Chinese Student Migration, Social Networking, and Local Engagement

in the UK: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The unprecedented growth in the number of Chinese international students since the twenty-first century raises questions about their links to and impact on local communities in host countries. Viewing Chinese students as an important part of diasporic Chinese community, this paper sheds new light on Chinese students' social networking with different groups internally and externally, both Chinese and non-Chinese, on campus or in the wider community. Many questions arise: What is the contribution of Chinese students to the growth and transformation of diasporic Chinese communities in major destinations? What is the scope of their social networking and what are their functions in regard to Chinese community cohesion and integration? What are the differences between Chinese students and local residents and between Chinese students from mainland China and those from Hong Kong and Singapore in terms of network building and local engagement? The above questions are addressed by a combination of official data analysis and a questionnaire survey conducted in Nottingham. The evidence suggests a correlation between the local engagement of Chinese students in the wider community and their social networking, which offers a key to understand the new momentum for the transformation of

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diasporic Chinese community in major HE destinations. Theoretical and policy implications are discussed.

Keywords

Chinese student migration, diasporic Chinese communities, social networking, local engagement, the UK

Introduction

Due to the globalization of higher education (HE), we have witnessed an accelerated growth in the number of international students globally, from 2.1 million in 2000 to 4.3 million in 2011. More than three quarters (77 per cent) of them are hosted by OECD countries (OECD 2013). Leading global HE markets, the US and the UK were hosting 17 per cent and 13 per cent of international students respectively by 2011. Meanwhile, international students account for 19.8 per cent of the university student population in Australia, 16.8 per cent in the UK, and 3.4 per cent in the US (Wang and Miao 2013: 8). As a leading supplier in the global HE market, mainland China accounts for one in six of the world's international mobile students (Maslen 2014).

The unprecedented growth in the number of international students raises questions about their social lives and their impact on host societies. While overwhelming attention has been paid to their intercultural adaptation and special needs in classrooms or on university campuses, little is known about their interconnections with and impact on local communities, including co-ethnic groups.

Regarding the links between international students and co-ethnic groups, Chinese students in the UK present an interesting case. This is because of the simultaneous growth in the number of both Chinese students and local Chinese residents since the beginning of the twenty-first century (ONS, 2012; HESA 2014). Equally important is the relationship between two categories. According to a recently published report by the Migration Policy Centre of the European University Institute (Unterreiner 2015: 12), among those born in mainland China and registered in the 2011 UK Census, three quarters were new migrants who had arrived since 2001 while the majority had entered the UK as students. The report indicates (Unterreiner, 2015: 12), furthermore, that 152,498 Chinese migrants from mainland China were residing in England and Wales in 2011, exceeding the number of those from Hong Kong (102,241) in the same period. Given the contribution of Chinese student migration to the growth in size of the ethnic-Chinese population in the UK, it is reasonable to ask what contribution Chinese student migration has made to the transformation of Chinese communities there, in terms of demographic profiles, Chinese dialects spoken, community organizations, and so on.

The impact of Chinese student migration on local Chinese communities can be understood in terms of the interconnections between Chinese students and local Chinese and non-Chinese resident groups in the host society. Such links are crucial for understanding new dynamics or trends emerging for the development of diasporic Chinese communities, in light of the communities' long-standing segmentation and fragmentation. This is because, historically, "different groups of Chinese have reached Britain along different paths, by different means, and with different projects" (Benton and Gomez, 2011: 61). More importantly, according to the same authors, "interrelations among Chinese groups and individuals were based less and less on an expectation of reciprocity and more and more on calculation of separate self-interest."

This paper attempts to shed new light on social networking by Chinese students, both internally (among different groups from mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia) and externally (between local Chinese and non-Chinese residents in the wider community). The paper aims to explore three dimensions of Chinese student migration:

- Chinese students as part of diasporic Chinese communities contributing to the growth and transformation of Chinese communities in the UK;
- Chinese students as agents of change by way of their social networking with different groups, both Chinese and non-Chinese, on the university campus and in the wider community, leading to changes in the Chinese communities;
- Chinese students as multiple groups in terms of national identity (e.g., from mainland China, Hong Kong, or Singapore) and cultural diversity, differentiated from and interwoven with each other both on campus and within the wider community.

The paper is organized in seven parts, including the introduction. The following section provides a theoretical framework for international student migration and integration. There then follows an analytical framework for designing and implementing research in the UK. The contribution of Chinese student migration to the growth in size of Chinese communities in the UK will be analyzed on the basis of official data (UK Censuses and statistics relating to higher education), while the impact of Chinese students on local Chinese communities will be gauged on the basis of a comparison of the results of two questionnaire surveys taken in Nottingham in 2002 and 2013. A detailed analysis of the results of our survey questionnaire in 2013 will yield a picture of the scope and function of students' social networking, followed by a summary and discussion of the survey findings. The paper will conclude with a discussion of some of the implications of the findings.

Chinese student migration and integration in local communities: A literature review

Chinese students in local communities must be understood within the context of the broader Chinese diaspora in the twenty-first century. Despite the lack of specific research on the links between international students and local communities of their co-ethnics, literature on following issues is related to the theme of this paper, including: international student migration, global diaspora, and student networking.

From the perspective of international migration, international students are a special group that is generally granted no more than a temporary resident permit. The mobility of international students and their choice of either staying in the host country or returning home after graduating can be analyzed using a "push-pull model". This model involves one or more factors, including human capital, career development, affordability and social mobility, global market competition, the quality of HE provision and services, and government policies in both sending and receiving countries (Wiers-Jenssen 2008; Shen 2009; Xiang and Shen 2009; Findlay 2011; Robertson 2011; Hawthorne 2012; Sovic and Blythman 2013; BIS 2013). Although they use different terminologies and come from different disciplinary backgrounds, scholars using this model share a more or less common belief that international student mobility/migration (ISM) is a process of rational choice by individuals as bearers of human capital (Raghuram 2013).

Regarding the impact of international student migration on local communities, researchers have paid increasing attention to students' social lives and personal experiences overseas. For example, many scholars suggest that international students should not simply be viewed as students, since they can also play multiple roles in host societies – as family members, temporary workers in local markets, participants in church activities, volunteers in local community

organizations, and so on (Neilson 2009; King and Raghuram 2013; Mosneaga and Winther 2013).

The term diaspora is relevant for understanding international students' relationship with local resident groups, including co-ethnic groups. The term refers to a group of people who have had to leave their historic homeland (e.g., Jews or Armenians) and live in other countries. In the era of globalization, the increasing mobility of people across national boundaries has resulted in a growth in the size of the immigrant population. As a result, the term diaspora has become increasingly popular but also more difficult to define. Cohen (2008: 18), who stresses diasporans' common features and characteristics, including country of origin and the maintenance of a collective identity, distinguishes five types of global diasporas: victim (Jews, Africans), labor (Indians), trade (Chinese), culture (the Caribbean), and imperial (British).

Since the start of the twenty-first century, researchers have increasingly emphasized the hybrid nature of global flows (of people, knowledge, and finance), transnational identities, and differences within diasporas (concerning gender and class) (Dufoix 2008: 22-34). For example, international organizations like the United Nations, International Organization for Migration, and the World Bank and the national governments of migrant-sending countries like China or India often use terms like "knowledge diaspora," "diaspora of the highly skilled," "migrants of talent," and overseas professionals) in order to promote return migration (Xiang 2005; Yang and Qiu 2010). Above approach emphasizes the contribution of the transnational network to the development of home countries but pays little attention to the links and contributions of these knowledge diasporas to their co-ethnic communities in the host countries. In particular regard to the theme of this paper, questions remain as to whether international students can be included in the category of knowledge diaspora, since the latter by definition refers to those who have

completed their degree courses and hold professional posts in the host countries (Xiang 2005: 6).

International students' interconnections with local communities and the consequences of those interconnections might be more complicated than those of knowledge diasporas in the host countries, given the uncertainty of the students' future. On the basis of their observations of Indian students, for example, Kumar et al. (2008) divide international students into three groups: 1) those that "extend their stay in the host country and join the workforce in order to compensate for their dissatisfaction about the quality of education"; 2) those that "stay and work at least for a couple of years in order to repay their heavy education loans"; and 3) those that "use the student visa to migrate and later on settle in the destination countries as it is an easy way to acquire permanent residence."

International students, like other migrant groups, need to establish and maintain social networks in order to communicate and interact with other cultural groups both on campus and in the wider community. Employing the concept of acculturation (Berry, 1997), for example, Tian and Lowe (2010: 291-304) identify four types of social networking used by Chinese students: separation/marginalization ("a very restricted social network of a small number of Chinese students"); integration/separation ("a Chinese social network, though generally remaining open to the possibility of friendships outside this network"); integration/identity retention ("aimed to participate closely in the host society... [and] maintain[ing] close friendships with other Chinese"), and integration/assimilation ("extend[ing] their social network with British people, commonly diminishing their association with other Chinese").

Jia Gao's paper in this issue offers valuable observations concerning the ways in which Chinese students engage with the local Chinese community in Australia by way of part-time employment

and entrepreneurial activities in order to develop their knowledge, experience, and skills, to the mutual benefit of both students and the local Chinese community. Along the same lines, Su (2013) suggests that experience of part-time employment in Chinese restaurants or voluntary work in local communities is helpful for Chinese students "planning to work in the UK after their study" and for learning "how to handle working relationships with colleagues of different cultures" (Su 2013: 237).

In their discussion of the history of Chinese communities in the UK, Benton and Gomez (2011: 47-48) suggest that Chinese students have formed a substantial minority of Britain's Chinese population, and have taken up part-time jobs, usually in businesses run by local Chinese in the ethnic enclave. Discussing the fragmentation of the Chinese community in the UK, the authors highlight the differences between three groups of Chinese students: ethnic Chinese from current or former British colonies, from Taiwan, and from mainland China. The differences, according to Benton and Gomez, are expressed in various ways, including in regard to the students' interconnections with local Chinese business, their lifestyles, and their relationship with the Chinese Embassy. The authors suggest that students from mainland Chinese and their dependents "retain the *liuxuesheng* label, which denotes a fixed social identity separate from that of 'overseas Chinese,' an identity they tend to look down on and reject" (Benton and Gomez 2011: 47-48).

Having briefly reviewed relevant literature, a research gap can be identified concerning the relationship between international students and local communities. This relationship has multiple dimensions, both in ethnic terms (e.g., Chinese vs non-Chinese) and in civic terms (within university and in the wider community). These relationships are examined in the rest of this paper.

Framework of analysis and research design

Chinese students as a part of the diasporic Chinese community can be analyzed from the point of view of students' social networking, a process that brings together different groups of Chinese students within campuses, and from that of the relationship between Chinese students and local residents (both Chinese and non-Chinese) in the wider community, a relationship that entails communication, interaction, and cooperation. The term social networking can be understood in two ways:

- The ethnic dimension refers to the "racial" relationship among Chinese students belonging to the same group (e.g., mainland Chinese) or to different groups (e.g., mainland Chinese and Hong Kong or Singaporean Chinese), or to the relationship between Chinese and non-Chinese groups;
- The civic dimension refers to networking by Chinese students within the university campus or in the wider community.

The scope of social networking, referring to the spread of Chinese students' communication and their interaction, can be measured at three levels:

1) Communication between different groups of Chinese students;
2) Communication between Chinese students and students of other nationalities;
3) Communication between Chinese students, local Chinese, and non-Chinese residents;

The function of social networking, defined as a set of conditions fostering mutual respect, trust, and support for one another within and between groups, can be observed from two angles: 1) community cohesion, a process that brings together individual members of the community or different Chinese groups with a view to boosting common interests; 2) integration, a process

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whereby the Chinese community is opened up so that different people or members of different groups can share resources and opportunities with the wider community, to the mutual benefit of both Chinese and non-Chinese groups.

Bringing together above considerations, the term "Chinese student networking" can be defined as the interconnections and interactions of Chinese students internally (i.e., within or between Chinese student groups) and externally (i.e., with local Chinese residents or non-Chinese groups, both students and local residents).

The concept of Chinese student networking provides a useful framework for observing and asking more specific questions about students' social lives and the impact of Chinese students on local communities. By taking into account the variety of Chinese students from mainland China or other countries (or regions), this concept can help to explain the extent to which different groups of Chinese students can be treated as a single Chinese student community, as well as the extent to which they can be viewed as a part of a diasporic Chinese community and contribute to the latter's cohesion and integration.

The above ideas originated in a number of pilot projects conducted in Nottingham in the period since 2011. The theme of these projects was the practicing of global citizenship in the Chinese community. More than 200 Chinese and non-Chinese students were mobilized to participate in a training and outreach program that involved local councils, civil society organizations, and Chinese community representatives (Wu 2013). In addition to participating in lectures and workshops, students were asked to prepare, develop, and deliver their proposed group projects with the aim of addressing the specific needs of the local Chinese community and to make full use of the resources and support of stakeholders, including local councils, civil society

organizations, local Chinese complementary school, and Chinese students association. With the participation and support of all stakeholders, a Nottingham Chinese community survey was designed and conducted in the summer of 2013. It consisted of two parts: an analysis of official data concerning changes in the Chinese communities in the UK and of the relationship of these changes to the growth in Chinese student numbers; and a questionnaire survey focusing on Chinese community cohesion and integration in Nottingham (Wu 2013).

The analysis used official data from two sources: the UK Census, which reveals the distribution of major minority-ethnic groups (including Chinese) in 326 districts or boroughs across England in 2001 and 2011; and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, which presents information about all international students who have attended HE institutes in the period since 2000, including the students' nationality. By bringing the two data sets together, the correlation between Chinese students and local Chinese residents can be revealed from the perspectives of both geographic distribution of population and the trends of growth.

The questionnaire survey was designed and conducted to cover all groups, both Chinese students and local Chinese residents, within Nottingham's Chinese community (Wu, 2013). This survey was compared to a survey that had been conducted by Nottingham City Council in 2002, a comparison intended to reflect the changes that have taken place in Nottingham's Chinese community in the intervening years.[1]

Impact of Chinese student migration on local Chinese communities in the UK

The contribution of Chinese student migration to local Chinese communities in the UK can be analyzed by comparing the growth and distribution of both Chinese students and the local Chinese residential population. Defining Chinese students as the sum total of students from

mainland China (denoted in yellow) and other Chinese from Hong Kong and Singapore (denoted in blue), Figure 1 shows a rapid growth in the number of Chinese students in the UK, from fewer than 20,000 in 2000/01 to more than 80,000 in 2011/12. The share of mainland Chinese students increased from about half to more than 80 per cent over the same period. This increase shows that mainland Chinese have been the main driving force behind the rapid growth in the number of Chinese students in the UK over the last decade or so.

Figure 1 Growth in number of Chinese students by region of origin
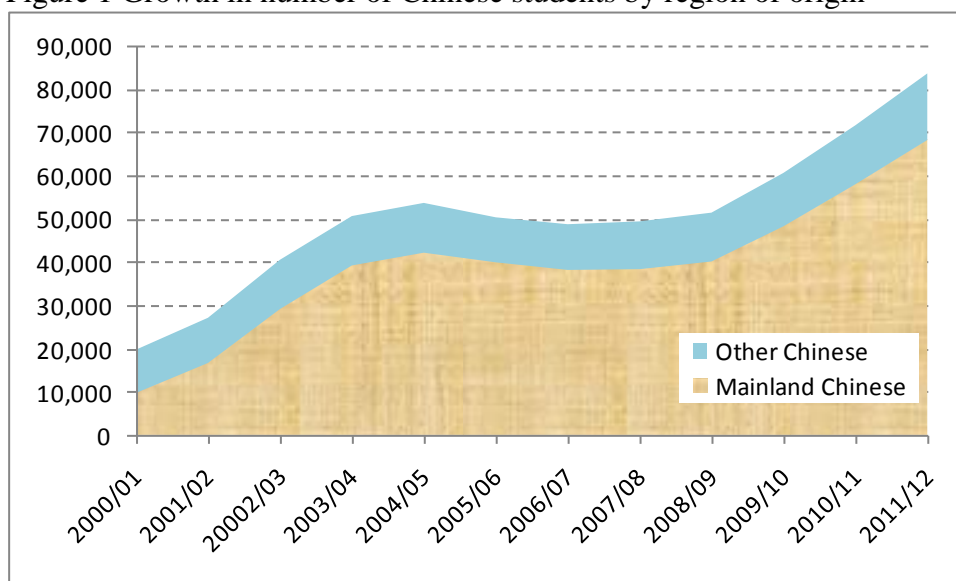
Notes: This figure is based on information provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The number of students is expressed in terms of full-time equivalents.

Using the same source, Table 1 provides more details about the contribution of Chinese students, particularly those from mainland China, to the growth in the number of international students in the UK's HE sector. It shows that from 2000/01 to 2011/12, the number of mainland Chinese increased by a multiple of 6.9, much higher than the growth rates of international students and of all UK students, which grew by a factor of 2 and 1.3 respectively. In addition, the overall share of international students in the UK's HE system grew significantly, from 12.4 to 19.0 per cent in the last 12 years, and the share of Chinese students in the total number of international students

increased from 5.5 to 18.8 per cent (mainland Chinese) or from 11 to 23 per cent (including

Chinese from Hong Kong and Singapore as well). It is worth noting that students from Malaysia,

the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand are excluded from these statistics, although ethnic

Chinese may form a significant proportion of their number.

Table 1 Internationalization of higher education and the position of Chinese students in the UK

Year	All students	International students	Mainland Chinese	All Chinese	Share (%)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(2)/(1)	(3)/(2)	(2)/(4)
2000/01	1,454,949	180,563	9,899	19,908	12.4	5.5	11.0
2011/12	1,923,274	364,699	68,385	83,771	19.0	18.8	23.0
Growth	1.32	2.02	6.91	4.21	--	--	--

Source: Table based on information provided by the HESA. Figures in cells represent the number of full-time equivalent students.

Focusing on the growth in the number of and the relationship between Chinese students and local

Chinese residents, Table 2 shows that the distribution of HE resources in England[2] significantly

influences the growth and distribution of the Chinese population. Of 326 local authority areas

(districts or boroughs), more than three quarters (77 per cent) have no university, 15 per cent

have only one university, and 5 per cent have two universities, while only 2 per cent have three

or more universities. The average number of Chinese students in each local authority area

increases from fewer than 529 in single-university towns or districts to 1,724 in the area with two

universities and 2,342 in areas with three or more universities. Looked at from the point of view

of the size of the Chinese student population, the number of Chinese residents is, on average,

about 2,000 and 4,000 in single- and two-university areas; these average population sizes are

between 3 and 6 times larger than those in areas without universities. Table 2 confirms the

impact of university resources on the growth in numbers of the local Chinese population – it

grows at is almost double or triple the rate of the local Chinese population in areas with no

university. With the caveat that only a small number of Chinese students participated in the UK census survey, we assume that the local Chinese population is equal to the number of local Chinese residents plus the number of Chinese students. As a result, Table 2 provides an estimate of the proportion of Chinese students to the local Chinese population. This proportion varies from 21 per cent in single-university boroughs to about 30 per cent in two-university boroughs.

Table 2 Distribution and growth in the number of Chinese residents and students by university resources (2011)

Number of Universities	Number of Districts	%	Chinese Students	Chinese Residents	% Resident Growth (2001-2011)	% Students in Total Chinese Population (2011)
0	252	77.3	--	636	52.7	--
1	50	15.3	529	1,968	93.2	21.2
2	17	5.2	1724	4,101	147.4	29.6
>=3	7	2.1	2342	6,336	87.2	27.0
Total/Average	326	100	966	1,164	65.1	--

Source: This table is based on a combination of UK Census and HESA data.

The above results, which are based on an analysis of official data, indicate that over the last decade the rate of growth of the Chinese population in university towns or cities was faster than that in areas without a university. Clearly, the greater the number of Chinese students, the greater the number of Chinese residents and the higher the growth rate of Chinese residents. The exception is bigger cities like London, Birmingham, and Manchester, which host three or more universities. There, the growth in the number of Chinese students is only one of many factors contributing to the growth in the size of the Chinese population.

Chinese student migration and the transformation of the Chinese community in Nottingham

The rest of this paper looks at the impact of Chinese student migration on local Chinese communities, and focuses on our survey in Nottingham. According to the latest UK Census, 8,930 Chinese lived in the County of Nottinghamshire in 2011, of whom two thirds (or 5,988) lived in the City of Nottingham. Chinese made up 0.82 per cent of the total of population in Nottinghamshire and 1.96 per cent in the City of Nottingham. The Chinese population had more than doubled in size (2.4 times) in Nottinghamshire compared with 2001, and had more than tripled in size (3.5 times) in the City of Nottingham.

As in many locations in the UK, the rapid growth in the size of the Chinese population in Nottingham cannot be seen apart from the internationalization of higher education over the last decade. The two universities - the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University - have played a leading role not only in attracting and recruiting Chinese students but also in developing business links with China, including the establishment of an overseas campus in Ningbo by the University of Nottingham. As a result, the number of Chinese students in the two universities has, according to HESA, increased eight-fold since 2001 and reached a total of 2,819 in 2011. By bringing together two sets of statistics, regarding Chinese residents (by way of the UK Census) and Chinese students (by way of HESA), we estimate that the actual size of the Chinese population in Nottingham City is likely to exceed 10,000 and that the share of students in the Chinese community could exceed 40 per cent (Wu, 2013:15).

With respect to changes in the Nottingham Chinese community over the past decade, Table 3 compares the 2013 survey with the survey held in 2002. Of a total of 311 participants in the 2013 survey, 52.1 per cent (or 162) are students, similar to the proportion of students in the 2002 survey. Seventy per cent of the respondents (both Chinese students and local Chinese residents) came from mainland China, compared with only 40 per cent in 2002. This is unsurprising, and an

obvious reflection of the rapid growth in the number of immigrants from mainland China over

the same period. By contrast, only 13.4 per cent of respondents were from Hong Kong in 2013,

compared with 40 per cent in 2002. As one might expect, there were more young immigrants

(below the age of 24) and new immigrants (i.e., who had lived in the UK or Nottingham for

fewer than 10 years) in the 2013 survey than in the 2002 survey.

Table 3 Comparison of two surveys on Nottingham's Chinese community

Item	2002 survey	2013 survey
Sample size	620	311
Students (%)	48.1%	52.1%
From mainland China	39.6%	70.0%
From Hong Kong	39.1%	13.4%
Female	51.8%	64.3%
Age 18 to 24	32.9%	44.9%
Living in the city >10 years	30.8%	14.7%

Source: Wu (2013: 18)

Beyond changes in the demographic profile of the Chinese population in Nottingham, a big

challenge facing Nottingham's Chinese community today is perhaps the decline of traditional

Chinese community organizations, in terms of their ability to attract and influence new

immigrants from mainland China. This can be seen from Table 4, which reports on the ability of

respondents to recognize a number of local community organizations. Taking two major Chinese

community organizations, the East England Chinese Association and the Nottinghamshire

Chinese Welfare Association, as examples, about half of respondents knew them in 2002 survey,

whereas only 20 per cent did so in the 2013 survey. Furthermore, the two organizations have a

much greater influence on local residents (38.3 per cent and 30.2 per cent respectively report an

influence) than student respondents (of whom only 5.6 per cent and 12.3 per cent report an

influence).

Table 4 Do you know the following organizations? (%)

Name of organization	2013	Residents	Students	2002
East England Chinese Association (EECA)	21.2	38.3	5.6	54.0
Nottinghamshire Chinese Welfare Association (NCWA)	20.9	30.2	12.3	43.1
Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA)	50.2	47.0	53.1	--
School of Contemporary Chinese Studies (SCCS)	41.5	34.2	48.1	10.2

Notes: all tables below are created by the author on the basis of the 2013 survey.

In contrast to the declining influence of traditional Chinese community organizations, however, Table 4 also shows the increased impact of universities and student organizations. For example, a large number of respondents (50 and 40 per cent respectively) recognized the Chinese Students and Scholars Association and the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies, part of the University of Nottingham, more than double the number of those that knew of the traditional community organizations. Given the large number (47 per cent and 34 per cent respectively) of local Chinese respondents that recognized these university organizations, one can probably conclude that a gradual transition is taking place in terms of the main focus of the Nottingham Chinese Community, from traditional community organizations to new organizations based at the universities – organizations that are more open and socially inclusive.

Regarding Chinese community cohesion and integration in Nottingham, Table 5 provides a list of major social events organized by local Chinese groups (the upper 3 rows) or non-Chinese organizations (the rest of table). All respondents in the questionnaire survey were asked to indicate whether they were aware of or participated in these events. Table 5 shows a low participatory rate (less than 10 per cent) for all events except the Chinese Spring Festival Gala (22 per cent), which was jointly organized by the Chinese Students and Scholars Association and the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies at the University of Nottingham. Around two thirds of respondents did not know about these events (except in the case of the Chinese New Year

Gala). The low level of awareness and participation seem to indicate a low level of Chinese community cohesion and integration. However, the students knew significantly more about these events (more than 20 per cent of them in most cases) than did local residents. This seems to suggest that there is a potential for university students to participate in and contribute to Chinese community projects in the future.

Table 5 Are you aware of and have you participated in the following local community activities? (%)

Name of event	Know	Participate	Residents	Students
Chinese Spring Festival Gala	62.4	22.8	55.7	68.5
Chinese community events	38.6	5.8	29.5	46.9
Chinese community-organized tourism	36.7	7.7	25.5	46.9
Local church activities	37.0	8.0	23.5	49.4
University Community Open Day	40.5	5.5	27.5	52.5
Local cultural festivals	30.2	5.8	26.8	33.3
Local social events (e.g., New Year Eve)	33.8	6.8	21.5	45.1
Local sport event (e.g., football)	32.5	2.6	18.8	45.1
Local music event	32.5	6.1	18.8	45.1

Scope and function of social networking among Chinese students

Our questionnaire survey measured social networking by way of a question about the scope of respondents' social contacts or friendships. The term "friends" in the 2013 survey was defined as those the respondent frequently met or regularly called on. Chinese student respondents were asked to tick boxes beneath four types of friendship, both on campus and in the wider community. Table 6 indicates, for example, that three quarters of 162 respondents who answered questions about their friendships on campus claimed that those friendships were with members of the same group (e.g., friendships among mainland Chinese [Type 1]). Nonetheless, more than 40 per cent of respondents reported that they were good friends with other international students (Type 3) and nearly one third had friends in other Chinese groups (Type 2). Unlike the

stereotype claim that Chinese from the same region of origin (Type 1) stick together, Table 6 seems to indicate that some Chinese students tried to widen their social networking to include students of other nationalities (Type 3 and Type 4) and paid less attention to members of other Chinese student groups (Type 2).

Table 6 Distribution of social contact by type of group in campus (N=162)

	1	2	3	4
Type	Chinese: same	Chinese: different	Other nationality	Domestic students
Of respondents	74.7%	32.1%	45.7%	30.9%

Regarding social connections with the wider community, Table 7 shows that 113 (or 70 per cent) of students claimed to have social contacts outside the university campus, while 30 per cent failed to answer this question. Among those with links with the wider community, 40 per cent claimed to be friends with local Chinese residents of the same ethnic identity (i.e., from the same country or region of origin as shown in Type 2), one third said they had non-Chinese friends (Type 4), and one in five (21.6 per cent) had friends in a Chinese group other than their own (Type 3), while nearly 10 per cent had either relatives (or kin) or parents' friends (Type 1) in Nottingham. The results show, firstly, that instead of being unconnected to or segregated from the wider community as some people may assume, a large number of Chinese students are involved with local resident groups to some extent; secondly, that they have a rather extensive social network with the wider community, both Chinese and non-Chinese groups, and limited to local Chinese resident groups, with people from the same country (region) of origin (Type 2) and/or different country (region) (Type 3).

Table 7 Distribution of social contact by type of group in the wider community (N=113)

Type	1 Relatives or parents' friends	2 Chinese: same	3 Chinese: different	4 Non-Chinese
Of samples	9.3%	39.5%	21.6%	32.1%

Table 8 shows the relationship between social networking with the wider community and the probability of whether or not the respondents have work experience in local communities. Of 151 respondents, more than 40 per cent had work experience, both paid and non-paid (volunteering), while nearly 60 per cent had no such experience. Table 8 shows the correlation between social networking and work experience in local communities. This can be justified from such fact: more than half of those with an external relationship in local communities had work experience, in contrast to only 17 per cent of the group without such contacts. This seems to suggest that social networking in the wider community is related to the development of work experience, an important need of Chinese students abroad.

Table 8 Students' working experience in terms of their external networking in Nottingham

Networking externally	Work experience		No.
	No	Yes	
No	83.3%	16.7%	48 (31.8%)
Yes	47.6%	52.4%	103 (68.2%)
Total	58.9%	41.1%	151 (100%)

Students' work experience, according to our survey, could influence their career plans in the near future. In the questionnaire survey, students were asked to choose from five statements regarding their plans for the period after the end of their courses at university. Table 9 shows that in the group without experience, 44 per cent of respondents intend to go home, double the percentage of those with work experience who intend to do so; while another 31 per cent considered the possibility of continuing their studies, compared with only 19 per cent of those with work

experience who did so. For the group with work experience, the most popular choice was finding

a job in order to stay in the UK. This accounted for 40 per cent, more than triple the percentage

of those without work experience. This seems to suggest that social networking and work

experience in particular may have some impact on students' preferences and on whether or not

they decide to stay in the UK after graduating.

Table 9 Relationship between work experience and future plans

Work exp.	Study here	Job here	Return home	Other country	Not yet decided
No	31.1%	12.2%	43.3%	3.3%	10.0%
Yes	19.0%	39.7%	22.2%	6.3%	12.7%
Total	26.1%	23.5%	34.6%	4.6%	11.1%

Having demonstrated the scope of the social networking of Chinese students and some functions

of networking for their career development in the near future, the rest of this section explores the

impact of social networking on Chinese community cohesion and integration. Table 10 confirms

that students with external networking have had more chances to be involved in both Chinese

and non-Chinese community activities.

Table 10 Students' willing to participate in local events by their networking (%)

Name of event	External networking?		Total	Chi-sq
	No	Yes		
Chinese community events	8.8	32.4	25.8	.032
Local church activities	11.4	24.5	20.7	.003
Local cultural festivals	14.7	15.3	15.1	.078
Local social events (e.g. New Year Eve)	11.5	36.1	28.9	.003
Local sport event (e.g. football)	8.8	16.3	13.8	.049

To reveal the differences among Chinese students in terms of social networking profiles, the

Chinese students in the sample are divided into two groups: mainland Chinese and Chinese from

Hong Kong and Singapore (designated as other Chinese). The strength of the social networking

can be divided into five grades, according to the scope of each type of social contact shared by

the percentage of group members: strong (>60 per cent), moderate (41 to 60 per cent), weak (20 to 40 per cent) and poor (<20 per cent). Bringing Table 6 and Table 7 together, differences between mainland Chinese and other Chinese in terms of the strength of their social networking are shown in Table 11.

Table 11 Contrast of social networking between mainland and other Chinese students

Location	Group	Chinese 1	Chinese 2	Non-Chinese
On campus	Mainland Chinese	Strong (82.5%)	Weak (27.2%)	Weak (37.7%)
	Other Chinese	Moderate (56.3%)	Moderate (43.8%)	Strong (63.6%)
Off campus	Mainland Chinese	Weak (36%)	Poor (17.5%)	Weak (26.3%)
	Other Chinese	Moderate (47.9%)	Weak (31.3%)	Moderate (45.8%)

Notes: 36 per cent of mainland-Chinese respondents and 17 per cent of other Chinese lack social contacts/friends off campus.

A number of observations can be drawn from Table 11. Firstly, mainland Chinese have strong ties among themselves (Chinese 1) but weak ties with other Chinese (Chinese 2) and students of other nationalities (non-Chinese). In contrast, other Chinese are more balance with different groups among Chinese students (here Chinese 1 and Chinese 2) on the one hand and have strong ties with students of other nationalities on the other. Secondly, members of the mainland-Chinese student group have somewhat weaker ties with either Chinese (Chinese 1) or non-Chinese groups in the wider community than students belonging to the "other Chinese" group, who maintain balanced ties with both local Chinese (Chinese 1) and non-Chinese groups. Thirdly, regarding networking within the same identity group (Chinese 1) and with non-Chinese groups, both mainland Chinese and other Chinese students are weak in terms of relations with different Chinese groups (Chinese 2) either on campus or in the wider community, although the performance of other Chinese students in this regard is better than that of mainland Chinese.

Using the same principle, we asked respondents to the questionnaire who are local Chinese residents to tick who are their friends. Taking into account the differences between the sending communities and the influence of mainland Chinese sub-cultures (e.g., north and south Chinese, Wu-dialect and Yue-dialect Chinese, etc), we used dialect as a variable in the questionnaire addressed to local residents. Respondents were asked to identify any one type or all four types of friends according to whether they belonged to a similar dialect group (Chinese 1) or a different dialect group (Chinese2) whether they subscribed to a different identity (Chinese 3, e.g. mainland Chinese vs. Hong Kong Chinese), or whether they were non-Chinese. Those friends were further divided into two categories according to job type – was it similar or different occupation (e.g. low skilled work in catering sector or high skilled work in universities or companies). Table 12 provides an outline of the scope and variety of social networks among local-resident respondents.

Table 12 Scope of social networking by local Chinese residents (N=149, %)

Job type	Chinese 1 *similar dialect*	Chinese 2 *diff dialect*	Chinese 3 *diff identity*	Non-Chinese *other ethnic*
Similar	45.0	28.2	23.5	24.2
Different	26.2	21.5	26.8	20.1

A number of observations can be drawn from Table 12. Firstly, local Chinese residents are rather diverse in terms of social contacts, since as there is no common pattern shared by a majority of respondents. The table nonetheless confirms that people who share the same or a similar dialect are more likely to become friends than people of different dialect or identity groups. Secondly, the scope and strength of social networking among local residents is much smaller, weaker, and less likely to cross occupation or social class boundaries than that of Chinese students, as shown in Table 11.

With respect to the challenges to and opportunities in the local-Chinese community, respondents among both students and local residents were asked to evaluate four policy recommendations drawn from our focus group meetings. Table 13 shows that all the suggestions received high scores, averaging at more than 4 out of 5. The statement "Universities should encourage and support students to engage with local communities" gained the highest score, at 4.32 (out of a maximum of 5), followed by support for more Chinese cultural and social events, at 4.24. While both students and local residents agreed with and supported these statements, the two groups differ somewhat in terms of the extent of their support and their priorities. The local-resident group is more likely to want projects to relate to Chinese community development and to prioritize Chinese cultural and social events. By contrast, students prioritize university support for their participation and local engagement.

Table 13 To what extent do you support the following statements?

Statement	Total	Residents	Students	N
• *Communication/cooperation should be enhanced between different Chinese groups in Nottingham*	4.16	4.33	3.97	230
• *Chinese students should be treated as an important part of the Nottingham Chinese community*	4.03	4.05	4.02	236
• *Universities should encourage and support students to engage with local communities*	4.32	4.31	4.33	242
• *More social events should be organized in traditional Chinese festivals to promote Chinese culture and community integration*	4.24	4.45	4.01	242

Notes: 5 = totally agree, 0 = totally disagree.

Another important indicator of common needs on the part of both students and local residents is the percentage of respondents responding to the last item in the questionnaire survey concerning personal contact information for any possible project regarding Chinese community cohesion and integration in the near future. Bearing in mind participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, Table 14 shows that roughly half of all respondents were willing to be involved in

the project in various ways and one third were prepared to offer voluntary support if necessary. While the level of interest and the intention to get involved were similar in the case of both local residents and students, the extent of support from the latter might be considered to be higher if one takes account of the fact that one third of student respondents were preparing to return to a new life in their home countries.

Table 14 Are you willing to be involved in Chinese community project in the near future?

If yes, please tick following boxes with details in blank space if appropriate	Respondent rate
Do you want to receive more information about community projects?	46.6%
Would you like to offer a voluntary support if appropriate?	32.5%
Your name so that we can approach:	54.3%
Your contact address (email, telephone):	52.7%

Discussion

Having analyzed both official data and surveyed information, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the interconnections among Chinese student groups are weaker than the interconnections with non-Chinese student groups. This finding differs slightly from that of Benton and Gomez (2011: 47-48), who indicated a division between students from mainland China and Chinese from other countries or regions. This finding seems to suggest that Chinese student networking is a useful term, partly because it indicates a space within which different Chinese student groups can develop and enhance their interconnections and interactions. More importantly, the evidence confirms the existence of differences among Chinese students: mainland Chinese have stronger in-group ties while other Chinese are more likely to maintain a balance between internal and external ties.

Secondly, not all Chinese students can be viewed as part of the local Chinese community, partly because a large number (30 per cent) of respondents have no social contact with the wider

community and partly because the limited contacts that do exist are more likely to be confined to the small group of local Chinese residents with a similar identity or place of origin (in mainland China or some other country or region). The interconnections with local residents, moreover, vary significantly within the various groups of Chinese students. For example, around 40 per cent of other-Chinese students have social contacts with local Chinese residents, twice as many as their counterparts from mainland China. Taking into account the fragmentation of the Chinese community, however, the above results confirm the existence and functioning of ethnic links, however weak, between Chinese students and local Chinese residents. Our survey in Nottingham would seem to support Jia Gao's conclusion, although the links between Chinese students and the local Chinese community in Nottingham are weaker than in Melbourne. The differences between the two sets of research findings can be seen in part as a reflection of the differences between the two cities in terms of population size and business opportunities (including ethnic-Chinese business opportunities), although they may also derive from differences in survey design.

Thirdly, the empirical evidence confirms the existence of a correlation between the local engagement of Chinese students and their career development, including job opportunities (paid and unpaid) in local communities and the decision on whether to stay in the UK or go home. Taking into account the fragmentation within the Chinese community in Nottingham and beyond, our survey shows that Chinese students make a positive contribution to community cohesion and integration. This can be seen not only from the fact that students network on a wider scale than local resident groups (as indicated in Tables 11 and 12) but also from the higher rate of their participation in local community events (as shown in Tables 5 and 10). Again, the performance of other Chinese student groups in this regard is better than that of the mainland

Chinese students. Unlike conventional interpretations, which operate in terms of either pull-push factors at the macro-level (Wiers-Jenssen 2008; Findlay 2011) or acculturation (Berry 1997; Tian and Lowe 2010) at the micro-level (i.e., in the classroom), the above findings suggest that both students and the co-ethnic community benefit mutually from students' networking and their local engagement.

Finally, bringing together the growth in the size of the Chinese student population and Chinese students' social networking both internally and externally, one can conclude that student migration from mainland China has had a growing impact not only on the quantitative growth in the size of the Chinese resident population in England but also on the ongoing transformation of the local Chinese community in terms of structure and organization. Despite the many differences between Chinese students and local Chinese residents in terms of needs and priorities, all Chinese groups in our survey share a common view: universities and Chinese students could contribute more to Chinese community cohesion and integration in future. Such findings shed new light on the role of global universities in local communities, a new research area that can contribute to the debates about the mission of universities or university-community partnership.

Conclusion and implications

This paper aimed to map out and discuss Chinese students' links to and impact on local communities in England. Viewing Chinese students as a special segment of diasporic Chinese community, their attitudes, performance, and contributions to local communities have been analyzed from the perspective of their social networking, referring to a process of interconnections and interactions within or between groups of Chinese students in the university

and between Chinese students, local Chinese, and non-Chinese in the wider community. Returning to the research questions posed at the beginning of this paper, a number of conclusions and implications can be drawn.

Firstly, there is a correlation between the growth in the number of Chinese students since the start of the twenty-first century and changes in local Chinese communities surrounding university towns or cities across the UK, both quantitative and qualitative. In light of the debates about global diasporas (Cohen, 2008; Dufoix, 2008), the case of Chinese international students allows us to broaden our understanding of "global diasporas" by taking into account the contribution of international students, including Chinese, to local communities in the host society.

Secondly, social networking is a useful concept with which to explain Chinese students' participation in and contribution to the wider community. This paper thus sheds new light on the contribution of Chinese student migration and integration to the on-going transformation of diasporic Chinese communities in major HE destinations.

Thirdly, the variegated nature of the Chinese student population in terms of their perceptions and experiences of local engagement can be observed, analyzed, and interpreted through the lens of their social networking, which comprises two dimensions: ethnic (same Chinese, different Chinese, and non-Chinese) and civic (on campus or in the wider community). An analysis of our questionnaire survey reveals the correlations between students' social networking, performance in local communities, work experience, and plans for career development. Further research is needed to reveal the mechanisms behind their social networking and local engagement.

Fourthly, the social networking and local engagement of Chinese students in the host society

benefits not merely the students themselves but local Chinese communities. This is clear not just from the growing influence of Chinese student associations and their organized events, which is greater than the influence of local traditional Chinese community organizations, but also from the many high-profile public events organized by local non-Chinese groups in Nottingham, which attracted more Chinese students than local Chinese residents. However, it may be too early to identify the precise role played by Chinese students in local communities, given the on-going transformation of Chinese communities in the UK on the one hand and the continuous development of students' social networking on the other.

Fifthly, the Nottingham survey shows that the growth in Chinese student migration has provided a new momentum for Chinese community cohesion and integration, and that the performance in this regard of Chinese students from Hong Kong and Singapore exceeds that of those from mainland China, while both exceed that of local Chinese residents. A policy implication for international student recruiters and supporters, university teachers, Chinese student leaders, and the government agencies of both sending and receiving countries or regions is that Chinese students should be encouraged to develop their interaction with and respect and support for other Chinese student groups. This is because a united and strong Chinese student community could not only benefit the students themselves and the local Chinese communities but also maximize their positive impact on the wider host community.

Finally, this paper argues that social networking analysis is helpful for understanding local engagement on the part of Chinese students and benefits both Chinese students and local Chinese residents. Further research is needed to engage with theoretical debates about the role played by social capital, and to apply and develop this framework for analyzing the behavior of Chinese international students in other HE destinations.

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Notes

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[1] Two versions of the questionnaire were designed for Chinese students and local Chinese residents respectively with some common questions in order to identify the commonalities and differences in terms of perceptions, networking, and social behavior. For the student survey, due to constraints caused by the examinations and summer holidays, the questionnaire was mainly conducted online (Survey Monkey), and the survey message was disseminated to targeted Chinese students through the International Office of the University of Nottingham to all Chinese students from mainland China, and through a Singaporean Chinese student society to other Chinese students from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. Students from Taiwan were not included in this survey due to small size of the Taiwanese Chinese student population.

[2] Data analysis for local Chinese population is limited to England because no Census information for Chinese population in Wales, Scotland, and North Ireland was released when this survey was conducted.