**Tapping the Flow: The Global Circulation of Talent and Urban Development in China**

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**Abstract**

An increasing number of U.S.-educated Chinese have reportedly returned to China in recent years. Chinese state-run media emphasize the prosperous outlook for these returnees and the state’s recognition of their importance for the country’s transition to a knowledge economy. As Chinese cities compete to attract talented returnees, little is known about how the municipal strategies work and what roles returning skilled labor indeed play in Chinese cities’ development.

This dissertation research studies the ways in which Chinese cities recruit U.S.-educated Chinese talent to achieve their goal of stimulating urban development, and how these recruitment initiatives in turn affect the migration decisions and reincorporation experiences of the targeted returnees. This study asks three questions: 1) how Chinese cities, in the hope of becoming global, recruit U.S.-trained Chinese talent back for development projects 2) how these recruitment programs affect the migration decisions of U.S-educated Chinese talent in the U.S. and the reincorporation experiences of the returnees in China 3) how the disjunctures between the ways the local Chinese state and the returnees conceptualize “value” and “contribution” influence the ways in which they interact with each other. I conduct a case study of the city of Nanjing in eastern China and utilize semi-structured interviews, participant observation and secondary analysis as the main methods of investigation.

This project makes a significant contribution to social science research on urban development, global cities, and transnational migration. It presents a critical case for understanding the complexities of urban development and reassessing the applicability of global city theories based on the Chinese experience. Moreover, by linking up meso-level policies in China with micro-level individual decision-making, this project demonstrates how state development policies affect the (re)location and (re)settlement of highly skilled labor.