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# Middle-aged Mutant Sea Turtles!

A case study of identity formation among Chinese returnees  
in Zhongguancun, Beijing

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# Abstract

When China opened its borders in 1979, the country suffered from a severe brain drain as its most talented students left the country to take advantage of educational opportunities abroad. However these emigrant engineers, known locally as “sea turtles” (海归) or Chinese returnees, have become a valuable asset for Zhongguancun Science Park. The authorities for the high-tech park are now adopting a reverse brain drain policy to aggressively attract these Chinese returnees back to China in order to jump-start their high-tech industry.

The theoretical framework of this study is guided by a number of identity theories, which use ideas from Anthony Giddens and George Mead’s micro-sociological approach and the concept of hybrid identity in order to analyse and explore three Chinese returnees’ identity formation overseas and what kind of role they are playing in ZSP.

This case study presents evidence that an identity formation process that involves cultural hybridization has occurred overseas among these three Chinese returnees. They return to China bringing back with them new cultural aspects of their identities to the ZSP which results in a positive effect on the area. Positioned as senior managers they will over time create cultural hybridization among the locals in ZSP.

*Key words:* Identity formation process, hybrid identity, Zhongguancun Science Park, Chinese returnees, transnational human capital.

# Geographic location of ZSP



Map of Beijing and Z-Park

Source: Administrative Committee of ZSP

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# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this first chapter is to provide the reader with a comprehensive introduction to this study. First a brief introduction of the problem will be presented, followed by the specific purpose of this study, the specific research questions and some delimitation I had to do for this study. Finally a presentation of my material and my course of action will be given.

## 1.1 Background

In our contemporary and increasingly globalized world, societies tend to internationalize, creating a higher demand for various goods and services. A greater global mobility has transformed migration from a historically one-way process to a reversible choice (Saxenian 2005:35). Individuals who possess new ideas, technologies and information become *transnational human capital*. For a developing country like China, these individuals have become an important cog in China's rapidly developing wheel of economic growth and technological development.

When China's president, Hu Jintao, recently opened wide the doors of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, his purpose was to address 4,000 Chinese who once had studied and worked overseas but now had moved back. Known locally as "sea turtles" (in Chinese 海归), or to us "Chinese returnees", these foreign-educated and western-trained talents are drawn back to their homeland, "to realise the great rejuvenation of our nation", as Hu puts it (The Economist 2003:71). Many of these returnees see China as a land of boundless opportunities, and this is a remarkable change. When China reopened its borders in 1979, few of those who had gained foreign passports ever thought of handing them back. But globalization has changed all that.

China has been experiencing a brain drain for the past two decades, a concept considered as negative for any country. However the increasing number of Chinese returnees provides clear evidence of the more positive concept of *brain circulation*. The concept of brain circulation is coined by AnnaLee Saxenian (2006), who argues for a two way flow of technical communities instead of a one way brain drain. The theory has become a popular formula for many policy makers of latecomer regions trying to jump-start their high-tech industries.

The authorities of Zhongguancun Science Park (ZSP, in Chinese 中关村科技园区), also referred to China's Silicon Valley, are adopting a "reverse brain-drain" policy in order to attract back Chinese returnees. This policy in combination with several new developments – China's entry into the World Trade

Organization (WTO), Beijing hosting the Olympics 2008, the government's success in attracting foreign investment and the burst of the dot.com bubble in the United States (US) – created a “gold rush” mentality that spread among Chinese engineers resulting in that many of them came home (Saxenian 2006:198).

## 1.2 Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first aim of this study is to explore and analyse the identity formation of Chinese returnees. These Chinese returnees bring worldviews and identities that have developed from shared experiences abroad, the possible outcome being a probable development of a new identity. The second aim is to discover what kind of role Chinese returnees play in the ZSP. In order to fulfil the purpose of this study, the following questions will be answered:

- How does the process of identity formation take form for Chinese returnees while affiliated abroad and what is the outcome of this identity formation?
- What kind of role do Chinese returnees play in ZSP?

The first question concentrates on those I interviewed for this study and their identity formation process while affiliated abroad. Furthermore it also explores the outcome of the identity formation. Do they feel different after their stay abroad? What kind of identity do they develop?

Answering the second question will establish a connection between the Chinese returnees to the ZSP. What kind of knowledge or experience do they bring back to China? What are their current roles? By establishing their roles in ZSP, one can reach an accurate conclusion concerning the type of impact they have in this area.

Commonly, the term Chinese returnees refers to those Chinese with Chinese origin<sup>1</sup> who travel overseas<sup>2</sup> for higher education. After receiving their degree, they might or might not have working experience in the West (Zhang 2007). According to Chen, the term Chinese returnees can also include those who are hired directly by enterprises in the West from China, and who return home after a few years (2007:3). For the purpose of this study, I will narrowly define Chinese returnees as those who *have an overseas degree* (higher education and above) and *at least three years working experience in the West*. They have either taken their associate professor title or their Masters degree abroad and have worked for a

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<sup>1</sup> Born in China and has PRC nationality.

<sup>2</sup> Overseas refers to the West, i.e. North America, Europe, Japan and Australia.



number of years in the West. Additionally they also have permanent residency or even citizenship in their host country.

### 1.3 Delimitations of this study

Due to the fact that there is a great number of Chinese returnees, I have decided to focus on one specific group within the ZSP, namely those Chinese returnees who work for a multinational corporation (MNC). A MNC refers to a corporation or an enterprise that manages their operation in at least two countries (NE 2007a). The other two groups I have excluded in this study are those Chinese returnees who have started their own companies and those returnees who have joined local companies.

I have two main reasons for choosing this group. First of all not much attention has been given to Chinese returnees working in MNCs. Most previous studies deal primarily with Chinese returnees who have started their own businesses. Secondly, the majority of my candidates were represented in this group.

I am well aware that the delimitation I have made will prevent me making generalizations about Chinese returnees in ZSP, but that is not the purpose when doing an identity study. According to Petersson when using in-depth personal interviews as a method, the question is not whether your result is representative for a larger group or not. The individuals constitute the larger group, so it is within the individuals you should probe for answers (2003:43). The value of these interviews would not decrease because the researcher cannot say that the sampled group of individuals is truly representative of the larger group. Instead the interview is interesting in itself, states Petersson (ibid). Furthermore the arguments I was given during my interviews are truly representative of the individuals' opinions who I interviewed, however, according to Petersson these limited insights are adequate in identity studies (ibid:42).

Henceforth I will make a clear distinction between Chinese returnees in general and those Chinese returnees I have interviewed for this study. I will use the term “case study returnees” when referring to those *Chinese returnees I have interviewed* and “Chinese returnees” when referring to *Chinese returnees in general*.

### 1.4 Material and method

In general the purpose of this case study is to explore my case study returnees and their identities in ZSP. A case study refers to an in-depth, multifaceted investigation into a single social phenomenon using qualitative research methods (Orum et al 1991:2). The social phenomenon I am attempting to explore and

analyse is the identity formation process of case study returnees during their stay overseas and what kind of role it could play within the ZSP context. Furthermore, I will use existing theories of identity formation in order to explore and understand the identity formation of case study returnees and what role they play in the ZSP.

As previously argued, globalization has led to an increased demand for transnational human capital, especially for developing countries like China. But China is not the only country that is urging for transnational human capital. Developing countries such as India, Philippines, Mexico and just any country in the world that has been engaging in the many aspects of globalization could benefit from these individuals. My explicit ambition is to show that the findings in this study are not only applicable to the situation in China but are useful when analysing similar situation in other countries. These results can then be applied to other cases within the transnational human capital discourse.

The advantage of doing case study is the fact that it allows the researcher to focus on “the experiences, situations and circumstances of real people within the context of a more general social problem” (Peck & Dolch 2000:3). By applying a case study approach, it enables me to use qualitative interviews as an instrument to understand the experiences of case study returnees overseas and their current situation in the ZSP.

#### 1.4.1 Material

This study ventures into an area of research that is uncharted in some sense. Studies made about Chinese identities are mostly made by historians, geographers, anthropologists or sociologists. They are usually about overseas Chinese and try to explore and map out the Chinese diaspora and their identities in America or in Europe (see for example Cassel 2002 and Christiansen 2003).

Studies about Chinese returnees in ZSP have increased during these past few years due to the fact that many Chinese returnees are coming back to China. The already mentioned “brain-circulation” concept coined by Saxenian (2006) has increased in popularity. This concept is an attempt to understand the flow of skilled workers between home and host countries. Saxenian compares several different high-tech parks such as Hsinchu (Taiwan), Bangalore (India) and Silicon Valley (US), and does not specifically focus on the ZSP. Other case studies about ZSP can be found by Yun-chung Chen. The author is about to publish an article where he will apply Saxenian’s “brain circulation” theory in ZSP (Chen 2007).

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of those studies that are about Chinese returnees in ZSP deal with those who have started their own businesses. Not many (if any) focus on Chinese returnees in MNCs. Furthermore my purpose is to explore their identities and link it to the ZSP. As far as I am aware, no one has tried to establish the identity of Chinese returnees and their role in a high-tech park.

Before I continue I would like to bring to your attention the issue of statistics in China. Official statistics in China are highly questionable and are often

exaggerated. I have attempted to find figures concerning Chinese returnees but since there is no official register for this group, accurate data is limited. The Administration Committee of ZSP (ACZSP) did not have access to this kind of information, neither did the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). So instead I had to rely on second hand information and most of them are estimates. Therefore, I will only refer to these figures in a limited fashion. When used it is only to give the reader a general idea.

Since material about the identities of Chinese returnees is non-existent, I had to rely on interviews as a major source. Thus, my analysis is primarily based on interviews I conducted in Beijing between July-August 2007.

#### 1.4.2 Method – interviewing

Interviewing is a method much advocated by scholars within the identity research field, claiming that interviewing is one of the best methods to understand identities (Petersson 2003:39 and Svedberg & Kronsell 2003:69). Furthermore, identity studies using interviews as a major source of information is a relatively new method and not traditionally used in political science (Petersson 2003:40).

Since identities cannot be quantified or measured, one has to allow the individual to speak for himself and use personal interviews, in order to discover what he really thinks or feels (ibid:42). The technique I used for my interviews is called *semi-structured in-depth interviews*. Mason refers to this interview technique as “conversation with a purpose” (2002:225), characterized by a conversational, flexible and fluid style. To achieve your purpose with the interview, the interviewer has to be active in encouraging the candidate to speak about relevant issues, topics and experiences during the interview itself (ibid).

Even though the interview method is much advocated by scholars there are of course problems with this approach. Petersson mentions three problems the researcher must be aware of when doing interviews – instrumentality, the inside-and outside perspective and the interviewer's effect on the candidate (ibid:43ff). *Instrumentality* refers to the candidates when they deliberately say something to satisfy the need of the interviewer. The issue of *inside- and outside perspective* refers to the problem that I am representing an outside perspective, which most definitely affects their answers. *The interviewer's effect on the candidate* refers to that fact that the interviewer will affect the candidate no matter how much he tries to be neutral. The problems mentioned above were taken into consideration and I tried to use a variation of interpretative and direct questions in order to avoid these problems as far as this was possible.

#### 1.4.3 My interviews

I would like to emphasize that there exists a certain code of conduct among Chinese. Social acceptance and personal ties in China also known as *guanxi*, have to be there before you can make inroads for your research. So I spent a lot of time

networking in an attempt to establish my own social network. All of my candidates I met were introduced to me by friends, relatives or contacts.

When sampling the candidates, I contacted many relatives and friends with personal networks in China. After my arrival in Beijing, I took contact with those people I had previously spoken to when I was still in Sweden. They helped me find many of the candidates. I also used other local friends I met during my time in Beijing. They too, helped me find other candidates.

I will use five semi-structured in-depth interviews in this study. Two of my candidates will be used as references, and the other three candidates will be used as individual case studies. All the interviews were conducted in English and the location for the interview was either in their office or in a conference room in ZSP. The interviews were recorded on tape and later transcribed. The majority of the interviews took about sixty minutes.

## 2 Theory

The construction of identity is a very complex concept to study and it calls for an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach from the researcher. In this chapter I will give a brief introduction to the concept of identity, present theories important for this study and finally I will construct a theoretical framework. By way of introduction to the reader it is advisable to ask these questions first – what is identity and how do we understand it?

### 2.1 Identity - how to define and understand it

Barker argues that identity is not an entity to be possessed but something “constituted through descriptions of ourselves with which we identify” (Barker 1999:9). The important point in Barker’s definition is that identity is not represented by qualities of the individuals but by *manifestation* and *representations* of an ongoing process.

There are two ways of understanding identities – one approach emphasizes identity as natural given and therefore fixed. The other approach is comprised of those who believe identity is something changeable and an ongoing process. The first mentioned was highly interlinked with nationalism and its focus on territorialism. Identity was based on objective criteria (such as race, language, religion) or subjective criteria (self-awareness or solidarity) (Özkirimli 2000:58). This approach was the prevailing one in the 1960’s, but it has been replaced nowadays by the approach that argues that identity is a part of an ongoing process and therefore something changeable.

The reason for this is quite simple. In our contemporary world, characterized by globalization and the increasing flow of information, technology, goods and services etc., we find that the individual’s awareness of himself is multi-faceted. Furthermore globalization has eroded national borders, making it harder to create a homogenous national identity. Therefore a different approach was needed – one that allowed identity to be more changeable, placing identity in a global context.

#### 2.1.1 Hybrid identity

The major difference between contemporary research and traditional research is the shifting focus on a physical place, i.e. from nation to a more global space. This space is placeless, distanceless and borderless, and the interactions between people are also more interdependent, thus making the role of national identity less

important. The platform for this kind of interaction is the world as a single place (Scholte 1996:44). This change has brought forward a wider range of sources and possibilities for identity construction, making it possible to develop a much more complex identity, a so called hybrid identity (Barker 1999:68).

The concept of hybrid identity is used to highlight the emergence of new forms of identity in the context of a post-traditional global society. This identity formation process, also known as *hybridization* is a way “in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (Pieterse 1995:49).

Furthermore Pieterse suggests that one should make a distinction between *structural* and *cultural hybridization* (1995:49ff). Structural hybridization refers to a variety of *social and institutional sites of hybridity*, such as border zones while cultural hybridization refers to several different *cultural responses*, which includes assimilation, hybrids that blur cultural boundaries and through forms of separation. These two types of hybridization can be seen as evidence for an increased boundary crossing. However, Pieterse goes on to argue that these boundary crossings do not represent the erasure of boundaries. Instead we need to be sensitive to both cultural difference and to other forms of identification that involves recognition of similarity (Barker 1999:70).

This means we have to recognize other forms of identity formation processes, which can be based on different grounds, such as cultural, ethnic and national identities, but also other aspects such as class, gender, age and so on. These different kind of identities are formed (and unformed) over time and across a variety of spaces. Barker recognizes six different types of identity formation process (ibid:70ff) (I will use Chinese returnees to state some examples):

1. Two distinct cultural traditions are thought of as separate in time and space. Chinese returnees could define themselves as *Chinese or American*. This type is highly connected to nationalism and is based on ethnicity.
2. Two separate cultural traditions are juxtaposed and meet in time and space. They would define themselves as *Chinese and American*, and move between them depending on the situation.
3. Local cultures are involved in global flows, making them translocal. Hybridization occurs when difference is recognized which creates something new. For example “*Chinese American*”.
4. One cultural tradition absorbs or distinguishes the other one and creates effective similarity. The outcome for absorbing another culture is assimilation – “*My parents are Chinese but I am American*”. One example of distinguishing another culture is imperialism, when tradition completely disappears.
5. Cultural traditions develop in separate places, but they are based on common grounds, such as traditions or perceived similarities, the outcome for this could be a *global Asian nationalism*.

6. New identity is formed based on several shared concerns such as class, ethnicity, gender, age etc. Similarities are strategic and created. For example, *Chinese and Asian people can share a common anti-racist strategy.*

It is also important to denote that the concept of hybrid identity assumes or implies the meeting of completely distinct cultural traditions. Taking one of the identity formations mentioned above as an example, the idea of a Chinese-American hybrid is based on the fact that two separate traditions mix in time and space. But it overlooks the fact that neither the Chinese culture nor the American culture is homogenous. Chinese culture and American culture are already a hybrid form, divided along the lines of religion, class, gender, age etc. So hybridization is just the mixing of that which is already hybrid (Barker 1999:71). Instead the concept of hybrid identity allows us to establish new forms of identities, such as the “Chinese-American identity”.

Furthermore, structural hybridization and cultural hybridization are interdependent (Pieterse 1995:64). Because of new structural forms of co-operation such as regional co-operation, transnational transactions, international institutions and so on, the possibilities for hybrid identity have been established. In other words, structural hybridization creates possibilities for cultural hybridization. Obviously the discussion concerning the relation between structure and actor is central when developing a hybrid identity. I will therefore use an approach that focuses on this matter, namely the *micro-sociological* approach (Kinnvall 2003:18).

## 2.2 Micro-sociological approach

The purpose of the micro-sociological approach is to explain the individual’s role in a social structure context. Many scholars who advocate this approach create models that explore the construction of identity, in order to explain the individual’s role in a social context. Some more representative scholars for this approach are George Mead and Anthony Giddens. Since Giddens’ theories use some of Mead’s approach when it comes to the individual’s interaction with his surroundings, I will present Mead’s theory first.

### 2.2.1 George Mead – symbolic-interactionism

Mead sees identity as a process, where the key elements for identity construction are *social interaction* and *social surrounding*. He calls this process *symbolic-interactionism* and uses a child as an example (Kinnvall 2003:18).

In the beginning a child will interact with its surrounding through “play” and “game”. The first mentioned comes first in a child’s development. The child will play alone, observing adult society in order to gain an understanding of different

social roles. For example, he learns how to be a policeman, father and so on (Mortensen 2003:155). The next step is when he has to participate in games. It is in these games the child learns how to *generalize others*, i.e. the child has to relate to the norms of the game and how to behave in order to be accepted as a player.

This understanding through generalizing others will later turn into a general understanding for the individual in other social settings. What kind of behaviour is expected, what is appropriated in social settings such as the family, in school and later on at work and the whole society in general (ibid). According to Kinnvall, language is an important factor in symbolic-interactionism, because it is through language we can communicate with others in order to learn how to generalize others (2003:19). So in other words, language works as means in which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world.

Yet another central aspect in Mead's theories is what he calls *the self*, referring to an individual's own identity. According to Mead the self is a product of a reorganization that brings in something that was not there before (1934:198). Put in more simple terms, new identities could be formed as an effect of social interaction processes.

## 2.2.2 Anthony Giddens – modernity and identity

Giddens' most recent work concerns modernity and globalization, and especially how the modern era has impacted upon our social life. The presentation below does not give a complete picture of his work in this area, instead I will highlight some of his concepts used in my theoretical framework<sup>3</sup>.

Giddens uses Mead's symbolic-interactionism in his theories, but only as a starting point. The similarities lie in the individual's interaction with his surroundings. One central aspect Giddens emphasizes is the changing identity in our contemporary world:

“[...] the level of time-space distanciation introduced by [...] modernity is so extensive that, for the first time in human history, ‘self’ and ‘society’ are interrelated in a global milieu” (1991:32).

As the quote shows, Giddens acknowledges the variety of space and furthermore, he emphasizes that identity is something non-static, rather it has become a *reflexive project* (ibid). In previous societies, identity formation was clearly defined, because cultures remained more or less the same for several generations (ibid:33). But in the context of modernity, identity formation has to be created by “a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change” (ibid). Identity formation in our modern era has become more uncertain, due to the blurring of boundaries, the loss of traditional aspects of identity and so on. This, in turn,

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<sup>3</sup> For further references, please refer to Giddens (1990) and (1991).



means that individuals have to be more reflective about the cause and consequences of their actions. As Giddens puts it:

“What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of [...] modernity” (1991:70).

As we can see, Giddens and Mead share the same ontological starting point. Identity is social constructed, making it both changeable and dynamic. But the difference between these two theories is Giddens’ focus on social structures. These social structures consist of rules and resources, which form the individual’s daily life when one applies these rules (Kinnvall 2003:20). But since Giddens acknowledges the individual as a rational human being with a reflective mind, one can make one’s own choice and use these institutional rules in different context. Therefore social structures seem to be both possibilities and constraints for the individual (ibid). Giddens labels this phenomenon as an *institutional reflexivity* (1991:20).

The central aspect of Giddens’ theories about the changing identity in our contemporary world links to the concept of hybridization introduced by Pieterse. As we recall the identity formation process Pieterse called *hybridization* is a way where forms become separated from existing practices and recombines it with new forms in new practices (1995:49). Giddens uses another name for hybridization – *disembedding mechanisms*. The disembedding refers to “the ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space” (1990:21). It is obvious that disembedding and hybridization refer to the same thing, i.e. just different ways to describe it.

## 2.3 My theoretical framework

Depending on the kind of theoretical framework you choose to use in a case study, certain aspects will obviously be emphasized at the expense of others. To give the reader a better understanding of those aspects I choose to emphasize in my analysis, I will present the theoretical framework I intend to use.

This study will share Mead’s and Giddens’ ontological starting point, *identity is socially constructed*. This means we think that individuals shape and are being shaped by the reality they live in (Kinnvall 2003:12). Furthermore it is also important to mention that Giddens argues that identity is not something we possess or have, rather identity is a *mode of how we think about ourselves* (Barker 1999:15). This means that identity is something contextually related, dynamic and changeable, similar to something in progress rather than an arrival. If you see identity as something contextually related, it becomes obvious that you have to study the concept of identity on the basis of its historical and social context. As Petersson & Robertson state, “[...] identity studies focusing on the individual without relating to the surrounding society is pointless” (2003:8).

Using Mead's and Giddens' micro-sociological approach in this study I will be able to focus on my case study returnees during their stay overseas and their work in ZSP. Furthermore Mead is useful because he emphasizes two key elements of identity construction – social interaction and social surrounding. I believe that while my case study returnees are staying abroad, *the grade of social interaction with their environment* is a very important element in the identity formation process.

Giddens sees the individual as a rational human being, making his own decision regarding what values to embrace and what values to refute (Kinnvall 2003:20). Identity is therefore something based on *individual choices* (Arnett 2002:781). Giddens' perspective gives me the possibility to explain many of the individual choices my case study returnees have to make, such as why they decide to go abroad and later return.

This study also acknowledges the possibilities for *hybrid identities*. I will use the concept of hybrid identities to highlight the emergence of new forms of identities – one possible outcome when individuals like Chinese returnees go overseas to study and work. The different identity formation process listed by Barker gives me an analytical tool to establish what type of identity formation my case study returnees go through when they are overseas. Since two of the identity formations listed (represented by number two and three) emerged most strongly in my empirical material, I will focus only on these two.

Furthermore by using Pieterse's distinction between *structural* and *cultural hybridization*, I mean to show how the structural hybridization in ZSP has created new possibilities for my case study returnees. As a consequence of these structural changes, I will explore the kind of possibilities it gives to case study returnees and their cultural hybridization.

As Barker has shown, this cultural hybridization can take many different forms. But what I will focus on in my analysis is the development of a hybrid identity based on *cultural aspects*. Culture refers to the various ways we make sense of the world (Barker 1999:11), through practices, representations, customs and signs. These refer to a very broad variety of things. Using what my candidates told me when speaking about Chinese culture, they mentioned: Chinese food, customs, practices at work and management culture (Informant C 2007, Tsang 2007, Xiong 2007).

Culture used to be something bounded to one physical place but in our global society, we can see cultural processes of both cultural integration and disintegration (Barker 1999: 36). The question we need to ask is what values are shared or contested, by whom, in what context and under what conditions. So in order to begin our analysis, let me first begin by presenting the individuals who have gone through this cultural hybridization.

## 3 Case studies

This chapter consists of three cases of Chinese returnees and their experiences abroad. It is with the help of these individuals I will try to explore their identity formation process overseas and see if the possible outcome is cultural hybridization. I will relate to my theoretical framework continuously. In this way I wish to give the reader a theoretical feedback instead of just describing my case study returnees.

### 3.1 Yan Lu

Lu is 34 years old and received a double bachelor degree from Tsinghua University. After finishing his studies in China, he went to Canada to pursue a Masters. The following four years he worked for Nortel before he returned to China. He spent totally 6 years overseas.

#### 3.1.1 “I am Chinese”

Lu is a good example of Giddens’ argument of *institutional reflexivity*. As we recall Giddens acknowledges that individuals as reflective human beings make their own choices and decisions within the boundaries of social structures.

To begin with Lu comes from a working-class family in Tianjin, China, who did not have the possibility of pursuing higher education. In the pre-modern context, Lu would have let tradition play a key role in articulating his actions. He would probably stay in Tianjin and start working in a factory just like his parents and so his identity formation would have been more or less clearly defined. But in the context of modernity, he chose to go another way.

He went to Tsinghua University in Beijing to pursue two bachelor degrees and later he went abroad for his Masters. However in order to do that he had to be very ambitious and work hard because the competition was tough both to Tsinghua University and the overseas universities<sup>4</sup> (Lu 2007). When the university accepted him, he had to rely on teaching-/ research assistantship in

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<sup>4</sup> When applying to an overseas university, the Chinese have to do the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduated Record Examinations (GRE). They will then send these results of TOEFL and the GRE together with transcripts and application letters to the universities they wish to go to (Lu 2007).

order to support his living overseas, because during that time his family could not give any financial support for his studies overseas (not many Chinese families could do that at that time). The social structure gave him possibilities to go to Beijing for a prestigious university and later also go abroad, but the constraints he had to overcome were the school's admission procedures. These institutional rules seemed to be both possibilities and constraints for Lu.

When he eventually ended up at the University of Waterloo, Canada, he emphasized two problems he had met during his time abroad – the different education system and the language barrier. Lu indicated several differences in the education system. For example, a Chinese professor would never ask about things not covered in the textbook, they had never done any projects or presentations before nor did Chinese universities control plagiarism (ibid). In combination with these educational differences he also had problems with the English language. When writing reports he ended up using “Chinglish” (ibid), i.e. English interspersed with Mandarin-induced syntax (Qiang & Wolff 2003:30), which did not make much sense for the Canadians. But after two years he gradually noted that his language and other skills were improving making it easier for him to do projects and also helped him afterwards when he began to work (Lu 2007).

The example given above by Lu provides us with empirical evidence of how Pieterse's hybridization and Giddens' disembedding mechanisms actually work. The practices he learnt from the Chinese education system were lifted out of their social relations context and put into a Western context. This meeting ended up in a new form of practices represented by improved English, presentation and writing skills (Lu 2007).

The cultural hybridization Lu went through did not necessarily mean the disappearance of his Chinese culture. Even though he received Canadian citizenship this did not automatically make him a “Chinese Canadian”. Instead he still defines himself explicitly as Chinese:

“[...] I know that I am Chinese no matter what kind of nationality that [sic] I have [...]” (Lu 2007).

In order to establish the outcome of Lu's identity formation, I will turn to another Chinese returnees who have had longer length of residency overseas.

## 3.2 Informant C

Informant C went to the US right after Tiananmen, 1989. He went to Kansas State University and received a Masters and a PhD. He spent 18 years in the US before returning to China.

### 3.2.1 “It is difficult to get into their culture”

Lu’s and Informant C’s reasons to go overseas were similar – there were not so many opportunities in China during the late 1980s. According to Informant C, working for a local company was not so rewarding. Opportunities to work for foreign companies were non-existent for him because most of the work positions were related to sales or marketing. So the third option was to go overseas to Australia, Canada or the US to study (2007).

After going through the same application procedure that Lu had gone through, Informant C entered Kansas State University in the US. The University lies in Manhattan, Kansas, a town with a population of 49,000 (K-State 2006). The Chinese community was not so large. However most of his friends were Chinese, during his five years in Kansas. He continued to socialize mostly with Chinese after Kansas as well, and ended up in Silicon Valley where there are about 15,000 high-tech professionals from mainland China (Wong 2006:25). The reason for this was simple, their seemed to be some cultural barriers:

“I have friends and colleagues [...] in other departments and we have a good relationship [...]. But not as close as a Chinese colleague [...] it is difficult to get into their culture, because you do not know too much of their culture [refers to the Americans] so it is difficult to make friends with those people” (Informant C 2007).

The problem arises from the fact that Informant C did not share the culture. As a result of this it was difficult for him to socialize with those who were non-Chinese. He felt simply more comfortable in socializing with co-nationals, since they shared the same language, practices, customs and other cultural aspects. However this does not mean that Informant C did not go through hybridization. According to Wong, there is another kind of hybridization which takes place in the mixing of different cultural values and cultural practices (2006:199).

Informant C told me that he liked the *Chinese living culture* and the *American working culture*. When it came to the living culture, such as the Chinese food, cultural values, social interaction, he preferred the Chinese way. But when it came to the working culture, he liked the American way. As an example, he liked the fact that American managers treated their workers as an asset and not just as labour (Informant C 2007). This hybridization can be linked to one of Barker’s identity formations. In this case, Informant C’s Chinese culture seems to have been juxtaposed to the American culture. The result of this cultural rendezvous is that Informant C uses the Chinese *and* American culture depending on the situation. When Informant C works, he applies the American working culture, but outside work he prefers to use the Chinese living culture. The same thing goes for Lu. He likes the Chinese living culture, but when it comes to work he prefers the Western way (Lu 2007). This cultural code switching becomes much more evident in their current work in ZSP, but that is a subject I will discuss later.

It seems that this hybridization with the working culture had been occurring in a place we so far have ignored, namely the working place. As we recall Mead’s

symbolic-interactionism theory, an individual's social interaction with its social surrounding figures as the key element for developing an identity. Informant C spent a major part of his overseas stay working for two MNCs, Sony and Juniper (previously Netscreen). I would like to argue that these working places figured as identity formation platforms. They created possibilities for him to socialize with Americans during working hours, making it possible for him to learn how to generalize Americans which later generated good general knowledge about American norms and practices. Furthermore the social structure of the Chinese returnees working environment also affects an individual's identity. Giddens argued that social structures consist of rules which form the individuals when they are applying these rules. Working for a MNC, characterized by flexible rules and a more fragmented organization, also means a flexible and fragmented self, according to Collins (1996:16). This is evident among my case study returnees. Many of my candidates, among them Informant C, states that working for an MNC has made them flexible and tolerant in their working style (2007).

As my last example will show there is another identity formation Chinese returnees can go through, and it will also show how important Mead's symbolic-interactionism is for identity formation.

### 3.3 Michael Tsang

Michael Tsang is 38 years old and moved to Canada with his mother 1986. After exactly 20 years overseas he returned to China.

#### 3.3.1 "Finally you get it"

Compared with the previous candidates Tsang never chose or tried to go abroad, it was his mother who made this decision. But looking back, he seems to be very content with his stay abroad (Tsang 2007).

Tsang is a good example of Mead's symbolic-interactionism theory. Since he went abroad at the age of 18, you can observe how Tsang gradually learnt how to generalize others through game. He mentioned how he did not understand American football whatsoever, until he started to stay in a dorm and began interacting with American friends. Then something happened:

"[...] you know all my American friends were coaching game after game after game, and then finally you get it. So it takes time getting used to it. But once you get used to it then it is like everything else" (ibid).

This understanding of American football later turned into a general understanding about social settings in general. Another point I would like to present from Tsang's case, is his acquisition of the English language. As seen before both Informant C and Lu improved their language substantially during their years

overseas, but Tsang has a different story to tell. He had the choice of going either to Denver or Berkeley for college. Since Denver has a much smaller Chinese community than Berkeley<sup>5</sup> it enabled him to interact with a social surrounding which had less Chinese influence, thus enabling him to learn the English language faster when compared to Informant C or Lu.

Since language is so central in identity formation as Kinnvall states, I would like to argue that Tsang's acquisition of the language in early age helped him to merge into American society more easily. Giddens also acknowledges the importance of language, and means that knowing the meaning of words will enable an individual to use them and integrate with the routine enactment of day-to-day life. Giddens continues to argue that our knowledge about reality does not come from our perception of it, but as a result of the differences formed in daily practices (1991:43). Tsang acknowledges the difference between, using his terminology, the Western and Chinese culture (2007). The Westerners have a different sense of humour, their life style is different and their management style is different, but he got used to it. He still shares the Chinese cultural identity he had from his childhood. However, I believe he has become more Western in his cultural outlook. Thus Tsang's believes his cultural identity to be comprised of a mixture of two local cultures (2007). The creation of a new identity is evident. Tsang sees himself as "Chinese American".

### 3.4 Cultural hybridization

Mead's theory of symbolic-interactionism seems to be very useful in explaining these individuals' identity formation. The boundary of what "Chineseness" is comprised of, is social, made up of interactions. But it seems that the length of residency does *not* have an impact for identity formation. Instead it is the level of interactions with others and also your age when you go overseas that is more important. The stories of Informant C and Tsang showed that even though they spent similar amounts of time overseas, their cultural hybridization looked differently due to different background stories and their level of interactions with others.

My case study returnees' interactions with their surroundings create a meeting between two cultural traditions that are very much different to each other. But using the concept of hybridization and Giddens' disembedding mechanisms helps us to understand how these meetings can rearticulate traditional practices and give rise to new practices. For Lu this rearticulation has created new practices such as

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<sup>5</sup> To give the reader a picture how great the difference is between Berkeley and San Francisco (where Berkeley is located) I will use statistics from the US Census Bureau on the Asian (includes, Chinese, Filipino, Indians, Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese) (US Census 2002:1) communities in these cities – Denver has 15,611 Asians compared to 239,565 Asians in San Francisco (US Census Bureau 2000:4ff).

writing reports, presentation skills and the improvement of his English. Informant C's hybridization created a new working culture while Tsang developed a more Westernized cultural outlook.

The creation of these new practices brings us to the conclusion that these three individuals have gone through an identity formation process that involves cultural hybridization. The outcome is an identity based on new cultural aspects. What these cultural aspects are varies, depending on background stories, the social environment they were exposed to and their interaction level with their surroundings. What they have in common is they have developed a cut and mix cultural identity in the context of our global society. As seen in the case studies above, individuals such as Informant C and Lu chose to emphasize their American working culture, but outside work they chose to emphasize their Chinese living culture. Tsang differs from the other two, since his cultural hybridization is already imbedded in his identity, making him even more skilful in cultural switching. Altogether these returnees, as a reflexive project, chose the values and made decisions that are very adaptive to different situations and contexts. This proves to be very valuable for the MNCs in ZSP, as I will show later on.

Since cultural and structural hybridization are interdependent (Pieterse 1995:64), it would be advisable to analyse the location my case study returnees are returning to. The question is whether the ZSP has gone through a hybridization process as well.



## 4 Zhongguancun Science Park

This chapter will give a shorter presentation of the ZSP and explore if the construction of ZSP also has created a structural hybridization. It is important for us to understand the location my case study returnees are returning to, before we can link my case study returnees and their cultural hybridization with the ZSP.

### 4.1 A presentation of ZSP

The ZSP consists of five science zones – Haidan Zone, Fengtai Zone, Changping Zone, the Electronic City Zone and Yizhuang Zone. The largest zone, Haidan District, is considered to be the heartland of ZSP and it is considered China's most talent-intensive region because it boasts 56 universities, among them China's two premier universities Beijing University and Tsinghua University as well as 232 research institutions, including the prestigious Chinese Academy of Sciences (Saxenian 2006:232 and Zhongguancun 2001).

The ZSP was officially recognized by the Chinese government in 1988, when they established the Beijing Zhongguancun Experimental Zone of New Technology and Industrial Development. The area was granted 18 preferential policies for its development, and it was China's first science and technology park at the national level. Starting with 11 enterprises, the numbers have grown and today the ZSP claims to accommodate almost 10,000 high-tech enterprises (Z-Park 2007:5), all of different sizes. Larger domestic enterprises, i.e. more than 500 employees worldwide, that use ZSP as their springboard includes Baidu, Huawei, Kingsoft, Lenovo, Sina and Sohu to mention but a few. Numerous Multinational Corporations (MNC), such as Ericsson, Google, Intel, Microsoft and others have established in total over 70 Research & Development (R&D) centres in ZSP, either fully owned or by joint-ventures with the local universities or research institutes (ibid:8 and Wei & Yu 2006:390).

#### 4.1.1 Structural hybridization

We recall what Pieterse mentioned as an example of structural hybridization – border zones (1995:50). These zones work as a meeting place for organizations that are transnational and international (MNCs), macro-regional and national (domestic enterprises such as Baidu or Sina) or micro-regional and local (such as HIT Shouchuang Technology). ZSP is such a border zone.

In June 1999, the State Council of China approved a note from the Beijing Municipal Government (BMG) and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) to speed up the construction process of ZSP. This marked a new era for the park and a new administration ACZSP was reformed. Its' purpose is to "supervise and co-ordinate the strategy promulgated by Beijing's Municipal Government" (Zhang 2007). A more tangible example was to figure as a regulatory institution, handling a range of administrative affairs such as licensing, taxing, international trade, finance, employment, and intellectual property rights for high-tech firms (Wei & Yu 2006:389).

It was also during this time, that the central government released China's fifth Five Year Plan 2001-2005<sup>6</sup>, recognizing the potential of the overseas community as an important source for China's economical and technological development (Saxenian 2006:206). With the Taiwanese IT-industry in mind, which used a reverse brain drain policy in order to successfully develop Taiwan's technology industry, the government planners knew that this was the way to go (ibid:164 and 202). So during the technology recession in the United States 2001, they began to aggressively recruit Chinese returnees mostly from Silicon Valley (ibid:202).

The ACZSP puts a lot of effort into encouraging inventions and start-ups and to promote the ZSP's image as China's Silicon Valley (Zhang 2007). The incentives for Chinese returnees include finance for start-ups, free office space, tax reductions and training etc (ibid). Other incentives are also available, such as beneficial social and legal rights for Chinese returnees, even though many of them retain foreign citizenships (Regulations on ZSP 2000:8ff).

Another important role of the ACZSP is to attract foreign investment to high-tech development in ZSP. In order to achieve this, the BMG provides many beneficial policies for foreign investors. Most of these policies consist of tax reductions, cheap land, subsidized loans, discounts on utilities and logistic support. To mention one tangible example:

"New and high tech enterprises with foreign investment shall be exempted from local income tax" (ibid:article 16).

Besides ACZSP's and the BMG's efforts to stimulate innovation and development of ZSP, the central government has additionally an incentive system that involves financial funding. Furthermore, the central government has intentionally reduced its direct intervention in the operation of enterprises in the ZSP, in order to improve the flexibility of capital accumulation<sup>7</sup> (Wei & Yu 2006:389).

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<sup>6</sup> The "Five Year Plan" is a series of socioeconomic development plans (Guo 2006:22) shaped by the Communist Party of China (CPC).

<sup>7</sup> In spite of the Chinese government's intention to refrain from intervening in ZSP, it is still important to be political for those Chinese returnees who do start-ups. Saxenian argues that telecommunication and banking sectors make up 50 percent of the IT budget, and its structure is still characterized by a planned economy, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to avoid dealing with the government (2006:240ff).

Altogether I believe that the incentives provided by the ACZSP, BMG and the Chinese central government create abundant opportunities for both enterprises and individuals such as Chinese returnees. It is difficult however, for me to assess the impact of the incentives given to Chinese returnees, but judging by the experience of my candidates have had, this does not seem to be the case. Reasons such as better working opportunities and economic opportunities seem to be more important for them rather than these incentives. But still, the structural hybridization seems to have been established:

“ZSP has become not only the engine of economic growth for Beijing, but also a high-tech window through which the city integrates with the global economic and urban system” (ibid:390).

As we recall in the previous chapter, both Lu and Informant C went overseas because they did not have many opportunities in China. Many Chinese returnees, especially those who left in the 80's, never had the intention of returning. Neither did those case study returnees I interviewed. China suffered from a brain drain, when their most talented students were forced to seek educational opportunities abroad, while the policy makers complained bitterly. But as Saxenian states, no one could ever foresee that these emigrants might become a valuable asset in the global economy of the twenty-first century (Saxenian 2006:7).

What I would like to argue is that the incentives given to attract foreign investment to ZSP have created a foreground for Chinese returnees and their cultural hybridization to thrive in. More work opportunities and a better economical environment are two of the major reasons why Chinese returnees choose to return as I will show in the last chapter of my analysis.

## 5 Case study returnees and the ZSP

This chapter seeks to link my case study returnees and their cultural hybridization with the ZSP area and explore the kind of role they are playing in this area. I will once again use the three individuals I presented in the previous chapter as an example.

### 5.1 A general picture

Even though there are still a large number of Chinese high-tech engineers still working in the West, they have gradually begun to return to China since the 1990's. As I mentioned before, this flow of Chinese returnees accelerated after 2001 due to several reasons. First, the burst of the IT bubble in the US. Secondly, China's economic growth that included a myriad of factors such as their entry into WTO, Beijing as hosts for the Olympics 2008 and especially the structural hybridization described in the previous chapter.

To map out *all* the Chinese returnees in ZSP is difficult because they are scattered across Beijing and none of the governmental agencies I came in contact with had any statistical information about them. But based on my interview with an ACZSP representative coupled with an information review has led to the result that the total number of Chinese returnees working in ZSP 2001, was 6,000 (Cao 2001). Today this number has increased to 8,000 (Zhang 2007). They can generally be divided into three groups (ibid and Xiong 2007):

1. Those who establish their own business
2. Those who work for an MNC.
3. Those who work for domestic enterprises.

Most Chinese returnees are represented in the first and second group. In general the returnees try to avoid working for domestic enterprises, particularly those who are state-owned (Saxenian 2006:201). The reason for this is quite simple. The local company does not have a position for them that can utilize their hybridization in an efficient way, unlike the MNCs. So in order to show what kind of roles Chinese returnees play in ZSP by working in an MNC, let us turn to the three individuals I presented in the previous chapter.

## 5.2 Yan Lu

Lu's current position is a senior manager, leading a team of 25-30 people for Juniper Networks.

### 5.2.1 The localized

Lu returned to China after the burst of the IT bubble in 2001, and started-up a small company together with two Chinese friends in Zhejiang province. He had several reasons for returning to China. First, he was made redundant due to the burst of the IT bubble. Secondly, he acknowledges the economic growth in China, and opening a start-up company with his friends was a business opportunity he could not refuse. Finally, he had a personal reason, his family moved back to China.

Lu left the start-up company after one and a half years because he got into a conflict with his local business partner. The dispute originated from the fact that Lu had brought home new kind of practices with him, as Lu stated:

“The local people believe the returnees are too arrogant, too Westernized, do not know the local market and culture. The returnees on the other hand believe that the local people are not running the business as it should be” (2007).

Lu, who prefers the Western working culture, applied this culture in a local context. However instead of cultural meeting where the outcome is hybridization, it became a cultural clash. It seems that the Western working culture does not work in a local context. This is different however when they work for an MNC.

Lu works as a senior manager for Juniper Networks R&D centre in ZSP (ibid). Structural hybridization in the ZSP has made it very attractive for MNCs such as Juniper, to outsource their R&D centres in the area. But since their headquarters is situated in Silicon Valley, US, these long-distance collaborations still depend heavily upon a shared social context and language (Saxenian 2006:15). Furthermore speed and responsiveness are two very central factors for competitive success in the IT-market (2006:15).

In order to co-ordinate these kind of collaborations, they need an individual that can work as a “liaison between China and the US” using Lu's concise description of his work role (2007). It seems obvious that his role, as a liaison between these two countries, requires him to define himself as Chinese *and* American depending on the situation, i.e. when he interacts with his local staff he takes on the role of American but when he interacts with the Americans at his headquarters he takes on the role of Chinese. If there are no liaisons between China and the US, the shared social context and language would not be there making the MNCs lose their speed and responsiveness.

Today Lu is localized in Beijing. He points out that he moved back to China permanently. He does not contemplate moving back to Canada, but I must add that he has the opportunity to do so because he has Canadian citizenship. Most Chinese returnees work as, what I would call “flexible citizens”. One example of such is my next case study.

## 5.3 Informant C

Informant C works for Juniper Networks’ R&D centre as a site manager. He is responsible for the overall operations on the site.

### 5.3.1 The expatriate

The so called “flexible citizen” refers to those individuals who maintain more than one national base, shuttling back and forth to manage their work (Wong 2006:206ff). Unlike Lu, who is localized<sup>8</sup>, Informant C works as an expatriate, meaning that he has to travel to Juniper’s headquarters in the US every two months. As Informant C states himself, he is not permanently located in China, because his expatriate contract is limited to one or two years. So when his contract is ended, he has two choices – get localized like Lu or move to the US. On a personal level, Informant C wants to stay in Beijing, because this is his “home country” as he called it (2007). He also acknowledged the changes Beijing has gone through during the past decade creating more work and business opportunities. But the major reason for Informant C taking on this post was because of family concerns. He wanted to have the option for his family to go back, once the children begin college.

Informant C returned for the same reason as Lu and many others Chinese returnees. He had the chance to return in order to explore the opportunities the structural hybridization had created. Other similarities with Informant C and Lu would be the current role they are playing in Juniper. Informant C also works as a liaison between China and the US. Using Informant C’s own definition:

“[...] the value we have [Chinese returnees in Juniper], is the cross region experience. It is hard to get somebody with both kinds of experience. For an American is hard to understand the Chinese, they will never be able to do that” (2007).

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<sup>8</sup> A majority of my candidates represented this kind of “flexible citizen”, which is a part of their works. Not many Chinese returnees who work for an MNC are localized such as Lu.

What the MNCs need is an individual who is culturally hybrid, one who has been exposed to American society, understands American culture and has knowledge about Western working culture. Additionally he has to have a Chinese cultural background in order to understand the local staff. Someone who is both Chinese *and* American at the same time, that is what the MNCs need to have and that is also how Informant C defines himself.

Over time the impact of these returnees will affect locals in the ZSP. Since all of my candidates are senior managers they are currently in the process of training local people to be senior managers. I believe the Western working practices and representations that my case study returnees are applying in their work will be transferred to the local staff. The outcome of this culture transfer will eventually create a cultural hybridization among the local staff. However like Informant C says: “eventually we get to go out and train local people to be senior managers as well, but that will take time” (2007). I will use Tsang, the last candidate to show how these senior managers are training their local staff in a more tangible way.

## 5.4 Michael Tsang

Michael Tsang is affiliated with Microsoft China, and now works for Microsoft’s Advanced Technology Centre (ATC) in ZSP. His title is test manager and he manages a team of 26-27 local people.

### 5.4.1 The foreigner

Tsang’s decision to return to China was based on several reasons. Firstly, he had a personal reason, to be closer to his mother who lives in Hong Kong. Secondly, he wanted to look for other work opportunities and different business prospects. Thirdly, he also thought that Beijing was a city where there were many work opportunities. These reasons helped him to make the decision to return to China. Since Tsang had only been in Beijing for one year, he told me that the locals see him as a foreigner (2007). He did not really know if he wanted to stay in Beijing forever. He is open for other opportunities such as Lu and Informant C. Tsang is also a “flexible citizen”, just like Informant C, and has to travel back and forth to Seattle, US, for work. The frequency of travel depends on the project.

In comparison with Lu and Informant C, Tsang has never worked for a local company before. I argued previously that the working place for Chinese returnees had two functions – firstly, it worked as a platform for symbolic-interaction, secondly, they can be regarded as social structures affecting an individual’s identity. This becomes much more evident in Tsang’s case. As we recall, Tsang defined his cultural identity as a mixture of Chinese and American living culture. But when it comes to the working culture, he explicitly defined himself as Western. This is not surprising since Tsang never got to interact with other practices rather than with the Western working culture. However his role in

Microsoft seems to be the same as the other two. He functions as a senior manager for Microsoft's R&D centre in ZSP and leads a team consisting of 26-27 locals. Furthermore he is also currently training locals to become senior managers. When I raised the question of how they actually train them he said:

“You really have to be a mentor and a coach to them [...] I am telling them, this is Microsoft [...] we have a very American culture and a Western style type of management [...] And maybe entirely different thing that if you go to something like Baidu or Alibaba, which is a local company [...] they have senior managers their as well, but their style is completely different (Tsang 2007).

What becomes clear from the statement above is that Tsang uses social interaction in order to transfer the Western style of management to his local staff. Links can be drawn to the importance of language in symbolic-interactionism, because it is through language that we communicate with others in order to learn how to generalize others. In this case, Tsang uses social interaction and the English language as a means of teaching the locals which norms and behaviour are expected within the social context of an MNC.

The process of cultural hybridization the local trainees are going through, looks similar to the process of cultural hybridization Lu and Informant C went through when they were overseas. Work figured as an platform for symbolic interaction with Americans and in the meantime, the MNCs social structure had the western working style imbedded, affecting them at the same time. In this case, Tsang represents the American which the locals are interacting with, and at the same time, working for Microsoft will also affect their identity. As I argued before this will, in a longer perspective, bring cultural hybridization to the locals in ZSP as well.

## 5.5 Hybridization and its role in ZSP

I argue the case that structural and cultural hybridization plays an important role in ZSP. First of all structural hybridization has created an environment for Chinese returnees to thrive in. Depending on their different stories, they returned for different reasons – however they all acknowledge that ZSP has a lot of work opportunities to offer as well as business opportunities. Using Giddens' institutional reflexivity, it helps us explain that the social structure of ZSP provides both possibilities and constraints for Chinese returnees. For Chinese returnees in general they have two possibilities – they can start their own companies or they can join an MNC. The constraint comprises joining a local company. The people in the three individual case studies above chose to join an MNC. Lu gave me a simple explanation:



“Doing a start-up you will hit the culture barrier [...] the marketing barrier, [...] the human factor barrier. Then working for a foreign company seems to be an easy choice [...]” (2007).

The cultural hybridization Chinese returnees are bringing to the ZSP fits into the MNCs needs perfectly. Lu who is the localized one, Informant C who is the expatriate and Tsang who figures as the foreigner all have different life stories but they all ended up in the same role leading a local team as senior managers (site manger as in the case of Informant C). Or put it in another way, their role is to bridge the cultural gap between China and the US.

Cultural hybridization works as a bridge in order to create a shared social context and language, something that is very crucial for MNCs that outsource their R&D centres elsewhere. The cultural code switching they have to employ is facilitated by the new practices they gained during their experiences overseas. Even if these practices were individually different, there are two new practices that I would like to mention, namely *language* and *Western working culture*.

As I have shown in this chapter, Chinese returnees, in their role as senior managers, are currently transferring Western working culture through social interaction. The means for this social interaction is through language. In the long run they are creating a cultural hybridization among the local staff.

## 6 Conclusion

In this final chapter I will conclude and discuss my overall findings in this study. Furthermore I will give feedback to my theoretical framework I have been using to analyze my empirical findings. The chapter also gives some suggestions for further research within this area.

### 6.1 Summary and conclusion

My aim in this case study was to explore and analyse Chinese returnees' identity formation in order to find out if they have developed a new kind of identity and see what kind of role it might have on ZSP.

My theoretical framework comprising Mead's and Giddens' micro-sociological approach helped us to understand that the identity formation of my case study returnees depends upon *social interaction* and *social structures*. When my case study returnees' are overseas and interacts with their surroundings especially in their work, they are creating a meeting between two cultural traditions that are very much different to each other. By using the concept of hybridization and Giddens' disembedding mechanisms helps us to understand how these meetings can rearticulate traditional practices and give rise to new practices.

In the end, the identity formation my case study returnees have gone through overseas, does create a different kind of identity making them "middle-aged mutant sea-turtles", thus the title of this study. Even though, Lu defines himself as culturally Chinese, Informant C holds on to the Chinese living culture and Tsang is a mixture of both, I would like to argue that their cultural identity is hybrid. There are two new aspects they bring with them that are a part of their cultural hybridization and play an important role in ZSP – their improved *English language skills* and *a new culture of management*. I would not say that they would be positioned as a senior manager (or as a site-manager as in the case for Informant C), if they did not have these skills. Their work roles *require* them to be hybrid. They are both Chinese *and* American depending on the situation. Tsang who defined himself as "Chinese American" falls into this category as well.

However this cultural switching does not seem to be valuable in the US, where the Chinese culture seems more to cause problems, such as language problems, cultural clashes and the glass ceiling phenomenon that functions as an obstacle to their career. I believe that I have showed that the creation of ZSP is an example of structural hybridization, and created an ideal environment for my case study returnees to thrive in. It is one of the major reasons why my case study returnees

chose to return to China, because it is in ZSP they can utilize their overseas experience, and they are doing it through working as a liaison between China and the US.

Chinese returnees working as senior managers in a MNC are important in the long run for the ZSP. Their improved English language skills may not have a great impact on the area, but the new culture of management does. When these senior Chinese returnees adopt their Western culture of management in the R&D centres, the locals working under them become affected as well. This fact will in the long run be even more beneficial for the ZSP. But it will take a long time, and we will not see these effects in the next few years. But hopefully this “Western culture of management” can spill over to the ZSP community at large.

One last subject I want to address as a suggestion for further research concerns the so called floating seaweeds (locally known as *hai dai*, 海帶). These floating seaweeds refer to those Chinese returnees that fail to find work after their return. They consist of a younger generation of individuals that are sent out by their parents for studying overseas but returns back to China after receiving a degree overseas. As this study shows that the working places works as an important platform of creating a cultural hybridization, the lack of working experience seems to be a obstacle for them to find a job. Additionally the increasing flow of Chinese returnees the job market for these youngsters is tougher. Having an overseas degree does not equal a good job anymore.

## 6.2 Closing remarks

I hope that this case study has shed further light on Chinese returnees working in MNCs, encouraging more scholars to study this group of individuals instead of just focusing on Chinese returnees as entrepreneurs. Using quantitative measures such as how many jobs they have created, revenues etc. is a simple way to show what kind of impact they have on ZSP. But the findings in my case study show that Chinese returnees in MNCs have an important role to play and they are creating a positive effect in ZSP. However, since my delimitation prevented me from making generalizations about Chinese returnees, I have only scraped the surface of this complex subject and hopefully these findings will inspire other scholars to follow my lead.

From a general point of view, the findings of this study could be applicable in developing countries or just any country engaged in the global economy. The findings of this study suggest that authorities should create structural hybridization in order to create a social context where cultural hybridization can grow. In this way countries can take advantage of those individuals that possess new cultural representations and practices, i.e. the transnational human capital.

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# Abbreviations

ACZSP	Administrative Committee of Zhongguancun Science Park
ATC	Advanced Technology Centre
BMG	Beijing Municipal Government
CPC	The Communist Party of China
ETS	Educational Testing Service
GRE	Graduated Record Examinations
HP	Hewlett-Packard
ITPS	The Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies
MNC	Multinational Corporations
MOST	Ministry of Science and Technology
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	Research & Development
ZSP	Zhongguancun Science Park
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Appendix 1

## List of respondents

### Informant C – Juniper Networks

Informant C was born and raised in Beijing. He received his bachelor degree in Tsinghua University. He worked in China for 4 years before he left, just after 1989, for the US to pursue master studies in computer science. He later pursued a PhD as well.

After his university studies he worked for Sony as a research engineer. After 3 years he joined Netscreen, who later became Juniper. He has been working for Juniper for 8 years. Informant C returned to Beijing 2005, to work as the site manager for Juniper's R&D site. Informant C has been overseas for 18 years.

### Michael Tsang – Microsoft Asia

Michael Tsang is 38 years old and was born and raised in Hong Kong. He moved to Canada with his mother direct after finishing secondary school in 1986. After finishing college he was then transferred to the University of Boulders, Colorado in the US. After receiving a bachelor degree in computer science, he went to California State University (CSU) where he received a business certificate. Directly after he began working for Hewlett-Packard (HP) in Boise, Idaho. He was later transferred to Sacramento in California, but still worked for HP.

Later he started to working for Microsoft in Seattle. He stayed there for 8 years before he returned to Beijing 2006, working for Microsoft's ATC Centre in ZSP. His job title is test manager, managing a local team of 26-27 people. Tsang was overseas between 1986 and 2006, making his accumulated years abroad is exactly 20 years.

### Yan Lu – Juniper Networks

Yan Lu is 34 years old and grew up in a city called Tianjin (170 kilometres south east of Beijing) (NE 2007b). He began his university education at Tsinghua



University, Beijing and received two bachelor degrees, one in material science and engineering and the other in industrial engineering. After completing his bachelor studies in 1998 he went overseas and ended up in Canada, where he was affiliated with the University of Waterloo, Ontario (Uwaterloo 2007). After receiving a Masters degree in management science (also known as operational research in the US), he began working for Nortel. He worked there for 4 years before returning 2003. Lu spent 6 years overseas totally.

After his return he worked for two different local companies before joining Nortel China. After staying in Nortel for 1 year, he joined his present company, Juniper Networks, working as a senior manager. Lu's team consists of 25-30 local people.

### Xinmin Zhang – Administrative Committee of ZSP

Xinmin Zhang works in a department called the division of talent resources, which is a department under the ACZSP. The ACZSP changed its name to its current name after The State Council on June 5, 1999 approved a note from the BMG and the MOST to speed up the construction process of ZSP. Its purpose is to function as a pilot unit in the development of the ZSP. The ACZSP is divided into 9 departments and its staff of the office consists of 60 people, mostly locals.

### Hawk Xiong – Juniper Networks

Hawk Xiong is 37 years old and graduated from Chengdu University of Technology 1991. After working for a local company and two different American companies, he applied for MBA studies and master studies in computer science in Tsinghua University. He never completed his master studies, but he holds an MBA degree from Tsinghua University.

He joined Netscreen 2001, who were acquired by Juniper 2004. It was from his time in Netscreen he moved to the US. After spending almost 6 years in the Silicon Valley, US, he moved back to Beijing.

I choose not to use Xiong as a case study since he did not study overseas. However I used him as a reference.

# Appendix 2

As I mentioned before, the technique I used for my interviews was semi-structured. Characterized by open-ended question, I asked the question variously depending on the answers my candidates gave me. Below is the question I used in general. All of the interviews were recorded and were conducted in English.

## General interview guide

- Introduce yourself very briefly
- What is your personal/academic background/age?
- Which enterprise are you affiliated to? Can you introduce your enterprise – current number of staff? How is the division between expats/locals/Chinese returnees?
- What is your current position? How long have you been affiliated with your current enterprise?
- Your stay abroad
- For how long were you abroad and when?
- Where did you study?
- What did you study (field and level, i.e. undergraduate, M.A., Ph.D., post-doc)?
- Why did you study abroad?
- What was the reason behind your choice of university/country? Did you apply for several universities in different countries? What was your first choice/second choice etc.?
- Who financed your study abroad (government, university, other scholarships, company, family...)?
- Describe your experience of your study abroad – did it meet/exceed/fall short of your expectations? In what way(s)?
- Did you feel integrated into the society? Did you find it easy to get on with the local people?

- Do you know friends who had the same experience as you, i.e. moved to another country to take a higher education degree? The opposite case (stayed in China)?
- After your stay abroad
  - What was your main reason for returning to China?
  - Do you wish to go abroad again?
  - What is your general picture of your stay abroad, any lessons learned?
  - Do you still have contacts/ties with the country you studied in or the university you studied at and if so what kind of ties?
  - Do you feel different after your foreign stay, i.e. do you feel more “westernized” or is your Chinese identity even stronger than before?
  - Can you think of any pros and cons about going abroad?
  - What is the most valuable experience you learnt? And less valuable?
  - Do you think your abroad experience had/will help you in your daily work-life?
- What kind of advice would you give other Chinese returnees who are thinking about going abroad or returning to China? What are the major challenges to conquer when you are thinking about going abroad or returning to China?
- One last question, I wonder if you have something to add in case I have missed anything important.