

Academic Adaptation of Young Returnee Teachers from the Perspective of Social Capital: A Case Study of Humanities and Social Sciences in Universities in Guangzhou

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Abstract

In order to create a more attractive environment for the development of overseas returnee talents, China government has formulated a more active, efficient and open talent introduction policy. The adaptation of returnees is very important to play their full role in innovation. Guided by the theory of social capital, 23 young teachers who had returned to China for 2 - 10 years were selected to study their academic adaptation. It is found that there is structural dislocation in the distribution of relationship network among young returnee teachers. In order to overcome this problem, young returnee teachers adopt the strategies of letting nature take its course, expanding their interpersonal relationship and conversion their relationships. It is necessary for university to give the social support and the internationalization of academic management to help the returnee teachers academic adaptation.

Keywords

Young Returnee Teachers, Social Capital, Academic Adaptation, Relationship Strategies

1. Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, the transnational flow of talents is more frequent, and the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the anti-globalization trend, making the international flow of talents more complicated. With the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength, more and more overseas students are returning to China. Statistics show that there are a

total of 519,400 Chinese overseas returnees returned to China in 2018. From the reform and opening-up policy to the end of 2018, a total of 3,651,400 people returned to China after completing their studies

(http://www.mohrss.gov.cn/SYrlzyhshbzb/zwgk/szrs/tjgb/201906/t20190611_320429.html). In 2021, the number of overseas students returning to China for employment exceeded 1 million for the first time, reaching 1.049 million, a year-on-year increase of 35.00%

(<http://www.shenhus.com.cn/html/shnews/liuxueshengluohu/9807.html>). Many overseas returnees choose to work in universities, most of them are young teachers (Zweig et al., 2004; Jonkers & Tijssen, 2008; Li, Yang, & Wu, 2018).

Young overseas teachers in universities have obvious advantages in cultural capital, economic capital and social capital, but they are faced with various difficulties and pressures, they need to adapt to the academic pressure as soon as possible, such as academic achievements, teaching evaluation, professional title promotion, etc., and some life pressure, such as children's education, marriage and housing, etc., also affect their living conditions. It is very important to pay attention to and study the academic adaptation of young returnee teachers in Chinese universities to full play to their role and take the advantages of returnee teachers. A large number of studies have discussed the adaptability of overseas teachers in universities and colleges, mainly focusing on three aspects, it is include the characteristics and the obstacle of the returning adjustment, and measures to promote the adaptation. These research findings are as follows: 1) most of the overseas teachers have different degrees of inadaptability in the early days of returning to China (Adler, 1981; Sussman, 1986; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Xu, 2009; Hao et al., 2016; Chen, 2017a; Zou, Wildschut et al., 2018; Li, Ding, & Shen, 2019), returnees of different disciplines have different adaption situations (Jonkers & Tijssen, 2008; Xu & Ou, 2022; Miao, Ai, & Liao, 2022); 2) At the individual level, the main obstacles to return adaptation are: high psychological expectation before return, weak self-management ability after return, and passive mentality of individuals (Li, 2013; Xu, 2016; Chen, 2017b; Zhu, 2017; Zhang, Mittelmeier, Lomer, & Lim, 2022); 3) Good academic environment, scientific management system and employment system are the key to retain returnee talents (Bland et al., 2005; Li et al., 2019; Liu, Xu, Zhao et al., 2022).

In summary, most research topic focused on the characteristics and obstacles of returning adjustment of overseas teachers in colleges and universities, and proposed measures and suggestions. Although some studies have noticed their dynamic adaptation process, little research discussed overseas teachers adapted the adjustment strategies (Zhang & Yaun, 2014; Hao et al., 2017). In addition, a small number of studies have noticed the particularity of returnee teachers in the field of Social Sciences. Zhu (2017) explored the "academic hard landing" phenomenon of young overseas teachers of liberal arts in colleges and universities, but she paid little attention to their strategies of the adjustment. Zweig et al. (2004) found that returnees use their transnational human capital to bring more

benefits and development opportunities to universities. Li (2018) studied China's Thousand Youth Talents Scheme scholars, they think that these outstanding scholars possess unique knowledge, skills and experience acquired overseas, and they establish their own career development space after returning to China. These studies think the frontier information, new technologies and interpersonal networks by the returnee scholars owned are their transnational capitals, but there is little research on the adaptability of returnee scholars from the perspective of social capital.

Therefore, from the perspective of social capital, this study focuses on the academic adaptation of young returnee universities teachers in the field of humanities and social sciences in Guangzhou, the following research questions guided this study:

- 1) What is the job-related network of young returnee teachers in the process of academic adaptation?
- 2) What strategies have they adopted to adapt to the academic environment in China? What were the results?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Definition and Components of Social Capital

Social capital was first proposed by Bourdieu in the 1970s. Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman and Robert D. Putnam have made a comprehensive and detailed discussion on social capital, which has attracted extensive attention. It is generally believed in the current academic community that the interaction of members maintains and regenerates social capital. Scholars such as Bourdieu, Coleman and Lin believe that social capital consists of resources embedded in social relationships and social structures. When actors achieve the purpose of targeted actions, they can mobilize the social capital they have.

Social capital is the network collection of relationships between people (Bian, 2006). In terms of social relationship network, Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) proposed the concept of "field", which refers to the relationship network formed by the activities of people. According to Bourdieu, social capital is a collection of actual or potential resources, which are embedded in and inseparable from the social relationship network. Coleman (1994) holds the same view, arguing that social capital exists in relational networks, and social structural resources are capital property owned by individuals. Social capital is neither attached to an individual nor exists in the process of material production. It exists in the structure of interpersonal relationships. Lin (2001) believes that social networking actions can be divided into two categories: one is instrumental and the other is expressive. Instrumental action makes individuals get needed resources by arousing a series of actions and reactions from others; expressive action is action that seeks emotion and support. Lin believes that social capital has three important components: resources, networks of social relationships, action. Among them, resources are central to the theory of social capital, which he tends to think of as a static

concept. From the perspective of the procedural conceptual framework of social capital, [Bankston III & Zhou \(2002\)](#) believe that social capital is a dynamic process.

According to the views of the above scholars, social capital can be understood as three stages. The first stage is the formation process of social relationship network, which lays the foundation for the investment and use of social capital in the future. The second stage of social capital formation is the response and action of individual actors, who achieve their own goals through the mobilization of social relationship network. The acquisition of purposeful resources is the final stage of social capital.

2.2. Social Capital and the Academic Relationship Network of College Returnee Teachers

The analysis of social relationship network was first proposed by [Granovetter \(1973\)](#). Granovetter investigated the job-hunting process in the labor market and found that job-seekers have more opportunities to acquire new information through “weak network”. Under Granovetter’s leadership, more and more scholars have devoted themselves to this field of research, and the analysis of social networks has been increasingly. According to Granovetter, “the strength of relationships is determined by time, affection, intimacy, and the obligation of reciprocity and recognition”. According to the strength of relationships, social capital can be strong or weak. [Bozeman et al. \(2001\)](#) found that scientists and technicians with transnational experience can not only enhance their personal abilities, but also enhance their social capital network. [Sun & Bian \(2011\)](#) found that the social network of researchers studying abroad is composed of both strong and weak ties. The domestic social network is mainly composed of teachers, classmates and colleagues, as well as various relationships developed in teaching and research, including decision-makers and leaders of academic organizations at all levels. [Yang et al. \(2015\)](#) analyzed the cooperation network of scholars under the “Thousand Talents Plan”, he found that the transfer of transnational social capital is a process from weak ties to strong ties, and from indirect ties to direct ties. [Li \(2018\)](#) points out that returnee scholars have already established relatively mature relationship networks in China before studying abroad (such as kinship network, classmate network, and teacher-student network, etc.), and these domestic relationship networks directly affect the localization effect of transnational capital after returning. Through the review of the above literatures, it is found that in the topic of returnee scholars, the division of social relations mainly includes strong and weak relationship network, domestic and foreign relationship network.

To sum up, existing studies have revealed the importance of network integration in the process of returning teachers’ adjustment. Some researchers have discussed the interaction of different network and the effects of different network on individuals. However, existing studies have focused more on the application and results of social capital, namely the second and third stages of social capital formation. Most of the quantitative researches on social capital involve the measurement of social relationship network, and there is no in-depth discus-

sion on the formation of social capital for overseas scholars. How scholars apply relationship strategies to form social capital and obtain resources is also rarely discussed. In this study, the theory of social capital provides a perspective that regards the academic adaptation of young returnee teachers as a process of integrating into different domestic social relationship networks, which require corresponding mobilization of relationship strategies. We believe that social capital is a process, and the social connection of young returnee teachers is the channel to form and develop social capital. The strategic use of social capital network is mainly reflected in the first and second stages, and the results and impacts occur in the last stage.

3. Data and Methods

The data collection used in this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview process is open and flexible, with only rough requirements on the conditions of interviewees and questions to be asked (Chen, 2000). Using this research method, interviewers can adjust the order of questions and the interview time according to the actual situation of the interview. The research objects of this study are young teachers who have received a doctor's degree overseas or have had post-doctoral work experience in overseas universities, are under 45 years old and have been return to China for 2 - 10 years. Snowball sampling was used in this study. According to the teacher information provided by the official website of the university, the author contacted some young overseas teachers from three universities in Guangzhou through email, WeChat, enterprise WeChat, etc., and then they introduced other teachers with similar experiences. Finally, 23 samples (including 13 males and 10 females) were obtained. Among the overseas experience of these surveyed teachers, 9 is in European countries, 7 is in Hong Kong and Macao, 4 is in Asian countries, and 3 is in North America (see Table 1).

The interviews were conducted from November 2019 to December 2020. The interview outline focused on four aspects:

- 1) Academic adaptation of young returnee teachers;
- 2) The distribution of social relationship network and the formation path of the relationship between strong and weak of young overseas teachers;
- 3) Coping strategies of young returnee teachers in the face of academic adaptation;
- 4) Academic career development of young returnee teachers under different academic adaptation strategies.

All the interviews generally lasted from one to two hours. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees (a total of 22 interviewees agreed to be recorded). Finally, the transcripts amount to 369,201 words in total.

4. Structural Dislocation: The Formation and Characteristics of Relationship Networks among Young Returnee Teachers

Granovetter (1973) classified relationships into strong and weak relationships

Table 1. Participants information.

Sample	Gender	Country/region where you overseas study	Study overseas period	Years of return to China
T1	male	Britain	14	2.5
T2	male	Britain	4	2.5
T3	female	Hong Kong, China	4	4
T4	female	Hong Kong, China	6	3
T5	male	Hong Kong, China	4	6
T6	female	Hong Kong, China	5	3
T7	male	Hong Kong, China	7	4
T8	male	Hong Kong, China	4	3
T9	female	Germany	5	10
T10	male	Germany	4	8
T11	male	Germany	6	3
T12	male	United States	7	5
T13	female	United States	2	3
T14	female	Japan	4	6
T15	female	Japan	7	7
T16	female	Japan	7	3
T17	male	Japan	6	6.5
T18	female	Singapore	11	3
T19	male	Australia	5	7
T20	female	Netherlands	6	3
T21	male	Macau, China	5	3
T22	male	New Zealand	6	6
T23	female	Ireland	5	5

Notes: time refers to the participants at the time of the interview.

based on four criteria: contact time, emotional closeness, familiarity and reciprocal exchange. According to Granovetter's definition, a strong relationship is a stable and profound social relationship with more interactions and close contacts; Weak ties are those that are more widely distributed but less interactive than strong ties. In this study the relationship networks can be divided into strong networks and weak networks. The strong network mainly refers to the relationship network formed with close teachers, classmates and colleagues. The weak network refers to the relationships formed with who are know but not well connected.

Based on the definition of Granovetter, and according to the forming process and way of the relationship network of the interviewee, this study subdivides the

strong relationship network into three types: the strong relationship endowed by the organization, the personal relationship endowed by the non-organization, and the strong relationship formed by the superposition of the organizational relationship and the personal relationship. The weak relationships can also be subdivided into two categories: one is the weak relationship endowed by the organization, and the other is the private relationship endowed by the organization.

4.1. Strong Relationships and Their Formation

When it comes to the relationship network related to professional development, there are three types of strong relationships in the study, which are: strong relationships endowed by organizations, strong relationships endowed by non-organizations, and strong relationships formed by the superposition of organizational relationships and personal relationships. The reason why this kind of relationship network is called strong relationship network is that in this kind of relationship network, both parties have a certain emotional basis and have close communication, which conforms to the definition of strong relationship network proposed by [Bian et al. \(2018\)](#).

4.1.1. Organizational Strong Relationship Network

The first type of strong network mentioned by respondents is the formal organizational relationship, which is the strong network with teachers, alumni and colleagues, which is acquired from their working experience in one or several institutions (universities). Once an individual enters an institution, he or she is given a corresponding organizational relationship ([Wang, 2000](#)). All of the interviewees in this study had college and university experience, and the colleges where they had studied and worked had naturally given them some formal networks. Individuals in this kind of strong network have close contacts due to the common interests of the organization or the needs of the work. This type of network can be called a strong network because of the long time and frequent interaction. However, the strength of these relationships weakens as individuals leave the organization. In general, these relationships are simple to form and can be obtained by working within the same organization.

According to the interviewees, this kind of strong relationship network generally contains the following resources. First are information resources. The interviewee thought the information that can be obtained through this kind of strong network includes academic frontier information, journal publication trend, literature and so on. Secondly, the resources that are not available or difficult to get were acquired by some key figures to influence some decisions. A typical case is teacher T7 mentioned:

T7: The leader of our college has mastered certain resources. They can help teacher to publish in some core periodicals. Of course, his recommendation depends on whether can be recommended. The dean will invite the entire editorial department to climb a mountain and chat together, and then you can take the opportunity to talk about your own manuscripts. (20201019) (Indicates that the

interview date is October 19, 2020. All interview dates in this paper are marked in this style).

4.1.2. Personal Strong Relationship Network

The second type of strong relationship network is informal personal relationship, which is not endowed by the organization, but often formed by kinship, geography, or introduction by classmates and friends, or participation in academic conferences and other activities. For example, interviewee T10 mentioned that:

T10: “There was a teacher in a university in Beijing who was doing similar research I am doing now, and there was a teacher in another university in Beijing who was also doing it, and there was another teacher in a university in Guangdong who was also doing it. There were such a few people who gradually formed such a small circle. Of course, I was quite active in it.”

Interviewer: “How did you learn about this circle and finally get into this circle?”

T10: “It was at the meeting that we joined.” (20201114)

According to the interviewees, such strong relationship networks generally contain the following resources: first are information resources; second is the influence of the key figures in the organization, who can influence things through their own rights in some organizations. For example, Teacher T17 described how his strong relationships which he had built up through informal personal relationships worked.

T17: “There will be ‘hilltops’ in the academy. (note: ‘Hilltop’ specifically refers to the collective exclusive behavior of an individual as a member of a group driven by group goals. See detail in Liu et al. (2016) When Collaboration Requirements Meet with ‘Mountain-Stronghold Mentality’: The Impact of Territorial Behavior and Task Interdependence on Team Performance [J]. Journal of South China Normal University (Social Science Edition), 2016, 223 (05): 99-109+191.) I don’t belong to any of them. My mother-in-law is a faculty member of ** university and she knows many people. By chance, my mother-in-law was sitting at dinner with one of the professors of ** university and was seen by the big guys, and they joked that I was part of their ** university, and then they would help me.” (20201026)

Thirteen interviewee teachers (T1, T2, T5, T6, T7, T9, T10, T12, T13, T15, T16, T17 and T20) indicated that there was a network formed through informal situations. Compared with the weak network, the strong network has added a lot of human relations and Guanxi, which is not limited to the exchange of interests, but also contains a lot of emotional components. Of course, strong networks can also be used for information exchange.

In general, the young teachers surveyed said that because of their overseas experience, they are more dependent on the strong relationships given by the organization, and less able to obtain the strong network developed from personal relationships. For example, ten teachers (T1, T3, T5, T6, T13, T15, T17, T20,

T19, T22) said that the barriers of domestic teacher circles were “hard to break” or “there is no way to break”, and that they were “helpless”, so they could not get the resources that could only be obtained through these networks. When talk about how to access to the teachers’ network, a young overseas teacher who returned from Europe said:

T22: “Why is it so hard to get into this network? In the academic circle, many people are based on the tutor, right? You are my student, you are in my circle, if you are not my student, you are not. No one can get along. Of course, some people are good at interpersonal relations, so they can get along well with others, but most of them come from their mentors and get to know other people.” (20201014)

The interviewees thought that an important reason why it is difficult to break the domestic relationship circle is the “dislocation” of their own strong network. For example, the interviewed teacher T18 pointed out that he studied overseas for his master’s degree and doctor’s degree, including European countries and Singapore. His overseas studies span different countries, and his abroad academic network are “not very useful for his development return to China”.

T18: “Since there are too many countries for master’s and doctor’s degrees, many classmates and friends have lost contact with each other. When I first came back to China, I kept in touch with my tutor a lot. I also wrote cards to him during holidays, but he didn’t reply, so I lost contact. After returning to China, I just let him write a letter of recommendation and have no other contact with him, nor have I asked him for help in any other aspects.” (20201015)

For the majority of respondents, the primary role of their strong network of contacts abroad was emotional or, in some cases, for the exchange of information—for example, searching for literature.

4.1.3. The Organization-Personal Overlay Relationship

The third type of strong network refers to the strong network formed by the superimposition of organizational and personal relationships. According to the respondents, the private-superimposed relationship network is in the firm field of the university organization. The strong relationship network originally endowed by the organization becomes stronger after adding informal relationship such as friendship. For example, the network formed by tutors, teachers and classmates adds the emotional color on the basis of formal relationship, that is, superimposed personal relationship on the basis of formal relationship. The organization-personal superimposed relationship will maintain a high frequency of contact even if it is separated from the organizational structure.

The nine interview texts of teachers (T1, T3, T6, T8, T13, T16, T7, T19 and T22) show that the strong relationship formed in this form is stronger. When asking the reason, teacher T13 explained it like this:

T13: “The first reason is the difference between domestic and foreign cultures. I give an example, I teach my master’s students, I think that the relationship between me and my students is much less professional. Because we often say that

taking master students is like visiting teachers, teacher like father, this is also a principle, we treat tutors like father, treat mother, just like a family.” (20201021)

This kind of strong relationship network contains resources such as information, decision-making role of the central person. For example, the T6 teacher can quickly know the periodical solicitation information through the organization-private superimposed relationship network, and because of the strong relationship with the editor, her articles are constantly invited. With the help of this network, T6 teachers are able to publish articles faster than their peers:

T6: “There is a circle of academic community during both the master’s and doctor’s degrees. Within this circle, there will be resource sharing for publishing articles. This means that you will know some editors, through whom you will know which articles are easy to publish, and these editors will come to me for manuscripts”. (20201020)

The organization-private superposition relationship belongs to the strong relationship network. Since both sides of the relationship are under the same organizational structure, it is not as difficult as the strong relationship network of private.

4.2. Weak Relationship and Its Formation

About the network related to professional development, there are two types of weak network commonly mentioned by the interviewed young overseas teachers: the weak network endowed by the organization and the private network not endowed by the organization. The reason why called weak relationship network is that the two parties connected by the network are not close to each other, the emotional component is weak, and the degree of intimacy is low.

4.2.1. Organizational Weak Ties Network

The first type of weak network is given by the institution where they study or work (university). This type of relationship is also an organizational relationship, which is derived from the fact that the two people connected work for the same organization. However, there is little communication and emotional connection between the two parties, so it is defined as a weak network endowed by the organization. For example, colleagues, leaders and classmates who do not have close contact with each other in the same university organization.

According to the respondents, this type of weak ties network generally contains the following types of resources: First, information. For example, teacher T8 received her master’s degree from a university in Beijing and her doctor’s degree from a university in Hong Kong in the interview, T8 described how he acquired information in the course of his work.

T8: “Colleagues will have a lot of work to deal with, for example, the administrative secretary needs to talk me about course scheduling, and I will consult colleagues about many details that I am not used to when I just come back to teaching, such as the setting of test papers, the use of textbooks, and the norms that I need to abide by, and the college will also organize outside activities.” (20201120)

These kinds of weak ties are gained by entering an institution. Therefore, the formation of such weak ties is relatively simple. Young teachers who have worked or studied in universities will have such networks. Young returnee teachers say that at the beginning of their return, they will be known due to the halo effect of “returnees”, but this “halo effect” will decrease year by year.

T11: “I have lost contact with my former master’s classmates and colleagues. The resources of our overseas returnees are all in foreign countries. In foreign countries, I can find a lot of academic resources and communicate with them in foreign languages, but in China, there are not resources in the short term. Therefore, our resources are very limited compared with those of local doctors, because overseas resources have little influence on our local development. The halo of overseas doctoral students is good in the first six months, after a year half the halo is gone, and it will be pretty much gone three or four years later.” (20191122)

4.2.2. Personal Weak Relationship Network

Another type of weak relationship was a personal relationship formed in an informal setting. It is usually formed through the introduction of friends or because the connected parties participate in academic activities. The relationship has little interaction and little emotional exchange.

According to the interviewees, this kind of weak relationship network generally contains the following types of resources: Firstly, information. Teacher T6 told how is information transmitted in the weak relationship.

T6: “When I was a doctoral student, I knew a girl who was studying for a master’s degree. Her supervisor was very well known in the academic circle, and her supervisor was good friends with some teachers I knew in Guangzhou. I treated this girl when she came to Guangzhou and then forgot about it. Then we met again at an academic conference, she told me that she was working in a magazine and asked me what research I was doing, and their magazine just lacked articles in my research direction, so she invited me to write for them.” (20201020)

Secondly, there is the influence of the central figure in the organization. The influence or decision of the central figure can exert some influence on the progress of things and thus help the actors achieve their goals. Private networks of weak ties can also help young returnee teachers gain access to key figures. Teacher T13 said that his post-doctoral studies were successful because of weak ties.

T13: “I planned to go to the United States for post-doctoral study, but there was no place available that year, so I had to re-contact professors in the United States. I saw on WeChat moments that a powerful American professor came to China to give a speech at a conference, so I went to him, and he helped me solve the problem.” (20201021)

Compared with organizational weak ties, the formation of private weak ties is more difficult, and young overseas teachers need to pay a certain cost, such as time and energy. The formation of private weak relationship networks requires

young returnee teachers to attend academic conferences or other activities to expand them. However, due to heavy teaching and administrative tasks, young returnee teachers do not have enough time to acquire such networks.

4.3. Summary

In this study, the strong relationships reported by the young returnee teachers include the strong relationships endowed by the organization, the strong relationships endowed by the organization and the strong relationship network formed by the superposition of the organizational relationship and the personal relationship. There are two types of weak relationship network, one is the weak relationship endowed by the organization and the other is the weak relationship endowed by the private. The resources contained in these five types of relationships include information, influence of key figures, and academic trust.

When adapting to the domestic academic environment, this study found that the defects of relationship network of young overseas returnees are mainly manifested as “structural dislocation”, specifically as follows:

- 1) Young returnee teachers are more dependent on the strong relationship endowed by the organization of study and work, and it is difficult to obtain the strong relationship network developed from personal relationship and the superimposed relationship network of organization-private relationship;
- 2) The advisor-postgraduate fellowship is very close in China, and the strong relationship network accumulated by the young overseas teachers during their doctoral or master’s degree is located abroad, so it is very difficult to play a role in the domestic academic circle or play a small role;
- 3) Due to the “halo effect” of overseas teachers, it is easier to obtain the weak organizational network of young overseas teachers, but with the increase of time, the halo effect will gradually decline;
- 4) Due to the heavy teaching and administrative tasks, it is difficult for young overseas teachers to have the time and energy to expand their personal network of weak ties.

5. Relationship Strategies and Resource Acquisition of Young Overseas Teachers

Strong relationship network and weak relationship network correspond to the following resources: 1) information acquisition; 2) forming academic trust; and 3) the influence of key figures. Different types of networks have different types of embedded resources and levels of richness. Among them, in the strong private network, actors can obtain key information more timely, such as information and trend of paper publication, academic frontier information. Heterogeneous information resources exist more in the weak network, which can help young overseas teachers broaden their horizons, deepen their understanding of professional knowledge and know what’s going on in different academic circles; on the other hand, in the strong relationship network, young overseas teachers have

access to more core decision-makers. The position advantage of the strong relationship network enables young overseas teachers to possess the academic trust.

The resources in the strong relationship network are the resources that young returnee teachers are more inclined to acquire, and the acquisition of resources depends on the strength of the relationship and relationship strategies. The structural dislocation of relationship network is the main obstacle in the academic adaptation of young overseas teachers, which is reflected in:

- 1) The strong relationship network in China is in its infancy, it is difficult to obtain key information in time;
- 2) There are few key people who can influence decision-making;
- 3) The sense of academic trust in the academic circle is low, and there is little relationship capital that can be expanded.

This study shows that young overseas scholars adopt three relationship strategies in the process of academic adaptation: “Let nature take its course”, “expand interpersonal relationship” and “relationship transformation”. “Networking strategy” which was adopted by the young returnee teachers intended to expand personal relationships; and “the relationship conversion strategy” is the actions of young overseas teachers also reflect more instrumental characteristics, aiming to transform the personal network into a stronger relationship with greater effect.

5.1. Let Nature Take Its Course

In order to maintain the existing strong relationship, the young returnee teachers have usually taken “let nature take its course” strategy. It does not mean no action, but rather that the actor make corresponding strategies according to the actual situation. Most of them believe that the relationship network is a process of mutual selection, and the improvement of their own academic ability is more important. In this study, 13 teachers (T2, T4, T8, T9, T10, T12, T14, T17, T18, T20, T21, T22, T23) adopted the strategy.

The group of teachers who used the strategy believed that social capital was as important as individual ability. The strategy of going with the flow was chosen for both active and passive reasons. The reason for the individual’s active choice is that he believes that the improvement of his academic ability is more important at the current stage, and the development of interpersonal relationship can be developed after the improvement of his academic ability at the later stage. While the passive choice of the strategy is largely due to the domestic academic and cultural environment. Teacher T13 said:

T13: “Academic fellowship is very important in China now. When I studied in ** university, and if my supervisor is a famous professor or not, they can immediately judge my academic relationship.” (20201021)

5.2. Expand Interpersonal Relationship

Some of the young returnee teachers indicated that they used attending conferences with a strong purpose to expand their academic network. Teachers who

adopt this strategy will use instrumental actions aimed at expanding their network. In the process of these, many relationships will be utilized, such as academic relationship, professional relationship, kinship relationship and geographical relationship, which are capital for relationship expansion. The channels of networking expansion include friends' introduction, academic conference, work and family relations, etc. Eight of teacher (T3, T5, T6, T7, T13, T15, T16, T19) adopted the strategy of networking development.

Some young overseas teachers think expanding networking is not easy:

T1: "After all, there is a network of relationships in the academic circle. I went abroad early and the domestic academic circle is cut off. My supervisor is not in Chin. If I can't join this circle, where do I get my academic resources from?" (20201022)

5.3. Relationship Conversion

Adler (1981) proposed a coping model of readjust from two dimensions: proactive mode, resocialized mode, alienated mode, and rebellious mode. Different types of coping model lead to very different adaptations. China is a human society composed of acquaintances. In the academic environment of China, people are influenced by human society to a large extent. There exist such phenomena as "relationship draft" of paper publication, "relationship ticket" of professional title promotion, and "power rent-seeking" in project approval. Therefore, in this study, young overseas teachers are also adapting to the "Guanxi" culture in China in terms of academic adaptation. In the process of relationship transformation, they add the color of personal relationship to the original weak relationship and transform it into a strong relationship by managing relationships.

In this study, seven teachers (T1, T5, T7, T11, T13, T17, T19) adopted the strategy of relationship conversion. A typical example is teacher T19. He worked in an international organization in Beijing for two years after returning to China with his doctorate, and then went to work in a university in Guangdong Province after working in a ministry for two years. T19 believes that his old colleagues are a kind of resources which will be helpful to his future academic career development. He thinks that a weak relationship can be converted to a strong relationship. The more common way to the strategy is to increase the emotional connection, which is to increase the number of contacts and meetings.

T19: "In China, Guanxi is very delicate, so it is usually through life to nurture work, and trust between people is also built through life. If you're out of town on business, you're going to go out to dinner with a good friend there, but if you're just a casual friend, you will not." (20201022)

Human norms of behavior are bound up with cultural background. The 23 subjects in this study are deeply influenced by the local culture of the country where they studied, and they still adopt the values, norms, attitudes and codes of conduct formed overseas after returning to China, which is consistent with the

results of Xu's research (Xu, 2016).

On the whole, most of young returnee teachers tend to adopt the "go with the flow" strategy because it does not require much effort and time, and costs less. The use of the two strategies of networking expansion and relationship conversion requires the actors to take certain measures, including showing their own ability, managing the existing relationship network, reducing the purpose of making friends and taking the initiative to contact. All 23 participants in the study agreed that Guanxi are very important, even as important as cultural capital.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Comparison with Previous Studies

Bian (2001) classifies Chinese social networks into three types: kinship networks, practical network whose members take credit and reciprocity as the core, the unequal human exchange network. Bian's theory is universal in its classification of relationship network. The typology classification of relationship network in this study is only for young overseas teachers in universities in China. Sun & Bian (2011) found that the social network of overseas researchers is composed of both strong and weak relationships, the results of this study are consistent with the conclusions of Sun's research and made a more detailed classification on the basis of the types of strong and weak relationships. Liang & Zhou (2016) found that what plays an important role in improving research productivity is scholars' "ownership" of various types of weak relationship social capital and their ability to "utilize" social capital, which was also verified in this study. Young overseas teachers who adopt two relationship strategies of network expansion and relationship conversion can obtain more social resources in social relationship communication. In terms of coping strategies, Yuan (2014) concluded that young overseas teachers mainly adopt four strategies when adapting to the domestic academic system environment, which are adaptation and obedience, ingenious utilization, resistance and adherence, and escape and exit. In this study, the adaptation strategies of young overseas teachers into letting nature take its course, expanding human connections, and relationship conversion from the perspective of social capital.

6.2. Suggestions

Based on the above research findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

- 1) Institution of higher education should provide social support to young returnee teachers. According to the strong network characteristics of young returnee teachers' dependence on organizations, young returnee teachers need support and help from institutions of higher learning in the process of academic adaptation, including sponsoring returnees to participate in domestic academic conferences, and inviting experts to guidance on domestic funding applications and academic article-writing.

- 2) Institution of higher education should make full use of the international

social capital of young overseas teachers. Since the strong relationship network accumulated by young overseas teachers is located abroad and has no effect or small effect in the domestic academic circle, the university should further promote the internationalization of academic management, so that young overseas teachers can make better use of the relationship network.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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