals (Xu, 2013). Moreover, discussions of graduate attributes (Barrie, 2007) and identity development (Daniels & Brooker, 2014) provide linkages between generic and core outcomes of higher education student experience and work readiness.

Outcomes beyond employability results are commonly found in international student literature. Overseas studying is said to lead to enhanced cultural awareness, changes in worldviews, self and intercultural identities (Gill, 2010). In Brown’s (2009) study, by placing international students in the context of long-term tourism to examine outcomes of the international sojourn, the outcomes found include cross-cultural understanding, independence, changes in life perspective and philosophy, self-direction, resilience and character building. While most of these references refer to concepts that are neutral or positive in nature, some of the outcomes discussed are negative; for example, reverse culture shock of returnees (Gaw, 2000).

While there is no direct comprehensive study on Chinese returnees career outcomes, a few studies have examined the consequences of the returnees’ overseas studying experience. These consequences have been discussed in association with returnees’ impact on home countries’ modernisation and globalisation in China and Taiwan (Wang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011, Zhou & Hsu, 2010), the effect of studying abroad experience on the returnees’ lives and work (Gill, 2010), family expectation (Lee & Morrish, 2012) and subjective career success (Guo et al., 2013), to name a few.

For the purpose of this study, career outcomes are operationalised as a construct understood as consequences of processes concerning whole persons developing their life and living. We share Wolfe and Kolb’s (1980) broad view of career development as a phenomenon that involves one’s whole life and person, changing life contexts, relationships with
significant others and the wider society. In addition, we specifically seek to identity desirable career outcomes, given that ‘career outcome’ should be treated as a neutral term.

Method

A study was designed and conducted to enhance our understanding of positive career outcomes of Chinese returnees. The study targets Chinese international students who had received at least one higher education qualification from an Australian university and returned to the Greater China region (Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) to work. It aims to examine what they referred to as positive career outcomes, what they actually experienced and what they deemed as contributing factors to the positive career outcomes.

A mixed methods approach is adopted for the research design of the study. Both questionnaire data and semi-structured interview data were collected. In addition, observation of references to positive career outcomes of Chinese returnees in stakeholder presentations was carried out to cross check regularities in the data. This paper presents findings from the quantitative data.

Given that there is no similar study which explores returnees’ conceptions of career outcomes or contributing factors, we adopt a direct, open-question approach in forming our main questions. We seek returnees’ demographic information, years of stay in Australia, types and levels of qualifications gained, and responses to three main questions regarding positive career outcomes, which are:

1. What do ‘positive career outcomes’ mean to you?
2. What ‘positive career outcomes’ have you experienced since you graduated from an Australian university?
3. Based on your answers to question 2, what aspect of your Australian studying experience contributed to the positive career outcomes above?

Respondents are asked to provide their own answers in the blank space provided or select one or multiple applicable answers from the 12 to 14 answer items provided. The development of these items was guided by career outcomes literature, survey design principles and particularly consultations with currently enrolled Chinese students, Chinese alumni, career service staff, academics, international student service staff and recruiters, employers recruiting Chinese returnees and professional associations.

As the potential subjects are native Chinese speakers and readers in either traditional or simplified Chinese, the survey questions were presented bilingually in both English with Simplified Chinese (for students from Mainland China) or English with Traditional Chinese (for students from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) translations. The translations and survey design were reviewed by two National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited translators and three academics from Chinese studies, Linguistics and Statistics to ensure accurate wording and friendly reading of the questions. Ethics approval was obtained for the study.

Researchers collected data face to face in China and Taiwan in the period of November 2013 to early January 2014. The main researcher was bilingual in Chinese and English. All subjects were recruited randomly. Most of the participants were approached at an Austrade China Careers Fair in Guangzhou for Chinese returnees who had studied in Australia. The fair targeted Chinese graduates who studied in Australian universities and returned to the home region to work. The event information and invitation were distributed widely through Austrade, Australian universities, Zaopin, Australian China Alumni Association and other relevant bodies. Some subjects were recruited through alumni dinners and networking functions. To participate in the study, subjects must be of Greater China (Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) origin, have had completed at least one qualification from Australian universities and returned to the Greater China region to work.

Results

Fifty-seven Chinese returnees from Mainland China and Taiwan participated in the survey, minus one invalid sample. However, no returnees from Hong Kong or Macau participated in the survey. The 56 survey respondents graduated from 21 universities in Australia and completed 64 qualifications in total. Eight returnees obtained more than one qualification from two universities and one respondent studied in three Australian universities. A total of 64.3% of respondents were female and 35.7% were male. The differences between the genders in respect to age and length has been tested with ANOVA and found insignificant. The majority of the respondents studied in the fields of finance, accounting, business, commerce, and education, which reflected both the general choice of studies of these students and the industries they work in (Austrade, 2011). The breakdown of qualifications completed is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications completed in Australia</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master coursework</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master by research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sixty-six per cent of the graduates in this study recorded having received a qualification in the last five years, with 2013 being the year of most degree conferrals. Eight-six per cent of all qualifications recorded were conferred in the last 10 years. The mode of length of stay is two years but the average duration of stay in Australia was 4.63 years. Most graduates were present in Australia only for the duration of their degree; however, there were several individuals who lived in Australia for significantly long periods before returning to China or Taiwan. The minimum recorded stay in Australia was one year and the maximum was 23 years.

The distribution of age in this study is meaningfully broad. Whilst the majority of graduates were in their mid-20s, there were a non-trivial number in a higher age range. The youngest recorded age is 22 years. The oldest participant is 49. The average age for members in this study was 30.5 years. Modal age was 24 years. Due to the sample size of the study, we are unable to analyse if age, degree background and level of study would yield any conclusive differences.

We note that results from mainland Chinese and Taiwanese respondents were not analysed separately. When results from Taiwanese respondents were added to the results of mainland Chinese respondents, results for each analysis barely changed. Of the 56 valid participants, 51 are now working in mainland China and five are working in Taiwan. Twelve of all respondents in the study also have had worked in Australia after course completion.

All respondents used one or more of the answer items provided for each of the three main questions. Very few additional responses were provided by participants. They were merged into identical categories or set aside for future reference in the next phase qualitative data analysis since the number was too small for statistical analysis.

**Ideal versus actual positive career outcomes experienced**

Figure 1 is derived from the total responses to the first two positive career outcomes questions: ‘What do “positive career outcomes” mean to you?’ and ‘What “positive career outcomes” have you experienced since you graduated from an Australian university?’

The bars indicate what returnees deem as positive career outcomes and are sorted from highest to lowest frequency according to the number of respondents identifying the outcome as positive. ‘Ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths’ had the highest percentage of respondents whereas ‘satisfy family needs or expectations’ garnered the least. The line indicates respondents who agreed that they had experienced that particular outcome. In three areas ‘increased self-confidence’, ‘enhanced employability’ and ‘obtain a recognised qualification’, the respondents indicated they achieved their desirable career outcomes. It is very clear that there is a discrepancy between all the other outcomes that Chinese returnees nominated as positive and all other outcomes they stated as having actually experienced.

Table 2 shows the top five responses to the questions of ‘What do “positive career outcomes” mean to you?’ and ‘What “positive career outcomes” have you experienced?’
What do ‘positive career outcomes’ mean to you?

Ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths (43)
Enhanced personal qualities and horizons (40)
Clearer sense of self and direction (38)
Life fulfilment (35)
Work in targeted occupation/job (32)

What ‘positive career outcomes’ have you experienced since you graduated from an Australian university?

Enhanced personal qualities and horizons (34)
Increased self-confidence (31)
Enhanced employability (30)
Ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths (29)
Obtain a recognised qualification (22)

Table 3. Bottom five responses of ideal versus realised positive career outcomes.

What do ‘positive career outcomes’ mean to you?

Enhanced social status (23)
Work in targeted position/level (22)
Work in targeted company/industry (21)
Obtain a recognised qualification (19)
Satisfy family needs or expectations (17)

What ‘positive career outcomes’ have you experienced since you graduated from an Australian university?

Enhanced social status (11)
Satisfactory pay (9)
Work in targeted position/level (9)
Work in targeted company/industry (9)
Satisfy family needs or expectations (8)

Table 2. Top five responses of ideal versus realised positive career outcomes.

Table 3. Bottom five responses of ideal versus realised positive career outcomes.

experienced since you graduated from an Australian university?

‘Ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths’ and ‘enhanced personal qualities and horizons’ appeared in both ideal and experienced outcomes. ‘Increased self-confidence’, ‘enhanced employability’ and ‘gaining a recognised qualification’ are also the most recognised career outcomes from studying in Australia.

Table 3 shows the bottom five responses to these two questions. From the responses it seems that although outcomes relating to social status and working in targeted workplaces do not seem as important as personal and professional improvement, they are nevertheless significant as more than 30% of the respondents have regarded them as positive career outcomes. Satisfying family expectations is still a significant outcome, although not deemed as important as the others. Similarly, in terms of the actual outcomes experienced, outcomes relating to pay, social status, targeted workplaces and family expectations ranked considerably low.

Figure 2 illustrates more poignantly the magnitude of the dissonance between outcomes amongst survey respondents. Only three outcomes ‘obtain qualification’, ‘enhanced employability’ and ‘increased self-confidence’ achieved a level meeting or slightly exceeding returnees’ expectations or ideals. ‘Satisfactory pay’ had the starkest discrepancy with 65% fewer respondents indicating having achieved the outcome compared to those who had designated it as a positive career outcome.

Affinity analysis was deployed to discover co-occurrence relationships among positive career outcomes. Each category available for selection is thought of as a binary variable. As respondents were invited to nominate or select relevant career outcomes according to the questions of the survey, affinity analysis can be used to model the frequency and dependence on which outcomes are being selected in order to gauge patterns (Agrawal & Srikant, 1994). By doing so, we can identify which career outcomes have a high probability of being selected together based on the patterns of all responses. Additionally, we can determine the specific outcomes that increase the appearance of other outcomes, offering insights into the underlying relationship between variables. A high co-occurrence between two (or more) outcomes suggests an association whereby experiencing one outcome increases the likelihood of also experiencing the second outcome.

We discovered that all respondents who experienced ‘increased self-confidence’ as an outcome also deem ‘enhanced employability’ and ‘ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths’ as positive career outcomes at the same time. They also acknowledged ‘international and cultural exposure’ as a contributing factor to their positive outcomes.

All respondents who experienced ‘the qualification’ as a positive outcome deem ‘work in targeted occupation/job’, ‘enhanced employability’, ‘enhanced personal qualities and horizons’ and ‘ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths’ as positive career outcomes.

Contributing factors to positive career outcomes experienced

Figure 3 shows the percentages and rank for each aspect of studying in an Australian university that
Figure 3. Aspects of studying experience in Australia contributing to positive career outcomes Chinese returnees experienced.

Figure 2. Percentage difference between ideal and realised outcomes.
Chinese returnees indicated as contributing to their positive career outcomes. Environmental factors such as ‘international and cultural exposure’, ‘opportunity to use English’ and ‘character building from challenges encountered’ ranked very high with 70–75% of respondents regarding them as contributing factors to their actual positive career outcomes. On the other hand, there were fewer respondents who accredited extracurricular activities, volunteer or community involvement, or career services at Australian universities as a contributing factor to their positive career outcomes. It is unknown whether this is because fewer respondents have been involved in or gained benefits from extra curricular and volunteering activities or sought assistance from career services, or there has been a disconnect or mismatch in offerings between these areas and the Chinese students.

Affinity analysis shows that when a Chinese returnee nominated ‘work in targeted position/level’ as an outcome they had achieved, 85.7% of the time they also indicated four factors as contributing factors – ‘international and cultural exposure’, ‘character building from challenges encountered’, ‘development of professional network’ and ‘the qualification’. Returnees who acknowledged any of these four factors as contributing to their positive career outcomes are also 4.3 times more likely to state they experienced the outcome of ‘work in targeted position/level’.

Returnees who identified ‘enhanced social status’ as an outcome they achieved, 67% of the time also indicated ‘development of professional network’, ‘friendships’ and ‘opportunity to use English’ as contributing factors to their positive career outcomes. A returnee who stated experiencing any of the three contributing factors was also 2.39 times more likely to have experienced ‘enhanced social status’ as an outcome.

Returnees who stated they had experienced the outcome of ‘ability to make social contribution’ 83% of the time also indicated ‘work experience’ and ‘curiosity to learn new things’ as the contributing factors. Those who acknowledged these two factors as contributing to their positive career outcomes are also 2.11 times more likely to state they gained the ability to make social contribution.

Moreover, our analysis revealed three broad patterns of groups of outcomes (Figure 4) that Chinese returnees were indicating, which suggests that some if not all outcomes in the group are associated with each other.

**Discussion**

What constitutes positive career outcomes for university graduates is a complex phenomenon. Many factors besides employability contribute to students’ quality career transition from university life into the world of work and theorists have taken various angles in examining career development at macro and micro levels (Bright, 2005). At the individual level, career optimism has been found to fully mediate the effect of self-efficacy on academic major satisfaction (McIlveen, Beccaria, & Burton, 2013), and career decidedness positively correlates with subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012; Uthayakumar, Schimmack, Hartung, & Rogers, 2010). Other factors, including the development of personal qualities and career identity (LaPointe, 2010), are part of a life-long transformative learning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These outcomes appeared approx. 95% of the time together</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced personal qualities and horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>提升个人素质与水平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>充实人生</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clearer sense of self and direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>清楚的自我认知与方向</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>增强自信</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to make social contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>有能力贡献社会</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These outcomes appeared approx. 84% of the time together</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>增强个人就业条件优势</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfactory pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>令人满意的待遇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>提升社会地位</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to utilise knowledge/skills/strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>能运用所学的知识技能及长处</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>These outcomes appeared approx. 81% of the time together</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Work in targeted occupation/job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>从事想做的工作职业</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work in targeted company/industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>从事想进的公司/产业</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work in targeted position/level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>从事想做的工作岗位</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfy family needs or expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>满足家人需要或期望</td>
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**Figure 4.** Broad groups of conceptions of positive career outcomes.
Specific to the Chinese context, Li (2012) has used a Chinese concept ‘SuZhi’ (p. 473) to look at Chinese overseas students’ employability construct. SuZhi is a Chinese concept which refers to the overall quality, development and cultivation of a person. SuZhi has no direct English equivalent but broadly means human quality pertaining to a person or a group of people in the modern context. Li distinguishes SuZhi from a narrow notion of personal capital and highlights its conceptual affordance as the term refers to more than the sum of individual skills (p. 488). Li found that Chinese overseas students attribute advantages they have gained to their international studying experience (‘soft currencies’ such as international exposure, intercultural competence and problem-solving skills) more than overseas credentials (‘hard currencies’). This distinction has been most appropriate and meaningful to be used as a model to explain the findings in this quantitative study. Indeed, following the same analogy, the study shows that ‘soft outcomes’ (enhanced personal qualities, clearer sense of self and direction, etc.) are ranked higher than ‘hard outcomes’ (employability, qualifications, pay, etc.) and the ‘soft contributing factors’ (international and cultural exposures, character building, etc.) are valued more than the ‘hard contributing factor’ (the qualification). The study of Guo et al. (2013) on Chinese returnees also yields similar findings which show that the returnees’ preferred career outcomes are those that reflect subjective career success, rather than objective career success such as income.

The findings indicate that international and cultural exposure is a very strong contributing factor to Chinese returnees’ positive career outcomes. This is supported by findings in the 2014 Zhaopin Overseas Returnees Survey (Zhaopin, 2014) in which 2655 returnees participated. A total of 32.84% of respondents regarded ‘enhanced intern-cultural ability’ as the biggest benefit of their employment in China after studying overseas, followed by ‘proficient foreign language skills’ (29.34%). Moreover, 69.87% of respondents ranked multi-national enterprises as their ideal place of work, much higher than domestic companies (21.43%) and public sector (4.41%). A recent qualitative study on international students in Australia in which most respondents were Chinese also revealed that the students’ aspiration was to work in large, top multinational firms (Deakin University, 2004).

It is interesting to note that satisfying family expectation did not come out as a top outcome in either the expected or actual outcomes achieved. Whether this may be a sign of shift from traditional family values, effects of single child policy, or other social, cultural or economic factors is worthy of further investigation. Given that the majority of the responses were collected at a careers fair, it is also interesting to note that the expectation of enhanced employability was met and it is not on top of the list of the most desirable career outcomes. In contrast, outcomes relating to a person’s being and capability were highly valued.

From the affinity analysis it appears that Chinese returnees’ conceptions of positive career outcomes can be roughly grouped into three clusters. One relates to personal and life development (person), one relates to positional advantage and capabilities (positioning) and one relates to being in a place of work in a desired type of job, occupation, level, company and industry or that meets expectations of others (place and people). These conceptions will be compared with the qualitative findings in the main study.

It is important to note that Chinese returnees rank international and cultural exposure, an English-speaking environment and character building very highly as contributing factors to their career success. Those who have increased self-confidence also experienced enhanced employability and ability to utilise knowledge, skills and strengths.

Conclusion

The quantitative study yields some interesting and counter-intuitive results and at the same time opens the floor for new questions to be asked about positive career outcomes for Chinese returnees. The benefits of overseas studies in Australia in terms of ‘hard currencies’ and ‘soft currencies’ are both recognised by Chinese returnees. However, the greater importance assigned to ‘soft outcomes’ may provoke new thinking in facilitating future Chinese returnees’ career development. The qualitative data will also be presented separately to compare findings from the quantitative study.

The affinity analysis shows that there are emergent groups of conceptions of positive career outcomes. Some career outcomes seem to strongly associate with each other. The separate interview data and observation analysis of the main study may assist in gaining a holistic picture of positive career outcomes for Chinese returnees. Due to the sample size, there is scope for the study to be expanded to include a larger number of returnees.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the inputs of Peter Petoz, Sijia Guo, Evelyn Chang and Darren Peters to the study and the valuable feedback provided by the reviewers.

Declaration of conflicting interests

None declared.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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