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The Politics of Scholarly Exchange:

Taking the Long View on the Rhodes Scholarships

Tamson Pietsch and Meng-Hsuan Chou

Introduction

Founded in 1901, the Rhodes scholarship scheme is one of the longest-running programs of scholarly exchange still in existence. It has been the model for many schemes that have since emerged. As such, it offers an ideal context for examining as well as raising new questions about the organization and overall efficacy of scholarly exchange across the twentieth century.

This chapter is the first attempt at a general historical analysis of the way in which the scholarship shaped the lives of those who received it. It takes a dual approach to the long view on scholarly exchange. Not only does it track the scholarship through the twentieth century, it also looks back to the 1890s and to the ideas and precedents that informed Cecil John Rhodes and his executors. Beginning by placing the foundation of the Rhodes scholarships in their historical context, the chapter then goes on to examine three basic issues that underpin most international exchange programs: first, the geographic distribution of award; second, gender parity in award; and, third, the long-term geographic mobility of scholars. By bringing together historical and quantitative methods, it points to identifiable patterns of continuity, change, and regional diversity in the management and effect of the scheme.

Rhodes Scholarships: History and Origins

In 1901, the Cape Town politician and mining magnate, Cecil Rhodes, left his considerable fortune to the establishment of a scheme of traveling scholarships. Bringing the most promising young men from across the English-speaking world to Oxford, Rhodes hoped to “instil into their minds the advantage to the Colonies as well as to the United Kingdom of the retention of the Unity of the Empire” and affect “the union of the English-speaking peoples throughout the world.” At the heart of Rhodes’ scheme was his belief that the experience of living and studying together in a residential university would “broaden [the] views” of his

scholars, “instruct them in life and manners” and in the process foster ties of mutual understanding that would serve to “render war impossible.” It was, Rhodes believed, “educational relations [that] make the strongest tie.”¹ Interpersonal relationships and informal forms of association, rather than the explicit content of educational programs, were therefore at the core of Rhodes’ idea.

In attempting to define the type of scholar he sought, Rhodes stipulated four selection criteria: (1) literary and scholastic attainment; (2) energy to use one’s talents to the full, as exemplified by fondness for and success in sports; (3) qualities of truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for the protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship; and (4) the exhibition of moral force of character and of instincts to lead that will guide one to esteem the performance of public duty as the highest aim. He explicitly sought scholars who would be “not merely bookworms,” but rather “capable leaders of men”: a global elite who, through influence and public office, would work for future world order. This was a notion of leadership that extended beyond disciplinary proficiency and intellectual capacity. It emphasized the physical and charismatic qualities of leaders, and placed as much stress on character and personality as it did on their academic attainments.

Targeted initially at the British colonies of white settlement (Canada, Australia, Southern Africa and New Zealand) and also the United States, Germany, Bermuda and Jamaica, the program expanded over the course of the twentieth century to also include African states, India and Pakistan, and for a time also Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.² From 2015, a further expansion has extended the scholarships to China.³

Across this period, the meaning and representation of the scholarship has also changed. It was initially embraced by liberal imperialist politicians, who saw it as a way of creating common sentiments across borders, but received a lukewarm reception from Oxford academics, who thought that selection on the basis of well-roundedness would lower academic standards of the whole institution. From the 1930s on, this vision of imperial citizenship came under further criticism, not least from Rhodes scholars themselves, who began to champion nationalist sentiments. The emphasis and popular understanding of the scheme shifted again after World War II, when in the 1950s its remit was expanded to include the countries of what was newly styled as the multiracial British Commonwealth of Nations—moving from a discourse that emphasized race and the English-speaking peoples to one rather that invoked internationalism. It was in this period too that the Rhodes program was taken up as a model for the Fulbright scholarships and since then it has been frequently cited as the inspiration of many newer schemes. Throughout this period, a key message from

the Rhodes Trust was the informal moral obligation upon scholars to return and contribute to their countries of selection. At the start of the twenty-first century, the emphasis has shifted again. Reflecting changing political and economic governance patterns, “rather than imperial or national, it is increasingly now good global citizens that Cecil Rhodes’ traveling scholarships are thought to create.”⁴ The Trust itself has begun to highlight the contributions of Rhodes scholars in various fields, including as Nobel laureates, Olympians and heads of state.⁵

How are we to examine the effects of the Rhodes program when not only its geographic distribution but also its stated aims, self presentation and context have changed radically across the twentieth century? High-profile individuals such as Bill Clinton, Bob Hawke, Wasim Sahhad, John Turner and Norman Manley have done much to shape the public image and maintain the program’s prestige. But—although they form an important subset of alumni—most scholars have not gone on to careers as political representatives.⁶ Despite publicly available information on eligibility, internal analyses of more recent cohorts, sectional studies (e.g. the Rhodes project on female Rhodes scholars) and the Trust’s promotional materials, a consolidated, longitudinal assessment of the Rhodes program is still needed. In this chapter we longitudinally analyze the publicly accessible data on Rhodes scholars as published in the *Register of Rhodes Scholars* to reveal their mobility patterns over the course of the twentieth century.⁷

<HDA>The Rhodes Foundation in Context

This volume emphasizes the need to take the long view on scholarly exchange programs—to move away from a hagiographic focus on a small cohort of prominent “familiar suspects’ and instead to examine the program’s impact on the later careers of all grantees. This is an important and necessary endeavor, but in focusing on the after-effects of exchange programs, there is a danger of reifying their moment of foundation—an event that is frequently given mythic status by the programs themselves and their institutional histories. This is particularly true in the case of the Rhodes scholarships which are frequently celebrated as the personal creation of Cecil Rhodes and abstracted from the wider context out of which they grew. Until very recently, it was traditional for scholars to raise a toast to “The Founder” at formal events of the Rhodes Trust.

In his 1998 biography of Cecil Rhodes, Robert Rotberg does acknowledge that Rhodes “almost certainly derived his ideas” from two men who, in the 1890s, were already planning a scholarship scheme for colonial students.⁸ In the July of 1891, J. Astley Cooper,

editor of the London weekly publication *Greater Britain*, had published his proposal for a “periodical gathering of representatives of the [English] race in a festival and contest of industry, athletics, and culture.”⁹ Cooper argued that such an event would foster imperial goodwill while also strengthening “family bonds” with the United States. He first proposed the idea of university scholarships as part of this festival in an article a few months later, adding in parentheses “(there are none in existence yet).”¹⁰

A year later, Professor Thomas Hudson Beare, an engineer from South Australia who held chairs at University College London and the University of Edinburgh, developed Cooper’s plans further, suggesting they should be called the “Britannic scholarships” and outlining the details of a scheme that shares distinct similarities with that later proposed by Rhodes.¹¹ A hundred scholars were to travel to Britain from each of the principal (white settler) colonies, while postgraduate awards were to enable British students to pursue research in the empire. “On his return to his Colony,” concluded Beare, “each student would form a nucleus around which would gather all that was best, and each would form another of those invisible ties, stronger than any which can be devised by the cunning of law makers, which will keep together, for good or ill, the Anglo-Saxon race.” According to Rotberg, Rhodes “doubtless learned” of these ideas through his and Cooper’s close associate, the journalist and imperialist William Thomas Stead, and throughout the 1890s, Rhodes gave more and more attention to his educational “big idea.”¹² But with their emphasis on fostering informal ties through friendship among students from the white settler colonies, and with their connection to sport and physical activity, Cooper and Beare’s “Britannic Scholarships” point clearly to the connections that Rhodes’ contemporaries were making between imperial federation, sociability and education.

At the time of Cooper’s 1891 claim, there in fact already existed an empire-wide scheme of traveling scholarships. These were the 1851 Exhibition scholarships, established in 1899 by the Commissioners of the 1851 Great Exhibition and awarded to “the most promising students” from the universities of the settler colonies, Ireland and the provincial cities of Britain so that they might “complete their studies either in those colleges or in the larger institutions of the metropolis.” Given the publicity accorded to the 1851 Exhibition scholarships in scientific circles, it is likely that Beare knew them well. With a focus on “extending the influence of science and art upon productive industry,” they differed from the scheme of Cooper and Beare in two main respects: first, the 1851 Exhibition scholarships placed an explicit emphasis upon the content of studies; and, second, they placed the

universities in the colonies alongside those in the provincial centers of Britain, seeing both as key to “national” development.¹³

Unlike Cooper and Beare, and later Rhodes, the 1851 commissioners did not principally see their scholarships as a mechanism for fostering imperial loyalty, but rather as a means of building national scientific and industrial capacity.¹⁴ In this, the 1851 Exhibition scholarships were by no means unique. By the 1890s, a host of universities across the colonies of the British empire had established scholarships that were designed to take their most promising graduates on to further study in Britain.¹⁵ In fact, Thomas Hudson Beare was himself a recipient of one of them—the South Australian scholarship. And when in the 1890s Rhodes was thinking about the form his own program might take, there were already eight “traveling scholarships” taking graduates from the Cape of Good Hope University to the United Kingdom. Such scholarships were focused on academic attainment and saw study in the ancient universities of Scotland and England as the apex of local educational structures.

The tension between these two hopes for scholarly exchange—as a means of fostering identity and goodwill on the one hand, and intellectual and technical capacity on the other—sit at the heart not just of the Rhodes program, but also of similar exchange schemes throughout the twentieth century. From Fulbright to Erasmus, it is a tension that has rarely been resolved.

Election Constituencies: Changing with the (Political and Economic) Times

In his will of 1901, Rhodes stipulated the constituencies to which he wanted scholarships to go. Rhodesia was to receive three a year, South Africa five, Australia six, New Zealand one, Canada three, and Bermuda and Jamaica one each. A further thirty-two were allotted on a more complex formula to the United States. In a codicil written in 1901, Rhodes also noted that the German Emperor had “made instruction in English compulsory in German schools,” and on the basis of this he left five yearly scholarships to students of German birth, the object being “that an understanding between the three great powers [Britain, the United States and Germany] will render war impossible [as] educational relations make the strongest tie.”¹⁶

The original footprint of the scholarship thus reflected the racial and imperial philosophy at the heart of Rhodes’ scheme. It was not just friendship between the leading powers of the day that he sought to foster, but particularly friendship between the “Anglo-Saxon peoples” of Britain, the United States and Germany. As indicated above, this geographic distribution has changed significantly over time, to such an extent that the Rhodes scholarships are now sometimes claimed as the first that sought to fashion and attract the

“human capital” of a global knowledge economy.¹⁷ Just how “global” they are, however, is less clear. In order to track the changing patterns of regional allocation of the scholarship over the twentieth century, we used the data published by the Rhodes Trust to calculate the number of scholarships awarded by country per year.¹⁸

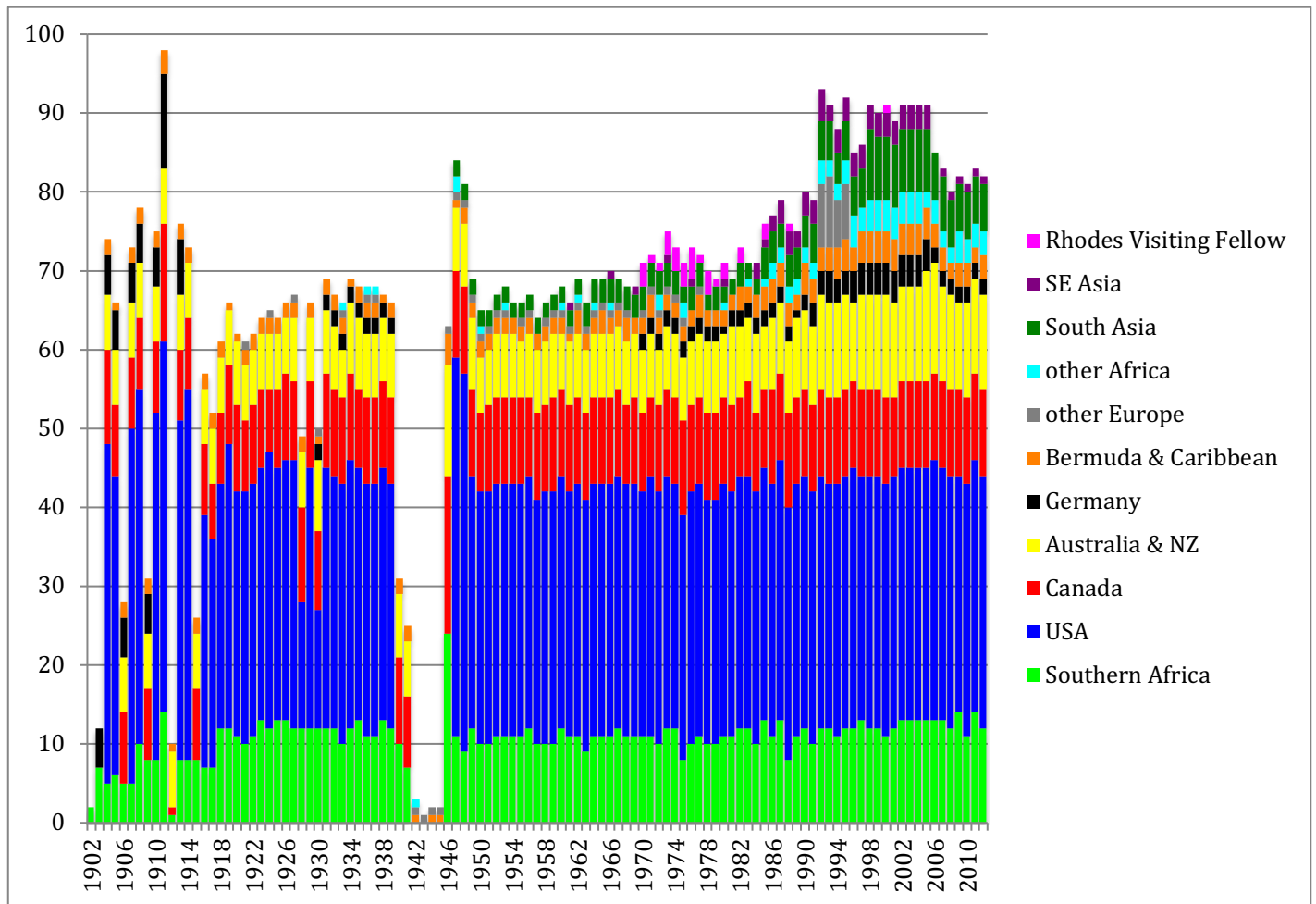


Figure 1.1 Election constituencies of all Rhodes Scholars, 1902–2012

Note: For a list of all scholars, please see: <http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes-scholars/rhodes-scholars-complete-list>

As Table 1.1 shows, the number of scholarships awarded annually has varied considerably, from a low of one (in 1943) to a high of ninety-eight (in 1911), but averaging at sixty-seven per year across the whole 110-year period. Throughout this period, the Trustees

have added (but also subsequently discontinued) approximately forty additional scholarships. Notably, the first decade of the scheme's operation points to the regional nature of this variation, with the American arm of the program displaying an episodic pattern of award. Immediately evident is the variation of award in some constituencies (such as Germany and East Africa) and the continuity of award in others (South Africa, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada).

This long view on the changing geographic distribution of award points to the close relationship between it and the wider contemporary global political and economic forces. The shifting politics of the British empire is clearly reflected in this data. The regions initially identified by Rhodes in his will reflect the concern at the turn of the twentieth century in British imperial politics with the "settler colonies" and moves toward what was called at the time "imperial federation."¹⁹ With the exception of Germany (on which see below), since 1902 there has continued to be a stability of award in these core constituencies. This reflects a stipulation in the original will, which directed that, in the event of insufficient income, the order of priority regulating the payment of the scholarships should be: Rhodesia, South Africa, other colonial scholarships (Canada, Australia, New Zealand etc.) and finally the United States.²⁰ But the expansion of the scholarships to include India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia in the 1940s to the 1970s reflects changes to imperial politics that took place in this period. From an approach before the 1930s that bifurcated the settler and "dependent" colonies, it manifests the shift to a more inclusive focus on the "British Commonwealth" of nations after World War II. With decolonization in Africa and South East Asia in the 1970s, the establishment of a small number of new scholarships for these constituencies in the 1980s traces both these political changes and ambivalence about them.

It is also possible to identify broader international politics at play in the variation of geographic allocation. The effects of the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s are evident in the reduced award to American students in 1928 and 1930. Most notable is the suspension and reintroduction of the German scholarship during and after World War I and World War II, and policies of appeasement are discernible in the continuing allocations to Germany throughout the 1930s during Nazi rule. The almost total cessation of the scholarships during World War II is striking. Although not large in number, the extension of scholarships to Asia (especially India and Pakistan) and Africa after 1945 may also reflect the attempt to influence the elites of these countries in the context of the Cold War. More recently, the expansion of the 1990s to the mid 2000s tracks the global economic boom of the same period. At this time the Trust chose—albeit briefly—to create new allocations for

Western Europe, reflecting perhaps the creation of the European Union in 1993 from the postwar European Communities and Rhodes' original intention with the German scholarships to foster "understanding" between the great powers. The subsequent retraction of the scholarships after 2008 similarly reflects the "global financial crisis" of the period and the Trust's attendant financial difficulties.²¹ A notable exception is the Hong Kong scholarship, which was abolished in 1997 following its withdrawal from the Commonwealth, but was reintroduced in the same year with a benefaction from the Lee Hysan Foundation. The recent expansion to include China similarly reflects the changing geopolitics of the early twenty-first century.

Two factors are evident in this overview: first, the long-term path dependencies that have ensured consistency of award to the original election constituencies; and, second, the Trust's sensitivity to changing global contexts. Although guided by the terms laid out in Rhodes' will, the Trust has not been insulated from wider political and economic forces, and has taken an active role in directing awards accordingly.

Gender Selection: Slowly Moving toward Parity

At its inception, the Rhodes scheme was open only to men. Women were expressly prevented from applying by the terms and language of Rhodes' will. After sustained pressure from scholars and universities, particularly from North America, in the early 1970s the Rhodes Trustees petitioned the (British) Home Secretary to request that a provision be included in the antidiscrimination legislation then proceeding through the Houses of Parliament to allow educational charities to amend their trusts to include women. With the successful passage of this bill, the Rhodes Trustees then asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science to pass an Act of Parliament (passed in 1976) to amend the terms of the original bequest, making women eligible to apply. The first women Rhodes scholars arrived in Oxford in 1977.²² Prior to this legislative change, from 1970 until the early 1980s, Rhodes Visiting Fellowships allowed a small number of women to take up residence in Oxford's women's colleges.

To track the relative selection of women since eligibility in 1977, we calculated the number of women scholars selected as a percentage of the total number of scholars for each year.

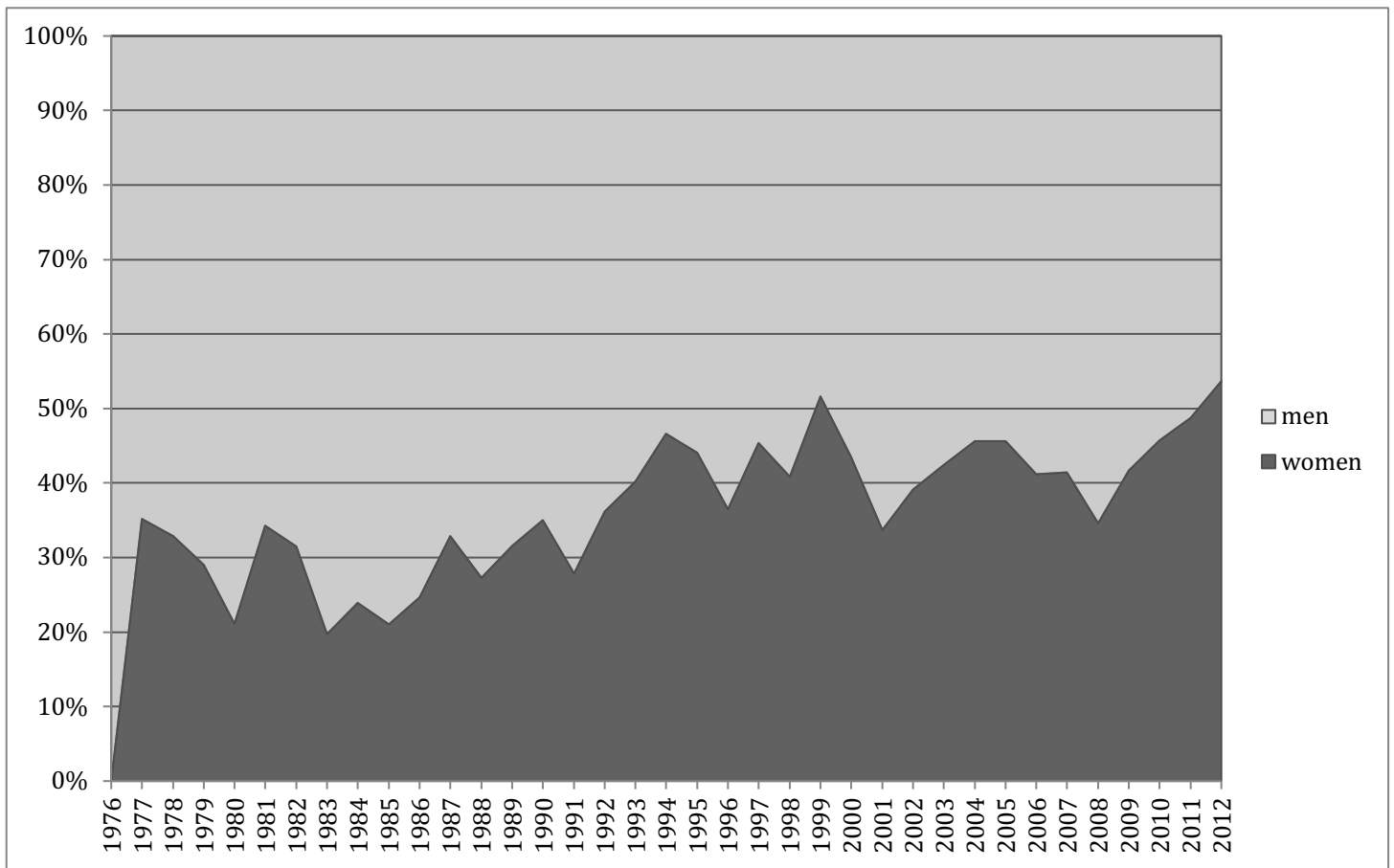


Figure 1.2 Women Rhodes Scholars, 1977–2012 (%)

As Table 1.2 shows, the percentage of women scholars selected has varied since 1977 in a consistent “ripple pattern” (peak follow by dips, then peak again). Although there is a general trend toward parity, the numbers have only reached fifty percent and above at two points in this thirty-five year period: in 1999 and 2012. This data makes clear the extent to which men, more so than women since their eligibility in 1977, have dominated the total numbers of recipients of Rhodes scholarships. While this may not be surprising, the “ripple pattern” of women Rhodes scholars is curious to note and requires further analysis.

Earlier we highlighted the emphasis that Rhodes placed on informal association and character in the selection and cultivation of his scholars. As Tamson Pietsch has shown more broadly for academic appointments in the period to 1939, the centrality of gendered and raced academic cultures of sociability to selection created highly uneven opportunities for access.²³ Although racial and religious minority groups were in theory accepted as scholars from the

very beginning, in practice opportunities for them were severely limited by the policies of the countries and institutions from which they came. We also note that analyzing the outcomes of higher education programs is inherently problematic, because the attainment of scholarships at the tertiary level is built on access to and performance at primary and secondary-stage schooling that is itself heavily influenced by a range of socioeconomic factors.

Geographic Mobility: Return to Countries of Election

Geographic mobility is at the heart of contemporary debate concerning knowledge exchange and generation. The assumption is that mobility enables scholars to make new contacts and acquire different knowledge that could lead to the acquisition of cultural and social capital, and opportunities for new collaboration and possible innovation. Hence, states encourage the mobility of scientists, scholars and students via funding support and through the reduction of administrative barriers to entry. The Rhodes scheme has traditionally brought selected participants to Oxford, envisioning that they would likely return to their countries of election and take up public positions of leadership. However, how far this has actually been the pattern for scholars has not been systematically examined. In order to track the geographic mobility of Rhodes scholars across the twentieth century, we therefore developed three indicators: (a) those who made their careers at home; (b) those who made their careers both at home and abroad; and (c) those who principally made their careers outside their country of election.

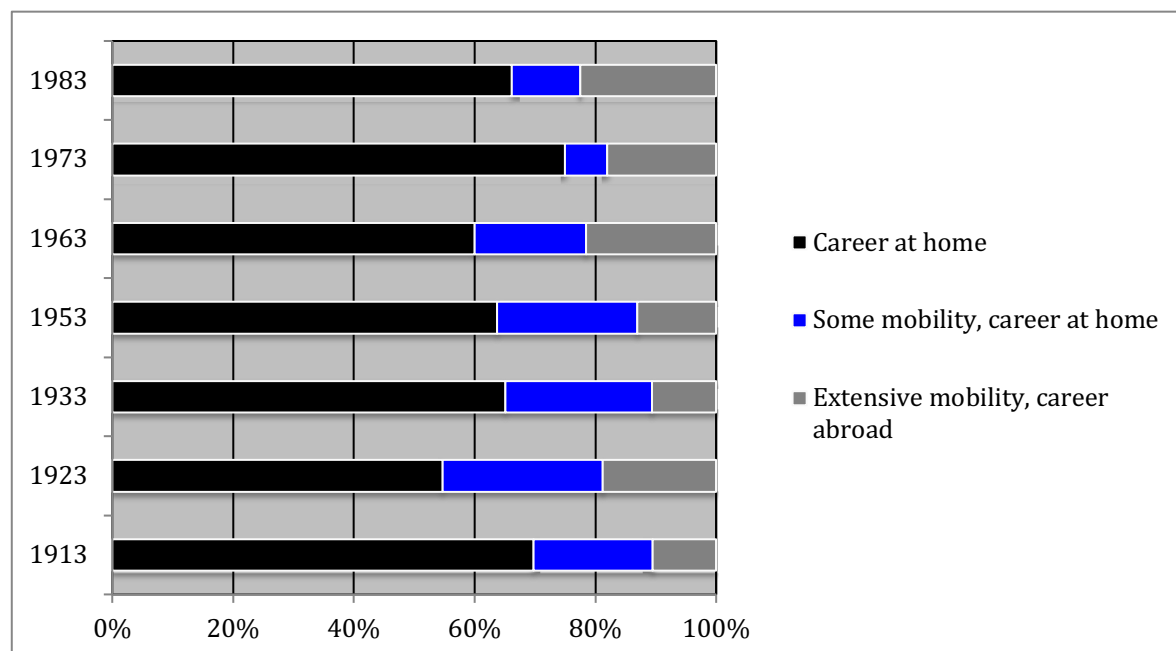


Figure 1.3 Geographic mobility of Rhodes Scholars, 1913–1983 (%)

As Table 1.3 shows, the majority of scholars elected in the years analyzed established their careers in their countries of election, with limited mobility to some mobility (more than seventy-five percent of all cohorts for all coded years). Scholars with extensive mobility, who established their careers outside of their countries of election, have generally remained in the minority (around twenty to twenty-five percent of their cohorts). However, since 1913, it is evident that the percentage of scholars in this category has been steadily increasing. We believe that it is likely that more recent cohorts, especially those from the late 1990s onward, may have still greater geographic mobility patterns than earlier cohorts.²⁴

One of the difficulties of this data is that it collapses the particular local and cultural contexts that shape patterns of behavior in different countries. To provide more fine-grained differentiation between the election constituencies, we have therefore disaggregated the geographic mobility patterns of Rhodes scholars who have been elected from the United States (a dominant cohort for most years) in comparison to those who were from other election regions.

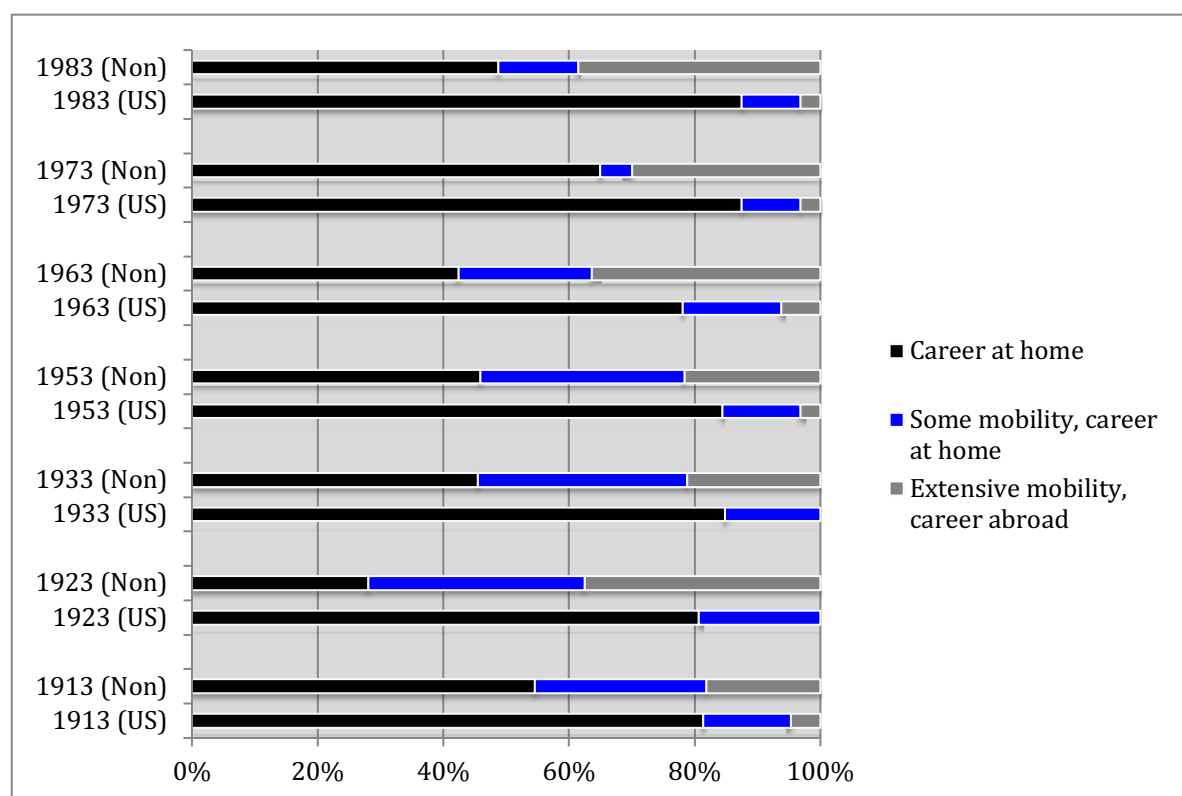


Figure 1.4 Geographic mobility of U.S. versus non-U.S. Rhodes Scholars (%)

Table 1.4 reveals several striking patterns. First, Rhodes scholars from the United States have been more likely (about twice as likely) to spend part of their careers at home than their counterparts from other election regions. Second, while very few U.S. scholars established their professional careers abroad, many more non-U.S. scholars pursued this option (between twenty-two percent in 1913 and sixty-two percent in 1983). Third, the relatively high mobility (compared to other decades) of non-U.S. scholars elected in 1923 points to the danger of telling a linear story of increasing mobility across the century. The opportunities and constraints of the interwar and World War II years, the period in which this cohort developed their careers, meant that more non-U.S. scholars built their lives abroad than did so in later decades. This data clearly shows that awardees from different constituencies have used the Rhodes experience differently in the establishment and consolidation of their professional careers: while U.S. scholars have utilized it as a platform to pursue a variety of careers principally at home, non-U.S. scholars have employed the Rhodes program as a springboard to careers outside of their countries of election.

Derek John de Sa

Derek John de Sa, was one of two students awarded the Rhodes scholarship for India in 1963. He was born in Lahore in 1939 and was educated at Sherwood College and the Christian Medical College in Ludhiana, graduating with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Science in 1962. At Oxford he was a member of Jesus College and undertook a doctoral degree in Pathology. Graduating in 1967, he stayed on in Oxford to work in the Radcliffe Infirmary and as Lecturer and Assistant and Honorary Consultant. In 1973 he accepted a post as Associate Professor of Pathology at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, where he also served as staff pathologist at St Joseph's Hospital and Chedoke Hospital. In 1982 he was appointed Professor of Pathology and Head of Paediatric Pathology at the University of Manitoba and Pathologist-in-Chief at the Children's Hospital of Winnipeg. He returned to McMaster University as Professor of Pathology in 1986 and in 1996 was made Professor of Pathology at the University of British Columbia. Derek de Sa. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists, served on the Council of the Society of Paediatric Pathology and was chairman of its publication committee. He was a consultant for the US Center of Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health and the Ontario Health Ministry. In 2013 he returned to Oxford to attend the 110thth Anniversary of the Rhodes scholarships.

We caution, however, against making assumptions between these patterns and the notion of “brain drain.” As several recent studies in other contexts have shown, the notion of brain drain is likely to oversimplify the relationship that Rhodes scholars have had with their countries of election.²⁵ Work by Tamson Pietsch suggests that Rhodes scholars who were academics maintained strong ties with their home countries, supervising the next generation of leaders and scholars from their countries of origin by hosting their stay abroad.²⁶ The importance of such intergenerational networks might also be considered in other professional contexts, notably medicine or management consulting. In these instances, rather than acting as the source of brain drain, Rhodes scholars who have made their careers outside their countries of origin have nonetheless still contributed to knowledge mobility and circulation—factors that are usually considered to sit at the heart of national innovation.

Conclusion

Taking the long view on the Rhodes scholarships highlights both the gravitational weight exerted by the terms and context of their foundation, and their protean and plural nature. The centrality of the original constituencies, the continuity of the Trust’s broad conception of leadership, its continuing belief in informal relations between scholars and the slowness of progress on questions of gender equity substantiate one of the central claims of historical institutionalism, which proposes that institutions, once created, are “sticky” and may be resistant to change.²⁷

But a long view on the Rhodes scholarships also shows that although exchange programs such as the Rhodes scholarships play a significant role in shaping elites through providing opportunity and connection, they are never insulated from broader historical and political forces affecting social and economic development. Such schemes sit in relation to the political imperatives that animated the era of their foundation, are guided by the changing objectives of those who manage them, are reshaped by future benefactions and are influenced by the exposure of their endowments to market and political forces. They will always be utilized for a variety of purposes by scholars, some of which will be contrary to the original aims of their foundation. It is in this deft political and social mutability that we perhaps find much deeper forces of continuity. As scholars of internationalism are increasingly showing, the United States first competed with and then assumed the mantle of British liberal imperialism. Culture was one of its key methods. And culture is one of the key methods being utilized by a wider variety of state and institutional actors as nations, corporations,

foundations and individuals alike seek to adjust to the emerging geopolitical order of the twenty-first century.

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