



Engaging a temporal–spatial stretch: An inquiry into the role of the state in cultivating and claiming the Chinese knowledge diaspora



Maggi W.H. Leung

International Development Studies, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Utrecht University, P.O. Box 80115, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 October 2013
Received in revised form 4 June 2014
Available online 4 July 2014

Keywords:

Academic mobility
Chinese knowledge diaspora
State
Development
Spatiality
Temporality

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the state in cultivating and claiming the Chinese knowledge diaspora for development, focusing on the Chinese–German academic space. It calls for a temporal–spatial stretch in conceptualising the state in this policy arena. The spatial stretch broadens the usual analysis of the state to go beyond the sending nation–state framework. It illustrates that the state, rather than functioning as a unitary body, comprises different agencies and exists in a multiplicity of forms. Examples demonstrate that the Chinese state at various geographical levels and localities as well as states in other countries engage with one another in making and tapping the Chinese knowledge diaspora. The temporal stretch necessitates an extension of our analytical optic from the conventional focus on how the state claims the diaspora ‘out there’ towards recognising its important role in the strategic and selective production of the diaspora. Furthermore, this paper calls for a higher sensitivity to other temporal characteristics in state policies and practices. Moving away from an expectation of a permanent return of its talents overseas, the Chinese state has turned to the ‘diaspora option’, which refers to regulating and tapping the potential of the Chinese knowledge network that contributes from afar and/or circulates transnationally. Other mechanisms to control the temporality of knowledge diaspora engagement will also be illustrated. Finally, the paper provides an analysis of the complex, sometimes collaborative while other times competitive relationship, between the Chinese and German states in producing and regulating the Chinese knowledge diaspora.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

As the knowledge economy becomes more globalised, scholars, researchers and students have become incorporated into the development visions of universities and other research institutions (see [Larner, this issue](#)), and more broadly of urban centres, sub-national regions and nation-states near and far from where these talents(-to-be) are currently located. In this global ‘war for talent’, state and private-sector institutions compete to host or at least share affiliation with the highest number and quality of talents, the movement of these increasingly mobile, seemingly footloose professionals has become a contested field. What does this mean to nation-states, like China¹, from which a large number of their university graduates, academics, researchers and scientists are in the global knowledge–production circuit? And what are the implications for nation-states who see the need for foreign talents in order to

keep up in the race in the increasingly globalised knowledge economy?

This paper examines the role of the state in cultivating and claiming the Chinese knowledge diaspora for development. Specifically, the analysis unpacks ‘the state’ and performs a temporal–spatial stretch in interrogating its workings. The *spatial stretch* broadens the usual analysis of the state as a coherent unit, anchored at the nation-state level and located in the ‘homeland’, the country of origin of the diaspora. In more concrete terms, this stretching emphasises the fact that the state comprises different agencies and exists in a multiplicity of forms. Examples will illustrate how the Chinese state, operating at various geographical (national, provincial, municipal/county) levels and localities (in China and overseas) engage with one another, and at the same time, with states of other countries – also to be understood as non-unitary – in making and claiming the Chinese knowledge diaspora. The relationships between these state entities are multiple and dynamic, shifting from collaborative to competitive in nature. This spatial stretching illustrates the fact that the Chinese and German state policies ‘co-produce’ the Chinese diasporic academics relationally, resulting in academic exchanges that impact bilateral

¹ E-mail address: W.H.M.Leung@uu.nl

¹ ‘China’ refers to China Mainland of the Peoples’ Republic of China, hence excluding the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, in the analysis. Taiwan is also not considered in this paper.

relationships. The *temporal stretch* enables an extension of our analytical optic in two ways. First, it stretches the conventional focus in the current discourse on how the state claims the diaspora 'out there' (i.e. after it has been formed) towards recognising the role of the state in the strategic and selective *production* of the diaspora. In the case of the Chinese knowledge diaspora, states at different geographical levels in China and beyond (in particular, the 'destination' countries of the mobile academics) are involved in identifying individuals of particular backgrounds, nurturing their mobility (and other forms of) capital and framing them into diaspora subjects and (future) agents for development. Second, it urges a higher sensitivity to other temporal characteristics in state policies and practices that materialise the 'diaspora strategy'. Moving away from an expectation of a permanent return of its talents overseas, the Chinese state has turned to explore a wider range of temporal possibilities in implementing its 'diaspora for development' strategies, encouraging its talents overseas to return for shorter period(s) and circulate in multiple, transnational (or translocal) knowledge networks.

The remainder of the paper is organised into six sections. Section 2 provides a review of the literature on the relationship between knowledge diaspora, the state and development. The next section presents the research background and methodology. Section 4 outlines the Chinese state's relationship with its knowledge diaspora, serving as a background for the next, more substantive section, which demonstrates a spatial-temporal stretch in conceptualising the state. The subsequent section zooms in to show how the Chinese and German states produce and claim the Chinese knowledge diaspora relationally. It brings forth the complex and changeable relationship shared among the various state entities in the making and tapping of the knowledge diaspora. Finally, the paper will conclude with some implications of this study.

Knowledge diaspora, the state and development

While knowledge diaspora contributing to (national) development is not a new phenomenon – considering, for instance, the role of returnee scholars in Chinese modernisation and national development in the early 20th century, it is a relatively new topic in the literature on migration and development. Meyer and Brown (1999) wrote about knowledge diasporas as a new approach to the brain drain in the end of the 1990s, marking practically the beginning of this branch of research. Subsequently, a number of research reports (e.g. Brown, 2000) were published. They gauge the potential of the 'brains in diaspora' in reversing the brain drain that haunts many, especially poorer economies. Indeed, the idea of the knowledge diaspora challenges the winner-takes-it-all paradigm arising from the dichotomous 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' framing, which had been prevalent in the migration and development literature. The notion of diaspora was activated in the debate pertaining to highly-skilled and professional mobilities, alongside with concepts like 'brain circulation', 'brain exchange' or 'brain rearticulation' (e.g. Arocena and Sutz, 2006; Pieke et al., 2004; Saxenian, 2005) to denote the often temporary, circular flows practiced by the highly-skilled, as well as their engagement and embeddedness in multiple networks and knowledge economies, straddling national boundaries. More recently, work on knowledge diasporas promotes them as an active strategy for nation-states to achieve brain gain. In their UNESCO working paper, Meyer and Wattiaux (2006) compare a number of international migration trajectories among scientists and engineers and illustrate evidences to show the capacity of diaspora knowledge networks. They conclude that there are 'strong potential resources for effective and mutually beneficial co-operation between developing and highly industrialised countries (1)'. A series of studies has subsequently been con-

ducted on case-studies around the world and in Asia particularly (especially China and India), reflecting the high level and rise of movements of academics and scientists from the region (e.g. the *Asian Population Studies* special issue on Skilled Diasporas in Asian Development published in 2007).

Within Asia, the large number of Chinese academics and scientists overseas and the active role of the Chinese state in the past two decades in claiming the Chinese knowledge diaspora have inspired a vibrant scholarship. The extensive body of work by David Zweig and his colleagues traces and evaluates the evolution of the Chinese state's policy and relationship with its diaspora, shifting from the conventional brain-gain vis-à-vis brain-drain model to the diaspora approach (e.g. Zweig, 2006; Zweig and Chen, 1995; Zweig et al., 2004; Zweig et al., 2008; Zweig and Wang, 2013). A dominant line of research considers the development impact and potential of the Chinese knowledge diaspora and offers policy recommendations. Xiang (2005) assesses how knowledge exchange can be promoted through diaspora professional networks and puts forward recommendations to improve government management and to better synergise state activities and market mechanisms. Scholars based in Australia have contributed a series of studies on the cases there (Welch and Zhen, 2008; Yang and Qiu, 2010; Yang and Welch (2012)). Operating with a transnational perspective, Yang and Welch (2010) argue that the Chinese knowledge diaspora serves as 'transnational human capital' that can be garnered by the Chinese and Australian states for development in both economies (cf. Zweig et al., 2004). The Chinese diaspora strategy has commonly been considered a role model and compared to other cases for policy suggestions. The Indian and Chinese cases have been compared by Xiang (2007) and Hugo (2010), while Wescott (2005) compares the Filipino and Chinese knowledge networks. Although the Chinese knowledge diaspora is (becoming) a worldwide phenomenon, the extant literature has a limited geographical coverage, focusing on the US–Chinese and Australian–Chinese cases. Hardly any grounded fieldwork-based research has been conducted, for instance, on the Chinese knowledge diaspora in Europe. My recent project represents one of the first studies that contribute to more contextualised understanding of this subset of the Chinese knowledge diaspora (Leung, 2011, 2013a, b, 2014a, b).

This paper builds upon this emergent scholarship. In particular, it contributes to overcome the major spatial and temporal boundedness commonly noted in the conceptualisation of the state and its relationship with knowledge diasporas. My efforts in unpacking 'the state' here are inspired by Xiang's (2011) ethnographic work on the complex relationships between the differentiated Chinese state and overseas Chinese professionals. He shows how different levels (central and local governments) of the state and multiple actors (e.g. government officials, staff at research institutes) within the state apparatus work to incorporate with differentiated intentions and strategies. Apart from this exceptional piece, the state has mostly been treated as monolithic in the extant literature. This paper aims to further develop the 'differentiated state' perspective. It contributes to an established line of work that underlines the multi-scalar and extra-territorial nature of the state, which has evidently not been linked closely to the scholarship on knowledge diaspora and development. In the 1990s, Neil Brenner (1999), for example, analysed the fate of the state in the age of globalisation. He argued against a state-centric epistemology and underlined the need to recognise how the state functions beyond the national-scale and -territoriality in its articulation with (global) capital when handling, facilitating and coordinating the globalisation process. The multi-level governance approach, which also emphasises the complex vertical (across levels of organisation) and horizontal (across geographical space) connections and interactions among diverse governing entities, has gained currency in the study and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073981>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073981>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)