

# The evolution logic and path innovation of China's overseas talent introduction policy after the founding of the People's Republic of China

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**Abstract:** Since the founding of The People's Republic of China, China has actively sought for technological breakthrough and economic growth under the situation of domestic and foreign troubles. Introducing overseas talents has become an important way to solve the shortage of talent resources. The policy of overseas talent introduction in our country has different times characteristics in different historical periods. Based on the analysis paradigm of historical institutionalism, the policy of overseas talent introduction presents an evolutionary stage of budding, exploring, consolidating and expanding. Economic development objective, political environment and social concept are important factors in shaping the policy of talent introduction. The combination of scale effect, learning effect, collaboration effect and adaptive expectation leads to the path dependence of policy, while international competition and domestic supply and demand contradiction are the driving forces of policy change. Through exerting broader social forces, expanding the introduction objects and improving the talent management mechanism, we strive to further promote the policy of overseas talent introduction and provide more support for our talent reserve.

**Keywords:** Overseas talent introduction policy; Historical institutionalism; Evolution logic; Path innovation

## 1. Introduction

After the third technological revolution, the rise and development of emerging technologies have accelerated the speed of social change, deepened the process of globalization, and increasingly frequent exchanges and conflicts between countries. The competition between great powers from military armed forces and economic strength has evolved into a contest of science and technology with talents as the core. Since the founding of New China, under the double pressure of the international situation and domestic development, China has placed personnel training on a new political high level. In addition to reforming the domestic educational structure and cultivating high-tech talents, the country has also set its sights on overseas talents.

## 2. Analytical framework

This paper chooses historical institutionalism as the analysis paradigm. Historical institutionalism is a mainstream research path of new institutionalism. Its development is based on the reference and criticism of old institutionalism and behaviorism.

The first is the deep structural dimension. As a political product, the system cannot be produced without the coupling of political factors, economic factors and social and cultural factors, which will lead to the occurrence and change of policy system under the joint action of these universal basic factors.

The second is the path-dependent dimension. In the absence of absolute certainty, in order to avoid risks and save costs, policymakers will not choose to abandon existing policies, but will choose to maintain the status quo or reduce the possibility of policy changes as much as possible.

The third is the dynamic mechanism dimension. Historical institutionalism focuses on the agency in the process of institutional evolution, emphasizing that actors are not only the objects shaped by institutional environment and the compliant of rules, but also the active designers of organizations.

<sup>[1]</sup>When the displacement of the existing institutional system tends to the threshold critical point, each

action unit will release its hidden subjective initiative. After comprehensively considering the costs and benefits of institutional innovation, Take action to facilitate or delay the change of the system.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **3. The historical evolution of overseas talent introduction policy**

#### ***3.1. Embryonic start: 1949 -- 1977***

In this period, the policy of overseas talent introduction was still in its infancy. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the demand for talent increased sharply and the blockade of western countries were the main reasons to stimulate the introduction of overseas talent policy. First of all, a complete system has not been formed for talent introduction at this stage, and there are no clear regulations on the standards, scale and supporting policies for talent introduction. The work stays in simple publicity and crude introduction, and pursues quantitative policy objectives of returning scale while ignoring the actual effect and quality of talent introduction. Secondly, talent introduction still has a strong ideological color and has not completely gotten rid of political struggles. For example, the focus of talent introduction is placed in Eastern European countries with close diplomatic relations, and in order to counter the sanctions of European and American countries, the United States is also selected as the key introduction country. China's relatively tight diplomatic relations limit the development of talent introduction in China. Third, the domestic political environment is still bad, class struggle has led to the persecution of talent, serious outflow, related work into difficulties.

#### ***3.2. Groping forward: 1978-1999***

The past 20 years was a period of rapid development of the policy of talent introduction, during which the return of overseas talents ushered in a small peak and the policy of overseas talent introduction began to take shape. The government has broadened the channels for studying abroad, and the form of both public and self-funded education has created more opportunities for students to study abroad. The sharp increase in the number of overseas students also provides a greater possibility for the return of talents. The central government has issued a number of regulations around the introduction of talents, which has consolidated the legal basis for the introduction plan, strengthened the important position of talent strategy, and enhanced the importance of talent. In this period, an epoch-making talent plan was also born. These projects made outstanding contributions to the introduction of talents in China, which not only encouraged a large number of overseas students to set foot on the road of returning to China to build their hometown, but also expanded the talent reserve, improved the scientific and technological strength, and provided a solid foundation for the rapid development of the economy after the millennium.

#### ***3.3. Consolidated and formed: 2000 -- 2011***

At the turn of the millennium, with the deepening of globalization, frequent international exchanges and fierce competition, China is also at the key point of grasping economic construction. Promoting economic development and improving comprehensive national strength have become the key goals of talent introduction in this period. The construction of the policy of introducing talents in China has changed from closed to open, highlighting the concept of "people-oriented" and effectively satisfying the internal demand of introducing talents. For the first time, China has officially classified and defined overseas high-level talents, clarified the scope of the introduction object, and made the introduction work to be "refined" and "scientific" in depth, which is conducive to the introduction of more professional and excellent talents, and China's intelligence introduction work from expanding scale to improving quality. However, there are still insufficient safeguards for the introduction of talents in this period, and the evaluation system is not yet complete. There is still room for improvement in the overall work.

#### ***3.4. Deepening and expanding: 2012 to present***

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the central government has vigorously promoted more innovative policies in previous talent introduction plans, and provided more attractive preferential policies and supporting policies for returnees. From a single material subsidy, it has shifted to focusing on improving a series of soft environment improvements after returning to China, and the attraction for talents has continuously increased. Moreover, the government regards universities as a key position for talent introduction, injecting social forces into talent introduction work. As an important scientific research institution, universities can more easily access high-quality talents and

understand their needs, providing a good working environment and scientific research support for talents, making them an important part of talent introduction work.

#### **4. Evolving Logic of Overseas Talent Introduction Policy**

The deepening and promotion of the national science and technology strategy has forced the gradual improvement of the overseas talent introduction policy. A policy can be updated and iterated over a period of more than 70 years, but still plays a prominent role in the development of the country. The evolution logic behind it can be analyzed from the perspective of historical institutionalism.

##### **4.1. Macroscopic three-dimensional structural analysis**

###### **4.1.1. Economic factors: economic development goals provide strong momentum**

Pursuing high-quality economic development has become an important goal of overseas talent introduction policies, and the trend of economic development has also become a vane of overseas talent introduction policies. Throughout the entire process of introduction policy changes, a steadily growing economy has become a strong driving force for the development of talent introduction policies. At the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed to shift the focus of the Party's work to economic construction. However, the current domestic situation in China is dominated by agricultural economy and light industry, with a weak foundation for economic development. In order to develop from an extensive development model to an intensive one, the Party Central Committee formulated a "three step" economic development strategy in response to the actual situation of China's low starting point of modernization. A large number of high-quality talents are urgently needed to provide support for the transformation of means of production. In 1983, in view of the ethnic sentiments of overseas Chinese and talents of Chinese descent who work overseas and share the same ancestry, <sup>[2]</sup>China issued the "Interim Provisions on the Work of Introducing Foreign Talents", which focused on overseas Chinese and Chinese as the target of introduction. In the early 1990s, the third plenary session of the 14th Central Committee outlined the framework of a socialist market economy. China began to use the power of the market to allocate resources. The transformation of the economic system reflects the mutually beneficial and complementary linkage between the market and society. It has become a historical necessity for talent introduction work to be incorporated into market practices. <sup>[2]</sup>China's talent introduction work has begun to focus on the role of the market in the allocation of overseas talent resources, no longer regarding the government as the sole force to attract talent, nor individual talent as the sole policy object. Instead, the policy scope has been expanded to third-party intermediary organizations, relevant units, etc., to promote a more mature talent introduction environment.

###### **4.1.2. Political factors: political environment determines policy top-level design**

Due to the collision of multiple factors such as different ideologies, historical legacy issues, and conflicting development paths, China's diplomatic environment has undergone a more complex process. In the 1940s and 1950s, China became friendly with the Soviet Union, inviting many Soviet experts to conduct academic exchanges in China, and sending a large number of foreign students to the Soviet Union for further study and construction. Good diplomatic relations provided convenience for the cultivation of military, industrial, and economic talents in New China. At the same time, some Western countries have relied on the capital and technology accumulation of the Industrial Revolution to continuously develop their military and expand the scale of industrialization, and have implemented a series of economic and technological blockades against China. In 1949, the United States joined forces with 17 countries to establish a "Coordinating Committee on Export Control" to restrict member countries from providing or exporting strategic goods and high-tech to socialist countries. <sup>[3]</sup> Hostilities with Western countries have led to a low frequency of talent exchange between China and European and American countries. After the Cold War, China's diplomatic relations with the United States and Japan eased, and China implemented a basic national policy of opening up to the outside world. This international environment has provided an unprecedented positive momentum for China to implement the overseas talent introduction plan. China has begun to expand the scale of public education, open up channels for self-funded study, increase the strength of talent repatriation, and frequent exchanges with other countries have helped China's high-quality talent repatriation, China's overseas talent introduction policy continues to deepen and develop.

#### ***4.1.3. Social factors: the concept of talent supremacy drives the policy process***

China has had a profound concept of talent supremacy since ancient times. Although the standards for measuring talent vary in different periods and factions, both the Confucian concept of "appointing people on merit" and the Mohist concept of "advocating merit" reflect the respect for talent in ancient China. After the founding of New China, under the impact of Western ideas, China began to pay attention to the cultivation of scientific and technological talents. The "Go Abroad craze" allowed more young students to study different cultures and new technologies around the world, creating basic conditions for overseas talent introduction and work. The talent introduction policy in the initial stage only pursued the introduction of large-scale talents, without paying attention to the detailed standards of the introduction targets, resulting in a vague and targeted scope of the introduction targets. Moreover, most of the talents introduced in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China were limited to the military field, with the main purpose of improving China's military strength and breaking the technological blockade of Western countries. The situation of talent shortage in other aspects of society has not been significantly improved.

With the changes of the times, China's concept of talent is constantly improving. After the founding of New China, especially in the process of reform and opening up and the comprehensive construction of a moderately prosperous society, the issue of talent has been considered as a strategic issue in socialist construction, and the country has begun to pay attention to socialist talent cultivation, employment management, and talent environment construction. [4]The concept of "talent first" is not only highly valued at the national level, but the vast majority of the public is influenced by the traditional concept of advocating excellence and cherishing talent, and can also recognize the importance of scientific talent concepts and talent work.[4]The country has continuously deepened its emphasis on talents, and policies are no longer superficial. Instead, it has begun to attach importance to the deep-seated needs of returned talents, improving the policy content for more supporting details. The government has gradually refined the management of returned talents, provided them with other benefits besides one-time subsidies, helped them and their families settle down as soon as possible, and relieved them of their worries from social security, medical insurance, and other aspects.

#### ***4.2. Path dependence analysis at mesolevel***

##### ***4.2.1. Learning effect leads to functional strengthening***

After the implementation of the overseas talent introduction policy, relevant departments and organizations need to meet the development needs, which will produce significant learning effect, accumulate experience in the process, seize a variety of opportunities derived from the policy, and strengthen the system itself. From the establishment of the "Committee for the Return of overseas Students Affairs" to the implementation of the "100 talents Plan" and other plans, to the country's talent power shoulding the national strategic mission, the policy of talent introduction has played an important role in the long history. There is no doubt that the establishment and promotion of the policy of overseas talent introduction is a historical choice and also one of the driving forces for China to occupy a place in the international community. Therefore, due to the remarkable effect of the policy, the government will take the policy of talent introduction as the necessary path to realize the power of science and technology and culture, constantly explore the profound connotation of the policy, and vigorously exert its diffusion effect. In the process, the status of policy itself is constantly sublimating.

##### ***4.2.2. Synergy limits policy changes***

At the same time of the deepening of the overseas talent introduction policy, the country has also introduced a series of relevant policies in order to ensure the accurate play of its functions. For example, the "academic talent introduction plan" formulated by universities in line with the central government's talent introduction policy, or the "high-level talent introduction plan" and "young talent introduction plan" launched by local governments in imitation of the central government; In addition to the formal rules, in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the policy, the relevant implementation rules, management system and other informal rules are established. These policies form a policy group, which are interrelated and influence each other. If the overseas talent introduction policy is withdrawn from the policy process, it will also affect the implementation of relevant supporting policies. It is not only difficult to change several policies at the same time, but also will cause many negative effects, resulting in widespread public complaints and affecting social stability. In order to avoid such huge risks, countries will choose to maintain the status quo and maintain the original policy structure, so path dependence is formed.

#### **4.2.3. Scale effects lock policy paths**

For more than 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, various policies to attract overseas talents and preferential treatment have never quit the stage of history. In 1950s and 60s, our country's national strength was weak. In order to support continued advancement of policy work of overseas talent introduction, we still persisted in implementing the policy of sending young people abroad to study and giving students certain living subsidies, invested a lot of design and implementing funds in the early days. First of all, in order to attract overseas Chinese and foreign experts to work in China, the country generally provides superior wages, one-time subsidies, tax incentives, children's schooling, project support and other means as an important part of preferential policies. In this process, the country needs to invest a lot of money to establish, maintain and consolidate the policy of overseas talent introduction. Secondly, in order to aim at overseas talent registration, recruitment, management and welfare issuance process, our country established the corresponding laws and regulations. In the process of the formulation of these policy documents, a large amount of manpower was invested and a large amount of intelligence was used, and the non-money investment is large.

However, with the deepening of policy implementation, according to the law of increasing income, unit cost and additional cost will decrease.<sup>[5]</sup>When the policy becomes stable, the benefits will become more considerable. After the implementation of the overseas talent introduction policy for many years, the scale effect comes into play. Now the cost of maintaining the policy is negligible compared with the benefits it brings, so the staff who make the policy are more inclined to maintain the status quo of the policy.

#### **4.2.4. Adapt expectations**

With the establishment and dominance of the system, it will inevitably induce people to produce permanent expectations for the rule. If people anticipate that the policy will continue, that the system will continue to have an impact, people will voluntarily follow the existing rules, which will inevitably strengthen the policy itself.<sup>[5]</sup>Although the government's investment in talent introduction policy was limited in the early stage, and it fell into a short period of stagnation due to the political situation, the country's emphasis on high-quality talents never weakened. The coverage of the overseas talent introduction policy has become broader and more detailed. More and more school-age students regard the introduction of overseas talents as a "gilded path" for their career development and choose to further their studies in overseas universities. The huge number of overseas students and returnees has proved the remarkable effect of the introduction of overseas talents from the side. In addition, the talent reserve strategy of China has taken overseas talents as an important source, and the talent training mode of China has changed from a single closed mode to a more international and open degree, which meets the needs of the increasingly frequent academic exchanges at home and abroad, and promotes the sustainable development of the policy of overseas talent introduction.

### **4.3. Analysis of dynamic mechanism at micro level**

Historical institutionalism believes that the power game between different action subjects will also promote the evolution of policies and form the dynamic mechanism of institutional change.<sup>[6]</sup>When the system reaches a certain stage, there will be changes due to the subjective initiative of the system itself or the executor or complex external conditions, which may promote the change of the system. It may also lead to institutional breakdown.

#### **4.3.1. Thrust: International competition accelerates the pace of policy development**

First of all, the current international talent competition presents a fierce situation. Germany, as the world's second largest talent importer, has introduced a large number of high-level foreign talents, and China is its second largest source of foreign talents. In addition, the number of Chinese immigrants in Australia, New Zealand and other countries is also growing rapidly.<sup>[7]</sup> It is not difficult to see that the international community attaches great importance to introducing overseas Chinese who master high-end technologies to enrich the foreign talent pool in China. Secondly, the management paradigm with government departments as the sole introduction subject and the traditional mode of purely relying on the political authority of the government to intervene in social public affairs are increasingly facing questions and deconstruction.<sup>[8]</sup>European and American countries have long abandoned the mode that government departments fully undertake talent introduction, but highly market-oriented talent introduction, forming a complete chain of talent capture -- talent introduction -- talent management with scientific research institutions and multinational companies. It has achieved a high degree of connection between the country and talents. Driven by multinational corporations, western countries have attracted

a large number of foreign talents to settle in their countries by virtue of their advantages in capital and technology.

Talent resources are not infinite, and it takes a lot of capital and energy to cultivate a high-level and sophisticated technical talent, and the training cycle is long, so the talent reserve is irreplaceable. In order to consolidate their international status, each country has launched an undercurrent scramble for talent resources. In such a situation, our overseas talent introduction work must be more active, learn from the experience of European and American countries in talent introduction work, and promote the improvement of relevant policies in order to obtain a place in the international competition.

#### ***4.3.2. Tension: internal power provided by contradiction between domestic supply and demand***

In the early days of the founding of New China, the country was in urgent need of high-tech talents to build socialism, but the domestic education was backward, and there was no good industrial science and technology foundation, it was difficult to train high-quality talents, talent reserve could not meet the needs of national construction, so it sent overseas students to learn advanced technology, through this way to achieve the cultivation and reserve of talents. Subsequently, the process of reform and opening-up has been accelerated. Our economy is growing at a high speed, the degree of industrialization is deepening, and the science and technology industry is booming. The principal contradiction in our society has been changed, and the sustainable development of the productive forces is the key to solving social contradictions, which is firmly linked with the reserve of high-tech talents. However, under the constraints of multiple factors such as insufficient domestic technology, too long training cycle and favorable foreign welfare benefits, there is a contradiction between the huge demand for talents and the supply of talents. The talent gap in the science and technology industry cannot be filled only by relying on domestic talents. This increasingly obvious contradiction between supply and demand provides an internal driving force for the further improvement of the overseas talent introduction policy. The policy of overseas talent introduction has evolved into a detailed and complete system. At the material level, the policy of attracting overseas talents is not only limited to one-time payment funds, but also begins to spread to tax incentives, project support and other aspects, giving overseas talents stronger attraction.

### **5. Path innovation of overseas talent introduction policy**

#### ***5.1. Government leading to multiple subjects: exerting broader social forces***

First of all, the government can increase cooperation with universities, scientific research institutions and enterprises, and encourage social subjects to independently publicize, introduce and manage talents. These social organizations can formulate talent standards according to their actual needs, which will help introduce suitable talents more accurately. Secondly, social forces can also be introduced to provide more financial support for the policy of introducing talents, increase publicity and preferential efforts, and enhance the attraction to overseas talents while implementing relevant policies more effectively. The government mainly provides escort role in this process, giving certain financial support and issuing policy documents with the nature of guarantee.

#### ***5.2. Individual introduction to team introduction: transfer the introduction target to a relatively complete scientific research team***

In the future overseas talent introduction policy, the target of introduction should be transferred from individuals to teams. The introduction team can ensure the continuity of the core technology, and can leverage the integration scale effect based on the technical and management experience. The government should formulate specific policies for the policies introduced by the team, pay attention to the integrity of the policies, and form a comprehensive policy chain including screening registration, preferential policies, emergency plans and return management of overseas teams. The formation of scientific research team is based on the formation of a reasonable age structure, balanced gender, complementary disciplinary background, and clear management level. The direct introduction of scientific research team can achieve twice the result with half the effort. After the team returns to China, it can skip the time of reassembling the team and the run-in period, which can not only reduce the on-duty time, but also ensure the smooth progress of scientific research work.

#### ***5.3. "Bring in" to "keep in": formulate a more perfect talent management mechanism***

Relevant departments should track the employment and settlement of talents in the whole process.

First of all, exclusive employment channels for overseas talents should be opened to help high-end talents understand the current situation of relevant industries in China and give some suggestions on career selection, so as to shorten the employment time of talents after returning to China, so that talents can quickly integrate into the domestic working environment. Secondly, relevant departments should be set up to track the application of household registration, social security and family conditions of returnees, so as to ensure that they have no worries and can escort talents to fully devote themselves to scientific research when they return to China. To some extent, these supportive assistance and preferential policies are more attractive than generous welfare benefits. Finally, a career growth platform should be built. High-level talents attach more importance to career promotion and future development space. The state can give more financial support to important research positions such as universities and research institutes, and vigorously build science and technology incubation parks and science and technology studios.

## 6. Conclusions

To sum up, the policy of overseas talent introduction has been in the process of continuous improvement for more than 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and has made remarkable contributions to the scientific and technological innovation in collaboration with the science and technology policy. However, in the process of spiraling policy development, there are still strong characteristics of The Times. The development of the system is the result of common adjustment of various factors. Whether the policy can meet the actual demand and achieve the expected effect is a question worthy of in-depth exploration. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to expound the historical change and evolutionary logic of the overseas talent introduction policy based on historical institutionalism. However, the research based on a single theoretical paradigm is still lacking and difficult to be perfect. There is still room for discussion on the overseas talent introduction policy. Throughout the current policy, our country has formed a mature model to attract talents, but how to improve the loyalty of overseas talents after returning from the material, scientific research environment, psychological and other aspects is still a problem that needs to pay attention to. In recent years, under the influence of the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has dropped sharply, and overseas talents working back home have been hit hard. How to safely and effectively create more opportunities for talent interaction and ensure the quality of overseas talent introduction is another urgent problem to be solved. The policy of overseas talent introduction embodies the profound connotation of the strategy of a country with strong talent in the new Era. Overcoming the existing problems in the policy of talent introduction will help our country to build an important talent center and innovation plateau in the new era of governance, speed up the flow of talent in the international community, and provide a solid backup to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

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