After Work or Study Abroad:

Chinese Return Migration and Kunming's '*Jia Xiang Bao*' - Hometown Babies

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Abstract

The process of migration has long been framed as a unidirectional process comprised of arrival, settlement, citizenship and assimilation motivated by economic necessities. This dissertation moves beyond these limited views and utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to explore the process of return migration of Chinese nationals to Kunming, China.

By utilizing in-depth interviews and observation to explore the motivations of a specific group of returnees to Kunming, a rapidly changing city in China's developing western region, this study has identified three insights that can contribute to a better understating of the return migration process. The first two key findings – *jia xiang bao* 'hometown babies' and the desire to be a 'big fish in a little sea' – can motivate future policy decisions that seek to attract returnees. The third, unexpected finding – *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition' of younger generations – acknowledges the perceived heterogeneity among returnees. Further research and policy efforts that recognize heterogeneity by age group and other potentially important but, as yet unstudied factors will be able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ever larger and inevitably more diverse returnee population.

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Glossary of Chinese Emic Terms

balinghou – refers to people that were born in the 1980s

guanxi – a concept similar to the western notion of relationships between people

haidai – literally 'seaweed,' but in the context of return migration it refers to a person that has returned to China, but is not viewed as being successful

haigui - literally 'sea turtle,' but in the context of return migration it refers to a person that has returned from overseas

haiou - literally 'seagull,' but in the context of return migration it refers to a person that is simultaneously living in China as well as overseas and is commuting back and forth. Often associated with a man that is conducting business in China and has a spouse and child living overseas.

hukou – a Chinese household registration permit identifying the legal residence of a citizen

jiaxiang bao – literally 'hometown baby,' a person that has strong ties to a specific place. In the context of this dissertation, that place is Kunming.

jiulinghou – refers to people that were born in the 1990s

linglinghou – refers to people that were born in the 2000s

mianzi – a concept similar to the western notion of 'face' as in 'to save face'

ningwei jitou, buwei fengwei – it is better to be the head of a chicken than the tail of a phoenix

tubie – refers to Chinese citizens that have never left China for work or study

XiBu DaKaiFa – Western Development Policy, a Chinese national level government policy that seeks to increase the development of the western region of China

xiao xiong xin – a phrase used to describe a person as having little ambition

Chapter One: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Chinese Return Migration

"Return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration."

-Russell King, Professor of Geography and Dean of the School of European Studies at the University of Sussex

Introduction

According to recently published statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE), approximately 1.4 million Chinese students and scholars went abroad between 1978 and 2008. It is estimated that 390,000 have since returned, and, of these returnees, almost half have done so from 2005 to 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2010). While it is not unusual that some migrants would eventually return to China, the recent dramatic increase in the number of returnees is unprecedented. Understanding the recent trend in Chinese return migration is a complicated undertaking because of the lack of research and theories that exist to help us to understand this increasingly common phenomenon of Chinese return migration.

Historically, migration literature relies on the old assumption that migration is a single, unidirectional and permanent process. David Ley (2010) describes the antiquated notion of migration as a "linear narrative of immigrant departure from homeland, followed by the serial processes of arrival, settlement, citizenship and assimilation" (p. 1). Standing in contrast to the one-time-event view of migration is a growing body of literature around the conceptions of transnational migration and virtual migration. Each of these concepts seeks to describe the increasingly more common

forms of temporary and circular migratory patterns exhibited by 21st century migrants. A review of the relevant literature is provided in Chapter Two.

This dissertation seeks to add to the emerging body of literature focused on return migration by investigating the destination decision of returnees to Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan Province in China. This location was selected as Kunming is part of the Chinese government's emphasis on western development making it ripe for the testing of contemporary economic theories of migration. Special attention is paid to the experiences of two specific age groups: those born between 1950 – 1960 and 1980 – 1990.[1] These groups were selected because, by virtue of their age, they would have had dramatically different lived experiences growing up in a rapidly changing China. Specifically, the older group would have grown up during the Maoist period and have had personal experience with events such as the Cultural Revolution, while the younger group was born into the Economic Reform period and are products of China's One Child Policy.

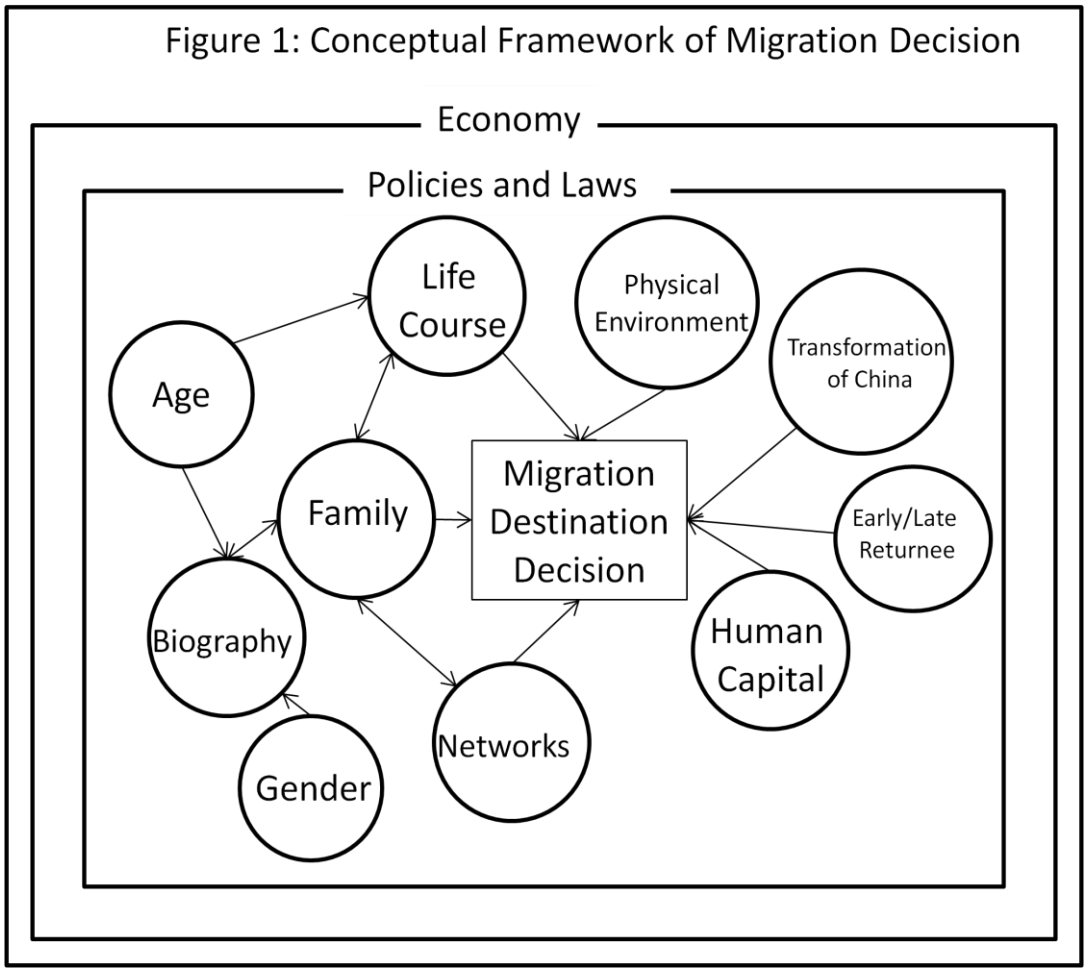
This chapter introduces the conceptual framework that has shaped my interpretation of the return migration decisions of Kunmingers.[2] In addition, it provides background information about my relationship to the topic, Chinese history relevant to the study of migration, a definition of return migration and a review of migration policies which will help the reader to understand the importance of this study. The

[1] "Contemporary" is referring to migration that has taken place since the mid 1990s. Emigration for education from China started to increase rapidly in the mid 1990s while return migration began to increase rapidly towards the mid 2000s.
[2] 'Kunminger' is the English language term that I found to be commonly used in Kunming to describe people from that city.

chapter concludes with the research questions guiding the research discussed in the rest of the dissertation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that is presented here (Figure 1) represents my understanding of the mechanisms that influence Chinese to return to Kunming. This framework



should not be viewed as a static model, but rather, one that is changing, particularly as the experiences of Chinese return migrants change. This framework has already

undergone significant revisions since I had first conceptualized it early in my doctoral studies. The changes reflect the insights that have resulted from both literature reviews and field work. For example, in earlier versions, age played a more central role in the framework. While age is still an important element, I have found that the role of the family is more central than age to migration decisions. It is important to note that this framework is inclusive of factors that are beyond the scope of the dominant migration theories. This is important because, as will be argued in Chapter Two, the dominant migration theories are insufficient in explaining the migration process of the population understudy in this dissertation.

The focus of my research is represented by the "Migration Destination Decision" box that is at the center of the framework. Each circle represents a factor that influences the decision of Kunmingers as to where to return after they have left Kunming to live abroad for a period of time. Perhaps the most important factor affecting the destination decision among Kunmingers is family. The role of the family takes many forms as will be discussed in Chapter Four, with some of the most important family influences being taking care of aging parents and marriage. Directly related to family and the destination decision is an individual's social network. In this research I find that networks are exceedingly local. In most cases a person's social network can only help them in the city where the network exists, not across geographic boarders. For example, having a strong network in Kunming will be able to provide little benefit in Beijing. Age is another particularly intervening factor in decision making as a person's age dictates where they are in their life course (e.g. recent graduate versus nearing

retirement), their personal biography (e.g. a 20 year old person cannot have ten years of industry experience) and where they fall on the continuum of returnees (e.g. an older person could have been on the early side of the returnee phenomenon, but a younger person could not). Because of the importance of age to my research an age, period and cohort framework is introduced in Chapter Two. In addition to these factors, gender also affects the migration decision. Two specific gender roles will be discussed in this study of Kunmingers: care taker and spouse.

Human capital obtained abroad is another factor which has an impact on the decision to return as well as the timing of the return. For example, earning a PhD takes time and may conflict with plans to start a family. Within the human capital element in this model, I distinguish between educational experience and work experience obtained abroad. These two types of human capital are valued differently by the marketplace and thus affect return decisions in different ways. As the number of returnees has increased, the quality of an individual's human capital has come under greater scrutiny. Early returnees with any overseas experience were highly valued, while returnees today are more closely evaluated as to the quality of their overseas experiences.

In an effort to attract and retain the influx of human capital, throughout China, there have been considerable efforts to recruit returnees. These incentives and programs are well known and can be significant. They were originally thought to be likely to influence individual decisions as they have in other studies (Zweig 2006, LaFraniere, 2010). However, among the population that was the focus of this research, these incentives bore little weight and therefore have been omitted from the framework. So,

while human capital was found to be important in this study of Kunmingers, returnee incentive programs were not. Another important element in this model is China's rapid transformation over the past several decades. This economic and social transformation has played a significant role in migration experiences, particularly in how they have affected living conditions and economic opportunities. Finally, all of these aspects of the model must be evaluated in the context of policies, laws and the economy. In order to migrate legally, there must be a legal pathway of migration. Over the years, policies and laws in many countries have cycled through periods of both restricting and encouraging migration. Relevant policy changes in the U.S.A. and China are reviewed later in this chapter. The economies of individual countries and the world in general also play important roles in the migration decision and on the policies and laws of individual countries. The theories of migration that are reviewed in Chapter Two will address the role of economics in migration decisions more fully because these are the leading contemporary theories on migration.

This conceptual framework has evolved over time as a result of my research and experiences in China. It serves as the basis for understanding the destination decision of the participants in my study. As stated earlier, it is not a static framework but rather one that has evolved as I have analyzed the data collected in Kunming. Before moving on to more details about the study itself, I would like to explain how my background and experiences in China have affected this project because, as a qualitative study, I am a participant in it.

Personal Background and Value Premise

In addition to being a Ph.D. student, I also have an appointment as a lecturer in the marketing department in the Carlson School of Management, the business school at the University of Minnesota. My primary responsibility is to teach the undergraduate and MBA courses in marketing research. In addition to the classes that I teach on campus, I am actively involved in teaching short-term faculty led programs abroad. Over the past six years, I have taught seven undergraduate courses (five in China, two in Dubai) and two MBA courses (both in China) taking a total of 214 students abroad. My teaching experience extends beyond the Carlson School and my study abroad programs to teaching courses in the MBA program at China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) in Shanghai, China. It is through these teaching experiences that I have been exposed to the importance of understanding Chinese return migration. Finally, from September 2010 to June 2011, I lived in China with my family, primarily in Dali Old Town, Yunnan Province, during the year of field work for this dissertation. Dali is near Kunming, the site for this dissertation research. Living in Dali, one can quickly appreciate the allure of Yunnan's natural beauty, regional specialties and ethnic diversity. As will be addressed later in this dissertation, these types of amenity factors play a large role in migration decisions of those returning to Kunming.

My frequent visits to China combined with the deep interactions that I am able to have because of my high but still growing cultural competency, have led me to this dissertation topic. The impetus for much of my thinking about return migration is a result of informal conversations with people that I have met through my work in China.

For example, I am close friends with an American that has been working in China as an expat for several years. We often discuss what life as an expat in China is like. One common topic is what it is like to live in an expat compound – a residential setting that was designed to accommodate western preferences and take advantage of large corporate housing stipends. When I had asked him about his neighbors, he expressed, as to be expected, that they are from all over the world. What was somewhat of a surprise was the number of Chinese-born returnees that he had noted were living in 'expat' housing. Why would a Chinese person live in such an environment? What did this indicate about their identity as Chinese? What might this signal about the living conditions that returnees had experienced while living overseas?

Another influential moment came during an MBA program course in China. One of my students was born and raised in China and moved to the U.S.A. after earning her undergraduate degree. My program was her first trip back to China in the seven years since she had left. She is a successful mid-level manager at a medical device company in the U.S.A. with a husband, two kids and a house in the suburbs. By her own account, she is "an American success story". Despite her success in the U.S.A. and her seven year absence from China, this visit to China left her distraught about her situation – she was conflicted about having left because of the success of her classmates that she had now physically seen and a China she no longer recognized. She is now contemplating a return. Will she go back, and, if so, would she live and associate largely with expats or would she return to her former Chinese locale? These stories and many more like them have caused me to think often about return migration and the

decision-making process that Chinese living overseas go through in deciding to return – and where to return to – when they opt for this path.

My experiences in China have shaped my research topic, but it was my coursework and research during my Ph.D. training that has reoriented me to a more constructivist perspective, the view of knowledge that most influences this dissertation. My master's degree coursework was largely informed by a positivist paradigm, which, in brief, means that knowledge is viewed as discoverable and the principal methods for research are experiments where the researcher is to be objective and external to the process of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, with its sterile, cause-effect requirements, this perspective did not help to adequately explain the complexity of return migration decisions because of the diversity of pathways, options and sequencing of events, that participants had identified. The transformation from a positivist view of the world of research to a constructivist one has not been easy or quick and has often been marked with complication and self doubt. In particular, I struggled with the freedom necessitated by the constructivist paradigm to become part of the study. At one point of my field work, which I discuss in Chapter Three, I attended the Kunming Chapter of a Toastmasters meeting – an organization that helps develop public speaking skills. At one point during the meeting I was assigned a role as one of the evaluators of the evening's speakers. At every session, most of the participants in attendance are assigned a role such as speaker, evaluator and session leader to help facilitate the meeting. My participation in this way allowed me to experience the meeting in a more intimate way and helped me to appreciate the challenge of language learning and its role

in assimilation that is identified as a contributing factor for return migration. At times like these, when the role of the observer and observed became completely indistinguishable, the value of taking a constructivist view into the field was readily apparent and I am confident that having this view has made for a better research project.

The evidence of this epistemological and methodological transformation in progress can be seen not only in my methodology and methods (discussed in Chapter Three), but also in my writing of the dissertation and my teaching. With respect to the writing, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, I have left the participants' quotes in as natural state as possible only intervening when absolutely necessary to ensure that the reader can understand the intended meaning. By leaving the quotes in their natural state the reader is also becoming part of the study as they can begin to experience the challenge of a non-native speaker trying to communicate their feelings. The struggle that ensues is symbolic of the daily existence of someone living abroad. In terms of my teaching, my methods are now grounded in a philosophy of discovery and co-construction of knowledge rather than a presentation by me of the established knowledge in the field handed down to my students. These changes in my understanding to knowledge production are important to recognize because they have affected how I view my role in this research project. For instance, referring to the Toastmasters example provided above, from a positivist perspective, I would have needed to have remained on the sidelines in a formal observer role and had had a more explicit reason for attending the meeting. However, from a constructivist perspective, attending the meeting was the "right" thing to do simply because I was invited by a

participant in my study. Similarly, once there, taking an active role in the meeting was only natural given my constructivist perceptive.

With this understanding of my background and perspectives in mind, I now turn to providing some details about recent Chinese history. In order to understand the migration decisions of the participants in my study it is important to understand the historical context in which the decisions were made. The following section offers a summary of key events in China related to this dissertation from 1949 to the present. Just as knowing a little bit about me helps in understanding the research, knowing a little bit about China will help in understanding the process of return migration of Chinese back to China.

Recent Relevant Chinese History: 1949 to the Present

China's recent history can be separated into two periods: the Maoist period and the Economic Reform period. The Maoist period spans from roughly 1949, when Mao Zedong was elected by the first political consultative council as the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the de facto leader of China until his death in 1976 and the subsequent arrest of the Gang of Four on October 6 of that year. The Maoist period is punctuated with several key events that have shaped the lives of those that lived through it. In the early years, Mao led several military campaigns that resulted in the re-uniting of China and demonstrated the nation's strength. Later episodes, including the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), are widely regarded as immense humanitarian disasters. The Great Leap Forward was an attempt by Mao to demonstrate China's strength by

boosting steel production to a level on par with world leaders like the U.S.A. and the U.K. The foundation of the effort was built on the utilization of one of China's most abundant assets – people - at a time when other nations were industrializing through mechanization. A huge range of missteps and misguided policies resulted in the Three Years of Famine that left an estimated 20 million dead and many more near death (Spence, 1999). For example, in an effort to free up labor resources for farming and make more metal available for smelting, neighbors were required to form communes. Having one common kitchen for several families freed up utensils, pots and pans to be recycled in backyard furnaces for the steel producing effort. Needless to say, the quality of the steel produced was worthless, and it reduced the capacity of people to feed themselves.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a campaign largely led by Mao that was an attempt to reassert his power. The violent campaign sought to erase the mistakes of the past in an effort to make possible a better future. Specifically Mao had called for the elimination of the "Four Olds": old culture, old ideas, old customs and old habits (Atwill & Atwill, 2010). In an effort to identify those in support of Mao or in opposition to him, individuals were classified into two groups based on their family's class background. Family's that were considered to be aligned with Mao's revolution were labeled as "red" and were typically of poorer backgrounds (workers, poor peasants, lower-middle-class peasants, revolutionary cadres or revolutionary solders) while those from more elite backgrounds (landlords, rich presents, counter-revolutionaries, evildoers, rightists, capitalists or reactionary intellectuals), were

considered anti-revolutionary and were labeled “black” (Atwill & Atwill, 2010). The divisive campaign destroyed the nation’s economy, ruined the education system and resulted in millions of China’s business and educational elites (the “black,” anti-revolutionaries) being sent to the country side for re-education by the ”red” peasants.

In contrast, the economic reform period, which was set in motion in the late 1970s, has produced rapid economic development and a rise in global competitive prominence. GDP per capita adjusted by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), a common measure of national economic productivity, has risen from approximately USD$250 in 1980 to just over USD$5,970 in 2008 (World Bank, 2010), a growth that represents almost 23 times the 1980 GDP per capita PPP. By comparison, while still larger in absolute dollars, the U.S.A.’s GDP per capita PPP has grown less than three times since 1980 from USD$12,185 to USD$46,350 (World Bank, 2010).

While China’s economic growth has been impressive, it has not been without controversy. One of the greatest expectations by many has been that China’s economic transformation would lead to changes in the nation’s political system. Yet, political challenges remain. Perhaps one of the most notable recent political events was the June Fourth Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. This was the culmination of a pro-democracy student movement that ended in bloodshed where hundreds were estimated to have been killed as the government sought to clear Tiananmen Square of pro-democracy protesters (Spence, 1999). Another controversial and important policy development occurring during the Economic Reform period was the establishment of the One Child Policy which, while largely discussed in the context of its social

implications, was in fact an economic policy. The policy was enacted at about the same time that Deng Xiaoping took over the reins of the nation and economic reforms from a socialist state to quasi-market economy were being implemented. The policy has had significant social ramifications, such as a growing sex ratio imbalance due to male offspring preferences among Chinese, and its impact on the participants in this study is pronounced.

The One Child Policy was developed as an economic reform because population size has a large impact on CDP per capita.[3] Many economic measures, such as the GDP per capita, utilize a nation's population as the denominator. Thus the GDP can be raised by increasing domestic production or decreasing the population or, in the case of China, both. Yet the policy has had a profound social impact in that is has created an entire generation of singleton children and single-child households. The rapid transition from high to low fertility has also significantly renegotiated family structures and roles. Most notable is the emergence of the 'little emperor/empress' phenomenon, meaning that each child is treated like royalty by their doting parents and grandparents. The phenomenon is symbolized by the ratio of 4:2:1 - reflecting the devotion of four grandparents and two parents on the one child. Now that these singleton children are entering adulthood, the stresses of responsibility for older relatives are coming into

[3] It should be noted that while the Chinese government chose to enact the One Child Policy, there is much scholarship about the topic of how and why fertility rates tend to decline as societies modernize (for more about this 'demographic transition' see the work of Coale,(1989)) which would call into question the need for the policy. While the causes of a decline in fertility are many, the argument presented to the Chinese people as to why the policy was needed was principally an economic one. Specifically, the government raised the concern that too large of a population would "hinder the modernization program and give rise to difficulties in improving the people's standard of living." From an open letter to the Chinese people from the Central Party Committee published in the *Beijing Review* as cited in Atwill and Atwill, 2010.

view, and these little emperors that have experienced unlimited family support and attention during China's prosperous times are now facing the realities of a 1:2:4 dependency ratio. One child is faced with helping to finance and manage the retirement and aging of two parents and four grandparents because of the economic transition away from a socialist system. The social safety net, or the 'iron rice bowl,' of a state that provided employment, housing and health care among other benefits has been dismantled, forcing China's 'Me' generation to think about 'Us.' The combination of being restricted to having only one child and the dissolution of the social safety net has led to a compulsive investment by parents and grandparents in the development of each family's "only hope" (Fong, 2004). Announced as a request in the form of an open letter to the Communist Party and Communist Youth League in 1980, the request, turned policy, has spawned a generation of 200 million people that have come to be known in China by their birth decade: *balinghou*, or '80s children,' *jiulinghou*, or '90s children,' *linglinghou*, or '2000s children.' To Chinese, being a *ba, jiu or ling linghou* signals that one is likely without siblings and is expected to shoulder the burden of supporting the family members who have invested so heavily in their development.[4]

These political, social and policy-related events will be referenced throughout this dissertation as they are important in shaping the migration decisions of the participants in this study. The next section more formally introduces the concept of return migration and provides details about its frequency in China.

[4] The discussion about the One Child Policy presented here is limited in scope. The intent is to provide the reader with sufficient background about the policy as it was hypothesized to play a role in migration decisions. For more information on social attitude formation of singletons see Sulloway (1996).

What is 'Return Migration'?

Defining Return Migration

Conceptually, return migration is defined as the return of an individual to his/her country or place of origin after being outside of that site for an extended period of time. When attempting to operationalize and subsequently measure return migration, the process becomes intensely complicated. Questions such as the following are often asked to try to clarify the meaning of return migration. Does the migrant have to cross international borders? How long does one need to be outside of a country or place in order to be considered a migrant? Does it matter if the person left the county or place as a student versus for a job? What was the individual's intent when s/he left and did s/he plan to return? How long will it be before they emigrate again? Is the relationship to the place of origin personal (the person was born there and migrated from the locale) or strictly historical (as in an ancestral home where relatives may have been born and lived, but they themselves have never lived there)? The lack of agreement on the answers to these types of questions (or even if these are the right questions) requires each migration scholar to make explicit his or her own conception of return migration.

Specific to China, Zeng (2005) offers a commonly used general definition: Return migrants are "that group of elite persons who have studied and have had work experience abroad, and who come back to China to work or to start up some endeavor" (p. 67). Wang, Wong and Sun (2006) provide a much deeper analysis of the origin of the phrase *haigui* or "sea turtles," which is the Chinese term that has widely been adopted to refer to people that left China to study or work and have subsequently

returned. They seek to operationalize the term by providing an extended definition with associated criteria (see Wang, Wong, & Sun, 2006, p. 296); however, while the definition offers more detail as to the variations of overseas experiences and durations, it does little to help delineate who is and who is not a *haigui*. It is for this reason that the following interpretation of the basic definition provide by Zeng (2005) cited above will be used in this dissertation rather than the one provided by Wang, Wong and Sun.

There are several specific criteria that I use in this dissertation to describe *haigui*. First, the person was born in China and left the country, remaining physically outside of China for a relatively significant, though unspecified, period of time. The period of time outside of the country should be relatively uninterrupted; for example a person earning an undergraduate degree in the U.S.A. may return to China for a few weeks over the summer break but not for an entire year. Second, the migration was voluntary for education and or employment as opposed to forced migration because of war, persecution or other involuntary displacement. The population of focus in this dissertation is limited to highly skilled workers, loosely defined as those with a minimum of a tertiary education level and who left China for education or employment. Finally, in general, and as applied in this dissertation, it is assumed that return migration must be preceded by an act of emigration to distinguish the return migration from the case of 'ethnic return migration.' This latter term describes the process of an individual returning to the birthplace of his or her parents or ancestors, which is different than his or her own place of birth, such as when an American-born Chinese moves to China. In defining ethnic return migration, Tsuda (2004) calls for a distinction to be made

between one's "*homeland* (a place of origin to which one feels emotionally attached) and *home* (a stable place of residence that feels secure, comfortable, and familiar)" (italics and parentheses in original p. 125). In this study, the participants are all persons who emigrated from China and are not ethnic return migrants. The parameters set forth in this three-part definition of return migration attempt to provide a balance between specificity and generality of the criteria that would identify someone as being a *haigui* or not.

The cumbersome use of vague qualifiers, such as "relatively significant," to describe a period of time outside of one's place of birth, is necessary because the variability between cases of migration is large and the phenomenon of return migration is relatively new and understudied. Over-specification of the phenomenon may lead to lost opportunities for inquiry such as if one were to set an arbitrary time limit. One person may develop a similar level of human capital in short amount of time as a second person does in a longer stay. The amount of human capital development may be a function of the individual, not the amount of time spent abroad. Another example of necessary ambiguity is with regard to the term "highly skilled." Increasingly, scholars are calling for a discussion about the variation of the quality of returnees (e.g. prestige of degree-granting institution). This is because not all individuals with a given level of education are of equal 'quality,' nor from the same field of study (e.g. engineering versus humanities). These differences in the meaning of "highly skilled" are important because the skills which return migrants bring back to China, may be valued differently (Kapur & McHale, 2005). However, while the importance of these differences is

recognized, the definition of "highly skilled" should not be too precise so as to limit the study.

Though a formally agreed upon definition does not exist, the term *haigui* has already transitioned from being a colloquial term to becoming a formal part of the nation's policy discourse (Wang et al., 2006). For example the term is now widely used in official government documents and communiqués. In addition to becoming more institutionalized in the language of policy, the term has spawned a number of new phrases to describe people that are associated with or affected by return migration. For instance, the literal translation for *haigui* is "returnees from oversea," as *hai* means "sea" or "overseas" and *gui* means "to return." Because *gui* has the same sound as the word for 'turtle,' returnees came to be called "sea turtles." In keeping with the theme, *tubie* means "stuck on the land" or "land turtles," – and is the term used to refer to individuals that have never left China for work or study (Zou, 2005).

As criticism of the quality of returnees has grown, returnees that are now finding difficulty in obtaining jobs are being referred to as *haidai* or "seaweed." More recently the term *haiou*, or "seagull," has been introduced to describe native Chinese who retain an international passport but are frequently commuting between the nation of their passport and China. *Haigui, haidai* and now *haiou*, with their frequent departure and returns, are all challenging the one-time-event narrative of historic migration theory. These examples of linguistic adaptation demonstrate the complexity of the patterns of return migration underway in China today as well as the varied views of them among Chinese who have and have not studied or worked abroad.

Measuring Return Migration

The difficulties in defining return migration are similar to the challenges in establishing a return rate. At its simplest, one would merely calculate the rate by dividing the number of people that have returned by the number that have gone abroad. This is problematic, however, because, at best, it can only measure one point in time rather than a process unfolding over the entire life course of all people in a given population. In other words, if an individual has not returned, it doesn't mean that s/he never will although there is evidence to suggest that the longer an individual stays abroad the less likely it is that s/he will return. The one exception to this point is death: for some cultures including China, being buried in one's native or ancestral land is of utmost importance (Tribalat, 1995, as cited in Castles and Miller, 2003). An additional complication is that a return rate requires an individual to be located in one place or another. As will be discussed later, transnational migrants, or the *haiou*, routinely move between locales, making it difficult to definitively count them as being either here or there. Finally, it is difficult to identify who to count. During several periods in Chinese history, many people left China for political reasons. For example, in 1949 the Nationalist fled to Taiwan, and during the Cultural Revolution many Chinese escaped to Hong Kong. Many of these individuals subsequently immigrated to the U.S.A. and are now retuning to mainland China. Because of the circumstances under which they left China, on immigration forms to the U.S.A., they may have identified themselves as Taiwanese or being from Hong Kong.[5]

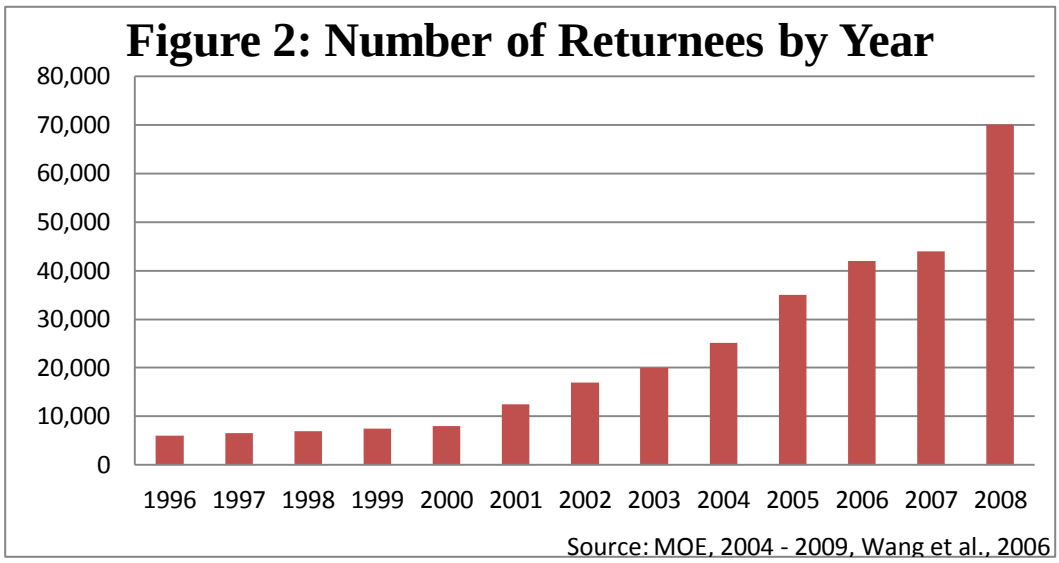
[5] For a more detailed review of the various pathways of Chinese to the U.S.A. see Skeldon (1996).

In addition to the theoretical constraints, there are institutional limitations as well. The challenge of measuring return migration to China based on U.S. data is problematic because immigrant departures from this country are not recorded (Warren and Krayly, 1985). Therefore, one cannot know how many Chinese have left the U.S. Further, based on my own analysis of census data for a poster that I presented at the 2010 Population Association of America conference, I found that the incidence of return migration (or more accurately self-identified Chinese-born immigrants leaving the U.S.A.) is too small to have confidence in its validity relative to the sampling error of 5% in the micro data sample datasets that are available for public use. Unfortunately, these kinds of data limitation issues are not restricted to U.S.A. sources but are also found in other countries, including China. For example, in China there are agencies that monitor the phenomenon of return migration, but none of them offer precise data. The Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Public Security (MOPS) and the Ministry of Personnel (MOP) all collect and publish statistics but the methods of collection, frequency and accuracy of the data are all suspect (Xiang, 2005). For these reasons, it is difficult to precisely track the migration patterns of Chinese.

Because of the limitations noted above, scholars have relied on a variety of strategies in an effort to estimate return rates. For example, Finn (2007), in an Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education report, that tracks foreign born Ph.D. students, uses tax records as a proxy for Chinese migrants being in the U.S.A. If no taxes were paid for a given year, then the author assumed that the individual had left the country. However, there may be several plausible reasons for not paying taxes in a

given year, such as not having earned an income or working illegally and not wishing to be detected, which limits the utility of the estimates of return migration generated by Finn. As part of a research project of Chinese in Canada, Ley (2010) relies on a number of federal databases to study the movement of Chinese in and out of Canada. The databases utilized included the Census of Canada, the Landing Immigrant Data System which is a database of landing cards completed by immigrant families upon arrival and the Longitudinal Immigrant Data Base, which links landing cards to tax files (Ley, 2010). Because of the complexities in tracking individuals and my limited access to the types of databases used by Finn (2007) and Ley (2010), I do not attempt to calculate return rates for the two cohorts of interest in this dissertation. Rather, I rely on the published rates provided by others because it is the general increase of returnees rather than the specific rate that is of central interest in this study.

For my purposes, the following data are sufficient to show that the number of Chinese returning to China is increasing. The MOE, Xinhua News Agency and the *Beijing Morning Post* have all published articles recently providing statistics stating the number of Chinese that left to study abroad and the number that have returned. While each of the articles cite different time periods, the trend of increasing return rates is the same. Figure 2 shows how the number of returnees has consistently increased over the past decade with more rapid increases occurring in the most recent periods.



An example of a more specific study of return migration to China is the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education report mentioned earlier (Finn, 2007), which tracked 2,071 Chinese students that were on temporary visas and earned their doctorate in Science and Engineering in the U.S.A. in 2000. In 2001, 5% of the graduates had returned and by 2005, 8% had returned. While the trend of more Chinese returning is similar, the magnitude is clearly different than the previously listed studies, which indicated that the return rate was much higher. The large difference in return rates highlights the importance of paying close attention to the details of the individuals being studied because different populations may have different motivations for migrating.

Further evidence to support the claim that return rates may vary based on the population under study is presented here. Zweig (2002) highlights how the rate of return of Chinese students from 1978-1997 varied significantly based on how individuals accessed international opportunities. Specifically, he found that return rates where highest (83.0%) for those that went abroad on state-sponsored programs (expenses paid

directly by the government), followed by those who migrated on work unit[6]-sponsored programs (56.5%) (expenses paid by the employer – typically a state owned company). The lowest rates (3.9%) were for those migrating via privately arranged programs (expenses paid by the individual's family). It should be noted that more recent data from the MOE suggest that this pattern has moderated since Zweig's analysis which ended in 1997. It is still the case that state-sponsored students return at higher rates, but there are far fewer of them going overseas as personal wealth has decreased the need for state level funding. The return rate for this group is now down in the mid sixties. The vast majority (almost 90% in 2008) of students going overseas now are self-paying and returning at a rate of about thirty percent (MOE, 2009).

Another example of how return rates vary by the population under study is to compare the return rates for people at different stages in their careers. Xiang (2005) argues that the stage in one's career will have an impact on the duration of return. For example he finds that those who are later in their career are more likely to return to China on a short-term basis. While these studies highlight aspects of type of degree earned, funding sources and career stage, it is likely that decisions about return are influenced by a wide variety of other factors. In this study, some of the factors that were explored include individual biographies, age, gender, human capital development, stage in life course and the economic transformation of China.

[6] During China's Socialist period, people were assigned to a 'work unit'. The work unit was not only their employer, but also provided housing, food, health care etc. All of these services were typically offered on-site. Each work unit was responsible for production quotas set by the state. As the economy has shifted to a more market based structure, work units have, for the most part, been disbanded, although they can still be found in varying forms.

In sum, defining returnees is difficult and return rates will vary based on the population under study. However, it is generally agreed by scholars that more Chinese are returning than in the past (Gill 2010; Li, 2005; Wang, et al. 2006; Zweig, 2003), leaving Wang et al. (2006) to conclude that the number of returnees has increased "steadily and impressively" (p. 297). While the reasons for return may be varied, they are enabled by government policies. The following section provides a brief summary of the relevant policy changes by both the U.S.A. and China. This analysis provides an example of how policies have facilitated the movement of Chinese to the U.S.A. and back.

Migration and Policy

Patterns of migration flows between China and the United States are directly influenced by the migration policies of the two countries. One of the most important questions to consider is how the Chinese that are now returning to China got to be in the United States in the first place. As stated earlier, return migration presupposes an original act of emigration, making the study of migration policy essential to understanding the opportunities and constraints on migration at particular points in time.

U.S.A. and Chinese Migration Policy

In the mid 1800s, labor in the U.S.A. was in high demand and pro-immigration policies facilitated Chinese immigrants' significant role in U.S.A.'s westward expansion. Large numbers of Chinese aided in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, worked in mines and provided laundry services along the rail routes. This inflow of Chinese was only possible because it coincided with an ailing Qing Dynasty's

change to its restrictive emigration policies. China's defeat during the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1857-60) served as a warning that China was losing pace with the rest of the world and contact with the outside was necessary (Spence, 1999). Analysis of U.S. Census data from 1880 shows that at the height of this wave of migration there were roughly 102,500[7] Chinese in the United States (IPUMS, 2010). However, the end of the Gold Rush and the American Civil War resulted in fewer job opportunities. Anti-Chinese sentiment grew as Americans increasingly found themselves in direct competition for jobs with Chinese immigrants. The struggle came to a head in 1882, when the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, effectively eliminating Chinese immigration to America (Skeldon, 1996). As a result of the implementation of policies that were specifically designed to keep Asians out of the U.S.A. (and Canada, Australia and New Zealand) or what Skeldon (1996) called the erection of the "Great White Wall," (p. 438) the number of Chinese living in the U.S.A. reached its lowest point of 42,000 in 1940,[8] (IPUMS, 2010) a function of a limited number of new immigrants, expulsion and mortality of Chinese.

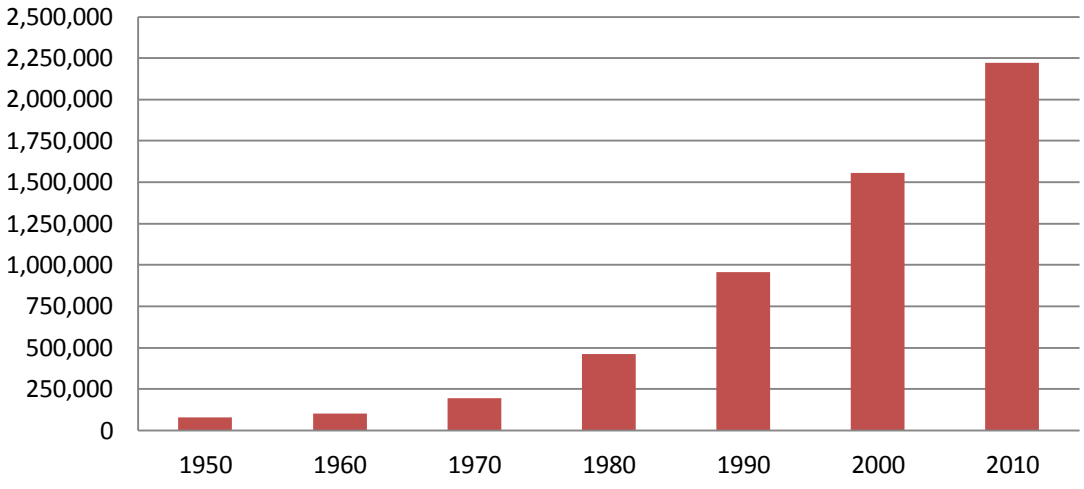
This lull in acceptance of Chinese into the United States was met with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the rise of Mao Zedong during the late 1940s. The arrival of the communist government ushered in a new wave of restrictive policies on migration and negative sentiment toward those that were overseas. This period lasted

[7] These data are based on U.S. Census data, which are only enumerated every ten years. There is likely variation between censuses. An important limitation of census data from this era is that data for the 1890 Census are not available as they were all destroyed in a fire. Based on data that is available, it is safe to say that the peak was in either 1880 or 1890.

[8] See footnote 7 regarding inter-decennial censuses.

from 1949 until the late 1970s. In the U.S.A., however, the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act was officially abolished in 1943 only to be replaced by a discriminatory quota system that set explicit limits only on the number of Chinese that were allowed to immigrate. It was not until the civil rights era, specifically in 1965, when the Immigration Act was signed and Chinese were no longer discriminated against by U.S. immigration policy. Prior to this period, the 1950s and early 1960s did see increases in the migration of Chinese to the U.S. with many migrants fleeing the catastrophes of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and engaging in family reunification. However, as Figure 3 illustrates, the true turning point in the level of migratory flows from China to the U.S. occurred in the 1980s and 1990s as a consequence of Deng Xiaoping's technology, education and economic reform initiative commonly referred to as the Open Door Policy, which was initiated in December 1978 (Li, 2005).

Figure 3: Chinese Immigrants in the U.S.A

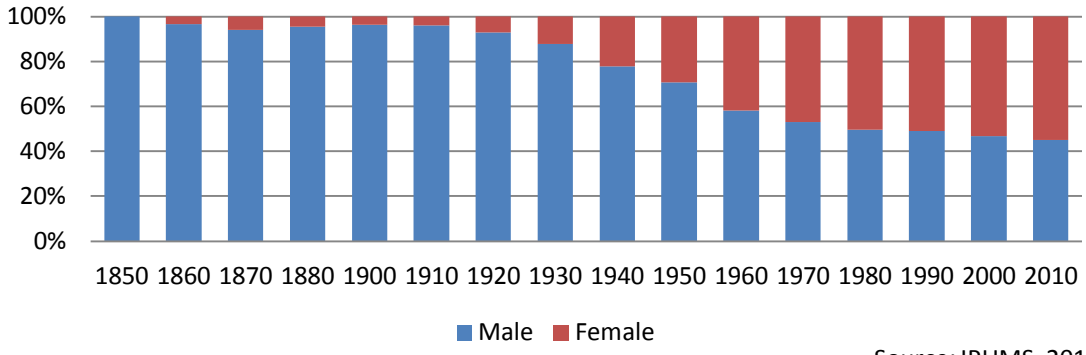


Key provisions in 1985 that enabled the outflow of Chinese were the issuance of identity cards to all citizens and the 1985 Emigration and Immigration Law. By having an identity card, individuals were un-tethered from their work unit, no longer requiring their permission to travel. The new law established the right of Chinese citizens to leave the country for private reasons (Skeldon, 1996). These changes signaled that the Chinese Government was de-coupling emigration and politics and that exit and entry management should be an area of service by the government rather than of control (Xiang, 2003). Thus, since the mid-1980s emigration has increasingly been seen as a matter of individual rights and unrelated to the person's role in the state system.

While these changes certainly increased the number of people eligible to emigrate, the barrier of obtaining a visa for the receiving country still remained. In her ethnographic study of singletons in the Dalian, Fong (2006) found that most of her participants "lacked the cultural and financial capital necessary for obtaining visas" (p. 155). Nevertheless, many Chinese are now living in the U.S.A. Analysis of the most recent U.S. Census show that there were just over 2.2 million Chinese born people living in the U.S.A. in 2010 (IPUMS, 2011).

As a consequence of these various reforms and policy changes in China and the U.S.A., both the level of migration and the composition of the migrants themselves changed. The most notable changes included the gender composition of the migrants and their occupations. Figure 4 shows how the sex ratio of Chinese living in the U.S.A. transitioned from being heavily skewed toward males, and almost exclusively so during certain periods, to a more balanced ratio of males and females today.

Figure 4: Sex Ratio of Chinese Immigrants in the U.S.A.



Source: IPUMS, 2011

In a similar way that the sex ratio transitioned, so too did the distribution of occupations. Early migrants were chiefly engaged in manual labor and blue-collar jobs, while more recent migrants hold white-collar jobs or are in school (see Appendix 1 for details). The majority are engaged in the field of science and technology (65%), with only four percent in the social sciences and humanities (Xiang, 2005).

Since the reform period in China beginning in the late 1970s, there have been two significant events that have had a direct impact on the flow of Chinese to the U.S.A.: The June Fourth Incident in 1989 and September 11, 2001. The first event was the culmination of a pro-democracy student movement that ended in bloodshed as the government cleared the protestors from Tiananmen Square. The American policy response was Executive Order 12711, issued in April 1990 by President George Bush. The Order allowed all holders of J-1 student visas to convert to more flexible F-1 visas and allowed any Chinese in the U.S.A. at the time to apply for permanent residence. It is estimated that 50,000 Chinese students and scholars were granted permanent residency under this Order (Li, 2005). The second event led to the passage of the USA

Patriot Act in October 26, 2001, which included significant changes to U.S. immigration policy. In addition to overall tighter restrictions on migration, the Act initiated an increase in physical border security, reductions in student visas and restrictions on subjects that can be studied by international students. Furthermore, the attacks on September 11th are thought to have caused more negative attitudes towards immigration, and this includes Chinese migrants (Essas, Dovidio & Hodson, 2002).

Education Policy and Migration

In addition to national migration policy, such as those discussed, education policy also plays a role in migration decisions. As the focus of this dissertation is on the return migration of highly skilled Chinese, special attention must be paid to China's policies related to academic exchange and overseas education. A significant portion of returnee's paths to immigration to the U.S.A. were, and continue to be, through the hallways of American institutions of higher education.

The isolationist policies of the Mao Zedong era, along with episodes of educational institution destruction, such as the Cultural Revolution, created significant deficiencies in China's ability to educate its population. In an effort to fill the void of both educated individuals and educational institutions that he had inherited, Deng Xiaoping sought to leverage the infrastructure already existing in other countries. A significant part of the Open Door Policy was the Academic Exchange and Overseas Education Policy (AEOE). Since its inception in the late 1970s, the policy has evolved to accommodate changes in China's economic development and the unintended consequences incurred by instituting overseas education initiatives.

In general, the AEOE policy has experienced three discrete stages. The policy, as first enacted in 1978, was generally referred to as the "initial opening up." This stage is largely characterized by the reversal of the long prohibition on sending students abroad experienced during the Maoist era and a transition of the subjects pursued by students who went abroad. Regarding the latter, a shift in typical study abroad subjects from foreign languages to natural sciences occurred during this first policy stage. During this stage, study abroad was a highly centralized and selective process. Deng's initial recommendation was to send 10,000 students abroad each year; however, the number was curtailed to just 3,000 by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Slowly, more conservative policy makers and institutions like the MOE recognized the benefits of overseas education, and the policy became more liberal, thereby increasing not only the number of students that were allowed to study abroad but also the types of programs in which they were allowed to participate.

The second stage of the policy highlights the liberalizing of the policy makers. The emphasis shifted from the fundamental mechanics of sending students abroad to encouraging students to return to China, reflecting the growing concern over brain drain. Brain drain is a form of migration when people with relatively higher levels of education leave one locale in favor of a second and stay in this new locale for long periods of their productive economic years. From the sending locale's perspective, the brain drain is viewed as an "outflow of human capital" and a negative phenomenon (Li, 2005, p. 79). This stage was implemented in 1992 and referred to as "the freedom to come and go" policy because a wider array of people were allowed to study overseas

facilitated by the decentralization of the application process and the increase in the types of programs in which students were allowed to participate. While there was an emphasis placed on trying to get students to return to China, there was more flexibility as to when they were to return and their ability to leave the country again after returning. Knowing that the state endorsed free movement between locales was enticing as many people were unwilling to leave family and friends for five years, the typical duration of an academic program. Finally, the most recent stage, formalized in 2001, is referred to as the "serve the nation from abroad" policy. It seeks to engage overseas Chinese by encouraging them to collaborate, be it academically or professionally, with their peers in China without burdening them with the requirement to return to China. It is this latter phase of the policy that has allowed for the development of transnational migration patterns that are becoming increasingly more common.

In general, Deng's policy initiatives, which utilized international educational exchange as a way to improve the human capital of individual Chinese people, have been. While return rates have been lower than initially expected, they are on the rise effective (Xiang, 2003). Further, of the hundreds of thousands that have returned, many have ascended the ranks in their field and now occupy senior positions. For example, over half of university-level administrators in the institutions directly under the Ministry of Education are returnees (Li, 2005). Further, Zhao and Zhu (2009) report that at least three quarters of the presidents of Chinese universities and the academicians at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering have overseas study and/or work experience. The changes in the AEOE policy discussed above are a

result of the government's efforts to leverage individual human capital development to benefit the nation, and they reflect the challenges faced by a government striving to produce economic prosperity for its citizens. It is these types of changes in policy that create the opportunity for the process of return migration that is the focus of inquiry of this dissertation.

Research Questions

As the number of Chinese returning to China continues to increase, the conventional view of migration as a one-time-event needs to be revisited. The purpose of this dissertation research is to explore how specific events and policies and changes in economies have had an effect on the decision to return as well as the return experiences of two specific age groups of Chinese returnees; those born between 1950 – 1960 and 1980 - 1990.

The research questions that guided this investigation were derived from the overview of migration patterns discussed above. First, as noted in Figure 2, the number of returnees to China is on the rise. While there have been significant changes in migration policies in sending countries like the U.S.A. and in the destination country of China, it is unlikely that these changes alone are sufficient to explain the rapid increase in returnees. Likewise, the economic theories of migration presented in Chapter Two offer additional explanations, but these too seem limited in explanatory power. Therefore, the primary research question for this dissertation is: What influences Chinese living overseas to decided to return to China?

In reality, one does not return migrate to China so much as one returns to a specific place within China. Given that the Chinese government has been explicit and purposeful in its economic development strategy, specifically developing the east first, followed by the central and western regions, a topic more fully addressed in Chapter Three, my second research question is: Why do some Chinese decide to return to Kunming rather than other places in China?

Finally, the two age groups that are highlighted in this study (those born between 1950–1960 and 1980-1990) have grown up experiencing two dramatically different Chinas. As another secondary question, I sought to understand how return migration varied between these different demographic groups. Thus, my third research question is: How do migration decisions vary between members of each of the age groups?

With regards to this last research question, it was my hypothesis that significant variation between the age groups would exist because of the different lived experiences of the two groups. The earlier group grew up in a poorer, more politically turbulent era while the later group grew up during a more economically robust and politically stable time. However, while this study has generated a useful finding which will be discussed further in Chapter Four, specifically that the groups are perceived to vary in their level of ambition, a significant period effect was not found. The lack of period effect is more likely a response bias non-sampling error rather than the actual absence of a difference. Having also, and more recently, experienced the economic prosperity and politically stable times, their ability to recall the specific motives for their return have

been distorted. This is not to say that those that had lived through China's more difficult years have forgotten them, but rather the role that those earlier experiences had on a latter return event have become disassociated.

While discerning differences for return between these age groups were not found, taken together, the answers to these three research questions support the central argument in this dissertation. Namely, that the most important reason for the return to Kunming and thus to China, for participants of any age, is the condition of being *jia xiang bao* or "hometown babies," a term that encapsulates both cultural and economic factors specific, if not unique, to Kunming.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this research will contribute new insights and ideas about migration in the 21st century. Given that the majority of the migration literature treats migration as a unidirectional and one-time event, this dissertation interrogates that notion and further challenges the economic theories that support it. The findings from this research show that, for the participants in this study, migration is a repeated process and that policy initiatives that seek to manage migration flows must engage more than economic incentives to affect migration decisions.

The Chinese government, through its changes in its policies, is advocating for the contribution of all Chinese to the development of the motherland. As the One Child Policy has now been in place for over thirty years, the leading edge of the *balinghou* generation is graduating from college and entering the workforce. Increasingly many of these students are graduating from institutions beyond China's borders and entering the

labor market outside of China. To be successful in attracting these and the Chinese citizens that had left China before them, the Chinese government must look beyond the economic theories of migration to encourage return. In the same way that the Chinese government can't rely on economic theories of migration to attract returnees, nations in which Chinese are currently living that are hoping to retain this human capital must also understand their motivations for return migration if they hope to discourage this return. The conceptual framework that was presented in this chapter along with the findings that are presented in Chapter Four should be considered by any government trying to develop effective policy regarding migration of Chinese citizens.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the dissertation and includes the conceptual framework that identifies the key factors that influence Chinese to return migrate to China. In an effort to provide the relevant context for the study, a brief history of China is provided as well as a definition of return migration and a discussion about the complexity in measuring the phenomenon are included. Given the importance of governmental policies in controlling migration and education as a pathway for migration background is provided for these topics as well. The chapter concludes with the research questions guiding the study and a section articulating its significance. The remainder of the dissertation includes four additional chapters.

Chapter Two includes a critical review of the leading contemporary economic theories of migration. The three theories addressed in the chapter include neo-classical economic theory, new economics of labor migration theory and dual labor market theory of migration. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation, the chapter

goes on to introduce an age, period and cohort framework, the concept of virtual migration and transnationalism. All tools needed to understand contemporary migration patterns.

Chapter Three provides the background and detail of the research that was conducted for this dissertation. The site of the study, Kunming, China, is introduced and justified. The use of a modified respondent driven sampling technique is explained along with a discussion about the participants that were recruited as a result of this technique's implementation. The chapter concludes with the details about my use of ATLAS.ti and how the data for this study were analyzed.

Chapter Four presents the finding from the research. The chapter offers a portrait of the arc of return migration discussing how many participants in the study originally left China – a necessary precursor to return. The three key findings which include the importance of place to returning Kunmingers, the desire to be a big fish in a small sea and a key difference in age groups are detailed. The theories and tools introduced in Chapter Two are used to explain the findings presented in this chapter. The fifth and final chapter offers a reflection on the research findings from this dissertation as well as recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Two: A Critical Review of Economic Migration Literature and an Introduction to Alternative Migration Concepts

Introduction

In January of 2010, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, two of the largest newspapers in the United States, both ran stories about Chinese return migration. Though both articles cited the same data source for the facts in their stories, the articles tell opposing tales; the *New York Times* told one of return while the *Wall Street Journal* told one about staying. While both articles are accurate in their own right, their true value to scholars of migration is when they are read in parallel. The newspapers' primary goals were to highlight the recent finding that, in general, fewer international students are staying in the United Stated after earning doctorates in science or engineering (S/E). Specifically, the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education report that was the basis for the newspaper articles (and was discussed in Chapter One) states that the "two-year stay rate had peaked at 71 percent in the early part of this decade; thus the more recent 66 percent rate represents a decline in the stay rate of foreign doctorate recipients" (Finn, 2007, p. 1). The *New York Times* notes the decline in the stay rate as evidence that many people are returning, while the *Wall Street Journal* highlights the 66 percent stay rate arguing that most are staying in the U.S.A. As each article provides a brief biography highlighting a particular migration decision, they also serve as good examples of relying on the limited and reductionist theories that will be critiqued in this chapter.

The conclusion that can be drawn by a parallel reading of these articles is that migration is extremely complex – a notion not lost on scholars in the field. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a critical review of the economics based migration literature and an introduction to how the age, period and cohort effects framework and the emerging literature on virtual return migration and transnationalism can be used to better understand Chinese return migration. In an effort to describe the limited progress made on our understanding of migration, Arango (2000) goes as far as stating that "there is no such thing as a general theory of migration" (p. 283). Due to the lack of a general theory, and in keeping with the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter One, this dissertation takes an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the data.

The *New York Times* article takes the position that while the stay rate may be high it is rapidly declining as China is aggressively recruiting returnees. Their story profiles Chinese born, Dr. Yisong Shi, who recently resigned from his high profile position at Princeton and declined a significant $10 million Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant in favor of a position at Tsinghua University in Beijing, one of the top two universities in China. This article takes a dual labor market (DLM) theory of migration approach in its analysis by emphasizing the role of the dynamics of economic systems in the migration process. Alternatively, the *Wall Street Journal* article takes the same stay rates and leverages them in an attempt to allay fears that China and India's economic rise will lure their nationals home, thereby placing the U.S. economy at a competitive disadvantage as this human capital of migrants is siphoned off. Chinese born Dr. Joy Ying Zhang, a research assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon University's

Silicon Valley Campus is profiled as an example of a 'stayer.' Dr. Zhang's choice is portrayed as an individual level decision, a carefully calculated one in keeping with the neo-classical economics approach to explaining migration that underlies the migration story presented in this article.

While widely regarded as insufficient, DLM and the neo-classical economics approaches along with the new economics of labor migration (NELM) theory, remain the three leading contemporary theories of migration. Economic theories have risen to prominence as social scientist sought quantification as a means of legitimacy as called for by John Stuart Mills at the end of the 19th century (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In light of the absence of a grand theory, Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino & Taylor (1993) have provided what is perhaps the best advice as to how the various existing migration theories can be maximized, and that is to consider them in conjunction with one another rather than in isolation. Further Massey et al. (1993) suggest an interdisciplinary approach, and they extend the recommendation to engage theories beyond those that are explicitly related to migration. Following this advice, this dissertation engages the age, period and cohort framework, virtual return migration and transnationalism as a way to explore return migration rather than being limited to migration theories from one discipline alone. This chapter begins with an introduction to the economic theories of migration followed by an application of these theories to the two newspaper articles introduced above. It then introduces three alternative concepts: the age, period and cohort effects framework, virtual return migration and transnationalism which can help to address the non-economic factors (including: life

course, family, age, biography, gender, networks, timing of return and the physical environment) outlined in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter One.

In the same way that Massey et al. (1993) recommend an expanded and interdisciplinary approach to understanding migration, Castles and Miller (2003) call for the integration of two theoretical domains. Specifically, they call for the linking of "theories on migration and settlement, and theories on ethnic minorities and their position in society" (p. 21). Once merged, this forms a framework of migration, settlement and minority group formation. Castles and Miller place migration as one of the components of larger systems (e.g. economic, political, social etc.) and suggest that it should be studied within this broader context and not in isolation from it. They argue that "migrations are collective phenomena, which should be examined as subsystems of an increasingly global economic and political system" (2003, p. 25).

Contextualizing migration as part of larger systems has taken theorizing from the narrow lens of the individual confronted by explicitly economic decisions to a more comprehensive and inclusive study. The following section provides a brief overview of the three dominant migration theories and serves as a starting point to employ the constellation approach suggested by Massey et al. (1993) and a silo free approach to research advocated by scholars such as Klein (2010) and Kline (1995).

Starting with these general migration theories, as opposed to theories specific to return migration, is required because of the fundamental lack of research that has been conducted on return migration. Ghosh (2000) characterizes return migration as "one of the most neglected areas of migration research" (p. 1). Taking the theories that follow as

a starting point is not without complications. This body of migration literature is largely constructed to explore migration as it relates to the United States rather than China, and it is constructed largely from a postcolonial perspective instead of a view that is more relevant to China (Ong, 1999). These differences are important because, as Hsu (2000) reminds us, the "assumptions underlying studies of Chinese migration differ markedly from those on American immigration" (p. 9). For example, Chinese are said to have spiritual ties to their native place that compel them to return, at least to be buried among their ancestors if not earlier (Hsu, 2000). In addition to certain theoretical constraints, there are also methodological considerations when relying on the historical constructions of migration. To date, most analysis of migration has been illustrative rather than analytical with a few exceptions (see Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino & Taylor, 1994), while recent writings about migration have employed methods that were not commonly used in the past. As an example of how new methods are being brought to the field, in the introductory chapter of the edited volume *Homecomings*, Stefansson (2004) writes that the book "contributes ethnographic case studies to an under-studied phenomenon while challenging a current theoretical master narrative that structures the ways in which researchers perceive and write about social processes" (p. 3). By adding methodological variety and innovation as well as new paradigmatic perspectives migration and, by extension, return migration can be better understood.

Theories of Migration

Neo-classical Economics Theory of Migration

In a direct application of rational choice theory to the phenomenon of international migration, the neo-classical economics theory of migration places the individual 'rational actor' at the center of its analysis. Individuals are assumed to evaluate the wage differentials of two countries, the probabilities of securing jobs (Todaro, 1969) and various costs associated with migration and would elect to migrate if the benefits exceed the costs.

It is assumed in this theory that discrepancies in labor markets create differential earning potential for various segments of the working population. Specifically, countries that have high labor requirements attract individuals from countries with an over abundance of low-skilled workers. As movement or flow of labor from labor-rich locations (areas with an abundance of workers) shifts to labor-poor locations (areas with insufficient labor to meet market demand) equilibrium will be achieved and wages in each locale will adjust to reflect the new state of labor supply. Labor migration, it is assumed, will stop once equilibrium is reached.

Neo-classical economics theory makes a distinction between the skill level of migrants, or what Massey et al. (1993) call the "heterogeneity of immigrants" (p. 433). This is to say that as low-wage, unskilled labor flows to labor poor locales, a simultaneous reverse direction flow of highly skilled labor should move into labor rich locales. Highly skilled workers are thought to maximize returns on their human capital

in areas that lack sufficient individuals with their skill set, thereby triggering migration from labor poor to labor rich locales.

Although this theory helps us to understand how a rational actor may behave, there are several key criticisms of the neo-classical explanation of migration (Massey et al. 1993; Arango, 2000). First, it assumes that markets are complete and well-functioning and thus would play no role in the migration decision. But markets are not always complete and well functioning. For example, a government policy may intervene and disallow movement thereby disrupting the functioning of the market. Second, its ahistorical nature does not account for how events of the past might influence the actor's migration decision. For instance the experience of family member's migration may inform the decision of a potential migrant, or a past failed attempt by the potential migrant may influence a current decision. Third, because of the emphasis on the individual, neo-classical economics theory is decontextualized, especially from the household when in fact major life decisions, such as migration, are often made in collaboration with family members. Finally, the emphasis on the migration decision being tied to wage disparities suggests that labor markets are the fundamental cause of migratory flows and that other types of markets (e.g. insurance markets) are not considered. Therefore, this narrow view of migration motivation encourages policy recommendations that control migratory flows by making adjustments that are specific to the labor market rather than looking more comprehensively at a wider range of influences.

New Economics of Labor Migration Theory

While still firmly grounded in economics, NELM shifts the unit of decision making from the individual to the family, household or other culturally defined unit of production and consumption. For brevity and consistency, "family' will be used here to encompass any such unit. This focus on the family alters the decision-making process in significant ways. NELM is predicated on the notion that in many places, access to credit and insurance are relatively scarce or expensive. Given that a family unit will contain multiple individuals, it assumes that the family can leverage these individuals strategically in an effort to reduce risk and increase household access to capital. For example, employment decisions are not solely relegated to income maximization for the individual as seen in the neo-classical approach. In NELM, obtaining the same wage but from a diversified source may be more desirable than receiving a higher wage by one family member if it is from the same labor market as the second family member. Multi-member families can allocate individuals to various employers or even locations in an effort to benefit from variations in local and foreign opportunities – a family can ostensibly be in two places at the same time while an individual cannot. This allowance for simultaneous participation in multiple labor markets by multiple family members is significant as it allows for consideration of remittances, an important aspect of migration because of the importance that remittances play in migrant sending communities. Hsu (2000) provides an example of how the citizens of the county in her study became reliant on remittances. She describes them as being "firmly embedded in

a life of dependence" on their family members overseas (Hsu, 2000, p. 40). The absence of remittances in the neo-classical approach poses a noteworthy limitation.

In addition to a broader conception of who is involved in migration decision making, the role of time and the role of the state are more deeply engaged in NELM than in neo-classical theory. In this second theoretical framework, a long time horizon is incorporated into a family's calculation – not just immediate returns as suggested in neo-classical model. For example, a family may invest in land not for the immediate returns that it may offer, but rather for the income that may be obtained through appreciation in value over time and for the diversification in investment that it offers. Second, NELM theory considers mobility as subject to the actions of the state, in contrast to the un-tethered individual at the center of neo-classical theory. This may include acts of restriction on migration from sending or receiving governments as well as active recruiting by receiving governments. The break from the assumption of perfect markets held by neo-classical economics theory creates a more realistic model of migration.

From the perspective of NELM, policy aims that seek to reduce migration will increase markets that mitigate risk (e.g. affordable crop or unemployment insurance) in the potential sending country and also change income distributions within these societies. It should be noted that when changing income distributions, it is not only absolute income that is of consequence in NELM but relative income as well. The concept of 'relative deprivation' developed by Stark, Taylor and Yitzhaki (1986) is central to NELM. The migration decision is not subject to only the changes in one's

own household income level but also household income relative to other households in the community. Raising average household income in a community in an effort to decease out-migration may actually lead to an *increase* in migration if one's sense of relative deprivation is not decreased. The inclusion of relative deprivation in NELM makes the theory more tenable because we know that individuals live in a society and it is likely that their decisions are influenced by other members of their society not in isolation from them. Further, from a policy perspective, the presence of relative deprivation in the theory reminds policy makers that the societies that they govern are interconnected and policies are likely to have a ripple effect throughout the society.

NELM provides many conceptual advantages over neo-classical theory, but it is not without its critics. Arango (2000), for one, offers a number of valuable critiques of NELM. He argues that while NELM does offer some improvements over neo-classical economic theory, it is little more than a modification than a discrete theory and therefore does little to advance the understanding of migration. For example, the shift from the individual as the focus in neo-classical to the family in NELM is argued to be an improvement; however, both are reliant on rational choice theory. The unit of analysis may be different, but the underlying mechanism of rational choice theory remains the same. Another concern is the asymmetrical nature of the analysis taking into account only the causes of migration from the sending country (Arango, 2000). NELM explores why people may want to leave a location, but it says little about what may be attracting one to a second location as illustrated in DLM.

Dual Labor Market Theory of Migration

DLM stands in contrast to both neo-classical and NELM because it argues that migration is not a function of people (individuals or families) favoring one locale over another, but rather it is a function of the demands of an economic system needing people. Piore (1979), widely regarded as the father of DLM, posits that the movement of laborers is caused by pull factors (localized labor shortages) as opposed to push factors (wage differentials, risk mitigation). Pull factors are a function of how national economies interact in a global economic system. Piore (1979) identifies four characteristics of advanced industrial societies that create the steady demand for immigrant labor:

1) Structural inflation – In a society, wages are not tied to supply and demand for the labor but rather are socially contextualized so that the range of a given wage is limited by conceptions of occupational prestige and hierarchies. If there is a supply shortage at the low end of a job scale, raising wages to attract employees will result in the need to raise wages of all occupations above that position, creating structural inflation. Failure to raise all wages in the hierarchy will result in disruption to the occupational hierarchies operating in the society.
2) Motivational problems – Occupational prestige is a function of both income and status. People work for an explicit income and also the social standing that a specific occupation offers. Occupational hierarchies by definition have a bottom tier, and at this bottom tier there is low status and limited opportunity for mobility. Thus, the jobs must be filled by individuals that are willing to work

solely for the financial reward and/or have a different relative conception of prestige. Immigrants, especially new immigrants, tend to fulfill this role. The remittances they send back to their homeland create significant prestige from a more relevant reference group.

3) Economic dualism – In advanced economies, labor and capital are carefully managed, and labor markets are bifurcated into primary and secondary markets. Primary markets offer "relatively high wages, good working conditions and opportunities for advancement into higher paying jobs" (Dickens and Lang, 1985, p.792). They contain highly skilled workers with specialized training and education who cannot be easily laid off and then rehired. If they are laid off, the cost of their unemployment is born by the company (i.e. unemployment compensation and insurance). In contrast, production in the secondary sector is labor intensive and contains an abundance of unskilled workers. Dickens and Lang (1985) characterize the secondary sector as having "low wages, bad working conditions, unstable employment, and little opportunity for advancement" (p. 792). When these unskilled workers are laid off, the worker assumes the cost of unemployment. During low demand periods, secondary market employees are seen as a cost to the firm and their employment is quickly terminated.
4) Demography of labor supply – In industrialized countries the people, typically women and teenagers, who tend to fill the jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy are no longer available because of fundamental changes in the society. First, since

the mid to late1900s, women tend to retain their status in the labor force beyond childbearing. This creates a more formal engagement with the labor force compared to the more sporadic employment biographies of women in prior generations. The concomitant rise in divorce rates and non-marital child bearing leaves an increasingly larger portion of women as the sole or primary breadwinner. Previously, the principal source of social identity for women was the family, not her occupation. This made lower status jobs more acceptable because it was not the job that was the source of identity construction, rather it was the family.

The second demographic phenomenon affecting labor supply is the age structure of the population. As countries industrialize, birthrates decline and participation in education increases, thus producing fewer teenagers available to work. For teenagers, social identity is derived from multiple sources including their family's status. Piore (1979) argues that the specific job held by a teenager is less important than the income derived from it that allows the teenager to buy things that elevates his or her status among his or her peers. The items purchased are the mechanism for status attainment, not the job.

DLM was introduced in response to the criticisms of neo-classical theory, which was viewed as being too limited in the factors that were contributing to migration decision. Specifically, DLM sought to engage institutional and demographic factors as outlined above. While initially well received, as most researchers found difficulty in opertionalizing the economic dualism aspect of DLM, the theory fell out of favor and

received increasing less attention in the literature (Massey, et al., 1993). In addition to these challenges faced by researchers, several of DLM's tenants became less applicable as time has passed. For example, Piore (1979) identifies recruitment of immigrant labor by nations as one of the pull factors. While it is true that today, some nations do actively recruit immigrant labor, most labor migration to the major industrialized nations that Piore wrote about is no longer motivated by receiving country recruitment (Arango, 2000). Demography of labor supply is another aspect of Piore's theorizing that has become antiquated. More recent scholarship about sources of teen identity has moved beyond only looking at family status and now incorporates domains such as peer groups as a notable source of identity formation (Brown, Eicher & Petrie, 1986). Finally, perhaps one of the weakest aspects of DLM is its overemphasis on pull factors. While the introduction of the role of these pull factors on migration was an enhancement to neo-classical theory's emphasis on push factors, DLM swings the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. Pull factors clearly are important, but they cannot operate in absence of push factors as argued by DLM.

The two newspaper articles that opened this chapter indicate that these theories of migration continue to provide some level of explanatory value. For example, the *New York Times* portrayed Dr. Shi's migration decision as one motivated by the larger dynamic economic systems of China and the U.S. in the global economy – a dual labor market explanation. The *Wall Street Journal* article interprets Dr. Zhang's decision as an individual cost benefit calculation – a neo-classical argument. However, when applied in isolation, each perspective leaves significant gaps in our understanding of the

migratory process. For example, in Dr. Shi's case, while characterized as being subject to pull factors, he must have had some agency in his decision to return migrate. Granting that Dr. Shi did have agency in the decision would violate the DLM argument and force one to reconsider a DLM-exclusive explanation. With regards to Dr. Zhang, the neo-classical explanation ignores the fact that he had migrated from China to the U.S. This migration process as well as his associated histories with each country must have played a role in his decision not to return migrate. While each theory does have limitations, it is a worthwhile exercise to see how they can be applied to the case of Chinese return migration.

Application of Theories

The perspectives of migration in the two newspaper articles about Chinese return migration illustrate how migration decisions can be situated at the individual or household level--as in neo-classical and NELM theories - or at the more global economic level as captured by DLM's pull factors argument. The *Wall Street Journal* story about Dr. Zhang suggests that he had carefully weighed his options, considered the location of his siblings and father and engaged in an accounting of his alternatives. Given his relatively low status at a satellite campus of a lower-top tier school (*U.S. News and World Report ranking*: 22), Dr. Zhang would probably be hard-pressed to dramatically improve his salary if he were to move back to China. Dr. Zhang's decision about migration is portrayed in a neo-classical light: he is rational actor, making largely an economic based decision.

Conversely, the *New York Times* portrayed Dr. Shi at the mercy of the 'pull' of a state in need, favoring a DLM theory explanation. Tsinghua University, as one of the preeminent universities in China, is at the heart of most major education reform initiatives in the country. For instance, several high profile policies have been enacted to try and raise the stature of higher education in China. Two marquee efforts are "Project 211" and "Project 985." The overall goal of Project 211 (established in 1995) is to help 100 universities to reach 'elite' status and be better prepared for the 21st century. Project 985 (established in May, 1998) targets specific universities, including Tsinghua, and provides funding to help them to reach top world rankings. By some measures these programs have been successful in raising the profile of Chinese academic institutions. As evidence of the success of the Project 211, Guo Xinli, Deputy Director of the Degree Office under the State Council offers that "China's academic citation frequency was one to 51 compared with that of the United States 10 years ago, and now it is one to six" (China Radio International, 2008). However, as illustrated in Chapter One, while return rates of Chinese students studying overseas are on the rise, they remain relatively low, meaning that much of the newly developed human capital being produced overseas is not physically returning to China. As a consequence, great effort has recently been put forth to try to attract returnees.

Specific recruitment efforts can be seen at every level within China, ranging from national to city to corporate-level programs. An example of a national level program includes the government-established "Overseas Study Service Centers" designed to help returnees find jobs. In 1989, there were 33 Centers in 27 provinces

(Zweig, 2006). In addition to these Overseas Study Service Centers, entrepreneurial parks were established in 1994. By 2005 there were 24 entrepreneurial parks at the national level and an additional 86 at the provincial level (Wang, Wong & Sun, 2006). Today there are over 150 parks that have started over 10,000 new businesses (Wang, 2010). Shanghai's successful "Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs" is an example of a city-level initiative. This office works with alumni associations of Shanghai universities and various networks of overseas organizations to link returnees with opportunities in Shanghai. In addition, some cities offer incentives, such as tax breaks, subsidies on housing, family support services including schooling for children and jobs for spouses and long-term residence permits trying to attract returnees (Zweig, 2006). The inducements at the firm level can be equally enticing, including salaries significantly above the norm, instant promotions to full professor at universities and housing allocations that are often reported as being on par with those of ministry officials. These various programs are examples of DLM theory pull factors and their effect on migration. This theory helps to explain return migration as part of the broader context of the global economic system, and of the Chinese economy's place in it.

These applications of the various theories offer convenient explanations of Drs. Zhang and Shi's migration decisions. However, they are overly simplistic because they do not address many of the subtitles of individuals making significant life decisions. These theories are also insufficient because they were principally developed to explain migration, not return migration, and they deal primarily with low-skilled labor migration, not highly skilled labor migration as in cases like Drs. Zhang and Shi.

Further, these theories are limited in that they investigate migration without considering broader economic, political and social contexts in which the migration event takes place. Nonetheless, in the absences of case-specific theories, they offer a helpful starting point for the investigation of return migration of highly skilled Chinese.

Stars in the Constellation

While DLM theory and its tenets of structural inflation, motivation, economic dualism and demography of labor supply were principally conceived to apply to low-skilled labor in the U.S. context, they can be fruitfully applied to the context of highly skilled labor in China. The following example shows how the concept of structural inflation can be applied to highly skilled return migration. This and the analysis that follow are examples of the call by Massey et al. (1993) for a constellation approach of inquiry for the study of migration.

Structural inflation argues that increasing pay at the lowest point in an occupational hierarchy will necessitate increases to all higher levels, thus negating the effects of the pay increase. However, given the unique historical turn of events in China, it may be the case that the society would accept asymmetrical pay increases. Specifically, as part of Mao's Cultural Revolution, all individuals and households were politically evaluated into revolutionary red or antirevolutionary black classes (Unger, 1982 in Bian, 2002). Intellectuals, who were historically revered, were deemed to be antirevolutionary or black by Mao's Red Guard. "Politically, intellectuals were Mao's 'stinky old ninths' ('*chou lao jiu'*), ranking [them] last among all nine 'black' categories" (italics and parentheses in original Bian, 2002, p. 97). Most were sent to the

Chinese country side for "re-education" – which often amounted to menial, tough physical labor like splitting rocks. This re-education was an effort to teach the intellectuals about their backward thinking and help them to understand the struggles of the proletarian. The Cultural Revolution all but destroyed the country's educational system and disenfranchised the intellectuals, now referred to as "China's missing generation in science and technology" (Zweig, 2002, p. 203). Today, with an emphasis on improving the nation's educational system and the recognition of the importance of world class faculty, increasing the pay to this disadvantaged group may not lead to structural inflation because the value of intellectuals has been raised to be on par with those at higher levels of the occupational hierarchy. Those at the higher levels will not feel it necessary to maintain their relative position to intellectuals. Continuing with the theme of relative status, NELM offers additional insight.

NELM provides the concept of 'relative deprivation' (Stark, Taylor and Yitzhaki, 1986) as a way to think about how changes in income are interpreted by a family in relation to their community. Dr. Shi invokes relative deprivation conceptually when he states, "In the United States, everything is more or less set up. Whatever I do here [in China], the impact is probably tenfold, or a hundredfold" (as quoted in the *New York Times* article, LaFraniere, 2010, p. A8). By this Dr. Shi means that his $10 million grant and $2 million lab at Princeton, while impressive, is only on par with many other labs in the U.S. Establishing such a lab in China, he believes, would have a much greater impact. Therefore, part of Dr. Shi's reasoning behind his return to China may have been the relative impact he can have in China as compared to the U.S.A. Moving

from the example of Dr. Shi to China's One Child Policy, another aspect of NELM that can be utilized when analyzing Chinese return migration is the emphasis on the family.

China's One Child Policy brings into sharp focus the family level decision-making strategies central to NELM. With only one child, the strategy of risk diversification becomes significantly constrained. There is only one resource -one child- and misallocation of this resource would spell disaster for the family. While the ability to defray risk has been constrained by the policy, this has been buttressed by heavy investment in the lone child. Families dedicate significant resources to providing the best possible opportunities for their child. Tales of the rigors of doing homework late into the night, special Saturday tutorial sessions, and the mastery of musical instruments and second and third languages is only the start of the list of stresses placed on the lone children to improve their human capital. Perhaps one could argue that this is a within-subject diversification strategy in contrast to the between subject strategy suggested by NELM theory.

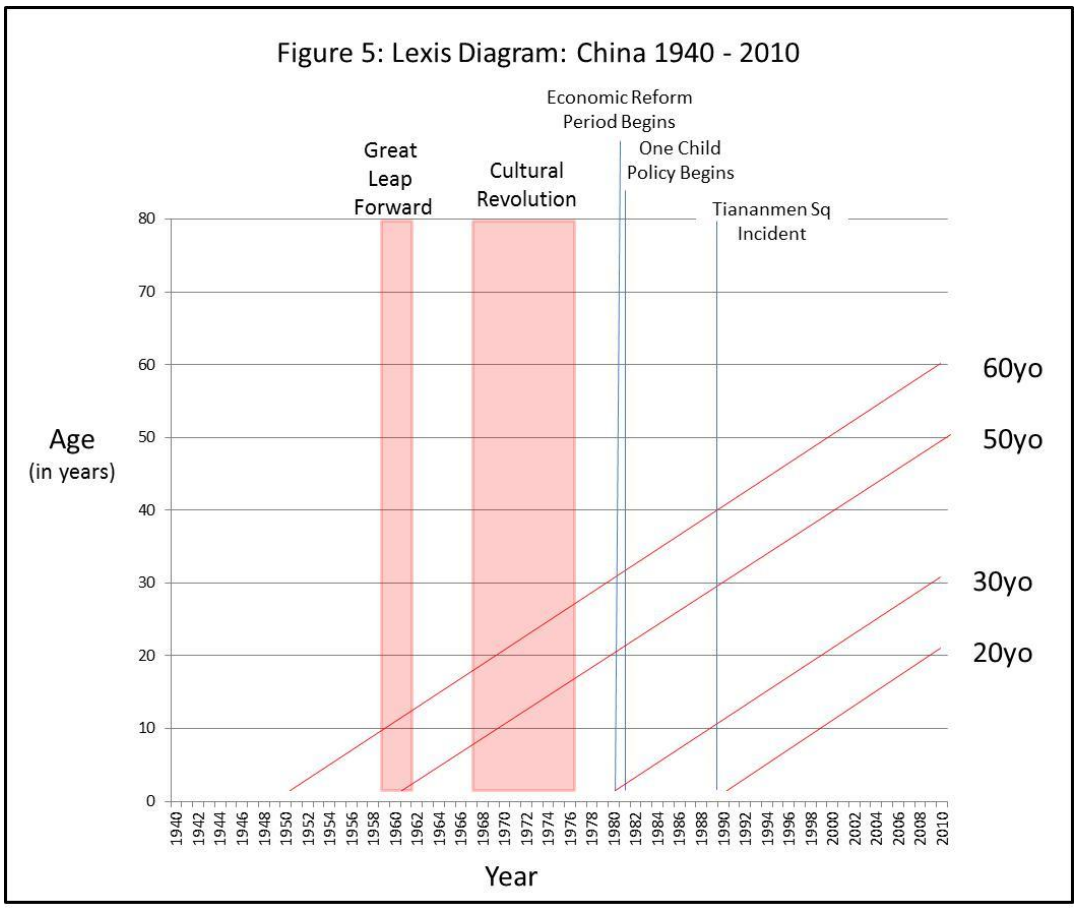
Moving Beyond Existing Economic Theories of Migration and into Interdisciplinarity

The migration literature, in general, is firmly rooted in the discipline of economics. Because migration is a complicated process involving more than economic principles, concepts from a wider range of discipline should be engaged to study the phenomenon. This section will demonstrate how the age, period and cohort effects framework which comes primarily from the field of demography and the concepts of

virtual return migration and transnationalism which are often utilized in anthropology can be applied to the case of Chinese return migrants.

Age, Period and Cohort Effects Framework

This study examines how the exposure to the historical events and policies discussed in Chapter One may have had an effect on each of the two age group's migration experiences. A Lexis diagram[9] (Lexis, 1875 as cited in Preston, Heuveline and Guillot, 2001), (see Figure 5), with age in years on the x-axis and time in years on the y-axis illustrates how age, time periods and cohorts can interact. To follow are some



[9] The name is derived from the 19th century economist and social scientist Wilhelm Lexis that helped to develop the diagram.

examples to demonstrate the utility of this framework. In this diagram, I delineate, with parallel 45° life lines, the two groups of return migrants that are the focus of this dissertation: 20 to 30 year-olds born between 1980 and 1990, and 50 to 60 year-olds born between 1950 and 1960.

The 45° life lines depict a person or group's life course. The line starts at the intersection of age zero on the y-axis and the year of birth on the x-axis. The life line continues at a 45° angle until death. In Figure 5, the lines continue until the present year (2010) to depict the boundaries of entire cohorts. Obviously some individuals within the cohorts were born in years other then 1950, 1960, 1980 and 1990, and not all of them are still living today. Vertical lines depict specific events and delineate periods. For example the Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and ended in 1976. The vertical line intersecting the x-axis at 1966 denotes the start of the Cultural Revolution and the vertical line intersecting the x-axis at 1976 denotes the end of the Cultural Revolution which literally ended with the arrest of the Gang of Four on October 6, 1976. The region between these two vertical lines denotes the period in which the Cultural Revolution took place. The horizontal lines emanating from the y-axis represent ages. The horizontal line originating at 40 on the y-axis identifies 40-year-olds across all years. At any point where an age, period or cohort line intersects another line there is said to be a possible combination of effects (e.g. age-period effect). The following section will provide examples of how this framework can be applied to my study of return migration.

Age Effects.

Some of the variability between the two groups under study may be explained by the fact that they are returning to China at different ages. For instance, someone returning to China at the age of 25 may have different reasons for returning and/or experiences of return than someone that is 55. In a study of white males migrating between states in the U.S.A., the authors find that younger people are more likely to migrate for economic reasons while older individuals are more likely to migrate for the amenity mix (e.g. weather, quality of museums etc.) in the destination state (Clark & Hunter, 1991). In their study a person's motivation for migration is an example of an age effect. On the Lexis diagram, age effects are noted by comparing points vertically on two separate 45° life lines. For example, if return migration occurred in 2008, then people born in 1990 would be 18 and people born in 1960 would be 48.

Specific to the newspaper articles highlighted in this chapter, the difference in the two doctor's ages may help to explain their migration decisions. As Dr. Shi is 10 years older than Dr. Zhang, it may be his age and therefore career stage that led him to return migrate while Dr. Zhang decided to stay in the U.S.A.

Period Effects.

During the Cultural Revolution and immediately thereafter, schooling in China was widely regarded as dysfunctional as intellectualism was denounced and the curriculum in schools was limited to the teachings of Mao's Little Red Book. Conversely a person that attended school during the Economic Reform period, when the reverence for education was on the upswing, would have had far greater access to

reliable and productive schooling. So while in both cases a person may have attended school in China, their attendance would have occurred in different periods and thus their experiences likely differed dramatically. This period effect can be seen on the Lexis diagram by following the horizontal line on the y-axis for a person of age 10 (approximately 5th grade). This horizontal line intersects with the 45° life line of a person born in 1950 during the middle of the Cultural Revolution, while for a person born in 1990, the intersection occurs during the Economic Reform period. Experiencing 5th grade during the Cultural Revolution would have been dramatically different than in the midst of China's economic rise. Dr. Shi is ten years older than Dr. Zhang which means that while they both attend school in China they did so during different periods, Dr. Shi in the wake of the Cultural Revolution and Dr. Zhang in the onset of Economic Reform period.

Cohort Effects.

Many people born in China after 1980 were products of the One Child Policy and thus are only children or singletons. By comparison, those born in the 1950s were born into families with higher fertility rates and likely had multiple siblings. By virtue of when a person was born, they are part of different cohorts. Members of the same cohort are more likely to have lived experiences similar to their counterparts in the same cohort than those of different cohorts. The two birth cohorts of interest in this study and their lived experiences are represented on the Lexis diagram by the pair of parallel 45° lines starting at 1950 and 1960 for the older cohort and at 1980 and 1990 for the younger cohort.

Dr. Shi is now 45 years old and was born at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. His parents were likely in their 20s when he was born. As members of the intellectual class, Dr. Shi's father was a mechanical engineering professor; the way in which the Shi family experienced life in China is almost certainly different than members of a family from the proletarian class. This is an example of a cohort effect: being from different socioeconomic or educational cohorts may lead to different lived experiences.

While there is a vigorous debate in the literature about our ability to disentangle age, period and cohort effects from one another, there is wide agreement that they are interrelated (Glenn, 1976, Mason, Mason & Winsborough, 1976). The more common combinations are age-period effects and age-cohort effects. Cohort-period effects do exist, but are less common and therefore will not be expounded upon here (Preston, Heuveline & Guillot, 2001).

Age-Period Effect.

An age-period effect would be a situation where a particular event or policy, like the One Child policy, influences all Chinese citizens, but how it affects them likely differs by a person's age. For example, woman who completed their child-bearing by the time the policy took effect would not have had to change their fertility-related behavior, but they would likely have had to worry more about a dearth of young workers in the coming generations who could help sustain the Chinese economy. On the other hand, 20-year-old women who were just beginning their childbearing years when

the policy took effect may have had to change their family planning in order to accommodate the requirements of the new policy.

Age-Cohort Effect.

An age-cohort effect is when both a person's age and their respective cohort is thought to influence an outcome. For example, because of their different life histories (cohort membership), one might assume that a 60 year-old male (born in 1950) living in China today will have different views about China than a male born in 1980 will have when he turns 60, thirty years from now because, for example, of how rapidly China is changing. Because aging takes time, conducting age-specific cross-cohort comparisons is difficult. In the example provided, a researcher would have to wait thirty years to complete the research to find out how perceptions of China vary among the two 60 year olds.

The goal of my research is not to definitively assign an outcome to a specific age, period, cohort or interaction effect but rather to use this framework to remind me to investigate the possibilities of explanations from multiple perspectives and possible causes (events, policies, life stages, lived experiences, etc.).

Virtual Return Migration

As the economic migration theories were developed to address an original act of migration, they lack the capacity to engage the return migrant's experience, because every return migrant has a prior experience with migration that may shape his or her future migration decisions. The original migration experience includes conceptions of

the place they left at the time of migration, the migration process and, finally, the emigration experience.

China's transformation over the past thirty years has been unprecedented. World class cities have replaced rice paddies in the span of a few short decades. On any dimension, whether physical, social, political or cultural, China today is categorically different than it was thirty, twenty or even just ten years ago. A returnee would be misinformed about the China that exists today if he or she was to rely only on conceptions of the China that they left. But these conceptions were their reality, and this reality is only augmented by new information from external sources (friends, family, media, etc.) and/or personal experience through visits back to China. It is unlikely that a returnee has a static notion of China, and the awareness of and experience with changes in the country are likely to have a profound effect on decisions to return. As the economic migration theories reviewed above do not address *return* migration, one needs to look at other disciplines to conceptualize the potential impact of media and other sources of information about China on migrant's decision making.

Not only has China changed in recent years, but so too has the process by which a potential returnee (re)constructs a Chinese imaginary. Zakaria (2008) makes the point that "with the arrival of big ships in the fifteenth century, goods became mobile. With modern banking in the seventeenth century, capital became mobile. In the 1990s, [voluntary] labor [became] mobile" (p. 25). Like modern banking, the labor market has shifted to one that can rely on "virtual mobility" or the ability to "move text, voices, and

images across enormous distances" rather than "material mobility," which helps to move "physical bodies and objects at high speeds" (Aneesh, 2006, p. 32).

Aneesh (2006) differentiates between what he calls embodied migration and virtual migration, which is relevant for this study of Chinese return migration because it is affecting the way in which potential returnees are informing their migration decisions. The distinction between embodied and virtual migration is that virtual migration "does not require workers to move in physical space" while embodied migration does (Aneesh, 2006, p. 1). Extending the concept to return migration, one can conceptualize the case of 'virtual return migration.' A returnee that 'virtually' return migrates may engage in and be exposed to most of the same experiences as if he or she was physically in the country, in this case China. The ever-increasing level of connectivity between any two locations on the globe, or the death of distance (Cairncross, 1997), is likely to be affecting the process of return migration, be it in the decision making phase or resettlement after the return. For example, someone that is living in New York can stay up to date on current changes in a local language in their native town in China by reading blogs or newspapers on-line or Skyping with friends and family residing there. If s/he was to visit the town, they would not use passé terms or references.

In addition to addressing issues not discussed in the traditional theories, virtual return migration may intervene in ways that would reduce or eliminate many of the risks associated with migration presented in the traditional theories of migration. For example, a critical aspect of neo-classical theory is the probability of finding a job in a

decision to migrate. This constraint can all but be eliminated with virtual return migration in that job seekers are increasingly securing positions in their destination county before the actual migration takes place. A job seeker can be made aware of a position through an on-line job posting, s/he can investigate the suitability of the firm through blogs or discussion groups, assess its location via google maps and conduct the interview via Skype.

Transnationalism

In addition to the notion of virtual return migration, another pattern of migration, transnationalism, has evolved that seeks to explain the activities taking place in the liminal space that exists between the dichotomous positioning of the traditional theories of migration of 'being here' or 'being there.' Transnational migrants maintain a residence in two or more countries and fly back and forth between them. Specific to the Chinese case, these families are called astronaut families, the children are called 'parachute children,' and the individuals returning to China are referred to as *haiou* or "seagulls" as described earlier (Pe-Pua, Mitchell, Iredale & Castles, 1996).

Transnational migration occurs for a variety of reasons among Chinese migrants. A typical scenario might be that in an effort to provide an American education for their child, the wife and child live in the U.S. while the husband maintains residency in China. The husband flies back and forth, typically not only to see the family but also for professional reasons. Another reason for the maintenance of dual locations of residence is to leverage the relative advantage of each of the two nations. An individual

might maintain ties to Canada for access to medical and retirement benefits while conducting business in the emerging economy of China.

As corruption in China has come under greater scrutiny, many dishonest officials are sending their family overseas to protect them, to off-shore embezzled funds and allow for an easy getaway destination if they are investigated. This example of transnationalism has led to the development of the phrase *luoti guanyuan*, or "naked official" offering the double meaning that the official has been left alone and that they are probably often naked engaging in a bachelor's lifestyle.

Both virtual return migration and transnationalism must be accounted for when attempting to understand the settlement and minority formation dimensions of Castles and Miller's (2003) framework, which seeks to link theories of migration to settlement and ethnic minority contexts. The engagement of return migrants in these processes, in particular, may be offering a priming effect that is in some way preparing them differently than if they had not had 'real' or 'virtual' exposure to the return destination. For instance, they may be more proficient in current trends in language, politics, and customs than if they had not been engaged in virtual return migration or transnational travel or temporary residency. This increased level of preparedness may make the transition of return migrants smoother than those that had been less engaged with China before their return. On the other hand, it may promote greater levels of isolation when a person does return. In anticipation of now known differences, the returnees may make decisions that will distance them from their perceived unattractive aspects of the destination. For example, returnees may enroll their children in an international school

that utilizes English language instead of Mandarin and a Western style curriculum instead of the traditional Chinese one. Because of the greater level of preparedness that virtual return migration or transnationalism offers, the returnee's children might have less contact with native Chinese as their school day would be spent in the international school and they may not be developing Mandarin language skills as the language of instruction is English.

There is some evidence that virtual return migration and transnationalism are occurring within China necessitating more consideration of its explanatory power. If these concepts are not considered, then they will be omitted from research and findings on the topic of migration decisions. It is particularly important for scholars of Chinese return migration because transnationalism is far more prevalent among Chinese, than other nationalities. For example, analysis of 2000 U.S. Census data shows that 10.3% of married Chinese residing in the U.S.A. have a spouse that is absent from the home, a rate that is almost double the average of 5.6% for all nationalities (IPUMS, 2010). As a practical example, the *New York Times* had to issue a correction in relation to the article that has been cited in this chapter, which was explicitly about return migration of Chinese, because an individual referred to in the story was identified as having returned to China when in fact he is maintaining his old position in the U.S.A. while *adding* a position in China. He had moved from being 'only' in America, to being transnational, not 'only' in China as the article had first reported.

In the introduction to his paper on knowledge exchange through diaspora networks, Xiang (2005) enumerates three criticisms of the research that has been

conducted about return migration to China. Citing the work of the most prominent scholars in the field, Xiang (2005) argues that most of the research: 1) is centered on long-term physical return 2) examines decisions about returns using a dichotomous: return or non-return outcome; and 3) is too general as they target top government agencies as their audience. Additionally, as I note in Chapter Three, most of this research is geographically limited to the major cities along China's east coast. While the majority of returnees do live in these select locations, the omission of the rest of China is a significant limitation in this body of literature. While utilizing these previous works as a foundation, this dissertation engages additional theoretical perspectives such as the age, period and cohort framework, virtual return migration and transnatioanlism as they play an important part in explaining migration decisions, particularly among Chinese returnees in an understudied region where, as will be shown, the conventional economic theories of migration have limited applicability.

Conclusion

As China emerges from its self-imposed isolation of the last century, its influence in the world continues to grow. Contributing to China's success is not only the 1.3 billon people that live within its borders but also the estimated 100 million people living beyond its borders (Michel & Beuret, 2009). The Chinese diaspora is part of the shift in migratory flows in which Asia, Africa, and Latin America have replaced Europe as the major region of migrant origin (Arango, 2000). In addition to new sources of migration, new patterns of migration are also emerging. The existing economic theories of migration are limited in their ability to account for these significant changes

especially in the case of Chinese return migrants, thereby necessitating an interdisciplinary approach to the study of migration using demographic tools such as the age, period and cohort framework and new theories of virtual return migration and transnationalism.

Born out of economics, neo-classical economics theory, new economics of labor migration and dual labor market theory have long been the primary ways of understanding migratory patterns. This chapter provides examples of how these theories are useful yet insufficient, particularly as they relate to return migration of highly skilled Chinese. This chapter has drawn on the recommendations of Massey et al. (1993) to apply a constellation approach of engaging various theories, not in isolation but in conjunction with one another to understand return migration decisions as part of a larger socio-economic, political, and cultural phenomenon and not as an isolated event based solely on the economic considerations of the individual. This review of literate informed the research design that was used in this dissertation. Specifically, a qualitative method was employed to, by definition, avoid the linearity of return decision making imposed by economic theories of migration and was open to the influences of other disciplines In the following chapter, I move from the review of the existing literature covered here to presenting the study that was undertaken in an effort to answer the research questions presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Three: Research Site and Study Protocol

Introduction

As increasingly more Chinese are undertaking the process of return migration to China, I sought to explore why they are returning, why those that had settled in the city of Kunming had chosen to do so, and how the birth year of the returnee affects the return experience. This chapter will provide the relevant background to support my decision in selecting Kunming as the site of my research and details my research process and methods.

Kunming, Yunnan Province

Kunming, with a population of about 6.5 million, is the capital city of Yunnan Province which is located in the far southwest corner of China. It is a highly strategic province for Asia as it acts as a gateway between China and Southeast Asia and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (Central Policy Unit, 2009). Yunnan borders the Chinese provinces of Tibet to the west, Sichuan to the north and Guizhou and Guangxi to the east. To the south, Yunnan borders the countries of Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. I selected Kunming for this study because it is billed as a rapidly developing frontier city and one that I had previously visited. I had spent a few days in Kunming in 2005 as part of a broader trip through Yunnan. This previous exposure, while limited, did allow for quicker emersion and greater efficiency in navigating the streets and culture. Moreover, it is a place where the scholars of economic theories of migration would argue is a

rational migratory destination because of the significant policy attention and financial resources provided to the region by the central and local governments.

The Ladder-Step Doctrine and the Rest of China

The growth and development of the east coast in advance of the rest of the nation was not an accident but rather an explicit part of Deng Xioping's economic reforms. Recognizing that the entire nation would not be able to prosper simultaneously, and that the east coast was already more developed, Deng famously quipped "Let some get rich first," referring to those on the east coast. In 1986, the Ladder-Step Doctrine was established, dividing the county into three regions: coastal, central and west (see Appendix 2 for a map of the regions). "Initial advantage" was granted to the coastal region with the intent that prosperity would travel west (Friedman, 2005, p.21). The plan was to "speed up the development of the coastal region, to put the emphasis on energy and raw materials construction in the central region, and to actively make preparation for the further development of the western region" (Yang, 1997, p. 29). In keeping with this western development master plan, policy initiatives at the national and local level have been established for this 'further development of the western region.'

The national government's *XiBu DaKaiFa*, or "Western Development Policy," was initiated in 2000 as an effort to expand the economic prosperity enjoyed by eastern provinces to the rest of China. The policy's primary initiatives included infrastructure development, attracting foreign direct investment, ecological protection, education expansion and reducing brain drain.

The most observable outcomes of the policy specific to Kunming are the substantial infrastructure projects in and around the city, including the development of the fourth largest airport in China, regional rail and road linkages to neighboring countries, a new six line subway system and a massive "Modern New Kunming" project centralizing government, education and logistics industries. Kunming's physical transformation is clear evidence of the Western Development Policy's implementation.

Less observable, but also important, is how the policy has allowed the provincial government, in cooperation with the central government, to established a number of formal regional agreements and plans to help foster trade and economic development in the region. For example, in 2000, a "specially administered border trade zone 'within the territory but outside customs' in China" was established (Central Policy Unit, 2009, p. v). This meant that opportunities have been created, by these government policies, that individual firms can take advantage which would lead to economic development in the region.

The following two examples, which I had collected during my field work, offer firm-level evidence of Kunming's growth and elevating regional importance. The first example is drawn from the November 2010 inaugural issue, of '*Horizons'* magazine, which proclaims to be the "definitive bilingual travel guide to Yunnan, Asia Pacific and beyond." The cover story makes the explicit argument for the emergence of Kunming and leads with the headline: "Kunming: Asia's Next Big Thing" (see Appendix 3) (Horizons, 2010). The second example is an advertisement from China Eastern Airlines promoting Kunming as a hub which allows one to "Go anywhere from here" (see

Appendix 4). These firm-level examples of the notions of emergence and central importance were heavily influenced by the national-level policy that has rapidly transformed the city.

National-level policies, such as the Western Development Policy and its supporting funds, are the type of economic activities that the economic theories of migration would argue explain individual migratory decisions. However, based on my research, it is my contention that in the case of Chinese return migration to Kunming, these economic models oversimplify the process of return migration and under explain the motivations to return migrate. Chapter Four will provide the details of my research findings.

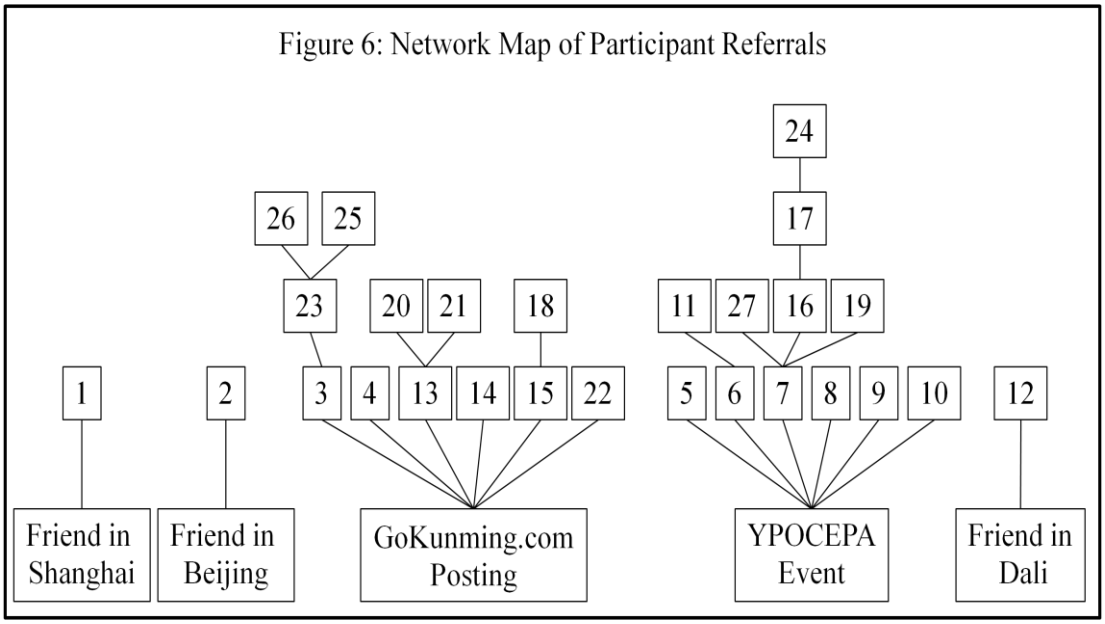
Research Methods

The methodology and data analysis in this dissertation were framed by constructivist perspective relying principally on the methods of interviewing and observation which allowed me to become part of some of the participant's lives. For example, I was invited to social activities like the Toastmasters club, attended movies and had informal dinners that were not part of the explicit interview activities. As discussed in Chapter One, constructivism assumes that knowledge is co-created in an interaction between the investigator and the participants in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It was often during some of these 'non-research' moments that the best ideas and explanations were espoused.

In an effort to explore the individual motivations for return migration to Kunming, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 27 individuals that had

returned to Kunming over the past 15 years. In general, I followed my interviewer's guide, but because of the trends that I had identified in my analysis, the amount of time spent on specific questions shifted to those that seemed to be most important to the research. Almost all of the participants were native to Yunnan and had been born and raised either in Kunming or in a village within a few hours drive. Participants were recruited through a modified respondent-driven sampling procedure described below. The sample generated a balanced distribution of 14 females and 13 males. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 55 years old and had studied in 13 different countries with some participants living in more than one country. Figure 6 shows the network map of participants. The number represents the order in which the participants were interviewed with number one being the first participant interviewed and number 27 the last.

Figure 6: Network Map of Participant Referrals



However, I was often in contact with participants on more than one occasion because of research needs as well as coincidence. An example of a research need would be that in some cases, latter interviews led to new insights that I had wanted to review with earlier participants. With respect to coincidence, in the process of my research I had attended events like the Toastmasters Club[10] and encountered past participants at the meeting. These unintended meetings often allowed for less formal discussion and additional insights into their daily lives. Table 1 provides selected details of each participant including the date of the initial interview, the year they graduated college, the time frame they were abroad and the country they had returned from.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

	CODE	Date of Interview	Sex	Completed Undergrad	Departure	Return	Country
1	121510001	15-Dec-10	F	2005	2006	2010	Japan
2	123010002	30-Dec-10	M	2000	2001	2008	USA
3	123010003	30-Dec-10	F	1994	1999	2009	Thailand, France, USA
4	123010004	30-Dec-10	M	2009	2001	2009	Thailand, USA
5	011911005	19-Jan-11	M	1997	2000	2005	USA
6	011911006	19-Jan-11	M	2006	2008	2010	Australia
7	011911007	19-Jan-11	M	1997	2005	2006	Philippines
8	012511008	25-Jan-11	M	1983	1989	1994	U.K.
9	012511009	25-Jan-11	M	1989	1996	1998	Thailand
10	012511010	25-Jan-11	F	1982	2004	2009	Canada
11	012511011	25-Jan-11	F	2008	2009	2011	France
12	020711012	6-Feb-11	F	2002	2005	2009	Israel, France
13	022411013	24-Feb-11	F	1995	2004	2010	U.K.
14	022411014	24-Feb-11	F	2010	2007	2009	Korea
15	022411015	24-Feb-11	F	2011	2006	2011	Netherlands

[10] Toastmasters Club is a global organization that helps people to become better public speakers. The club in Kunming focuses on developing public speaking skills in English. It should be noted that the club meetings in Kunming that I had attended were held by a group that had not yet officially been chartered by the Toastmasters governing body.

16	030911016	9-Mar-11	M	1997	2000	2004	New Zealand
17	030911017	9-Mar-11	F	2000	2002	2005	USA
18	030911018	9-Mar-11	M	2011	1986	2011	USA
19	031011019	9-Mar-11	F	2000	2000	2005	USA
20	031011020	10-Mar-11	M	2007	2007	2009	USA
21	031011021	10-Mar-11	F	2007	2007	2009	USA
22	031011022	10-Mar-11	M	55YO	multiple		Switzerland. USA
23	031011023	10-Mar-11	F	1999	2005	2008	Netherlands
24	031011024	10-Mar-11	M	2000	2001	2003	Canada
25	032311025	23-Mar-11	M				U.K.
26	032311026	23-Mar-11	F	1988	2003	2005	U.K.
27	032311027	23-Mar-11	F	2002	2007	2009	Australia

In some cases, individuals had multiple departures and returns with living experiences in more than one country. For these individuals, all of the places where they had lived are listed, but only the dates for the longest period outside of China are included. For participant 22 I did not record the year in which he completed his undergraduate studies so I provided his age (55 years old) as a proxy for this missing data. The departure and return fields for this participant are listed as multiple as he had many overseas living experiences with the longest ones being of an approximately equal three years. Specific dates for participant 25 have been omitted because I did not record the exact dates. When asked, general ranges were provided, so I know approximately when the events transpired but not with sufficient precision as to populate the chart. The following section provides the details as to how I recruited each of the 27 people listed above.

Participant Recruitment

The specific mechanism that was used to recruit participants was a modified version of Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS), a form of network sampling. In its

most common form, network sampling relies on respondents to refer additional respondents to the researcher. Confronted with the absences of a sampling frame from which to draw a sample, relying on individuals known to be members of the population is an effective way to have access to additional participants. However, the process is inherently limited, as referrals are contingent on the initial referent (Heckathorn, 1997). RDS differs from typical network sampling in two ways: first, it "involves a dual incentive system - the reward for being interviewed (a primary reward) plus a reward for recruiting others into the study (a secondary reward)," and second, "subjects are not asked to identify their peers to the investigator, but to recruit them into the study" (Heckathorn, 1997, p. 178). Other researchers have successfully used this modified RDS technique in China such as Fong (2006) with her ethnographic studies in Dalian, and it seemed like an appropriate approach for my study as well.

While rewards were not offered in this study, they typically include cash or gifts that serve to recognize the participant for their time and contributions. I elected to not offer rewards for several reasons. First and foremost, it has been my experience in China that once an introduction and explanation of purpose has been made, and if that purpose is explicitly for educational purposes, people are generally willing to help. I have personally had success with this method and have arranged factory visits, corporate site visits, class lectures and informal dinners each of the seven times I have taught classes in China. Secondly, I wanted to avoid any possibility of creating a sense of obligation or coercion on behalf of the participants. Their participation was solely a function of their own interest and not externally motivated.

My study leveraged the second aspect of RDS, namely, participant recruitment. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant was given a few cards with my contact information and some basic information about the study and was asked to distribute these cards to their *haigui* peers. This process obviated each participant from having to offer the name and contact information of a peer without that person's permission. When receiving a card, the potential participant independently decided if s/he wanted to participate in the study or not. RDS provided me with a wide range of participants with varying backgrounds and characteristics. This is in keeping with Heckathorn's (1997) finding that RDS "reduces the biases resulting from voluntarism and masking, and provides means for controlling the biases resulting from differences in the sizes of personal networks" (p. 177).

Participants in this study resulted from three different initial recruiting efforts: my personal friend network, the GoKunming.com website and a returnee event that I had attended while in Kunming. The following is a description of the recruitment results from these three efforts.

After receiving IRB approval from the University of Minnesota, I reached out to my personal network in China informing my friends and colleagues about my research and my desire to talk to *haigui* that are living in Kunming. I provided each of them with an information card as described above. These efforts yielded 3 interviews in Kunming with friends of my friends that lived in Shanghai, Beijing and Dali. Dali is a small city about 200 miles west of Kunming.

Another recruitment tool that I utilized was the "News & Information" section of the "Classifieds" page of the GoKunming.com website. GoKunming.com is an English language website that reports on news and events in the greater Kunming area. In addition to the content provided by the website staff, there are also forums and classifieds sections open to user contributors. I posted three separate recruitment requests, one each on December 17, 2010, February 18, 2011 and March 15, 2011. These postings resulted in six direct participants. Of these six participants, three referents yielded six additional participants.

On January 16, 2011 I attended a recruitment event hosted by the Yunnan Province Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs and Professionals Association (YPOCEPA). The YPOCEPA is one of the many government funded entities that is tasked with creating welcoming environments that would attract *haigui*. Typically, this takes the form of a "business park" that provides office, laboratory or manufacturing space at reduced rents, on-site access to government services to expedite business registration tasks, reduce tax environments and a social network of fellow *haigui*. This particular event was designed to showcase the success stories of members of the association and to recruit new members to join. The event featured several individual speakers sharing their specific stories, a panel discussion about benefits of joining and a networking dinner. In total, there were approximately 40 returnees. During the networking dinner I introduced myself to many of the attendees and presented them with my recruitment card. Six individuals from the event participated in my study with two of them yielding six additional participants.

In total I conducted 27 interviews and decided to stop at this point because additional interviews were not yielding significantly new information. I felt that I had reached what Merriam (1998) refers to as "a point of saturation or redundancy" (p.64).

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted in English and took place in coffee shops, restaurants and offices and typically lasted about one hour. All of my participants agreed to be audio recorded, and I had also taken notes. After each interview, I transferred the digital recording from the recorder to my laptop using a coding system for the file name that would protect the identity of the participant. A backup of the file was saved on the University of Minnesota's secure remote server. In between interviews I transcribed each interview in their entirety. The transcriptions were typed in Word and then uploaded into a qualitative data analysis software program called ATLAS.ti for coding. The process of simultaneously conducting interviews, transcribing and coding proved to be highly valuable as I was able to adapt and adjust my interview protocol as themes began to emerge. All interviews were conducted under the guarantee of anonymity. As such, quotations utilized in this dissertation by individual respondents are not attributed to any particular person. Additionally, as English was not the participants' first language, in some cases it was necessary to provide minor edits (in brackets) to help with clarity. Edits were made only to the extent needed to ensure that the reader would understand the quote. Leaving the quotes in as much of their natural state as possible allows the reader to appreciate the linguistic limitations that the participants may have

encountered while abroad. This is particularly useful when participants discuss cultural differences and their challenges in assimilation.

In addition to formal interviews, I conducted unstructured observations. Despite Kunming's large population and geographic size, finding *haigui,* or at least the places that they tend to congregate is relatively easy to do. There are a few areas of the city that have a decidedly 'Western' feel to them which attracts a number of *haigui*. They are populated with many coffee shops, boutique shops featuring Western style clothes, restaurants serving Western fare and grocery stores offering imported foods. Observing what is being offered for sale, who patronizes these stores, what they are buying and who they are interacting with provides some insight as to the intersection between Western society and Kunming. As part of these observations I had many informal conversations with people from all over the world who were doing many different things in Kunming. Some were just travelers passing through, while others had started businesses in the area. Additionally, I read the local English language newspapers watched the news and read blogs and websites that I thought would help inform my study. While in the field it was hard to separate my research experience from my personal living experience. For example, while in Kunming, I had attended a film festival. My purpose in attending the festival was purely personal. However, while at the festival, I had run into no less than three of the participants in the study. Talking to them about how they found out about the festival[11], which movies they had seen, why

[11] The official website for the film festival was blocked in China by the Chinese government because several of the films had not obtained the proper permits for filming and because some of the films had content deemed to be inappropriate. While officially 'banned,' the festival was allowed to continue

they had selected them and what they had thought about them provided additional insights for my research.

All of the data that was collected during my field research was archived in ATLAS.ti for analysis. For example, the picture of the China Eastern Airlines advertisement mentioned above was uploaded into ATLAS.ti. Once the image is in the software, I was able to highlight a specific area of the image and code it. This process allowed me to link insights from any form of media or any aspect of my research. The data is then easily searchable and network maps can be generated to show linkages between concepts. While my data is comprehensive, there are limitations to this research.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the cautions offered by Hsu (2000) and Ong (1999) mentioned in Chapter Two about the proper framing (migration is not only a 'to the United States' event) and contextualization (assumptions about Chinese migration vary markedly from American Migration), one must also be cognizant of differences that exist in conducting field research in China and limitations of language and cultural understanding by the researcher that can limit the study. For example, *guanxi* and *mianzi* are two of the more commonly discussed cultural norms in China. *Guanxi* is often explained as being related to the western notion of relationships or networks. In China, *guanxi* is about these things, but it is a more intricate and nuanced concept. For example, Bian (1997)

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without interruption. Further, one of the primary screening venues was in a Yunnan provincial government building.

offers a detailed investigation of not just the absence or presence of the phenomenon, but how "strong ties" vary in particular ways from "weak ties."

Mianzi is similar to the western notion of 'face' – as in 'to save face'. Again, the western concept is similar but not as nuanced. In China individuals will go to great lengths to protect or insulate *mianzi*. For example, lacking proper etiquette at a meal or seat selection in a meeting could result in the loss of *mianzi* and strained relationships. In an effort to accommodate both Western clients as well as Chinese clients, a factory that I had previously visited while in China, had two conference rooms. Each was set up according to the norms of the respective cultures; the Chinese styled room had the chairs along the perimeter of the room with no table present. The Western styled room had a large table in the center of the room with chairs at the table (see Appendix 7 for photos). The firm has the two differently styled rooms so that they would be able to cater to clients of each culture, as to avoid offending their clients and thus saving face or *mianzi*. Because of their importance in Chinese culture, it is not surprising that both g*uanxi* and *mianzi* limited my study in the process of recruitment and response bias.

As an outsider with limited *guanxi,* it is likely that my ability to recruit participants was in some ways compromised. I was new to the area and had limited or no established networks or relationships from which to recruit. The use of Respondent Driven Sampling helped to reduce this limitation as I was not relying solely on my network, but rather the network of each participant. However, the lack of a personal network likely affected participation.

Just as the factory with the two culturally specific meeting rooms described above tried to be sensitive to their clients in an effort to save face, I too worked diligently to be sensitive to *mianzi*. During the interviews I was acutely aware that the participants may be susceptible to social desirability response bias with respect to questions about themselves and also about questions related to China. Not wanting to lose face, especially to an unfamiliar foreigner, participants are likely to respond with face saving responses as opposed to the truth. While response bias is a threat to all studies, the importance of *mianzi* in Chinese culture makes it more likely to be a problem. In an effort to reduce the affects of social desirability response bias I tried to build rapport and trust with the participants. I would leverage my experience in living and working in the Chinese culture to develop the relationship before asking potentially sensitive questions. For example I would discuss family (mine and theirs) as in China ones family is very important and asking about a person's family is a sign of interest and respect. Despite my efforts to build rapport, it is likely that some participants were still hesitant to provide me with some details or offered socially desirable responses instead of honest answers.

While I am not an expert in all of the ways in which field research in China may vary from research conducted in the United States, I am aware of most differences and perhaps most importantly that differences do in fact exist. Further, it should be noted that in addition to the way in which field work is conducted, interpretation of the data collected must also be contextualized.

Bohley Hubbard, Adams and Whitten (2008) provide one example of how values and therefore responses may be rooted in historical philosophers followed by many Chinese; “Both Lao Tsu and Confucius were less concerned about finding the truth and more concerned about finding the way. These moral values express themselves in the Chinese management styles and impacts market research. Chinese managers seem to be more concerned with the process more than the goal” (p. 42). Research that was conducted by Lin (2006) on cross cultural variation of survey responses shows that Chinese respondents were less likely to select extreme values on survey scales, or overstating their preference for an object. These two examples of how responses may vary by culture speak to the importance of considering culture when interpreting results. Knowing that response choice can vary because of culture, I was sensitive to this lamination while designing, implementing and analyzing my research. Using depth-interviews allowed me to probe and ask follow-up questions when I sensed that the participant was seeking a middle ground. Transcribing, coding and analyzing while still in the field allowed me to identify and investigate patterns of centeredness and adjust the line of inquiry to address the issue if and when it emerged.

Finally, I am a native speaker of English and have limited competency in Mandarin. During my interviews, if I noticed that a participant was having difficulty in explaining something or expressing themselves in English, I offered that they say it in Chinese and I would later have it translated. While this did happen, it was far more common that they referenced the translation dictionary on their phone or computer rather than leave me to do the translating. Thus, my lack of fluency in Mandarin could

have been a serious limitation had I attempted to conduct interviews in this language; however, it is likely that this affected the ability of some participants to express complex ideas fully, but it did not seem to affect the flow of the interviews.

This chapter presented an introduction to Kunming, the site of the research project as well as the details of how the research was conducted. It included information on the research methods, data analysis and the limitations of the study. The next chapter presents the findings from this research project.

Chapter Four: Findings about Returnees to Kunming

Introduction

In this chapter I present the major findings from my research and demonstrate how the participants' explanations and rationales for return were varied and often deviated from the economic theories. While each participant had expressed his or her own mix of explanations, several themes had emerged during the interviews and these themes are taken up in the major sections that follow. First however, the economic theories of migration along with the age, period and cohort effects framework, and the concepts of virtual return migration and transnationalism are reviewed briefly because they are referenced throughout this chapter as I compare and contrast the participants' explanations for their return migration decisions and established theories of this phenomenon. Following this review four case studies are provided to contextualize the findings that are discussed in this chapter.

Review of Relevant Analysis Tools

A neo-classical economist or demographer would argue that the reason that the participants in this study had returned to Kunming was because they were rational actors who, having made the cost benefit analysis comparing wage differentials, the likelihood of securing a job, and the costs associated with the migration, found that moving back to Kunming would maximize economic returns. The mechanism that would have instigated this migration was the geographical differences in supply of and demand for labor.

Building on some of the main principles of the neo-classic perspective, new economics of labor migration theory seeks to explain migration decisions as family-level risk aversion and capital obtainment strategies. In this case, scholars would have concluded that returning to Kunming was the best economic choice for the participants' families. They would have noted that diversifying employment types and sources of capital between family members reduces the risk to the family unit, in that if loss occurs it only affects the one member of the family employed in that sector rather than the entire family.

Standing in contrast to the individual/family actor rationale employed by neo-classical theory and new economics of labor migration theory, dual labor market theory shifts the emphasis of explanation from the push factors of limited home market opportunities to the pull factors of weak and strong national economies interacting in a global economic system. Specifically, four characteristics (structural inflation, motivational problems, economic dualism, and demography of labor supply) of advanced industrial societies are credited with creating the steady demand for immigrant labor into their economies. Returnees, it would be argued, were drawn back to Kunming by great macroeconomic forces that make employment in China at the present time, and Kunming in particular, a better option than the country in which they were living.

In addition to these three theories, the age, period, and cohort framework is another analytical tool that could be employed to analyze the responses of the participants in this study. This framework helps to remind us to not only investigate the

role of a participants' age, the period in which they lived and the cohort to which they belong, but also how these elements interact. Because of the many discrete episodes that have had a significant effect on China's transformation, this framework is a helpful tool in analyzing the data but should not be used in isolation any more than the three theories above should be.

Furthermore, the concepts of virtual migration and transnationalism can also play a role in helping to explain migration processes. Technological innovations, from the compass to the internet, continue to have an impact on the migratory process. However, the more recent innovations have created the possibility of virtual migration or the elimination of the need to physically move from place to place in order to experience each destination. In this dissertation the concept of virtual migration has been expanded to include and investigate the notion of virtual *return* migration, and the data below suggest that it is a useful concept in understanding the migration process of the participants that *did* return to Kunming even though they could have stayed abroad.

Technology is not only allowing for virtual return migration, it is also allowing for the possibility of transnationalism, or physically living in many spaces simultaneously, rather than conceptualizing one's home as here or there. In the analysis below, it is clear that some of the participants are living lives no longer rooted in a single place, but instead, are living in multiple locations at the same time.

As argued in Chapter One, the process of return migration is complicated and requires a constellation approach, drawing on many tools for explanation. Throughout this chapter, these concepts in concert with my conceptual map presented in Chapter

One, will be leveraged to help answer my research questions. Additionally, several new ideas about what motivated the participants in this study to return to Kunming that had emerged in the process of conducting my research will be presented.

Case Studies

The process of conducting in-depth interviews allows for the development of rich case studies that are provided here to more fully highlight the themes and patterns described in this chapter. As all interviews were conducted under the condition of anonymity, pseudonyms and modified location names have been used in the following cases.

The purpose of the following case about Ms. Zhang is to provide an example of the struggle that some returnees endured as they tried to stay abroad. Some of the participants were very interested in extending their stay abroad, transitioning from their role as a student to an employee and in some cases a citizen in the host country. While for others, there was never any question as to whether or not they would return to China. However, whichever is the case, it should be noted, that because all of the people that I had spoken to for this project have in fact returned, it was sometimes difficult to assess whether their decision to return was actually their preference or a consequence of the host country's policy, legal limitations or their inability to find employment.

This case offers some insight as to the challenges faced by those that desperately wanted to stay abroad but ultimately did not. In this case, the inability to find employment that would allow Ms. Zhang to transition from her limited student visa to a work visa was the cause for her return.

Case 1: Ms. Zhang, Age: 26, Financial Analyst at a Large State Owned Company

Ms. Zhang is an ambitions finance major that graduated from the prestigious Sun Yat-Sen University – one of China's 'key' universities. Before graduating in 2007, she had studied abroad in Britain during her senior year. Enjoying the "western culture" and finding the study of finance to be "more advanced" than at her school, she was determined to earn her MBA overseas. Perceiving that American MBA admissions officers place importance on work experience she took a job at one of China's largest banks; the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). While working at ICBC she took the GMAT and TOEFL and applied to eight schools gaining admission to six of them. The list of schools included: Brandies, Syracuse, Bentley College, Boston College, University of Arizona, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Less than one year after completing her undergraduate program in China, she had enrolled in UIUC's one-year MBA program which started in May 2008. She referred to UIUC as her "dream school" arguing that the "program is excellent" and that she "like[s] its culture." Upon graduating in May 2009 she was emphatic that she did not want to return to China explaining that she was:

> …so happy and so satisfied to study there. There is a lot for me to learn and the environment there is better. I think in the U.S. is more independent, more free, more freedom. And actually I feel the finance is much more advanced. My major is corporate finance. Investment acquisitions, something like that, so I really want to stay.

With respect to the "environment," she was referring to the physical environment, as in air quality. When asked about her reference to being "more independent, more free" she was referring to her ability to make decisions in her own self interest, not constrained by the influence of her parents or friends. In her words: "I mean you can do, you can be the person that you want. You don't care what people talk about me. People don't, they will not care so much. There is not so much social pressure." Despite her positive experiences in school and desire to stay in the U.S.A., she returned to China in September 2009, four months after graduating from UIUC. The following section offers a detailed account of her efforts to gain employment in the U.S.A. over the course of these four months.

Shortly after arriving on campus she started to experience first-hand the difficulties that lay ahead in finding a job in the U.S.A. She recounted how the financial crisis emerged in September 2008 just before the school's Career Fair leaving most of the exhibitors passing out corporate materials but not job applications. Most firms had already instituted hiring freezes. In preparation for the tightening job market Ms. Zhang made many efforts to increase her marketability. She earned her Chartered Financial Analyst certificate, passed the Sarbanes–Oxley exam and practiced her interview skills with mock-interviews offered by her university's career center. Her aunt had even arranged for Ms. Zhang to practice phone interviews with the human resources staff at the company where she works in Paris. Despite all of this preparation and effort, Ms. Zhang was not able to secure a job before she had graduated. She spoke about maintaining her "courage" as she faced the prospect of having to leave the U.S.A., as

without a job, her visa would soon expire. Given her interest in finance, she and another Chinese classmate drove to New York City in hopes of finding work there.

She was able to stay at a friend of her parent's home in New Jersey, where she continued her preparation and job search. She describes her time and activities as being: "…quite tough. I went to every career fair I can get to and I apply to every job. Every day when I woke up, I open up the computer as not to eat breakfast or something. I think it was a very good experience; because you want something very much and you work, make every effort to get it." However, these efforts paid few dividends as she was only able to find unpaid internships and part-time work, nothing that would offer her the work visa that she needed to legally stay in the U.S.A. At times she was working several 'jobs' at the same time with the hope that a more permanent position would become available. For example, she was a research assistant to a professor at NYU, did some interning at a boutique investment bank that was trying to enter the Chinese market and tutored undergrads at various universities around the city.

Then came what she had thought would be her break. A financial analyst position became available at her alma mater; UIUC. She had former professors write personal letters of recommendations and increased her preparations for the interview. She conducted mock interviews and spent every morning practicing her English with the New Concept English program that has you record yourself as you speak in front of a mirror. The interview went well. However, two weeks after returning to New York, she learned that she was the number two candidate out of the 100 applicants. She recounted receiving the news: "The number one is a local. You know she is a

professional. She already worked in this field for three years and they say I don't have this kind of experience. So at that time I cried. I am very sad. I think this is the only opportunity, so close."

Shortly after missing out on the UIUC opportunity she endured a similar experience with a financial analyst position at a paper company in New York. "They called me, I also rank number two there. The first, number one, the guy also had experience; two years. So, I feel very sad." The lack of success that she was experiencing was common among her peers. "After September began, I feel a little bit panic because many of my friends they just go back. Before that we have some friends go to New York together so we just, you know, encourage each other. We must have competence, we must get job there. We kinda lose competence." She became more discouraged as her visa would soon expire and she was faced with the dilemma of choosing to continue her job search in the U.S.A. or return to China where her friends, who had already returned, were reporting success in finding jobs and the annual university recruitment season was about to begin. She describes the process of her five friends returning to China as follows: "They live in Flushing, New York together. And then they decided to go back home. So we send them back home one by one… …[They] got lots of interviews and they are from very good, big companies." After a period of reflection and continued lack of success, Ms. Zhang decides to return to China.

> I feel like I am in a lonely, like [in a] corner at that time. Cause I lived in Flushing myself and I don't have much friends to struggle together for job. So I

> think back in China many girls of my age have a stable and decent job and started to move forward in their life. So it is very, very big. So I struggle for a long, long, long time to make a decision. That is the first decision that I feel like I am growing up. I kind of making my own decision. I just have to be responsible for my own life. So yea, so it is very hard. After that I came back.

Upon returning to China, Ms. Zhang secured several job offers from a range of firms including Deloitte - an international consulting firm, a small Chinese private equity firm and the large State Owned Enterprise where she now works.

Moving from a case that illustrates the challenges of deciding to return to China the next three cases focus on the three key findings of this dissertation. In the next case Ms. Li's story about her connectedness to Kunming is used to highlight what it means to be *jia xiang bao.*

Case 2: Ms. Li, Age 35, Lead Representative at a Foreign Trade and Promotion Office

Ms. Li is a self-described *jia xiang bao*. In fact, she is one of only two of the participants in this study that actually used the specific term. Many others described the behavior of being a home town baby, but Ms. Li used the phrase as if it was a part of her identity. Much in the same way that she might have said that she was Chinese. She even took the time to write it down for me in my notebook. This is not to say that Ms. Li is not worldly or not interested in traveling to other places. It simply means that, given the option, she wants to live in Kunming, despite coming at a great emotional cost to her, as her husband lives and works in Shanghai.

A few years after graduating from Yunnan University, the best university in the province, Ms. Li was inspired by her employer at the time, a Dutch firm, to apply to study abroad in the Netherlands. While there, she earned two degrees: a one year bachelor degree as well as a Master of Science degree in environment and renewable energy management. Before returning to China she spent three months in a prestigious internship at the United Nations in New York.

Upon returning to China she went to live in Shanghai with her husband and began a job search there. But after a short while, despite better economic opportunities, she returned to Kunming. She explained he decision as follows:

> But the reason actually I came back to Kunming? Of course, Shanghai is a big cosmopolitan city. You can have more opportunities, job opportunities and economic is much blooming than Kunming, but climate is not as nice as that in Kunming. So also my parents are living in Kunming, so is my child. I have one boy, three years old. He's taken care of by my parents. So that is the reason I decided to come back to Kunming.

Later she went on to offer additional reasons for wanting to return to Kunming:

> Yeah there are some opportunities [in Shanghai] but finally I decide to come back here because the climate is nice and it's not that busy as Shanghai. Actually I don't like that busy city. It is too big and very busy, very crowded and everybody have to run very quickly to go to office. I don't like that busy life.

This case offers great insight as to what it means to be *jia xiang bao* and the commitment home town babies like Ms. Li have in returning to Kunming. Ms. Li is

faced with at least three destination options. First, she could have stayed abroad, which she mildly considered: "When I graduated if I can find a job maybe I will stay there [in the Netherlands] but I think I will come back to China because my husband is here and my family is here. So actually my idea is to come back to China." Second, she could have lived in Shanghai. This option was a serious possibility, as the previous quote suggests, and the fact that when she initially returned to China she did in fact stay in Shanghai for several months looking for work. Finally, the third option was to move back to Kunming which was her ultimate decision.

While staying abroad was an option, it was clear that she struggled most with deciding between Shanghai and Kunming. The decision was complicated as she had family in both cities – her husband in Shanghai and her parents in Kunming. She, of course, could have moved her son to Shanghai or have left him with her parents in Kunming as it is not at all uncommon for children to be raised by their grandparents in China. But unlike the economic theories of migration might suggest, Ms. Li chose the climate, slower pace of life and less crowded atmosphere of Kunming over the economically superior Shanghai.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the concept of *jia xiang bao* is a complicated mix of factors that seem to trump the conventional economic rationales that are thought to explain migration decisions such as Ms. Li's.

In addition to being a *jia xiang bao*, Kunmingers often returned because of the opportunity that Kunming offers for returnees to be the big fish in the little sea. This

next case about Mr. Peng highlights the importance of being the boss to some, and how Kunming is a good fit for these individuals.

Case 3: Mr. Peng, Age: 36, Part Owner of Real Estate Development Firm

For the returnees that were more entrepreneurial in spirit, Kunming offered a unique blend of market size and opportunity that attracted their attention. Specifically Kunming was a relatively large city with over six million people and was in the process of being transformed from a sleepy capital of one of the poorest provinces in China to being China's gateway to Southeast Asia. In short, if a returnee wanted to return to China to run their own business, to be the boss, then Kunming was a better destination than many of the major cities on the east coast. After spending four years in New Zealand, Mr. Peng returned to China wanting to be a boss. Mr. Peng went to New Zealand with a plan, he wanted to become an accountant and obtain a permanent residency card. He chose New Zealand primarily because he felt that it would be faster and cheaper with about the same outcome than going to the U.S.A. or the U.K. He noted: "The accounting system in New Zealand is about same as U.K. and similar to U.S. It is good pathway and it is cheaper. If I study in U.K. for four years it cost more so that is why I choose New Zealand." He had also noted that the path to immigration was faster in New Zealand than in the U.K. He left China with an offer of admission to a University in hand. However, once he arrived in New Zealand, he quickly found a job at an accounting firm. He rationalized that getting overseas work experience was valuable and if he worked for a few years and obtained his permanent residency, then

the pursuit of the chartered accountant degree would be cheaper as tuition costs would be lower at the university as a resident.

The work experience was valuable, but perhaps not in the way he had originally thought. He appreciated the work experience because he knew that it would be valued by the Chinese marketplace once he returned. However, what he had really learned from working in New Zealand was how the scale of the economies are different between New Zealand and China and also what it meant to be an employee. Mr. Peng described the situation as follows: "…but unfortunately when I work for the accounting firm I feel I little but frustrating cause the business environment in New Zealand is not so exciting. Just so small. Doing the accounting things just like sitting on the computer all day and doesn't meet my imagination." Having decided to change course and return to China without attending school, Mr. Peng wanted to build up his skill set beyond accounting in an effort to ensure his marketability once he returned to China. He did this by becoming a certified wine professional and learning to play golf.

The added skills paid off as it was easy for him to find a job when he returned. He explained his success upon returning as follows: "I got a job in Shanghai, right then it's just so easy. I got three job offers right away, because not many people like me, I have such wide qualifications. Just get me so popular, easy to get the job." He attributes his ease with finding employment to his overseas work experience as well as his uniqueness of being a certified wine professional. A designation that he asserts is very unique in China going as far as claiming that he is the only person in Yunnan with such a title.

While finding employment was not difficult, Mr. Peng quickly encountered the same despair that he had met with in New Zealand – being employed is not the same as being the boss. He described it in this way: "…I find in the big city like Shanghai and Beijing, of course you have opportunity, but of course the opportunity there is only for work for someone else. You know you can easily get a good job and a high payment and you know an international company, corporations, things like that. But you always work for someone else. It is hard for doing your own things." It is because of this desire to be the boss that had led Mr. Peng to return to Kunming. As will be discussed in detail below, Kunming offers those that want to be the boss and easier pathway to being the big fish in a little sea. Or as Mr. Peng noted: "Cause in Shanghai you probably small parts like in big machine, but here you can do something."

In this last case, the variation between age groups is addressed. Specifically Ms. Liu's story helps to articulate how much China has changed and as a consequence how growing up in different periods in China may affect a returnee's level of ambition.

Case 4: Ms. Liu, Age: 50, Part-time worker at a Foreign Trade Office

When asked about the job she chose after graduating from college, Ms. Liu is quick to point out that when people of her age, that were lucky enough to have attended college graduated, they did not have a choice in which job they would take. Nor would they apply for jobs or even express a formal preference for the type of job that they were interested in. In her words: "At that time, I was assigned [to a work unit] by the government." This type of rigid work unit allocation was emblematic of the period in which Ms. Liu came of age in China. Her given name Xiao Hong or 'Red Dawn' is also

a symbol of the time. Many Chinese born during the Cultural Revolution or shortly thereafter were given names that were intended to demonstrate their parents support (real or implied) for the revolution.

Ms. Liu studied in the U.K. for two years earning her master's degree there. When asked why she had returned to China, she offered the typical responses of a *jia xiang bao*: family, weather, relationships etc. But when presses, she adds another reason that is largely limited to people of her age cohort and that is that her overseas experience was funded by the government and returning to China was a condition of the scholarship. She offered that "I got the scholarship and I promised I would come back again." These examples of Ms. Liu's experiences are typical of her generation. However they stand in stark contrast to those born after 1980. Later in this chapter the concept of *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition' will be discussed as a finding that delineates members from the different age groups based on the different China that they have grown up knowing.

Overview of Key Findings

This section will provide a brief introduction to the three key findings from this dissertation research that will be the focus of this chapter. To provide a context in which the findings can be viewed, this section is followed by a description of the return migration process which includes a discussion of why some people want to emigrate from China, the role of undergraduate overseas education in the migration process and the destination selection process of the participants in this study. The actual process of return will be covered as part of the key findings.

The first of the key findings to be discussed is the concept of *jia xiang bao.* Perhaps the most salient explanation for return is one for which a term has been developed to describe the behavior: the notion that Kunmingers are wed to Kunming. They are, as the local saying goes, "*jia xiang bao*" or "hometown babies". The reasons that Kunmingers are likely to return to Kunming is due to an intricate web of factors such as geographic proximity to family, localization of professional networks, access to regional food specialties, mild weather, and good air quality. Because of its vast geographic size and cultural diversity things like food and weather patterns in China vary greatly from region to region. Traveling from one area to another within China often feels like traveling to a different country where one might feel out of place because they are not accustom to the local norms. It is important to note that the *jia xiang bao* explanation cuts across the first of my two research questions, namely why do people decide to return to China and why do they decide to return to Kunming.

The discussion of *jia xiang bao* will include an introduction to China's *hukou*, or household registration system, which is often thought to constrain physical mobility within China. However, as will be shown, the participants in this study did not identify their *hukou* as a restriction on their mobility. In addition to the *hukou* system, the importance of Kunming's designation as the City of Eternal Spring in attracting returnees will be explained and the limited role in migration decisions of *XiBu DaKaiFa,* a national economic policy designed to promote development in the western region of China, will be addressed.

A second major theme that emerged that leans more towards an economic rather than a cultural explanation for return is Kunming's 'underdeveloped' status as a 'Tier 2' or 'Tier 3' city. According to some participants, this presents unique opportunities for returnees as they see the possibility of obtaining 'big fish in the little sea' status. When weighing the options of settling in a developed 'Tier 1' city, such as Beijing or Shanghai, the level of competition and perceived sophistication of the regulatory environment present in Tier 1 cities was noted by some as a barrier to settlement there.

Finally, the third major theme, and the one most related to the third research question about the two cohorts in the study concerns the way in which the returnee funded their original emigration, which turns out to have a strong cohort effect. Earlier emigrants were often funded through government programs and were obligated to return while younger ones were 'self funded,' receiving support from their parents or extended family and had no contractual obligation to return. In addition to the funding mechanism, or perhaps because of it, the motivation for overseas study has also changed. Older respondents explained that they left China out of necessity while the younger ones, it appears, sojourn out of 'curiosity' - as one older respondent put it. The term *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition,' will be introduced as a way to delineate the generations.

Before moving to these three specific findings, I would like to offer a more holistic view of the return migration process. As noted in Chapter Two, in order to have a *return* migration, there must be an initial act of emigration. The following sections will provide the context in which my analysis of return migration is situated, a stage in a

process that is beyond the truncated framework of ‘migration, settlement and minority group formation’ as envisioned by Castles and Miller (2003).

The Arc of Return Migration

Getting Out

In his book, *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China*, John Pomfret details his account of being one of the early exchange students to China. It was the early 1980s, and China was still recovering from decades of Maoism and slowly transitioning to a market economy. Despite China’s upward trajectory, going abroad was still the goal of many Chinese students. Pomfret describes the role he played in assisting his classmate in their delicate task of fulfilling their dream:

> Most of the Chinese hoped to study overseas. That fall I edited fifteen college applications on behalf of my new Chinese friends to Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, University of Chicago, and Stanford. The applications were hand-carried to Hong Kong and mailed there to avoid censors, spies, and jealous colleagues who with a word could derail the plans of a lifetime. (p. 11)

Later Pomfret chronicles a classmate’s success: “…Song boarded a plane for the first time and flew for sixteen hours from Beijing to Dubai to Rome, becoming the first member of his class to realize another dream of their generation: going abroad” (p. 115).

Since Pomfret’s description of the early 1980s, China has experienced dramatic changes, but the dream of going abroad has endured. This is evidenced by the continued, rapidly increasing numbers of Chinese going abroad (178,900 in 2008,

229,300 in 2009) and confirmed by my participants (Jiang & Ma, 2011). Expressing her persistence in the mid 1990s, one participant in my study recalled "I keep applying for scholarship outside of China. So in 1998 I was granted a half scholarship by Asian Institute of Technology. So I go there for one year." Another participant explained this persistence by saying that "Americans have this 'American dream,' Chinese have this 'going abroad dream'." To confirm these sentiments, I asked a university instructor if student's mindsets had changed since she had graduated and pursued her dream of going abroad a decade ago. She replied: "No I think that kind of mindset keeps even stronger now. All of my students, if they have that kind of material resources that support them to go abroad, they will definitely want to go." In these comments, and in the literature, one finds that going abroad remains a dream for many; however, the age at which they are going abroad is starting to change. Historically, high school and undergraduate students accounted for only 30 percent of the students going abroad with the remaining majority enrolled in masters and PhD degree programs. This ratio is already in transition and is expected to be the reverse in the coming years with 70 percent of the students going abroad being enrolled in high school and undergraduate programs (Ning, 2011).

Almost all of the participants in my study went overseas to obtain formal educational degrees. Most went for post-graduate masters degrees, while a few obtained doctorates or undergraduate degrees. As noted above, of those that go overseas for education from China, going for a post-graduate degree has been typical. The decision to go overseas for an undergraduate degree was less common but is a rapidly increasing

phenomenon. Because it is a rapidly growing segment of the Chinese students abroad, and reflected in my findings, the following section will address this phenomenon.

Undergraduate Overseas Education.

Because of the setbacks to the education system caused by the Cultural Revolution, including huge teacher and administrator shortages, undergraduate institutions in China are gradually reaching international levels of competitiveness. Post-graduate education, however, lags behind, leaving overseas institutions as the best viable option for those that can obtain it. This explains why most Chinese students to date have ventured overseas for graduate studies. Given the increasing quality of undergraduate colleges in China, why has there been an increase in undergraduate students studying abroad?

The increase in overseas undergraduate education is a result of many factors, some economic and others psychological. Rapid increases in personal wealth are only now making it financially possible for families to afford to send their children abroad for studies at this level. This new wealth has created dramatic changes in who goes overseas, where they are going and how long they stay. As access to overseas education is no longer limited to funding by the government, a broader range of students are going abroad. For instance, previously, because of the limited funding, the process was very competitive, constraining access to highly qualified or well-connected students. Today, however, self-funding by the children of the growing middle class allows them to individually select which institutions they want to attend. Students now only need to be competitive in the admissions offices of the schools where they apply, instead of at both

admissions offices and at Chinese government funding offices. Since they are paying for their education out of personal savings, they are no longer reliant on government funding and beholden to their restrictions. For example one participate in my study offers the following self-evaluation as to why he wants to study abroad but why the U.S.A. will not be a likely place for him: "I think the U.S. is the best one for the quality of education. I think the U.S. is the best in the world. And also the economics, education, culture is good. But the tuition is very expensive. And I am not a good student so I think I can not apply a scholarship. So I think I choose England and Australia." This decoupling of funding from the state has also affected the decision of students to return in that most government funded students were required to return, and external funders like foundations often strongly encouraged return. However, with self-funding, the decision rests with the family and/or with the students themselves so that now students can remain abroad at their discretion though affected by immigration policies, laws and economic conditions of sending and receiving countries.

In addition to the changes in funding sources, other factors have also contributed to undergraduate overseas education. As China continues to transition to a market-style economy, the labor market has become more competitive. As a quarter of last year's graduates have yet to find jobs, many students see an overseas degree as a point of differentiation that will help them in this tough labor market. Another reason to go overseas is to avoid the very stressful Chinese college entrance process. The *gaokao*, or "college entrance exam," is a three day, universal, annual exam that is largely the sole determining factor of which university a student will attend. The single score from this

one exam, which is made public, determines the fate of roughly 10 million high school seniors each year. The singularity of opportunity combined with the stresses of expectations on millions of only children results in a few cases of suicide each year. In a particularly dreadful case in 2011, it was reported that a student committed suicide after having arrived fifteen minutes late to the test site and was denied entrance by the exam supervisor (Chang, 2011). Finally, although far less common, attending college may be a way to alleviate boredom or satisfy intellectual curiosity of *haiou*. One of the participants in my study is a mother living with her son overseas while he was attending college. Rather than sit idle, she enrolled in an undergraduate program too. Yet the decision about when to go overseas for further education – as graduate or undergraduate students – is preceded by the decision about where to go. The next section explains the destination choices of the participants in my study.

The Overseas Destination

As noted in Chapter Three, the participants in my study lived in 13 different countries with some people living in more than one destination. The destinations were as follows, with the number of people that had lived in that country in parentheses: U.S.A. (10), U.K. (4), France (3), Thailand (3), Australia (2), Canada (2), Netherlands (2), Israel (1), Japan (1), Korea (1), New Zealand (1), Philippines (1), and Switzerland (1). Despite the wide range of locations, the selection of destinations seems to fall into three broad categories: being strategic, leveraging networks and seeking amenities.

Strategic issues were typically related to cost and pathways to permanent residence. In some cases individuals had specific preferences of a place to study abroad

but were unable or unwilling to pursue that destination because of the real or perceived costs involved. One participant explained, "…in the beginning I wanted to go to Canada but it was like too expensive, they asked you to come up with what to say 400 grand, like RMB [RenMinBi – the official currency of Chinese]." Participants had to weigh options and trade-off considerations, as evident in the following comment: "My main purpose to New Zealand was to be a chartered accountant, O.K. Cause, the accounting system in New Zealand is about same as U.K. and similar to U.S. It is good path way and it is cheaper. If I study in U.K. for four years it cost more so that is why I choose New Zealand." In a few cases participants had applied for and received scholarships from specific institutions. In most of these cases, these were the only places to which they had applied, so the location decision was solely a consequence of the scholarship offer. For some, having access to permanent residency was important, as seen in the following statement: "…another major point is that this job can help me to have a permanent residence in New Zealand." In addition to these kinds of strategic issues, various networks had an influence on destination decisions.

In many cases the decision resulted from interactions with key people, such as the referral from a relative: "You know my brother [she meant cousin], his father worked in Japan, he advised me that Nagasaki is a good place." Friends were also commonly cited as being important in participants' networks: "I have [a] friend in [the] Netherlands his family is also very kind. This [is] also why I choose to study in Netherland rather than other country." More formal sources like student placement centers also played a role: "One time [I] went to [an] education center which was free

and they recommend that place." In a few cases the participant was following a spouse that was transferred to the location or a child attending school in the location, as this participant explained: "But most the reason for my son, my son want to go to university to study by himself. I [went] with him." For some participants, it was their network that most influenced their decision-making, but for others it was the lifestyle of the destination.

Amenities of a specific location, in particular, played a role in choosing a destination. Almost always they related to the natural environment: "… the scenery is beautiful the air is pure some times when I was there I was so moved by the beauty of nature, especially I like the ocean. The place where I stay is Vancouver Island. Lots of water and big trees, I like trees." In some cases access to tourist destinations played a role: "I am also a person who like traveling. So in the U.S. every summer break, winter break, I didn't come back to China I just go traveling and I take my driver license one month after arrive in U.S. So I just go traveling with my friends, we drive. We go Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Florida and Yellowstone, also New York, Chicago." Regardless of the reason that they chose their destination the participants all eventually returned to China.

Moving from the analysis of the outbound migration process, the following section provides the details of the actual process of return addressing why the participants in my study decided to return to China, why they chose Kunming as their destination within China and differences that were seen between age groups.

Coming Back

My original research questions treated the decision to return to China and to return to Kunming as two separate queries. For a few of my participants, they were mutually exclusive, and sequential, but for the vast majority, these decisions were intricately linked. I had hypothesized that their line of thought would be: 'I want to go back to China, and in what city should I live?' But instead, it was more often a case of: 'I am going back home to Kunming, China.' It is worth noting, as argued in Chapter One, that my analysis only intervenes in these individual's migration processes at a specific point in time. What is being treated here as a destination may, in fact, at some time in the future, be a point of departure to other locales. This section will discuss the participants' explanations for returning to China in general as opposed to the specific decision to return to Kunming because some participants did explain their decision-making with reference to China. The data analysis reveals two main themes that stimulated general return to China: the role of belonging to a group and external structural forces.

The participants offered common stories of the immigrant experience that relates to the theme of being Chinese and belonging to this group. The language barrier, for one, precluded them from fully engaging in the local culture where they studied or worked abroad, or they tended to spend time with other Chinese, not people from the local country, when they lived elsewhere. Cultural practices often were the source of feeling different from others in the host country and for the boundaries they and other

Chinese students established. This woman, for example, noted different customs around sharing food:

> Participant: Because I live in a house with a lot of students from different countries some America, United Kingdom, India and we have a big kitchen, we cook together. When I cook, I like cook a lot of food and share with others, other students live in the same house. But when I feel hungry and I see they were eating something and I want to eat but they don't want.
>
> Researcher: They don't want to share?
>
> Participant: Yeah they don't want to share. I know Chinese people prefer share food or share things with others but I don't think western people like that. Sometimes I think we are good friends I share my food with you, why you not?

In some cases, the participants thought that they were going to countries more similar to China and therefore the cultural differences would not be so great. However, in the following example, the participant expressed how she purposefully chose Japan as a destination, expecting that the cultural differences would be more limited than had she gone to a Western country but assimilation was still not obtainable despite her long duration of stay in the country: "…I can feel I was not part of them. Even I stay there for 4 years and my husband stay there for 9 years, we feel that we are not close, we are guest over there."

In addition to these examples of attempts at group participation, return was sometimes necessitated by existing or emerging membership in a group, specifically the process of family formation.

In several cases people returned because they were either getting married or already had a spouse that was internationally immobile. As one female participant said, "… my fiancé don't speak any English. So he don't want to move abroad." Clearly the role of family as discussed here is important and is related to *jia xiang bao* highlighted in the discussion about returning to Kunming to follow, but the distinction is that the family formation described here only necessitates a return to China, while in the latter discussion it requires return specifically to Kunming. The woman, who had recently returned from living overseas, with a fiancé that has not been overseas and doesn't speak English, is saying that they don't want to go abroad, but is not restricting their mobility within China. *Jia xiang bao* mobility, as discussed below, is limited to returning to Kunming.

The importance of belonging is captured in a common expression that is uttered by returnees in an effort to explain why one would return to China from overseas: "*Hao shan, hao shui, hao ji mo. Hao zang, hao luan, hao re nao.*" It means that an overseas location may have beautiful mountains, beautiful sea, but for a Chinese person it is lonely (boring). On the other hand, they recognize that China is very dirty, very disorderly, but it is lively (exciting). The essence is that one place may have aesthetic benefits, but they are not as important as the ability to be a part of an active community or relevant group.

While the importance of belonging to a group was one reason for general return to China, external structural forces also played a role. In many cases people may have wanted to stay abroad, but they encountered obstacles that were outside their individual

ability to control or overcome. Reflecting on her time in the U.S.A., one participant expressed this sense of a lack of access as follows: “Yes it is a good country, there are lots of opportunities. I mean it is a good stage for a play, but you stand so far away from the center you cannot play a part there.” In this quote one can feel the struggle she experienced in being kept at arm’s length from the action. She went on to express how she felt that not being a citizen without direct access to the labor market was a constraint to her staying in the U.S.A.: “I don’t have this Green Card or permanent residency. You see this opportunity there but you cannot get it just because you are outsider, foreigner. But I think it is easily to understand because they protect their citizens.” Obtaining legal working status through mechanisms like a Green Card is a difficult process, but even if one was obtained, the economic condition of the host country also plays a role in employment opportunities and migration decisions.

In several cases, participants graduated into a declining economic market, making employment exceeding difficult in the host country. The tightening economic market was exacerbated by visa requirements for international workers. Here a participant describes the challenges of a rapid shift in the labor market combined with visa requirements in the U.S.A.: “It is very hard for overseas international students because, you know the financial crisis broke up in September or October in 2008 the day just before our [college in America] career fair. So there are a lot of freezes. They just don’t hire international students because they cannot provide H1B visas.” This problem was especially evident for younger recent graduates in the study than for older individuals with more established careers. This is an example of an age-period effect as

the economic crisis happened at a particular time and has affected everyone, but the effects are different based on one's age.

Another issue faced by students studying abroad is the timing of the employer recruitment season in China. Students are only eligible to participate in the recruitment season (September) that immediately follows their graduation (June). If a student is overseas during this recruitment period they forgo their opportunity to participate in it. This quote illustrates how one participant was conflicted about the possibility that she may miss her recruitment period: "China's recruitment system started in September. At September. After September beginnings I feel a little bit panic because many of my friends they just go back." The combination of the declining labor market and visa restrictions led many students to return to take advantage of the recruitment season in China including the woman just quoted.

Age and gender discrimination are two additional external structural factors that were identified as a constraining factors. As with the following participant, there can be an urgency to return home to get married. In this case the age constraint was specifically related to gender: "So they [girls] miss opportunities to form a family or something and in China there is, I feel the pressure is there if the girl is over 25. And I [feel] stronger and stronger pressure in this field [area]." In another case, the participant encountered obstacles to employment because of her age. She had returned from overseas and was re-entering the local labor force. There were expectations that a person of a certain age should hold a certain level position in an organization. I had asked her how she had found out about her current job, to which she replied: "I find it through your [my] friend

and I came here and I attended the test and they say ‘you are so old, why you came here? Maybe for some government official people from your age maybe should be the leader.’” It should be noted that in China it is the norm to have not only personal information such as your age and height on your resume but also a photograph. While this individual was directly confronted about her age, most people would not have been as their resume would be passed over by the reviews that would have age information from the resume.

Finally, another dimension of gender that was discussed was how the sending and receiving cultures varied with respect to women and men’s assumed roles. One participant shared his thoughts on gender roles when a husband and wife are considering returning to China from America and why the women are often resistant because of the gender role differences that exist in China. Specifically he said that in China, it is a more traditional society, and women are expected to be more subservient to men. Further, promiscuous behavior by the husbands is more tolerated in China than in the U.S.A. This creates a conundrum for the wife: If she stays in America to take advantage of the more favorable gender environment and overall living conditions, then the perception is that her husband will almost certainly be having an extramarital affair back in China. If she goes to China in an effort to intervene in such affairs, then she will be subjected to the less favorable gender environment and sub-par living conditions. This participant’s views show how age and gender, which are uncontrollable by the participants, can shape migration decisions.

Whether because of the role of belonging to a group or external structural forces the decision to return to China is an exceedingly complex one. The next section looks at the specific question of the decision to return to Kunming because, as noted above, returning to China and going to Kunming were one and the same for most participants.

Jia xiang bao

The most important finding in my research is the conception of Kunming's *jia xiang bao* or 'hometown babies.' The concept has far greater explanatory power than any of the economic theories of migration, virtual return migration and transnationalism that were discussed in Chapter Two.

At the start of this research I had considered how the One Child Policy may have had an effect on migration decisions. It has, but the One Child Policy and *jia xiang bao* should not be confused. First, *jia xiang bao* is bigger and multi-dimensional, whereas the One Child Policy identifies only a single reason why people would return to Kunming, i.e., to care for aging parents and grandparents as a result of the 1:2:4 phenomenon. While *jia xiang bao* does relate to family caretaking demands, it also relates to things as disparate as the weather in Kunming and local social networks. Second, there are examples of people that are not singletons that are *jia xiang bao*. Being an only child is neither a necessary, nor sufficient, condition to being *jia xiang bao*. Kunmingers return because they are *jia xiang bao*. So what does it mean to be *jia xiang bao?*

Leveraging the opportunity that in-depth interviews afforded me, I sought to understand the motivations for return to Kunming by asking about it in many ways.

This qualitative approach has yielded deeper understandings than some of the earlier survey-based quantitative work that was reviewed in Chapter Two. In general, if one were to ask a returnee, irrespective of age, why they chose to come back to Kunming it is almost certain that they will mention their family, often citing family as being the most important reason. Presented here are some typical responses:

> "Some [variety of] reasons, but family is top one."
>
> "…I and my husband, we come back here because my parents is here, my family is here. Family means the whole family, my grandfather my auntie, my uncles…"
>
> "I have family to take care of."
>
> "Like our family are here. So we can take care of parents. My parent and his parents."
>
> "My parents have always talk about me coming back and just having me close to them."
>
> "… I must stay [in] my hometown. My parents maybe need someone to help and sometimes I need them, then I must stay, they need me stay in Kunming. So I come back."

Given China's long history with the Confucius value of filial piety, it is not surprising that my participants would cite family as an important reason for return. While it may be true that participants made the decision because of family, it is also viewed as the 'right' thing to say, a social desirability reporting bias. In this quote one can sense the participant hedging about saying the socially desirable thing versus a more truthful

response: “If we live in Shanghai or Beijing we can’t take care of our parents, so here I can take care of my parents. Maybe now they can take themselves good. But the future, get old, so I can take [care of] them.” The first part of the quote is the socially desirable answer: I am coming back for my family. Anticipating a follow up of question about her parents being young and not in need of her care, she hedged by adding that her return was in anticipation of their future needs, which in this person’s case is likely to be at least 20 to 25 years away. My point is not that participants were being disingenuous or that filial piety is, in and of itself, not a sufficient reason to return to Kunming. However, my research shows that it is likely not the lone contributing factor as might be interpreted from survey response research where response choices are limited in either choice set or depth of response. Additional dimensions of *jia xiang bao* will be addressed below.

An economist might argue that the decision to return to play the role of care-taker is an economically motivated one. The returnee may have calculated the cost of hiring a care taker in lieu of providing that service directly and determined it to more efficient to provide the service directly. While this is, of course, a possibility given the labor rates in Kunming and the salary differential between working in Kunming versus overseas, it is unlikely that the calculation would favor return. I would argue that the equation is simply incomplete because the culture around caretaking for one’s family in China is fundamentally different than in many other parts of the world. It is not a question of cost; it is a sense of responsibility as expressed in the following quote by a female participant:

> And also there is problem with my family. My parents, my dad's health is deteriorating now in a wheel chair. He was not before, but now he is in a wheelchair. My mother has to take care of him all the time. Since my brother is in Beijing, I am the only one here with them. So because of them I don't think I can go. If anything happens to them there is no one. I just cannot leave my parents. That is my responsibility.

People that return to be close to family should not only be viewed as making contributions to the family because they are also directly benefiting from the close proximity to family revealing another dimension of being *jia xiang bao*. For example, many returnees were able to take advantage of family networks. Networks, whether specific to the family or not, were also important in return decision.

The concept of *guanxi*, or broadly 'relationships,' which was introduced in Chapter Three, is an exceedingly common topic when discussing China. It is an important topic and a significant amount of research has been conducted on it. Accordingly, I was not surprised to find that it had played a role in migration decisions. As one man explained: "…[Returning to Kunming] will let me to come back to my old hometown to leverage some of my old contacts and also the contacts of the family. [They] may be potentially helpful for the business you know. As you know the Chinese business is relationship driven." These comments are consistent with other research on *guanxi* in China, but the findings from this study suggest that *guanxi* may be locally constrained or limited by geographic boundaries. Specifically, a person may have many contacts and be very powerful within a broad social network, but it is likely that that

power or the utility of those relationships are limited to a specific geographical area. For example if someone in a network is a powerful real estate developer in Kunming, she can easily help that person in Kunming but will likely be of very little help to that person in Shanghai.

The geographical boundedness of social networks was evident in many participants; comments about why they returned to Kunming. For example, I was told by one participant who wanted to work in the local government about how, through a friend of her father's, she was able to receive special consideration on an important portion of the civil service application process facilitating her being hired. Part of the reason that she had returned to Kunming was because of this special opportunity. Her father's connections, although very powerful in Kunming, would not extend beyond the local government's jurisdiction. If she wanted help in getting a civil service job, her only choice was Kunming.

In another case, I was discussing the limitations of the One Child Policy with a participant. Specifically, we were talking about how she can only have one child as she does not meet any of the government specified criteria that would grant her an exemption, such as both she and her spouse having PhDs. She corrected me by saying, "I can have two children if I want." Explaining that her fiancé's parents are doctors, she explained that "If I want to have two children or more than two, we can have certificate that we have twins or something." She concluded the discussion by saying that "If I work in Beijing, I cannot do this. Life in China is very dark." This participant introduced me to the term *qianguize* which she defined as meaning 'hidden rules'. Part

of being *jia xiang bao* is not just offering support to family and friends nearby but also being a recipient of such support, whether it is of the *qianguize* type or otherwise. This support seems to be far greater in a less geographically-expansive network, as in one that operates primarily in a city like Kunming, than in one that spreads across mega-cities or national boundaries.

Hukou **System**

As illustrated by the examples above, the localization of *guanxi* does influence mobility in a way that many believe China's *hukou* system, or household registration system, does. Readers who are familiar with China might point to the *hukou* system's legal restrictions on mobility within China as a reason for return to Kunming. Here, I will briefly explain what the *hukou* system is, then argue that it is in fact not a restraint on resettlement or mobility but it does help to explain the localization of *guanxi*.

Up until the unification of China in 1949, China was a loose network of warlord states and fiefdoms each reigning over their own geographic territory. After unification, the Chinese government instituted a household registration system[12] that explicitly tied an individual to a specific place. Moving from that place would require several layers of government approval, which was difficult to obtain. The primary goals of the *hukou* system were first, to limit the migration of people from the bleak countryside into the more prosperous cities thereby overrunning them, and second, with the onset of a planned economy, to allow for better management of distribution of goods. If the population was highly mobile, then resources might be misallocated. For example,

[12] This discussion about *hukous* is limited to the contemporary system initiated after 1949 versus earlier systems that were in place in ancient times.

clothing might have been sent to where people were living instead of where they were living at present.

An additional element of the *hukou* system was part of Mao's military defense strategy. Having what he called the 'third front,' the mountains, deserts and other topography - separating population centers, made these centers less accessible to outside invaders to capture. These factors led to very little movement of people between locations and the localization of *guanxi*. However, as the needs of the nation changed, so too did the rules of the *hukou* system.

The factories that emerged on China's east coast as a result of the economic reform period created huge labor demands that could not be satisfied by local populations. Not wanting to stifle the burgeoning economy, *hukou* restrictions were relaxed. Specifically, rural migrant laborers were 'allowed' to pour into the cities to work in factories. However, while they were granted the opportunity to work, they received few other benefits afforded to local *hukou* holders, such as access to schooling, health care and the right to buy real estate.

While far fewer in numbers, human capital demands in the professional sectors has also promulgated adjustments to the *hukou* system. For example, firms in urban areas can apply to 'sponsor' workers, granting them full work authorization. However, younger individuals typically do not bother with the bureaucratic procedure unless they have children. Access to schooling for child seems to be the primary benefit that triggers concerns over *hukou* registration. Participants in my study were all aware of the legal limitations of the *hukou* system; however, none of them saw it as an obstacle. It

was largely regarded as something that existed but was not a problem. A typical response when I asked if changing a *hukou* was problematic was the following: "No. Not that hard. Some years ago it was a big problem. Now it is ok." Another example suggests that, in the short term, the system is viewed largely as inconsequential:

> Only when I am in Beijing I will think about I have to get my *hukou* out and go to Beijing. But a lot of people working in Beijing don't have Beijing *hukou* either. My brother doesn't have it. Because now it is not bad problem. But you know, when you buy a house or send your kids to school then that can be more important.

While the *hukou* was originally designed to maintain strict controls on individual mobility, it is largely seen today as being a more flexible system and not a barrier to mobility. Several of the participants in my study had changed their *hukous* without difficulty. While labor is more mobile today and new networks are forming, the isolated geographies of the past have created powerful yet highly localized *guanxi* that is still influencing migration decisions today. While having a Kunming *hukou* may not guarantee a person a good job or *guanxi*, it will provide them with year round spring like weather.

City of Eternal Spring

Kunming is often roughly translated into the 'City of Eternal Spring' or the 'Spring City' because of its year round mild temperatures and beautiful landscape. As China is a vast nation, it has cities in a wide range of climatic zones. Kunming is often said to have the best weather in all of China. In addition to the mild year round

temperatures, Yunnan is the province with the most biodiversity and cultural diversity, laying claim to almost half of all the ethnic nationalities in China.

In Chapter Two, a study by Clark and Hunter (1991) was cited showing how the amenity mix (e.g. weather and quality of museums) played a significant role in migration decision of older white males migrating between states in the U.S.A. The same can be said for the participants' return to Kunming. With almost the same consistency that family was cited, the physical environment is a big reason for return. Here a participant is responding to a question about why she had returned to Yunnan:

> Yunnan is because it is where I am from, my home town. Really one factor, when I read your [interview] questions yesterday, I thought about it. Weather is really, I don't know maybe it is weather. I really feel comfortable here. I discussed this with my colleague, they said yeah they don't feel comfortable to go any other place, they feel too cold, too warm, weather can be a factor I think.

Often the weather was stated comparatively to another place that they had considered moving to, as in: "Beijing is too cold in winter." In contrast, people in Kunming would say, as if stated from a brochure: "The weather is perfect." However it was relayed, weather clearly mattered because it is part of a broader set of quality of life 'amenities.'

While major cities like Beijing and Shanghai may offer better economic opportunities, participants felt that those cities cannot compete on quality of life factors, such as housing prices, stress levels, commute times, crowdedness, and air quality. This is a typical response when asking about pursuing opportunities in east coast cities:

> You know in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou they are super city in China. The competition is very strong and the house or the apartment is very expensive. You will spend a lot of money on living. More than 12 hours each day you have to spend on working and you haven't any relationships there. Nobody can help you when you need help. But in Kunming, the environment is a lot nicer than super city even though it is second level or third level city in China. My life will be easier.

Participants repeatedly emphasized quality of life factors indicating a conscious assessment of what various destinations may offer. While some may be quantified in economic terms (e.g. amount of time spent commuting or housing price differentials), these factors were not constructed in the minds of the participants as economic tradeoffs. They were part of a larger set of amenities that make one a *jia xiang bao.*

Trying to leave

While most of my participants are *jia xiang bao,* not all would identify themselves as such. One interesting case is that of a couple where the husband, who was the participant in this study, expresses frustration with the anchoring effect of the wife's *jia xiang bao* tendencies. In the following exchange you can see an alternative perspective to the homely *jia xiang bao* image that I had portrayed above. Here the husband, whose parents also live in Kunming and was raised there, explained the reason for return as 'family' like so many other participants. However, his story is one of resentment as he feels that he was pulled back to Kunming unwillingly because of

family commitments, after earning an MBA in Thailand and living in Guangzhou working for large multinational companies.

Specifically his wife wants to live in Kunming while he does not. He characterizes himself as 'western-style': "Naturally I am somehow western-style, because I read a lot of western books. I watch a lot of western movies, especially U.S. movies. So my logic, way of life, somehow truly influenced by U.S. style." To him, Kunming is not western enough or advanced. When asked why he doesn't want to live in Kunming, he replied, "…Kunming is a mess, a small one [city]. [In] most of Chinese people's minds Kunming, it is just like a town. There isn't much industries, so big companies usually do not have presence here." In an attempt to understand the difference in perspective that he had from his wife about where to live, I had asked why he had thought his wife was so intent on returning to Kunming. His wife had lived in Thailand for a period while he had earned his MBA there and expressed to him that she had liked it, but did not want to live there or in Guangzhou, opting to return to Kunming instead. He explained:

> Simple. This is also due to her family, education. Her family is somehow inner-oriented. My parents-in-law, they like to take care of children. They like children to be around them. So (he laughs) you know what? Ever since her primary school, even grade school, kindergarten, primary school, high school, university all this education, all located within 20 minutes bus, by bus away from her home. So you can imagine how she thinks of the world.

I provide this view-point to offer that *jia xiang bao* is a powerful force and perhaps even trumps economic motivations such as those offered by neo-classical theories, which will be discussed more fully in the following section. This man had better economic opportunities in Guangzhou, but he had to forsake them in favor of lesser ones in Kunming, deciding not on economic grounds to stay in Kunming but rather because of the social dynamics of family. This example suggests that not everyone who returns to Kunming does so because of its good weather and positive social networks; rather, there are some who are influenced by the general *jia xiang bao* pattern, but they themselves are not *jia xiang bao*. The next section explores the extent to which an economic policy influences migration decisions.

XiBu DaKaiFa

I paid particular attention to *XiBu DaKaiFa* or 'Western Development Program,' because it is the type of policy that neo-classical theory would recommend to influence migration patterns between locales, in this case, between provinces in China. By giving preferential treatment such as reduced taxes and below market office space, the government is increasing the benefits and reducing the risks making Kunming a more attractive destination to a would-be migrant than Beijing or Shanghai. Further, the inducements are targeted at highly-skilled workers, the kind that neo-classical theory suggests would be migrating to a labor-rich city like Kunming that has a surplus of low-skilled labor that is emigrating to the cities on the east coast. The following quote could be explained using neo-classical theory. When this participant was asked about why he had chose Kunming, he offered a number of rationales, this being the second: "Second

is choose the western province because a couple of western province under the Chinese West Develop Plan. There is a long term plan in China so that provinces like Yunnan has a lot of beneficial policies or tax treatment from government."

While this quote suggests the impact of a policy informed by neo-classical theory, it was not the primary reason for this participant's return to Kunming nor is it representative of the explanations that I heard for returning to Kunming. At best *XiBu DaKaiFa* plays only a supportive role among a small group of people, a group limited to individuals that are seeking to take advantage of Kunming's less developed status as will be discussed in the next section and those that have the ambition to operate large firms (those over 100 employees). This is not to say that people are not aware of or feel that they benefit from the policy. But the awareness of *XiBu DaKaiFa* was discussed like that of many government policies: they know about them from the press or friends, but the benefits are thought to only be at the broader population level (e.g. new roads or bridges) as opposed to the individual personal level. A more typical response when asking about *XiBu DaKaiFa* was one of awareness and distance: "This is a government project and maybe far away from normal people, maybe just government know about this. I just know *XiBu DaKaiFa*, I don't know exactly what project and what they think to do so, I don't know."

While it is clear that many people know about *XiBu DaKaiFa*, it is also clear that it did not play a significant role in migration decisions as would be suggested by neo-classical migration theory. For a small number of people it may have had an influence; however it was secondary to other factors such as family and being *jia xiang*

bao. The following section offers evidence of where an economic theory did play a role in the migration decision of some participants.

Big fish, little sea[13]

One area where the economic theories of migration do offer some explanatory power is when returnees discussed their careers. While not identified as a primary explanation for return, a few participants did explain how the variation in career opportunities between countries or cities within China played a role in their decision to return to Kunming. On aspect of the dual labor market theory of migration argues that the income and status that a job can offer will result in some level of occupational prestige. This occupational prestige acts as a motivating factor for migration.

China's strong sense of entrepreneurship has resulted in a culture that highly values being the boss or being a leader. In this study, it was clear that being the boss of a small company was better than being an employee in a larger corporation. For many Chinese, a significant amount of value is derived from running your own business. In the following quote, a participant was explaining the trade-off that Chinese are willing to make in order to achieve the status of being a boss: "…they would choose to run a small store rather than working in a big company - be a white collar. They prefer to run a small store. That is boss."

[13] Throughout this dissertation I have limited the use of mandarin phrases to reflect their usage by participants in the study. In the case of 'Big fish, little sea' a mandarin equivalent does exist, however it was never used by a participant during my study. 'Big fish, little sea' however was and that is why I have opted to use the English phrase instead of a mandarin one unlike in the other cases such as *jiaxiag bao*. The mandarin equivalent would be: *ningwei jitou, buwei fengwei* which would roughly translate to suggest that it is better to be the head of a chicken, than the tail of a phoenix. In general, it is better to be the head of something less desirable than the tail of something more desirable.

Because of Kunming's 'underdeveloped' status as a 'Tier 2' or 'Tier 3' city, many people see the opportunity to start a company or offer a service leveraging the human capital that they had obtained while overseas. Working in a Tier 1 city may offer job opportunities but not the status of being a boss as this participant noted:

> Another reason is I find in the big city like Shanghai or Beijing, of course you have opportunity, but of course the opportunity there is only for work for someone else. You know you can easily get a good job and a high payment and you know an international company, corporations things like that. But you always work for someone else. It is hard for doing your own things.

In this quote, another participant is expressing the importance of being the boss in motivating his return to Kunming. In addition to highlighting the return to Kunming, the notion of occupational prestige is made salient in this quote as the participant expresses not only his desire to be the boss, but the subordination of his former classmates: "So I came here [Kunming], the main reason was he [a relative] told me he was doing this huge project he needs an architectural team organized. So I thought I would come here, form my own team, hire my unemployed classmates from the States."

When discussing the opportunity to run their own business, Kunming was cited as being undeveloped along two dimensions: competition and regulation. The following example, from a participant who completed her undergraduate degree in physical therapy (PT) overseas, illustrates the opportunities that are perceived to be available along these two dimensions:

> China is still developing so there is still a lot of space for you to grow up. The PT is not very developed here, either is the healthcare sector. So it could be like great opportunity for me to come back and have my own business. There won't be too many competition for me. And most PT here were healthcare practitioners. They are not properly trained. ….Also the business regulations in China are pretty lousy so you can do whatever you want basically. So like what I feel like in Europe, everything should be on paper. …It is like they have big boxes that you can only jump in. But in China you can build your own box. Now I am boss. Just like you have your space for what you like, not really limited by the government regulation that much.

While regulations in China tend to be lax, particularly in areas of credentialing, they can be very strict in segments of the society that are still tightly controlled by the government, the internet for example. One participant lamented about the licensure regulations required to be a designer in Canada:

> For example, if I want to be designer in China, if you graduate no matter whether you are designer [major], even without degree you are designer. Nothing, you design things for people you are designer. But in Canada after you graduate you get certificate or paper from school but you have to apply for examination to pass certain exam to get the certificate. Even sometimes to run that business someone must have that certificate in that company.

While this participant felt inhibited by the restrictions on running an internet business in China, transnationalism was his solution: "I registered the company in Canada. Because

register company in Canada seems easier than in China. Especially internet or things like that." Now he splits his time between Canada where his business is registered and Kunming where he can be a designer, and his business is run. As a city that is less developed than many of those on the east coast, Kunming can offer returnees the status of being the boss because of its relatively low level of competition and the lax regulatory environment. The preceding sections offer insights as to why the participants in this study had decided to return to China and specifically to Kunming, the following section discusses the key finding related to age group differences.

Xiao xiong xin

Turning to my last research question about differences between age groups of returnees, I found that a strong cohort effect explains much of the variation between the groups. Having been born into and grown up during the economic reform period, younger returnees are seen as simply having a different perspective on life. Specifically, they are seen by the older age group as having *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition.'

According to the older participants, it is not so much that the younger generation is not ambitious as much as what they value is different from earlier generations. Thus, they are perceived as lacking ambition because they don't place the same emphasis on the same things such as work. According to one older participant, he thinks that the younger generations' motivations for going abroad are even unclear to themselves or are at best limited to pleasure or what he calls 'better life': "I don't even know if they know why they are going out at all. It is mainly for, how to say, for better life." In the

following quote, from another older participant, she uses her nephew to illustrate her perception of the difference between the two age groups:

> [Younger returnees'] commitment is totally different from us. I can, including my nephew. My nephew didn't go to study abroad, but he graduated from a very famous university in China, I always criticize him: 'You should study more, not just limit yourself with the novelty of the university.' But he told me… …he said 'Our generation don't want to work very hard like your generation. You are very always under pressure, but we want to have more fun, more leisure time." So that is the difference, that is the very clear difference between these two generations.

This generational divide is not a uniquely Chinese, or Kunming, phenomenon because it seems that in most places the old perceive the young as less ambitious and lacking the same work ethic they have. What makes the case in China unique is how large the gap is between the two generations with respect to opportunities for leisure, or for doing something other than work. The older generation's life was, by the socialist government design, centered around work. People were assigned to work units and lived in housing provided by the production unit. Housing, schooling and medical care, for example were provided by the work unit. Work and life were one and the same (Friedman, 2005). In today's market style economy, in contrast, leisure and conspicuous consumption has rapidly emerged. This is a direct consequence of the ability for individuals to earn an income independent of the state.

The conflict between the generations is often characterized by the notion that many young office workers of the younger generation are earning more in one year than older generations may have earned in their entire lifetime. The expression "There is no 'old money' in China" is a reflection of the youthfulness of Chinese wealth in contrast to other countries. For example 62 percent of the top 10 percent of the richest people in China are under 35 years old compared to just 18 percent in the U.S.A. (*China: Hotspots Report*, 2004). Additional evidence of rapidly rising affluence of the younger generation is the skyrocketing childhood obesity rate in China. Today there are more than 42 million obese children, three times the number there were 30 years ago (Nilsson & Zhihua, 2011). This is generally attributed to increased wealth of young parents that allows for the combination of a greater consumption of fats, oils and animal proteins found in processed foods and fast food restaurants and more sedentary lifestyles which include more trips by car rather than walking or cycling.

Today's market-style economy which allows for individual career planning and individual accumulation of wealth has shifted the ambitions of the younger generation. The following quote is representative of the shift away from an emphasis on work to an emphasis on the quality of life. The participant was responding to a question about why she wanted to pursue a career in teaching. She explained her priorities – family over work, then argued that teaching was less demanding than working in a company: "My family is like 70% and my job is 30%. So I think teacher is a good job for me. It is an easy job. If I got a job in company, I have to work very hard and I have no time for my family." In the following exchange I was asking another participant about her

boyfriend's job. The following exchange shows the emphasis that she places on the quality of life that her boyfriend's job brings, not on the work itself:

> Researcher: Does he like his job?
>
> Participant: Yes
>
> Researcher: Do you like his job?
>
> Participant: I don't know. But it is good for me, because he doesn't have to work late. Begin at 9 stop at 5.

In this quote from a younger participant, s/he argues that even when the younger generation does work, it is only a means to an end – consumption:

> I think I can just compare the two groups I can see that the old *haigui* which is the one between 1950 and 1960, older, I think they are more diligent, much more diligent. At that time, much more difficult for them to go overseas so for those that can go overseas at that time they are really outstanding. So most of them I think they cannot fund their studies; for sure they can only get their scholarship. But for the new *haigui* most of them are funded by their parents so that when I just witness some of them overseas I think they would like to spend more time on getting part time jobs rather than studying. The reason, the money that they earn from the part time job is for consuming.

China is a vastly different place today than it was 30 years ago. Growing up in and returning to this different China has shaped the members of the two age groups differently. In general the younger generation is seen as being less focused on work and more interested in obtaining a quality of life that includes relaxation and enjoyment.

These aspects of life are viewed by older Chinese as luxuries prompting them to label the younger generation as having little ambition or *xiao xiong xin.*

Conclusion

Kunming is unique in many ways. If one mentions the city's name to someone from China their eyes are likely to light up as they contemplate the beautiful landscape, diversity of people, and unbeatable weather. The same attributes that make Kunming a popular tourist destination and the envy of many Chinese are also what contribute to native Kunmingers desire to return to their native land, even if it does not offer the best economic alternative.

The economic theories of migration offer little to help explain the *jia xiang bao* of Kunming. Instead, an interdisciplinary perspective is needed to investigate the complex web of influences that motivate return migration decisions. This chapter provided insight into the role of elements such as family, social networks, weather, age, and gender in migration decisions. These are elements that may be part of some theories of migration but have been neglected by most narrow economic explanations. Instead of a single factor or two, the data in this study suggest that the decision to return to Kunming is multifaceted and requires the tools of disciplines beyond economics such as sociology and anthropology.

Chapter Five: Revisiting Reasons for Return and Looking Ahead

Introduction

The impetus for this project came from an early trip of mine to China. It was clear to me, as it was to most China observers, that China was changing. But what was less clear was how the change in China was affecting the people that had left the country. They too, of course, were watching but with a different perspective. As China continued to emerge as an economic success story the question many foreigners were asking themselves was how they can get *into* China, while Chinese living abroad were asking themselves how they can get *back to* China. I quickly became very interested in these different questions as I met with and spoke to friends and colleagues who were moving to China and some that were considering a return migration back to China.

As mentioned in Chapter One, I have been the faculty leader of multiple programs to China. Two different but overlapping students' stories serve to illustrate the desire to get *into* and *back to* China. One of the students that had participated in one of my early undergraduate programs to China had no former connection to China with the exception of a general interest and a few semesters of Mandarin language classes. After the three-week program, he completed his undergraduate degree in the U.S.A. the following year then packed his bags and moved to Beijing. During subsequent conversations that we had had in Beijing, I had asked him about why he had moved to China and he expressed that he needed to get to and be a part of that dynamic place.

Over the course of the past several years he has been promoted from being one of the dozens of foreign teachers teaching English, to being the head foreign teacher for the third largest English language school in Beijing and the private tutor to some of that city's top Chinese business officials. I am intensely proud of his success and the deep bond that he has formed with China. His story has helped to motivate this research because it demonstrates the possibilities that contemporary China can offer - not only to people that were already living in China, but to outsiders moving to China as well. Stories of people finding success by moving *to* China like his gave pause to those that had thought that they had already made that move to opportunity - people that had moved *from* China in search of opportunity elsewhere and are now faced with a decision of return.

The second story which highlights my first direct exposure to someone that was contemplating return migration to China came during the first MBA program that I led to China. One of the students on that program was born and raised in China and completed her undergraduate studies there. Later she had moved to the U.S.A. Once in the U.S.A., she worked her way up to be a mid-level manager in a medical device company, got married, has two kid, two cars, and a house in a tony suburb of Minneapolis. The MBA program to China was the first time she had returned to her native land in over seven years. Almost immediately during the trip and in several meetings since then, she has expressed the difficulty she has had in reconciling her decision to leave China and come to the U.S.A. and the simultaneous struggle in

deciding if she should return. It is her story and the many more like it that I have encountered that has motivated this study.

More Chinese are going abroad and more are returning, increasing a pattern of migration that stands in contrast to the historic notions of migration as a onetime, unidirectional event. I started this research with the hypothesis that people are returning to China to take advantage of the economic reforms happening there. As such, I turned to the economic theories of migration, which are reviewed in Chapter Two, assuming that those theories would explain the motivations and decisions of people like the MBA student contemplating return mentioned above. Early research led me to realize that the economic theories would be insufficient in explaining the phenomenon of return migration of Chinese and an interdisciplinary approach would be needed because the motivations for return migration are multifaceted and are decidedly not limited to economics. Chapter Two included an introduction of the relevant tools drawn on from beyond the field of economics that are utilized throughout the dissertation. These include an age, period, and cohort framework and the concepts of virtual migration and transnationalism. The use of this broader set of tools has led to three important findings: the resonance of *jia xiang bao*, or 'hometown baby,' as an unquestioned motivation for return; the desire to be a 'big fish in a little sea' as a unique advantage to returning to Kunming; and perceived ambition differences by generation – the *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition' among younger generations. All of these findings are further elaborated below.

The findings from the research for this dissertation highlight the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach and moving beyond the dominant theories of migration. The details of the research process for this dissertation were provided in Chapter Three and are briefly summarized here.

From a methodological perspective, a qualitative study was needed because the process of migration is complex and varies significantly between participants. In-depth interviews allowed the flexibility to probe and explore meanings. Had it not been for this process, it is unlikely that I would have been able to identify one of my key finding – the role of Kunmingers as *jia xiang bao* - as the precise phrase was only mentioned to me by two of the 27 participants. It was not until I was conducting the data analysis that these subtle references were in fact identifying a theme that existed across most of the participants. During the process of analysis I was able to learn that while most of the participants did not use the phrase *'jia xiang bao,'* perhaps because they knew that I was not fluent in Mandarin, they were in fact describing themselves as hometown babies.

Participants for the study were selected using a modified respondent-driven sampling method where enrolled participants recruited subsequent participants into the study. In-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions along with notes or photos from observations were archived and analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software.

In addition, Chapter Three also introduces Kunming, China the site of the field research conducted in this study. As will be discussed below, while the findings that emanated from this site are rich and specific, it is still unclear as to the extent that they

are a function of a selection effect or in fact a broader phenomenon found in other places in China. The next section provides a summary of the key findings that are presented in Chapter Four.

Summary of Key Findings

The key finding from this dissertation is that; participants in this study knew that a return to China meant a return home to Kunming. This is because Kunmingers are *jia xiang bao* or 'hometown babies,' meaning that they are linked to the city in historical, cultural, social, and economic ways that made returning to Kunming a necessary condition for returning to China. The following quote, which was originally presented in Chapter Four, illustrates the strength of the social link that this participant has to Kunming and embodies the essence of what it means to be *jia xiang bao*: "… I must stay [in] my hometown. My parents maybe need someone to help and sometimes I need them, then I must stay, they need me stay in Kunming. So I come back."

A second, and related major finding was the role that Kunming played in some participant's desire to be the 'big fish in a little sea.' Kunming's status as a Tier 2 city along with a given returnees' strong localized relationships or social network made it the required choice if they wanted to fulfill the goal of being a 'big fish in a little sea' or the 'boss.' More developed coastal cities like Beijing and Shanghai may be perceived to offer greater immediate financial opportunities, but the opportunities in those cities are viewed as being less advantageous as they would require one to be a worker in a big firm, instead of being the boss of a smaller one. Kunming is one of the cities targeted for the national government's *XiBu DaKaiFa* or 'Western Development' programs

creating a unique intersection of nationally encouraged growth (positioning Kunming as a gateway to Southeast Asia for trade and economic development) and the location of the returnees' social network or *guanxi*. In this study, it was found that while *guanxi* may be strong, it is very localized. This means that if a returnee wanted to take advantage of his or her relationships to become the boss, it can only be done in Kunming, not in far-off places like Beijing or Shanghai. Moving from the key findings about motivations, the third finding related to the two different age groups that were the focus of this research.

The final key finding of this dissertation is related to how return migration varies between age groups, specifically those born between 1950-1960 compared to those born between 1980-1990. Given the massive social and economic transformation of China over just the past several decades, I hypothesized that members of the different age groups would vary markedly in their migration experiences. While differences do seem to exist, it is the differences in attitude, specifically the younger generation having *xiao xiong xin* or 'little ambition' that was the most salient finding. The older generation is seen as being more diligent while the younger generation is characterized as being less focused with respect to their studies and work. While the identification of *xiao xiong xin* is important, as noted below, further research is needed to better understand the differences in age groups.

The qualitative nature of this study allowed for the collection of rich data that has led to three key findings. However, there is more work to be done. The next section

identifies several areas illuminated by this dissertation that are in need of further research.

Suggestions for Future Research

As noted above, the qualitative nature of this research provided great detail about a small group of people that took a specific action: Kunmingers who returned to Kunming after time spent working or studying abroad. Building on the findings detailed in this dissertation, future research which might leverage the fields of economics, demography and international education is still needed. For example, drawing on the economic theories which posit that migration destination decisions are motivated primarily by financial benefits, future research could include some of the populations that represent the counterfactual cases to those returning to Kunming. For instance, there are some people that are native to Kunming that have gone abroad and have returned to China but are living in places other than Kunming. How do they differ from the participants in this study? Is there some selection effect that predisposes the participants in the current study to return to Kunming while others do not? Likewise, there are people that are native to Kunming that have moved abroad and have not returned to China. Why have they chosen to remain abroad? If and when they return, will they return to Kunming?

From the perspective of demography, it should be noted that the dissertation research presented herein and the avenues of further inquiry suggested here are all cross-sectional in nature; that is, findings capture a point in time. Some participants may be confident that they have performed their final act of migration while others may have

already begun thinking of their next move. Unless a longitudinal approach is adopted, where specific individuals are followed over a long period of time, it will be impossible to know whether or not the process of physical migration has concluded. Therefore, while understanding various populations is one area of additional study, another possibility is to continue the current study to follow participants through their life course as they make future decisions to migrate away from or stay in Kunming.

The degree to which my findings regarding motivations for return migration apply more generally in Kunming or in all of China are additional open questions. As the number of Chinese electing to study abroad continues to increase, it would be valuable to scholars of international education to know how prevalent the motivation patterns identified in this dissertation are. Adding a quantitative component with a probability sample, one could explore the generalizability of the specific findings that I have identified in this study and address some of the possible biases of the respondent-driven sampling used in this study. Because RDS was used to recruit participants, those that had participated may be of a limited cross-section of returnees and not representative of all returnees. A quantitative study would help to answer questions such as: To what extent does the *jia xiang bao* phenomenon describe the broader population of returnees to Kunming? Is the importance of being the boss common among most entrepreneurs in Kunming? How big is 'little ambition' – is it pervasive across all members of the younger age group? Whether qualitative or quantitative in nature, additional comparative work with cases from other countries may also help to examine the process of return migration. However, before moving to additional studies

which may address possible sampling errors, non-sampling error related to the age group research must be addressed.

Addressing non-sampling error

As noted in Chapter One, one limitation of the current study is the possibility that a response bias non-sampling error may lead to the lack of findings regarding a hypothesized period effect between the two age-groups included in the study. More work in this area could be conducted to validate either the absence of an effect or the presence of error. My hypothesis was that older participants would have different return experiences because of their lived experiences with China's recent history. For example, someone that had lived through the Cultural Revolution and then subsequently left China would think differently about returning than someone who had only lived through a more open and economically robust period. However, the participants in this study rejected the notion of China's tumultuous history as being an impediment to return. Despite repeated efforts through rephrasing, projective techniques (Can you tell me about a friend of yours that…) and follow up questions, there was little evidence to support the notion that personal experience with China's past had affected decisions about return. Some possible explanations may include the fact that study participants had, in fact returned and they may feel the need to rationalize their decision. Or, they may have been apprehensive about talking about the past in any way and therefore they simply avoided the topic. The passage of time may also be an intervening factor. For some of the most notable events, it has been over 40 years since they occurred, and much has transpired since then. With the passage of so much time, distortion of

recollection or decay of memory is likely to occur. In sum, while the role of the participant's age did offer an unexpected insight about perceptions of ambition, more research is needed to understand how one's lived experience influences decisions to return for various age groups returning to China.

Implications for Policy Makers

As the number of Chinese going abroad continues to increase, this initial act of going abroad facilitates an increasing likely act of return migration. Policy makers, whether in sending or receiving countries, would be well served with a better understanding of contemporary migratory patterns and motivations. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter One shows how migration decisions are made in a context that includes the policies and laws enacted by governments. While policies and laws may be in place that allow for the legal process of migration, this dissertation shows that, as currently written, they offer little power in motivating migration. In the case of return migration to Kunming, the Chinese government policy changes in the late 1970s that liberalized return policies (discussed in Chapter One) created a legal pathway by which Chinese living abroad could return to China. However, factors presented in my conceptual framework such as family, social networks and human capital, rather than government policies such as *XiBu DaKaiFa*, were the real motivators for return. Future policies to engage these important factors may prove more effective. For example, incentives for Chinese employees to pursue Chinese in their social network who are currently working or studying abroad for positions within their firms might leverage the importance of social networks to returnees that is documented in this

dissertation. Further, family support stipends to those who return would recognize the high value placed on family demands and connections in decisions to return. Finally, policy mechanisms that create leadership positions for returnees in Tier 2 or Tier 3 cities can capitalize on the appealing idea of being a 'big fish in a little sea."

Conclusion

While the MBA student described in the introduction to this chapter has not yet decided if she will return to China, if she does return, her decision will likely be motivated by the factors in my conceptual framework – family connections, human capital acquisitions – not necessarily the motivations posited by the economic theories of migration and not a government policy trying to encourage return. As return migration of Chinese nationals is becoming increasingly common, this dissertation sought to address the gap in the migration literature which largely ignores the phenomenon of return migration.

By utilizing in-depth interviews and observation to explore the motivations of a specific group of returnees to Kunming, a rapidly changing city in China's developing western region, this study has identified three insights that can contribute to a better understating of the return migration process. The first two key findings – *jia xiang bao* 'hometown babies' and the desire to be a 'big fish in a little sea' – can motivate future policy decisions that seek to attract returnees. The third, unexpected finding – *xia xiong xin* or 'little ambition' of younger generations – acknowledges the perceived heterogeneity among returnees. Further research and policy efforts that recognize heterogeneity by age group and other potentially important but, as yet unstudied factors

will be able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ever larger and inevitably more diverse returnee population.

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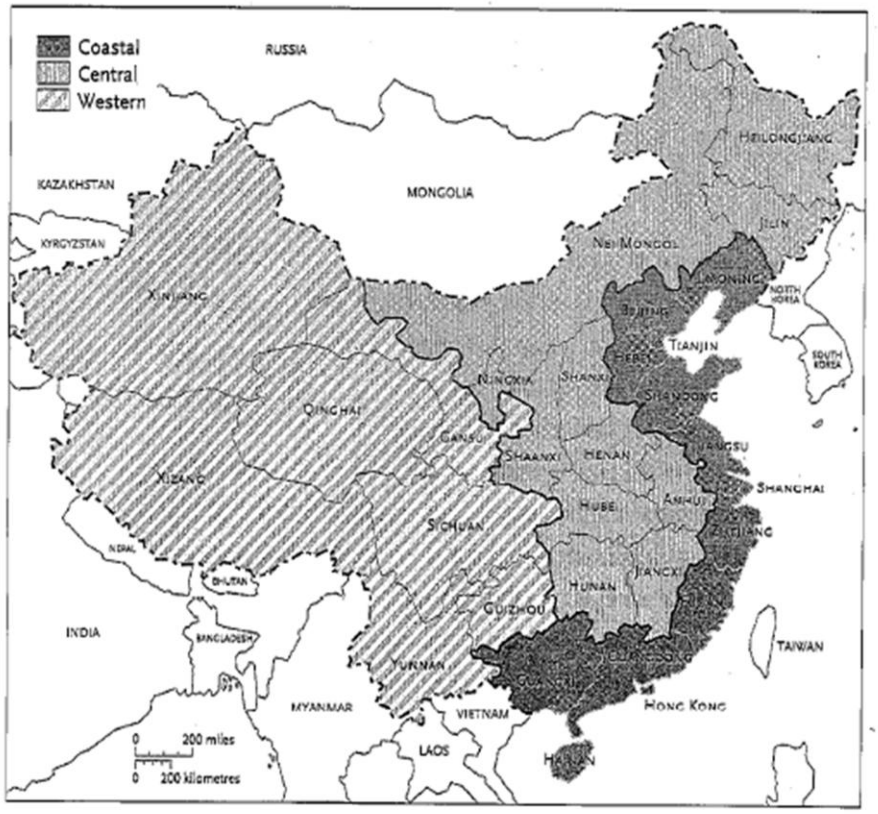
Appendix 1: Occupation Classifications of Chinese Immigrants 1900 and 2000

Occupation	1900	2000*
Operatives	36.0%	12.4%
Laborers	18.6%	1.5%
Service Workers (not household)	13.8%	18.3%
Farm Laborers	11.2%	0.2%
Managers, Officials, and Proprietors	7.0%	11.2%
Non-occupational response	5.2%	0.0%
Service Workers (private household)	3.0%	0.0%
Farmers	1.8%	0.2%
Professional, Technical	1.3%	36.4%
Craftsmen	1.0%	3.9%
Sales Workers	0.9%	4.0%
Clerical and Kindred	0.3%	11.9%
Student	<1%	~10%

*One third of population "N/A (blank)".
Of these, one third are "in school".

Source: IPUMS, 2010

Appendix 2: China's Regions as Outlined in the Ladder-Step Doctrine



The Ladder-Step Doctrine, 1986

Source: China's Urban Transition, Friedmann (2005)

Appendix 3: Horizons Magazine Cover

Appendix 4: China Eastern Airlines Advertisement

Photo Credit: Seth Werner

Appendix 5: Photos of Culture Specific Conference Rooms

Western Styled Conference Room

Chinese Styled Conference Room

Photos Credit: Seth Werner