

PEER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG LOCAL AND RETURNEE  
CHINESE EMPLOYEES

By

SIHUA HE

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The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of SIHUA HE find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Patricia M. Sias, Ph.D., Chair

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Michael Salvador, Ph.D.

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Jeffery C. Peterson, Ph.D.

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Abstract

by Sihua He, M.A.  
Washington State University  
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Chair: Patricia M. Sias

This study focuses on the peer relationships among returnee and locally educated Chinese employees in the Chinese academia. It examines the various types of peer relationships returnee employees formed with locally educated coworkers and with other returnees. Perceived homophily and workplace envy are suggested to contribute to the returnees having relatively more returnees collegial peers and less locally educated collegial peers. Specifically, academic degree and the length of sojourning time are found to be associated with perceived homophily, and the length of returning time associated with envy. In addition, the study identifies high commitment as one of the determinants of special peer relationships which is absent from previous peer relationship literature.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Students from the People's Republic of China resumed the flow to foreign countries in the late 1970s when China launched the "Reform and Open-door" policy. Since then, the number of students studying abroad has increased drastically. In response to the rapid "brain drain" that might cause the country to lose a large portion of its well educated and trained personnel, all levels of Chinese governments and institutions introduced lasting projects and enacted preferential or rewarding policies to attract foreign educated elites back home (Zweig, 2006; Broaded, 1993; Orleans, 1989; Yin, 2002; Li, 2005c; Xu & Yan, 2009). Orleans (1989) described a number of ways the Chinese national and provincial governments and various work units seek to provide advantages for returning scholars. These include greater freedom to choose one's job, greater accessibility to research funding, priority for housing, and the establishment of open laboratories that serve as "holding units" for returned scientists, allowing them to continue their research for a couple of years while seeking suitable employment. The Chinese government's decision to create world-class universities, and its recognition that this goal could only be achieved by attracting Chinese scholars with foreign Ph.D.s, changed the climate in the academia. The Ministry of Education and many provinces have sent recruiting teams abroad and established "Returned Scholar Service Centers" to assist overseas scholars to make connections with potential employers. The returnee "is given the best of both worlds: he enjoys all the benefits of a national, at the same time he has also all the rights and privileges accorded to

foreigners” (Yin, 2002).

The incentives seem to be effective. According to the 6th news conference of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China in 2009, the total number of overseas students and scholars has reached 1,391,500; the number of returnees is near 390,000. Both numbers show a stable increasing trend (14.84% and 55.95% respectively compared to the previous year). Returning students and scholars have emerged in China as a distinguished elite class. Generation after generation of returnees, returning either to serve the country or for personal development, have built important bridges between China and the rest of the world, and constructed high-speed passageways for bringing in advanced Western science and technology. Returnees have greatly improved the economic structure of China’s human capital and talent market, promoted the merging of the China’s market with the world market, and promoted advances in China’s forces of production. In particular, returnees already dominate the political and academic leadership of China's higher education (Li, 2005c).

An overwhelming majority of professors and administrative leaders at top Chinese universities have studied in foreign countries as either degree candidates or visiting scholars (Li, 2004). For example, over 2,000 out of approximately 3,000 faculty members at Beijing (Peking) University studied abroad for more than one year (Li, 2005a). Over half of the university-level administrators in the institutions directly overseen by the Ministry of Education are returnees (<http://www.xinhuanet.com>, February 16, 2004). In addition, 81 percent of members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, 54 percent of members of the Chinese Academy of Engineering,

and 72 percent of team leaders of national technological research projects are returnees (People's Daily, *Renmin Ribao*, March 2, 2004, 11). Li's (2004) report on returnees in Chinese institutions of higher education and research indicates that returnees made more contributions than the comparison group in such aspects as academic activities, open publications, research achievements, collaborative scientific research, management, international exchanges and cooperation, and social services. Zweig, Chen, and Rosen (2004) focus on the returnees' value as "transnational human capital" and report that foreign Ph.D.s are more valuable than domestic Ph.D.s in terms of people's perceptions, technology transfer and in their ability to bring benefits to their universities. In addition, returnees working in high-tech areas, compared to people in the areas who had not been overseas, are more likely to import technology and capital, to feel that their skills were in great demand within society, and to use that technology to target the domestic market.

However, the returnees are not necessarily welcomed by everyone, especially when they are placed in positions of competition. Through comprehensive interviews conducted in 2001, Rosen and Zweig (2005) captured complicated sentiments—"jealousy", "rejection", and "resentment" expressed by "locals" working with "returnees" in higher education. Among academics, locals felt their work enthusiasm harmed because they thought the government over-emphasized returnees. More locals than returnees felt that the latter got "much more" research funding, "much better" housing, and, "much faster" promotions (Zweig, 2006). On the other hand, returnees also found their situation unsatisfactory but for quite different reasons. Antal and



Walker (2005) discovered discrepancies in expectations of organizational learning between returnees and local employees—the knowledge that the returnee feels the organization needs are not necessarily what the local employees seek to tap into. Their findings suggested “cross-cultural difficulties” might have occurred and impeded the knowledge sharing process between the local Chinese and the returnees. While the returnees felt they were left as outsiders by both their Chinese peers and the foreigners, local Chinese employees unpleasantly sensed the returnees’ lack of humility which the locals considered to be very important in enabling organizational learning.

Historically, the complicated sentiments that China’s local elites feel toward returnees may be rooted in the strong emphasis of education in the Chinese culture. China invented the world’s first civil service examination system. It meant to provide common access to the ruling power and was one of the few institutionalized ways to rise above one’s given social status (Bond, 1991). However, the examination was also an instrument used to withhold political power and privileges to the limited few who had access to educational resources. Hence, education has always been viewed as extremely significant in moving up the social ladder all along Chinese history (Chan, 1999; Chen & Chung, 1994; Oh, 1991). To date, knowledge is still seen as an important tool of bettering one’s life and a symbol of superior status by many Chinese.

Returnees in the higher education sector are typically considered intellectually or academically superior to their local peers simply by virtue of their study abroad experience. According to a recent report from the Research Center for China Science Evaluation (2007),

Western academic or research institutes have overwhelming better teaching and research strength compared to their Chinese counterparts (<http://rccse.whu.edu.cn/college/sjdxkyjzl.htm>, *Scientific Research Competiveness Ranking of World Universities in 2007*). Students and scholars trained in the West are then naturally considered as experts and leaders upon returning. In the words of Norman Goodman, the “western educational system and structures continue to define education for the rest of the world, and by extension, they define what is knowledge and who may claim competence in it” (Goodman, 1984, p.10). The conflict triggered by returnee dominance over China’s academics is probably best exemplified by the “Beida (Beijing University) Reform” (Li, 2005a). This reform to establish a world-class university was proposed by the foreign-educated Party Secretary. One major move of the reform would be replacing most lower- and middle-ranking faculty members with better qualified candidates, primarily from universities overseas. Opponents argued strongly that the real purpose of the reform was to replace the current faculty with America-trained Ph.D.s, and to serve the interests of the returnee incumbents. Blind adoption of the American education model could not lead to the internationalization of education and establishment of world-class universities. The reform might even send out a misleading message to students that only foreign degrees are valuable. Consequently, returnees’ presence in the workplace was often seen by their local peers as a threat (Rosen & Zweig, 2005).

Nonetheless, peer relationships between the returnees and their local peers serve important functions for the individuals and the organizations in which they work. In the widespread discussion about contemporary returnees, they are often jokingly referred to as

“haigui” (abbreviation of “returnees from overseas”, “sea turtle” homophonically).

Correspondingly, people sometimes call the returnees’ peers “tubie” (“land turtle” or “turtles from the puddle” homophonically), implying they have never left China where they received higher education. In the Chinese academia, “haigui” and their peer “tubie” usually occupy higher level of positions and have primary access to out-of-organization network and resources. As Sias (2008) summarized, the quality of an employee’s peer relationships directly or indirectly influences individual outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and stress, and organizational outcomes including employee performance, citizenship and turnover. However, extant literature and empirical studies of peer relationships are mainly limited to North America. Almost no empirical research applying the current theories or models has been found conducted in mainland China.

This study sought to apply theories and research methods developed in the US to study peer relationships in Chinese organizations. Considering the vastly different cultural context and cultural values, current theories might need to be adjusted when used in the Chinese context. This in turn, shed light on the further development of existing organizational theories of peer relationship. Studying organizational behaviors in a country with distinctive national culture and constantly changing dynamics is greatly challenging. Certain notions and constructs need to be adjusted or modified. This is consistent with Shenkar and Glinow’s (1994) finding that Western organizational theories varied in their degree of applicability to the Chinese context. Most theories required significant adjustment before they could be used to study and interpret the

macro-level of Chinese organizations, and the attitudes and behaviors of those employed in them.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Chinese Interpersonal Relationships**

Chinese history is a hybrid of a long period of self-closure and a comparatively shorter modern period of opening up to the outside world. China stayed considerably isolated from the West until the Opium War in 1840. Even after People's Republic of China was founded, consecutive political incidents kept the door shut until late 1970s. Chinese culture and society featured distinctive Confucius teachings as a "set of pragmatic rules for daily life derived from the lessons of Chinese history" (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Although the influence of Confucianism is diluted to a great extent in the modern society, it is still so deeply ingrained and remained an inseparable part of the attitudes and behaviors of Chinese people (Oh, 1991). Confucianism provides the foundation of ethics and morality in social and personal life, detailing the attitudes and behaviors appropriate to every type of human relationship, from the top to the bottom of the social order, from the most intimate family relationships to the most distant associations, as in every area of daily life.

According to Confucianism, an individual is fundamentally a social or relational being. Social order and stability depend on properly differentiated role relationships between particular individuals (King 1991). Confucius defined "five cardinal role relationships" (Oh, 1991), each corresponding to one constant virtue: emperor-subject (loyalty), father-son (filial piety),

husband-wife (faithfulness), elder-younger brothers (brotherhood), and friend-friend (sincerity).

Out of the five cardinal relationships, only in a friend-relationship can two people relate on an equal footing. Between friends, an attitude of mutual sincerity is considered appropriate.

However, friendship in Chinese culture has received little research attention. Extant literature of Confucianism influence on organizational relationships primarily concentrates on the familial relationships and emperor-subject relationship, which have more implication on supervisor-subordinate and/or mentoring relationships in modern organizations (for example, Oh, 1991; Bozionelos & Wang, 2006; Mao, 2006; Yum, 1988, etc.).

Another important factor of Chinese social life and interpersonal relationships is the concept of “guanxi”, literally translated as “relation”. However, Chinese do not simply refer to guanxi as “interpersonal relations” (Su & Littlefield, 2001). The term guanxi has taken on an additional semantic dimension through its usage in social life. According to Chiao (1982) and King (1991), guanxi in traditional Chinese society is based on factors that promote shared social experience between and among individuals. They include being a relative (close or distant), having the same natal or ancestral origin, being a former neighbor, classmate, colleague, teacher/student, or supervisor/subordinate, having a common friend (intermediary), and so on. These shared social experiences become the basis for establishing guanxi. Guanxi then refer to the network of informal relationships within a social group or, at an individual level, a particular individual’s informal relationship ties with other individuals within this social group (e.g., Chow & Ng, 2004; Fan, 2002). In a practical sense, it means “good connections” that can be

strategically employed as a social or network resource (Tsang, 1998; Tung, 1996). And it is this meaning that makes the issue about how Chinese conduct their interpersonal relationships especially significant and complicated. Depending on the occasion, guanxi can be overlapped with or even transformed into other types of relationships, such as friendship.

Guanxi and friendship, however, are distinct concepts. Friendship is characterized by mutual sincerity and faith and develops for emotional/expressive benefits (Berman et al., 2002; Ibarra, 1993a; Sias, et al., 2003). Guanxi is fundamentally a social resource that develops for instrumental benefits. Given this practical aspect, guanxi relations can be employed to achieve one's organizational goals, and consequently, the power to help another becomes a major concern for establishing or employing a particular kind of guanxi. The prevalent view of the role of guanxi in the Chinese social context is crystallized in the following sentence: "in order to succeed ... who you know is more important than what you know" (Tung, 1996, p.239). Chinese managers perceive that network resources or guanxi can enhance their career progression (Wong & Slater, 2002). The relation between power and guanxi becomes reciprocal-- the more power one has, the more complicated and extended one's guanxi becomes; on the other hand, the better one's guanxi becomes, the more power he or she can claim (Chang & Holt, 1991). To maintain good guanxi relationships, one needs to pay attention to social harmony by interacting with people smoothly at a superficial level, and to keep a balanced resource exchange sheet, but also not to refuse others' attempts at creating new relational ties of guanxi (Chang & Holt, 1991).

Furthermore, guanxi stresses small-group relationships (Hong & Engstrom, 2004) and

has developed into an “insider” (person belonging to the same group) and “outsider” (those who do not belong to the same group) distinction (Hung, 2004; Leung et al., 1996; Warren et al., 2004). Compared to the broad sense of interpersonal relationships, Huang (1988) listed two major categories of Chinese interpersonal relationships: (1) the family, who focus upon caring for each other and helping each other in times of need; and (2) outgroup members, who focus on the rules of equity, disregarding human feeling. Good friends could be belonging to the ingroup. They are extensions of the family circle, and thus enjoy the highest degree of intimacy, openness and trust only second to family members. Common interests and mutual obligation unite the ingroup; one’s ingroup provides care and protection (Eberhard, 1971). The line between an ingroup member and an outgroup member is drawn clearly (Yum, 1988). One is not expected to behave the same way toward one’s friend as one will toward strangers. For instance, patterns of communication differ vastly between insiders (often described as “one’s own people”) and outsiders (“outgroup people”) (Chang & Holt, 1991).

Furthermore, the development of Chinese interpersonal relationship exhibits another kind of dynamic. Fei (1947) compares the evolution of one’s interpersonal relations to a stone cast into the water that generates ripples moving outward from the center: the innermost ripples represent those closest to the social actor, different tiers of the ripple representing different degrees of intimacy and obligation. Fei’s analogy shows that the individual is the self-created center of an ever-expanding set of relationship “circles”. Relationship ties in non-family *guanxi* are differentiated in terms of the degree of intimacy, trust and emotional attachment they involve

(Tsang, 1998; Yang, 1993; Luo, 1997); those toward the high end of the intimacy, trust and affection continuum are considered as “close” guanxi relationships, and those toward the low end of the continuum considered as “distant” guanxi relationships (Chow & Ng, 2004; Tsui & Farh, 1997; Yang, 1993). The principles of obligation and commitment govern the former type of relationship ties, while the principles of instrumentality and opportunism preside over the latter (Su & Littlefield, 2001). This differentiation resembles the distinction between ingroup and outgroup, yet allows the existence of a gray zone of mixed expressiveness and instrumentality. In fact, certain authors note that purely instrumental relationships do not exist in the Chinese cultural context (Luo, 1997). It has been observed that in the Chinese context relationships always start as expressive and they may evolve to include various degrees of instrumental elements.

### **Peer Friendships**

As mentioned above, Chinese people live and socialize in intertwined networks of relationships--“guanxi”. These relationships extend into the workplace and have important implications for the individuals and the organizations where the relationships are developed and maintained. Workplace peer relationships are between coworkers with no formal authority over one another, and characterized with “equivalent status” (Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002). Workplace relationships generally function as decision-making, information-sharing, and instrumental and emotional support systems (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Rawlins, 1994), peer relationships in particular are most likely to serve as sources of emotional and instrumental support, primarily



because coworkers share knowledge and understanding about the workplace experience unknown to external sources (Ray, 1987). Peer coworkers also have strong influence on one another regarding workplace attitudes and behaviors (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Peer relationships vary with respect to quality and intensity. From a broad sense, workplace friends range from mere acquaintances to “true” friends. Classical "ideals" of friendship often presuppose enduring relations among equals. Workplace peer friendship involves more than people merely acting in friendly ways or being mutual acquaintances. They involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests or values (Dobel 1999, 2001; Ambrose, 1999; Blieszner & Adams 1992; Hallowell, 1999). In this vein, Sias and Cahill (1998) examined the ways employees form different types of relationships with their coworkers: from acquaintance to friend, then to very close or best friend. They found employees in different types of relationship interact in fundamentally different ways. Specifically, friends communicate more openly, with much more frequency and intimacy than do acquaintances. Communication between coworkers becomes increasingly broad and deep as their friendships grow.

The most widely used categorization of peer coworker relationships was developed by Kram and Isabella in 1985 when they identified three primary types of peer relationships that could function as alternatives to mentoring. The various types of peer relationships are distinguished by the nature of communication between the relationship partners. Among other factors, variance in patterns of communication is also manifested in different types of Chinese guanxi relationships. Descriptions of the three types of peer relationships and their comparison

with Chinese guanxi relationships are presented as below.

*Information peer* relationships are characterized by low levels of intimacy, self-disclosure and trust. Communication in these relationships is limited to work-related contents and responsibilities (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Fritz & Dillard, 1994). From a guanxi perspective, information peers can be classified as “out-group” members with whom one shares no blood or friendship ties. Instrumentality dominates the development and maintenance of such relationships.

*Collegial peer* relationships are characterized by moderate levels of intimacy, trust, self-disclosure, and emotional support. Communication in these relationships includes personal as well as work-related topics. Collegial peers combine coworker and friend roles in their relationship (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Odden & Sias, 1997), which can be situated between in-groups and out-groups in the guanxi network.

*Special peer* relationships are characterized by high levels of intimacy, emotional support, trust, self-disclosure, and personal and career-related feedback. Communication among special peers reflects almost limitless breadth and depth of content. Kram and Isabella (1985) described the special peer as equivalent to a “best friend”. Consequently, special peers shall be placed in the in-group circle but probably having no blood relationships. A friend in the innermost circle of guanxi relationship is most likely to provide emotional support, to discuss personal issues, and to share mutual understanding.

As implied above, the nature of information exchanged (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Sias &

Cahill, 1998) in various types of peer relationships varies, so does the amount and quality of information (Sias, 2005). Specifically, information peers mainly exchange work-related information rather than personal information. Information exchange in these relationships is required to accomplish common tasks or fulfill work responsibility. Collegial peers exchange both task-related and personal information. They also offer feedbacks to one another with respect to personal and work-related events. Special peers exchange information of the greatest width and depth. There is almost no limit to the topics they discuss. These peers often share intimate information regarding their personal lives and work lives. In particular, special peers are more forthcoming and less cautious articulating their opinions and feelings about work-related issues such as problems with a supervisor or other peers (Sias & Jablin, 1995).

Research indicates links between the quality of peer relationships and the amount and quality of information shared within the relational context (Sias, 2005). Sias (2005) found that employees with more collegial peers receive higher quality of information than those who have more information peers. Information provided by collegial peers was perceived as more accurate, useful and timely (of higher quality) than information received from the more superficial and role-defined information peers. In addition, employees communicate more frequently with those coworkers they consider to be friends than with those they do not consider as friends (Sias & Cahill, 1998; Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003).

Information, collegial and special peers not only provide information-exchange functions in the workplace, they also perform multifaceted and multidimensional mentoring roles. Hill,

Bahniuk, Dobos and Rouner (1989) found that employees benefit from receiving collegial task and collegial social support from their peer coworkers. Collegial task support and collegial social support do not substitute, but rather supplement the social and mentoring network provided by traditional mentor/protégé relationship between an individual and someone in higher hierarchies (e.g., a supervisor). Particularly in the Chinese workplace, Bozionelos and Wang (2006) found that mentoring is substantially more prevalent than in the Anglo-Saxon workplace, and that Chinese employees do not distinguish their guanxi into expressive and instrumental. These findings were consistent with the views that mentoring is an integral part of the Chinese culture and that guanxi in the Chinese society is not purely instrumental.

As noted in the above discussion of Chinese interpersonal relationships, various forms of social connections, such as schoolmates, alumni, geographic origins, and common relations with an intermediary person, can facilitate the initiation and development of peer relationships.

Generally, current models of workplace relational formation and development consist of two major factors, personal and contextual factors. Personal factors include, for example, perceived similarity in demographic characteristics (i.e., sex, race, education, marital status, etc.), status, attitudes, values, interests (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge, 1979; Brehm, 1985; Sias & Cahill, 1998). Contextual factors are bounded to the context, such as physical proximity (Griffin & Sparks, 1990), frequent exposure (Zajonc, 1968), common tasks and work projects (Sias & Cahill, 1998), and critical life events (Levinger, 1983). Perceived similarity provides the motivation for interaction, and work-related problems create

stress and uncertainty that propels employees to seek support via interaction with peers. The nature and quality of communication changes as a peer relationship develops. Specifically, communication among peers become more open, broader and deeper, in some cases even more personalistic, intimate and less cautious once collegial or special peer relationship is established. Recursively, progressing changes in communication effectively influence the relationship to become closer (Sias & Cahill, 1998).

According to Teboul and Cole's (2005) evolutionary psychological model of workplace relationship, humans tend to strive to develop relationships with the highest complementary and highest similar relational partners available. The authors suggested the exchange and coordination of activities of employees' relationships are driven by preference for similarity and needs and instincts for survival, adjustment and adaptation. As a consequence, employees classify others as "high-preference partners" (HPPs) and "low-preference partners" (LPPs). HPPs are distinguished from LPPs by virtue of similarity and capability of enabling adjustment and integration in prestigious hierarchies. The authors suggested that it is not only automatic, but also an outcome of measured assessment that individuals develop close relationships with similar others and with whom the individuals perceive as occupying advantaged positions in prestigious and important social networks. It implies the instrumental nature of workplace relationships that span across varying power and status. For example, a local employee may cordially approach a returnee colleague who has more desirable job assignments or is more favored by the supervisor; but the local employee's motive is more for his/her own profit or success than for sincere

affection for the returnee colleague. Such dyads are more likely to form information peer relationships but not collegial or special peer relationships because they are bonded by instrumental ties.

In addition, scholars have examined the deterioration of workplace friendships. In an exploratory study examining employees' narratives of experiences, Sias, et al. (2004) identified five primary causes to workplace friendship deterioration: problem personality, distracting life event, conflicting expectations, promotion, and betrayal. Particularly, the complication of promotion referred to situations in which one employee is raised to a position of formal authority over the relational partner. Narratives of promotion depicted the difficulty of negotiating that change in status. In the case of Chinese returnees, the fact that they are often rewarded with quicker promotion poses a critical challenge to the maintenance of friendships with coworkers. Returnees who climb the organizational ladder faster than others may find it difficult to maintain close relationships with former peers. If they remain as close as before the promotion, others may suspect favoritism involved. For the sake of further career success, returnees may distance themselves from close peer friends, or even avoid making close friends in the first place.

Reentry following an extended stay overseas could also impact the returnees' peer relationships. The process of reentry is generally described to be both problematic and painful. Students and scholars returned from study/work abroad usually face the challenge of reentry adjustment in various aspects of their life, particularly in that of their interpersonal relationships (Martin & Harrell, 1996; Martin, 1986). Uehara (1986) investigated reentry adjustment

experiences of American students after an extended sojourn abroad. Results indicated that returnees from abroad experienced much greater reentry adjustment problems than domestic travelers. Results revealed that changes in the individual's value structure are an important factor associated with reentry adjustment. More recently, Sussman (2002) found correlations between cultural identity and repatriation experience in a study that tested 113 American teachers who sojourned to Japan. She found home culture identity strength inversely predicted repatriation distress. Repatriates experiencing high distress reported weak cultural identity. Preliminary findings also suggested that repatriation experience is related to shifts in cultural identity. High repatriation distress was positively correlated to an identity shift away from the home culture but bent toward the host culture.

Among all the reentry problems, social relationships greatly influences their life and communication. In a study that investigated East Asian international students after they returned from New Zealand to countries of origin, Butcher (2002) reported the students encountered a "disenfranchised grief" (p.354) that "cannot be openly acknowledged, perhaps for social or cultural reasons and restrictions" (p.355). Such grief was partially caused by expectations that they could maintain the relationships with friends that they had before left to study abroad but many experienced otherwise. Renegotiating these relationships was necessary but painful. Butcher (2002) suggested that the detachment from home societal expectations and changes in religious world view relate to the grief of losing friends and the challenges of others' unrealistic expectations upon the returnees. Martin (1986) presented a theoretical rationale for investigating

the role of communication in reentry relationships. He investigated student sojourners' perceptions of positive and negative changes in three types of reentry relationships-- with parent, sibling, and friend. Relationships with parents and siblings were perceived to have changed more positively than negatively. Relationships with friends were perceived to have changed both negatively and positively. Likewise, Brabant, Palmer and Gramling (2000) investigated the problems with family and friends confronting foreign students following their sojourn at an American campus. Their findings indicated reverse culture shock may be more problematic for females than for males.

Similar to returning from study abroad, professional repatriates must cross the threshold of readjustment after they finish overseas assignments to return to their home corporation or headquarters. On an organizational level, they were often expected to fit back in the home culture quickly, as if the overseas assignment had never happened (Black & Gregersen, 1999). On the level of personal life, friends and family often lack interest in the returnees' experiences. In the book *The Adventure of Working Abroad*, Osland (1995) summarized that the challenge to repatriates is to reconcile the profound experience of expatriation with the reality of life at home. More than half of the repatriates she interviewed reported returning as "difficult" (p.170). Several themes emerged in their stories of returning home, including "you can't go home again", and "others' lack of interest in their experiences" (Osland, 1995, p.171). "You can't go home again" described the repatriates finding themselves dramatically changed or grown which made it difficult to restore life prior to going abroad. While true friendships stayed intact, other friends



from the past seemed so distant that they no longer got along as before. “Others’ lack of interest in their experiences” was another common complaint that no one at home really wanted to share their sojourning experiences. While returnees were eager to share their experiences, most of their friends quickly got bored with such conversations and attributed unpleasant traits, such as braggart to the returnees. Once noticed the unwelcoming and superficial reactions from their friends or colleagues, repatriates learned to refrain from the talk and saved their stories for other repatriates. Consequently, repatriates turned to people with similar experiences for comfort, support, consultation, and in some cases, for friendship.

### **Homophily**

As noted above (Sias & Cahill, 1998), peer relationships develop into friendships in part because individuals are motivated to interact with people they perceive as demographically and/or attitudinally similar. The homophily principle that similarity links with interaction has long been supported by prior empirical research. Heider (1953) posits that if one person is similar to another, he or she will seek to develop contact with that other. Studies show that people are more likely to interact with similar others (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981; Sorenson & Stuart, 2001), and people interact with greater frequency with ones who are more similar to themselves, resulting in increased communication and sharing of information (Van den Bulte & Moenaert, 1998). In her study of group network ties, Carley (1991) reported that the stronger the tie of similarity, the more likely two people were to interact.

Liking and affection is positively linked to perceived similarity (Heider, 1953).

Individuals are more likely to develop and maintain supportive relationships with others who are similar to them on important social dimensions (Feld, 1982; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Marsden, 1988; Merton, 1968; Fararo & Skvoretz, 1987). Furthermore, sociologists find that friends tend to be similar with one another, particularly on such dimensions as age, sex (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge, 1979), education, prestige, social class, and occupation (Coleman, 1957; Laumann, 1966; Lipset, Trow, & Coleman, 1956; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge, 1979). Among these findings, Fararo and Skvoretz (1987) unified Blau's (1977) macrosociological theory with Granovetter's (1973) theories of relational ties, and found that similarity is determined by the number of social dimensions that people have in common. All social dimensions were given equal weight in Fararo and Skvoretz's (1987) mathematical equations which provided basis for the unification principle. This unification principle thus implied all social dimensions are equal determinants of similarity.

Unlike the unification principle proposed by Fararo and Skvoretz (1987), Sutor, Pillemer, and Keeton (1995) suggest that experiential similarity is the most important determinant of sources of emotional support to people who have recently experienced major status transitions, such as returning from study or work overseas. Dimensions of structural similarity that are especially salient following a particular status transition may also affect these patterns, however, structural similarity (e.g., similarity of age, life cycle stage, educational attainment, etc.) may be of less importance than experiential similarity for individuals in explaining interpersonal

relationships. Theories of role structure and reference groups (Coser, 1991; Homans, 1950; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Merton, 1968) imply that individuals sharing similar social statuses tend to hold similar values and are more knowledgeable about one another's circumstances, resulting in greater empathy. Sutor, Pillemer, and Keeton (1995), however, argue that such shared values and knowledge primarily result from experiential similarity, which produces greater empathy and understanding, as well as increased ease of discussing problematic aspects of the transitions. What is noteworthy, one of the researched groups in Sutor, Pillemer, and Keeton's (1995) study were returning students in a large US public university. Results revealed that the returning students experienced interpersonal stress regarding the transition of status and received emotional support from peer returning students. Specifically, friends and relatives who have experienced the same transition are the most emotionally supportive and least critical following the acquisition of a new status.

Organizational peers are generally similar with respect to status level and authority (Sias & Cahill, 1998). However, foreign degrees and overseas working/research experiences bear much more weight than Chinese local degrees and local working/research experiences in the current situation. According to the literature reviewed above, people tend to gravitate toward people sharing similar education background, similar prestige, and social class, (Coleman, 1957; Laumann, 1966; Lipset, Trow, & Coleman, 1956; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge, 1979); people who have experienced similar transitioning life events, such as returning to home country after study abroad, are important sources of emotional support (Sutor, Pillemer, &

Keeton, 1995). To keep an equal standing with one another, returnees may prefer to develop relationships with other returnees who have similar status and privileges in the organization. Compared to locally educated peers, fellow returnees share overseas experience and most importantly, no matter where they gained the overseas experience, they have all undergone the transitional phases in which one adapts to a new culture and upon return, re-adapt into the home country. These transitions provide common ground that can breed mutual understanding and emotional support between fellow returnees. Consequently, returnees may have a higher proportion of returnee friends than they have of locally educated friends.

### **Workplace Envy**

Differences in professional knowledge, varied access to key information, and location in the supervisor's social network are all important factors that produce status inequalities (Waldron, 2003). Returnees may face envy and jealousy in the workplace due to their above-average social status and achievement. With the national and organizational preferential policies, returnees often have more convenient access to organizational resources (such as research funding) and support from higher-level administration. Workplace conditions are generally more favorable to returnees and more encouraging for their further achievement. In response to the organizational reality of unequal statuses and allocation of resources, scholars defined the concept of envy and distinguished it with other emotions involved in the workplace. According to Bedeian (1995, p.49), "envy is an emotion that occurs when a person begrudges another for having or receiving something that he or she does not have, and perceives with displeasure the other's prosperity or

advantage”. Vecchio (1995, 2000) suggests that the perception of an undesirable distribution of scarce resources is an essential condition for the creation of envy. Because it is common in the workplace to see people competing for limited resources (i.e., merit raises, office space, promotions, grants, valued assignments, etc.) or having incompatible goals, dissatisfaction or even envy is commonplace in organizations.

Festinger (1954) argued that humans have a natural propensity to self-evaluate “based on comparison with other persons” (p.138). Likewise, Homans’ (1961) emphasized that individuals particularly compare based on rewards. Prior research shows that employees at higher organizational levels enjoy plentiful rewards such as higher income, more power and influence, more satisfying assignments, greater prestige and elevated social status, and are more likely to become targets of envy and derogation (Vecchio, 1995). The feeling of envy could also be triggered by the employees’ perceived inequity (Adams, 1963). Equity theory (Adams, 1963) posits that inequity occurs when an individual feels one’s job inputs and/or outcomes are disproportionate to that of the referents. Both the perspectives of social comparison and perceptions of inequity are consistent with the notion that individuals are envious of salient referents perceived to receive superior reward. Summarized from literature on social comparison, spatial proximity, degree of interaction, and availability of information are primary determinants of people’s choice of salient referents (Festinger, 1954, Kulik & Ambrose, 1992, Williams, 1975). Spatial proximity not only refers to propinquity, but also a variety of other demographic measures of social distance such as age, tenure, education, gender, and the like. From the other

way around, people generally experience positive emotions when making downward comparisons (Greenberg, Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2007). Vecchio (2005) examined envy among employees from the perspective of the envied as well as the envious. Overall, he found that the envied experienced less negative emotion than the envious. However, Taylor and Lobel (1989) suggested individuals tended to avoid contact with those they considered as underperformers or of lower social status. Those in positions of power distrusted others' motives of approaching them (Kipnis, 1976). This suggests that higher-ups may consider others' contact with them more for instrumental (resource-supplying) ties than for expressive, emotional (i.e. friendship, Ibarra, 1993b) ties and may, therefore, lead to their perception of less workplace friendship. Returnees who have advantaged status over their local peers possess more power in the workplace. Powerful individuals move away from social contacts with the less powerful (Kipnis, 1976) and the less social contact, the less friendship development (Sias & Cahill, 1998; Sias et al., 2003).

To attenuate the feelings created by perceived inequity (Adams, 1963), envious people are likely to engage in a variety of practices aimed at eliminating the disparity between the envied targets and themselves. In terms of peer communication and interpersonal relationships, the stronger feeling of envy reported (Cohen-Charash, 2000), the more likely negative behaviors towards the envied target are to happen. These include withholding assistance and cooperation, sabotaging the target's work and reputation, hurting the target, etc. Envious employees were also reported to be more suspicious of others and behaved unpleasantly or even hostile to the envied

target. The influence of workplace envy could also spread to the work group and interferes with efficient organizational operations (Bedeian, 1995; Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Schaubrock & Lam, 2004; Vecchio, 2000). People may obstruct each other for reasons of jealousy or envy (Cohen-Charash, 2000). Envious people may express their own feelings of envy by attempting to prevent their rival's successful performance via sabotage, hostility, derogation, harassment, and backstabbing (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Vecchio, 2000). Overall, envy is found to be associated with effort reduction in the group, impaired intra-group relations, lower cohesion.

## **Hypotheses**

To summarize, Chinese returnees play a pivotal role in various areas of the country's social and economic development. Like everyone else, they encounter various opportunities, challenges, and problems in the workplace and seek work-related and nonwork-related support from peer relationships. Given their unique educational/professional background and comparatively superior status in the organizations, returnees are likely to differ from their locally educated peers in terms of workplace relationships. Although Chinese people have distinctive features and modes of interpersonal relationships such as *guanxi* and the ingroup-outgroup distinction, we can still compare the Chinese notions of friendships with the three primary types of workplace peer relationships identified by Kram and Isabella (1985). Similarly to the peer relationships in American organizations, different levels of friendships in the Chinese society also exhibit variances in communication patterns. The closer the friends, the more frequently and more frankly they talk. The homophily principle holds that perceived similarity, particularly

experiential similarity such as studying abroad, draws peer coworkers closer. Inequity in organizational status produces envy. Not surprisingly, envy is detrimental to the friendly relations between the envious and the envied. Based on these theories, returnees are more likely to form close friendships with peers having overseas experiences than with peers who have only been educated in China. Returnees are less likely to experience close friendship with their locally educated peers because of envy and less similarity.

Given the above, the following hypotheses were examined:

H1: Returnees will report higher levels of perceived similarity to other returnee employees than will locally educated employees.

H2: Locally educated employees in organizations with a large number of returnee employees will report higher levels of coworker envy than will returnees.

H3. Returnees will report a higher proportion of collegial and special peer relationships with fellow returnees than they have with locally educated peers.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHOD AND DESIGN**

#### **Sample**

To test the above hypotheses, this study respectively assessed returning and locally educated employees' perceived homophily, general feelings of envy, and proportions of various types of peers in Chinese organizations. This study defined a returnee as a Chinese native who was born in mainland China, left to study overseas as a student, visiting scholar or guest



researcher for at least one year, and who has returned to China to work on either a temporary or permanent basis. The sample consisted of 127 faculty members in several Chinese leading universities and research institutes. To generate a representative and geographically diverse sample, the *Chinese Academy of Sciences* (CAS) and five leading universities were selected based on a recent report --2007 Competitiveness Ranking of Chinese Universities (<http://rccse.whu.edu.cn/college/2007/zddxpm.htm>). The five universities were Peking University (located in Beijing), Tsinghua University (located in Beijing), Nanjing University (located in Nanjing), University of Science and Technology of China (located in Hefei), Zhongshan University (located in Guangzhou).

Although the sample represented six organizations, preliminary analyses indicated no significant differences in scores for the variables of interest from different organizations. Of the total 127 participants, 57 were locally educated (44.9%), and 70 were returnees (55.1%); 100 were male (78.7%), and 27 were female (21.3%). Forty-six point five of the respondents were among the age 30-39, 30.7% were among 40-49, 15.7% were under 30 and only 7.1% were above the age of 50. Most of the respondents have a doctoral degree (88.2%), 10.2% have a master degree and only 1.6% have only undergraduate degree. Among returnee participants, 55.7% had spent 1-3 years abroad, 20.0% had spent 3-5 years abroad, 14.3% had spent 5-7 years abroad, and only 10.0% had lived overseas for more than 7 years. Thirty-four percent of these returnees went overseas in pursuit of academy, 8.5% studied as temporary exchange students, 58.6% had been invited abroad as visiting scholars, 50% had worked (e.g., post-doc research)

overseas. Sojourn destinations were mainly the US and European countries (e.g., Germany, Swiss, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdoms, etc.). A few returnees also went to Japan. Most of these returnees had been back in the country and served the current organization for a relatively long time. 62.8% of the returnees had been back to China for over 3 years, and only 17.1% were just back for less than 1 year. Similarly, 80.0% of the returnees had served their current organization for over 3 years, and only 10% less than 1 year.

### **Procedure**

Data were obtained via an anonymous online questionnaire containing three survey instruments tailored to the correspondent hypotheses. The questionnaire was generated and sent via online-survey software ([www.sojump.com](http://www.sojump.com)) to enable data collection from geographically scattered participants. The author first contacted her acquaintances in the target organizations and asked them to encourage organizational members to participate in the study. Then a web-link to the online survey was sent through these acquaintances or directly from the author to the potential participants. This means of soliciting participants is consistent with the literature that the formation of *guanxi* in Chinese society is often based on intermediary connections.

### **Perceived homophily**

Perceived homophily among employees was assessed using the attitude and background dimensions of homophily scales originally developed by McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly in 1975 and revised and improved by McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond (2006). In the context of the current study, the background dimension of the instrument relates to experiences and

educations of the participants. The attitude dimension may also reflect different values and attitudes between returnees and the locals, but they are not necessarily linked to whether they studied or worked abroad. The homophily measures asked the participants to compare themselves with their returnee peers, and choose either “True” (true = 1) or “False” (false =0) to the following statements.

Items for Background Homophily: (\*Item polarity reversed prior to scoring.)

This person is from a social class similar to mine

\*This person’s status is different from mine

\*This person is from an economic situation different from mine

This person’s background is similar to mine

This person’s status is like mine

\*This person is from a social class different from mine

This person is from an economic situation like mine

\*This person’s background is different from mine

This person and I come from a similar geographic region

This person’s life as a child was similar to mine

Items for Attitude Homophily: (\*Item polarity reversed prior to scoring.)

This person thinks like me

\*This person doesn’t behave like me

\*This person is different from me

This person shares my values

This person is like me

This person treats people like I do

\*This person doesn’t think like me

This person is similar to me

\*This person doesn’t share my values

This person behaves like me

\*This person is unlike me

\*This person doesn’t treat people like I do

This person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine

\*This person expresses attitudes different from mine

This person has a lot in common with me

## **Workplace envy**

A five-item measure of workplace envy assessed a general feeling of envy toward others (H2). The measure was developed and refined through several prior studies (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Vecchio, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2005). Each item includes a 5-point response scale (1= Never, 2= rarely, 3= seldom, 4= occasionally, 5= often). The participants marked their degrees of agreement to the following statements.

Items measuring envious feeling:

Most of my coworkers have it better than I do.

My supervisor values the efforts of others more than he/she values my efforts.

I feel that I'll never have a job as good as some that I've seen.

I don't know why, but I seem to be the underdog at work.

It is somewhat annoying to see others have all the luck in getting the best assignments.

This measure did not provide specific assessment of envious feeling toward either returnees or locals for the following reasons. First, the sample was drawn from organizations that have a large proportion of returnees. Potential participants constantly encounter and interact with both returnee coworkers and locally educated coworkers. Based on the envy literature, returnees are less likely to feel envious of local elites and other returnees who share similar status and treatment. On the other hand, local employees may be envious of coworkers whoever outperforms oneself, and enjoy higher status, especially their returnee coworkers. Therefore, returnees and locals may differentiate on the general feeling of envy because of which group (returnees or locals) they belong to. Second, envy is a negative emotion. It might damage workplace relationships and cause organizational crisis. A measure of general envy is less likely

to make the participants identify themselves with either returnee or local, and thus target the other group. This makes the participants more comfortable to accept and cooperate with the survey.

### **Peer coworker relationships**

Peer coworker relationships (H3) were assessed using an instrument developed from prior studies (Kramer, 1994; Odden & Sias, 1997; Sias, 2005) examining the Kram and Isabella (1985) typology. Consistent with Kram and Isabella's (1985) three primary types of peer relationships, the instrument provides randomly ordered descriptions of each peer relationship type. Participants were then asked to estimate the respective proportions of returnee peers and locally educated peers that they would classify in each of the three categories. Descriptions provided by this instrument focus on communicative variances among different types of peer coworkers, which also characterize different levels of Chinese guanxi relationships. Therefore, the usage of this instrument is appropriate in the Chinese organizational context. Following statements are the descriptions of types of peer coworker relationships.

Information peer: "We primarily share the information necessary for us to get our jobs done. We provide very limited emotional or psychological support for each other. We primarily talk about work or impersonal topics such as weather, sports or current events."

Collegial peer: "We share information about careers and provide feedback to each other, as well as needed job information. We help each other out as appears needed. We discuss personal topics such as families."

Special peer: “We rarely keep secrets from each other. We make a concerted effort to provide emotional support to each other. We talk frankly about nearly all topics. We let each other know how we feel about things at work and away from work.”

The entire questionnaire was translated into Chinese. Specifically, the questionnaire was first translated into Chinese by the author. Another Chinese master student translated the Chinese version back into English. Both versions were then cross-checked by two Chinese doctoral students of Communication in the author’s institution to achieve consistency. Gumperz (1982) claimed that language use in communicative process plays a significant role in the exercise of control and in the “production and reproduction of social identity” (p. 1). The choice of language could affect the participants’ self-identification and responses. Considering the study was conducted with Chinese nationals in Chinese organizations, it was reasonable to apply Chinese translation of the questionnaire in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Cultural Concept of Friendship**

Because the theories and research that ground this study’s hypotheses were developed in the United States, it was important to assess the extent to which participants’ perceptions of “friendship” were similar to the U.S. culture from which the theory and measurements were derived. To do so, respondents were asked at the end of the questionnaire to define "friendship" from their personal perspectives. Analysis of the open ended responses revealed four primary

themes, three of which described characteristics of a genuine "friend". The last theme reflected categorization of friendship in the aforementioned literature. The themes were organized as: (1) truthfulness; (2) supportiveness; (3) similarity; and (4) friends vary in types and levels.

The theme of "truthfulness" appeared repeatedly in the responses and was often emphasized as essential to "genuine" friendship. The characteristics of being "sincere", "trustworthy", and "loyal" seemed to be basic requirements of a true friend. One respondent described such friends as "safe and honest". Truthfulness played an important role in encouraging intense and deep communication between friends. It was a prerequisite of conversation "without reservation". Many respondents mentioned their friendships extended into emotional aspects and family life. Trust was essential for friends to engage in private conversations. One respondent highlighted this point using a Chinese proverb: "The heart of a true friend withstands the test of time". Truthfulness was regarded as the basis of solid friendship.

Descriptions about being "supportive" appeared most frequently. Actions of support ranged from simply "stay in contact", "care for each other", "respect and understand each other" to "provide advice and motivation, emotional comfort and spiritual support". Although a few respondents included "sharing information", "sharing research progress", and "suggestion for scientific research" into the scope of support, most others tended to consider emotional and spiritual communication and support as more crucial. For example, "true friends don't have to be around all the time, but always thinking of each other". Most respondents also defined "help" beyond its content and stressed the significance of dedication and purity. A common expression

was true friends would not hesitate to do one's best to help each other at any time. True friends never helped in hope of getting retribution. "True friends offer help requiring no payback". One respondent commented using both English and Chinese proverbs, "the friend in need is a friend indeed; genuine friendship is free from concerns for benefit". To share weal and woe was also a pivotal component of friendship, "friends need to undergo hard times together". In addition, offering support and assistance was also a mutual act. "[Friends are people who] support me when I do things right, correct me when I make mistakes, offer help when I don't know what to do. And he would want me to do the same for him."

The similarity theme stressed commonality between friends and coincided with the literature regarding homophily. In respect to background similarity, a few respondents considered school classmates, coworkers, and even people who have participated in common activities as friends. Most respondents focused on having common interests, goals and pursuits. A respondent summarized his definition for "friend" as someone who "(1) have common or similar values; (2) have similar approach with life; (3) conversable". Conversations often began with having similar thoughts, point of views, and values and attitudes. But sharing goals and visions raised such relationship to a higher level.

Some respondents assorted their answers into groups that clearly exhibited different patterns or levels of intimacy. One classified friends according to different aspects of life, "I group my friends in three categories. Friends in personal life I can talk without hiding anything. Friends at work help and support each other. Friends for casual communication I can spend spare



time with." Some answers directly corresponded with the ripples of guanxi which represent different degrees of intimacy and obligation. "There are different levels of friends: a friend helps you at work; a good friend takes care of you in life; an intimate friend share with your visions." "Best friends can talk about anything; good friends help each other when needed; ordinary friends are just work partners." Higher levels of friendships involved higher degrees of intimacy, trust, and emotional attachment.

In general, friends are "people who we can talk about things beyond weather, who we trust, who we can seek help." Additionally, two respondents commented on the difficulty of making friends at workplace. One of them expressed overt aversion toward returnee coworkers, "returnees look down upon 'land turtles' [locals] at heart. There's no real interaction [between returnees and locals]. Chatting about weather is already giving us [locals] face. My friends were mostly made before I started working because we have no conflicting interest." Nevertheless, comments directly related to returnee-local relationship was not seen in other responds. The above themes mirrored with the literature about similarity (Feld, 1982; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Marsden, 1988; Merton, 1968; Fararo & Skvoretz, 1987) and peer relationships and indicated that the respondents differentiated friends in gradient levels according to the degree of intimacy, trust, and emotional attachment (Sias & Cahill, 1998, Kram & Isabella, 1985), and that similarity was an important factor in the concept of friendship (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge 1979; Coleman 1957; Laumann 1966). Therefore, the concept and measurement of friendship derived from the above discussion could be applied to the sampled population.

## Homophily Factor Analysis

To identify underlying dimensions of the homophily items, those items were subjected to a principle components analysis, using a maximum likelihood extraction with a Varimax rotation.

The analyses resulted in four factors with a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0. To be included on a factor, an item had to load clearly on that factor at .50 or better and less than .40 on any other factor. Under these criteria, four factors were retained and five items were dropped from further analysis. Table 1 provides information regarding the factor loadings of the items. Table 1 provides information regarding the factor loadings of the items.

Table 1

### *Results of Factor Analysis for Perceived Homophily*

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Item 1 - This person is from a social class similar to mine*****	-.028	.079	.256	.150
Item 2 - This person's status is like mine****	.183	-.005	.213	.482
Item 3 - This person expresses attitudes different from mine*	.618	.049	-.017	.016
Item 4 - This person is similar to me*	.680	.383	.156	.003
Item 5 - This person is from an economic situation different from mine*****	.100	.005	.265	.582
Item 6 - This person's life as a child was similar to mine***	-.041	.085	.755	.198
Item 7 - This person's background is similar to mine***	-.046	-.036	.835	.107
Item 8 - This person's status is different from mine*****	.083	.149	.032	.654
Item 9 - This person is different from me*	.520	.192	.010	.075
Item 10 - This person doesn't share my values*	.560	.368	-.016	.346
Item 11 - This person is from a social class different from mine*****	.036	-.008	.080	.246
Item 12 - This person behaves like me*****	.546	.561	.025	.013
Item 13 - This person's background is different from mine***	.240	.115	.512	.175
Item 14 - This person is from an economic situation like mine*****	.040	.155	.319	.552

Item 15 - This person shares my values**	.205	.732	.017	.147
Item 16 - This person thinks like me**	.236	.707	.001	.096
Item 17 - This person has a lot in common with me**	.157	.715	.110	-.006
Item 18 - This person doesn't behave like me*	.624	.095	-.002	.134
Item 19 - This person and I come from a similar geographic region*****	-.128	-.006	.041	.078
Item 20 - This person is like me**	.128	.614	.108	.020
Item 21 - This person doesn't think like me*	.535	.331	-.009	.178
Item 22 - This person doesn't treat people like I do*	.529	.159	-.031	.005
Item 23 - This person treats people like I do*	.642	.311	.036	-.039
Item 24 - This person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine**	.313	.704	-.041	.156
Item 25 - This person is unlike me*****	.421	.368	.040	.121

\* Loaded on Factor 1

\*\* Loaded on Factor 2

\*\*\* Loaded on Factor 3

\*\*\*\* Loaded on Factor 4

\*\*\*\*\* Insufficient factor loading; excluded from scale construction

The first factor was comprised of eight items assessing information regarding the respondents' perceived attitude similarity (e.g., the person expresses attitude like me, the person behaves like me, etc.). This factor was labeled "Attsim" (alpha = .86). The second factor was comprised of five items assessing the respondents' perceived similarity in values (e.g., the person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine, the person thinks like me, etc.). This factor was labeled "Valsim" (alpha=.84). The third factor was comprised of 3 items assessing the respondents' perceived background similarity (e.g., the person's background is similar to mine, etc.). This factor was labeled "Backsim" (alpha=.76). The fourth factor was comprised of 4 items assessing the respondents' perceived similarity in socioeconomic status (e.g., the person's status is like mine, the person is from an economic situation like mine, etc.). This factor was labeled

“Sessim” (alpha=.74).

Principal component analysis was conducted on the five “workplace envy” items and resulted in only one factor. Therefore, variables under the “workplace envy” scale were grouped together into one variable labeled as “envy” (alpha=.69). The "envy" score was computed as the average score of all five variables in the original scale. "Envy" scores ranged from 1.00 to 4.40. The mean of the 127 valid responses was 2.134.

The score of each peer relationship type equals the percentile reported by the respondent. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and zero order correlations for all variables concerning the hypotheses.

Table 2 - *Descriptive Statistics and Zero Order Correlations*

*a. Descriptive statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
N=127			
1. Attsim	.3986	.34958	0-1.0
2. Valsim	.5780	.38646	0-1.0
3. Sessim	.6594	.35027	0-1.0
4. Backsim	.4593	.40917	0-1.0
5. Envy	2.1339	.69422	1.0-4.4
6. Age	2.31	.879	1.0-5.0
7. Gender	.21	.411	0-1.0
8. Degree	2.87	.385	1.0-3.0
9. Return	.55	.499	0-1.0
10. Abroad	.98	1.175	0-4.0
11. Back	2.08	2.125	0-5.0
12. Tenure	2.39	2.307	0-5.0
13. Re. Coll. Peer	41.821%	28.5103%	0-100.0%
14. Re. Spe. Peer	26.756%	28.7305%	0-100.0%
15. Re. Info. Peer	50.143%	30.9553%	0-100.0%

16. Loc. Info. Peer	50.890%	27.7963%	0-100.0%
17. Loc. Spe. Peer	27.097%	25.8337%	0-100.0%
18. Loc. Coll. Peer	38.360%	25.9972%	0-98.0%

*b. Zero Order Correlations part 1*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
N=127									
1	-	.569**	.214*	.111	-.170	.092	-.015	.178*	-.035
2		-	.237**	.155	-.234**	-.031	-.050	.214*	.072
3			-	.440**	-.064	.196*	.135	.262**	.265**
4				-	.108	-.074	-.066	.074	.059
5					-	-.317**	.055	-.069	-.182*
6						-	-.033	.219*	.523**
7							-	-.220*	.005
8								-	.263**
9									-

*c. Zero Order Correlations part 2*

	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
N=127									
1	.066	-.061	-.029	.274**	.288**	-.197*	-.161	.313**	.097
2	.195*	.035	.029	.049	-.003	-.220*	-.155	.063	-.187*
3	.252**	.242**	.211*	.083	.076	-.001	.020	-.013	-.049
4	.125	.031	.009	-.135	-.141	.038	.153	-.102	-.129
5	-.167	-.296**	-.178*	-.237**	-.151	.059	.085	-.067	-.025
6	.450**	.636**	.572**	.318**	.331**	-.068	-.120	.254**	.260**
7	-.108	.026	.011	.041	-.066	-.057	-.062	-.061	.101
8	.241**	.197*	.229**	.102	.111	.028	.056	.060	-.066
9	.759**	.886**	.940**	.092	.186*	-.118	-.140	.109	.021
10	-	.652**	.623**	.152	.277**	-.225*	-.204*	.239**	.055
11		-	.912**	.092	.162	-.083	-.131	.083	.030
12			-	.058	.159	-.062	-.098	.080	.012
13				-	.736**	-.382**	-.403**	.617**	.642**
14					-	-.380**	-.378**	.790**	.548**
15						-	.624**	-.380**	-.148
16							-	-.473**	-.420**
17								-	.619**
18									-

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, preliminary correlation analyses were conducted prior to testing hypothesis to assess the extent to which any demographic factors might have been associated with the dependent variables and therefore impact hypothesized relationships. Zero order correlation analyses indicated that respondents with higher academic degrees were more likely to perceive similar attitudes ( $r=.178, p<.05$ ), values ( $r=.214, p<.05$ ), and status ( $r=.262, p<.01$ ) with their returnee coworkers. The longer returnees had lived abroad, they were more likely to share values ( $r=.195, p<.05$ ) and status ( $r=.252, p<.01$ ) with fellow returnee coworkers. Age ( $r=.196, p<.05$ ), tenure ( $r=.211, p<.05$ ), and years since returning to China ( $r=.242, p<.01$ ) were also positively correlated with the individual's status similarity with returnee coworkers. In addition, the individual's perceived attitude similarity with returnee coworkers was positively correlated with one's proportions of returnee collegial peers ( $r=.274, p<.01$ ), returnee special peers ( $r=.288, p<.01$ ), and local special peers ( $r=.313, p<.01$ ). Furthermore, the more individual shared values with returnee coworkers, the less likely the individual was to have local collegial peers ( $r=-.187, p<.05$ ).

Correlations were also examined between the factor "envy" and other variables. Envy was related to the age of the respondent ( $r=-.317, p<.01$ ), how long he/she had been back to China ( $r=-.296, p<.01$ ) and how long he/she had served in the current organization ( $r=-.178, p<.05$ ). Envy was also negatively correlated with the proportion of returnee collegial peers ( $r=-.237, p<.01$ ) one had. Finally, peer friendship types were correlated with two demographic

factors. The respondent's reported proportions of returnee collegial peers ( $r=.318$ ,  $p<.01$ ), returnee special peers ( $r=.331$ ,  $p<.01$ ), local collegial peers ( $r=.260$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and local special peers ( $r=.254$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were all positively correlated with age. The length of sojourning time positively correlated with one's proportions of special peers in both local ( $r=.239$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and returnee ( $r=.277$ ,  $p<.01$ ) coworkers. On the contrary, one's proportion of information peers, whether returnee ( $r=-.225$ ,  $p<.05$ ) or local ( $r=-.204$ ,  $p<.05$ ), was negatively correlated with the length of sojourning time. These observed relationships were considered in hypothesis testing.

H1 predicted that returnees will report higher levels of perceived similarity to other returnee employees than will locally educated employees. Having taken into consideration of the correlation results, H1 was examined using univariate analyses of variance, including age, degree, time spent abroad, returning time, and tenure as covariates. Results indicated that returnee status was not significantly related to attsim, valsim, backsim, and sessim. However, educational degree did predict attsim ( $F=4.875$ ,  $p<.03$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ), valsim ( $F=4.812$ ,  $p<.03$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ), and sessim ( $F=4.951$ ,  $p<.03$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ). Specifically, the higher the degree, the higher the perceived similarity in attitudes, values, and status with returnee coworkers. The length of time returnees spent overseas was also correlated with their perceived similarity in values ( $F=5.552$ ,  $p<.02$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ). The longer they stayed abroad, the higher the perceived similarity in values.

H2 predicted locally educated employees would report higher levels of coworker envy than would returnees. H2 was examined using univariate analysis of variances with age, returning time, and tenure as covariates. Results indicated returnee status was not associated with

envy. Therefore, H2 was not supported. However, the length of returning time ( $F=8.613$ ,  $p<.004$ ,  $\eta^2=.06$ ) was negatively correlated with workplace envy. The longer the respondent was back, the less envious he or she became. Table 3 displays results of the univariate analysis.

Table 3

*Univariate Analysis of Variance for Workplace Envy*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
Corrected Model	9.888 <sup>a</sup>	4	2.472	5.932	.000
Intercept	58.652	1	58.652	140.756	.000
BACK	3.589	1	3.589	8.613	.004
TENURE	1.471	1	1.471	3.529	.063
AGE	1.549	1	1.549	3.717	.056
RETURN	.000	1	.000	.000	.987
Error	50.837	122	.417		
Total	639.000	127			
Corrected Total	60.724	126			

a. R Squared = .163 (Adjusted R Squared = .135)

H3 predicted returnees ( $N=70$ ) would report a higher proportion of returnee collegial (mean=44.176%, Range=0-100.0%,  $SD=28.6299\%$ ) and special peers (mean=31.557%, Range=0-90.0%,  $SD=30.6030\%$ ) than locally educated collegial (mean=38.861%, Range=0-98.0%,  $SD=27.1495\%$ ) and special peers (mean=29.617%, Range=0-100.0%,  $SD=28.8429\%$ ). H3 was partially supported. Results of Paired-samples T Tests indicated that returnees reported a higher proportion of returnee collegial peers than local collegial peers ( $t=2.128$ ,  $p<.04$ ), but there was no significant difference between their reported proportions of returnee special peers



(mean=31.557%) and local special peers (mean=29.617%).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

The current study collected descriptions of how the respondents defined "friends" in combination with the quantitative survey results. Insights provided by the qualitative findings were preliminary to interpreting and understanding the survey results. When compared with prior research of peer friendships, the theme of "truthfulness" and "similarity" coincide with characteristics that have previously been identified, such as mutual trust, loyalty, and reciprocal liking and shared interests or values (Dobel, 1999, 2001; Ambrose, 1999; Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Hallowell, 1999). More importantly, the last theme "friends vary in types and levels" suggests the respondents categorized their peer relationships and acted differently toward peers of different categories. Friends of the highest levels enjoy open and intimate communication, trust and dedication of little reservation, and emotional reliance. According to Kram and Isabella's (1985) typology, such friendship corresponds with special peer relationships which are characterized by high levels of intimacy, emotional support, trust, self-disclosure, personal and career-related feedback. Special peer is considered equivalent to a "best friend". Lower level friends, on the other hand, are rejected from personal life and limited to work-related matters only. Like information peer relationships, such relationships are characterized by low levels of intimacy, self-disclosure and trust. Communication between information peers is limited to work-related content and responsibilities. The respondents' description of friends in the moderate

level resembles that of collegial peers, of whom combine work partner and life friend roles (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Odden & Sias, 1997), yet not as intimate, trustworthy, and supportive as special peers. Communication in these relationships includes personal as well as work-related topics. The qualitative findings support the use of Kram and Isabella's (1985) typology of peer friendship types in a Chinese cultural context. It is also consistent with Sias and Cahill's (1998) finding that peer coworkers in different types of relationship interact in fundamentally different ways. The closer the relationship is, the more open and intimate their communication becomes.

Unlike scholarship developed in the US, Fei's (1947) analogy along with some later Chinese scholars (Tsang, 1998; Yang, 1993; Luo, 1997; Huang, 1988) also specified and emphasized different degrees of obligation and commitment for the different layers of relationship circle. As the extension of family circle, friends in the inner circles bear more obligation and commitment, and need to provide care and protection whenever needed (Huang, 1988). Common interests and mutual obligation unite the ingroup (Eberhard, 1971). Current findings were consistent with the above theories. On one hand, the "supportiveness" theme contained contents such as sharing information and showing emotional support that overlapped with corresponding research in the US (Kram & Isabella, 1985). On the other hand, the strong emphasis of mutual obligation and dedication was almost absent from western scholarship. In the Chinese minds, a true friend should do one's best to help each other under any circumstance and without any hesitation. A true friend never helps in hope of getting retribution. In other words, a true friend does not show support for instrumental purpose. Genuine friendship is pure and

therefore, must be free from concerns for benefit. Finally, a true friend's commitment is reinforced by actions such as sharing weal and woe. In summary, while being someone's best friend (special peer) is beneficial in nature; one also needs to be aware of the effort and hardship in constructing and maintaining such relationship.

Quantitative results of the current study indicated that returnee status affected Chinese returnee employees' peer relationships. Returnee employees were more likely to form collegial peer relationships with fellow returnees than with local coworkers, however they did not have varied proportions of special peers. The high standard of "true friends" could help explain why returnee respondents' choice of special peers was not associated with whether the person was a fellow returnee or not. Genuine friendship, which was equivalent to special peer relationship in the current study, requires enormous and continuous investment in all respects of life. Peer coworkers, regardless of being local or returnee, could hardly engage in such relationship without knowing one another for a long time. The positive correlation between age and collegial peers and special peers suggested that it took longer to build higher levels of friendship. More time and effort needs to be invested in having higher level of friendship. The formation of special peer relationships in particular is rather dictated by the principles of obligation and commitment than similar backgrounds or shared interests and values.

From another perspective, returnee employees tended to be the "high-preference partners" (HPPs) (Teboul & Cole, 2005) at workplace because of higher organizational status and easier resource accessibility. Guanxi with an HPP is fundamentally a social resource that

develops for instrumental benefits, contradictory to the purity of genuine friendship. The principle of instrumentality and opportunism predominates the development and maintenance of guanxi relationship (Su & Littlefield, 2001). As noted before, guanxi relationship has the potential of incorporating instrumentality and expressiveness, and gradually develops into closer relationship such as collegial peers. However, it could still hardly meet the requirement of dedication and purity in a special peer relationship.

The current study also examined underlying factors that might explain why returnees tended to have more returnee collegial peers. Results support predictions that a returnee's peer relationship types would be associated with coworker envy and perceived similarity. It was indicated that more envious employees tended to have fewer returnee collegial peers, and perceived similarity with respect to returnee attitudes and value was associated with collegial peer relationships. Specifically, the more individuals perceived they shared attitudes with returnee coworkers, the more likely they were to have returnee collegial peers. In contrast, the less local collegial peers the individuals have if they perceived sharing values with returnees.

Contrary to predictions, however, the respondents' perception of homophily with returnee coworkers and their envious feeling were unrelated to their returnee/local status. Instead, the amount of education was a much better indicator of one's perceived similarity with returnees, regardless of where the person had studied. More educated individuals tended to view themselves as similar to their returnee coworkers in terms of attitudes, values and socioeconomic status. The length of time one had spent abroad was also positively associated with perceptions

of value similarity with other returnees. Although prior research suggested that envy could compromise peer relationships at workplace and the current results showed envy negatively correlated with the reported proportion of returnee collegial peers, results provided no evidence that locally educated employees were more envious than returnees. Interestingly, having studied or worked abroad was not totally irrelevant with feeling envy. The length of returning time was negatively associated with envy: the longer they had been back in China, the less envious they became. These findings lend support to the hypotheses that overseas experiences impact one's workplace peer relationship, but not as influential as predicted.

Prior studies have pointed out the formation of relationships were mainly affected by personal factors and contextual factors. Of the two factors, personal factors such as perceived similarity in education, status, attitudes, values, and interests (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Verbrugge, 1979; Brehm, 1985; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981; Sorenson & Stuart, 2001) were seen as the motivation for initial contact and further interaction, thus implied closer relationships between similar individuals. As shown in the current results, organizational employees had higher proportion of returnee collegial peers and special peers when they shared similarity of attitudes with returnees. However, the homophily principle did not apply to similarity in socioeconomic status and background. This was consistent with how the respondents defined "friendship"-- most of them put emphasis on common interests, goals and pursuits instead of common background or status.

Besides structural similarity, experiential similarity (Suitor, Pillemer, & Keeton, 1995) as

well provides common ground for relational development. For returnees who experienced major status transitions, collegial peers with similar experiences were important sources of work-related advice and emotional support. On one hand, locally educated coworkers probably lacked understanding and interests in the returnees experiences. Prior research of sojourning students (Butcher, 2002) and professional repatriates (Osland, 1995) all reported the difficulties of renegotiating peer relationships among other challenges of going home. For example, conversations about overseas experiences quickly became unpopular among locally educated peer (Osland, 1995). Discrepancies with work-related matters might occur between returnees and local employees. Antal and Walker (2005) found that while the returnees felt left out by their Chinese peers, local peers considered the returnees failed to demonstrate the good virtue of modesty. Consequently, communication between the returnees and the locals may become shallow and less frequent, resulting in more superficial relationships. While true friendship survives, less intimate relationship perishes. On the other hand, fellow returnees were more likely to perceive similar attitudes and values resulting from the sojourn experience, and provide mutual support. Therefore, returnee employees were more likely to turn to one another to fill their need for collegial relationships.

This study also indicated a link between sojourning time and perceptions of value similarity. For the returnee employees, the longer they had stayed overseas, the more they shared values and ideas with one another. According to Suito, Pillemer, and Keeton (1995), some dimensions of structural similarity such as values were substantially affected by experiential

similarity, particularly following major transitions. Considering China has a unique cultural and social system, the core values of Chinese society remain distinctive (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004).

When encountered with the host culture, sojourners inevitably faced clashes between different values and went through an acculturation process. Their degree of acculturation was affected by the length of overseas stay (Storti, 1997). The longer the sojourn, the greater the chance for acculturation away from home culture; the more their values altered, the harder to identify with people back home. Thus, diverging values may distance returnees from locally educated coworkers. On the contrary, experiential similarity produced greater empathy and understanding (Suitor, Pillemer & Keeton, 1995). Henceforth, returnees with longer sojourning time were more likely to identify with the values of other returnees.

Educational level was another important predictor of perceived similarity. Organizational employees, no matter local or returnee, tended to perceive similarity in attitudes, values, and socioeconomic status with their returnee coworkers. Correlation results indicated that returnees generally had higher academic degrees. Higher educational level often enables individuals to climb up the social ladder faster and higher. The well-educated have always been a distinguished group in China (Bond, 1991). Such way of thinking was not only deeply rooted in the Chinese culture but has also been a social fact for many generations. Even for the locally educated employees, better educational background paves the way to more important positions in the universities and research institutes (Li, 2005b). Higher academic degree holders, foreign and local alike, enjoy privileged social status and the ensuing higher economic rewards. This helps

explain the strong link between academic degree and status similarity. Education also has powerful impact on individuals' attitudes and values. Inkeles (1960) found support for the theory that perceptions, attitudes, and values are standardized patterns of response to the standard institutional environments of the modern society. He further clarified, "the average proportion of persons holding a particular view may be distinctive of a given country, but within all modern societies the order or structure of response is the same, following the typical status ladders of occupation, income, and education (p.1)". Institutional patterns of the modern society, explicit or implicit, defined the role-structure in differentiated status and fostered typical patterns of perceptions, opinions, and values cross-nationally. Similar attitudes, behaviors and values were molded by similar education and socioeconomic status. This finding also disputes the common western misconception that because Chinese society is highly hierarchical, there is little mobility and flexibility in moving up and down the social structure. In fact, education has always been an important mechanism that facilitates and optimizes the social system and brings the talented to positions where they are needed.

Although workplace envy was not directly related to the individual's returnee status, it was related to the returnees' length of sojourning time. Returnees who had gone back to China for longer time were less envious. This is consistent with the fact that returnees are generally better rewarded and promoted faster than their locally educated peers. Not only because they were given higher expectation in the first place, it was also a possible outcome of their enhanced ability and work performance. Storti (2001) found that after the initial reverse cultural shock and



re-adaptation, returnee employees were often increasingly capable of discovering problems in the domestic system and of combining one's knowledge and international experience with the current organizational practices. Furthermore, results from the same Univariate analysis indicated no significant connection between organizational tenure and envy. It implied that locally educated employees did not become less envious over time like their returnee coworkers did. Compared to the returnees, locally educated employees with the same tenure might not have the same kind of advancement and promotion, and thus suffer from more perception of inequity and more negative social comparison. Gradually, the returnees became more envied than envious. According to previous literature, the envied experienced less negative emotion than the envious (Vecchio, 2005), but the more advantaged tended to suspect and avoid contact with those who were perceived to have less power or lower status (Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Kipnis, 1976). As a result, envy obstructs the friendship development between returnees and their locally educated coworkers.

### **Practical Implications**

As a group in between information peers and special peer, collegial peers function as both supporters at work and consultants in life. Information provided by collegial peers tended to be viewed as more accurate, useful and timely as compared to information provided by information peers (Sias, 2005). Employees with access to information of higher quality were more likely to succeed (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). Employees could benefit from receiving collegial task and collegial social support from their peer coworkers (Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos &

Rouner, 1989). Collegial task support and collegial social support often supplement the prevalent social and mentoring relationship in the Chinese workplace. Having less locally educated collegial peers might impair the returnees' ability to make decisions and perform tasks effectively (Sharda et al., 1999). More importantly, locally educated coworkers were important sources of knowledge and insights regarding the rapidly-changing domestic environment that returnees might lack due to the years of absence. Without sufficiently understanding the domestic conditions, returnees could not take full advantage of their international experience and transform it into local wisdom. A participant in the current study commented in a later email on returnees' overall achievement, "only very few returnees could achieve what they could have achieved abroad", because the condition of scientific research and the reward system in Chinese academia was still heavily influenced and restricted by administrative power and faction politics. Promotion and compensation was not solely decided by the progress and outcome of research, but also depended on how well the employee handled organizational relationships.

With regard to the findings of workplace envy, equity theory has significant implications for returnee employee motivation and commitment. Equity theory helps to explain the degree of commitment that returnee employees give to the organization (Robbins, 2001). If the employees perceived that the organization was not treating them fairly in light of their international experience, they tended to feel less committed and sometimes were induced to go abroad again (Xu & Yan, 2009). Robbins (2001) suggested that supervisors should heighten the perception of fairness by openly sharing information on how decisions are made and following consistent and

unbiased procedures. Administrators and supervisors could also encourage positive equity perceptions by planning in advance what types of returning talents the institution needs (Xu & Yan, 2009) and placing the returnees in positions that they could utilize the experience and knowledge gained abroad (Goss & Hynes, 2005). Returnee employees are more likely to endure the transitional phase of reentry when they perceive acknowledgement of their experiences and achievements (Goss & Hynes, 2005).

A recent move to attract more returnee elites may also contribute to the sense of inequity. In December of 2008, the central government of China launched the "Qian Ren (a thousand people) Project" which aims at bringing in over a thousand top sojourning scientists and scholars in high-end industries and emergent fields of science research within the coming five to ten years. These returnees will be provided with the highest level of financial support and compensation package by far. This ongoing project has triggered discussion among the academia about potential conflicts between the "elite" newcomers and the "old" returnees (Xu & Yan, 2009). In comparison with the promising reward and support the new returnees will get, earlier returnees were worried about their territory being eroded due to resource redistributions that favor the new returnees. With the growing influx of returnees, the competition in the Chinese academia may be escalated-- no longer just between returnees and locally educated, but also among returnees.

High quality peer relationships with locally educated coworkers and the sense of equity would enable returnee faculty and scholars to perform more effectively. It also contributes to the overall organizational functioning as well. Prior research (Sias, 2005) suggested organizations

should encourage policies that enhance the formation of more collegial peer relationships at workplace. Employees do not share information in optimal ways if they have large proportions of information peers instead of collegial peers. Low quality information-sharing could impact employee attitudes and performance, and in turn, undermine the overall functioning of the organization. Chinese academic institutions have offered above-average rewards to returnee employees in hope of strengthening the nation's education and research capacity as well as catching up with world-leading counterparts. To accomplish these goals requires collaboration and cooperation of all foreign and locally educated faculties. If current policies have caused discords and conflicts in the academia, it needs to be brought to the attention of policy makers and institution administrators.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study did not examine causal relations between peer relationship types and perceived similarity or workplace envy. To determine how the factors affect Chinese returnee employees' peer relationship types would require the incorporation of more in-depth qualitative studies. Furthermore, assessing respective proportions of the returnees' peers did not directly address the relationships between returnees and locals. It may oversimplify complex dynamics of the peer relationships between the two groups, such as the W-curve theory of adaptation (Storti, 2001). To obtain a more complete understanding of the returnee-local peer relationships, future research could benefit from more in-depth qualitative studies or more cultural appropriate survey

questions. For example, the factor of full-hearted supportiveness and commitment needs to be added to the description of special peer relationship. Researchers can also collect longitudinal returnee responses regarding workplace envy. Their report of envy may fluctuate as the returnees go through different stages of re-adaptation, rather than just diminish along time.

The sample was limited to faculty and researchers in universities and science research institutions. Nearly ninety percent of the participants had a doctoral degree. The educational level of this sample is unusually high. Also, the participants might enjoy relatively more independence at work than employees in other occupations. A larger and more varied sample taken from other occupations could have yielded more complex and insightful results, particularly in terms of the returnees' perceptions of homophily and workplace envy.

The definition of "returnee" used in the current study might have caused confusion. Specifically, visiting scholars who had spent over one year abroad were included in the returnee sample. In fact, the increase of cross-national scholarly cooperation has given greater ease to researchers and faculties in top Chinese universities to study and conduct research in foreign countries. However, visiting scholars mostly stay in the host country for relatively shorter time and are not viewed as typical "returnees". After the short-term sojourning, they simply went back to the original organization where they were already familiar with. Particularly with the help of modern communication technology, visiting scholars can easily keep in contact with friends and coworkers at home. They can also receive updates from the employing organization. As Storti (2001) suggested, the more familiar the reentry environment is, the easier the reentry. Visiting

scholars might experience less reentry challenges and obstacles than returnees who had been away longer. Future research will need to define "returnee" in a more publicly recognized way, or tailor the definition to fit with the target industry or field of specialty.

Despite these limitations, the current study has made exploratory contributions to both theory and practice regarding the ever growing group of Chinese returnees. In particular, results indicated that perceptions of similarity and the feeling of envy were associated with Chinese workplace peer relationships. In particular, returnee faculty and researchers in Chinese academic institutions tended to form collegial peer relationships with fellow returnees rather than locally educated peers. The length of sojourning time had impact on perceptions of value similarity. Educational level predicted the participants' view of status, attitudes, and value similarity. Moreover, the returnees' feelings of envy were associated with their length of sojourning time which suggested their faster promotion and advantaged status in the workplace. In practice, policy makers and administrators of academic institution in China should consider policies that help encourage collaboration and cooperation among coworkers, particularly between returnee and locally educated employees.

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