

What does last of doctoral supervision? Retrospective assessment of doctoral education as prediction of employment destinations

Pilot evidence from Chinese nationals who got a PhD in the UK some 10 years ago

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Transitions, trajectories and transformations in postgraduate supervision: The times they are a-changing

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Presentation is about:

- Scope of research
- Devising research
- Basic results (5 slides)
- Prospect research
- Conclusions

Scope

- 1) Trace actual identities of doctoral holders of Chinese nationality who got a PhD in the UK, building an original dataset
- 2) Understand their basic employment trajectories
- 3) Assess their own subjective opinion about the doctoral experience as predictor of what career has been later (primary data)
- 4) Link subjective opinions with other secondary data (i.e. productivity)
- 5) Preliminary conclusions

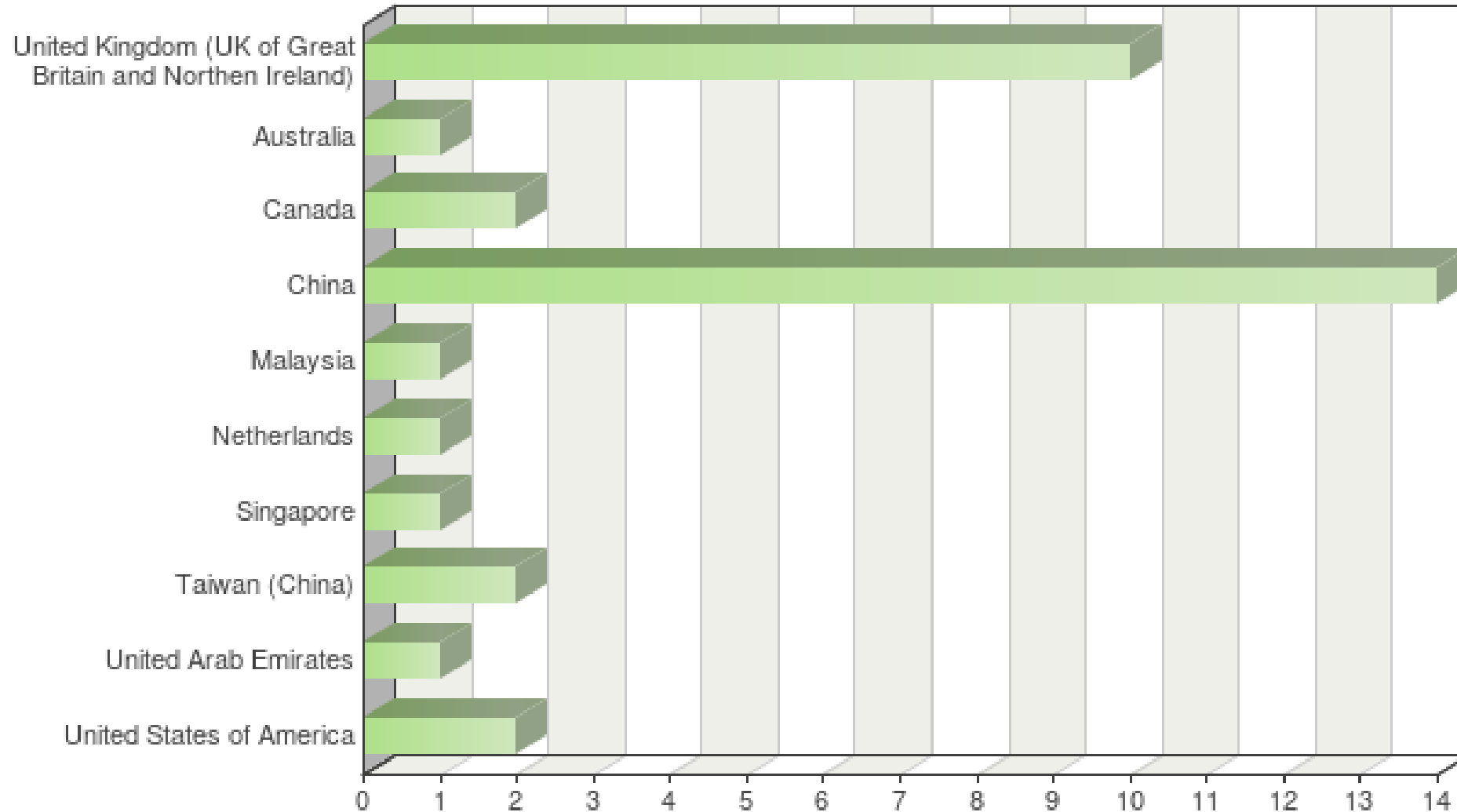
Devising this research

- This is a pilot out of a small grant – IoE Doctoral Centre “seed corn”
- Email addresses collected manually via British Library Ethos repository – PhD thesis deposited in 2011, 2012 (please see [here](#) for more)
- I collected 283 apparently valid email addresses checking open web sources, such as Google Scholar, institutional academic websites, etc.
- Some 19 email addresses resulted undeliverable
- Response rate is satisfactory (14.4%), although too inefficient altogether

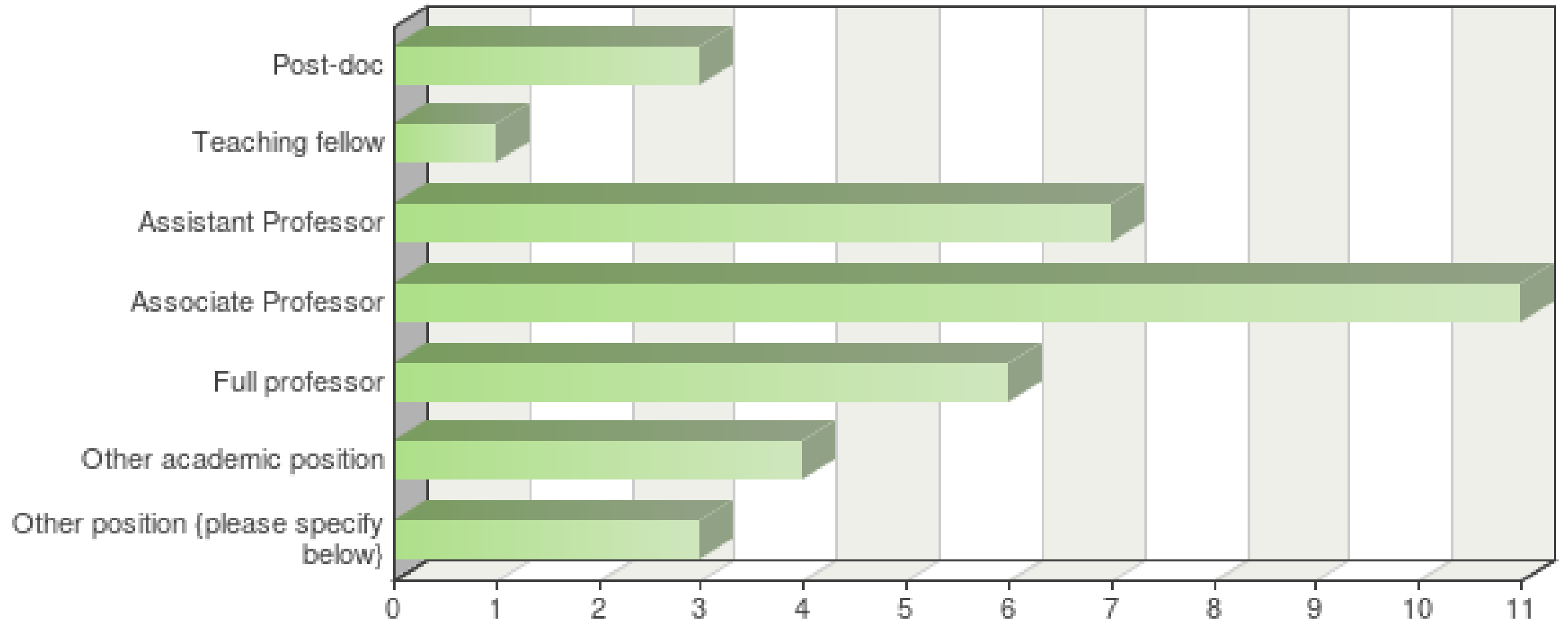
Results (to be continued)

- Around 2/3 males
- Around 1/3 had non-UK scholarship
- Around 1/3 had academic contacts with seniors in home country during PhD studentship (which seems to be associated with non-UK scholarships)
- Around 80% applied for research grants, and all got at least co-PI role
- A good half kept occasional relationship with PhD supervisor, and 2/5 stable relationship
- Around 1/4 applied for non-academic R&D positions (less than 1/10 actually got such positions) [this is likely to underestimate actual labour market destination]
- Among the few remarks I found that
 - poor institutional prestige is a problem,
 - “perma-post-doc” is an issue,
 - “protectionist” academic labour market destination (non-UK, non-CN)
- Satisfaction: 9.83 (1-10)
- Best and most successful career trajectories for those coming back to home country (see later)

Current country of residence



Current position



Drivers of motivation and satisfaction (1-5 Likert)

Motivation	Av.	Satisfaction	Av.
Prestige of the PhD per se	4,51	Training sessions	4,09
Prestige of PhD attained in the UK	4,26	Quality of Supervision	4,71
Indecision about other working destinations	2,49	Competence of supervisor(s)	4,69
Desire to deepen knowledge on a specific topic	4,71	Interpersonal skills of your supervisor	4,46
Becoming an academic	4,60	Research culture and environment	4,69
Improve employability	3,80	Overall satisfaction	4,69

Checking productivity (normalised)

Checking productivity (Scopus publications), I note that:

- Those who returned in homeland have published almost the double in comparison to those who remained in the UK or went elsewhere
- Those having done PhD with a Chinese scholarship produced much more
- Those who got professorship published more
- Some discernible difference by success in getting grants
- No distinction by satisfaction of PhD experience in any indicator

Prospect research

- Expanding the pilot into a “real” survey
- Checking whether productivity and patterns of scientific production (e.g., co-authorships) fairly predict rank (full prof, ass prof, other) - confounding by mobility, grant acquisition etc. but also supervision assessment
- Testing doctoral scholarship and academic relationships (academic social capital) with home-country as predictor of mobility and/or academic success (at parity of productivity)

Conclusions

- Too small for advanced statistical analyses
- Good as a pilot, albeit different strategy needed for the sake of efficiency (ORCID/Scopus contact details collection)
- Nevertheless, useful indications are as follows:
 - Motivations and opinions about PhD do not appear to predict rank, nor productivity
 - Those returning to home country slightly more satisfied about time spent as PhD student in the UK
 - Chinese doctoral scholarships predict return to the Mainland, not necessarily success
 - Forms of social capitals during and post-PhD (with supervisors) seems to don't predict main career patterns
 - To become PI in a grant is essential, but not enough