

# **China-UK Talent Exchange Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges**

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## **1.About SAFEA**

First please allow me to introduce my organization: the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs(SAFEA). This administration is an organization serving international talent communication and cooperation activities of China. Currently it serves over 900,000 foreigners every year working in or cooperating with China, supporting them by making relevant policies and plans, granting foreigner's work permit, jointly issuing talent visa, coordinating the implementation of key overseas expert plans and programs. It also manages annual overseas training plans,organizes over 36,000 Chinese talents every year who go abroad for training. It also supports governmental and non-governmental international talent exchange and cooperation activities. 30 years ago, this organization set up an office in the UK. Here it is commonly referred to as the UK Office of China

Association for International Exchange of Personnel, and I am the current Chief Representative of the UK Office.

Today my topic is: **China-UK Talent Exchange Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges.**

## **2.The willingness to cooperate**

There is no doubt that talent exchange and cooperation between UK and China has seen freshly new opportunities coming. So hereby I would like to highlight two of them.

Firstly, the willingness to cooperate. Brexit is facing many issues, people from all walks in the UK are positively turning to the market potential and cooperation opportunities in China. Throughout our visit to different organizations and experts, we can see their great interests in cooperating with China. Pew Research Centre conducted a survey across thirty-eight countries involving more than forty thousand people. The result is fairly interesting. Sixty-two percent of the young people in the UK are positive

about China, which probably is the best record so far, and is a good reflection of the public support for China UK cooperation. Similarly, China now runs into some issues with its relationship with the US, people from all walks of life in China are also positive about the UK. With a stable social structure, sound law system, splendid culture, first-class education system and high quality talent resource, UK is attracting people from various industries in China to cooperate with it. As a globally strong country in science and innovation, UK has many entrepreneurship platforms that attract Chinese companies. For example, The Oxford Sciences Innovation(OSI), founded by The University of Oxford three years ago, is trying to help Oxford's world class science to go to market by providing financial and industrialization service. We visited OSI last year, and discovered that it had already attracted risk investments funds from four Chinese companies, which include Tencent, Fosun and Blue Pool Capital under Alibaba. Meanwhile, OSI is actively attracting more Chinese investment partners to join.

### **3.The foundation of talents**

Secondly, the foundation of talents. The United Kingdom is a strong nation in terms of talents, only second to the US. It is a talent treasure house with great potential.

Up till now, there are over 900,000 foreigners working in or cooperating with China every year. Among them 4.5% are from the UK, which is not a big number compared with other countries. It is less than half of that from Japan and South Korea, ranking at the fifth position after the US (16.27%), Japan (11.49%), South Korea (10.9%) and Germany (5.31%).

Nevertheless, the quality of UK experts is relatively high. Since 1991, Chinese government would accredit those foreign experts who made great contributions to China with “The Friendship Award”. From 1991-2017, there have been 1,549 experts from seventy countries and regions receiving this award, among them there are 88 UK experts, making up 5.6% of the total. The contribution rate of UK experts in China, when compared with their amount share, is 1.1% higher. When it comes to high level expert communication and cooperation, UK experts have an even greater

advantage.

China now has 170,000 oversea students in the UK. Besides them, there are also considerable amount of Chinese origin talents staying in the UK. There are over 6,200 Chinese origin academics teaching or working in UK universities. Among them there are over 600 professors. Every year China also sends more than 4,000 selected talents to the UK for short term training.

The overall development and entrepreneurship environment for talents in China still has many weaknesses. When compared with the UK, there still is a great gap. However, China also has its own advantages, such as a broad market potential and various completely new chances. This year the statistics show that the total population of science and technological human resources in China sums up to 83 million as in the year of 2016. This number is even larger than the entire population of UK. This means entrepreneurs basically won't need to worry about being short of staff when forming a new team in

China. The statistics also show that the amount of entrepreneurship investment organizations in China and the capital managed by them rank as the second globally, only after the US. This means that it's relatively easy to collect the money for starting a company in China.

As I mentioned, there are many UK experts working in and cooperating with China, many Chinese students studying in the UK, many Chinese origin academics working in the UK, and many Chinese visiting UK for training. Accumulated throughout the years, these people have formed a considerably large and influential group. It is the talent base for the current and future China UK cooperation.

This willingness to cooperate and solid talent foundation that have never been seen before, provide infinite opportunities for further innovation cooperation between China and the UK. However, there are also many challenges facing China UK communication and cooperation. Hereby I also would like to mention two of them.

#### **4.The information asymmetry**

Firstly the information asymmetry. During our contact with all kinds of people in the UK, we found them very willing to cooperate with China. But they are not clear about which organizations and companies in China also share the same intention, as well as how to push forward the cooperation over existing obstacles. To name one of such common cases, China has a special type R visa for high level foreign talents. But many of those high level UK experts we know cooperating with China, are still worrying about spending time and energy to apply for a visa, each time before they visit China. They are still hesitating on whether to visit China for cooperation because of the trouble in getting a visa. However they are not aware that China reserves a special quick pass for high level foreign experts. They can easily get a talent visa valid for five to ten years without even going to the consulate personally. This asymmetry of information exists across China too. China organizes various domestic groups to visit the UK every year, looking for cooperation by holding various events. But obviously, at the most time they are not clear about where their UK cooperation partners are, about the real requirements from

the groups of talents that are willing to cooperate with them.

## **5.The culture gap**

Secondly, the culture gap. The Science journal have conducted a small survey, which shows that ninety-three percent scientists believed that the culture gap is a factor that stops scientists from moving to live in another country. We had visited CBBC (China-Britain Business Council), asking them what challenges UK companies have met when conducting business in China. The director of the research department of CBBC answered four:

First, the political system of China. Second, the understanding of Chinese government policies. Third, the language barrier. Fourth, the Chinese culture and lifestyle. Similarly, Chinese companies also face same obstacles in laws and regulations, culture and language gaps when they come to the UK seeking further development. For instance, Huawei, a Chinese telecommunication company, came to the UK eighteen years ago. Now it has around fifteen-hundred staff here, of which eighty-two percent are local employees. This month we visited its head quarter in

Reading with Professor Tang Yinshan and Richard Li-Hua. We discovered that managers from China spent large amount of time and energy in cross culture communication and management. They were even saying that only after coming to the UK, had they started to know that English is hard to understand, that there are culture gaps hard to cross over.

## **6.Two suggestions**

After all, the innovation cooperation between China and UK is witnessing unprecedented opportunities as well as challenges. We can take various ways and channels to realize our goals. On this I would also like to bring forward two suggestions:

Firstly, organize various forms of interactive communication events, widen the information channel to push forward innovation cooperation. For example, forums like this held today let more people know each other, and improve the communication and cooperation between China and UK. To see its full effect, such events need to be

persistently held and carried over.

Secondly, fully take advantage of the bridge built by Chinese and UK friends. When Chinese companies come to UK for business, there are always some key figures familiar with both countries behind many successful cooperation cases. We also found that among those UK experts who keep a long term cooperation relationship with China, many either married a Chinese partner, or have their Chinese students. These people understand the laws and regulations, customs and practices, languages and cultures of both countries. They are the bridges connecting China and the UK. They are the heroes behind the stage of China UK cooperation.

Those UK experts who work in and cooperate with China, those Chinese students who study in the UK, those Chinese origin academics as well as those trainees who visit the UK for training, understand more about what valuable cooperation information there is, about which organizations and people would be willing to, and are possible to cooperate with. They know what kind of

difficulties must be overcome to make a successful cooperation and how to. We should pay attention to this group of people, make use of their values and let them be the bridge and engine for us pushing forward China UK innovation cooperation.

## **7.Summary**

Finally, let me summarize the three main points I made: firstly, we see new opportunities for China UK talent communication and cooperation in science, technology and industry fields. For example, we see unprecedented cooperation willingness and solid talent foundation. Secondly, we also see some challenges, such as information asymmetry and culture gap. Thirdly we proposed several pieces of advice for future communication and cooperation. We can widen the information channel, take advantage of China and UK friends to let them play their roles in bridging communication and pushing forward cooperation. Among them we can try to discover key figures who are familiar with both countries and are able to bring about major cooperation.

