Social Mobility and International Graduates in China

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B.A., M.A.

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education

School of Education

College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

October 2019

Abstract

By comparing the social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates, this is a unique study into Chinese international graduates' post-study living and working experiences.

It aims to address the overarching research question: What is the social mobility of international graduates in China? To answer this question, I proposed five sub-questions: 1) What are the labour market outcomes of Chinese students obtaining master's degrees abroad compared with those of non-mobile Chinese graduates? 2) What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China? 3) What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with that of home graduates in China? 4) What is the relationship between social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates in China? 5) What roles do international graduates play in social class formation and culture and lifestyle change in China?

Adopting a mixed-methods approach to research and a pragmatic paradigm, this study employs survey and in-depth interviews to collect data. A multi-regression model, mapping analysis and thematic analysis are used to analyse the data. Although home graduates perform better in the labour market and upward social mobility than the international graduates, the international graduates are still favoured by China's labour market and have more opportunities to develop their careers through their accumulated cultural and social capital. Interestingly, their labour market outcomes and social mobility are closely connected to their spatial mobility. The analyses reveal that the likelihood of studying abroad is linked to one's place of origin and positively associated with parental socio-economic status. Moreover, the results of the mapping analysis highlight the uneven opportunities for spatial mobility when comparing international returnees with their peers. Therefore, this study recommends that policymakers should focus on social security and institutions for high-end home graduates. Increasing equality of education opportunities, especially the chances of studying abroad, can shrink the social mobility and inequality gaps.

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Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sincere thanks to China Scholarship Council (CSC) which funded my full PhD study and those who generously supported my PhD thesis and the three-year life in Glasgow. Without your help and support, I could not finish this thesis and spent so pleasing time in Glasgow.

My first and foremost thanks go to my two supervisors, Dr Marta Moskal and Dr. Barbara Read. I am so fortunate to meet them. Because of their patience, kindness, encouragement and tolerance throughout my three-year PhD study, I enjoyed my PhD journey and rarely felt pressured. I still remember that on 22nd October 2015, I contacted with Marta about PhD supervision. She provided many suggestions to revise my research proposal and helped me a lot with my scholarship application. During the three-year PhD study, with Marta's consistent patience and encouragement, she continually inspired me and led me to grow as a social science researcher. Throughout the three years, Marta promoted my ability of English writing, skills of research knowledge and research methods. More importantly, she influenced my attitudes to research. Her preciseness in expression and argumentation made me see the right attitudes of doing research.

Marta introduced Barbara to me on 15th February 2017. I felt very happy when I met Barbara the first time, because Barbara always has warm smiles and is a great source of comfort. Barbara also contributes a lot to my PhD thesis, especially in theories and concepts. Every time when I receive a lot of new information and extensive feedback from Barbara, I am surprised at her abundant knowledge. She always has rigorous expressions and attitudes to research. Barbara's influences on me go far beyond my PhD and will affect my attitudes to teaching and learning. In my final stage of PhD thesis writing, Marta and Barbara really helped me a lot and they deserve enormous respects and admirations.

In addition, I wish to extend special thanks to Professor Andy Furlong. Although I met Andy only once, his social scientist temperament left me deep impressions. I wish in future I can be an accomplished scholar like him.

I am also thankful to the participants in my PhD research. Over 700 Chinese

graduates participated in the survey, so I cannot remember all of them, but I really appreciate their help. Through the participant recruitment process, my good friends supported me a lot. Sihui Wang, Geng Wang, Rui He, Xu Cai, Xiaofei Cao, Lingling Hua gave me a lot of help in finding suitable participants. Some of friends, Yaobing Taong, Kaiyun Feng, studying with me in University College London also recommended many suitable questionnaire participants. Besides, my friends and teachers of undergraduate university (China University of Mining and Technology, CUMT) also found many suitable participants. Professor Xinlian Su, Professor Daqing Zu, Professor Hengxing Ding, Professor Tingting Liu, Professor Yan Miao, Yuhui Wang, Dan Han, Jingjing Li, Yanmei Bi, Lei Sun and a lot of friends in CUMT provide substantial help with participant recruitment. My friends also back me when I meet problems. In fact, I owe many thanks a lot of friends and teachers in China. I remember you and your help in my heart.

Last but not least, I will give special thanks to my family. My mother Weiyan Jiang, sister Xintong Jiang (nickname: tudawang) and father Zhongxiong Zhai provide endless love, though they seldom say it out. My sister pushes me to work on PhD quickly and encourages me to work hard through demonstrating her coursework reports with low marks. My brother Xing Gao not only helps my life but contributes to my initial understandings of research and academic publications. I give the deepest thanks to all of you.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Signature _____

Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CGSS	China General Social Survey
GPA	Grade-Point Average
MOE	Ministry of Education
PRC	People's Republic of China
REF	Research Excellence Framework
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UNESCOE	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	The United States of America

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research problem and questions

The mobility of highly educated people has recently received scholarly attention in developing and transitional countries such as China (Fu & Gabriel 2012; Liu & Shen 2014; Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Mok & Han 2016; Du 2017; Liu, Shen & Xu 2017). University graduates are an interesting demographic because they comprise a highly skilled and mobile segment of society (Marinelli, 2013). Educational mobility patterns reflect the intensifying global flows of people and knowledge and intertwine with globalisation, increasing neoliberalism and geo-social transformations (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Waters, 2008; Xu & Montgomery, 2018). The growing internationalisation of higher education has encouraged students to pursue international mobility to develop their skills. Chinese students make up the largest and fastest-growing body of international students (UNESCO, 2014). The UK hosts the second largest number of all international students globally. The increase in the number of Chinese international students has been encouraged by the recruitment efforts of UK universities (Moskal, 2017). The attractiveness of Western education is partly associated with China's transition to a capitalist economy and its growing need for international competencies (Thomas & Inkpen, 2017).

At the same time, as Xu and Montgomery (2018: 2) observe, large economies such as China have witnessed increased internal education mobilities—a complex phenomenon integrated with geopolitical, cultural and socio-economic factors. A significant proportion of Chinese students have moved from rural to urban areas, from economically less developed western regions to the economic centres in the east (Li, 2013; Li & Heath, 2017). With the deepening economic transformation and the growing number of higher education graduates, skilled migrants constitute an increasing and significant part of both the internal migrant population and urban society, and they need to be seen as "prospective citizens" (Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015: 639). Internal education mobilities have been linked to China's recent policies aimed at improving higher education infrastructure and countering the increasing trend of Chinese student migration to

other countries (Thomas & Inkpen, 2017). These policies have helped to increase domestic student enrolment (Gribble, 2008), but they still appear to have had less significant impacts on Chinese student mobility abroad. Chinese local governments also offer special incentives to encourage overseas students to return, such as tax breaks, subsidised rent, or residency permits in the "*Hukou*" (household registration) system (Zhou, 2004). Therefore, understanding the migration dynamics of highly educated youths is important in policymaking for regional development (Liu, Shen & Xu 2017: 652).

Most research on China's student returnees focuses on their motivations for international mobility and labour market outcomes after they return to China; but little effort has been made to explore their social mobility after returning to China. This thesis explores the features and patterns of their social mobility, comparing international graduates to domestic graduates in China. It investigates the social mobility of international graduates who obtained a master's degree in the UK compared with China's domestic master's level graduates. Although scholars tend to distinguish between social mobility and spatial mobility, it has been noticed that the social mobility of university graduates often accompanies their spatial mobility (Xiang & Shen, 2009). Therefore, this thesis takes spatial mobility into consideration and examines their effects on and relationship with social mobility (see detail analysis in Chapter Five).

To achieve these aims, the study focuses on five main research questions (RQ):

(1) What are the labour market outcomes of Chinese students obtaining master's degrees abroad compared with those of non-mobile Chinese graduates?

(2) What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China?

(3) What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with that of home graduates in China?

(4) What is the relationship between social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates in China?

(5) What roles do international graduates play in social class formation and culture and lifestyle change in China?

1.2 Research background

1.2.1 Social mobility and social class in China

According to Blau's (1977) definition, social mobility refers to the movement between a lower and higher social status. The process of social mobility, a basic factor behind the majority of patterns of structural movement within social structures, not only affects the social positions and distribution patterns of social resources and power, but also influences people's lifestyles, behaviour, cognitive attitudes, and values. Similar to Blau's definition, Miller (1960) defines social mobility as a change in income, political power, social relations (social distance or deference), skill, or occupational prestige. Social mobility focuses on the difference between one's previous social background ("origins") and their current social achievement ("destinations") (Song et al., 2016). More importantly, Blau and Duncan's (1967) US study established new standards for social mobility research—the coding of occupations into the US's occupational classification scheme and status attainment model (Duncan & Hodge, 1963; Duncan, 1966). Blau's contributions make it possible to assess the relative importance of education and family background (Ganzeboom, Treiman & Ultee, 1991: 282). Based on Blau's contributions in terms of occupational classification, Lu (2002) establishes China's 10 social statuses, which are widely accepted and applied in China's social mobility research. This thesis takes advantages of Lu's social status classification and Duncan-Blau's status attainment model to investigate Chinese international graduates and their social mobility in China.

In the Maoist period, it was very rare and difficult to change one's social class in China because of the rigid institutional walls, including the rural and urban dichotomy (Keister & Nee, 2000), the work-unit (*Danwei*) boundary (Bian, Logan, Lu & Guan, 1997), and the cadre-worker divide (Bian, 2002). In the Chinese context, "cadre" means the manager and leaders in the state sectors and are categorised as the upper classes. Since China launched its economic reform policy put forward and carried out by Xiaoping Deng in 1978, Chinese society has

undergone huge social changes, resulting in upheaval in all industries and social structures. Since the post-1978 market-oriented economic reforms, Chinese social stratification has transformed from a rigid cadre-dominated hierarchy in Maoist times to an open system in the post-Mao era (Bian, 2002; Bian, Breiger, Davis & Galaskiewicz, 2005). Therefore, over the past 40 years, cross-class mobility has occurred relatively frequently because China's rigid social class boundaries have been transformed. In addition to the institutional transformation, the Chinese economy has developed and transformed rapidly. Furthermore, living standards in China have largely improved over the last 40 years, and, as a result, social stratification and social inequality have increasingly become a topic of public concern (Hong & Zhao, 2015). Consequently, more Chinese people have started to pay attention to equality of opportunity and social justice. It is against this background that this study focuses on the social mobility taking place in contemporary China. Moreover, higher education is closely related to social mobility and always plays a key role in social equality and individual success (Li, 2007). Research has found that intergenerational mobility is higher among individuals holding a college degree than those having lower levels of education; more importantly, higher education is a great equalising tool because it can help towards reducing the gap in terms of the individual advantages/disadvantages granted by birth (Torche, 2018). In China, higher education was given a great deal of attention when the college entrance exam was reinstated in 1977. Therefore, there is a rich body of research studying social mobility and higher education since 1978. China is currently undergoing huge social transformation. It is different from what took place during the reform period because the country has now stepped into the post-reform stage (Chen, Glasmeier, Zhang & Shao, 2016). In the post-reform era, income inequality, the urban and rural dichotomy, education opportunity equality, higher education, and social class and mobility have all become controversial issues discussed widely in China's society. The Chinese are increasingly focusing on practical issues, such as how and to what extent does education relate to social mobility (Marginson, 2018).

1.2.2 International education opportunities and social mobility

This study focuses on social mobility in relation to the international education opportunities for China's students. International education has attracted

increasing academic interest, as international student migration has become a prominent aspect of social change in China (Xiang & Shen, 2009: 514) over the last 40 years. The internationalisation of higher education in countries like the UK, the US and Australia has intensified over the last 20 years (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Huang, 2007), contributing to shaping and transforming higher education in Asian countries (Altbach & Knight 2007). China is the largest source of overseas students in the world, making up 45% of all Asian students studying abroad and 25% of all international students. The number of Chinese international students has been growing more quickly than for other countries; between 2013 and 2016, the number of Chinese students studying abroad increased by 22%. Among the large number of Chinese international students, 10% choose to study in the UK, and the proportion is increasing year by year (Education at a Glance 2018). Data from Education at a Glace OECD 2018 show the significance of the UK for Chinese international students. A substantial number of studies highlight that Chinese students prefer UK universities because of their 'global reputation' (Bennett & Kane, 2009; Bodycott, 2009) and the 'UK university brand' (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Gray, Fam & Llanes, 2003; Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009). Against this backdrop of globalised higher education, China represents a large and lucrative market (Moufahim & Lim, 2015). Chinese students have been increasingly choosing to study abroad ever since individuals were first approved to engage in self-funded overseas study in 1981 (Zhan, 2017), following the country's 1978 reforms. The 21st century has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of Chinese students studying abroad. Data from 1999-2002 provided by China's Ministry of Education (MoE) show that the number of students studying abroad increased fivefold in this three-year period. In 2016, there were 544,500 Chinese students studying abroad, an increase of 3.97% compared with 2015 (MoE, 2016). In addition, in order to encourage Chinese students to pursue international higher education, in 2018, the China Scholarship Council (CSC) launched several new scholarship schemes, increasing to 32,300 the number of grants to support a variety of overseas study projects. Meanwhile, many graduates have returned to China after obtaining their overseas degrees. According to MOE 2016 data, 409,100 graduates came back to China after graduating in 2016. In the period from 1978 to 2016, there were 2,651,100 returnees to China after graduating from overseas institutions (MoE, 2016). Thus, by 2016, the Chinese returnees had become a very large group with significant influence on Chinese society (Liu, 2016c).

The 20th century has witnessed a rapid growth in master-level graduate students (Wakeling & Laurison, 2017). Among the large number of Chinese international students, master's graduates account for the largest percentile. Therefore, it is essential to study whether their master-level qualifications have become the new frontier of social mobility (Liu, 2016c; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017). UK universities have identified that international students can bring significant economic benefits, and these benefits can help to finance the UK's domestic students. This is why UK universities have spared no effort to attract more international students, including Chinese students, the largest source of international students (Moskal & Schweisfurth, 2017). Different from Chinese domestic master's graduates in terms of their lifestyles, tastes, cultural identities, and education attainments, returnees are expected to be high-end talents and play different roles in China's development (Li, Cheng & Fang, 2015). Chinese scholars have strong interests in studying the talent group attending advanced international higher education to explore the role of international higher education in their post-return success and upward social mobility (Peng & Fu, 2015). Furthermore, with the sharp increase in international gradates coming back to China, this "return tide" is having a great effect on the domestic employment of home graduates. This results in increasing competitive tension between international graduates and their domestically educated peers; moreover, the fierce competition damages the flow cycle of talents (Chen, 2015a).

In 2016, 508,927 master's degrees were awarded in China, an increase resulting from the expansion of the country's higher education. However, the massification of higher education has not necessarily contributed to more occupational opportunities and greater upward social mobility (Mok, 2015). Chinese university graduates have begun to doubt the role of higher education in labour market competition (Mok & Wu, 2016). In addition to the large number of home master's graduates, recent policies related to the reform of China's master's education have had an evident effect on university admissions and on the employment of master's graduates. More importantly, China's society has always had different views and discussions regarding domestic and international master's graduates, who obtain different patterns of career development and social mobility. As Chinese society cannot ignore the importance of its talents acquiring advanced higher education, there is much research discussing the differences between these

two groups of master's gradates. However, the main research focus is still on comparisons of entrepreneurship performance, international graduates' identity, and their re-integration. Also, as international master's graduates are expected to play important roles in China's development, studying these their social mobility can reflect China's social changes and new structures (Chen, 2015a). Nevertheless, there are few studies exploring and assessing the individual development of international and domestic master's graduates, especially their employment and social mobility.

Home graduates and international graduates assume that they are likely to have a stronger sense of their own place in the world and that they will enjoy greater employment prospects and mobility than undergraduates. That is also in which the largest concentration of international students is found, facilitating a balanced sample (Moskal & Schweisfurth, 2018: 97). The research subjects of this study are Chinese international graduates who have obtained master's degrees in the UK and then returned to China. In order to more accurately measure international graduates' labour market outcomes and social mobility performance and provide convincing reflections and suggestions, this thesis also studies China's domestic master's graduates without international mobility. The comparative research can be useful in assessing the differences and similarities in terms of the two groups of Chinese graduates' spatial and social mobility. To achieve the aims of the research, this study attempts to place greater attention on international graduates and their peers. This talented group acquiring abundant cultural capital is destined to contribute to China's development in every aspect; therefore, their social mobility should also be the focus of great attention in order to investigate the roles of international higher education and domestic higher education, and their impact on social justice and social problems in China today. Therefore, it is both timely and necessary to study these international graduates.

1.3 Research significance

In social practice, social mobility is clearly still a major question that we need to consider and reflect upon. The persistence of income and social status across generations largely affects the perceived equality of opportunities, and thus social mobility is a prime policy issue (Borck & Wrede, 2018: 688). The evidence

contained in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2009 report shows that the relationship between parental socio-economic background and their offspring's educational and wage outcomes is positive and significant in practically all countries (Causa & Johansson, 2009). As social mobility, with its historical and regional characteristics, is integral to the core regulation of societies, studying social mobility is key for exploring social structures and relationships. According to Sorokin, education is seen as contributing to upward mobility. As a result, obtaining higher education degrees becomes a virtually mandatory stage in the trajectories of upward mobility (Burlutskaia, 2014). However, unequal educational opportunities and intergenerational inheritance of social status have weakened the function of education in promoting social mobility in China (Yu, 2014). Social mobility and education are still two major concerns in Chinese society. Xiang and Shen (2009) link international education trends to general patterns of social transformation currently occurring in China. International education in China has emerged to play an increasingly important role in personal success.

Although social mobility is an extensive research focus, studies in the Chinese context and of international graduates are rare. A few studies have explored the topic of Chinese social mobility, but they are fairly simplistic (Li & Zhu, 2017). More importantly, China, as a developing country, has been a socialist state since 1949. Although China has experienced market reforms since 1978 and has been trying to become a market economy, it is a totally different nation from Western countries, which all share similar overall patterns of social mobility (Lipset & Zetterberg, 1965). The centrally planned socialist system of the Maoist era has been transformed into a special social order (Xu, 2000) and is still undergoing economic transformations (Chen, 2013).

More importantly, there is rich research on international students' experiences of studying abroad, but their post-study transitions are not noticed or studied (Moskal, 2019). This thesis, therefore, studies international graduates' social mobility, linking their overseas study experiences and outcomes and post-graduation transitions in China's labour market. Additionally, current social mobility research in the Chinese context focuses mainly on intergenerational mobility and factors inducing social mobility; thus, spatial mobility has rarely been

studied. As Chinese regions are economically unbalanced and opportunities are not equal across different cities (Lin et al., 2018), spatial mobility is an important topic in Chinese social mobility research. This study aims to investigate the social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates in China and makes comparisons in terms of social mobility patterns and indicators between international and Chinese master's graduates.

1.4 Research design

As an interdisciplinary research project traversing education and sociology, this study fills a gap in the knowledge and understanding of the social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates, providing comparative perspectives to investigate Chinese master's graduates' experiences and practices of social mobility. I employed a mixed-research approach, providing quantitative and qualitative analysis, to study the social and spatial mobility of master-level graduates in China. This approach offers detailed descriptions of the graduates' experiences in terms of social mobility and career outcomes, and also outlines the general trends of social mobility of the two types of graduates, thereby contributing new understandings of the social mobility of the different cohorts.

In order to answer the above five main research questions, the study employed a combination of survey and in-depth interview. The fieldwork consisted of two phases, pilot and main round. In total, 746 valid questionnaires were collected from respondents, from whom 20 graduates were invited to take part in in-depth interviews. To analyse the data, a multi-regression model, mapping analysis, and thematic analysis were employed. Drawing on a mixed-methods research approach, data collection and analysis process were guided and discussed in terms of a pragmatic paradigm.

1.5 Contributions

This thesis makes three sets of contributions:

Theoretically, I combine a series of western social mobility theories and Chinese institutions to present an adequate account of Chinese contemporary social

mobility research. China is a socialist country that has its own social stratification system, which cannot be fully explained by Marx's, Weber's and Bourdieu's social mobility theories discussed in this study. Guo (2016) noticed the important role of political power in Chinese social activities and used it to explain Chinese contemporary social stratification. By linking the social institutions of *Hukou, Bianzhi, Guanxi* produced by state power to established theories of social mobility this study extends the theoretical framework for social mobility research and renders it suitable for studying Chinese contemporary society.

Methodologically, this study promotes a mixed-method approach. The existing literature shows the strong preference of quantitative methods for social mobility research. Noticing the long-standing criticism of survey research regarding its alleged inability of modelling attitudes, identity and stories within individuals and family, I combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. By integrating quantitative (mapping analysis, regression analysis) and qualitative (thematic analysis) research analysis, this study is one of the first that offers mixed-method approach to examine social mobility in contemporary China.

Practically, this study initially investigates social mobility of international graduates in China. With a comparative lens, this thesis contributes to empirical evidence for returnees' and home graduates' social mobility. International graduates still have more opportunities of career development and upward social mobility. More importantly, the empirical results of this study show how social mobility is connected with spatial mobility. These results make an encouraging case for more extensive consideration of spatial mobility in the future social mobility research.

1.6 Structure of thesis

In total, the thesis comprises eight chapters. The next seven chapters are organised as follows. Chapter Two describes the theoretical framework of this thesis. In this section, Marxian, Weberian and Bourdieu's class theories are discussed and integrated to establish the theoretical framework for analysing the data. Chapter Three positions the thesis in terms of the relevant literature on social mobility in China, spatial mobility and social mobility of graduates, before

identifying gaps in the research. Chapter Four presents the methodology, including a discussion of the methods selected, which include survey and interview. It also addresses issues of reliability and validity and discusses data analysis methods and processes and the specific problems related to the fieldwork. Chapters Five, Six and Seven all report the findings. Chapter Five reports the results and analyses of graduates' spatial mobility through a series of maps and hotspot analyses. The patterns, drivers and results for the graduates' spatial mobility are investigated and compared. Chapter Six presents the findings on the social mobility of graduates based on data from the survey. In Chapter Seven, the participants' perceived social mobility and labour market outcomes and factors are reported and compared. Chapter Eight summarises the findings and discussions, linking the quantitative and qualitative results of social mobility research, social mobility and spatial mobility. This concluding chapter also provides insights to further our understanding of the social mobility of graduates in contemporary China by reflecting on the perceived sense of success, social position and mobility of the research participants. Chapter Eight concludes by reflecting on the research's originality and draws some implications for policy.

Chapter Two: Theoretical considerations

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses Marxian, Weberian and Bourdieusian theories and gives an overview of social class, stratification and mobility to develop a conceptual framework that situates the theory of social class and mobility in the Chinese context. I have used this framework, that integrates complementary aspects of Weber and Bourdieu's theories to understand the social dynamics and processes of mobility and inequality. Both theories have some complementary features with Marxist theory, although I have primarily utilised Marxist theory to help explain aspects of Chinese Nationalist ideology that underpins the rationale for some specific Chinese institutions.

Acknowledging that a large number of differences among the three sociologists' theories exist, I argue here that they can be used and integrated in such a framework, to decipher social stratification, class and mobility – particularly in China - from different perspectives. Marx and Weber are two key founders of the social mobility research field (Waters, 1994). All of the subsequent theories are affected by or developed in relation to Marxian and Weberian theories. For example, Weininger (2005) discusses how Weber's notions such as 'class' and 'status' are very influential to Bourdieu. Bourdieu's *Distinction* takes as its object the relation between social classes and status groups with the latter understood, following Weber, in the sense of collectivities defined by a uniformity of lifestyle. It is in this proposition that the full significance of Bourdieu's attempt to yoke together "class" and "status" becomes apparent (Weininger, 2005:84). In my thesis, I have focused on a number of key relevant concepts linked to these theories to explain my data (see Table 2-1). For example, a Chinese institution of *Danwei* can hardly be explained by a single western social theory. I connect Weber's bureaucracy and Bourdieu's social capital concepts together to explain interview participants' points about how China's *Danwei* and *Tizhi* impact on their career trajectories.

Besides, Marx's focus on economic determination, Weber's individual lens and market, Bourdieu's cultural capital and notions of field and habitus can arguably be utilised in combination to explain data of spatial mobility of international and

home graduates (see Table 2-1). In this study, self-funded overseas study and post-study spatial mobility are closely linked to Marx's notion of economic determination (albeit also acknowledging the influence of superstructural dynamics such as social and cultural factors that is a key contribution of Bourdieu). The economic development and urbanisation and the emergence of middle class plays a key role in driving the increase in studying abroad and social mobility. Marx's dynamic perspective explains China's changing social stratification. The Chinese national ideology (Marx's theory) produces state power, which has a key effect on Chinese contemporary social mobility (Guo, 2016). Different from Marx, Weber focuses on the power of middle class and provides a lens on the individual level for social stratification studies. Weber puts emphasis on the role of education and the notion of market. Influenced by Marxist theory, yet placing a key emphasis on cultural rather than solely economic dynamics as a driving force for change, Bourdieu's innovative cultural capital theory provides a further analytical perspective in studying social mobility (Bourdieu & Randal, 1993), with a focus on international and home graduates' lifestyles, spatial mobility clusters, education, and his concept of the social reproduction mechanism. It should be noted that these classical social class theories are widely contested in China (Yu & Bu, 2017); nevertheless, they could be still considered useful for explaining dynamically changing social realities and practices in China.

Based on the integration of aspects of Weber's and Bourdieu's theory, along with insights from Marx, I developed the five research questions (in Chapter one). Specifically, research question three and five reflect the individual lens promoted by Weber. Research question five reflects Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, focusing on the role of culture in social stratification and mobility and social reproduction mechanism. Connecting economic and cultural factors, individual (Weber's lens) and collective (Marx's lens) perspectives, I proposed the first to third research questions. In this thesis, I also argue that these social class theories are relevant to examine international graduates' social mobility in contemporary China.

In order to clearly present the theories used and links to my research data and findings, Table 2-1 was produced as follows:

Table 2-1 Three theoretical perspectives used, their main themes and their relation to my research questions

Theoretical perspective	Main themes	Theoretical relevance	Research Question
The Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective	'Economic determination' 'Capital' 'Middle class'	The Marxist perspective draws attention to the problem of the manufacture of consent in the creation of false consciousness and provides radical solutions. With its unique rhetorical power, it contributes to the conceptualisation of some important aspects (e.g. economic determination, agency, class conflicts) in the thesis. Economic determination is linked to spatial mobility as well regarding the costs of mobility.	RQ1 What are the labour market outcomes of Chinese students obtaining master's degrees abroad compared with those of non-mobile Chinese graduates? RQ2 What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China?
Weber's perspective	'Market' 'Social status' 'Individual level' 'Education's role' 'Middle class' 'Bureaucracy'	Weber's perspective focuses on social stratification at individual level, which provides a conceptual lens to help us understand how individual young subjects being formed in the context of neoliberal economic reform and how they conforming to the 'disciplinary power'. His notions of 'market' conforms to China's market reform and suits well with Chinese contemporary reality. More importantly, Weber's notion of bureaucracy' can explain well China's social connections in state companies and government. Unlike Marx, Weber sees the important role of education and consents its key role in social stratification.	RQ1 What are the labour market outcomes of Chinese students obtaining master's degrees abroad compared with those of non-mobile Chinese graduates? RQ2 What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China? RQ3 What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with that of home graduates in China? RQ4 What is the relationship between social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates in China? RQ5 What roles do international graduates play in social class formation and culture and lifestyle change in China?
Bourdieu's perspective	'Capital theory' 'The important role of cultural capital' 'Class reproduction mechanism' field	Bourdieu's theory provides strong support for the study of capital accumulation and conversion in China's dramatic stratification. Spatial mobility is then closely connected to social mobility through capital conversion in spatial scale. More importantly, Bourdieu can explain China's middle class's motivations and returns of studying abroad through capital theory (i.e. lifestyle, education and notion of field) and the social class reproduction mechanism.	RQ3 What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with that of home graduates in China? RQ4 What is the relationship between social and spatial mobility of international and home graduates in China? RQ5 What roles do international graduates play in social class formation and culture and lifestyle change in China?

Humans, as social animals, desire to form meaningful connections with other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which provides humans with mental and practical support. This support can contribute to an individual's career development (Granovetter, 1973) and well-being (Yamaguchi, 2013). On the basis of their career development and well-being, people acquire different social resources. According to Marx's social class theory, the means of production determines social stratification, so social resources determine the social class one enters. However, based on Weberian and Bourdieusian class theories, at any time, the possibilities of entering a given group are limited and shaped by economic or cultural resources, group prejudice and privilege, and the opportunities provided by the local and national economy, as well as educational opportunities and means of transportation. Most people circulate within a given structure, but minorities change by either creating new spaces within old structures or by moving. The worldwide migration currents reveal the human drive towards obtaining better lives. In the social competition to achieve a better life, social mobility is introduced into sociology to study individuals' changes in social class. In the mechanism of social mobility, social changes and inequality are the main subjects of concern. From the sociological perspective, social mobility is the best mechanism to show the structure of social opportunity and paths and patterns of success.

Traditional theories of social class and mobility, including Marxian and Weberian theories, are invariably derived from the proposition of economy. They view social class and mobility as economic phenomena conceived from perspectives of property ownership, market or economic capitals (Pakulski & Waters, 1996). The economic mechanism also then determines individual class positions and life chances. Social stratification and mobility take place that can be observed within the economic field (Goodman, 2014). In the last three decades, however, culturalist approaches have denied the analytical model in which economic "base" determines the nature of the "superstructure"—aspects of social culture and organisation. By contrast, culturalist theories posit that culture, lifestyle and taste actively contribute to, and help shape, the social stratification and mobility and the reproduction of social hierarchy and inequality. More importantly, these theories argue that culture is not simply an effect of social class formation, but the cause of social class formation and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1987). Therefore,

social stratification and mobility can be linked to both economy and culture. I have decided to follow this perspective by basing my theoretical approach on "cultural" theorists, such as Weber and Bourdieu, to expound the role of higher education in social mobility in China (Tsang, 2013).

2.2 Marxian theory and its applicability to the Chinese context

Marxian and Weberian concepts of social class and mobility always prioritise the economy. When researchers study Chinese society, they refer to Marxian theories such as national ideology (Xie, 2005). Marx developed his theory using class as a theoretical concept determined by the ownership of production. The means of production relates to material conditions and can therefore determine individual places in the production relationship (Marx, 1971). Thus, there is a resulting class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The core concepts of Marxian theories mainly focus on class consciousness and class conflict, while neo-Marxist class theorists concentrate on improving Marxian theories in order to further explain empirical realities diverging from Marx's account (Neilson, 2018).

Criticism runs through Marxian theory (Callinicos, 1996), as is evidenced in the references to class conflicts and constant revolutions. According to Marx, criticism is dynamic for social progress. More specifically, Marx adopted 'objective' attitudes to know nature while employing 'subjective' attitudes to criticise and change nature. The former attitude is adopted under materialism and the latter is intertwined with history and development (McBride, 1977). Based on the single division standard, Marx saw social stratification as a dynamic process driven by changes in the ownership or control of the means of production. In addition, Marx made predictions regarding future developments.

Although Marxian social class theory is a classic, and perhaps out-dated, one that might seem irrelevant to China's current social mobility research, I still discuss it and employ it to explain findings and discussions for two reasons. Firstly, Marxian concepts of social class can be seen as a starting point for analysing class formation and providing a basic framework to discuss social class, stratification and mobility, and which influenced subsequent thinking about social class and stratification. Some key concepts in Marxian theory such as class and capital are

also discussed in later social class theories and provide a basic paradigm for other theories (Li, 2016).

Secondly, Marxist ideas are ideologically important in the development of China. China is a socialist country in which Marxism is seen as national ideology. Marxian theory stems from historical materialism, concentrating on class, class consciousness, class relations, class struggle and class development. According to Marx, class conflict, revolution and social changes result from differences in the means of production (Avineri, 1968). Thus, the means of production, which can be regarded as all kinds of capitals, becomes the single standard for dividing social class, as Marx believed the means of production gives rise to other capitals. Facing the irreconcilable conflicts, the intermediate class will diminish and will be divided into bourgeoisie or proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1888). Based on the development of production, the wealth gap will become larger, so when economic crises take place, the proletariat will attract and include more people (Marx & Engels, 1888). In other words, as the proletariat become poorer and poorer, they will become an increasingly larger group and then overthrow the bourgeoisie. Thus, we can find that the Marxian polarised class divisions do not take the middle class into consideration. Marxian theory was applied to Chinese society after 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established (Li, 2016). Chinese society, led by the PRC, is dominated by the working class, and this class identity was particularly important from 1949 to 1978 because it could determine individual life chances and those of one's offspring. Class conflict and struggle were the main focus of that era (Goodman, 2014). During that period, many institutions that are unique to Chinese society were produced, including "*Danwei*", *"Hukou", "Bianzhi", and "Tizhi*. Through these institutions, the state power acted as a determinant of individual life chances (Guo, 2016). China's class structure has changed dramatically since the post-1978 market reforms, and new classes have emerged.

After the 1970s, neo-Marxist innovations were required given the realities that diverged from orthodox Marxian theories (Neilson, 2018). The new generation of Marxist theorists sought to explain the "middle class", as they were referred to by Wright, as challenging the two-class concept. Neo-Marxist class theories put extensive focus on the differences between occupation and class. These theories

follow Marxist principles in locating jobs in class schemes but adding new ideas to differentiate between class and occupation. More importantly, neo-Marxism is the continuing product of Marx's intellectual project, for it can explain contemporary capitalism (Neilson, 2018). Marx's methodology, conceptual framework, and historical analysis are still valuable tools for critiquing contemporary capitalism, and, more importantly, they are self-critical (Lebowitz, 2003). The neo-Marxist theories provide a better means for reflecting on Chinese society, especially for studying the Chinese middle class. The up-to-date Marxian theories can be applied to analyse Chinese contemporary classes and their internal institutional factors.

There is plenty of relevant research applying these neo-Marxist theories. For example, using Marxian theory, Mao (1925) analyses China's social class during China's time of revolution, during which China's social classes underwent change and all power was united under a socialist system. In Mao's (1925) article, he notes the existence of a middle class in China and unites power. Unlike Marx, Mao puts forward the idea that the proletariat can unite with the middle class. Over recent decades, Marxian theories have been widely applied and developed in China (Cai, 2010). Li (2016) reviews Marx's social class theory and its contemporary value in China, focusing on capital and labour relations. The means of production can still be a suitable standard in terms of class classification (Li, 2016).

2.3 Max Weber's social stratification theory

My analysis is also based on Weber's theory which gives importance to the notions of social status and market. Marx concentrates on the fundamental role of economy, as it is on economy that he believes the cultural and political aspects are based. According to Weber, social class and status are determined separately. Moreover, the concept of market in Weber's theory can explain China's contemporary social and spatial mobility. Weber was innovative in also focusing on individual agency at the "micro" level and how this connects with wider "structural" influences in society, laying the foundations for Bourdieu's theory. As this study also considers the importance of individual agency at the "micro" level, the interview method is employed to analyse individual agency in social mobility. With reference to a large-scale survey, this study connects it to a wider social structural influence and then provides results and discussion for the Chinese

context.

Social class is determined by wealth and property and takes place within economic order. Status is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of ‘prestige and honour’ (Weber, 2010: 148). Social status is related to an individual’s lifestyle, education, training and socialisation, as well as his or her inherited or occupational prestige (Tsang, 2013). Status can be seen through the closure that exists between different classes, which safeguards social stability. “Party” is about power determining social redistribution and law-making. Party actions are oriented towards attaining social “power”, which means that they are directed towards influencing communal action, regardless of its content. In principle, parties can exist as a sociable “club” as well as in a “state” (Weber, 2010: 148). Besides, the trinity standard (social class, social status and party) works in the notion of market, and conflicts in market do not take place within classes, but in the concept of group. So, the Weber’s market-related forms of struggle for class and status advantage are the determinant factors in social stratification, rather than the economic determination in Marxism. More importantly, Weber’s notion of bureaucracy explains China’s current social connections (Guanxi) well. "Patrimonial bureaucracy" is a mixed or in-between state of irrational and rational types of domination, since it contains elements of both patrimonialism and bureaucracy (Lai, 2015), which causes China’s social connections and social structure.

Unlike Marx, although Weber observes social inequity, he does not put effort into finding the root cause or even eradicating it. In addition, Weber sees social stratification as a steady state. In contrast with the Marxian view that social class is constantly developing, Weberian theories do not concentrate on the development of class. Instead, Weber only provides a division method, resulting from Weber’s value neutrality. With respect to the role of education, Weber sees it as the basic element of class formation and a key factor in upward social mobility because it indicates membership of a specific social class that controls access to highly paid jobs.

Weber provides a complete analytical framework for understanding social class, stratification and mobility at the microcosmic level as well as a trinity

stratification standard. However, Weberian theory is not perfect. In Weberian theory, every single class is independent, which means comparisons between different classes are hardly made. The microcosmic perspective of Weberian theory also does not allow the viewing of social mobility as a whole (Xie, 2005). Although Weberian theory is not perfect, it is widely used in social stratification and mobility research. Weberian and neo-Weberian approaches are more relevant to the study of a new Chinese middle class after the 1978 reforms (Tsang, 2013). As China has become a market socialist system since the 1990s, the Weberian notions of *party* and *market* have come to be used to understand China's transitional issues (Yu & Bu, 2017). As for the Weberian notion of *Status*, class distinctions are related to status distinctions in a variety of ways. Unlike Marxism, property is not necessarily recognised as a qualification of status, although it does come to be so in the long term. And the distinction between social classes can only be observed in the market (Weber, 1946). Since 1978, China has transformed from a planned market economy to a market economy. In contemporary Chinese society, social class distinctions can also be observed in market activities, whereby opportunities of capital conversion and exchange are produced (Liu, 1993).

Cai (2010) applies Weberian theory to China's current social mobility context and finds Weberian notions of education, lifestyle and taste become significant distinctions in determining China's contemporary social stratification. Zhao (2013) further argues that the Weberian concepts of social class and status are determined by economic and cultural factors. Economic differences affect individual opportunities for higher education, resulting from the uneven access to different levels of education resources, study time, and environment. Cultural determinants mainly indicate the intergenerational education transmissions. Parental education level has significant correlations with their offspring's education attainment. Therefore, social stratification can be seen as a reproduction mechanism (Zhao, 2013). In summary, Weberian theory, including concepts of market, middle class, education and taste, to some extent, helps to examine China's emerging middle class and the role of education.

2.4 Bourdieu's capital theory

Bourdieu's work combines rigorous empirical analysis with a theoretical

framework (Bourdieu & Randal, 1993). His ideas are based on a subjectivist view of social reality (Neilson, 2018: 279). Bourdieu believes that objectivity is relatively indeterminate, and in the reality of the social world, there are no clear-cut boundaries, no absolute breaks (Bourdieu, 1987: 13), which offers a significant insight into how the subject constructs the object. Based on these philosophical considerations, Bourdieu (1989) provided a new conceptual framework for class analysis, transforming Weberian individual social stratification by occupation into a series of forms of capital (Neilson, 2018). Capitals (economic/cultural /social/symbolic) held by individuals are applied as grouping criteria to classify social class on an empty abstract multidimensional canvas defined by Bourdieu as a "social space". More importantly, as the capital concepts are unconnected with capitalism, capitalism is not part of the analysis in Bourdieu's class theory.

Bourdieu provided an analytical model to reintroduce the notion of the agent based on the concept of habitus. Bourdieu grounds the agent's actions in objective social activities, without falling into the mechanistic determinism of Marxism analysis.

Bourdieu (1984) focuses on culture in his class analysis to offer a new way of discussing social status. The notions of capital in Bourdieu's theory consist of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Cultural capital is a mechanism for the transmission of social status and can be transformed into social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is defined as a form of knowledge, an internalised code or a cognitive acquisition which makes social agents have empathy for, appreciation of or competence in expounding cultural relations and cultural artefacts (Bourdieu, 1984). Classes can be distinguished from one another by their different educational levels, family inheritances, and internally coherent sets of tastes (Bourdieu, 1989). Consequently, Bourdieu provides detailed explanations of cultural capital and capital transformation, thereby offering a different way to discuss social status. Although culture itself does not contribute to social stratification, tastes and cultural consumption are predisposed to meet the functions of a certain class; thus, they trigger a process of social reproduction.

In addition, it is more difficult to obtain cultural capital than other kinds of

capitals. Cultural consumption patterns and cultural resources are regarded as the standards for dividing social classes. Cultural capital can be disassembled into three forms: incorporated, objective and institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1977). Incorporated cultural capital is made up of dispositions, a set of meanings and modes of thinking, individual intellectual skills for learning other advanced skills, directly associated with time, effort and parental nurture. Objective form means artefacts such as books or paintings, while institutionalised form is represented by educational qualifications or credentials. One of Bourdieu's central concerns is the role of culture in the reproduction of social structures. More specifically, Bourdieu uses culture to view modern society and figure out the relationships between cultural reproduction and social reproduction. A dominant economic class will be able to capture superior cultural capital through education, which is a means of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu's notion of *Habitus* suggests that individuals with similar culture can easily become a stable group. The *Habitus* consists of a set of dispositions resulting from a long process of inculcation, like a second sense. *Habitus* explains the similarities that exist among individuals from the same social class. In addition, agents need a place in which to conduct their social activities. In order to explain this place, without falling into the determinism of objectivist analysis, Bourdieu provides another notion called *Field*. This place must be governed by a set of objective social relations. According to Bourdieu's analytical model, any social formation is structured by a serious of hierarchically organised fields with its own laws of functioning and with its relations to other fields. If one wants to enter a field, the person must possess the *habitus* predisposing one to enter this *Field*. This person is required to possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, skill or talent to be accepted as a member in this *Field* (Bourdieu & Randal, 1993). In line with the notion of *Field*, it can be seen that people with a similar background will gather together. The notions of *Habitus* and *Field* expound the social stratification from the perspective of capitals, which also deals well with subjectivity and objectivity at the same time.

Bourdieu's conceptual considerations, including incorporated and institutionalised cultural capital and notions of *Habitus, Field and Habitus,* have wide applicability to studies of social class and mobility. In China, numerous researchers have

conducted extensive studies into Bourdieu's theory and applied it to China's context. Donald and Zheng (2010) explore the relationship between taste, choice and social stratification in contemporary China based on Bourdieu's theory, presenting the pivotal role of cultural capital in China's social stratification. The 1978 reform policies invited a system of authoritarian capitalism, thereby fostering a network of social values (Donald & Zheng, 2010: 1). The opportunities for individual success arise from cultural capital (local networks), social origin, sufficient funds for education, and urban upgrading. Similarly, in Wang's (2016) studies of the logical and practical significance in China of Bourdieu's theory of cultural stratification, he finds that Bourdieu's cultural capital theory can explain China's social stratification, indicating that cultural distinctions can constitute China's social classes. Local networks and cultural consumption preferences can be regarded as important distinctions between individuals of different social status. Economic differences are hardly measured in social mobility research, because everyone tends to show their positive situation to others (Wang, 2016). Cultural consumption can be a euphemistic and efficient way of measuring social mobility (Wang, 2016).

Scherger and Savage (2010), in their study of cultural transmission, educational attainment and social mobility, found cultural capital to be a fundamental factor influencing educational attainment in the process of cultural transmission. Parental class influences individual educational attainments through the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital. Those who experience a higher intensity of cultural socialisation are more likely to achieve upward social mobility (Scherger & Savage, 2010). Interestingly, Xiang and Shen (2009) note the impacts of international student migration from China on the wealth-creation process. By linking international education to China's contemporary social transformation, Xiang and Shen (2009) investigate how different kinds of capitals, including human, social, political and cultural (international degrees), are converted and make a difference within the top stratum of Chinese society. In the new era, high-valued cultural capital (international degrees) cannot be purchased directly with money. Without accumulated genuine human and cultural capital, it is hard to achieve high-valued international degrees. However, once attained, individuals can gain other kinds of capitals and access to the top stratum of society relatively easily. These applications of Bourdieu's class theory to practical research show that it can

provide strong and supportive explanations of China's social class, stratification and mobility.

2.5 Summary

The above theories are rooted in different epistemologies and therefore explain social class, stratification and mobility from different division perspectives. This underlines the importance of integrating the three theories for the data analysis in this study. The theoretical framework within which this study is based consists of applying Marxian, Weberian and Bourdieu's theories to explain China's social mobility. Marxian stratification theory is full of the conflicts and struggle that correspond to the proletariat's radical struggle at the time of the theory's emergence. Weber focuses on individual social activities, realising both subjectivity and objectivity. Bourdieu's theory is based on Marxian and Weberian theories and innovatively sees social class from the perspective of cultural capital, thus transcending the traditional dichotomies. However, although the three theories have their applicability to different research areas in the Chinese context, they are all subjected to criticism from sociologists. Marxian radical theory cannot help society to develop stable improvement and neglects the impacts of the middle class (Xie, 2005). Weber prefers peaceful repairs and changes in society to minimise social destruction. However, Weber pursues value neutrality and does not provide predictions or suggestions for future development. In contrast with Marx and Weber, Bourdieu, as a sociologist in the modern era, sees society from the perspective of cultural capital. He redefines social activities through his innovative notions: *Habitus* and *Field*, with a focus on cultural capitals. The integrations of the three theories can provide different insights for social mobility research in this study.

My thesis explores social mobility and international graduates in China. China has been a socialist country since 1949, and Marxism has played a leading role in China's ideology, economy, politics (Chan & Hui, 2017). Chan and Hui (2017) argue that the Chinese state is socially embedded, and in the *Field*, inter-class struggles take place, which can be noticed from the wage standards, pensions and the intensified competition among Chinese workers. Therefore, Marxian theory is still helpful to examine the Chinese state, and Marx's macro-level analysis still

provides implications for China's national ideology. As for Weberian theory, with the research focus on the individual level, the *Market* is an important notion as social stratification takes place within the *Market* field. China is now entering a post-reform era (Bian, 2002), having transformed into a socialist market economy, which is a brand-new social system. Thus, Weber's notion of *Market* can be applied to social mobility studies in the Chinese context. In terms of education, international education and social and spatial mobility, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory provides comprehensive conceptualised explanations. Bourdieu sees class culture as a weapon in status competition. His focus on social class appeals to Marxists (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Differences in education and related cultural factors determine individual status. In short, although the three theories are not developed in a Chinese context, part of the key concepts can be applied in research on China's social mobility.

While Marx, Weber and Bourdieu offer an analytical and theoretical perspective to study Chinese social class and mobility, these theories are based on socioeconomic perspectives, emphasising the importance of education, credentials, and inherited socioeconomic status (Tsang, 2013). However, the Chinese case of social class and mobility study cannot fully follow above line of reasoning. With the end of the Maoist era and since the 1978 economic reform, social institutions such as *"Danwei"*, *"Hukou"* and *"Guanxi"* continue to affect individual life chances, success and social mobility (Li & Zhao, 2017) (see Chapter Three). The social stratification and mobility of the post-Maoist era are more political-ideological than sociological (Tsang, 2013). However, no "political turn" has been the subject of class analysis or theory, though the vital roles of political practices in China are particularly noteworthy. Consequently, Chinese social stratification and mobility cannot be fully understood without considering state power as a critical factor of inequality, because it is a major principle in the mapping of social stratification and class (Guo, 2016).

Chapter Three: Research context—social mobility, spatial mobility and Chinese graduates

3.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the existing literature related to social mobility in China, the social mobility of Chinese graduates, and the spatial mobility of Chinese graduates. Through the literature review, this chapter provides a comprehensive picture of the current social mobility of international and home graduates, and then identifies research gaps.

3.2 Social mobility in contemporary China

In this section, the relevant literature studying China's social mobility after 1978 is reviewed, as it was after the 1978 reforms that substantial changes occurred in social structures and class stratification. Before 1978, China experienced various and complicated social modes, including feudal autocracy, semi-colonial society, and socialist society (Guo, 2003). The People's Republic China (PRC) was established in 1949 as a socialist country. Reforms and opening policies launched in 1978 have brought significant changes to China over the last 40 years. The major areas have been in economic reform, starting from China's rural areas, it has resulted in a changes to the economic system, and has led to industrial and institutional restructuring, rising unemployment, a dramatic increase in urban poverty, spatial and residential re-organisation, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor (Wang, 2004). A series of reforms and resulting social problems have produced many social changes, in terms of the roles that social stratification and mobility play in Chinese social life.

3.2.1 General analysis

Several studies have analysed China's social changes and provided maps of social mobility. Bian (2002) provides a detailed framework by reviewing post-1980 research on class stratification, socioeconomic inequalities, and social mobility in China. Through the 1978 reform and opening policies, China has transformed from a planned economy to a market economy. Between 1949 and 1978, China was a

planned economy, in which occupation boundaries were solid; thus, the society did not experience social mobility, and state power was a determinant of life chances. Before 1978, jobless people in a work-unit were excluded by the social mobility mechanism. People with stable jobs in a work-unit could achieve upward social mobility within the work-units. The rigid social class system in the pre-reform era hierarchy led to little social interclass mobility (Bian, 2002). However, after the 1978 market reform, the rise of the labour market eroded these institutional divisions, and previous social class boundaries were also broken (Bian, 2002). All of these institutional changes contributed to China's rapid and frequent social mobility. Bian (2002) also discusses the issues related to China's contemporary social mobility, including housing and consumption, gender inequality, inequality between urban and rural areas, and social networks (*Gaunxi*). In addition to Bian's work, there is an extensive body of empirical research exploring China's contemporary social mobility.

Li (2005) notes that the structure of the Chinese society is an inverted "T", consisting of a massive low-income population and a tiny minority possessing a disproportionately large amount of wealth. Wu and Perloff (2004) also find that all forms of resources are increasingly concentrated in the hands of an emerging elite group. Chen (2013) uses the 2005 and 2006 data from the China General Social Survey (CGSS) to investigate China's contemporary intergenerational mobility and finds that the total social mobility in China arises from the changing structural context, but that social fluidity is largely stable over time. Despite the rising trend of total upward mobility, Chen (2013) suggests that during the reform era, China has not become a more open society. The current rising trend of upward social mobility mainly results from the structural changes, and there is no evidence showing China has evident social fluidity. The internal causes of total mobility are ascribed as being the combined effects of state interventions and economic restructuring in different stages. In conclusion, there is no significant change in the endogenous pattern of social mobility in China (Chen, 2013).

Similarly, Li and Zhu (2017), also using data from the CGSS, analyse social mobility in China over the past 60 years. They find that absolute social mobility has largely increased. With the transformation of the socioeconomic system, the mechanism of social exclusion changed from systemic exclusion to market exclusion, which

can positively promote the degree of social openness. The exclusion change determines a change in social mobility mode. However, in China, intergenerational inheritance among the privileged strata has gradually declined, and cross-class cyclical mobility has become more difficult. As the dominant class is accustomed to achieving class reproduction through the market exclusion mechanism, China may still experience class solidification (Li & Zhu, 2017). A great deal of existing research comes to the similar conclusion that China is not a very open society due to the low social fluidity and many difficulties and barriers to upward social mobility.

In addition to the general analysis of social mobility in contemporary China, there is emerging research investigating social mobility from specific perspectives based on the two main analytical rationales: economic and technological rationale, and socio-political rationale (Li & Zhu, 2017).

3.2.2 Economic and technological analysis

The economic and technological perspective, also known as the modernisation rationale, views the changes made by the process of modernisation to economic and occupational structures as the driver of a great increase in social mobility, greater equality, and a more open society (Blau & Duncan, 1967: 207-234). The early founders of social mobility research confirmed the dominant roles of industrialisation in the great increase in the social mobility rate (Fox & Miller, 1966). Similarly, China's changed class structure in the post-1978 reform era has contributed to a mixed market-socialist economy and a new pattern of social stratification (Bian, Breiger, Davis & Galaskiewicz, 2005), and the combination of industrialisation and political institutions simultaneously impacts social mobility.

More importantly, urbanisation, an indispensable part of industrialisation, is a structural driving force in China, contributing to improving social mobility and the reorganisation of social classes (Bian, 2002). Many scholars have found that China's rapid urbanisation is positively related to the expansion of the middle class (Chen & Qin, 2014). Chen and Qin (2014), in their analysis of China's current urban economy, argue that rapid urbanisation is generating agglomeration economies and improving social mobility. Specifically, enterprises have tended to

agglomerate in one region, and the agglomeration effects create numerous new opportunities for people in lower social classes.

In contrast with Chen and Qin's findings, Golley and Kong (2013) argue that uneven urbanisation also accompanies the great inequality in intergenerational transmission of education between urban and rural areas. Compared with in China's urban areas, social mobility in rural regions is much lower. The great persistence of intergenerational transmission of education in urban areas combined with social mobility, upward or downward, in rural areas is likely to aggravate China's rural-urban disparity (Golley & Kong, 2013). The rapid urbanisation increases the developmental gaps between urban and rural areas, and the urban migration accompanies development and life chances of individual rural resident in cities (Wu & Zheng, 2018). Yi (2008) explores the social mobility of ethnic minorities in China from a cultural perspective. The economic development of ethnic enclaves in China is not as good as it is in other regions. Consequently, although state education is widely implemented across China, the economic inequality results in educational inequality and cultural exclusion in social mobility.

3.2.3 Socio-political analysis

There is a larger body of research investigating Chinese social mobility from the socio-political perspective. The literature extensively focuses on the links between social mobility and political roles and institutions, gender and education.

Without recognising state power as a critical determinant, social mobility in the post-Maoist era cannot be fully understood (Guo, 2018). China's institutional changes after the post-1978 economic reforms (Bian, Breiger, Davis & Galaskiewicz, 2005) and state power (Bian, Shu & Logan, 2001; Guo, 2016) are determinants of life chances, though empirical research on China's post-Mao social mobility tends to stand against the proposition of economy. The class structure changed dramatically after the 1978 reforms carried out by the Chinese Government. The market-oriented economic reforms created a mixed market-socialist economy, establishing a new way and bringing great changes in the post-Maoist institutional bases. A cadre-dominated social hierarchy was replaced by multiple dynamics of

class differentiation (Bian, Breiger, Davis & Galaskiewicz, 2005).

As the most evident and important part of state power, institutional power and social mobility have been widely linked and investigated. State power is accessible to individuals, but it is mainly differentiated in *Hukou* and working system (*Tizhi*) (Guo, 2003). *Hukou* status determines the spatial mobility (rural-urban migration) and wellbeing of individuals (Xiang, 2015). According to the National Statistics Report 2018, on average, the per capita income of urban residents is 2.8 times higher than that of their rural counterparts. Guo (2018) reports that only a small number of rural residents can obtain urban *Hukou* and join other classes. In rural areas, most residents inherit their peasant occupation from their parents. Although there is a great number of rural migrants working in urban cities, they cannot obtain urban *Hukou* or take advantage of social benefits like the urban indigenous.

Integrating three national surveys (Life History and Social Change 1996, CGSS 2005/2006/2008/2010/2011/2012/2013, China Labour-force Dynamics Survey 2014), Li and Zhao's (2017) studies of social mobility in China highlight that *Hukou* is a disadvantageous factor for rural residents, especially for ethnic minority men, who have poorer socio-economic and cultural sources. Their research is based on a series of large-scale surveys, enhancing the sample representative, but the data is chronologically continuous and not up to date. The new changes have taken place in China. Nevertheless, their findings are important in understanding the effects of Chinese institutions on social mobility. The *Hukou* institution is related to inequality in social mobility opportunities. Given the greater career and success opportunities provided by cities, China has experienced massive rural-urban migration; but the *Hukou* conversion is difficult and rare (Wu & Treiman, 2004; Zhang & Treiman, 2013). Interestingly, Zhang and Treiman (2013) find that *Hukou* converters with urban childhoods are more likely to study in universities, while converters with rural childhoods are happier than their urban peers. The *Hukou* conversion has links to the future success of the converters. Also focusing on *Hukou* conversion, Wu and Zheng (2018) investigate socioeconomic inequality in urban labour markets. The possibility of obtaining urban *Hukou* is positively associated with earnings; moreover, the urban *Hukou* pays off for converters who have better educations and decent jobs in the state sector.

Similar to *Hukou*, *Tizhi* is a mechanism that divides the Chinese economy into public and marketised sectors, shaping employees' economic rewards in urban China. The *Tizhi* and work units (*Danwei*) affect social stratification (Wu, 2013). In China, *Danwei* literally refers to a work "unit". However, in practice, the concept was expanded in the socio-political context of pre-1978 urban China (Sevigny et al., 2009). Once they joined a *Danwei*, individuals would have little to do with other forms of governmental or social life, because the *Danwei* determined income security, housing, health care, education, social and political control (Lu, 1989; Li & Atteslander, 1995; Chen, 1996). Wu (2013), drawing on data from the CGSS 2005, finds that the boundaries still exist between the state sector and enterprises. The differences between the working of the two systems are evident in terms of their relative income levels and fringe benefits. Working in a *Danwei* or *Tizhi* means higher income and more fringe benefits. Working in a state sector (or *Danwei* or *Tizhi)* shapes and structures inequality and classes in China (Guo, 2018), and the boundaries have significant impacts on China's social stratification (Wu, 2013). From the perspective of capital convertibility, the Chinese state not only initiated international educational migration, but also facilitates the convertibility of different forms of capital (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The state still serves as a major producer of symbolic capital. By focusing on particular discourses of human capital, meritocracy, and global competition, the Chinese state confers political value on holders of international degrees and assists and guides them to "cash in" their human capital for Chinese development. This process reinforces its legitimacy in the context of global competition (Xiang & Shen, 2009).

Regarding gender issues in China, all of the relevant literature comes to the common conclusion that social mobility mechanisms tend to disadvantage women in relation to men (Pimentel, 2006; Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013; He & Zhou, 2018). Wang, Ding, Song and Huang (2006) find that female employees in the labour market face certain disadvantages in terms of social mobility compared with their male peers. It is not only the social mechanisms that hold females back but also cultural expectations. Women are arguably more likely to hold themselves back and are more likely to be held back by others. Chinese women are less likely to be considered by employers for promotions because of the perceived extra burden. In traditional Chinese culture, for many Chinese women, family issues take priority over their careers, thus widening the gender gap in social mobility. Focusing on the

expansion of higher education, Yeung (2012) finds the gender gap in attending higher education is disappearing; but there is an advantage to females studying shorter programmes than at academic universities. For females, age is an important factor in determining individual success, occupation, and social stratification. Chen (2014), studying the inequality of income and social mobility between female and male clerks, finds that females are in a disadvantaged position in terms of intergenerational occupation mobility and generational occupation mobility. Even when women have higher academic achievements than males, they still earn less money than men. Concentrating on occupational attainments, He (2017) examine gender disparities in occupations and reveal that, despite the pervasive impacts of gender norms, females still face obstacles when working in male-dominated occupations. The structures in China is still controlled by men, and women have fewer opportunities for upward social mobility in male-dominated occupations. Additionally, the persistence of traditional attitudes to gender increases the likelihood of females working as office workers.

Some feminist scholars extend Bourdieu's notion of capital to gender and looked at embodied cultural capital (Reay 1997; 2004; Skeggs 2004). For Bourdieu, capital is a resource that defines how opportunities are enabled or constrained for individuals in a given field (McAdam et al., 2019:463). Bourdieu's (1986) argues that embodied cultural capital takes the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body possessed through, for example, processes of self-improvement or socialisation, to assert that gendered dispositions may also act as capital (McAdam et al., 2019). More importantly, gender capital is available both to men and women (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013). For men, they can utilise to maintain their advantage with the help of gender capital. However, motivated by the notion of gender capital, Ross-Smith and Huppatz (2010) analyse gender capital which is wielded in women's management field. They report that women might use gender as a resource or form of capital in establishing and maintaining their managerial careers (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010:549). That concept can explain why and how a generation of women have sustained careers in senior management under the context in which men are dominant in current labour market.

According to Blau (1977), education has become an important tool for promoting social mobility. There is rich research focusing on the relationship between social

mobility and education. Indeed, education equality, higher education attainments and individual success have become important research topics in China (Wu, 2011; Li, 2011; Tang, 2016; Liu, 2016b). Education is interlinked with social stratification not only because education is a means of accumulating various types of capital, but also because it promotes individuals to a higher level of capital conversion (Xiang & Shen, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that the market reforms taking place after 1978 have increased social mobility and that individual achievement is the basic determining factor for China's contemporary social stratification and mobility (Fang & Feng, 2005). Moreover, education is the most important factor in promoting social mobility in China and the best and most efficient measurement to evaluate individual achievements (Fang & Feng, 2005). Drawing on mixed-methods research that included a large-scale survey and in-depth interview, Fang and Feng (2005) found there is a new mechanism rooted in the current social mobility system, and that this mechanism has influenced individual ways of obtaining education, thus enhancing the importance of family background in education attainments and social mobility. However, Fang and Feng do not give evidence or explanations of their sample representativeness. The validity and reliability issues are not considered in their study. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods is not noticed. Despite providing a large-scale study empirical evidence, Fang and Feng's research raises several questions including mixture of data collection, analysis and assessment. Dong, Wang and Chen (2009) explore the effects of education selection on social mobility and the interactive relationships between social mobility and educational selection in China. Their research results show that social mobility and educational selection are increasingly interrelated in China, but there are still a lot of mutual constraints. These constraints include backward education in China's rural areas, unequal opportunities for upward social mobility, incomplete performance of educational selection, barriers to structural mobility, and the lack of guidance for natural mobility. In addition to the above constraints, the low rate of intergenerational mobility has also become a significant problem (Dong, Wang & Chen, 2009).

In terms of the relationships between social mobility and education in China, there are different arguments. Researchers increasingly focus on the role of education in social mobility. Many researchers believe that education can efficiently promote social mobility in China, especially after the resumption of the university entrance

examination in 1977 (Wang, 2010). It is certainly true that since the 1978 reform, higher education has indeed played a pivotal role in promoting social mobility. Fan and Cheng (2018) study the different choices and access to overseas study among different social strata in China, supported by original survey data from ninth graders of Beijing middle schools. Although their study was supported by a large-scale survey, the issues of generalisability were not considered, leaving need for explanations, clarification and further study. In Fan and Cheng's research, particular attention was paid to families from the upper-middle classes, including high-ranking officials, wealthy business owners, and white-collar professionals. Overseas education is seen as an alternative for high-quality educational resources. It is also viewed as a tool for advantaged social classes to maintain their original class and for disadvantaged classes to achieve upward social mobility. Similarly, Tsang (2013), drawing on participation observation and interview data, examines how the Chinese second-generation middle class, who are unable to obtain admission to China's premier universities, turn their backs on other public universities and instead attend private universities in China, resulting from unequal intergenerational mobility. Private universities and overseas higher education provide opportunities for these second-generation middle-class students to maintain their social class. Tsang's (2013) research also provides an example of integrating different social stratification theories (Marx's, Weber's and Bourdieu's theories) for explaining data. According to the Fan and Chen's and Tsang's research, students from families with abundant economic and cultural capital have easier access to international higher education, which in turn allows them to maintain their social class origin or promote their social mobility, thus conforming to Bourdieu's social class theory (see Chapter Two). The middle class can transform its economic resources into cultural resources between the first and second middle-class generations. A great deal of literature on China confirms the links between education and social mobility and converges with the findings of mainstream research (Ganzeboom, Treiman & Ultee, 1991).

However, emerging research also gives strong evidence that education cannot contribute to social mobility in China and that its role in promoting social mobility has been weakened (Zheng, 2007; Yu, 2014; Xu, 2016). Boliver (2017), reviewing the relevant research, finds that higher education arguably gives people a misplaced sense of optimism in relation to their mobility, because higher

education reproduces rather than diminishes social inequality. Despite absolute increases in higher education enrolment rates for all social groups, socioeconomic differences in relative rates of progression to higher education have revealed no sign of equalising (Breen et al., 2009: 1481). Many scholars explore the role of higher education in social mobility in the Chinese context. Xiong (2015) explains that education fails to facilitate upward mobility for migrant students in urban cities. A "ceiling effect" and a counter-school culture further strengthen the inequality in China's educational system. This results in further class reproduction and class solidification. Huang and Ming (2014) argue that the role of education in promoting social mobility in China has been weakened because of differences between urban and rural areas and among different schools. As the imbalance in educational resources has determined different educational attainments, education's role in promoting social mobility has weakened. Since China launched its mass higher education initiative in the 1990s, scholars have increasingly argued that higher education cannot promote social mobility in China. Yeung (2012), using data from the CGSS between 2005 and 2008 and multivariate analysis, finds that, although the expansion of higher education has been an equalising force in that more youth can have access to higher education than during the pre-reform era, intergenerational inequality still persists. Young students from more socioeconomically advantaged families can remain in their social class through access to better higher education. The impact of family background is a persistently strong factor in enrolment at top universities.

From a labour market perspective, Mok (2016) examines the impact of the expansion of higher education on graduate employment and social mobility in the context of a globalising economy and changing labour market needs. Mok's research provides evidence that the massification of higher education does not lead to more occupational opportunities for youth or greater opportunities for upward social mobility. Instead, China's higher education massification has brought widespread dissatisfaction and inequality in education, an oversupply of university graduates, and skill mismatches (Mok, Wen & Dale, 2016). More and more educated youth in highly competitive cities have to fight for better educational resources, while students from relatively lower socio-economic backgrounds have limited access to elite education. In summary, the massification of higher education generates significant impacts on China's labour market and

social mobility (Mok & Wu, 2016). Li and Zhong (2017) also explore the impact of higher education expansion on intergenerational mobility. Using data from the CGSS, they find that the higher education expansion has increased the advantages in higher education for the children of cadres and has enhanced the intergenerational educational correlation. In line with that finding, higher education expansion, through the intergenerational education correlation, influences intergenerational mobility. In other words, the competition for social mobility depends more on intergenerational education.

3.3 Labour market outcomes, social mobility and success of international graduates in China

As an emerging country with the world's largest population, China has witnessed the largest number of students moving abroad to study in the UK, the US, Australia and other developed, mainly English-speaking, countries. The growing wealth and size of China's middle class are important drivers of Chinese student mobility (Xiang & Shen, 2009). With the rapid growth in the number of Chinese international students in the UK, Iannelli & Huang (2014) study the motivations for Chinese students studying there and estimate that Chinese students are in total expected to reach 7 million by 2020. Counsell (2011) finds that Chinese students choose the UK as a place in which to pursue their higher education out of a search for a quality higher education and a desire to improve their English language skills. Different from Counsell's research results, Cebolla-Boado, Hu and Soysal (2018) analyse the factors affecting Chinese international students' choice of the UK as their overseas education destination. They find that university prestige is the most important factor, together with the social and cultural offerings provided by these prestigious universities.

There is also emerging research on the return of Chinese international graduates. Cheung and Xu (2015) explore returnees' decisions regarding whether to return or to stay abroad and the related influencing factors. The authors highlight a variety of aspects relating to these elite students' choices with respect to their return to China, the factors influencing their choices. They find that the most influential predictors of a student's decision to return were job opportunities in China (r = +0.32), followed by family ties (+0.23), and the difficulty of obtaining a job in the

receiving country (r = −0.24). Career development and individual development are still the core motivating factors for Chinese international graduates. Focusing on the effects of studying in the UK after Chinese students' return, Gill (2010) finds changes in the graduates' sense of identity influenced by their intercultural learning. Faced with these changes, there is emerging research investigating these graduates' identity changes and their reintegration into Chinese society; nevertheless, Chinese international graduates' post-study transitions have rarely been investigated (Moskal, 2019).

3.3.1 Labour market outcomes of Chinese international graduates

While many studies on returnees explore different aspects of the international graduates' career development and labour market outcomes in China, the results are not consistent. Although international student mobility is widely perceived to enhance international graduates' employability in globalised labour markets, only a minority of employers consider recruiting international graduates. Employers make decisions by connecting the practical needs for a foreign language and for international experience (Mol, 2017). Thus, international higher education is not a pass card valued by all employers. Nevertheless, Chinese international students widely perceive that studying abroad can be a generally positive experience, because their soft skills, such as independent studying skills, are improved and their social networks can be established (Hu & Cairns, 2017). Counsell (2011) notes that UK degrees are regarded as being more valuable for a career than Chinese degrees. The study and living experience in the UK offer are the best conditions for Chinese students' career prospects. In terms of Chinese returnees' perceived positive labour market outcomes, Chinese returnees assign great importance to "soft outcomes" relating to personal pursuits and life fulfilment than "hard outcomes" such as income and positions (Lin-Stephens, Uesi & Doherty, 2015). Thus, the labour market outcomes of Chinese returnees are diverse. The UK returnees hold optimistic views of their post-study careers due to their improved English language skills and their UK quality higher education.

Hao and Welch (2012) explore returnees' job-seeking experiences after their return to China and find re-integration and Chinese networks and values become problems for them. Returnees' employment outcomes turn out not to be as

positive as expected (Hao & Welch, 2012). Similarly, Mok et al. (2017a), employing a mixed-methods research approach, analyse returnees' labour market outcomes and career development, with particular reference to their perspectives of employable skills and contextual impacts. The research results reveal that international graduates rate their overseas study experiences highly for what they have obtained in terms of hard knowledge, soft skills and intercultural understandings, which can all contribute to their positive career development. In line with Mok, Wen and Dale's (2016) research, Mok et al. (2017a) provides more evidence to explain Chinese returnees' employment and other outcomes. As argued widely by numerous scholars (e.g. Knight, 2014), skills are essential for employment/employability. Chinese returnees' soft skills mainly include foreign language proficiency. Thus, the ability to speak fluent English is the most advantageous factor during a returnee's job search process (Mok et al., 2017a).

In summary, Chinese international students expect their overseas study experience to be able to strengthen their future job prospects and career development. Indeed, it is true that overseas higher education's provision of hard knowledge, soft skills and cross-cultural understandings is still valued by Chinese students because these abilities are perceived to contribute to employability in general (Mok et al., 2017b). From a labour market perspective, it is found from their employment results that there has been a decline in the labour market value of the "hard currencies" of overseas qualifications such as knowledge, while the "soft currencies" obtained from their UK education, such as problem-solving skills, are more important (Li, 2013). Besides focusing on the positive perceptions of employment outcomes among returnees, there is a great deal of research exploring returnees' problems in employment. Studying academic returnees' development in a Chinese university, Xu (2008) finds that academic returnees in China encounter opportunities and challenges. The opportunities derive from China's talent policies, while the challenges result from the locally embedded competences and difficult international transfer (Xu, 2008).

A great number of returnees encounter problems during their employment due to the difficulties posed by international knowledge transfer. Studying returnees' performance in a specific industry based on a knowledge-based view and network perspective, Dai and Liu (2009) explore the returnees' entrepreneurial

performance. They find that international networks positively affect a firm's performance in high-tech industries. More importantly, returnees appear to have more competitive advantages than local entrepreneurs. However, Li et al. (2012) come to the opposite conclusion to Dai and Liu's research. Li et.al. (2012) explored returnees' and indigenous graduates' entrepreneurial performance in China's technology sector. The authors find that in the Chinese context, locals perform better than returnees because the locals know China's rules and have wider social networks. Given these conflicting results, it is therefore necessary for researchers to develop a large-scale sample research studying a specific group of returnees. Regarding values and norms, Zweig and Yang (2014) study the diffusion of international norms in post-Mao China, including among (i) the political elites who see the benefits of Western norms and (ii) returning scientists, academics, and entrepreneurs who establish 'small environments of reform' in which new norms become hegemonic. These international graduates' reshaped views and norms are influencing Chinese international graduates' identities and their practices in their individual development.

A few studies analyse international graduates from a gender perspective, but empirical evidence based on large-scale data is scarce (Hao et al., 2017). Jin (2012) reviews Chinese female employment after 1949 from a historical perspective. Female Chinese university graduates are still in a disadvantaged position in terms of income and opportunities compared with their male counterparts. Moreover, Chinese females are still affected by the traditional Chinese culture that prioritises family life. Conflicts between a female graduate's employment responsibilities and her role in the family put her at a disadvantage. More importantly, China's labour market prefers to recruit male university graduates due to the economic benefits. A recent study by Moskal (2019) contributes to the understanding of the post-study transitions of Asian international postgraduate students. Gender is found to be particularly important in their post-study transitions, career development, and trajectories. China has witnessed continuous changes in the positions of women in society. Nevertheless, male graduates have always enjoyed greater scope within which to develop professional careers, while females meet greater challenges due to family pressures and social conventions. Additionally, although female returnees hold international qualifications and overseas study experience, females in East Asia still face discrimination in their

job-search strategies in the labour market. In the case of young women from Kazakhstan, because of gender and religion, they face greater pressure in terms of employment and family life (Holloway, Pimlott-Wilson & O'Hara, 2012).

Another advantage of obtaining a formal qualification overseas is the greater global competence it confers on international graduates compared to those without international academic mobility (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Cosmopolitanism, as cultural capital, is regarded as a desirable disposition by education institutions (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). Unlike an educational system limited to just one country, international higher education provides extensive interactions with people from multiple nationalities; thus, the opportunities are uneven among different social classes (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). In spite of the fact that the link between international higher education and highly paid jobs is weakened, more and more international students are still choosing to study abroad (Li & Lowe, 2016). Moskal and Schweisfurth (2018) investigate the global competence learning and capital conversions of non-Western graduates and find they play positive roles in graduates' employment outcomes upon their return. Although international students have greater possibilities of obtaining cosmopolitan competency, it is not easy to acquire, and it cannot automatically be converted into capital/benefits in regional and national labour markets, which explains the differing levels of cosmopolitan competency among international postgraduate students.

Parental involvement and social connections are also positively associated with Chinese graduates' employment outcomes. In China, social networks are a major focus in the pursuit of individual success (Su & Meng, 2012). Indeed, the *Renqing* (social connections) society logic that is rooted in China impacts parents' behaviour (Zhai, 2014). Social contacts and strong family networks play an important role in graduates' employment outcomes. In the era of higher education expansion, middle-class graduates are found to have more access to high-quality job information and better labour market outcomes than their less-privileged peers. Middle-class parents are more involved in graduates' job searches, providing social ties and supervising their offspring's endeavours. However, underprivileged families lack information required for their job searches as well as the necessary social ties. Consequently, graduates from advantaged families have

better employment outcomes than their underprivileged counterparts (Liu, 2016a). Therefore, parental involvement represents a large barrier to equal opportunities and individual future career development in China's labour market.

3.3.2 Social mobility of university graduates in China

With the expansion of higher education, researchers have become increasingly interested in intergenerational education and family support. Bourdieu theorises that parents with little cultural capital are limited in their ability to support their offspring's schooling and their future social mobility. With respect to the intergenerational transmission of education and social mobility, Magnani and Zhu (2015) examine the impact of parental education on the education of their offspring. They find that the intergenerational persistence of education is considerably heterogeneous among individuals. The effects of families' cultural capital cannot be ignored when studying an individual's development and their social mobility. The high persistence of intergenerational education reflects the economic inequality in urban China. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, Kong (2016) finds that rural parents strongly desire educational success for their offspring and see education as a means to their achieving social mobility. Kong's research results show rural parents seldom engage in visible forms of parental involvement in their offspring's schools, for example, by attending parent-teacher meetings. Further, culture and socio-economic status influences different forms of parental involvement in their offspring's schooling.

Focusing on capital theory, Qiao (2011) studies Chinese university graduates' social mobility, including their human, social and cultural capital. Among the three kinds of capital, human capital is found to be a determinant element for employment outcomes and, thus, upward social mobility. However, family background and social capital also have significant influence on graduates' choices of occupation. These factors are closely related to income and social class. Moreover, Qiao (2011) divides social capital into two categories, strong and weak ties, to discuss the effects of social capital on social mobility. Numerous Chinese scholars and some empirical research support this approach. Regardless of the strong or weak ties, social capital undoubtedly has conspicuous effects on upward social mobility. For example, for some Chinese students, their family connections can determine

which university they can be enrolled at and which kind of class they will enter, no matter how poorly they behave at high school (Qiao, 2011). To Qiao's three kinds of capital, Li (2009) proposes a fourth kind of capital in China, adding political capital. Endowed with Chinese characteristics, political capital has a great effect on the social mobility of university graduates. Especially in governmental sectors, political capital can greatly benefit a graduate's upward mobility. Political capital results from family education and so-called *Guanxi* (social connections).

Although higher education is widely seen as a pathway to promote social mobility, China's higher education expansion weakens this role. The expansion of higher education increases attendance in higher education, but it does not bring more occupational opportunities for the youth. Instead, the expansion of higher education in China intensifies competition and inequality in education. University graduates do not experience upward social mobility through higher education (Mok, 2016; Mok & Wu, 2016). Contradicting with Mok's findings (2016), Liao (2016), drawing on a large-scale survey of 2014 university graduates, finds higher education still plays a positive role in promoting social mobility, especially for rural students. Most rural graduates "shed themselves" of their social origin and stay in cities upon graduation. Additionally, Bregnbaek (2016) studies China's "ant tribe", referring to the millions of unemployed university graduates living in the outskirts of Beijing, and finds, in reality, that many of these university graduates' quest for social mobility cannot actually come true. This even sometimes leads to instances of suicide, which highlights the appalling working conditions of mobile university graduates in China's large cities like Beijing. Therefore, the existing research reveals that Chinese graduates who do not experience international academic mobility meet great challenges to achieving upward social mobility. China's higher education cannot secure graduates' upward social mobility.

With the devaluing of China's domestic degrees, more and more Chinese students are choosing to study abroad in order to secure a good job and achieve upward social mobility or maintain their original social class (Tsang, 2013). Xiang and Shen (2009) explore the role of international student migration from China to other countries, with a focus on the transformation of different types of capitals. The research results reveal that international education plays an important role in class formation and reformation in various Asian countries. However, the Chinese

case is seen as special because China's social transformation is particularly dramatic (Xiang & Shen, 2009). Thus, the relationship between international education and the social stratification is intimate and complex. Given that the international graduates acquire international higher education qualifications and international views and perspectives, they might be perceived as valuable employees by China's labour market from the perspective of human capital theory. Xiang and Shen (2009) provide a new analytical means of studying the effects of international education on Chinese society. By analysing returnees' labour market outcomes and social mobility results, based on the first-hand data and a mixed-research approach, Feng and Fan (2017) find the role of international higher education in social mobility has weakened. That is shown in the low rate of returnees' employment levels, their low salaries, and employers' unclear understandings of these returnees. The challenges met by the returnees result from the massification of international higher education, the decreased gap in the education offered by different countries or regions, and the rational attitudes to returnees. The increased number of returnees reduces the value of international higher education degrees, resulting in a weakened role in promoting returnees' social mobility. In addition, with the internationalisation of higher education, China's higher education has been improved and joint programmes have enhanced China's domestic programmes. As a result, the returnees' international qualifications do not show evident effects on their upward social mobility. More and more Chinese students see overseas education as an option for ensuring a high-quality education and a tool for the advantaged class to maintain their status and for the disadvantaged class to enter the upper class (Fan & Cheng, 2018). Middle- and upper- class families have a greater array of options for their offspring. Studying abroad may create new opportunities for differentiation based on the current social production, which is uneven in terms of education options (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014: 248).

Integrating Weberian, neo-Weberian and Bourdieuian theories, Tsang (2013) establishes a new framework to investigate the social mobility of the Chinese second-generation middle class. Many Chinese students choose international higher education because they cannot secure a place in China's top-ranked universities. Thus, by attending international universities, their parents expect them to maintain their social class or achieve upward social mobility. With

reference to Chinese institutions such as *Danwei* and *Hukou,* Tsang (2013) finds the progenies of cadres and skilled professionals are the main beneficiaries of the 1978 economic reforms and opening policies. These second-generation middle classes can achieve their expected social positions as their family's privileged *Guanxi* helps them with higher education acquisition and future capital conversions and social mobility.

3.4 Spatial mobility of China's university graduates

The spatial mobility of university graduates has long been an important research field, especially in developed countries, and it has recently gained momentum (Faggian & McCann, 2006; Venhorst, Van Dijk & Van Wissen, 2011; Giuseppe & Genovese, 2012; Marinelli, 2013; Faggian & Franklin, 2014; Tang, Rowe, Corcoran & Sigler, 2014; Tano, 2014). However, it is only recently that the mobility of highly educated people has received scholarly attention in developing and transitional countries such as China (Fu & Gabriel, 2012; Liu & Shen, 2014; Cui, Geertman & Hooimeijer, 2015; Mok & Wu, 2016; Du, 2017; Li, Shen & Xu, 2017). Since 1978, China's economy transformed from a planned to a market economy, and, as a result, income gaps and rural-urban migration have appeared. Thus, a growing number of scholars are addressing university graduates' spatial mobility. With the notable exception of Liu, Shen and Xu (2017: 652), little attention has been given to the diversity of graduates in the analysis, nor to the effects on their mobility patterns of critical life cycle events, such as university entry and labour market transition.

Since China's economic reforms and the "open-door policy" were launched in 1978, rural-to-urban migration has become an unavoidable feature of population mobility in the country (Ma, 2002). Many of China's demographic changes may be attributed to economic, social and political forces. The economic imperatives include foreign direct investment (FDI), the privatisation of housing and real estate, and the shift from state socialism to capitalism. Social changes, such as the increasing mobility of the population and the shifting lifestyles, family structures, and expectations, have also contributed to the transformation of China's cities, especially in the eastern coastal regions (Gaubatz, 1999; Ma, 2002; Liu & Shen, 2014).

The social mobility of residents in cities is closely related to the characteristics of the cities in which they live and work, because economic development and the extent of urbanisation are important factors (Treiman, 1970; Piketty, 1995). Moreover, cities have different social structures and degrees of social equality. The different access to education and the labour market and redistributive politics are identified as key factors impacting social mobility (Hedberg & Tammaru, 2013). In cities, one's neighbourhood also directly affects perceived social mobility. The neighbourhood itself can be seen as a form of symbolic status and capital (Emily, 1999). Moving from low-income to prosperous neighbourhoods can be likely to increase social status and promote social mobility. Moreover, each neighbourhood represents a unique social environment that may represent an exclusion from other neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are related to mutual social assistance and high-quality education opportunities (Chen et al., 2018). Thus, movement between regions and neighbourhoods is linked to the pursuit of upward social mobility and higher social status. Xiang and Shen (2009), based on capital theory, discuss the importance of spatial scale in capital convertibility. Space acts as a provisional fix of the territorial scope of social actions or relations. In fact, a group of human geographers have recently highlighted the importance of scale in social changes (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The spatial scale determines the efficiency of capital conversion and the total value of capital.

3.4.1 Domestic graduate mobility

The spatial mobility of China's graduates has many features, including rural-urban migration (Qin, Wang & Lu, 2018), west-to-east flows (Guo et al., 2016), and gendered differences (Jin & Whitson, 2014; Goodburn, 2015), *Hukou*'s impacts (Wang, 2005; Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Zhang & Wang, 2010), which are connected to education and the changing family structure (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003; Davin, 2005; Choy & Li, 2017). Over the last two decades, Chinese cities have witnessed an influx of university-educated rural migrants. As China has limited educational resources in relation to the size of its population, higher education attainment enables new job market entrants to make the rural-urban transition, inducing faster urban growth (Choy & Li, 2017). Liu (2016b) reports the importance of higher education to students coming from rural areas before China launched its

policy of expanding higher education. Rural students can enter cities to acquire higher education, and many of them stayed in cities after finding occupations, which changes their *Hukou* status and social class. Hence, the general tendency is for higher education degrees to help rural students move to and stay in cities and achieve upward social mobility.

Based on the 2010 National Health and Family Planning Commission Survey of China's migrant population, Qin, Wang and Lu (2018) examine the living conditions of this growing population and compare them with urban local graduates. Through university migration, these rural students stay in cities. The research results show that rural graduates have similar income levels to those of local urban graduates; however, they work longer hours than their local urban counterparts and receive fewer social benefits. Although, through spatial mobility, rural migrants are able to work in cities, their working conditions are not as good as local urban graduates. However, compared with less-educated rural migrants in cities, university-educated migrants have more favourable working and living conditions. Despite the rural-urban migration, rural migrants cannot fully reap the benefits of higher education due to the institutionalised exclusion and discrimination (Qin, Wang & Lu, 2018). Peng (2007) studies the relationships between China's higher education and rural social mobility based on theories of rural social mobility. According to Peng (2007), the benefits of rural social mobility in terms of acquiring higher education cannot only make graduates more upwardly mobile but also transform the identities and positions of the next generation. Liu et al. (2015) focus on new migrant enclaves in Guangzhou, a very large city in China, to study the social mobility of migrants there. These rural migrants are found to be active agents who have developed a vibrant garment manufacturing cluster. By establishing a flexible garment production system, embedding their businesses within the enclave and maintaining a nationwide translocal network, these migrants obtain a feasible path by which to achieve social mobility, adapt to the urban environment, and enter the middle class.

Huang and Tian (2013) collect first-hand data and conduct empirical research on university graduates studying in "985" and "211" universities. Supported by a large-scale sample, this research shows that 40% of university graduates choose to work in China's eastern regions, while less than 10% were willing to work in the

poor western areas, where working and living conditions are inadequate and there is little economic development (Liu et al., 2009). This finding indicates that in developed areas, graduates had more opportunities for upward social mobility. Zhu and Liu (2016) take Shanghai as a study case. After analysing Shanghai's GDP (2,356.094 billion RMB), the authors find that Shanghai has great influence on the surrounding cities, because of its more than 100,000 foreign companies or branches, which provide numerous job opportunities. Therefore, the eastern regions of China can provide more opportunities for graduates to obtain career development and success, thereby motivating university graduates to move to Shanghai. The changes in China's contemporary family structure should also be noted. The reduction in the average family size raises concerns about whether such changes might challenge support mechanisms for older adults. With China's one-child policy having been implemented for over 30 years, caring for older adults in a small family is a key issue for many young adults, and is also related to individual spatial mobility (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003).

Gender differences also affect spatial mobility in China. Goodburn (2015) examines the impact of rural–urban migration on primary school-age migrant girls in China and finds that migration may allow them to achieve a better, more independent life than that available to them in rural China. According to Davin (2005), there are some gendered patterns that affect the differences in spatial mobility. Female graduates tend to prefer working in public institutions and living close to their parents. Despite gender discrimination and the more limited career opportunities open to women, spatial mobility can still promote women's autonomy and decrease expectations regarding women's social responsibilities and roles (Davin, 2005). Urbanisation and Westernisation have eroded traditional gender and patrilineal values to a greater extent in urban areas than in rural areas (Evans & Strauss, 2011; Hu, 2016).

Extensive research discusses the spatial mobility of China's talents who do not have international student mobility. Liu and Shen (2014) find that the coastal region has benefited from the influx of skilled labour, but other regions are suffering from a severe "brain drain". The inequality of employment opportunities and wage levels results in skilled labour spatial mobility, and these mobile labourers prioritise their career prospects over amenities in the migration

decision-making process. Using nationwide survey data, Liu, Shen and Xu's research (2017: 651) shows that, while recent university graduates are highly concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, the destinations of university entrants tend to be geographically dispersed. These highly educated youths have a strong inclination to stay in the same province in which they obtained their higher education degrees. Zhao (2017) also proves the strong inclination of highly educated individuals to stay in the same place. Master's and Philosophy of Doctor (PhD) degree holders have stronger spatial mobility than undergraduates. Also, inter-province spatial mobility is showing a rapid increase. Moreover, these skilled graduates are attracted to regions with a higher number of key national universities and focus more on wage levels when it comes to their spatial mobility. Although major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are still concentrated destinations for university graduates, the spatial mobility of graduates is starting to show a diversifying tendency (Feng & Fan, 2017), which may be shaped by the high urban housing prices triggered by the rapid population migration (Lin et al., 2018). Focusing on the different levels of higher education, Du (2017) explores how geographic mobility is interlinked with the process of bonding with a place. The spatial mobility of graduates differs with educational qualifications. Among the highly educated group, returnees are more likely to be ones who have relatively lower levels of educational qualifications, while migrants are those who are likely to have higher levels of education qualifications. In Du's research, a higher level of education qualification is a significant factor determining graduates' spatial mobility, including inter-city and inter-provincial migration.

Following Du, Nie and Liu (2019) study the spatial pattern of talent flows in China. The Yangtze River Delta, the Pearl River Delta and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei regions are the most concentrated places for university graduates. There is an evident clustered pattern of talent migration in these three developed regions, with Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou the most popular destinations for employment mobility, indicating the effect on talent immigration of highly developed cities. Song (2016) studies the differences and similarities between China's new urban migrants and their peers, analysing the influences of the *Hukou* on the social mobility of China's urban migrants. The research results show that new urban migrants were relatively vulnerable because the *Hukou* restricted their access to social welfare and security. In general, the society expects them to

assimilate rather than achieve upward social mobility. From the perspective of the social system, the registered permanent residence system restricts their access to social welfare and security.

Meanwhile, although some new urban residents have access to social welfare and security, they are still labelled as “lower-middle class” with regards to their consumption habits, and they maintain a certain level of flexibility to further establish their social and economic status. In Song’s research, opportunity emerges as a significant theme in the thematic analysis. New urban residents try to take advantage of their urban resident status to create individual wealth, but the system of registered permanent residence has reduced “opportunities”. China’s social system still plays an exclusive role in new urban residents’ social mobility. As spatial mobility cannot guarantee a person’s social mobility, for new urban residents, becoming middle class in a city is very difficult. From the perspective of labour market segmentation theory, Howell (2011) studies the relationship between labour market segmentation and graduate migration in Xinjiang. In Xinjiang’s labour market, female migrants are located within the lower segment. In other words, spatial mobility cannot secure the labour market prospects of new urban migrants. Furthermore, graduates take housing prices into consideration when they move between cities (Liu & Shen, 2014). A high cost of living, particularly in terms of housing prices, encourages the out-migration of talents (Venhorst, Van Dijk, & Van Wissen, 2011).

Wang (2014) puts forward a new term “place stratification”, which means the hierarchies of places. In China, cities are hierarchised by administration. The cities of high-level administrations usually have more opportunities for FDI and advantageous policies (Filatotchev et al., 2011; Liu, Lu & Choi, 2014). By analysing the unequal development among places, Wang (2014) finds that place stratification has strong links to social stratification and that geographical mobility has direct impacts on social mobility. The phenomenon and patterns of talent mobility should be analysed using a mixed model of geographical and social mobility. Although some research, such as Blau and Duncan’s (1967) study, mentions geographical and social mobility, few scholars concentrate on geographical mobility when studying social mobility. Studying the migration from rural to urban areas, Li (2007) discusses social mobility based on the inter-regional

migration. For university graduates, through higher education, rural graduates stay in cities and achieve social mobility. The social mobility is a mixed result of inter-regional migration and higher education.

3.4.2 International returnees in China

There is a growing literature on Chinese international returnees' spatial mobility. Commonly, the largest and most developed cities act as "talent magnets" in both the student-receiving and student-sending countries. In the context of educational migration, Western education is conceptualised as enabling students to succeed in highly competitive markets for university places or for jobs when they return home (Robertson, 2013). Attracting foreign university graduates becomes a strategy for these cities, which aspire to be the "talent hubs" for highly skilled and well-educated potential candidates (Moskal, 2017: 133). Returnees' spatial mobility has been attracting increasing research interest of late, with the main focus on how their spatial mobility relates to their individual employment development and to cities' restructuring. In terms of the spatial mobility of returnees, Li (2011) studies overseas returnees' entrepreneurship and found the urban environment tends to affect their choices. In general, eastern regions of China, with their supportive policies and facilities, attract the majority of returnees who engage in entrepreneurship.

Regarding returnees' employment, Tong (2014) analyses gender differences and their effects on the employment of returnee students in Shanghai. Among these returnees, few have a registered residence in Shanghai. With a focus on Chinese doctoral returnees who obtained their degrees in the UK, Zhai and Gao (2018), based on a grounded theory approach, investigated a variety of factors influencing their social mobility. Different from undergraduate-level degree holders, master-level graduate returnees usually have similar work destinations, tending to work in academic institutions or in the state sector, and their social mobility is mainly determined by the gap between social origin and destination. Most of these returnees are from upper-middle-class or middle-class families. It is very rare to observe that they achieve upward social mobility, indicating the impact of returnees' social origin and limited room for upward social mobility. In a study of the gender differences in the spatial mobility of returnees, Tong (2014) finds that

female returnees are in a weaker position in employment compared with their male peers; they have lower rates of employment and face more difficulties in achieving professional success and other positive outcomes. Although both the female and male returnees are spatially mobile and tend to select Shanghai as their workplace, female returnees fare worse in labour market outcomes after spatial mobility.

Motivated by the question of whether or not "better" cities can bring better lives, Li and Chen (2010) examine the city life of migrants in Shanghai. Citizenship is interlocked with *Hukou*. Although the *Hukou* system has been opened and migrations between cities have appeared, Shanghai has set up a hierarchical structure of population registration and management (Li & Chen, 2010: 145). Without changing the *Hukou* system in any substantial way, Shanghai has established a residence card system in order to trade differential citizenship for talents, super-low-cost labour and capital. The flexible changes to *Hukou* can be seen as policy support for attracting returnees and talents. In China, only the top talents can secure a Shanghai *Hukou*, such as members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, members of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, experts enjoying the State-Council special allowance (*Guowuyuan Teshu Jintie),* or returnees from overseas, known as sea turtles or "*Haigui*" (returnees) (Li & Chen, 2010: 151). For returnees, *Hukou* is not a significant barrier to their spatial mobility and future individual development. Similarly, Beijing, home to the largest proportion of returnees, has launched a series of policies to attract Chinese returnee talents. Beijing's Zhongguancun Science Park faces challenges to its industrial upgrading due to the fact that national champions are slow in creating their own technologies. Therefore, Beijing sees returnee talents as the new vehicle for technological development (Chen, 2008). These policies implemented by the popular destinations contribute to the returnee cluster phenomenon. Moskal's analysis (2019: 15-16) suggests that family appears to be an important factor that internationally mobile graduates need to negotiate. Women are often discouraged from entering the labour market or from displaying occupational interests. In terms of one's life course, the period abroad undoubtedly affects students' attitudes towards the workplace and their views regarding the relationships and generational roles within the family and the household.

3.5 Summary

After reviewing the relevant literature, I found a strong research focus on the relationship between social mobility and higher education. The is substantial literature on social mobility and university graduates' social mobility in China, which is helpful to understand China's university graduates' labour market outcomes, success and social mobility. The research reviewed in this chapter discusses state power, social mechanisms, and individual education outcomes, and how these are interrelated to shape university graduates' success. The literature on social mobility reviewed above could be grouped in four research strands: (1) China's transformation from a plan economy to market economy brings significant changes in social stratification. Although China experiences large absolute social mobility, it is still difficult to identify relative social mobility. Through market exclusion mechanism, China may meet the problem of class solidification (Li & Zhu, 2017); 2) State power and social institutions of *Hukou*, *Bianzhi, Tizhi, Guanxi* are important factors that influence social mobility and spatial mobility of university graduates in China. Social network (*Guanxi*) and social origin are two key aspects in upward social mobility. State driven talent policies give international graduates more opportunities in career development and upward social mobility; 3) There are many contradicting discussions on education and social mobility in China. Extensive research shows higher education can promote social mobility while many scholars argue that the expansion of higher education plays negative roles in upward social mobility. In terms of international graduates and social mobility, the existing research shows that international graduates meet challenges in labour market, and in Chinese labour market, their 'soft skills' are important in employment and career; 4) University graduates' spatial mobility is closely linked to social mobility. International and home graduates show a very different clustering pattern regarding post-study spatial mobility.

Three research gaps could be identified after the extant literature review. Firstly, the studies on social mobility in China only examine the role of higher education in general and do not break down university students into undergraduates and postgraduates. Bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree holders all face different difficulties and dilemmas in their individual development in Chinese society (Li, Li & Chen, 2010). This thesis takes these differences into consideration and focuses on Chinese master's graduates from Chinese and UK universities to provide a more

nuanced understanding of master's graduates' social mobility.

Secondly, China's domestic researchers extensively study domestic education and social mobility in China. However, they rarely notice Chinese students' international higher education attainments and their post-study social mobility. Returnees are increasing by 10% every year in China (MoE, 2016), and, thus, international education, as an increasing choice for Chinese students, cannot be neglected in social mobility research in China. The relationship between international higher education and social mobility and comparisons between international graduates and home students are two important issues. Therefore, if they are not fully noticed by the public, it will result in an incomplete understanding of international graduates and their roles in China's social development. Without exploring this area, it is hard to discuss what returnees can do for China's society, what they consider when selecting international higher education, what we can do to develop China's domestic master's education, and what roles international graduates and their peers play in China's contemporary society. By studying the social mobility of international graduates and comparing China's domestic master's graduates' social mobility with international graduates, this thesis can contribute new content and perspectives for studying social mobility in China.

More importantly, this thesis provides new evidence to tackle the inconsistencies of China's social mobility research results. China has undergone significant social transformation since 1978, with new social classes forming, as well as social stratification and mobility. Education is seen as an important and essential tool for promoting social mobility, and it is the focus of a great body of literature. International higher education, as a new type of available education, is bound to make a difference to social mobility. Nowadays, many Chinese scholars, when debating the relationship between higher education and social mobility, still do not include international higher education. In addition, the subjects of these debates are not divided into international graduates and Chinese graduates. What is more, current research does not take the impact of international graduates on Chinese home graduates' career development and social mobility. International graduates are distinguished by their different education, lifestyles, global competence, and family support in comparison with home graduates. The impacts

of international graduates on social class and mobility in China has not been widely studied, which has led to the dearth of data linking international higher education and individual success at the micro-level. More importantly, existing studies do not notice the links between university graduates' social mobility and spatial mobility in China, wherein regional differences are evident in terms of economic development, old institutional impacts, talent policy support, and career opportunities. Therefore, to tackle the emerging social and educational issues, more focus should be put on international graduates' post-study transitions and their impact on Chinese social classes and their mobility.

Thirdly, the research methods employed to investigate social mobility in China still leave much room for improvement. Extant research seldom employs mixed-research methods to study returnees' and their peers' social mobility. Single research methods lead to flaws in data collection and data analysis. While most research into social mobility tends to use quantitative methods that ignores a wide range of detailed information produced by international graduates and their peers' study experiences and life stories. This in-depth data can be complementary to studying the deeper causes of or obstacles to individual social mobility. Combining quantitative and qualitative research methods can help tackle the problem. However, another question follows: how to connect the two research paradigms. In recent times, a few Chinese studies have explored social mobility using a mixed-methods research approach, but with little philosophical support. The mixed methods research design used does not seem robust. Furthermore, research into China's social mobility lacks robust surveys and large-scale samples. Unlike Western counties, in which there are plenty of national surveys on social mobility, China has very few national surveys that can be used for the purposes of sociology, such as the CGSS, from which Chinese scholars can extract demographic data. No first-hand data focusing specifically on the social mobility of international graduates has ever been collected. In order to fill this gap, this research employs mixed research methods in an attempt to extend social mobility research. Different patterns of social mobility can be regarded as tests against an ideal society of equal opportunities and social justice (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn & Payne, 1987). Therefore, studying the social mobility of international graduates and their peers based on mixed research methods and first-hand large-scale data constitutes pioneering research that can provide deeper reflections on

international higher education, more profound considerations of China's domestic master's education, and a richer empirical understanding of China's social class, stratification and mobility.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach employed in this study, including philosophical assumptions, strategies and methods of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and inferences, and the quality assessment (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Based on a mixed-methods research approach, I have chosen pragmatism as the research paradigm, pragmatically integrating quantitative and qualitative research to answer the five research questions. A questionnaire survey and interview were used to collect first-hand data from 756 valid questionnaire responses and 20 interviewees. Afterwards, I respectively employed mapping analysis, multiple regression model, and thematic analysis to analyse the mixed data. The data collection and analysis consisted of two phases: pilot research and main research. Finally, ethical issues and study limitations were also considered, and the quality of the mixed-methods research was assessed, focusing on validity and generalisability. Figure 4-1 shows the overview of data collection and analysis process as follows:

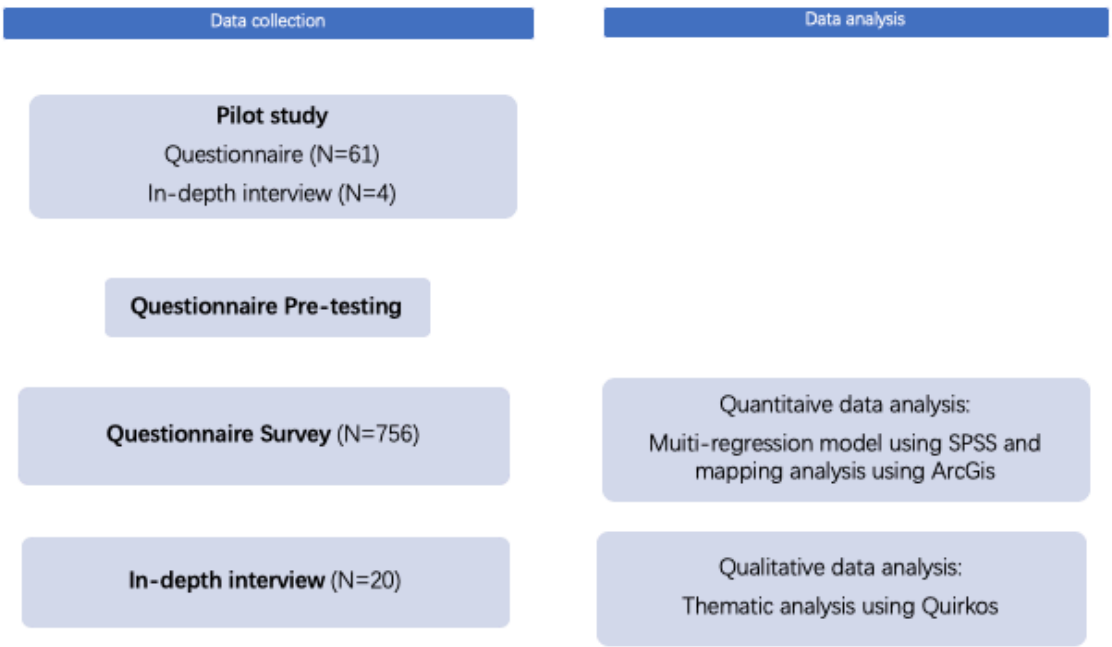


Figure 4-1 Process of data collection and analysis

4.2 Research paradigms and mixed-methods research

At the core of any research is paradigm. A clear paradigm is essential for research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as can be traced back to the arguments of Kuhn (1970). As Kuhn (1970) argues, a paradigm, regarded as an accepted model or pattern, is associated with a set of beliefs, procedures and working practices which inform the dominant worldview and shape the context of modern science. These factors articulate the epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations in social contexts, impacting and shaping the nature and procedures of research (Sparkes, 1992). A research paradigm can be regarded as the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology, and focuses on beliefs about the nature of the world (Admiraal & Wubbels, 2005: 315). Ontology relates to the theory of social entities and what exists to be investigated (i.e. beliefs about the nature of reality), while epistemology is concerned with the values we hold in understanding knowledge (i.e. beliefs about the nature of the "knowledge" that the researcher produces) (Walliman, 2006: 15-16). Methodology mainly relates to the investigative approach consistent with the aforementioned principles (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, different ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs result in different research paradigms (Admiraal & Wubbels, 2005). Scholars should pay first attention to the selection of a research paradigm when embarking on any research (Creswell, 2010).

4.2.1 Positivism

Philosophically, the paradigms viewed as the dominant ones are positivism and interpretivism (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Positivists holds the following set of beliefs: there is a single external reality "out there" that can be objectively defined, and it is therefore possible to ascertain a single "truth" about the nature of social phenomena (ontology); the researcher and the object should not have mutual relationships, so the research results are true and objective (epistemology). In line with the epistemology, the research results need to be valid and reliable. Within this paradigm, quantitative methods are seen as the best means of testing hypotheses (methodology), as numbers and statistical patterns can show a clear map of research objects.

4.2.2 Interpretivism

Interpretivists contrast with positivists in that they believe there is no such thing as a single objective reality (ontology), and it is only possible to produce subjective enquiries (epistemology), as all human beings interpret the world slightly differently – including researchers. Consequently, interpretivists tend to favour qualitative research methods (methodology), as they aim to understand the "inside" of individuals – how they interpret the world – in order to understand their thoughts and actions. Thus, an interpretivist paradigm strives to understand the subjective world of research participants by interpreting their stories and experiences (Cohen et al., 2011).

Notwithstanding the important achievements made by feminist, postmodernist, poststructuralist and critical schools, as well as many other philosophical positions within the broad frameworks, positivist and interpretivist paradigms remain the two dominant research paradigms in methodological and epistemological debates in social science research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

4.2.3 Mixed-methods research

Social science research has seen long-standing and ongoing debates between proponents of quantitative and qualitative research. Others see the potential of combining the two approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Creswell (2010) argues that factors of "exploration" and "explanation" can determine whether quantitative or qualitative research is suitable for research questions. Quantitative research tries to explain or predict relations between independent and dependent variables, while qualitative research aims to explore the nature of particular situations. Generally speaking, qualitative research contributes as significantly as quantitative research to social science studies (Walliman, 2006). In the debate over quantitative and qualitative research, mixed-methods research has sometimes been proposed as part of the development of a separate paradigm that sees certain elements of the world as objectively "real" and certain other elements as "subjective" (see below). This approach favours the mixing of both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer a series

of research questions in a single study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Breaking the boundaries between quantitative and qualitative research, mixed-methods research aims to provide a better understanding of research questions than either approach can do alone (Greene et al., 1989). By meeting demands that go beyond "simply numbers in a quantitative sense or words in qualitative sense" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007: 13), researchers can expand the basic research focus to focus on wider implications (Greene et al., 1989). More specifically, a mixed-methods study can gather more information in different modes about a phenomenon, and the breadth of findings can highlight flaws in a single method (Giddings & Grant, 2006: 6). Thus, there is a growing group of researchers now pursuing mixed-methods research. Moreover, mixed methods research successfully deals with many challenges posed in research practice regarding paradigm (Feilzer, 2010), validity, reliability and generalisability (Yin, 2018).

4.2.4 Pragmatism as a research paradigm

Focusing on methodological practices and downplaying paradigmatic differences (Yin, 2018), I employed pragmatism as the research paradigm in my study.

Proponents of mixed-methods research strive to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches, and thus mixed-methods research should not fall into one or the other of the aforementioned paradigms (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). However, there is little agreement about the nature of a mixed-methods research framework, though several alternative stances on the paradigm issues have been put forward (e.g. Greene et al., 2001; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). One of the most commonly proposed is pragmatism, which provides an alternative worldview to focus on the problem to be studied and the results of the research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Pragmatism allows researchers to be free of the mental and practical constraints imposed by the forced choice between postpositivism and constructivism. Creswell and Clark position pragmatism inbetween postpositivism [it critiques and amends positivism, and notices objectivity by recognising the possible effects of biases] and constructivism [a theory about the nature of learning that focuses on how humans make meaning from their experiences]. They argue that choosing

pragmatism gives an alternative to what would otherwise be a "forced choice" between the two (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007: 27). And thus, researchers do not have to 'be the prisoner of a particular method or technique' (Robson, 1993: 291). Pragmatists view the measurable world as an "existential reality", referring to the different elements or layers, some objective, some subjective, and some a mixture of the two, in an experiential world (Dewey, 1925: 40).

Therefore, pragmatists believe quantitative and qualitative methods are not different at an epistemological or ontological level, but rather share plenty of similarities in their approaches to inquiry (Hanson, 2008). Pragmatists also hold the notion of utility, which calls for reflexive research practice. For pragmatists, if a phenomenon has different layers, mixed-methods research can plug the gap by employing quantitative methods to measure some aspects of the phenomenon in question and qualitative methods for others (Feilzer, 2010: 8). In order to achieve true integration and transcend the forced dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative methods and data, pragmatism strives to look at phenomena from different perspectives and provide an enriched understanding (Jick, 1979: 603-604). At the methodological level, mixed-methods research occurs in different ways: the mixing of data, design, and analyses (Yin, 2018). These three types of mixing will guide my methodology section.

4.2.5 Validity

Validity ascertains whether the research design can accurately explain the phenomenon in relation to methodology, analysis and interpretation (Bush, 2012). Furthermore, "validity" in different types of research has different meanings (Cohen et al., 2018).

In quantitative research, validity means the accuracy of research data (Yilmaz, 2013: 318). If the results of the study measurement process are accurate, we can say the data can be valid. That means, a measurement instrument is valid to the degree that it measures what it is supposed to measure (Yilmaz, 2013: 318). Shadish et al. (2002: 37-38) put forward four main kinds of validity, including construct (i.e. the meaning, definition and operationalisation of factors), statistical conclusion (the appropriate use of statistics to determine correlation),

internal (valid relationship between research design and results), and external validity (generalisability). For survey section, this study measures its validity based on the four kinds of validity.

The concept of validity in quantitative research corresponds to the concepts of *trustworthiness* and *credibility* in qualitative research (Yilmaz, 2013). That means the study findings are accurate not only from the standpoint of the researcher but also from that of the participants and the readers of the research (Yilmaz, 2013: 319). According to Hartas, validity in qualitative research is the integrity of a study in terms of the accuracy of inferences and the trustworthiness of results (Hartas, 2010: 451). In many cases, validity in quantitative research is related to the faith in the assumptions underpinning the statistics, the construct, and content validity of the measure, as well as to careful sampling (Cohen et al., 2018: 247) and statistical conclusion validity (e.g. distributions of data, sample size, measurement) (Shadish et al., 2002).

Validity in this study was considered in accordance with the principles of validity in mixed-methods research outlined by Long (2015). Though the methods in mixed methods research must meet the specific validity requirement of quantitative and qualitative research, there are also specific validity requirements for mixed methods research (Cohen et al., 2018). From the main viewing of the sample, sequential issues, data conversation, and paradigmatic mixing, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) propose nine types of legitimation based on sample, data collection and analysis. Based on the work of Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, Long (2015) advocates a wider embrace of validity and argues that the issue of validity in mixed methods research has been confined to issues of design, procedures, methods and techniques. I reviewed all above types of validity.

Another area that requires great attention in research design is that it can ascertain true cause-and-effect relationships. Regarding causality, the post-positivist paradigm attempts to build valid cause-and-effect relationships between independent and dependent variables, while the interpretivist paradigm questions firstly whether causality is a valid concept for social science in the first place (Yin, 2018: 2). Therefore, I tested the validity of the survey and statistical models employed (see Chapter 4.5.2). The theoretical considerations in

composing the interview questions (Chapter Two) also clarify key notions, for example, what "social mobility of university graduates" means in the Chinese context of this study. Keeping track of notions ensures the validity of qualitative research.

4.2.6 Reliability

Reliability is widely discussed in quantitative research, but not in qualitative and mixed-methods research.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the concept of reliability is largely positivist, as it adheres to quantitative research rather than qualitative research. In quantitative research, to have reliability, a research must demonstrate that if it were carried out on similar group of participants with the same research methods in a similar context, then similar results would be obtained (Cohen et al., 2018). It is important to note the consistency or the degree to which a research instrument measures a given variable consistently every time it is used under the same condition with the same subjects (Yilmaz, 2013: 317). In other words, reliability applied to time not to the measurement instruments. From the different perspectives of approaches, there are 4 types of reliability, and they include *test-retest, parallel forms reliability, internal consistency reliability and inter-rater reliability* (Huck, 2000). In this study, I chose *test-retest reliability* to check the 61 questionnaire participants both taking part in pilot and main research, which shows highly positively correlated results.

However, Cohen et al. (2018) argue that reliability is relevant to both quantitative and qualitative research and involves three principles: stability, equivalence and internal consistency for quantitative research (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). In quantitative research, "reliability" refers to the exact replicability of the process and results, while in qualitative research, it mainly refers to consistency (Grossoehme, 2014). Five approaches are proposed to enhance the reliability in qualitative research: refutational analysis, constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, including deviant cases, and use of tables (Silverman, 2009). This study followed the five approaches to ensure the reliability of the in-depth interviews.

4.2.7 Generalisability

An important aspect of validity, generalisability belongs to external validity (Shadish et al., 2002), raising awareness of the implications of different types of samples to generate findings beyond a specific study (Yin, 2018). Generalisation is an act of reasoning that draws broad inferences from particular observations. It has increasingly become a quality standard in quantitative research. For qualitative research, too, generalisation has also been given careful attention (Polit & Beck, 2010).

However, generalisability has different aspects in quantitative and qualitative research. For instance, when researchers try to generalise to a large population, random samples may be employed, befitting the positivist paradigm. For the interpretivist paradigm, purposive samples may be targeted to compare with different kinds of cases not being studied and thus increase the transferability of findings to other cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2007: 78-80). In this study, statistical generalisation is mostly linked with quantitative research while analytic generalisation is mostly linked with qualitative research. Statistical generalisation focuses on sample choice, while analytic generalisation concentrates on the conceptualisations of processes and human experiences through in-depth scrutiny and higher-order abstraction (Polit & Beck, 2010: 1453). Through inductive analysis, qualitative research can reach insightful and inductive generalisations in relation to the phenomenon under study. In this study, generalising to a theory or to a conceptualization is an important matter that warrants a degree of generalisability regarding a field of understanding (Thorne et al., 2009). Therefore, how to link each interview data analysis to theoretical considerations (Chapter Two) is an important issue regarding generalisations.

4.3 Research design

Supported by a pragmatist paradigm, this study was carried out employing an explanatory sequential strategy. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the research process included two phases: pilot and main round.

4.3.1 Explanatory sequential design

In a pragmatic paradigm, utility is a main principle. Thus, the research design derives from the research questions laid out in Chapter One. In this study, the explanatory sequential strategy was selected. Explanatory sequential design includes a two-phase approach in which qualitative data is used to build on quantitative data collected in an earlier phase (Creswell, 2003). This design befits situations in which additional qualitative data are required to support findings from a quantitative study. In this study, the research subject is international graduates' social mobility, which contains many complicated layers in different dimensions. Some of the research questions were to be answered using a large-scale sample and map, while the others should be answered with detailed information.

Therefore, this study uses a pragmatic research paradigm to link mixed data and research methods to answer the research questions. Pragmatism, as an alternative paradigm, sidesteps the contentious discussions of truth and reality. According to pragmatists, there are singular and multiple realities open to empirical inquiry. The paradigm is suitable for solving practical problems. Pragmatism allows the researcher to be free of the mental and practical constraints imposed by the forced choice dichotomy between positivism and constructivism (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This would suggest that mixed research methods struggle to be truly integrated—in the sense of looking at social phenomena from different perspectives and providing enriched understandings (Feilzer, 2010).

Based on this paradigm, the reason for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods in this study was to improve the analysis by avoiding the limitations of using one type of data and balancing this with the strengths of another. Today's social mobility research has become a highly specialised and technical area, reshaped by the adoption and development of survey, which is seen as an exclusive method (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). Bertaux and Thompson (1997) argue that by using a sophisticated survey, the researcher can develop a clear overview of social mobility and a mathematical measurement of social justice by choosing a variety of data and mathematical models. Not only that, but the survey can provide far-sighted trends and predictions for social implications by describing statistically the relative sizes of flows within a society. The survey

provides numbers to be used to describe social phenomena. By selecting a representative sample, the researcher can generalise its empirical findings to the whole population. It can be concluded that mainstream social mobility studies tend to use quantitative methods of research. Quantitative methods have played a crucial role since the very first studies in the social mobility field, when social mobility was studied using specialised methods rather than with loose descriptions (Glass, 1954; Lockwood, 1958; Duncan, 1961; Blau & Duncan, 1967). Due to these advantages, in order to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, and 4, this study employed a large sample and statistical models to measure social mobility and the effects of specific factors.

Although a survey has many strengths, it has built-in limitations: characteristic weaknesses (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). In fact, numbers can only carry limited arguments and descriptions, while more space is required to show the centrality of subjective perceptions in social mobility. If solely quantitative methods were employed, this study would be able to achieve statistical data and model in relation to patterns of social mobility, but many hidden details would be lost. Studying social mobility requires individual stories (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997), as it is what happens within a family and social context. Therefore, an abundant source of subjective information is needed for a complete study. More importantly, at the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked for their suggestions regarding the questionnaire and additional information about this study. This generated plenty of qualitative data, in terms of the participants' answers to inquiries about the validity of the questions, comments on their answers, and suggestions regarding the methodology. Using a pragmatic research paradigm, this study did not ignore these data. Instead, it incorporated sequential in-depth interviews to explore these emerging issues in greater depth. This was a further reason for conducting the second phase. The sequential or two-phase design provided the flexibility required adapting the second stage to the findings from the first phase.

Mixed-methods research designs have been employed widely in studies of international graduates in China. For instance, Hao, Wen and Welch (2016) employ mixed methods to examine how international higher education shaped graduates' subsequent employment after their graduation and return to China. Using survey

and in-depth interviews, Hao, Wen & Welch analyse the detailed data relating to the returnees' employment development and the hidden causes. Similar to Hao, Wen and Welch's research, Mok et al. (2017a) employ mixed methods to explore how international or transnational higher education affects the job searches and career development of university graduates, with particular reference to perspectives of employable skills and contextual influences. Based on the existing studies, it can be seen that a mixed-methods research approach has been employed effectively in the study of international graduates. This provides strong support for using the methodological design in this study, too. Therefore, considering the strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research designs and the practical needs to answer the research questions, this study combined quantitative and qualitative research methods, thereby improving the level of analysis by avoiding the limitations of using only one type of data. On this basis, the understanding for integrating different ways of knowing can be improved (Bergh & Ketchen, 2009).

4.3.2 Pilot and main round

The data collection and analysis consisted of two stages: a pilot and main round. In the pilot research, 61 valid questionnaires were collected and analysed, comprising 30 questionnaires completed by international graduates and 31 by home graduates. Based on the feedback of the 61 participants, two minor changes were made to the questionnaire. After minor revisions, the questionnaire was deemed to be acceptable and comprehensible for the respondents. A question regarding the effect of policies on master's graduates was improved by specifying the scope of the policies. The other change was an improvement to an expression about employment history. The vague language of the previous expressions induced the participants to submit inappropriate answers. After these minor changes, the questionnaire was sent to 8 participants (4 international graduates and 4 home graduates) for a final review, to ensure the final version was acceptable and understandable. From the 61 participants completing the questionnaires, four participants were selected for the sequential in-depth interviews. In order to ensure a good gender balance, two male and two female participants were selected. Also for balance, two of the interviewees were international graduates and the other two were home graduates. After the

interview data were collected, it was found to be insufficient for thematic analysis, because many individual stories did not contain enough details for analysis, which gave further implications for next main round research.

Then, the main research was carried out. At this stage, 756 valid questionnaires and 20 valid interviews were collected. In the main research, I strived to dig individual stories and experiences and emotional expressions as many as I can during the in-depth interview so that enough information could be collected.

4.4 Data

4.4.1 Survey

In China, existing studies on social mobility are mainly based on interpretative research. Their theoretical considerations are discussed widely by Chinese scholars. Although there is emerging empirical research, there is no Chinese national survey data exclusively aiming at gathering data for social mobility research. Therefore, such survey data are still extremely difficult to obtain even today (Bian, 2002). As a result, researchers tend to employ part of the national social science survey data and variables for social mobility research. Moreover, there are few surveys of international graduates' social mobility and success after their graduation and return to China. This was the situation I faced when I collected my first-hand data.

The survey questionnaire used in this study to collect data was mainly developed based on Kinloch and Perrucci's survey. Kinloch and Perrucci (1969) seek to understand how higher education affects individual social mobility by collecting and analysing 3,360 completed questionnaires. Their survey mainly focuses on social origin, academic attainments, college selectivity, college prestige, and current occupational condition. Although Kinloch and Perrucci's survey can be seen as the classic basis for social mobility surveys, this study also required the consideration of specifically Chinese characteristics, such as social class classifications. In addition to using Kinloch and Perrucci's survey, this study also took Dong and Chen's (2013) survey as a reference. Dong and Chen's (2013) research investigates the influence of higher education on social mobility based on

2,300 completed questionnaires and 230 interviews. For the questionnaire design, Dong and Chen consider source, amount, level, type, region, orientation, qualification and speed of social mobility. Their research pays exclusive attention to educational aspects. Besides its sophisticated design of including independent variables, Dong and Chen's research also classified all of the China's existing occupations into five tiers. The occupation classification also conforms to Lu's research. In Lu's early research (2002), he defines 10 social classes by different occupations according to economic, political and social capitals, which is a basic and ongoing social class mode used in contemporary China. Therefore, the survey in this study is based on the social class classification defined by the surveys of Dong and Chen and Lu, with the integration of current representative surveys. Then, this study selected variables from Dong and Chen's research, including registered residence, university reputation, location of university, university programme, and Grade-Point Average (GPA).

In the questionnaire (Appendix Three), there are four sections. The first section introduces the goals and significance of this study, the ethical issues, and the instructions on how to answer the questions. In the second section, the participants' demographic information is collected. The following section is the main part, which collects data regarding social mobility. The last section includes two free questions: suggestions or anything comments about this questionnaire, and willingness to take part in a sequential in-depth interview.

Because the subjects in this study are Chinese graduates, I translated the questions into Chinese to ensure their full understanding. In order to ensure the quality of translation, three Chinese university teachers and two Chinese master's-level graduates reviewed the questionnaire in order to ensure that was acceptable and understandable and correctly translated. Then, the pilot research provided the feedback necessary to revise it. According to the feedback, the questionnaire was improved after the two aforementioned minor changes were made.

For reasons of efficiency and convenience and the need to obtain a large-scale sample, the questionnaires were distributed online. In hard-to-reach and hard-to-involve populations, online sampling can expand the geographical scope

of research and increase levels of confidence (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

4.4.2 In-depth interview

The conceptual framework also highlights the importance of investigating graduates' career development experiences and social mobility stories after their graduation. As qualitative research is fundamentally interpretative, it can reveal the depth of students' success, the influential factors, and the links between higher education and success.

Qualitative methods are usually used in studying the experience and perceptions of international higher education and international graduates as they provide more evidence with which to study subjects. Punch (1998) argues that interviews are a useful tool to elicit interviewees' views, meanings and reality. Therefore, the interview method fits my intention to build an interactive situation for data collection, because interviews can encourage participants to speak about their inner states (Seale, 1998).

I chose the in-depth interview method because it can provide space for flexibility in future analysis and can potentially cover more areas (Bryman, 2004; Seidman, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 2010). The in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured interview in this study was flexible and could provide new ideas and allow for better comparisons between interviewees. The in-depth interviews were carried out face to face, and the interview questions were derived from the main research questions and the existing literature. The existing literature extensively discusses questions such as returning/post-return status and impact (Hao et al., 2017), entrepreneurship performance (Li et al., 2012), career outcomes (Lin-Stephens, Uesi & Doherty, 2015), and educational attainments (Iannelli & Huang, 2014). Considering the main research question and the existing research, ten questions were designed for the interview, with great attention paid to university choice, master's study experience and outcomes, future expectations, current occupation situation, factors relating to occupational outcomes, family situation, and opinions of international and home graduates. All of the interview questions were aimed at recapping those of the questionnaire and digging further to uncover more and new information. From the piloted pre-test, the interview questions were deemed to be acceptable and easily understood (see Appendix

Five).

Each interview lasted from between one hour and one and a half hours and was conducted in a quiet location, such as a café or meeting room. At the beginning of each interview, I outlined the goals and significance of this study, as well as the relevant ethical issues and procedures. Then, I talked about the participants' current lives as a way of warming them up. All of the interviewees showed positive attitudes and quickly engaged in the interviews. The whole interview process was audio recorded, and no risks or accidents were encountered.

4.4.3 Language issues

The questionnaire distributed online to the participants was in English. In this study, all of the participants were master's-level graduates, so they were able to understand English. According to the feedback from the pilot study, the questionnaire in English was easily understandable.

All of the participants were offered a choice of language for the interview (English or Chinese); they all preferred Chinese. They felt more comfortable sharing their personal experiences and able to discuss issues in greater depth in their mother tongue. As the researcher was also Chinese, using this language helped to avoid misunderstandings between the researcher and the interviewees, and facilitated the sequential transcription process and date coding.

Before coding, I translated all interviews into English. In the process, objectivity and the practical contexts were the two main guidelines. In the transcription process, I encountered many specific Chinese terms that cannot be translated, such as *Hukou* or *Bianzhi*. I kept these terms in Chinese in the coding process and related them to the existing literature to ensure that all texts were close to their original meanings.

4.4.4 Participants

Survey participants

In order to reduce the sample bias, I employed various strategies to recruit

diversified participants. The online questionnaires were distributed with the help of academic and administration staff at 62 China's universities. Alumni centres at Chinese universities were also approached to find the most suitable participants. Moreover, I also sought help from the human resources departments of public administration/private/foreign companies of 27 cities in China. Through these networks, I was able to contact large number of international graduates. International returnee participants were also recruited through a WeChat group (Chinese students studying abroad tend to join such a group). There are over 980 million Wechat Users by 2017 (China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, 2017), and 8 out of 10 Chinese phone owners use WeChat (Long, 2017). According to the statistical data from Chinese Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2018), by the end of 2017, the number of rural Internet users reached 219 million, and WeChat is the most popular networking application among the rural population, attracting 27.9% of users and far surpassing the Twitter or Weibo platform (CNNIC, 2017). Additionally, the survey participants were master-level graduates and most of Chinese master-level graduates work and live in urban areas (Nie & Liu, 2018). Therefore, online survey was an efficient and suitable method for the scope of this study. Before the main data collection round, I conducted a pilot study in order to ensure the validity and reliability. At the pilot stage, 48 survey questionnaires were collected and assessed, and I found the questionnaire as valid and the data were valid and reliable.

Finally, 915 completed questionnaires were collected, consisting of 419 from international graduates and 496 from home graduates. After being checked, 347 completed questionnaires from international graduates and 409 from home graduates were deemed to be valid. The 159 invalid questionnaires were removed because they were either incomplete or completed by the wrong subjects. According to the demographic information of survey participants, their age ranges from 22 to 33 years old. On average, they had working experience of 2 - 3 years. The surveyed population was relatively young and did not reach occupational maturity. This was important for this study, which looked at the intergenerational mobility and the role of family in education and social mobility. If the sample would be older and reached occupational maturity, it would be difficult to tell whether ascribed or achieved factors are important for social mobility. The 409 home graduates in the survey did not experience international higher education.

From social origin perspective, international graduates in the survey had more advantaged social origin than their peers. Almost all participants of international graduates came from urban areas while 35% of home graduates were from rural areas (see Table 5-1).

Although the snowball technique can bring higher response rate, it increases the likelihood of sampling biases. As there was no national survey data suitable for this study, the first-hand data collection was the best and the most efficient way to gather information. Under the circumstances, the strategy of data collection is appropriate in this study. I checked the diversity of sample in order to ensure the validity of research design. The sample of participants shows high diversity; with the 756 participants' places of origin and current residence locations spread over 32 provinces and 183 cities. The participants graduated from over 200 different universities and majored in a wide range of subjects, including engineering, the sciences, the social sciences, the arts and humanities. Their current employment was also varied, with positions such as civil servants, common clerks, teachers, engineers, doctors and governmental roles. Moreover, I also kept gender and age balanced within the sample (see Tables 4-1). The spatial distribution of participants also supports the sample diversity. In Chapter Five, I found that the distribution of the 347 participants' registered places of residence across the three parts of the country (eastern, central and western provinces) conforms to the general distribution of China's population as a whole, with the population distribution being 14:9:1 in the eastern, central and western provinces respectively. Therefore, the diversity of the sample of this study can reflect several aspects of diversity in the whole population. The strength of the diverse nature of the sample for suitably conditioned between-group comparison should be noted. Finally, due to very broad communication with participants and various strategies for recruiting them, the potential contacts between participants and then bias was reduced. This recruitment strategy enhances the validity and generalisability of the research findings.

Participants in the interviews

Among the 756 valid questionnaire participants, over 140 respondents expressed an interest in taking part in the in-depth interview. In order to achieve a balanced distribution regarding gender, university, GAP, residence of origin, current

residence, and subject, purposive sampling methods was employed to recruit interviewees so as to ensure the selection was as diverse as possible (Seidman, 2006). Finally, I selected 30 interview participants, including 20 targeted interviewees and 10 back-up interviewees in case of unexpected dropouts. The 20 targeted interviewees comprised 10 international graduates and 10 home graduates. Considering the balance of gender, residence, education, I selected 10 male interviewees and 10 female interviewees. The 20 interviewees had totally different residences of origin and current residences, undergraduate universities, master's universities, GPAs, and study subjects.

Table 4-1 Demographic information of international and home graduates

	Home graduates (N=409)		International graduates (N=347)	
	No.	Ratio	No.	ratio
Age				
A.19-21	0	0%	0	0%
B.22-24	0	0%	16	4.61%
C.25-27	127	31.05%	279	80.4%
D.28-30	245	59.9%	42	12.11%
E. ≥30	37	9.05%	10	2.88%
Only one child in family?				
A. Yes	187	45.72%	267	76.95%
B. No	222	54.28%	80	23.05%
Gender				
A. Male	178	43.52%	140	40.35%
B. Female	231	56.48%	207	59.65%
From one-parent family?				
A. Yes	26	6.36%	21	6.05%
B. No	383	93.64%	326	93.95%
Current work situation				
A. Employed	357	87.29%	278	80.12%
B. Unemployed	52	12.71%	69	19.88%
Current work place				
A. Foreign or Sino-foreign company	28	6.85%	83	23.92%
B. Chinese private company	86	21.03%	95	27.38%
C. Chinese public company/institution	198	48.41%	79	22.77%
D. Family business	1	0.24%	2	0.58%
E. I have my own business	13	3.18%	13	3.75%
F. Government	30	7.33%	5	1.44%
G. no option in list	2	0.49%	2	0.58%
H. Blank	51	12.47%	68	19.6%

4.4.5 Ethical issues

This study could be assessed as low risk because all participants were over 18 years old. The research topic did not directly involve issues deemed to be highly sensitive; although as with most areas of research, there was a possibility that the study could move into areas that the participant may feel uncomfortable or distressed by; hence, I needed to make sure I was aware of such potentially sensitive areas before the data collection. Thus, I complied with the latest 2018 British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) ethical guidelines. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured with the questionnaire and the one-to-one in-depth interview.

First, before completing the questionnaire, the participants were assured that their data would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw from this research at any time, and any data collected from them would be destroyed if they so requested. They were made aware that their data would be used absolutely exclusively for this study, and no third person or agent had access to them. Moreover, all participants would remain anonymous in the final presentation. At the start of the questionnaire, the research content, aims and all ethical issues were highlighted with detailed explanations. Ethical issues included confidential agreements, anonymity, data use, and storage. Filling in the questionnaire meant the participants agreed with all of the ethical rules, as was also highlighted at the beginning of the questionnaire. The in-depth interview started with a brief warm-up to ensure the participants did not feel distressed. Then, the ethical issues regarding the interview data were repeated again. A formal consent form containing research content, purposes, and all confidential rules was shown to the interviewees who were required to sign it. All signed consent forms were kept in a safe place. During the interview process, the participants' emotions were observed at all times, and the whole process was recorded using audio equipment. If any possible distress should appear, the participant would be asked whether he or she would like to temporarily or permanently halt the interview. Last but not least, the participants were assured that all of their personal data would be stored in a password-protected mobile device as soon as the thesis is completed. In line with the data protection rules of the University of Glasgow, all research data will be kept in a safe device for 10 years after the completion of this research. The hardcopy documents will be destroyed using a shredder after the thesis is

complete.

Having reassured them regarding all of these ethical issues, the participants were likely to be willing to disclose any problems or concerns they felt regarding their master's education and career development.

4.5 Data analysis

After mixed data were collected, mapping analysis, multi-regression modelling, and thematic analysis were employed respectively.

4.5.1 Mapping analysis

In the last decade, significant advances have been made in tracking technology, and we can now obtain a wide range of geo-referenced disaggregate spatial behaviour data (Petrenko et al., 2014). Mapping analysis was employed to present, explain and compare the data. Compared with traditional methods, mapping analysis can support large-scale surveys (Griffiths, Smith, & Paron, 2011) and provide a wide range of geo-referenced disaggregate spatial behaviour data to demonstrate the process of sequential mobility in a clear way (Petrenko et al., 2012).

Spatial mobility, closely connected with social mobility, was measured and presented via mapping analysis in this study. The graduates' spatial mobility relates to the locations in which they were born, where they study and where they work. This is the process by which their upward social mobility takes place. Further, the features and supportive factors of their social mobility can be detected and then deciphered. Targeting the graduates' spatial mobility between birthplace, study place, and workplace, this research, based on a large sample and the use of mapping analysis, can answer Research Question 4. Mapping analysis supports large-scale surveys (Griffiths, Smith & Paron, 2011) and maps containing all spatial mobility information can be presented visually and clearly.

The online survey data were collected in the graduates' birthplaces, at their master's universities, and in the Chinese cities they currently inhabited. In order

to identify the relationships between labour market outcomes, social origin, and spatial mobility, the questionnaire also collected employment and social class origin data. Although all of the international graduates in this study obtained their master's degrees in the UK, this section focuses on their spatial mobility within China and does not consider the location of their master's universities. After reviewing all of the collected questionnaires, 756 were found to be valid, and included 347 questionnaires completed by international graduates and 409 by home graduates. The complete data included the international graduates' registered residence and the Chinese city in which they were currently living, as well as the home graduates' registered residence, the location of their master's universities, and the city which they currently inhabited. In order to have a clear classification of rural and urban areas, the online questionnaire required participants to submit detailed information on their registered residence and current living place (e.g., Zhongshan Village, Shu County, Liu'an City, Anhui Province).

The sample of participants shows high diversity; with the 756 participants' places of origin and current residence locations spread over 32 provinces and 183 cities. The participants graduated from over 200 different universities and majored in a wide range of subjects, including engineering, the sciences, the social sciences, and arts and humanities. Their current employment was also varied, with positions including civil servant, office clerk, teacher, engineer, doctor, and governmental roles. Moreover, we attempted to make the sample diversity by keeping gender and age balanced (see Tables 4-1).

The online questionnaires were distributed with the help of academic and administration staff at 62 of China's universities. Alumni centres at Chinese universities were also approached to find the most suitable participants. International returnee participants were firstly recruited through a WeChat group (Chinese students studying abroad tend to join such a group). Afterwards, the snowball technique was used to recruit further participants. Employing snowball sampling in the process of recruiting participants contributed to a higher response rate than would have been possible through random recruitment and increased the sample diversity (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

Targeting the master's graduates' mobility between place of origin (birthplace), study place and workplace, their spatial mobility, which is closely connected with social mobility, was measured and presented via mapping analysis. On the basis of the data collected in the online survey, 756 participants provided information on their place of origin, university location, and current place of residence. The answers were specified down to the village level, which could illuminate specific patterns of the spatial mobility of the research targets. Using GIS software, all data were imported and then a series of maps were produced. The maps for the home graduates consisted of their places of origin, the location of their master's universities, and their places of current residence, while the maps for the international graduates included their places of origin and current residence. Since the returnees in this study had obtained their master's degrees in the UK and then returned to China, their master's university locations were not in China. Thus, only residence of origin and current residence were studied when looking at international graduates. Figures 5-1, 5-5 and 5-7 were produced using GIS software and were used to expound and compare the spatial mobility and the social mobility of graduates in China.

In the process of producing a descriptive analysis of the spatial mobility of the two types of surveyed graduates, this study found that there is a clustering pattern inherent in the spatial mobility of returnees' mobility and that of home graduates. Thus, a hotspot analysis was conducted. Hotspot analysis is used to visualise geographical data in order to show areas where a higher density, or cluster, of activity occurs. In this case, a pattern of inequality related to spatial mobility can be revealed. A red colour gradient is used to indicate areas of increasingly higher density. Based on the collected data, this study sequentially conducted hotspot analysis using the local spatial statistic tool Getis-Ord Gi* (Ord & Getis, 1995). The G-statistic (G_i) can indicate whether research targets with high values or low values tend to cluster in a particular area (Wei, Yuan, & Liao, 2013). The Gi can be expressed in the following equation:

$$G_i(d) = \frac{[\sum_j w_{i,j}(d) x_j]}{\sum_j x_j} \quad (j \neq i)$$

In this equation, the subscripts refer to the number of sub-regions of an area;

x_j refers to an observation for sub-region j. [$w_{ij}(d)$] is a symmetric binary spatial weight matrix. In the matrix, j represents each case that is within distance d of a given case i. The inclusion of d in the definition of the statistic is not essential. Instead, it highlights that the technique can be used to discover clusters at a range of different spatial scales by varying d. In this article, if the spatial mobility within a specific city is high and those of its neighbouring cities are high as well, it is part of a hotspot. A city's local sum of spatial mobility and its nearby cities are compared proportionally to the total sum of all cities in China. In order to measure whether there is a significant difference between the local sum and expected spatial mobility, a Z score (Z_i) is introduced. The Z score can be calculated using the following equation:

$$Z_i = \frac{\left[G_i(d) - E\left(G_i(d)\right)\right]}{\left[Var\left(G_i(d)\right)\right]^{\frac{1}{2}}}$$

In the Z_i equation, $G_i(d)$ is the G-statistic. $E\left(G_i(d)\right)$ denotes the expected value of G_i. $Var\left(G_i(d)\right)$ represents the variance of G_i. In summary, the G_i and Z_i equations explain the principles of hotspots. Based on the principles, hotspot maps are produced (see Figures 5-3, 5-4, 5-8, 5-9 and 5-10).

4.5.2 Multiple regression model

Regression models, as a statistical technique, are used to estimate the relationships between variables that have reason-and-result relations. If one dependent variable and more than one independent variable need to be studied, a multiple regression model will be required (Walliman, 2006). Multiple regression models can accurately calculate relevant degree and fitness degree, especially when various variables exist. This study included a variety of independent variables and one dependent variable, so the multiple regression model was employed to analyse the quantitative data. In addition, for multiple regression models, normality and linearity must be examined (Uyanik & Guler, 2013), as outlined in the following paragraphs. In this study, SPSS software was used to generate the model. All results are presented in Chapter Six.

The multiple regression model can be statistically expressed as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \cdots + \beta_p x_{p+}\varepsilon \quad \varepsilon \sim N(0,\sigma^2)$$

In this model, the number of independent variables is p. $x_1, x_2, \cdots x_p$ are independent variables while Y is the dependent variable. $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p, \sigma^2$ are unknown parameters having no relationship with $x_1, x_2, \cdots x_p$. Similar to the univariate regression model, the multiple regression model still uses ordinary least squares (OLS) to measure parameters $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p$. In this process, sum of square of errors is firstly applied: $Q(\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p) = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \beta_0 - \beta_1 x_{i1} - \beta_2 x_{i2} - \cdots - \beta_p x_{ip})^2$. OLS here aims to measure the smallest value of $\hat{\beta} = (\hat{\beta}0,\ \hat{\beta}1,\ \cdots, \hat{\beta}p)^T$ that can minimise the value of Q. Because $Q(\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p)$ is the square of $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p$, the smallest value must be available. Afterwards, according to the extremum principle of multivariable calculus, after obtaining the partial derivative of Q and assigning 0 to Q, $\hat{\beta} = (x^T x)^{-1} x^T Y$ can be obtained. And the $\hat{\beta} = (x^T x)^{-1} x^T Y$ is the OLS measurement of β. Because there are two types of research targets, two models were established respectively.

Dependent variable

After the model was established, the variable system needed to be built. Mainstream practice of OLS is to use continuous variables. This thesis topic focused on social mobility, and according to the research questions and research design, many ordinal variables were included. In social science research using OLS, some researchers also take this strategy (see for example Bussemakers & Kraaykamp, 2020; Casacci & Pareto, 2015; Fishman, 2019; Lalla, 2017; Liu, 2019; Su et al., 2018). Taking Bussemakers and Kraaykamp's research (2020) as an example, they measured education attainments based on ordinal variables such as primary education, PhD or post-academic education. The debated central issues concern the definitions and the characteristics of ordinal data involving the prohibition of the algebraic operations between them, as consequence of an explicit exclusion of equidistance between levels of measurement of each ordinal variable. In fact, if there were equidistance, it would be an interval scale (Lalla, 2017:436). Similarly, Liu (2019) also took this strategy to model the relationships between Chinese young adults' social mobility and family background. Based on

Lu's (2002) social class classification, Liu (2019) employed multi regression model which includes same-scale ordinal variables. Social mobility is a complicated social phenomenon which includes many different kinds of variables (Liu, 2019: 19). If the variables have different scale, logit could be considered. The similar research provides methodological support for the models used in this thesis. Mainstream practice also uses categorical regression approaches (e.g. logit), which is a statistical procedure used to investigate research question with focus on the prediction of a discrete, categorical outcome variable from one or more explanatory variables (Timothy, 2013:145). Logit can model variables which are not continuous. Based on the log ratio, variables can be included in the logit model. However, in my thesis, considering that the scales of every ordinal variable, ranging from 1 to 5, have the same scale range (1-5), it is acceptable without doing logit.

Doubtlessly, the dependent variable is the social mobility that was measured by occupation. Among the extant research, occupation is the most commonly used measurement of social mobility (Blau, 1956; Halsey, 1989; Grusky & Weeden, 2005; Mazumder & Acosta, 2014; Hertel, 2017). Although it is the subject of many debates (e.g. Erikson et al., 2012; Savage, Devine & Cunningham, 2013), occupation is an efficient measurement widely used in social mobility research. It is very easy to measure social mobility by occupation as the occupation category in China has been classified in plenty of studies. Other measurements, such as cultural factors, taste, and habits are hard to measure, taking Bourdieu's theory as an example. In China, salary is not a good measurement of social mobility due to the imbalance between social class and salary.

Therefore, this study determined to measure social mobility by occupation. Among China's current occupations, Lu (2002) divides all jobs into 10 social classes (state and society administrator, manager, private enterprise owner, technological specialist, clerk and officer worker, individual entrepreneur, commercial and service worker, industrial worker, farmer, unemployed) and five large categories. All of the subsequent sequential studies have taken Lu's research as the basis of social class research. This study also used Lu's social class categories to divide participants' occupations. The dependent variable has different tiers regarding social class and status and capital (Lu, 2002; Li, 2011), indicating that it is an

ordinal variable in the multi regression model. In pragmatic need, the scales, such as education level and occupations, between different ordinal variables cannot be measured as equidistance. Thus, the difference between two ordinal categorical variables can be characterised as a discrete scale. Nevertheless, mainstream practice would be to use categorical regression approaches (e.g. logit). This tension has been acknowledged, and it can be justified on pragmatic grounds. I designed all ordinal variable scales with 5 tiers based on the existing survey designs and pragmatic needs, which ensures the model is valid. By making comparisons between their fathers' occupations and the participants' occupations, the participants' social mobility was marked and calculated. Furthermore, through the questionnaires, the participants' workplaces were also investigated, which could be helpful with occupation classification, because the misuse of titles in China is very common. For example, in China, a clerk in a study abroad agency is also called a teacher.

Independent variables

In terms of determining independent variables, this study used two strategies. Firstly, it took the existing survey by Kinloch and Perrucci (1969) as a reference. Kinloch and Perrucci's (1969) survey included the variables of college grade, college prestige, and social origins. On the basis of Kinloch and Perrucci's survey, I chose the following independent variables: father's education degree and occupation, mother's education degree and occupation, undergraduate and master's university GPA, and university reputation.

Parental education degree and occupation refer to the participant's parents' professional level. The two variables are unavoidable ones in studying social mobility, because they are directly related to the participant's social origin. Back in the 1950s, in order to investigate the social class of Cambridge University graduates, Jenkins and Caradog (1950) analysed the subjects' paternal education degree and occupation. Following Jenkins and Jones, Halsey (1989) employs route analysis and also introduces paternal education background and occupation into the index system. In Kinloch and Perrucci's (1969) survey, they highlight paternal education background. Early research focuses on paternal education and occupation, but neglects mother's education and occupation due to the impact of patriarchy (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). However, with the rise of feminism,

mothers' roles in a family should be taken into considerations in social mobility research. As a mother can affect her child's scholastic achievements and life chances (Toomey, 1989), this study took the participants' mothers' education and occupations into consideration as well. In this study, educational background mainly includes academic performance at university. In terms of social mobility, the most important factor is higher education, and this is the area that has been most widely studied (Burlutskaia, 2014). Many Chinese scholars still hold the view that higher education is a main means of upward social mobility in China (Peng, 2007). More specifically, higher education is, to some extent, regarded as the entry requirement for obtaining decent and well-paid jobs in China (Zhou, 2008). In order to assess the effects of higher education, GPA and university reputation are two important variables.

Plenty of research also explores other factors affecting social mobility that are not studied in current surveys. Therefore, this study selected several factors so as to connect with this recent research and Chinese characteristics. These factors are residence of origin (*Hukou*), current residence, one-child family, gender, single-parent family, master's course, master's tutor, and national policies on employment, entrepreneurship or talent introduction of postgraduates. While some studies do consider residence of origin when studying social mobility, in China, it is an unavoidable topic due to the geographic inequality. China's registered residence policy determines individual wellbeing in education, medical treatment, and purchase of house. *Hukou,* the old Maoist institution, still plays a pivotal role in individual life chances in China (Tsang, 2013). Those with rural *Hukou* origins face less favourable chances (Li & Zhao, 2017). In this study, the city classifications standard stems from official Chinese denominations. Chinese cities are divided into five tiers according to municipal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and registered population. This study used the city classifications offered by Chinese National Bureau of Statistics in 2018 (CNBS, 2018) which is an official classification. According to the city classification defined by CNBS (2018), there are five ties, and I assign values (1-5) to every city. Analysing the changes of residence can provide information about the space within which social mobility is achieved, and the features of social mobility can be ascertained.

"One child" is a new variable and refers to whether or not the participant is an

only child. This variable is derived from the theory of economic and time resources. Resources are more important than class culture (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Chin & Phillips, 2004). In the multiple regression model, “one-child” is a dummy variable. If the participant is the only child, the value “1” is assigned, if not, it is marked “0”. Similar to “one child”, the “single-parent family” variable is also derived from the theory of economic and time resources. Participants in a single-parent family must cope with many adjustment problems, particularly in social relationships (Cheung & Liu, 1997). Social class is related to unfavourable family situations and occupational components, such as, time-flexible jobs and more children. Unequally distributed time and economic resources can determine individual life chances.

Gender is a necessary and prevalent variable in recent social mobility research (Hao & Chen, 2013). In fact, gender differentiates social mobility taking place in many countries, even among the most mature market economies. In China, gender inequality still persists in job-hunting. The emergence of labour markets, coupled with gendered role differentiation within families as prescribed by patriarchal traditions, increases gender gaps in job mobility (Cao & Hu, 2007). In addition, males tend to earn higher salaries than females, and can therefore obtain more opportunities for upward social mobility than females (Chen, 2014). Gender, in the multiple regression model, is also a dummy variable. “1” means male and “0” represents female.

There is a rich body of research on UK master’s courses from different perspectives (Tian & Low, 2012; Bamber, 2014; Stelma & Fay, 2014). Although it is a very significant factor in international graduates’ study, few studies consider master’s programmes when studying social mobility. In relation to master’s tutors, there is a great deal of work exploring the role of the tutor in students’ development (e.g. Youens & McCarthy, 2007; Sun, Chen & Huang, 2013; Ross et al., 2014). Given their importance, this study uses the multiple regression model in an attempt to uncover the significance of the role of master’s tutors. The last independent variable is “Chinese national policies on employment, entrepreneurship or talent introduction”. National policies have very significant positive effects on returnees in terms of their entrepreneurship (Wan, 2013), talent introduction (Huang, Chen & Chen, 2014), and China’s domestic technological development (Chen & Yang,

2013). For example, in order to attract returnees, Beijing launched a policy to grant them registered residence if they live in Beijing. Therefore, national policies have played important role in promoting individual development. For a summary of these variables, see Table 4-2; Table 4-3 shows the coding of variables:

Table 4-2 Variables and definitions

Variable category	Variables	Abbr	Definitions
Background information	gender	G	male or female
	one child	OC	whether this participant is the only child in his or her family
	one parent	OP	whether this participant is from a one-parent family
	birthplace	BP	city this participant comes from
	living place	LP	city this participant is living in
Parental information	father's occupation	FO	this participant's father's occupation
	father's education	FE	educational level of this participant's father
	mother's occupation	MO	this participant's mother's occupation
	mother's education	ME	educational level of this participant's mother
Educational information	undergraduate university	UU	university at which this participant obtained his or her bachelor's degree
	undergraduate GPA	UG	GPA of this participant when he or she graduated from undergraduate university
	master's university	MU	university at which this participant obtained his or her master's degree
	master's GPA	MG	GPA of this participant when he or she graduated from master's university
others	master's curriculum	MC	how important are master's courses to career development?
	master's supervisor	MS	how important is master's supervisor to career development?
	policies	P	how important are employment, entrepreneurship and talent policies to this participant's sequential career development?

Table 4-3 Coding of variables

Variables \ Scores	5	4	3	2	1
University GPA	≥90% in China A in UK	≥85% in China B+ in UK	≥80% in China B in UK	≥70% in China C+ in UK	≥60% in China C in UK
University ranking	Top 9 universities in China REF ranking from 1 to 10	"985 project" universities in China REF ranking from 11 to 30	"211 project" universities in China REF ranking from 31 to 50	"Yiben" universities in China REF ranking from 51 to 80	"Erben" or "Sanben" universities in China REF ranking from 81 to 154
Parental education	Higher education	Vocational or high school education	Secondary school education	Primary school education	No formal education
Parental occupation (social class)	State or society administrator, professional manager	Private enterprise owner, technological specialist	Clerk and officer worker, individual entrepreneur	Commercial and service worker, industrial worker	Farmer, unemployed
City	First tier cities	Second tier cities	Third tier cities	Fourth tier cities	Fifth tier cities

Note: the city is coded by the classification criteria of CNBS (2018). The gender, only one child and single parent family are dummy variables. The master curriculum, master supervisor and talent policies are perceived by participants and assessed from value of 1 to 5.

For quality control and validity, a test of significance, including *F*-test and *T*-test, was carried out. In this study, the hypothesis of relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable was tested using the multi-regression model. I supposed there were linear relationships between the independent variables and dependent variables. Therefore, after the multiple regression model was established, it was necessary to conduct a test of significance of linear relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

An *F*-test can assess the significance of the model. In other words, an F-test evaluates whether all of the regression coefficients ($\beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p$) are, at the same time, approaching 0. So are null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis. The null hypothesis (H_0) can be expressed as: $H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \cdots = \beta_p = 0$, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is that not all $\beta_1, \beta_2 \cdots \beta_p$ are 0. Before figuring out the F value, it is necessary to know the SST (total sum of squares), SSR (regression sum of squares), MSR (mean square of regression), MSE (mean square of error), and SSE (error sum of squares). At this condition, SST=SSR+SSE is still workable. The degree

of freedom of SST, SSR and SSE is $df_T = n - 1, df_R = p, df_E = n - p - 1$ respectively. *p*, in the three equations, represents the number of independent variables, and *n* is the number of observed variables in reality. Further, MSR and MSE can be obtained as follows: MSR=SSR/ df_R, MSE=SSE/ df_E. When H_0 works, the equation F=MSR/MSE~F(df_R, df_E) is tested, which is the process of the *F*-test. In conclusion, the *F*-test works for testing whether the dependent variable has significant relationships with overall independent variables. Therefore, by carrying out the *F*-test, the model in this research can be tested for its validity and reliability.

The *F*-test can assess the significance of the model, but it cannot ensure every independent variable has the significant linear relationship with the dependent variable. After confirming that the regression model is significant, this model requires a *T*-test to inspect every independent variable. A *T*-test verifies the significance of every single coefficient by establishing a null hypothesis (H_0) and alternative hypothesis (H_1).

$$H_0: \beta_i = 0, \quad H_1: \beta_i \neq 0, \ (i = 1,2, \cdots p)$$

$COV(\hat{\beta}) = \sigma^2 (X'X)^{-1}$ is known, C_{ii} is the element of number *i* in leading diagonal in matrix $(X'X)^{-1}$, so the variance of estimator is $Var(\hat{\beta}_i) = \sigma^2 C_{ii}$. In addition, MSE=SSE/ df_E is calculated as estimator of σ^2, when H_0 is workable, $t_i = \frac{\widehat{\beta_i}}{\sqrt{MSE * C_{ii}}}$~t(n-p-1). On the basis of above equations, the *T*-test can be carried out, and thus the significance of every independent variable can be inspected.

Given its advantages, this study selected the multiple regression model to analyse the quantitative data. After building the variable system, this study conducted *F*-tests and *T*-tests in order to ensure the model and all independent variables were valid and reliable.

4.5.3 Thematic analysis

The in-depth interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, a foundational method made popular by Braun and Clarke. Thematic analysis can allow the researcher to identify and interpret key features of the data, guided by the

research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2017). More specifically, thematic analysis can provide accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from interview data.

The 20 interviews were recorded using voice-recording equipment and were transcribed onto hard copies. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, but the transcriptions were presented in English for convenient analysis and future review. All of the translation manuscripts were reviewed by two professors of English who work at a Chinese university to ensure the reliability of translation and confirm that all transcribed information accurately represented the interviewees' original meanings. All of the transcribed interview hardcopies were numbered so that all and themes can be tracked.

Quirkos software was used for the coding. The coding process started with open coding, a process by which concepts are identified among data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Afterwards, axial coding was used to group codes, and then themes were developed. From the large number of codes emerging in this study, non-hierarchical axial coding allowed the generation of a coding book containing all of the descriptions of the coding labels. Finally, linking all of the codes formed themes that help to answer the research questions. The coding processes used with Quirkos software and the main themes can be found in Appendix Six.

4.6 Limitations of this study

The limitations of this study mainly include sample, generalisability, and measurement of social mobility.

Firstly, this study draws on a large-scale survey (N=756) and data from 20 interviews. The sample shows good diversity. However, 756 questionnaires are not sufficient, considering the huge size of the Chinese population. Although the participants come from over 200 cities and more than 400 different universities, the sample is not perfect. Moreover, due to time limitations, I did not collect panel data to follow up the participants' development and success. Social mobility is a dynamic process, and, therefore, a longitudinal study could better explain the experiences and practices of social mobility.

Secondly, this study is based on a mixed-methods research design (756 questionnaires and data from 20 interviews). I have tried to ensure the validity, generalisability and reliability of the study. In OLS design, based on pragmatic needs, I gave the same scale for all variables (1-5). It is convenient to model all variables and do not largely affect the interpretations for analytical results. However, for future research, logit can be considered to test for the model. The scale for each variable is not the same in reality. The qualitative research is sequential to the quantitative research. The 20 participants have totally different places of origin, universities, programmes, and parental occupations. As for generalisability and reliability, the pilot and main round of research were conducted sequentially to assess the interview questions. Due to time limitations, data from only 20 interviews could be collected and analysed. For issues of generalisability and reliability, more interviews should be conducted to reduce potential biases, though, from a positivist perspective, it is impossible to ever achieve generalisability through interview methods.

Finally, this study incorporated the widely used measurement of "occupation" to calculate intergenerational mobility. There are plenty of discussions regarding how best to measure social mobility, and some researchers oppose using "occupation". There are controversial discussions on occupation and city classification variables. However, in China, "occupation" is the most suitable measurement of social mobility (Lu, 2002) because it is closely linked to social status, economic, social, political capital, and social wellbeing. The limitation lies in the cross-section data of occupations. Changes in occupation of parents and participants were not considered in this study.

4.7 Summary

This chapter describes the process of research design, data collection, and analysis. The fieldwork lasted for 11 months, starting in June 2017, and comprised two stages: pilot and main round. In the pilot stage, 61 completed questionnaires were collected. In the main research, the whole sample is 756. For the main round survey, 756 participants (including the 61 participants in the pilot study) were selected randomly from Chinese master's-level graduates, both from the UK and China. For the in-depth interviews, 20 graduates including 10 international

graduates and 10 home graduates were selected from the 756 questionnaire participants. By using mixed method approach, this study bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative methods of studying social and spatial mobility of university graduates. The use of mixed methods helps to focus on the patterns of both the returnees' and the home graduates' social mobility and on their perceptions and experiences of mobility. Mapping analysis, a multiple regression model, and thematic analysis are complementary to each other, and made up the mixed data analysis.

Based on the above research process, the results of the data analysis were obtained and will be presented in the following chapters. The next chapter mainly discusses the spatial mobility results of the graduates. Chapters Six and Seven explore their social mobility based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Chapter Five: Impact of place of origin on international and domestic graduates' mobility in China

5.1 Introduction

The cumulative effect of individual mobility choices is often associated with opportunity and wealth accumulation. Drawing on a survey of 756 Chinese master's graduates from UK and Chinese universities, this chapter looks at spatial im(mobility) patterns among international and domestic graduates in China. The analyses reveal that the likelihood of studying aboard is linked to place of origin and is positively associated with parental socio-economic status. The findings also show uneven opportunities for spatial mobility between international returnees and their domestically educated peers. International returnees largely affect the urban restructuring of core cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, while home graduates tend to aggregate in sub-core cities. Looking in tandem at both internal and international mobility, this chapter argues that international and domestic graduates' choices are both constituted by and constitutive of the growing regional inequality of income and opportunities in China, and that they significantly influence overall interregional migration outcomes.

5.2 Results and Discussion

5.2.1 Spatial mobility of international returnees in China

The 347 international graduates who completed the survey came from 146 different cities and were living in 71 different cities (Table 5-1) at the time of the research. Among the international graduates surveyed, 58% came from eastern provinces and 31% from central provinces, with the few remaining participants coming from western China. The distribution of the 347 participants' registered places of residence across the three parts of the country (eastern, central and western provinces) conforms to the general distribution of China's population as a whole, with the population distribution being 14:9:1 in the eastern, central and western provinces respectively (Zhu, 2016), which strongly supports the diversity of the sample.

Among the 347 participants, 24 (7%) had registered residences in rural areas, but

only 5 participants were living in rural areas after finishing their UK master's courses and returning to China. The rural-urban migration trend (Song & Zhang, 2002) also applies to the spatial mobility of returnees. Moving into urban areas is important for rural migrants in terms of their future development and social mobility (Chen & Qin, 2014). Most of the international graduates chose to live in eastern coastal cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and Nanjing, which are attractive because they provide good opportunities for returnees to pursue their career aspirations (Shen, 2012). The eastern areas of China have attracted more foreign investment and international trade, leading to faster economic development (Liu & Shen, 2014; Huang et al., 2014). In addition, among the 347 participants, almost half (N=152) did not have any spatial mobility within China, choosing to return to their registered residence locations after they had obtained UK master's degrees. Among these 152 participants, 82% were born and raised in big cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and provincial capitals.

Table 5-1 Information of 347 international participants

Provinces	Registered residence		Rural area		Current residence		Rural area	
	N	Ra (%)	N	R (%)	N	R (%)	N	R (%)
Eastern provinces	**200**	**57.63**	**7**	**29.20**	**288**	**83.00**	**2**	**40.00**
Beijing	27	7.78			75	21.61		
Shanghai	12	3.46			86	24.78	1	
Tianjin	10	2.88	1	4.17	8	2.31		
Jiangsu	39	11.24	1	4.17	27	7.78		
Hebei	10	2.88	1	4.17	4	1.15		
Liaoning	13	3.75			9	2.59		
Zhejiang	35	10.09	3	12.50	26	7.49		
Fujian	4	1.15			4	1.15		
Shandong	15	4.32			7	2.02		
Guangdong	28	8.07	1	4.17	39	11.24	1	
Guangxi	6	1.73			2	0.58		
Hainan	1	0.29			1	0.29		
Central provinces	**107**	**30.83**	**15**	**62.50**	**39**	**11.24**	**2**	**40.00**
Shanxi	21	6.05	2	8.33	6	1.73		
Inner Mongolia	11	3.17	1	4.17	5	1.44		
Jilin	5	1.44			0	0.00		
Heilongjiang	7	2.02			3	0.86		
Anhui	16	4.61	4	16.67	7	2.02	1	
Jiangxi	7	2.02	3	12.50	0	0.00		
Henan	18	5.19	1	4.17	6	1.73		
Hubei	13	3.75	2	8.33	7	2.02		
Hunan	9	2.59	2	8.33	5	1.44	1	
Western provinces	**40**	**11.53**	**2**	**8.30**	**20**	**5.76**	**1**	**20.00**
Chongqing	4	1.15	1	4.17	3	0.86		
Sichuan	10	2.88			5	1.44		
Guizhou	2	0.58			0	0.00		
Yunnan	1	0.29			0	0.00		
Xizang	1	0.29			0	0.00		
Shaanxi	7	2.02			4	1.15		
Gansu	5	1.44			2	0.58		
Qinghai	1	0.29			0	0.00		
Ningxia	3	0.86			1	0.29		
Xinjiang	6	1.73	1	4.17	5	1.44	1	

Note: N means number; R refers to ratio.

Table 5-2 Information of 409 home graduates

Provinces	Registered residence		Rural area		Master University		Current residence		Rural area	
	N	R (%)	N	R (%)	N	R (%)	N	R (%)	N	R (%)
Eastern Provinces	**219**	**54.00**	**64**	**45.00**	**303**	**74.08**	**321**	**78.48**	**15**	**75.00**
Beijing	3	0.73			74		51	12.47	1	5.00
Shanghai	2	0.49			57		69	16.87		
Tianjin	2	0.49			9		17	4.16		
Jiangsu	79	19.32	37	26.24	84		103	25.18	12	60.00
Hebei	36	8.80	8	5.67	2		9	2.20	1	5.00
Liaoning	17	4.16	1	0.71	8		11	2.69		
Zhejiang	23	5.62	6	4.26	15		21	5.13		
Fujian	8	1.96	2	1.42	2		2	0.49		
Shandong	42	10.27	10	7.09	28		27	6.60	1	5.00
Guangdong	2	0.49			22		10	2.44		
Guangxi	4	0.98			2		1	0.24		
Hainan	1	0.24			0		0	0.00		
Central Provinces	**149**	**36.00**	**64**	**45.00**	**42**	**10.27**	**57**	**13.94**	**2**	**10.00**
Shanxi	35	8.56	12	8.51	0		4	0.98		
Inner Mongolia	10	2.44	6	4.26	0		1	0.24		
Jilin	10	2.44			9		7	1.71		
Heilongjiang	5	1.22	2	1.42	5		2	0.49		
Anhui	38	9.29	17	12.06	3		12	2.93	1	5.00
Jiangxi	1	0.24	5	3.55	4		2	0.49		
Henan	35	8.56	16	11.35	5		11	2.69		
Hubei	8	1.96	4	2.84	9		11	2.69	1	5.00
Hunan	7	1.71	2	1.42	7		7	1.71		
Western Provinces	**41**	**10.00**	**13**	**10.00**	**64**	**15.65**	**31**	**7.58**	**3**	**15.00**
Chongqing	3	0.73	1	0.71	4		1	0.24		
Sichuan	9	2.20	4	2.84	28		11	2.69	2	10.00
Guizhou	1	0.24			1		0	0.00		
Yunnan	1	0.24			3		0	0.00		
Xizang	1	0.24			0		0	0.00		
Shaanxi	14	3.42	5	3.55	25		15	3.67	1	5.00
Gansu	5	1.22	3	2.13	3		2	0.49		
Qinghai	1	0.24			0		0	0.00		
Ningxia	1	0.24			0		0	0.00		
Xinjiang	5	1.22			0		2	0.49		

Note: N means number; R refers to ratio.

Table 5-3 Summary of spatial mobility analysis

	International graduates (N=347)	Home graduates (N=409)
Non-spatially mobile	152 (43.8%)	49 (12%)
	Male:63%; Female: 37%	Male: 72.5%; Female:27.5%
Mobile	195 (56.2%)	360 (88%)
	Male:22.7%; Female:77.3%	Male:40%; Female: 60%

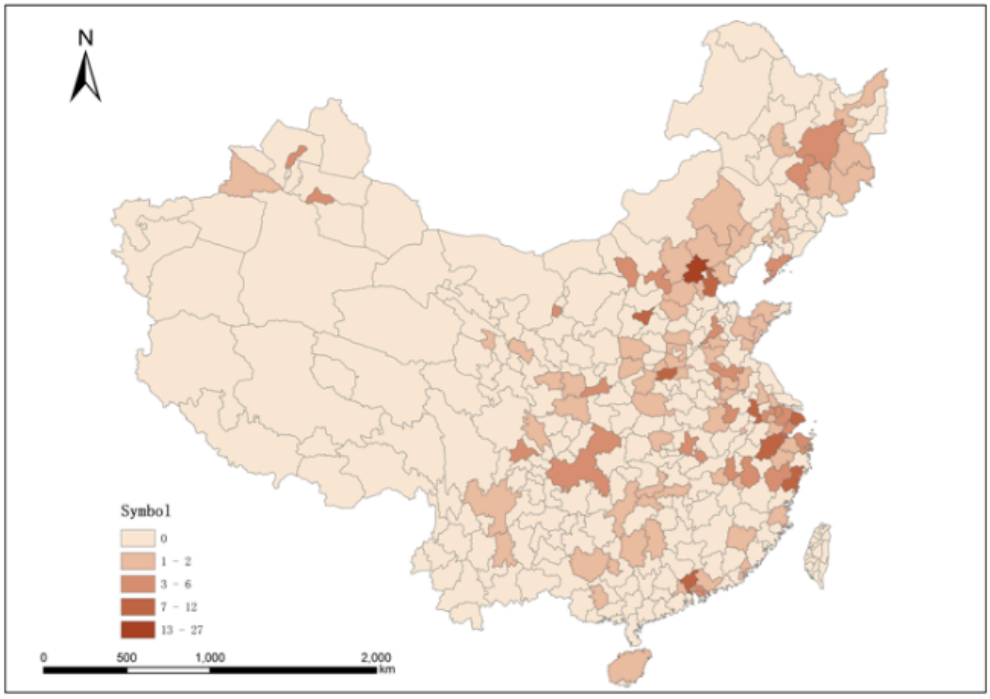


Figure 5-1 Registered residence information of international graduates

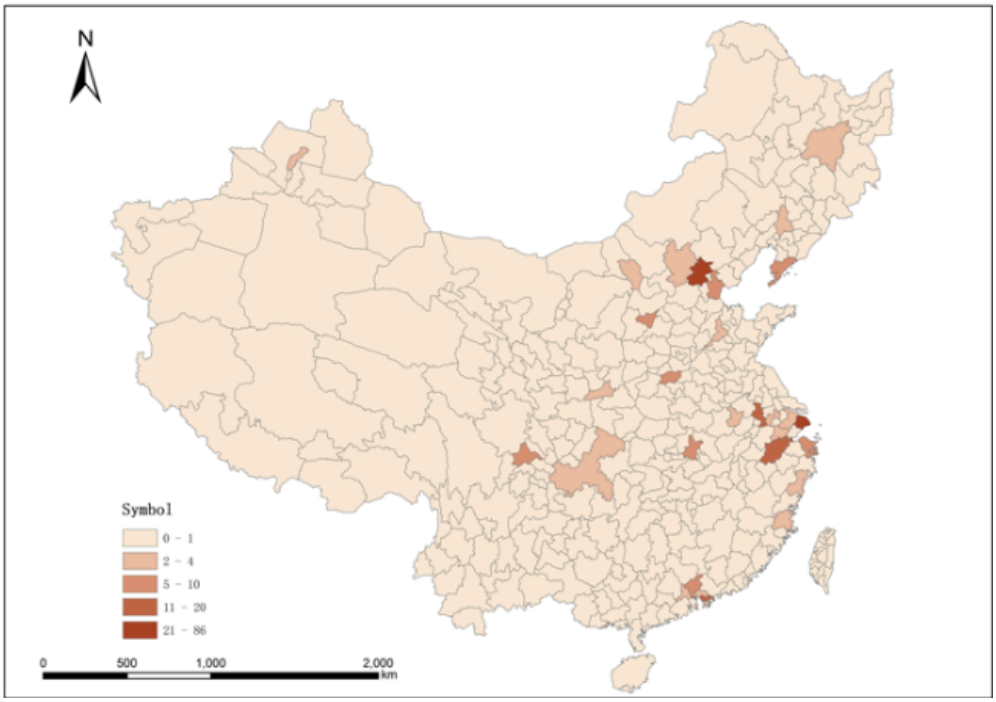


Figure 5-2 Current residence information of international graduates

Figures 5-1 and 5-2 depict the data on the returnees' places of origin and their current places of residence. By comparing these figures, it can be found that the distribution of international graduates transforms from even distribution to evident aggregation. However, Figures 5-1 and 5-2 can only statistically show the distribution of registered residence and current residence. In order to identify the internal clustered pattern of the returnees' spatial mobility, hotspot analysis was used to visualise geographical data. Hotspot analysis (Figures 5-3 and 5-4) can show areas where a higher density or cluster of activity occurs, revealing a pattern of uneven distribution related to spatial mobility. A red-coloured gradient is used to indicate areas of increasingly higher density. According to Figure 5-3, the returnees' registered places of residence were concentrated in eastern provinces, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta.

The three concentrated regions correspond to China's most developed eastern areas and have the largest population density and the fastest urbanisation. The collaborative development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has been promoted by the national development strategy, which has resulted in the urbanisation, traffic networks, environmental quality and living standards all being significantly higher than in other regions (Fang et al., 2018). The gross ocean production (GOP) of the Circum-Bohai Sea Region reached 2.2152 trillion RMB in 2014, accounting for 37% of the national GOP and representing the largest marine economic development region in China (Ren, Wang & Ji, 2018). The Yangtze River Delta is the most globalised city region in China, and has experienced dramatic urbanisation (Wu et al., 2017). As the hotspot analysis shows, the participants clustered in these three core areas, which reveals that place of origin is linked to the likelihood of studying abroad. Figure 5-4 shows the clustered pattern of current living place, and a very evident pattern of moving to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the Yangtze River Delta; at the time of the study, over 65% of the participants were working and living in these two areas, which also contain China's two largest cities (Beijing is central to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, while Shanghai is the core city in the Yangtze River Delta). These two cities boast the largest amount of foreign investment, the greatest variety of ventures and international talents, and the best social welfare and public production. These two core cities and their neighbouring areas, including the provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, attract a

large concentration of returning graduates. The data confirms this, as 22% of all surveyed international returnees chose to live and work in Beijing, while 25% chose Shanghai.

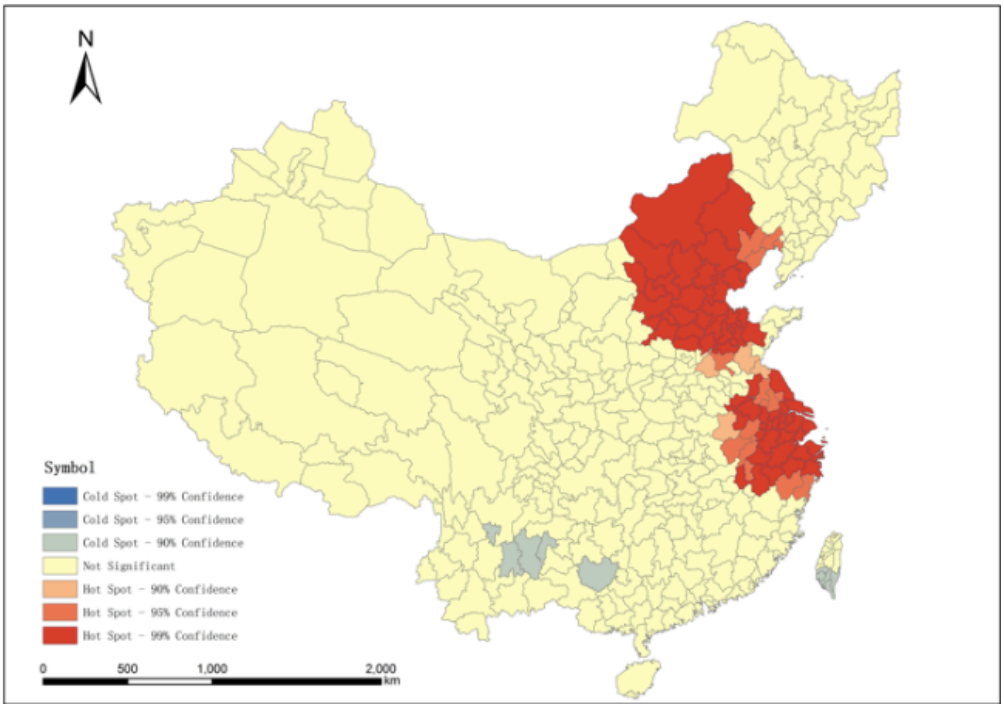


Figure 5-3 Hotspot map of registered residence of international graduates

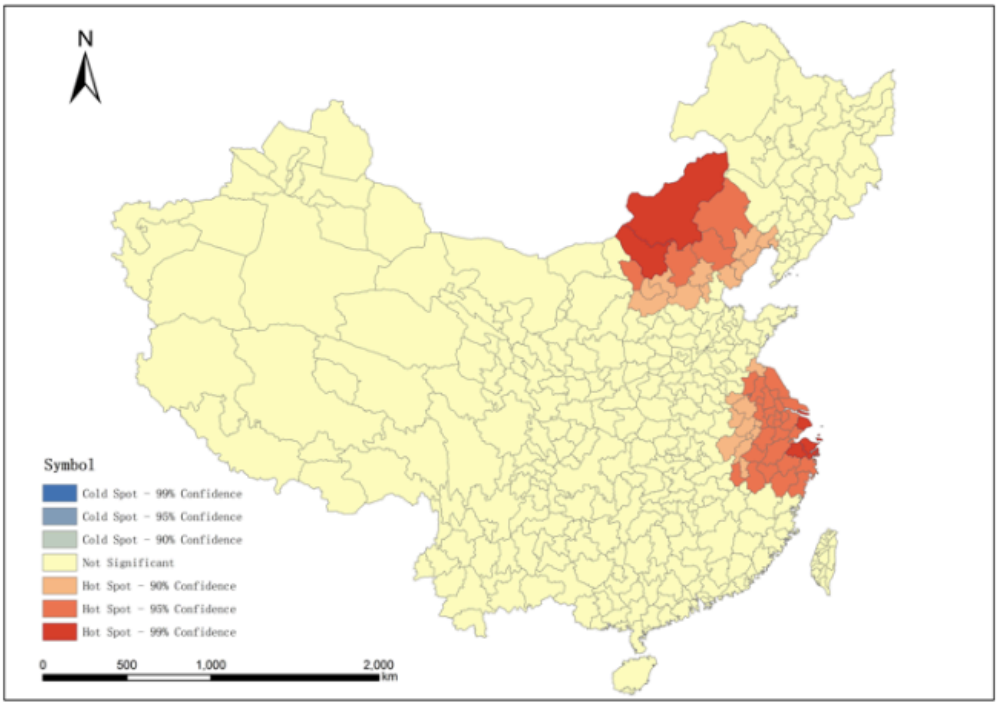


Figure 5-4 Hotspot map of current residence of international graduates

Developed cities act as 'talent hubs' for highly skilled workers, providing opportunities for higher education and career development (Moskal, 2017). Attracting highly skilled graduates has become a strategy for cities, and it has been particularly effective for these major cities. However, staying in one's place of origin is convenient for people who have caring responsibilities for older adults. China's average family size is shrinking (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003), and caring for older generations places a large burden on young adults. Gender difference also significantly affects spatial mobility. Among the 152 non-spatially mobile participants, 63% were male. In China's traditional culture, young male adults are expected to take on the responsibility of caring for older family members (Li, Kou & Li, 2014). As a result, many male graduates returned to their registered residences after they finished their master's courses, while most female returnees surveyed in this study chose to migrate to other cities to work. With respect to the rest of the 195 outward migrants, most of them moved to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and provincial capitals. These are China's largest cities, where economic and education development, social welfare and public infrastructure are more advanced than in other cities, and where urbanisation is faster (Gaubatz, 1999) and there are more employment opportunities (Song, 2016).

5.2.2 Spatial mobility of China's home universities graduates

409 graduates of Chinese universities who had not experienced international degree mobility completed the online questionnaire. Table 5-2 includes these participants' information and labour market results, and Figures 5-5, 5-6, 5-7, 5-8, 5-9 and 5-10 were produced to visualise the spatial mobility of home graduates.

The 409 participants come from 182 cities, and their master's universities were located in 43 cities. When surveyed, these home graduates were living in 81 different cities. As Table 5-2 shows, 54% of the home university graduates came from eastern provinces, 36% from central provinces, and 10% had registered residence in western provinces. Among the 409 home graduates, a large number (141) was born in rural areas, accounting for 34.5%. However, with regard to their current place of residence, only 20 participants (less than 5%) were living in rural areas. The tendency of home graduates to move into cities accords with China's

rapid urbanisation (Song & Zhang, 2002; Goodburn, 2015) and the graduates' desires to succeed in their careers (Li, 2007). Most of the 409 participants were from second- and third-tier cities. Only a small number had their registered residence in the largest and most developed cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Of the home graduates, 74% had completed their master's programmes in eastern provinces, 10% in central provinces and 16% in western provinces. Currently, over 78% were living in eastern provinces, while only 14% were in central provinces and 8% in western provinces. Some participants (84) whose registered residence was not in an eastern province had moved to eastern provinces by entering master's universities located in that part of the country. As abundant education resources and policy priority are given to the eastern provinces of China (Zhu, 2002), many students moved to the east to undertake their master's programmes. After graduating from their master's programmes, 321 of the graduates chose to continue living in eastern provinces and stay in the same city in which they had obtained their highest academic qualification (Liu, Shen, & Xu, 2017).

The home graduates in the study were highly mobile. Among the 409 home graduates, only 49 did not have spatial mobility (meaning their place of origin, master's university location and destination were the same city). The demographic analysis shows that these 49 participants were born in Beijing or in provincial capitals where education resources and social welfare are much better than in other cities. In addition, these 49 participants all came from upper middle-class families, indicating that social origin had a significant impact on their spatial mobility. A significant number of participants (31%) left their registered residence for university and then stayed in the city where they attended their master's course, which was likely Beijing, Shanghai, a provincial capital or another first-tier city, where most universities are located (Zhu, 2002; Liu, Shen, & Xu, 2017). A slightly larger proportion (37%) of the home graduates were onward migrants, meaning their current living place was neither their registered residence nor their master's university location. The remaining 32% returned to their registered residences after they had finished their master's programmes. The factors affecting these returning migrants include the responsibility to care for older family members (Gaubatz, 1999), finding suitable employment through local social networking, and the pressure of high housing costs in larger cities (Huang,

2010; Venhorst, Van Dijk, & Van Wissen, 2011; Liu & Shen, 2014).

In the process of analysing and comparing the home graduates' spatial mobility (Figures 5-5, 5-6 and 5-7), a clustered pattern was found in terms of the home graduates' registered residence, master's university and current location. In particular, places like Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and the province of Jiangsu have the most evident clustered patterns.

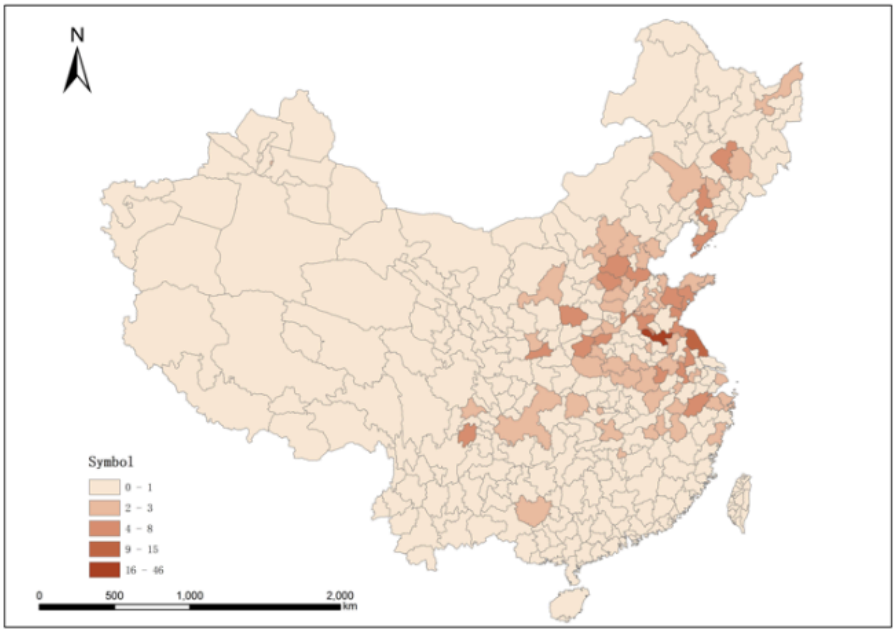


Figure 5-5 Registered residence of home graduates

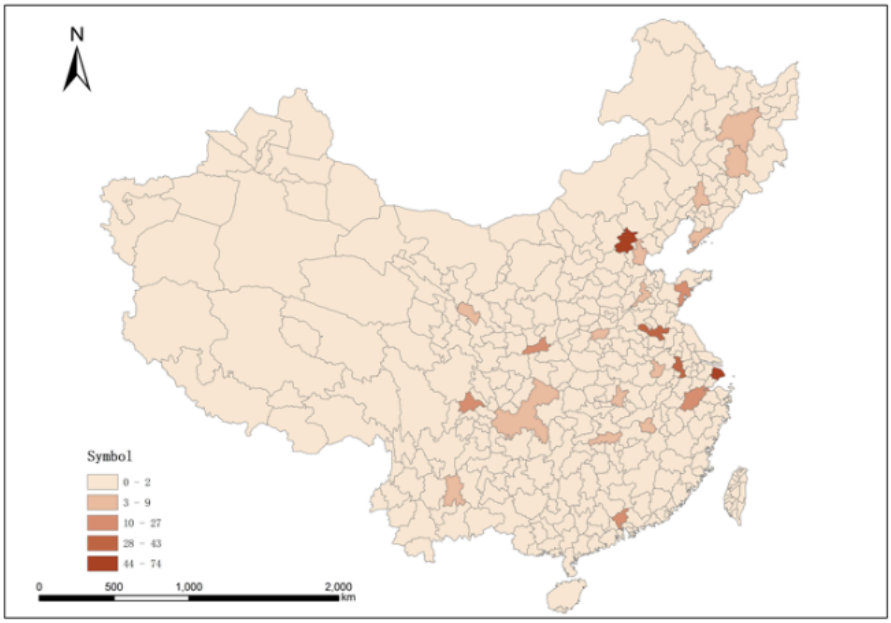


Figure 5-6 Master university location of home graduates

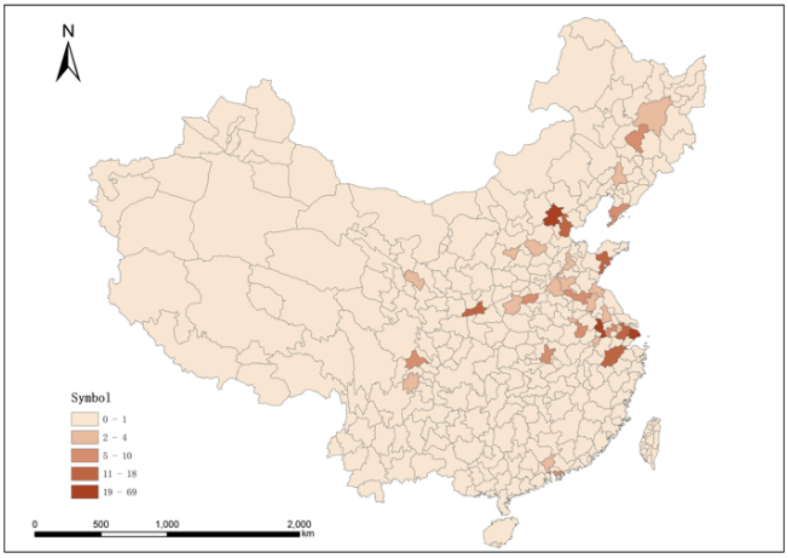


Figure 5-7 Current living residence of home graduates

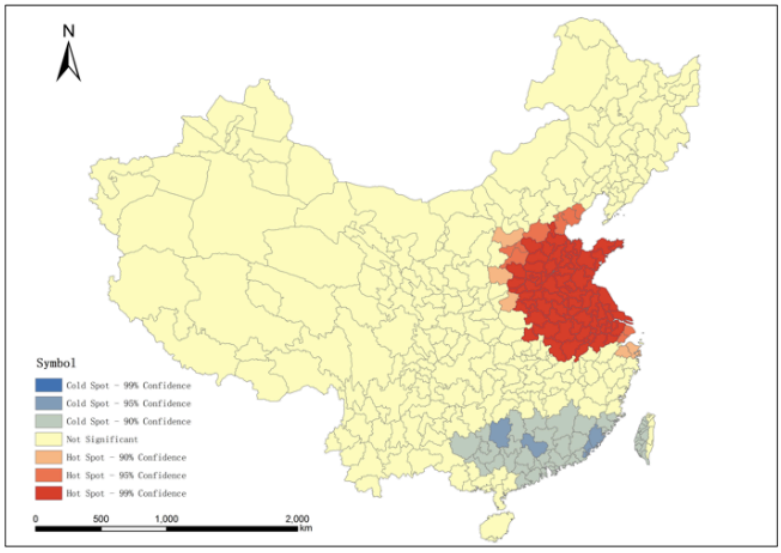


Figure 5-8 Hotspot map of registered residence of home graduates

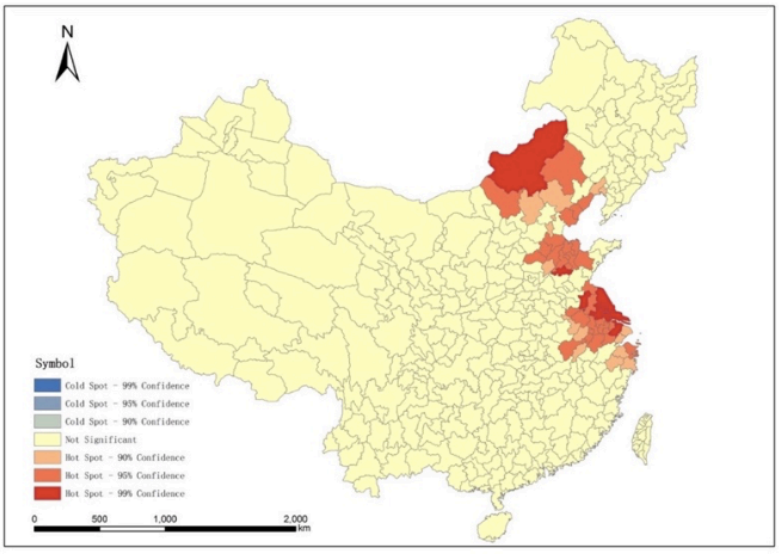


Figure 5-9 Hotspot map of master university location of home graduates

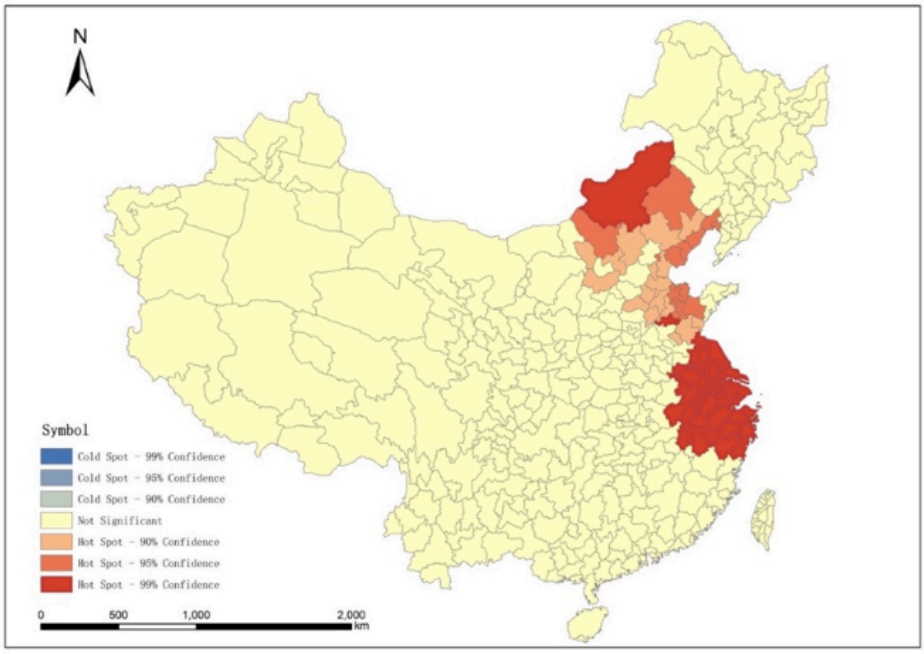


Figure 5-10 Hotspot map of current residence of home graduates

Figure 5-8 shows a strong clustered pattern in the eastern regions of China. These regions include Tianjin, Shanghai and the provinces of Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Henan and Anhui. The hotspot analysis results also reflect the fact that these areas belong to China's most densely populated and economically developed regions. The home graduates in the survey mainly came from towns and small cities in the eastern provinces, which is divergent from the patterns identified among the returnees. Figure 5-9 shows that clustered patterns can be noticed in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and the provinces of Henan, Anhui and Jiangsu. Moreover, the aggregation of education resources in China can be identified. In Figure 5-8, the clustered regions form one large zone, while Figure 5-9 shows that master's university distribution is concentrated in three relatively independent and small areas, but with a high density. For example, in the aforementioned areas, there are 20 universities associated with the national Project 985 and 59 universities associated with Project 211, which are schemes introduced by China's Ministry of Education to raise the research standards of higher-level universities and cultivate strategies for socio-economic development. It is therefore clear why many students move into these regions to pursue higher education and how the university graduates' aggregation patterns are generated.

Figure 5-10 shows that the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta have clustered patterns regarding the

home graduates' current residence locations. This finding indicates that the three most developed regions in China can certainly attract plenty of university graduates. In addition, this study finds that some mid-sized cities surrounding the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta have strong clustered patterns, indicating that many home graduates were increasingly willing to work and live in second- and third-tier cities, which offer relatively low living costs, better living environments and moderate competition. The three core zones played a positive role in affecting the development of their surrounding cities as well (Tang & Yu, 2018), so these emerging cities have the potential to attract more talents in the future.

5.2.3 Opportunities for international and domestic graduates in China

Many similarities can be observed between the spatial mobility of the international returnees and their domestically educated peers. Both groups of master's graduates tend to flow into urban areas. Over 95% of the participants who had their registered residence in a rural area chose to move into cities. In addition, all the graduates in this study preferred eastern areas as their living and working places. Specifically, both the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the Yangtze River Delta show clustered patterns for all the master's graduates' current residence. While only 57.63% of the 347 international graduates had a registered residence in eastern provinces, the proportion whose current residence was in eastern provinces reached 83%. Similarly, 78.48% of home graduates were living in eastern provinces, but just 54% of home graduates had a registered residence there. These developed eastern regions are seen as preferable because they can provide better income and career opportunities.

Yang et al. (2017) finds that opportunities related to income and lifestyle provide important motivation for people to move as they can improve their standard of living, even though the government's strict *Hukou* system complicates the migration issue in China. This institutional system categorises people's identity based on their birthplace, which entitles citizens to different types of social security payments (e.g., pension and medical services), as well as differing opportunities for education and career development. The interregional migration trend is becoming stronger as the population becomes better educated and

wealthier. Although new urban migrants have disadvantages in terms of social welfare and security (Song, 2016), returnees with advanced cultural capital are sought out by cities. Unlike the spatial mobility of rural-to-urban migrants, the spatial mobility of international graduates is supported by cities' talent policies (Huang, Chen & Chen., 2014; Jin, 2017). Although the *hukou* system is still a barrier to new urban residents' spatial and social mobility (Song, 2016), large cities make allowances for talents with desired cultural capital (Li & Mao, 2017). Core cities like Shanghai and Beijing have granted *hukou* permits to international graduates in order to attract 'talents'. Therefore, different graduates have uneven opportunities to enter a major city.

The analysis also shows differences in spatial mobility between the two kinds of master's graduates. Firstly, more home graduates than international graduates came from rural areas. Among the international graduates, only 24 (7%) participants came from rural areas. In contrast, 34% of home graduates had their registered residence in rural areas. Most of the international graduates came from first-tier cities, while most of the home graduates came from second- and third-tier cities, revealing that place of origin is linked to the likelihood of studying aboard. Among the international graduates, 49 participants had a registered residence in Beijing, Shanghai or Tianjin, while among the home graduates, only 7 had registered residence in these most developed cities.

The choice of current residence also differed between the two kinds of master's graduates. The analysis shows that the current residence of the returnees was mainly concentrated in Beijing and Shanghai, the core cities of the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta. The clustered pattern of the current residence of home graduates was particularly significant in the cities around the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta. Many of the home graduates chose these areas as their current living place as there was less living pressure and social competition. Mok et al. (2017a) indicate that unlike home graduates, most of the students who graduate from international higher education institutions have advantaged family backgrounds. Thus, international mobility may result in the reproduction of social inequality as graduates from advantaged family backgrounds can afford the higher living costs in metropolises. With respect to returnees' labour market results, it is evident that a UK study

experience is helpful in meeting the employment requirements of foreign companies in China, and international companies based in major cities are becoming returnees' preferred considerations (Moskal, 2017).

Finally, this study finds a gender difference in the spatial mobility of the returnees. Male participants accounted for a large share of the returnees without spatial mobility in terms of their registered residence and their current residence. However, for domestic participants, no gender difference was evident.

5.3 Summary

The spatial mobility of graduates in China has become an increasingly important issue, both for the outcomes of individual graduates in the labour market and for cities' development strategies. By looking at internal and international migration in tandem, this study has focused on two specific groups of master's graduates and their migration patterns to unpack the unevenness of graduates' flows between the regions and the cities in China. The findings show how graduates' mobility perpetuates the concentration of wealth and opportunities in the core cities and reinforces the uneven development of China's regional economies. With the help of mapping analysis of the data relating to the 756 graduates surveyed, this study has found that the likelihood of studying abroad is linked to place of origin and has a positive association with parental socio-economic status. Considering differences in mobility after graduation, the results imply that the likelihood of working in a larger city is contingent on one's place of origin and international mobility. The family background advantage that facilitates international mobility extends to sequential spatial mobility after returnees come back to China. In addition to social origin, one's place of origin is closely related to current residence. While the relatively abundant employment opportunities available in large cities attract all graduates, significantly more international returnees than home graduates move to the largest cities. Although the extant literature has discussed the contributions of talents to city development, the analysis presented in this study shows that cities' restructuring and development are affected by the spatial mobility of different master's-level graduates. International graduates usually have more privileged family backgrounds (Mok et al., 2017a) and tend to reside in core cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, while home graduates tend to

work and live in sub-core cities. Overall, the mobility patterns of international and domestic graduates seem to contribute to the reproduction of existing social inequalities and intensify the existing uneven development amongst the eastern, central and western regions of China and within the urbanised areas of the east coast.

These results contribute new evidence to the understanding of international student migration and Chinese educational mobilities and their labour market outcomes, linking these to China's opportunity- and wealth-hoarding phenomena. Such findings are important for understanding the social and educational inequalities in higher education mobility in China. Future research could extend the current analysis to adopt a longitudinal approach to understand the role and status of international graduates and their labour market outcomes. Additionally, further investigation is now needed to better understand the population distribution effects of international graduates. Doing so will inform the development of potential future policy directions so as to better target the key characteristics that underpin the attraction and retention of 'talents' (Tang, Rowe, Corcoran & Sigler, 2014).

Chapter Six: Education, labour market outcomes and social mobility of graduates in China—based on a survey

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on labour market outcomes and social mobility based on a statistical analysis of the survey data. In order to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, a questionnaire was designed to collect data, and a multi-regression model was employed to analyse the collected data. 756 valid questionnaires were collected, consisting of 347 questionnaires from international graduates and 409 questionnaires from home graduates. The data were analysed using tables generated by SPSS software. The analysis focused on the educational attainments, labour market outcomes, and social mobility of international and home graduates. Differences and similarities between the two groups of graduates were then identified and discussed.

6.2 Education of graduates in China

China's universities are divided into five tiers: Sanben and Erben[1] (the lowest tiers), Yiben[2], 211 project[3], 985 project[4] and C 9[5] (the highest tier). In contrast with China's official university division, the UK has only one official university ranking system: Research Excellence Framework (REF). In order to assess the university tiers, this study divided all of the universities listed in the REF ranking into five tiers:1 to 10, 11 to 30, 31 to 50, 51 to 80, and all other universities. The international graduates are distributed relatively evenly across the different undergraduate university tiers. The only exception is that only 50 participants

[1] Sanben refers to the third tier of bachelor's degrees in China, while Erben refers to the second-tier. Now many Sanben Universities are incorporated into Erben Universities. The boundary between Erben and Sanben universities is disappearing.

[2] Yiben refers to the first tier of bachelor's degrees.

[3] It refers to the top 100 universities in the 21st century in China. The 211 project was launched by the State Council in 1995 to establish 100 world-class universities.

[4] It usually refers to the top-39 universities in China. The *985 project* was proposed in 1998 by the Ministry of Education in the 'Action Plan for Education Revitalisation for the 21st Century' to provide generous funding and resources for selected higher education institutions that had the potential to deliver world-class research excellence.

[5] The C9 league includes the top-9 universities in China. It is also the top university league in China.

(14%) graduated from China's C9 universities. Only a few participants obtained their bachelor's degrees from China's top universities. Most of the home graduates attained their bachelor's degree from Sanben, Erben, Yiben and 211 project universities. Regarding their master's universities, 89% of the international graduates graduated from the top-30 REF universities, while 34.72% of home graduates completed their master's education at 985 project and C 9 universities. From the survey data, it can be found that there are more international graduates than home graduates obtaining an undergraduate and master's education at top universities. A few home graduates enrolled at China's top universities for their undergraduate courses, while numerous participants then entered China's top universities to study master's courses.

Table 6-1 Education data of international graduates

Undergraduate university	Number	Ratio	Master university	Number	Ratio
Sanben & Erben	74	21%	Others	10	3%
Yiben	79	23%	RER 51-80	13	4%
211 project	76	22%	REF 31-50	13	4%
985 project	68	20%	REF 11-30	122	35%
C 9	50	14%	REF 1-10	189	54%
	347	100%		347	100%

Table 6-2 Education data of home graduates

Undergraduate university	Number	Ratio	Master university	Number	Ratio
Sanben & Erben	82	20%	Sanben & Erben	22	5.38%
Yiben	122	30%	Yiben	67	16.38%
211 project	151	37%	211 project	178	43.52%
985 project	42	10%	985 project	103	25.18%
C 9	12	3%	C 9	39	9.54%
	409	100%		409	100%

The data for the sample in this study reveals that international graduates have better education backgrounds than home graduates in terms of their institutions' ranking, which is contrary to the general impression in China of international graduates. Indeed, Tsang (2013) concludes that international graduates' choices are determined by their poor performance in China's college entrance examination. The theory goes that because these students fail to secure places in China's top universities, they have to turn their backs on China's second-tier universities and instead pursue an international higher education. However, in this study, the majority of international students acquired their undergraduate and master's degree from better universities than their domestically-educated peers.

Similar to Tsang, plenty of Chinese people hold the view that studying abroad simply requires economic capital, meaning that academic performance is not important for entering overseas higher education institutions. After they realise that economic capital can be directed into cultural capital in a diploma mill, the aureole and symbolic capital of returnees becomes weak in China (He, 2017). He (2017) concludes that overseas degrees have become devalued in recent years in China, because studying abroad has become so popularised. Based on the MOE's data, studying abroad has become very common for Chinese students, and it represents just an additional study choice for them. But, in the light of the disputes regarding international higher education and its outcomes, more and more Chinese students are now choosing international higher education in a rational way (Li & Feng, 2018). Therefore, in contemporary China, international graduates no longer mean poor academic performers. Instead, international graduates are facing a competitive environment after their graduation and return to China.

In addition, it can be found that there are many differences between undergraduate and master's universities for home graduates. In this study, 50% of the home graduates studied their bachelor's courses at 211, 985 and C 9 universities, while 78.27% of them enrolled at these tiers of universities to study

their master's courses. This shows that Chinese students tend to pursue their master's education in better universities than their undergraduate universities. Zhao (2016) also analyses how Chinese students choose their master's university and comes to conclude that the majority of undergraduates want a better place to gain advanced knowledge; thus, they prefer better universities to be their master-level universities. In this study, the data relating to the home graduates support Zhao's research results. Among Chinese students, entering a university with a good ranking and reputation for one's master's studies can to some extent compensate for the disadvantages of having studied at a lower-ranked undergraduate university. There is another factor related to China's master's education system. In China, universities can open master's courses and enrol master's students only after they are assessed and then approved by China's MoE. This assessment is a time-consuming and complex process and focuses on a university's academic performance, staff qualifications, external reputation, and graduates' employment (Sun, 2012). In other words, universities opening master's programmes tend to belong to be among the top universities in China; hence, most Chinese master's graduates attend better universities compared with their undergraduate universities.

Although home and international graduates exhibit many differences in terms of their undergraduate and master's education, the greatest difference lies in their master's education. Home graduates enrolled on master's courses in China, while international graduates studied in the UK. The two different kinds of master's education and master's-level degree divide these master's graduates into two groups. Their cultural and symbolic capital is also different. Thus, these differences in education between home graduates and international graduates determine their different employment outcomes in the labour market after graduating from their master's universities.

6.3 Labour market outcomes

In terms of these graduates' employment outcomes, this study explored this aspect from the perspectives of employment rate after their master's graduation, their workplaces and their positions, and then made comparisons of the employment outcomes of these two groups. According to the questionnaire data, these participants' employment situation can be depicted as follows:

Table 6-3 Employment situation of graduates

	International graduates		Home graduates	
Options	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
A. employed	279	80.12%	357	87.29%
B. unemployed	68	19.88%	52	12.71%
Total number	347		409	

Globalisation and the evolution of the knowledge-based economy have changed the world dramatically in terms of the character and functions of higher education. In order to gain global competitiveness, China, as an emerging economy, has started to expand its higher education system, which has significantly affected the relationship between higher education and China's graduate employment (Mok, 2016). China, in recent years, has struggled to increase its supply of employment positions and is experiencing long-term structural adjustment. Therefore, the increase in the number of employment positions for higher education degree holders cannot keep up with the increasing rate of university graduates (Chen, 2015b). Thus, in China's current employment environment, it is difficult for a master's graduate to find a satisfying job and then to acquire social upward mobility, as is also reflected in this study's sample. Among the international graduates in this study, at the time of reporting, 19.88% of them did not have jobs, while 12.71% of home graduates could not find employment after graduation. Among these unemployed graduates, more female graduates were

unemployed than male graduates, which will be examined in detail in Chapter Seven.

Although many master's graduates were not able to obtain jobs after graduating in China, the home graduates had a lower unemployment rate than their peers. It is widely acknowledged that international graduates have better employment than home graduates (Mol, 2017), but in this study, international graduates had a lower employment rate. This research result might be due to two factors. Firstly, in this study, most international graduates graduated in September and then obtained their one-year taught master's degree certificate in November or even later. The study completion date and the graduation dates are disadvantageous for international graduates applying for jobs in China. In China's labour market, the period from September to March is the main recruitment season (Gao & Wang, 2018), so many international graduates in this study missed the ideal job-hunting season. Consequently, many international graduates had not been able to obtain their first job after graduating. Instead, they had to accept a one-year gap. Secondly, many scholars have explored Chinese returnees' re-integration and cultural identity after these Chinese students graduate from overseas institutions and then return to China. As identity and reintegration are two major problems many returnees meet, returning to China' s labour market and readjusting to China's living environment are unavoidable challenges for many international graduates (Zweig & Yang, 2014). Under these circumstances, many international graduates choose to spend more time readjusting to China's environment, and, as a result, many of them do not obtain jobs upon their return to China.

By contrast, most home graduates in this study's sample were able to find jobs after graduating from their master's universities, even though China is going through a period in which graduates with higher education experience employment difficulties. The better job outcomes of the domestic graduates might be ascribed to their access to more timely information and their stronger social networks compared to international graduates. From the research results, it

can be seen that the home graduates had a higher employment rate than their peers, which diverges from the findings of many other studies (Lin-Stephens, Uesi & Doherty, 2015; Chen, 2015a). Many studies conducted by Chinese scholars find that Chinese university graduates are facing unprecedented employment pressure (Chan, 2015) as a result of China's economic transformation and its massification of higher education. However, both the international graduates and the home graduates are master's graduates who meet many enterprises' qualifications requirements. This means that master's graduates have a wider choice than undergraduates. Among China's domestic master's graduates, the employment rate in 2016 was over 90% (Yu, Ma & Bao, 2017), and the figure was over 95% for graduates from China's key universities (Gao, Liu & Yi, 2016). This finding is in line with the findings of this study. In addition, compared with home graduates, international graduates have higher social class origin according to parental occupation data. Since they have higher social class origin, it is more difficult for them to achieve evident upward social mobility. Instead, many international graduates remain in their original social class (Tsang, 2013).

Although there is rich research exploring Chinese university graduates and their employment outcomes, little research explores master's graduates' employment. Thus, it may be a misconception that all types of university graduates face employment difficulties and have low employment rates. Therefore, in conclusion, while, with respect to employment rates, international graduates do not perform as well as their domestically educated peers, nevertheless, the two groups of master's graduates still have high employment rates.

Table 6-4 Workplace of graduates

	International graduates		Home graduates	
Options	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
A. Foreign company or Sino-foreign joint venture	83	23.92%	28	6.85%
B. Chinese private company	95	27.38%	86	21.03%
C. Chinese public company or institution	79	22.77%	198	48.41%
D. Family business	2	0.58%	1	0.24%
E. I have my own business	13	3.75%	13	3.18%
F. Government	5	1.44%	30	7.33%
G. If there is no option matching your situation, please specify: _____	2	0.58%	2	0.49%
Blank	68	19.6%	51	12.47%
Total number	347		409	

Both kinds of master's graduates have high employment rates, but they have very divergent employment orientations. International graduates put Chinese private companies and foreign companies or Sino-foreign joint ventures as their first and second employment choices respectively, accounting for over 50% of international graduates. Firms demanding good foreign language and decision-making skills have a high demand for international graduates (Mol, 2017), so, China's labour market has targeted the needs of international graduates compared with home graduates. Unlike the international graduates, 48.41% of home graduates chose Chinese public companies or institutions as their workplaces. The fact that the two groups

of master's graduates entered different workplaces is related to their study environments. In this study, most home graduates preferred to be a teacher in public schools while international graduates chose private institutions. Moreover, 7.33% of home graduates chose to work as civil servants, which is a much higher rate than for the international graduates.

From these research results, it can be found that different kinds of master's graduates have different preferences for working places. Considering their career development, they have their own expectations and plans according to their personal situations. Thus, working in different places can meet different people's social mobility demands. For international graduates, private and foreign companies or Sino-foreign joint ventures can provide more opportunities for further career development, while Chinese public companies or institutions are more suitable for meeting home graduates' career demands. Social mobility occurs through occupational change. Therefore, choosing a suitable occupation and workplace is key. As different workplaces have different requirements, master's graduates choose suitable workplaces where they believe they can successfully achieve their expected career development and social upward mobility. Therefore, in conclusion, although both kinds of master's graduates work in China, the two groups have their different preferences regarding workplaces.

All of the participants' workplaces can be found in China's current occupation system, except for the positions of two international graduates working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Among all of the master's graduates, few had chosen to set up their own businesses, though the Chinese Government has launched a variety of policies supporting university graduates' entrepreneurship. Chinese master's graduates prefer to work in large companies after leaving university. Few of them have intentions of starting their own companies (Bernhofer & Li, 2014). Similarly, few of the international graduates in this study intended to start their own business, despite having obtained international higher education and experience of different employment cultures.

Regarding these participants' specific job positions, the questionnaires contained hundreds of different answers. Therefore, this study divided all answers into four categories in order to present a clear summary. In terms of the 279 employed international graduates, their current job positions included technological staff, non-technological staff, manager, and private enterprise owner. Technological jobs include teacher, engineer, architect and lawyer. Non-technological jobs include office clerk, translator, civil servant, auditor, school administration, data analyst, technological support, and assistant. The position of "manager" includes project manager and department leader. "Private enterprise owner" includes education company owner, media entrepreneur, and owner of overseas education agency. In conclusion, 51.58% of the international graduates had obtained non-technological positions, while 25.79 of them had found technological positions or become private enterprise owners. Only 3.43% of them were in state and society administration or managerial positions. However, among all of the 279 employed participants, none of them belonged to the commercial and service industry or was an industrial worker.

The home graduates' positions can also be categorised in the same terms as the international graduates' jobs, but there are many differences between them. Firstly, two home graduates worked in the commercial and service industry or as an industrial worker. Although this accounts for just 0.49% of home graduates, it highlights how home graduates' employment is more varied than that of international graduates. Secondly, 3.7% of home graduates entered the social class of state and society administration or manager; more than their internationally-educated peers. Among all of the home graduates, 43.84% had secured technological job positions, while 39.4% of them had non-technological positions. Thus, in terms of their employment positions, the home graduates had more advantages than their peers. This research result can be explained by considering their workplaces. For international graduates, Chinese private companies and foreign companies or Sino-foreign joint ventures are their workplace preferences; hence, the position is not their priority. Instead, career

development and opportunities are their first consideration. This is supported by the interview data (Chapter Seven) presented subsequently in this chapter. As a result, many international graduates chose to be office clerks in companies. By contrast, many home graduates selected Chinese public companies or institutions as their employment preference because they valued the occupation's position and stable status very highly. In Chinese public companies or institutions, labour mobility is very low, and all appointed staff have long-term or permanent contracts. Based on comparing the different choices of workplace between the two groups, it can be seen that the home graduates in this study have a higher social class than their peers. Therefore, based on the occupational data, home graduates, in general, have a higher social class than their internationally educated counterparts.

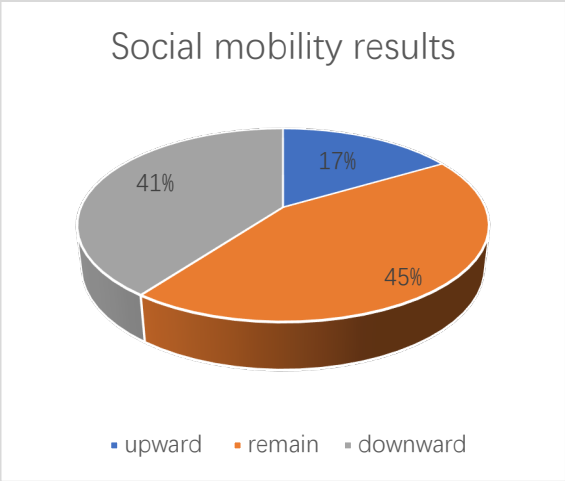
In sum, this study found that home graduates have better labour market outcomes than their peers, regarding employment rate and social class. This result is divergent from much extant research that holds the view that international graduates have better occupation opportunities than China's local graduates. Certainly, the quantitative data, with its lower explanatory capacity than qualitative data, cannot explain in detail why home graduates perform better in this regard than their peers. Therefore, Chapter Seven will provide comprehensive and complementary explanations for this research result.

6.4 Social mobility of graduates in China

Based on the above section on labour market outcomes, after measuring paternal occupation and master's graduates' occupation, I calculated intergenerational social mobility to analyse the social mobility of the two groups of master's graduates. Through plus or minus of social origin and current social class measured by occupations, the intergenerational social mobility was measured. The sample is relatively young and do not reach occupational maturity. However, this study looks at the intergenerational mobility and the role of family in education and social

mobility, so if the sample is old enough and gets occupational maturity, it will be hard to tell whether ascribed or achieved factors are important for social mobility.

According to the collected data, I calculated every participant's social mobility. The social mobility results are illustrated by in Figure 6-1 and 6-2. The coding of occupation is shown in Table 4-3. Because occupation in this study is an ordinal variable in the multi-regression model, it is an appropriate model. All abbreviations in Table 6-7 are explained in Chapter four (Table 4-2, page 83).



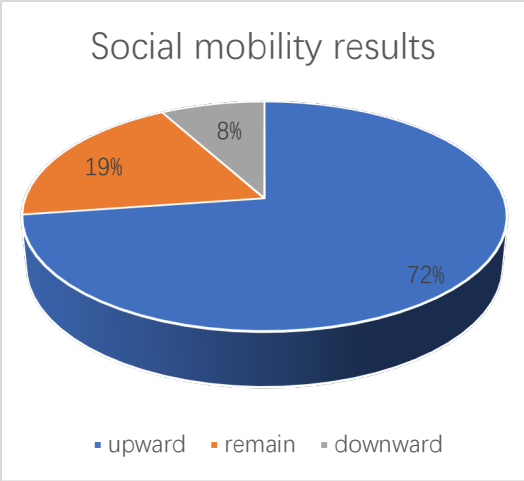


Figure 6-1 Social mobility results of international graduates. Figure 6-2 Social mobility results of home graduates

Employing the multi-regression model, this study firstly measured social mobility. It was found that home graduates have greater social mobility than their peers, as seen from the calculations of intergenerational social classes. Specifically, this study found that home graduates have upward intergenerational social mobility, while international graduates in general have downward intergenerational social mobility. This difference resulted from a series of factors, including international graduates' late graduation dates, workplace differences, different employment perceptions, and different social class origins. In other words, international graduates, with overseas master's education certificates, do not obtain the expected upward social mobility and even might struggle to retain their original social class. Although there are plenty of discussions on whether international graduates perform better in the labour market than their peers, few studies give

clear answers with sound empirical support. This study, employing quantitative data, provided some specific answers in this regard: home graduates perform better in China's labour market and social mobility than international graduates. Secondly, on the basis of social mobility research results, in order to figure out what specific factors play roles in the social mobility of the two groups of master's graduates, this study selected relevant variables used in previous surveys and in the literature, and then obtained the required data through the collected questionnaires. Given the various variables, in order to understand what and how different factors affect the social mobility of the master's graduates, this study employed a multi-regression model, which, compared to a regression model, can better deal with relationships between various independent variables and a dependent variable. Using a multi-regression model, the coefficients of the variables were calculated, and the effects of relevant factors were quantified. The process of calculating every coefficient of the variables is called a T-test. The multi-regression model results were as follows (model 1 for international graduates, model 2 for home graduates):

Table 6-5 Model summary

Model summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.642[a]	.413	.383	1.05327
2	.827[a]	.684	.671	1.01059

Table 6-6 ANOVAa of Model 1 and 2

Model		Quadratic sum	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance
1	regression	248.534	16	15.533	14.002	.000b
	residual	353.892	319	1.109		
	sum	602.426	335			
2	regression	832.134	16	52.008	50.924	.000b
	residual	384.009	376	1.021		
	sum	1216.142	392			

Table 6-7 Coefficients and T-test results

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Standardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
	T	Beta	Significance	T	Beta	Significane
(Constant)		2.586	.010		3.951	.000
MC	.146	2.795	.006	.085	2.349	.011
MS	-.070	-1.306	.093	.034	.959	.038*
P	.055	1.151	.011***	-.470	-6.401	.012*
BP	.086	1.814	.021***	.013	.403	.020**
IP	.096	2.064	.004*	.012	.412	.018
UU	.133	2.827	.005***	-.010	-.305	.006**
UG	.042	.926	.015**	.013	.403	.017
MU	.066	1.414	.035***	.031	1.028	.009***
MG	.096	2.156	.023	.001	.042	.026
OC	-.089	-1.841	.067	-.018	-.534	.034
G	.031	.710	.008**	.056	1.813	.001***
OP	-.028	-.637	.025	-.008	-.270	.007
FO	-.608	-12.269	.000**	.462	8.611	.000
MO	.036	.726	.069*	.135	2.863	.004*
FE	-.038	-.631	.029	-.038	-.855	.393**
ME	-.030	-.464	.043	-.159	-3.476	.001

Note: MC means master curriculum, MS means master supervisor, P means talent policies, BP means place of birth, IP means current living place, UU means undergraduate university, UG means undergraduate GPA, MU means master university, MG means master GPA, OC means only one child in family, G means gender, OP means only one parent family, FO means father's occupation, MO means mother's occupation, FE means father's education level, and ME means mother's education level.

A high value for r-squared tells us that the independent variables account for a high proportion of the variation in the dependent variable. Thus, the two models in this study are adequately capable of explaining the total variation in Y. This study firstly analysed the social mobility of international graduates. In this study, it was found that the international graduates, in general, have downward intergenerational mobility, which is divergent from much extant research. Many scholars conclude that Chinese student returnees with international mobility have more advantages in terms of employment and opportunities for career development than local graduates. After reviewing all of the collected questionnaires, it was found why Model 1 has weak significance. Many of the international graduates, when filling in the questionnaire, were still in the process of negotiating conditions such as wages and positions with different companies. Therefore, many of them had not yet obtained jobs at that point. However, this does not mean that they had failed in terms of their employment and social mobility. For some master's graduates, finding a job is not as important as the quality of the job (Jia, 2015). Therefore, many international graduates with advanced international higher education degrees were not yet employed in this study.

Among the unemployed graduates in the study, female graduates make up a large proportion. China's master's degree and international higher education cannot bridge the gender gap, and females still have more difficulties of finding a job than men. The gender discrimination in China's labour market will be discussed in Chapter Seven supported by interview data. The current quantitative data cannot explain more at this point. Unlike international graduates in the study, home graduates had obtained upward social mobility. Among the home graduates, approximately 90% had found employment since graduation. On the basis of the analysis of their employment outcomes, on average, they had obtained evident social mobility. According to the collected data, the home graduates enjoyed strong advantages in terms of social mobility. Empirical support is required to answer the question of what factors play roles in their social mobility and how

these factors affect social mobility. The coefficients of every factors (Table 6-7) mean the effects of them on social mobility of home and international graduates.

According to the analytical results of Table 6-7, this section provides details about the effects of all independent variables. The effects of variables related to international graduates and home graduates will be compared and analysed respectively.

Firstly, some background information will be provided. Gender is a dummy variable. The coefficient of gender in Model 1 is 0.71. Hence, in this study, male graduates have more social mobility than female graduates. The gender coefficient for home graduates is 1.813, revealing that male home graduates have many more advantages than female home graduates. In China, gender still poses persistent barriers to social mobility, especially for home graduates without international mobility.

With respect to birthplace and current living place, the two variables show positive effects on both two groups of master graduates. For international graduates, the coefficients of current living place are a little larger than for their birthplace. The two coefficients are much larger than the coefficients of birthplace and current living place for home graduates. In other words, the registered living place and current living place of international graduates are more influential than they are for home graduates, which can be expounded by capital theory. China's urban living standards are much higher than rural areas, and first-tier cities are more economically developed than non-core cities. Economic capital can be converted into cultural capital under certain conditions (Xiang & Shen, 2009). This is proved when one considers the phenomenon whereby most of China's master's students studying abroad are funded by their family, and over 50% of international graduates are born or raised in China's first-tier cities (Li, 2009).

Therefore, for many international graduates, their families' economic capital is of

fundamental importance to allow them to pursue an international master's education. The coefficient of living place for international graduates is very high due to the locations of their registered residences. Since many international graduates have first-tier household registrations, they tend to choose to stay at home or work in larger and more developed cities. In addition, their current living places are related to their employment opportunities, and the place choice is determined by their workplace and career development plan, as was analysed in depth in Chapter Five.

The next variable to consider is "one-child family". China's one-child policy has been implemented for many years, and the effects on this only child's development have been widely discussed and studied. This study's results indicate that the only-child factor has negative effects on the social mobility of international and home graduates. Similar to the "one-child family", the "one-parent family" variable also has a negative correlation with social mobility for both kinds of master's graduates. However, the coefficient in this case is not very high, which suggests that having only one parent has only slightly negative effects.

This study also collected parental information. There are four variables related to parental information, including father's and mother's occupation and education. In terms of international graduates, their paternal occupation has very strongly negative effects on their social mobility. In addition to the international graduates' high unemployment rate, many participants' fathers held decent jobs and belonged to the upper-middle class, making it very challenging for these graduates to surpass their fathers. This research finding is rather divergent from that of much existing research. Many studies have found intergenerational mobility to be very low, with higher education playing an increasingly weak role. However, in this study, many of the international graduates had not secured their parents' upper-middle-class status. Instead, they experienced downward social mobility.

Very different from international graduates, home graduates' social mobility showed strong connections to their parents' occupations, with the effects being very large. This result can be supported by their workplace data. Over half of the home graduates chose to work in Chinese public institutions. Thus, this phenomenon might have resulted from different employment preference. As many international graduates preferred to work in foreign companies, social connections did not matter in social mobility. The mother's occupation of the international graduates and home graduates had slightly positive effects, but much less so than the father's occupation. This result suggests that in China today, the father has a stronger effect on children's social mobility than the mother. The father's and mother's education were found to have negative effects on the social mobility of international graduates and home graduates.

However, this result needs to be further analysed. Since China expanded its higher education, there are now a growing number of graduates with higher education degrees. In modern-day China, education certificates have become devalued compared with those of the students' father's and mother's generation (Cai & Wei, 2007). Thus, this study finds that there is no standard by which to divide the participants' education and their parents' education. In the questionnaire data, the participants' parental education level ranges from PhD degree level to non-education level. However, only one parent held a PhD degree, with the others holding bachelor's degrees and non-degree education. Thus, all but one of the participants in this study had a higher education level than their parents did. With the massification of higher education, a university degree no longer carries the same sense of symbolic and cultural distinction as it did in the 1980s (Bai, 2006; Waters, 2008; Mok, 2016). The different values of higher education degrees in different times are hard to compare, as is shown in the statistical models. The significance values for the two variables are too large to provide useful explanations. However, this study still collects parental education information. From the collected data, it emerged that the participants have upward social mobility or retain their social class if their parents have high school education or

higher education. This supports the view that parental education can be transmitted to the next generation through a process of family education and capital conversion (Scherger & Savage, 2010; Zhao, 2013).

Lastly, this study analysed the participants' educational attainments. Four variables were used to assess the participants' education outcomes: undergraduate university, undergraduate GPA, master's university, and master's GPA. With the exception of the undergraduate university of home graduates, the variables have positive effects on social mobility.

The undergraduate universities of the international graduates have strong positive effects on their social mobility, with a coefficient value of 2.827. By contrast, the home graduates' undergraduate universities have weak negative effects. This finding results from the different master-level graduate admission rules in place in China and in the UK. In China, entrance examination is required before a student can be enrolled as a master's student, while the UK implements an applications system (Chen & Zhang, 2016). In the UK, graduate admission requirements include a GPA requirement and the tier of undergraduate university, meaning that undergraduate and master's studies are integrated for international graduates. If a student has a good honours degree as an undergraduate, this student will have a high chance of being enrolled in a good master's university. However, in China, a master's university entrance examination determines enrolment, like a form of National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao),* to some extent. As the home graduates' undergraduate university does not affect their enrolment in a master's university, the effects on their sequential social mobility are not so strong. The master's universities of the international graduates and of the home graduates both have similar positive effects. This indicates that one's master's university still plays an important role in graduates' social mobility. With regard to the impact of grades, the undergraduate and master's GPA was found to have positive effects on graduates' social mobility. Although the coefficients are not large, GPA still plays a key role in participants' social mobility. The master's GPA of international

graduates has a relatively large coefficient value, indicating that international graduates' labour market outcomes and their subsequent social mobility are more deeply affected by their academic performance in international higher education.

In summary, educational attainments have great effects on master graduates' social mobility. This study will also consider some additional factors that are not covered in extant surveys but are studied and discussed in some research. These three variables are master's courses, master's supervisors, and employment, entrepreneurship and talent policies. Here, "master's courses" consist of all the knowledge and training provided during a master's study. For international graduates and home graduates, the master's course variable has strong positive effects, suggesting that master's courses are beneficial in labour market competition and for social mobility. Many scholars have attempted to prove or explore the flaws in China's master's courses and advocate for their speedy reform (Yan, 2017). China's education has changed in many aspects and has many development problems (Murphy & Johnson, 2009).

However, from the data in this study, it can be seen that master's courses are successful, at least, in terms of offering social mobility. As the core factor in a master's education, master's courses in the UK and in China have strong positive effects on the graduates' career development and in their social competition after graduation. Since the master's courses of international graduates have a higher coefficient, this factor plays a more important role in international graduates' social mobility. The master's supervisor of international graduates has a negative effect on their social mobility, with a coefficient value of -1.306, which is closely connected to the unfortunate fit between international graduates' graduation dates and China's main recruitment season. Master's supervisors usually supervise the students during their master's dissertation until its submission. Thus, many international graduates connect their unemployment with their supervisor, as is supported by the interview data in Chapter Seven.

In addition, as all of the participants work in China, the supervisors of international graduates cannot help them deal with China's employment competition. Compared with the supervisors of international graduates, home graduates' supervisors have positive effects. However, the effects are not evident. This result might show that in China today, master's supervisors cannot build strong relationships between master's study and social mobility for their graduates (Gen, 2012). In China today, the role of master's supervisors is far removed from their expected role. With the commercialisation of master's supervisors, the research result reflects somewhat the expectations of the role a master's supervisor should play in students' development (Gen, 2012). From the data, it appears that the master's supervisors of international graduates and home graduates do not contribute to graduates' social mobility.

Employment, entrepreneurship and talent policies, as the most direct factor affecting graduate's destination of spatial mobility. Due to allowance and social welfare of different cities, this variable shows positive effects on international graduates, but have negative effects on home graduates. Among the various policies, it is easy to find that China's policies are steered preferentially towards absorbing international graduates. With the advantages of policies, international graduates place huge pressure on home graduates in terms of employment competition (Chen, 2015a). Although there are plenty of positive policies for home graduates, home graduates can seldom take advantage of these policies because the policies are not implemented effectively. With the massive number of university graduates, China's Government and universities respond actively in policymaking. However, these policies lack reasonable policy evaluation and measurement and their effects are not sufficiently analysed (Qian, 2014). Thus, it is very hard to conclude that all employment, entrepreneurship and talent policies are actually implemented and that they then have effects on home graduates.

6.5 Summary

Based on a survey, this chapter analyses graduates' education, labour market

outcomes, and social mobility. International graduates obtained undergraduate and master's education from better-ranked universities than home graduates. Home graduates, in general, obtained master's degrees at higher-tiered universities than their undergraduate universities. Overall, home graduates had a better performance in China's labour market, in terms of employment rates. However, the two groups of master's graduates had very different employment orientations, resulting from their different education backgrounds. Finally, while home graduates obtained social upward mobility, international graduates did not, meaning that home graduates have more advantages in terms of social mobility than their overseas-educated peers.

With regard to the factors at play, there are a series of variables affecting social mobility. Among these variables, for international graduates, father's occupation, master's supervisor, and one-child family status are found to have strong negative effects. While most international graduates' parents come from high social classes, in modern-day China, the intergenerational mobility of a privileged class has become weak. Thus, overall, mobility between different social classes has become increasingly difficult in China (Li & Zhu, 2017).

In contrast, significantly positive effects were found for master's courses, birthplace, current living place, undergraduate and master's university, and master's GPA. For home graduates, talent policies and mother's education have large negative effects, while master's courses, master's supervisor and master's university have significantly positive effects.

For an exploration of the factors, patterns and processes, the next chapter will provide more information based on 20 in-depth interviews. The participants' perceived labour market outcomes and social mobility are investigated, and the hidden factors and reasons, which influence social mobility, are also explored.

Chapter Seven: Perceived social mobility of graduates in China

7.1 Introduction

The findings presented in this and the previous chapter focus on the similarities and differences in the perceived labour market and social positions of international and home graduates in China. By analysing the 20 qualitative interviews with Chinese international returnees and home graduates without international academic mobility, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

1) What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China?

2) What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with home graduates in China?

Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative research data to investigate the relationship between social mobility and international higher education. The analysis concentrated on determining the social mobility of international graduates compared to their peers, and to what extent international mobility is perceived as beneficial to the career development of graduates.

7.2 Labour market position of graduates

All twenty participants involved in the qualitative interviews were relatively young, aged between 23 and 30. They were all in their first jobs at the time of the interview, working in both the private and state sectors, in education, business, as office workers, middle-rank managers, and medical doctors (Table 7-1). The only

exceptions were Wei (28, female, office worker) and Li (26, female, medical doctor), who were in their second jobs. All participants had graduated and worked for between one and four years. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese labour market has witnessed frequent shifts in employment patterns (Li, 2013). However, all of the respondents indicated their reluctance to switch between jobs, preferring a stable and decent job. The qualitative sample has a good balance in terms of gender (female=50%, male=50%) and represents a diversity of working places.

In Chapter Six, I found that home graduates had a higher employment rate and that the majority of them preferred to work in the state sector or in public institutions. By contrast, the international graduates tended to work in private or foreign ventures. The two groups of master-level graduates had very different preferences regarding their working place, as was also found in the qualitative analysis contained in this chapter. As can be seen from Table 7-1, a large proportion of the home graduates worked in the state sector, while only a few international graduates worked in this sector. Additionally, I found that the international graduates among the sample were, on average, younger than their peers.

In order to establish a baseline for comparing the master-level graduates' labour market outcomes, I compared the perceptions of the employment situation of the two groups of master's graduates and the factors they perceived to benefit or hinder their labour market position in China.

Table 7-1 Participants' place and position of employment

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Current position	Working place	Is the current job the first one? If not, previous jobs are indicated.	
International graduates (1-10)							
1	Li	26	F	Medical doctor	Public hospital	X	Medical doctor
2	Hu	25	F	Teacher	Private school	√	
3	Tian	26	F	Teacher	University	√	
4	Wang	25	F	Teacher	University	√	
5	Zhou	25	F	Office worker	Joint venture	√	
6	Lai	26	M	Office worker	Private sector	√	
7	Jun	23	M	Office worker	Joint venture	√	
8	Zhong	24	M	Office worker	State sector	√	
9	Zheng	25	M	Middle manager	State sector	√	
10	Fan	24	M	Middle manager	Foreign venture	√	
Home graduates (11-20)							
11	Sha	27	F	Civil servant	Government	√	
12	Luo	29	F	Teacher	University	√	
13	Qian	26	F	Teacher	Public school	√	
14	Wei	28	F	Office worker	Private sector	X	Office worker
15	Dong	28	F	Admin staff	University	√	
16	Tang	28	M	Engineer	State sector	√	
17	Hou	28	M	Office worker	State sector	√	
18	Huang	30	M	Engineer	State sector	√	
19	Cao	26	M	Research staff	University	√	
20	Sheng	28	M	Office worker	Private sector	√	

Note: F refers to female; M means male. No.1-10 are international graduates; No.11-20 are home graduates.

Table 7-2 Participants' social origin and place and position of employment

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Current position	Father's & mother's occupation category
				International graduates (1-10)	
1	Li	26	F	Medical doctor	State & society administrator; Manager
2	Hu	25	F	Teacher	Private enterprise owner; Private enterprise owner
3	Tian	26	F	Teacher	State & society administrator; Technological specialist
4	Wang	25	F	Teacher	Technological specialist; Clerk & office worker
5	Zhou	25	F	Office worker	Clerk & office worker; Clerk & office worker
6	Lai	26	M	Office worker	Private enterprise owner; Private enterprise owner
7	Jun	23	M	Office worker	Manger; Technological specialist
8	Zhong	24	M	Office worker	Private enterprise owner; State & society administrator
9	Zheng	25	M	Middle manager	State & society administrator; State & society administrator
10	Fan	24	M	Middle manager	State & society administrator; Technological specialist
				Home graduates (11-20)	
11	Sha	27	F	Civil servant	Industrial worker; Industrial worker
12	Luo	29	F	Teacher	Manager; Clerk & office worker
13	Qian	26	F	Teacher	Industrial worker; Industrial worker
14	Wei	28	F	Office worker	Industrial worker; Unemployed
15	Dong	28	F	Admin staff	Individual entrepreneur; Individual entrepreneur
16	Tang	28	M	Engineer	Farmer; Farmer
17	Hou	28	M	Office worker	Technological specialist; Clerk & office worker
18	Huang	30	M	Engineer	Industrial worker; Industrial worker
19	Cao	26	M	Research staff	Industrial worker; Industrial worker
20	Sheng	28	M	Office worker	Industrial worker; Unemployed

Note: F refers to female; M means male. Nos.1-10 are international graduates; Nos.11-20 are home graduates. "Individual entrepreneur" means one-person company, as defined by Lu (2002).

7.2.1 Perceptions of labour market outcomes

The majority of the international graduates interviewed in the study were very satisfied with their current working situations. The participants talked about their occupations mainly from the perspectives of social status, income, and working environment. For instance, Li worked in a public hospital in a second-tier city. When asked about her perceptions of her current job, she said:

> ….a doctor is a decent job, and grants a high social status. Although, I did not care about social class, my parents suggested I see social status as my first priority when I looked for a job. I get a salary of over 10,000 RMB every month. As a postgraduate and a freshman in the labour market, I am very proud of my salary. More importantly, my hospital provides a lot of social benefits for us.

> For example, every month, we can receive "fringe benefits", which are more generous than in other public institutions.
> (Li, 26 years old, female, an international graduate, a doctor in a public hospital)

Li came from an upper-class family, and her family paid great attention to the social prestige granted by Li's job. Unlike Li, Hu (25 years old, female, working in Beijing) believed a good job was defined by a high salary and comfortable working environment. She said: 'I am working in an international school, not a public school, because I like the comfortable working environment. Working in a work-unit (*Danwei*) would kill me. You will certainly get power with the authorities (*Bianzhi*) if you work in a public school and have a seemingly higher social class, but I do not like the complicated social connections in these public institutions.' Hu's demonstration can be linked to Weber's theory on bureaucracy (see Chapter 2, pages 14). According to Weber, social connections characterise a form of bureaucracy he labelled 'traditional', where informal agreements, favouritism and mutual favours would proliferate, in contrast to Weber's ideal form of transparent 'rational bureaucracy'. This links well also to Bourdieu's concept of social capital, where such connections in public institutions can be seen as a form of capital advancing the well-being and social status of more privileged groups. In China's practice, the concept was expanded in the socio-political context of post-reform urban China (Sevigny et al., 2009). After joining a *Danwei*, individuals would have little to do with other forms of governmental or social life (Lu, 1989; Li & Atteslander, 1995; Chen, 1996). In order to achieve this capital accumulations they need to deal with the slight favouritism of this form of bureaucracy and the need to do favours for others.

The unique Chinese social institution of *Danwei* is important for participants in this study and was mentioned by the majority of the home graduates who preferred to work in a state enterprise. *Danwei* was an important concept in pre-1978 urban China because it was related to an individual's income, housing, health care and education opportunities (Sevigny, Chen & Shen, 2009). *Danwei* was particularly

connected to the concepts of neo-traditionalism and work unit socialism (Womack, 1991), the organisation of work and leader-member exchange, material rewards, such as income and housing (Adamchak et al., 1999), power and dependence in Chinese workplaces and personal *Guanxi* (social connections).

Similarly, *Bianzhi* (power deriving from connections with the authorities) defines the process of the production of *Danwei* and relates to welfare and political power. Both concepts are at the core of Chinese bureaucratic structures (Brodsgaard, 2002). *Danwei* still plays an active role in the post-reform era in China's political processes. However, greater choices for finding a suitable job in different sectors are now available to Chinese people outside of *Danwei,* and people are increasingly reluctant to seek out *Bianzhi*.

Several participants had not had any expectations or future plans when deciding to study in the UK. Therefore, after returning, they were not sure whether they would be successful or not. When asked about their current working situations, they replied: 'Not bad, not good'; 'I did not have a plan'; 'I just think the current situation is fine'; 'It is not perfect, nor terrible'; 'At least, I have a well-paid job'. Unlike the international returnees, the home graduate respondents were all satisfied with their current working situations. Interestingly, all of them already had a clear career plan when they decided to study their master's programmes. Hou described his career plan as follows:

> I studied my master's programme [public administration] due to my career plan. I hoped to be a civil servant or have some kind of stable job. A master's-level degree holder would have more opportunities and better chances in the civil servant examination and interview.
> Hou (28 years old, male, a home graduate, working in a state company)

Similar to Hou, Zhou also expressed her reasons for studying her master's programme:

> …in my last year as an undergraduate, I tried to find a job. But finding a

> satisfying job requires a master's-level degree. I planned to work as an English teacher at that point, so, in order to meet the entry requirements, I studied a master's programme.
> Zhou (25 years old, female, a home graduate, working in a public high school)

According to the excerpts from the home graduate respondents, they appeared to have a clear understanding of their motivations for studying master's courses and of China's labour market requirements.

Nevertheless, all of the international graduates held the view that they had an advantage in China's labour market compared with the home graduates. They felt that this would endow them with better prospects in job interviews and in their future career development. For example, Li (26 years old, female, a medical doctor in a public hospital) was very satisfied with the job she secured after she studied aboard and return to China. Li's first job before her master's studies in the UK was as a doctor in another hospital. Noticing that Li's two jobs were the same, I asked her why she had quit the first job and had chosen to study in the UK. She said: 'I disliked my first job as a junior doctor due to the low salary. I was an undergraduate at that time, so I really needed a master's degree if I wanted to have a better job.' Li was happy with her second job and its pay, and she felt that she had a better chance of promotion as a result of her international degree.

7.2.2 Employers' needs through the graduates' eyes

'Interviewers showed great interest in my international study experience and attainments, and I could see they like recruiting returnees,' stated Hu. According to Hu's experience, studying abroad can be regarded as a process of pursuing and accumulating international cultural capital (Cebolla-Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2018; Moskal & Schweisfurth, 2018). Being able to distinguish oneself as having acquired this capital is usually seen as beneficial to international graduates' labour market outcomes, because it can be symbolic of self-growth in relation to experiencing

and learning from a diversity of cultures. This then increases the likelihood of a candidate demonstrating a positive attribute to employers in an increasingly competitive globalised context. More importantly, international study experience also potentially provides other life-course outcomes such as self-growth (Cebolla-Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2018: 368). In China's labour market, 'the ways of thinking as a global thinker is an important factor', Hu said. Life-course outcomes can be seen as the cultural capital accumulated through international study. Lai (26 years old, male, working in Shanghai) also perceived that employers in China prefer interviewing and recruiting returnees. Lai said:

> Chinese employers are more willing to recruit international graduates to promote their company's international image. As a result, returnees could enjoy substantial advantages when being interviewed and in their future development compared with home graduates.
> Lai (26 years old, male, an international graduate, private company office worker)

Similar perceptions were expressed by Tian, a university teacher. Tian believed that an international graduate had a natural advantage in employment interviews, as returnees had certain exclusive benefits, as she explained:

> An overseas degree does attract employers. And because I am an international graduate, I did not need to take a written examination. At that time, when I was told about my exemption from the written examination, I realised the value of an international degree. During my job interview, I was also asked about my overseas study experience and English language skills. I can see that China's labour market still sees returnees as talents.
> Tian (26 years old, female, an international graduate, a university teacher)

Jun expressed similar thoughts:

> …although the annual increase in international graduates in China is rapid, the gross of international graduates is much smaller than that of home graduates. Returnees are regarded as a kind of rare human resource. Thus, I get more training opportunities than my peers who don't have an international degree.
> Jun (23 years old, male, an international graduate, an office worker in a joint venture)

Home graduates also believed that employers prefer to recruit international graduates. As noted above, in China's labour market, international degrees and overseas study experience are positively associated with employers' favourable impressions and evaluations, because in China, overseas study experience is associated with Bourdieu's symbolic capital. The symbolic capital of studying abroad represent 'a student's nature and international horizon and education quality', Tang said (28 years old, male, a home graduate, working in a state sector as an engineer). The phenomenon is interesting to note and seems to be strongly influenced by the discourse of human capital theory. From a human capital perspective, an overseas study experience emerges as an instrumental pathway to send positive and distinctive signals to employers (Fong, 2011). Bourdieu sees the diploma/other formal qualifications as a manifestation of institutional cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, international graduates can maintain their class advantage by acquiring 'cultural capital' in the form of overseas experience. The institutional cultural capital always attracts employer's attention in China, because 'international graduate is seen as a rare talented group', Tang said. As a result, Chinese students increasingly invest in international higher education to gain global academic standards and then increase their monetary return from their investments in international higher education (Cebolla-Boado, Hu & Soysal, 2017). Reporting Tang's job-seeking experience and career development situation, Tang notes:

> International returnees are attractive for interviewers from the moment they show their CVs, as home graduates are too common for interviewers. There are millions of master-level graduates graduating from Chinese universities every year. However, international graduates seem to be a rare resource. Because of the stereotype, in the beginning, international graduates can receive more attention and better opportunities of getting training after being placed. For example, my boss takes some employees with international diplomas with him to meet business guests. In his words, international graduates can represent a good corporate image and understand the implied meanings of what foreigners are saying. Although, my working place is a state company, it focuses on technological research and product sales. Communicating with foreign countries is necessary and common; so international graduates are regarded as valuable talents. Despite the fact

> that some home graduates can speak English fluently, these opportunities are, without any doubt, given to international graduates.
> Tang (28 years old, male, a home graduate, working in a state sector as an engineer)

Tang's experience shows how his employer sees the employees from the viewpoint of human capital theory. It is interesting that some participants used the phrase "rare resources", which seems to be very much influenced by the discourse of human capital theory. There is a difference between participants' own individualised perceptions influenced by human capital theory and the social structural dynamics having a role in their outcomes. Although Tang perceived international graduates have advantages in China's labour market, home graduates still have satisfying labour market outcomes due to their accumulated domestic cultural capital. Home graduates tend to work in state companies and government in which domestic cultural capital is enough in terms of their employment and career development. Having worked in a state company for over three years, Tang was an engineer. However, his colleagues who were international graduates had received more training opportunities and had developed stronger social networks. Tang felt that these colleagues would have more possibilities of getting promotion than he would, even though he perceived his performance at work to be better than that of the international returnees. Tang realised, at this point, that he was in a disadvantaged position when it came to develop his career compared with international graduates. This shows Tang's contradictory and complicated perceptions. However, Tang was still satisfied with his current position, in terms of his income and social status compared to other home graduates.

In addition, the quotation from Tang can also be analysed through the lens of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Tang compared the different kind of cultural capital between international and home graduates and found international graduates have more advantages in labour market and future career development, because of their global cultural capital such as English language skills. Moreover,

the lack of rationality in the assumption that 'international is best' is arguably something Weber would call a flawed form of bureaucracy rather than ideal rational bureaucracy.

A similar situation was also reported by Sha (27 years old, female, working in Beijing, a home graduate). Sha worked as an office worker for the government. She expressed her confusion regarding companies' crazy preference for international graduates: 'I find many companies like recruiting international graduates even if the position does not need English language proficiency and overseas study experience. I think it is the result of employers thinking that international graduates are superior to home graduates.' Studying abroad carries more symbolic power than effective knowledge. Bourdieu regards symbolic capital as the prestige and authority that distinguishes certain subjects from others. Individuals and groups endowed with symbolic capital constitute them in expressive styles, transformed and unrecognizable forms of positions in relations of force (Bourdieu, 2013: 297). While it is certainly true that many returnees do not have a high-quality degree or extensive knowledge, they have better employment results. The international education degree carries symbols that distinguish them from domestically educated graduates, and more importantly, 'the labour market also claims that the symbols are important regarding their recruitment decision,' said by Sha. Additionally, the symbolic capital also works among home graduates. Labour market prefers to recruit graduates from universities with high ranking and good reputation. The established symbolic capital of international degree drives Chinese students to study abroad and labour market to recruit international graduates. Sha ascribed the behaviour of employers to the blind partiality and unfair bias shown in favour of international returnees. Similarly, Qian said:

> …to be honest, international graduates would have more opportunities to get additional working training and promotion than us. Taking my school as an example, the leaders always assign foreign affairs stuff to international graduates, because the large number of returnee employees can be

> recognised as a high level of the school's internationalisation.
> Qian (26 years old, female, a home graduate, a public-school teacher)

The labour market environment and employers' beliefs contribute to the fact that international graduates held an advantage over their peers with home diplomas. Compared with local graduates, the international graduates in China were seen as talents who foster intercultural communication and bring innovative ideas and advanced technology from foreign countries – or, at least, the "symbolic" capital of their degrees suggests these qualities.

Most of the home graduates in the interviews believed that international graduates had an advantage in the labour market and agreed that employers preferred to recruit international graduates. There were only two home graduates who disagreed with this view, Hou and Sheng. Hou reported:

> …my company does not divide candidates into home and international graduates. All candidates consist of undergraduates and master-level graduates. My company is a Top 500, but the human resources department does not have the capacity or energy to identify all of the international institutions. Frankly, I prefer to interview home graduates, because I know every Chinese university. For foreign universities, I only know Cambridge University, Oxford University, and graduates from these universities would never like to work in my company.
> Hou (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an office worker in the human resources department of a state company)

For some Chinese companies, recruiting home graduates is a safer strategy if they have limited information and understandings of overseas universities. Similarly, Sheng (28 years old, male, working as a marketing officer in a private company) had a large number of colleagues, none of whom were international graduates. Sheng admitted he had had some interest in studying abroad, for example, to study a master's programme in the UK, but he had changed his mind as he thought an international study experience would not improve his position in the labour market:

> Now the value of an international degree is less, because international graduates are no longer scarce resources, and the number of returnees next year, I guess, may be 200,000. My job is to sell products, and my colleagues come from various educational backgrounds. My boss did not go to university, but he is very rich now, so I do not think a degree can decide everything.
> Sheng (28 years old, male, a home graduate, working as a marketing officer in a private company)

Sheng perceived that he had no disadvantages in labour market, despite not having an international degree. His job only required him to have excellent communication skills and a good social network, not a degree certificate. Overall, he was very satisfied with his employment. According to Sheng, it could be noticed that an international degree does not work in all industries or companies. Bourdieu's notion of field is helpful to explain this. The value of forms of cultural capital such as qualifications is fluid and depending on the particular 'field' that the person is entering e.g. certain employment 'fields' will not place as much value on the degree as others. This is arguably a key reason for international and home graduates having different workplace preferences. Foreign company/private company fields value international degrees more than China's domestic degrees, while state company/government fields value domestic degrees more. The social/power dynamics depends on different fields. Therefore, the value of an international graduate was dependent on the industry he or she would enter.

Although Hou and Sheng outright rejected the argument that the labour market prefers international graduates, many of our respondents (both home graduates and international returnees) perceived international graduates as having more opportunities in the labour market. This was true of graduates from all backgrounds and working fields, whether they were males or females.

In addition to the perception that international graduates were more preferred by the labour market, international returnees regarded themselves as more competitive candidates in the labour market. The different views of international

and home graduates are influenced by neoliberal perceptions. Human capital theory can explain participants' perceptions of themselves, as this theory reflects neoliberal philosophies that are highly influential in terms of shaping public thinking. Both kinds of graduate perceive that international graduates have more opportunities and better labour market outcomes, but the analytical results show each group is satisfied with their labour market outcomes. This may be decided by the different labour recruitments in different fields. Both institutional domestic and international degrees are attractive to employers, and employers arguably select the most suitable employees on the basis of profit maximisation. The perceived symbolic value of degrees is therefore a key factor employers' choice. Although this is very 'rational', 'social connections also play a part in the employment, especially in state sections', said by Hou.

Interestingly, home graduates also expressed pride in being more competitive than international graduates. These conflicting perceptions may be the result of the competition between the two groups of master-level graduates. Chen (2015) also finds increasingly intense employment competition between international graduates and indigenous graduates of Shanghai, where international graduates occupied more employment places than home graduates. However, according to the quantitative research results presented in Chapter Six, home graduates had better performances in the labour market. In order to decipher the divergent perceptions of international and home graduates, I further investigated what factors contribute to their competition in the labour market and affect their current working situations.

7.2.3 Factors perceived to influence labour market outcomes

The interviewees mentioned multiple factors that could lead to differences in labour market outcomes between the two groups of graduates. These factors can be grouped into the following four main themes.

Knowledge or skills?

Home graduates reported knowledge and skills as being two key factors in their labour market performance. In this study, “knowledge” refers to the academic contents which respondents learnt from modules in the classroom, while “skills” mainly include professional skills, study ability, transformed ways of thinking, and English language and global competence.

None of the international graduate respondents related their labour market outcomes to knowledge. They thought the academic knowledge they had gained during their studies was very specific and thus hard to apply to their current jobs, which Bourdieu has explained in his capital theory. Capital cannot be transferred in all fields. In China, part of international cultural capital cannot be successfully converted, ‘which is determined by China’s realistic and cultural difference between the western and eastern’, Lai said. (26 years old, male, an international graduate an office worker in a private company). This negative argument resulted from the gap between the study content of their master’s programmes and their current occupations. For example, Lai worked for an education agency as a salesman in the marketing department. He provided information about studying abroad and persuaded clients to buy services from his agency. In his words, the knowledge he acquired at the overseas university was useless for his current job. Jun (23 years old, male, an international graduate, an office worker in a joint venture) also experienced a similar situation, as she reported: ‘In the UK, I studied how to conduct a medical experiment, but it could not be applicable in China, where totally different safety regulations are implemented.’ The knowledge learnt in the UK is often not relevant to the Chinese context or difficult to transfer, which produces a major problem for international graduates. Nevertheless, the respondents appreciated the importance of accessing the overseas academic knowledge (which was, in their opinion, unavailable in Chinese classrooms) and the changes the experience had brought to their ways of thinking. The international graduates reported an improvement in their skills as a result of their study experiences in the UK.

On the contrary, the home graduates believed that the knowledge was beneficial to their employment and career development. The home graduate respondents who had studied engineering or science had concentrated on acquiring professional knowledge. According to their interviews, professional knowledge was consistent with their future working positions, as Tang (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer) explained: 'If I was just an undergraduate, I would have no chance of knowing how to conduct a research project. What I learnt from my master's study is used in my current work.'

Tang was an engineer in a state company. He concluded that the basic knowledge of how to conduct a research project is a fundamental skill required to do his current job. Also majoring in engineering, Huang (30 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer working in a state sector), outlined the importance of professional knowledge in his current job. He stressed the value of knowing how to conduct a research project and of having professional knowledge in the engineering field. Interestingly, different individual subjects had different opinions of whether professional knowledge was important. Respondents majoring in social sciences and the arts did not make a significant association between professional knowledge and their labour market outcomes.

The two groups of master-level graduates also held different views with respect to skills. All of the international graduates in the study ascribed their labour market outcomes to their skills developed during their master's studies in the UK. They identified four main categories of skills that they had developed: independent study skills, personal communication in intercultural contexts, proficiency in English language, and global competence.

For example, Hu (25 years old, female, an international graduate, working in an international school in Beijing), who completed her master's degree in the UK in 2017, highlighted the fierce competition in China's labour market. She believed that her independent study ability and English language proficiency were the two

main benefits of studying abroad. She said: 'Having a good understanding of foreign culture and being proficient in communicating with non-Chinese are advantageous factors when looking for a job in China.' All of the returnee respondents mentioned independent study ability. As Jun notes, 'We were pushed to study independently. When I had questions in modules or afterschool readings, I needed to find answers by myself in the library. I had to make an appointment with the lecturer if I could not figure it out on my own.'

Concentrating on acquiring independent study skills, Li (26 years old, female, an international graduate, a medical doctor) planned her study time, solved questions by herself, and regularly reported the progress of her experiments to her supervisor. It seems that the total timeline was flexible in the UK, which required students to study independently. As Li's supervisor was responsible for several large research projects, Li needed to make an appointment if she encountered some problems and needed to get face-to-face help. Li said: 'I had to solve the questions by myself. Making an appointment and getting answers from the supervisor was time-consuming. Only if I came across major problems with which I could not cope would I contact my supervisor for suggestions.' Of course, Li also felt that her communication skills developed in an intercultural context were much improved. She said:

> …my English language improved a lot in seminars and modules. More importantly, through interpersonal communication, I felt that, in addition to English language skills, my understandings of foreign culture were enhanced. I could see questions from a global perspective and had a better understanding of people and things that I had never seen before.
> Li (26 years old, female, an international graduate, a doctor in a public hospital)

Global competence, a kind of cultural capital (Moskal, 2017), was frequently mentioned by all of the international graduate respondents. Global competence refers to skills and individual development linked to self-awareness and self-reflection, as a benefit of internationalisation. Not everyone has an equal

opportunity to develop cosmopolitan competences, and the norms and values that define them are not necessarily universally shared (Moskal & Schweisfurth, 2018:94). Global competence can be regarded as a specific aspect of the capital acquired through international experience discussed earlier in the chapter, and can be seen as a specific aspect of Bourdieu's cultural capital. The access to global competence determines the prestige of some specific groups. Integrated with the international higher education degree, global competence as constituting cultural capital belongs to global cultural capital in the stratified realm of global higher education. It can be seen as the most distinctive symbol of the returnees because it was developed through a Western lens in the arguably more "individualistic" societies of the USA, UK or Australia (Moskal, 2017). Moskal (2017) argues that global competence has become a key "pull" factor when the link between higher education in the home country and a well-paid job is weakening. The returnees' global competence obtained from their overseas study has become an invisible value in employability, as explained by Zhou:

> A certificate of international higher education by itself cannot guarantee a well-paid job, but international graduates' unique global competence, which is unavailable to home graduates, is a core ability and a distinction that contributes to international graduates' success.
> Zhou (25 years old, female, an international graduate, working in Beijing)

Unlike the international graduates, home graduates in the study perceived professional knowledge and skills as equally important. They talked about two main categories of skills: interpersonal relationship and communication skills, and academic communication skills. Sha explained it as follows:

> …Knowing how to deal with interpersonal relationships in China can be seen as a profound skill if you want to have a satisfactory career development. At university, the environment is similar to a working situation. You have a community in which you communicate with your supervisor and your classmates. Dealing with interpersonal relationships in the community is a challenge. Working in local government, I have found that interpersonal relationship skills can determine career development.
> Sha (27 years old, female, a home graduate, a civil servant in Government).

Sha worked in a local government in Beijing and was satisfied with her working situation, because her current job matched her master's major and preferred profession. Cao (26 years old, male, a research associate) also talked about the importance of interpersonal relationship skills, and particularly stressed public speaking skills. Cao said: 'Developing further mainly depends on professional knowledge and research skills, social connections and good public communication skills.' As a research associate, Cao thought that both professional knowledge and soft skills were essential for further development. Qian (26 years old, female) was an English teacher in a public school. She viewed knowing how to communicate with students as a key part of her work: 'I greatly developed my English language skills at my master's university, and now it is important for me how to convey the knowledge to my students.' In addition to interpersonal relationship and communication skills, academic communication skill was another theme mentioned by the majority of the home graduates. They perceived that academic communication skills essentially consisted of two aspects: oral expression (e.g. academic presentations), and academic publications. In China's master's education, students are provided with basic academic training and are encouraged by supervisors to publish papers. Sha (27 years old, female, a civil servant) regarded the process of producing an academic paper as a way of developing new ideas for seeing society. She said that writing an academic paper and publishing helps develop logical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are useful in her working career. Similarly, Hou said:

> …in my resume, my boss was attracted by my academic publications. Although I am working in a state company, the boss was still interested in my academic publications. In my boss's words, publications could be used as a tool to evaluate the quality of master-level graduates. In China, master's degrees are research degrees, and many universities set publication as the graduation standard. If a master's student was diligent, smart and ambitious, he or she would be able to publish some papers with his or her supervisor's help. Also, in the working context, presentation skills are crucial. By taking part in a lot of academic conferences recommended by my master's supervisor, I lost my fear of speaking in front of people.
> Hou (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an office worker in a state company)

Hou interpreted the world through the lens of the individualised discourse of graduate success, which downplays social inequality. In contrast with the international graduates, the majority of the home graduates integrated professional knowledge and practical skills and thought they were equally important.

University reputation and ranking

For both international and home graduates, their master's university's reputation and ranking emerged as an important theme, as it was mentioned by all respondents several times. Participants tend to see university reputation and ranking as a form of symbolic capital which is perceived to be an important factor in their career success. All international graduates in the interview emphasised the importance of master's university reputation and ranking, and, more importantly, they explained the link between university reputation and ranking and their employment and career development. Lai, too, mentioned university reputation and ranking many times and ascribed his career success to this factor:

> If I had not got my degree from my master's university, I would not have had the opportunity to get my current job. I think my master's university reputation and ranking was the decisive factor that persuaded my boss to hire me. I believed that my master's university could determine my employment and sequential career development. I could not explain the hidden meaning of university reputation, and it just looks like a symbol. You graduate from this prestigious university, so you share the honour of this university. A good university, in general, can produce graduates of high quality.
> Lai (26 years old, an international graduate, male, an office worker)

Lai showed the influence of university reputation and ranking on his labour market outcomes, linking his success to the reputation of his university. However, as the university produced a better 'high quality' graduate than others, Lai also achieved his success based on his qualities. Lai's experiences confirmed that university prestige is the most important factor when choosing an overseas university (Cebolla-Boado, Hu & Soysal, 2018). Cebolla-Boado, Hu and Soysal (2018) argue that university prestige is the main driver for Chinese students choosing UK higher

education, together with the further social and cultural offerings that these universities can provide. This indicates the importance of the variety of capitals provided by a prestigious university. The strong links of university reputation and ranking can be explained from a human capital perspective, underlining the expected return from international higher education. It frames out-migration to desirable universities as an option for individuals to enhance their labour market outcomes and career positioning (Cebolla-Boado, Hu & Soysal, 2019: 367). Analysing this through the lens of symbolic capital, participants are heavily focussed on university reputation and university ranking, because 'all of Chinese students are chasing prestigious university and taking it as a proud thing', Wang said. With the massification of higher education in China, a university degree no longer has the same value of symbolic and cultural distinction as it did in the 1980s (Bai, 2006; Waters, 2008). In order to pursue symbolic and cultural distinction with high quality, Chinese students choose to study in a prestigious university or study abroad. Wang also emphasised the role of university reputation and ranking in her labour market outcomes:

> My master's university is a top one, famous for its worldwide reputation and ranking. China's employers still value university ranking, and they like to recruit employees who graduate from a top university. Compared with academic staff quality and programme structure, university reputation and ranking seem more important in the labour market. The university ranking level can, to some extent, determine the quality of your first job.
> Wang (25 years old, female, an international graduate, a university teacher)

The UK study experience enhanced Wang's resume and was beneficial to her future career development. She said: 'In my daily work, I also have to receive foreign delegations, a task assigned to me by the university rector. My rector thinks that as I graduated from the UK, my English is good enough to accompany foreign guests.' Like Wang, all of the international graduates thought their overseas study experience gave them more opportunities for work and training and greater trust from their bosses. In addition, all of the international graduates perceived their universities (no matter which university they graduated from) as having a good

reputation and a good position in the ranking. They also believed their university reputation and ranking position to have been helpful in their job-hunting process and for their future development.

Similar to the international graduates, home graduates also believed their universities' ranking positions and reputations were crucial to their employment prospects. Home graduates always mentioned the top-tiered 211 and 985 universities, as Tang reported:

> The university reputation and ranking played a decisive role in getting my current job. My company only considers recruiting graduates of 211 universities, so I was so lucky to be placed. If I had not graduated from one of the 211 universities, I would have had no chance of being interviewed.
> Tang (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer)

Sha (27 years old, female, a civil servant, a home graduate) experienced a similar situation and viewed university ranking as a basic condition for securing a good job. She said: 'Many employers set a 211 or 985 university as the minimum requirement. For example, some government positions only consider 211 or 985 graduates. If you are not, you cannot get an interview opportunity.' However, Hou was a special case, as he had conducted his undergraduate studies at a *Sanben* University (*Sanben* refers to the third tier of universities, i.e. not high ranking). He succeeded in securing a place at a *211 university* for his master's programme after he realised the importance of graduating from a prestigious university. He said: 'Being a graduate from a *211 university* made me stand out when I looked for a job.' Without a master's degree from a 211 university, Hou felt that he would have struggled to obtain his current job. Studying in a prestigious university is becoming an instrumental means in terms of the increasing likelihood of sending positive and distinctive signals to employers. The respondents' emphasis on university ranking and reputation shows their labour market outcomes are greatly affected by it.

All of the international and home graduates referred to the vital role played by

university reputation and ranking in their labour market outcomes. In addition to employment, all respondents linked the cultural offerings provided by their universities' prestige to their career development. For Bourdieu, society is made up of "fields", and higher education is one field in which capital is the central idea (Bourdieu, 1986). Higher education provides educational credentials and various forms of cultural goods. The different kinds of "field" link to different qualities of cultural goods and social circles. In the same field, individuals tend to share similar lifestyles, tastes, social networks and information. At least those from the more advantaged middle classes will share this, and this is a key area in which working-class students feel disadvantaged or excluded. Bourdieu's notion of "field" provides explanations for inviduals graduating from different universities. For international graduates, they enter a totally different "field" compared with home graduates. The cultural goods and international students' social circle are not available for home graduates. From a combination of human capital and cultural capital theory, these bring success in their future career and personal development (Alba & Sidhu, 2015).

Gender issues

Gender issues were frequently discussed by all of the respondents. In China, men still dominate occupations offering more pecuniary rewards and greater authority (He & Zhou, 2018). A 2010 survey reported that China's gender income gap is becoming larger because the income of rural women is 56% that of their counterparts and urban women's income is 67.3% that of their male counterparts (Kim, 2013). Huppatz and Goodwin (2013) expand the work of feminist Bourdieusian scholars, arguing that gender as well as class may be a central form of stratification in the social order. As men are not expected to do unpaid family care work, females are often discriminated against in work allocation due to ideas about female inferiority and factors such as maternity leave, childcare, and women taking more time off than men for household matters (Pimentel, 2006).According to the interview respondents in this study, gender issues are mainly embodied in disparities in employment attainment, positions, and

professional/technical occupations.

Sha was an art graduate and experienced gender disparities when looking for a job. As she worked as a civil servant, her position was very different from those in enterprises, as she explained:

> …in government, vacancies are very limited and controlled by leaders. Governments always want to reduce running costs, so they do not want to see maternity leave. The number of *Bianzhi* in a department [permanent identity of working for the state] is fixed. In addition, the Government cannot fire employees at random, because of *Bianzhi*. Thus, all civil servants have a permanent contract. Therefore, due to the limited and competitive positions in government, females are usually not considered if males can meet the requirements.
> Sha (27 years old, female, a home graduate, working in local government)

Men utilising gender capital maintain their advantages, and the feminist Bourdieuian analysis of gender can explain the gender advantage/disadvantage in the workplace (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013). Through a lens of gender capital analysis, Hou's perception on workplace can be explained. From the perspective of a worker in the human resources department, Hou recapped his experience of being recruited and his working experience:

> Gender was an advantage for me when I was looking for a job. It is easy to understand that the maternity leave of female employees will bring losses. Also, positions such as human resources clerk, manager, assistant, and so on are required to deal with some public relations, so male employers are more suitable. Now I am working in human resources department. My boss tells me directly that if there are suitable male job hunters, females can never be considered unless a female job hunter has an impressive resume. I also understand their behaviour, because companies do not expect to make a loss.
> Hou (28 years old, male, a home graduate, working in a state company)

According to Hou, men are more suitable to do jobs involving public relations. For example, drinking is a necessary part of entertainment in external relations. In traditional culture, Chinese women are required to be good wives and mothers while men should work outside and take part in a variety of social activities. In

order to avoid family conflicts, women, in contemporary China, are encouraged to return home to do unpaid family household work upon finishing their work in companies.

It can be noticed that China lacks a notion of equal opportunity rights for women. A large proportion of Chinese women plan to have children and assume that it is their right to take time off after a child is born, unless in the case of shared parenting. Due to these gender norms and perceived family duties, Chinese women face increasingly complex and unfavourable labour market conditions in the post-reform era (He & Wu, 2017). A disparity in employment attainment is a widely observed phenomenon, and in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), its impact is much stronger (Glass et al., 2013; Sassler et al., 2017), as Tang stated:

> In contemporary China, females have difficulty finding a job compared with males. Taking my company as an example, it is in the state sector and has limited places for females. The human resources manager does not have the right to recruit females. Without the approval of his boss, the human resources department cannot consider female graduates. Only female graduates who are very talented in their area of expertise or have rich social connections can be recruited.
> Tang (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer in a state company)

In Tang's company, recruiting a female graduate was very rare, and the number of female employees was small. In addition, in the STEM field, most employers did not plan to recruit females due to the perceived "health" considerations. Cao (26 years old, male, a home graduate, working in a university) was a research associate working on equipment maintenance, with risks of being exposed to radiation. Thus, considering female workers' individual plans, especially regarding pregnancy and childcare, the employer did not want to take risks of recruiting females. Cao provided more information:

> …my position involves danger due to the invisible radiation. More importantly, it is not healthy for females who are preparing to have a baby. Also, maternity

> leave may bring inconveniences in the lab, because there is not enough staff to run the equipment. Recruiting more people is hard, as *Bianzhi* is very seriously limited. Thus, females would not be expected to be interviewed for such positions.
> Cao (26 years old, male, a home graduate, a research associate in a public university)

Similar to the home graduates, the international graduates also shared their observations of gender disparities in labour market outcomes. All of the female respondents, despite being employed, observed gender disparities. None of the female international graduates were satisfied with their current career development due to the gender inequality. Both Li (female, working in a public hospital, an international graduate) and Hu (female, working in an international school, an international graduate) said they were very lucky, because at the time when they were interviewed, there was no male competing with them for the same position. Li said: 'My boss would have rejected my application if a male with a similar resume and working abilities had applied for the same position.' Similarly, Wang said:

> In addition to employment, females meet problems getting promotion and additional benefits. Because Beijing decreased the number of *Hukou* last year, the assigned number of *Hukou* to my university became fewer. The university gave the only *Hukou* to a male teacher, not based on working outcomes, but on gender.
> Wang (25 years old, female, an international graduate, working in a public university)

Another interesting point is that while the majority of female graduates discussed age and relationship status, the male respondents did not mention these aspects, as Li stated:

> In my job interview, I was asked whether I was single. It was very embarrassing at that time. My boss was reluctant to recruit a female who was in a stable relationship, as it meant marriage leave and maternity leave was imminent after starting work. As I was single when I was interviewed, my interview result was not too bad.
> Li (26 years old, female, an international graduate, a doctor in a public hospital)

Wang also agreed that the single relationship status was an advantage for females, and put even greater emphasis on the age of females:

> My job interview experience went generally smoothly. The interviewer was very satisfied with me, for I was single at that time. I knew an alumnus who was 30 years old. She also applied for the university in which I am working. However, she was rejected because of her age. The reason given for her rejection was that she may put too much energy in her family, and thus, as a married woman, she did not have enough time to work in the university. I am sure she would have devoted her time and energy to her work, but the university was not willing to take the risk.
> Wang (25 years old, female, an international graduate, a university teacher)

None of the female respondents could avoid the question of age or relationship status in their job interviews. Gender was seemingly inextricably linked with age and relationship status for female candidates from the viewpoint of employers. However, none of the international graduates reported problems related to age in their employment as all of the female international graduates were relatively younger than the home graduates. Some of the older female home graduates, like Wang's friend, struggled to find a job. It appeared that employers perceive that older females usually spend more time and energy on having a baby or serving a family than younger graduates.

As for the views of the male respondents, Fan (24 years old, male, an international graduate) explained the gender differences in his working context. He worked in a foreign company as a middle manager, but he needed to do a night shift once a month. He said: 'The work is not suitable for females at all, because males and females have physical differences. Working for a whole night is completely fine for a man, but females cannot hold on.' Similarly, Zhong (24 years old, male, an international graduate, an office worker in a state company) said: 'The workload in my company is very heavy, so my boss usually only considers males.' Zheng, viewing the gender issue from the perspective of family size, reported:

> In China today, employers tend to assign important tasks to male employees. It

> is rooted in the employers' consciousness, some kind of stereotype. China has abolished its one-child policy, and more importantly, family size in China has shrunk rapidly. More care for children and older adults is an important issue for every Chinese family. Thus, females need to take more responsibilities for caring for their families. However, employers do not wish to see too many leave applications from females, and the best and most efficient way is to only recruit males.
> Zheng (25 years old, male, an international graduate, middle manager in the state sector)

In summary, the influence of gender equality norms is pervasive (He & Zhou, 2018). Even though the expansion of higher education has largely contributed to narrowing the gender gap in achievement at higher education level in China (Yeung, 2012), women, both international and home graduates, are still disadvantaged in terms of occupational attainment and career development. It seems that international study attainment and a UK degree are not sufficient to be able to narrow the gender gap for female graduates in the workplace. Much worse, a large number of male respondents implied that females should take on more responsibility for household affairs (Chen, 2018), despite acknowledging the gender inequality. The long-standing gender paradigm still affects females, and higher education has not worked well to bridge the gender gap in the labour market and in family households.

Social connections and employment policy

Bourdieu's notion of social capital can explain the importance of social connections and employment policy. The social connections of the international graduates mainly related to alumni help. For the home graduates, on the other hand, their master's supervisors' help was their main form of social connection. Policy was considered to be an advantageous factor for international graduates but had moderate effects on home graduates' labour market outcomes.

Although the majority of international graduates said that their master's supervisors had been helpful with their master's study and for developing their ways of thinking, they negatively evaluated their supervisors' contributions to

their labour market outcomes. Instead, the international graduates felt that their alumni connections positively affected their working outcomes. Lai (26 years old, male, an international graduate, an office worker) said: 'The alumni of my master's university helped me a lot. To be honest, social connections are very important in every stage of the career. Many alumni have recommended a lot of clients to me, so my boss believed I was a talent and I felt my career was promising.' Zhou also had a similar experience. She said:

> …Many classmates were working in Beijing, and we had a lot of meetings and alumni events. In these activities, we could establish business cooperation and know more people via our current alumni circles. These resources were very helpful for my current job.
> Zhou (25 years old, female, a home graduate, an office worker in Beijing)

In stark contrast with the findings for the international graduates, the majority of the home graduates defined social connections based on their supervisor's help, which was determined in terms of the relationship between Chinese master students and their supervisors. Social capital in the form of relationship between master supervisors and students depends on the particular field. 'In China, a master's degree is defined as a research degree. Master's students are assigned a supervisor who is responsible for all academic training, like a PhD supervisor,' said Tang (male, a home graduate). Cao, working as a research associate in the university in which he had studied his master's programme, said:

> …Master's graduates usually find it very difficult to stay and work in their universities. My master's supervisor helped me a lot. He is a professor and a lab manager, so he has a lot of social connections. Because of his connections, the interviewers gave me positive feedback. Finally, I got my current job.
> Cao (26 years old, male, a home graduate, working in university as a research associate)

The other respondents also received help from their supervisors, in the form of academic conference recommendations, internship recommendations, academic publications, and so on. According to the respondents, the connection network

was structured by master's supervisors and helpful for graduates' future development. As I have discussed in this chapter, social connections (Guanxi), according to Bourdieu's capital theory, can be regarded as a form of social capital since it implies an exchange of favours and obligations (Xin & Pearce, 1996). 'In Chinese context, social capital is an important factor in social mobility and employment,' said by Cao. Social capital can bind together to defend their common interests.

Employment policy also emerged as an important theme for international graduates, Hu said:

> National policies play a positive role in returnees' development. International returnees can get Beijing *Hukou* while home graduates are usually not given it. The policy is aimed at attracting returnee talents. Many returnees work in Beijing to attain Beijing *Hukou*.
> Hu (25 years old, female, an international graduate)

Similarly, Jun (23 years old, male, an international graduate) also mentioned the Shanghai *Hukou*, which is an exclusive policy for returnees. According to the demographic information provided, Hu and Jun were not originally from Shanghai or Beijing, so this policy, to some degree, determined the employment place and spatial mobility of the master-level graduates.

7.3 Perceived social mobility of international graduates and home graduates

The majority of the interview respondents believed that international graduates had better and more opportunities to achieve upward social mobility. However, the majority of international graduates also reported that they had not achieved the same level as their parents in terms of social status and social class. In contrast, all of the home graduates reported that their social status was much better than their social origin.

Almost all of the international graduates stated that they had better and more opportunities in the labour market than the home graduates, 'so we could easily achieve upward social mobility in the future," said Hu (25 years old, female, a teacher in an international school). Tian (26 years old, a university teacher) also said: 'International graduates have more opportunities for achieving upward social mobility.' Focusing on the role of family support, Wang (25 years old, female, a university teacher) said that 'returnees usually had better family backgrounds, which is useful in their social competition. Social connections really matter in China. Thus, returnees have more capital for achieving upward social mobility than home graduates.' From Table 7-2, it can be observed that there are evident differences between the social origins of the two groups of master-level graduates. In the quantitative data analysis, I also noted that the international graduates, in general, had more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds than the home graduates. This also conforms to Mok et al.'s (2017a) research findings which indicate that returnees have better family backgrounds and support than home graduates. As for the perceived level of intergenerational mobility, the international graduates said they had a similar or lower social status than their parents. According to the demographic information for the international graduates, they all had "better" family background than the home graduates, so 'we had little chance of surpassing our social origin,' said Lai (26 years old, male, an international graduate, an office worker).

Therefore, although the majority of the international graduates perceived they had better outcomes in terms of upward social mobility than the home graduates, they did not perform well in terms of intergenerational mobility.

A significant proportion of the home graduates perceived that the returnees had achieved upward social mobility. The home graduates believed that China's labour market still preferred to recruit and gave more chances to international graduates. Thus, returnees had more chances of promotion and personal development, as Cao said:

> I think international graduates may have perform better in terms of social mobility than home graduates. China is in need of talents with global competence and international horizons. China has developed a variety of connections with foreign countries, so international graduates are key talents in China's future labour market.
> Cao (26 years old, male, a home graduate, a research associate in a 985 university)

Luo explained the benefits of being an international graduate as follows:

> According to my working experience, I feel international students have more chances of getting promotion. For example, in my university, some important assignments are exclusively for international graduates, because the leaders trust the returnees' abilities. In sum, international graduates get more focus and better training opportunities, which means they have much more chance of becoming middle managers than home graduates.
> Luo (29 years old, female, a home graduate, a university teacher)

Moreover, all of the home graduates perceived their social status as being higher than their parents'. As Tang said:

> My parents live in a rural area, working as famers. Now I am working in a large company in an economically developed city and live a "decent white-collar life". In terms of intergenerational mobility, I am successful, and my parents are very satisfied with my current situation.
> Tang (28 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer in the state sector)

Tang worked as an engineer, earned a good salary, and had a decent life in a third-tier city. He had reached a higher social class than his social origin. In his hometown, he was one of the few people who had left the village and entered a city through higher education. Tang's case indicates that higher education still had the function of promoting social mobility (Li, 2007). Sha (27 years old, female, a home graduate) shared a similar experience. She worked in the local government and had made evident progress in terms of upward social mobility through her higher education, for her parents were both industrial workers, as she stated:

> My parents are not middle class, or upper-middle-class. I am a civil servant and my situation seems much better than my parents'. Now I live in Beijing

> and have got a Beijing Hukou. If I had not gone to university, I would be an industrial worker like my parents.
> Sha (27 years old, female, a home graduate, a civil servant in government)

Huang (30 years old, male, a home graduate, an engineer) had a similar experience to Sha and Tang. His parents were both industrial workers, and he now had a decent job and good salary. Thus, it was found that home graduates had evident intergenerational mobility, which indicates that higher education still promotes social mobility (Torche, 2018). It's important to note that such mobility is still influenced in a variety of ways by the acquisition and perpetuation of certain forms of capital, that mean there is still social stratification despite certain amounts of mobility.

7.4 Summary

The findings discussed in this chapter show that home graduates in China had significant upward social mobility, whereas most of the international graduates did not show the same upward social trajectory. International higher education does not seem to secure upward social mobility. However, both home graduates and international graduates perceived international graduates as more competitive and successful in the labour market.

Participants tended to view their situation and prospects individualistically, due to the influence of neoliberal discourses exemplified through human capital theory. However, from a critical sociological perspective, Bourdieu's social theory has more explanatory power in noting how social advantage is constructed and maintained in these contexts. Bourdieu's notion of field helps to explain some of the variation in individual labour market outcomes and workplace preference, because different forms of capital are valued to differing degrees in different workplace fields. There does seem to be some individual social mobility. Nevertheless social structural inequalities due to differences in capital remain. The difference in social mobility between the two groups of graduates is

determined by a series of factors, discussed in this chapter. These factors include gender and marriage, family background, educational attainments, the city in which participants work and live (spatial mobility), working department, and the graduates' expectations of and attitude to career development, all of which play a significant role in producing the difference in social mobility between the two groups of graduates. These factors affect the two groups of master-level graduates in different ways, especially gender, marriage and family background. Due to gender prejudices, marriage and family care, female graduates still find themselves in an inferior position regarding social mobility and labour market outcomes compared with their male counterparts, even when they have obtained an international master's-level degree. Family background provides economic capital which international graduates can convert into other capital and achieve success. Instead, the majority of home graduates rely more on their educational attainments. Parental support is an invisible tool that allows international graduates to succeed in terms of social mobility and even spatial mobility.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the two distinct phases of my research, presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. I aim to consolidate the findings and to develop a fuller understanding of the research questions proposed in Chapter One. I begin with a discussion of the results from the mixed-methods research into the social mobility of international and home graduates in China. I focus on the links between the social mobility and the spatial mobility of graduates and on the close relationship between the uneven opportunities resulting from regional disparities and graduates' social mobility. Comparisons of social mobility between home and international graduates are made to bridge the gap and satisfy the need to examine the two groups of graduates together. The chapter discusses the major findings in relation to the theoretical framework proposed earlier and concludes by outlining some implications for policy and making recommendations for future studies.

8.2. Discussion of results from mixed-methods research into social mobility

According to the results from analysing the mixed-methods research data, both the home graduates and the international graduates perceived the former as having advantages over their domestically educated counterparts in terms of upward social mobility. However, the interview data in Chapter Six also revealed that both home and international graduates perceived that international graduates were more competitive in the labour market and had more opportunities to develop their careers. With respect to the factors affecting labour market outcomes, based on the analytical results of both the quantitative and qualitative data, I found some similarities and differences in terms of the social mobility of the international and home graduates. Combining the analyses of the mixed data, I identified six themes: individual educational attainment, family

support, *Hukou* system, migration, gender, and marriage. These themes were instrumental in understanding the data and in the discussions contained in the following sections.

8.2.1 Individual educational attainment versus family support

This section addresses the **research question (RQ 1): What are the labour market outcomes of Chinese students obtaining master's degrees abroad compared with those of non-mobile Chinese home graduates?** The question is addressed in terms of the *Hukou* system and migration (8.2.2) and gender and marriage in social mobility (8.2.3). This section also discusses **RQ 2: What factors affect international and home graduates' labour market success in China? and RQ 3: What is the perceived social mobility of international graduates compared with that of home graduates in China?**

Based on the survey data, this study models the factors that influence social mobility and calculates the social mobility results and labour market outcomes of the international and home graduates participating in this research. According to the results of multi-regression analysis, home graduates experience significant upward intergenerational social mobility, while international graduates do not achieve evident upward social mobility. An international higher education does not seem to secure upward social mobility. What these international students' parents want is for their children to maintain their middle-class status through international higher education (Tsang, 2013). Instead, Chinese domestic higher education does indeed appear to act as an efficient tool for promoting social mobility.

According to the results of the thematic analyses, both the home graduates and the international graduates perceived the former as being more competitive and successful in the labour market. The mixed data do not conflict; instead, the interview data provide supportive evidence. Through the thematic analysis, I

found that the majority of international graduates are from families of a higher social class, which means that there is limited room for them to achieve a higher social class/status. The international graduates' experiences and practices of social mobility and their labour market outcomes reveal that they have more advantages in terms of upward social mobility and career development, due to the help they received in the form of family support and from institutions such as *Hukou,* as well as from various talent policies. There appears to be a significantly positive relationship between spatial mobility (birthplace and current residence), and undergraduate and master's university and master's GPA. For the home graduates, talent policies and mother's education are found to have largely negative effects on spatial mobility, while master's supervisor and master's university have significantly positive effects.

Educational attainment and family support are found to be two key factors in social mobility. According to the mixed data analysis, when positioning themselves on the labour market, home graduates mainly draw on their educational attainments, while international graduates take advantage of the international educational attainment permitted by their advantaged family backgrounds. Thus, family socio-economic position plays a more important role in international graduates' labour market success than that of home graduates.

There are clearly different patterns of higher education attainment between the international graduates and the home graduates. In this study, the international graduates completed their master's programmes in UK higher education, which provides them with cultural and symbolic capitals (Cebolla-Boado, Hu & Soysal, 2018). The two groups of graduates obtained two different kinds of education credentials, which can be seen as different kinds of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Obtaining these capitals, international graduates are perceived as the more competitive talents in the quest to achieve upward social mobility (Tsang, 2013). Motivated by the UK's quality higher education and pushed by the competitive entrance examination for entering master's programmes in China (Tsang, 2013),

increasing numbers of Chinese students choose to study a master's programme in the UK, as was also reported by the interview respondents. However, the results do not explain why Chinese students who can secure a place at a top university in China turn to overseas postgraduate studies. In the sample, students' completing their bachelor's degree studies at '211 university', '985 university' and 'C9 university' were divided equally between by international and home graduates when it came to their master's studies. The number of Chinese students in the UK is increasing rapidly, which means that studying abroad is becoming a less elitist choice for students who cannot secure a place in China. According to the interview data, the majority of the home graduates would like to have had the opportunity to study abroad, but their financial situations had represented the major barrier to accessing expensive international academic mobility. The average cost of studying in the UK is GBP 30,000 a year, which is 23 times higher than the per capita annual disposable income in China's urban areas, and 70 times that of people in rural China (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The high costs of studying abroad make international higher education the exclusive domain of students from advantaged families.

Based on the analytical results of the mixed data, the majority of the respondents are now employed and link their labour market outcomes to their education attainments. The international graduates have lower employment rates than home graduates. Thus, it would seem that an international higher education cannot guarantee a job for international graduates after returning to China (Hao & Welch, 2012). This finding contrasts with the majority of existing research, which finds that international graduates have positive employment results and it is China's home graduates that encounter greater challenges in the employment world (Mok, 2016; Mok & Wu, 2016; Mok & Jiang, 2018). In this study, the home graduates are considered those who completed a master's-level programme in China. About 90% of them have been employed, and the qualitative research analytical results reveal that they are satisfied with their current jobs and future opportunities. The differences between the findings of this study and those of previous studies may result from using divergent study subjects and levels. Only a

few previous studies have defined the subjects and looked at the undergraduates and postgraduates together, despite the fact that the two groups have very different employment situations.

In addition to their different employment rates, the international and home graduates in my study expressed slightly different preferences for their places of work. Around 56% of the international graduates work for private or foreign companies, while over 56% of the home graduates work in the state sector or in government. In the interviews, the majority of the home graduates spoke about their wishes for a stable life and *Bianzhi*, while many of the international graduates said that they were not used to the regulations in place in the Chinese public sector or government. Thus, the home graduates tend to work in public institutions and enjoy the stable life and the benefits accruing from *Bianzhi*, while the international graduates prefer to work in foreign or private companies with their Western culture and their openness (Mol, 2017). Some of the home graduates also referred to certain secret rules that must be adhered to in public institutions, which they did not feel positive about. These special rules that must be followed when working in public institutions are complicated. Moreover, having social connections, relations to leaders, and interpersonal communication skills are all much more important factors than personal and professional skills in the public sector. Thus, working in the public sector pushes people to behave with discretion when speaking bosses, leaders and colleagues.

With regard to social mobility, the mixed data analysis reveals that the international graduates did not perform as well as the home graduates, although the former did have more opportunities for promotion, which may be linked to their social background. The international graduates' success was facilitated by their parents' involvement in their employment and career development (Liu, 2016a) and by their greater cultural capital (Xiang & Shen, 2009; Su & Meng, 2012). The fact that the majority of the international graduates had advantaged family backgrounds made it hard for them to reach any higher level and achieve upward

social mobility. These international graduates were simply striving to maintain their high social positions through international higher education (Tsang, 2013). The mechanism by which the advantaged positions of the international graduates were reproduced provides a good example of Bourdieu's central interest. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) believe that the domestic intergenerational transfer of capital (economic, cultural and social) has strong connections to children's educational success. Supported by their advantaged families, the international graduates can obtain international degrees, which in turn allows the continuation of the hereditary transmission of capital. This transmission of capital then facilitates social reproduction in systems like education and highlights the strategies individuals use (in education) to maintain or promote their and their children's social positions (Canny & Hamilton, 2018). International higher education has a dual function of providing a recognition of academic achievement for the students whole also acting as a signifier of cultural competence for the university. Hence, the university operates as an agent of success for the middle classes. In order to maintain their social positions, Chinese students choose UK universities with good reputations and high rankings, as this enables them to be better prepared for the international talent competition, as well as to compete against China's increasing number of domestic university graduates.

The respondents perceived educational attainment as being more important than family support in enabling upward social mobility for both home and international graduates. Interestingly, neither the international nor the home graduates' families helped with upward social mobility. Nevertheless, the majority of the home graduates still believed that international graduates' families did in fact support their upward social mobility. This can be connected to the discourse of individualised achievements. According to neoliberal rhetoric, individual success belongs only to talents. The qualitative data analysis shows that all of the international graduates were financially supported by their families during their studies abroad. The majority of the home graduates ascribed their own lack of mobility abroad to a lack of financial support from their families. As Marxian social

class theory argues, the economic basis determines the superstructure.

However, in contradiction of Marx, Bourdieu believes that economic capital is not necessarily the primary determining factor. Nevertheless, the qualitative data suggest that economic capital is indeed the primary factor for Chinese students' international mobility. Examining the survey data relating to the respondents' educational attainment (undergraduate university ranking and GPA) presented in Chapter 6, the home graduates had equally good performances, but the accumulated cultural and human capital of these home graduates was not enough to support their international mobility. Thanks to the economic resources coming from their advantaged families, the international graduates obtained the opportunities to acquire an international higher education, which is not a public good available to all Chinese students. Marx's concept of economic determination explains rather well the phenomenon of Chinese students' mobility abroad. However, it is the graduates' situation after their return and the convertibility mechanism that determines the value of their capital. Since 2000, the exchange and conversion of different types of capital have increasingly become intensified and concentrated within the top stratum of Chinese society. As the cultural capital offered by international higher education is favoured by China's labour market, Chinese students increasingly study abroad to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market (Mok & Qian, 2018).

According to the respondents' demographic information (Table 7-2), it could be observed that international higher education was closely integrated with the advantaged family background of the international graduates. Some of the international graduates believed that symbolic capital such as university reputation and ranking were the key factors for their upward social mobility. More importantly, it is their cultural capital linked to their overseas study experience that contributes to their positive career development (Mok & Qian, 2018). Since 2000, more and more Chinese students have joined the international higher education market, which has led to greater attention being paid to the university

rankings. In response to the market signals, parents are sending their children to study at elite universities to accumulate enough human and cultural capital. Consequently, the means of converting economic into cultural capital is becoming more institutionalised (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The qualitative data analysis revealed that all of the international graduates received financial support and parental involvement in their employment and career development. As noted earlier, despite evident family support for their international mobility and post-return career development, the international graduates did not see their family background as contributing to their upward social mobility. Instead, the international graduates were more confident of their cultural and symbolic capitals and perceived that their success resulted from their personal qualities. When asked about social connections and family support, they disliked being labelled as "rich second-generation kids". They strived to show that their success was linked to their achievements (education, global competence), rather than to the commonly ascribed factors (family background).

Although the international graduates argued that their career development and upward social mobility resulted from their educational attainments and personal qualities, from the view of capital theory, it is hard to disconnect their social mobility from their family backgrounds. Rich families tend to send their offspring abroad to study so that they can maintain their wealth and positions. However, ordinary middle-class families also wish to secure their offspring's futures (Xiang & Shen, 2009). With the help of China's post-reform market mechanism and capital conversion, middle-class families can provide more opportunities and support for their offspring. The reason that international graduates are not willing to link their career development to family support is that the current high-value cultural capital (reputable Western degrees) cannot be purchased without the basic accumulation of cultural and human capital. By succeeding in international education, Chinese graduates can easily obtain symbolic, social and political capital (Bourdieu, 1986). More importantly, the international graduates highly rated their overseas learning experiences and believed they would have a positive

impact on their future labour market outcomes and upward social mobility. Thus, the majority of the international graduates attributed their success to their educational attainments. However, many international graduates overlooked the fact that converting between different forms of capital requires larger amounts of financial capital to start with (Xiang & Shen, 2009: 521). Therefore, family support is a precondition for capital conversion and the subsequent career development of international higher education degree holders.

8.2.2 *Hukou* system and migration

A central concern of social stratification and mobility is the interplay between institutions and individual experience in their effects on life chances (Zhang & Treiman, 2013). The interview data show that *Hukou* is an important societal institution, both for home and international graduates, and a factor affecting their social mobility in China.

In social mobility research, there is a large consensus that social class is formed in the economic sphere. Guo (2018) places politics into class analysis and finds that *Hukou* has a significant effect on an individual's spatial mobility and social mobility. The *Hukou* system (household registration system) is one of China's most important institutions, and changes in *Hukou* status is an important pathway by which one can achieve upward social mobility (Xiang, 2015). *Hukou* is produced by the political mechanism and then reproduces classes at the macro level. On average, the per capita income of an urban family is three times that of a family in rural areas (Zhou, 2005). Only a small number of rural residents can obtain an urban *Hukou* and join other classes. Instead, the majority of rural Chinese inherit their peasant class from their parents, and this will remain their social class unless they can find a job and secure a permanent foothold in a city. However, even when they migrate, these rural migrants still remain in a lower social class.

Based on the survey analysis, the multi-regression model reveals that place of

origin has a significant effect on the social mobility of both the international and the home graduates. *Hukou* and individual attempts to obtain *Hukou* mobility have reshaped China's contemporary social mobility. In this study, *Hukou* was found to have a positive effect on international graduates and a negative effect on home graduates. In line with the quantitative research results, the interview data also show that the majority of home graduates perceived that *Hukou* was important during the early stages of career development because some companies prefer to recruit graduates with local *Hukou* due to concerns about labour mobility. Employees with a local *Hukou* tend to have a lower probability of moving to work in another city. Graduates from nearby cities can also be considered. Despite the ending of *Hukou* conversion control (rural *Hukou* turns into urban *Hukou*) in China after the 1978 reform and the opening-up (Liang & Ma, 2004), it has remained very difficult to obtain Beijing *Hukou* or Shanghai *Hukou*. A local *Hukou* offers local benefits and can facilitate social mobility. Thus, in the largest cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou), *Hukou* creates a kind of social exclusion system for migrants. Without a local *Hukou*, some graduates are reluctant to live and work in these cities, due to their low chances of success.

Conversely, the social system is advantageous for international graduates' social mobility, due to these cities' policies to attract returnee talents. The largest and most developed cities position themselves as "talent magnets" for high-quality graduates (Moskal, 2017). In stark contrast with the situations faced by home graduates, international graduates enjoy priority access to *Hukou* of Beijing or Shanghai. Indeed, the data shows that the international graduates tended to concentrate in China's largest cities, and these international graduates did not see the social system as a negative factor. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are the most economically developed cities in China, each offering abundant opportunities for career development. As high-end talent has become a basic determinant of a city's development, cities have implemented a variety of talent policies to attract high-end talents (Zhang, Wang, Tian & Zhang, 2017). However, although both home graduates and international graduates represent so-called

"high-end talents", the current labour market has established two separate pathways for the different types of graduates. In terms of the social system, international graduates have more advantages, as it offers them greater social mobility and more choices in terms of spatial mobility. By contrast, the *Hukou* system does not bring evident advantages for home graduates, who thus perceived it as a negative factor for their social and spatial mobility, particularly were they to choose Beijing or Shanghai as a place to live and work. Thus, the Hukou system contributed to the phenomenon whereby international graduates clustered in Beijing and Shanghai, while only a few home graduates lived in these cities. The international graduates also believed that the *Hukou* system provided them with advantages for their future development. Therefore, it can be argued that the *Hukou* system has close links to graduates' spatial mobility and social mobility, which will be discussed further in Section 8.3.

8.2.3 Gender and marriage in social mobility

A gender perspective is widely discussed in the social mobility field; yet it is missing in the literature on social mobility in China, despite the fact that it seems to be particularly important for graduates' post-study transitions and career development (Moskal, 2019). In the empirical evidence gathered from the respondents, I found that gender and marriage were two significant factors in the social mobility of both male and female graduates. Due to family pressure and social conventions, the male graduates have more freedom and opportunities in their career development and social mobility, whereas females face many challenges to their upward social mobility.

All of the female respondents, from both the home and international graduates, regarded their gender as a disadvantage for their upward social mobility. An international higher education degree did not help to narrow the gap between males and females and did not support the female participants any more than their domestically educated female counterparts (Moskal, 2016). The majority of

female participants preferred to have a stable job in the state sector, such as in public universities, public hospitals and government services (Table 7-1). Females in China struggle with upward social mobility due to the unequal work and professional development opportunities. Employers tend to assign tasks and grant training opportunities to their male employees rather than to their female workers. Females have fewer choices than males when looking for a job. Many positions are exclusive to males, with females not even having an opportunity of an interview. Also in terms of future promotion and career development, male employees have more chances than their female colleagues (Moskal, 2019). Thus, women are a disadvantaged group in terms of social mobility.

Chinese females are willing or are forced to devote more time than males to housework, which accentuates the gender inequality in the division of labour in the home. China's traditional culture affects females negatively in many respects. The interview participants believed that China's current society always perceives females' work performance as inferior to males', and that females are obliged to care for their families. However, the international female graduates stated that they could not accept being a housewife or dedicating more time to caring for their families. Although the male international graduates noticed the inequality between men and women, they were against changing the phenomenon, as they too believed that women should spend more time and energy caring for their families than men. According to the quantitative data analysis, gender has a much stronger positive effect on the male home graduates, which may result from the places of work. The home graduates tended to work in the state sector, while the international graduates preferred to work for private or foreign enterprises. Gender was seen to have different effects on individuals in different working places.

Although the female respondents all met barriers to their individual development, none of them had quit their jobs to become a housewife. The extant research shows the predominant role of the husband's class position in determining married

women's success and life satisfaction. In order to achieve a desirable social status, the female respondents showed the positive role of relationship status (single, married and having children) in promoting social mobility. However, the interview data shows that the women who did not have the family care burden would have more opportunities to achieve upward social mobility.

From analysing the views of the male respondents, gender was found to be a significantly positive factor for their upward social mobility. Employers prefer to recruit males. Females, whether or not they are in paid employment, have to spend more time on household work, as gender is still integrated with the caring responsibilities. Looking after the house and caring for family members, including children, is still considered to be within a female's domain in China.

A stable relationship status was perceived as a beneficial factor for the upward social mobility of both the male and female respondents. In my sample (N=20), five respondents were married, two were in relationships (cohabiting), and the remaining 13 were single. Interestingly, none of the international graduates were married; all five of the married respondents were home graduates. The young age of the respondents determined the single status of most of them. Their single status was also perceived as being advantageous for their social mobility, because a single person could devote all of his/her energy to work. The interview data show the strong belief that a single man can usually devote all of his energy and focus to work and be praised by the bosses. This was different from the perception of a single women, who receives more respect at work once they get married and have a baby.

Male graduates have advantages over female graduates, who still do not enjoy equality in their upward social mobility, indicating international higher education cannot bridge the gender gap. The mixed data analysis results support the dominant model of masculinity. Xiang and Shen (2009), based on Bourdieu's distinction between the male-dominated economic ladder and the

female-dominated cultural ladder, analyse the differences between Chinese male and female international students. To conclude, the gender issue in my study relates to marriage, females' maternity leave, traditional culture, and childcare. Different groups have different understandings of gender roles in labour market success and social mobility. Females encounter multiple challenges to achieving satisfactory working lives and upward social mobility. There is a strong indication in my data that an international degree is not sufficient to provide women with better labour market opportunities in China, as it does not narrow the gender gap in terms of social mobility.

8.3 Spatial mobility and social mobility

This section summarises the spatial im(mobility) patterns of international and domestic master's-level graduates in China, pointing to the close links between social mobility, success and labour market outcomes and spatial mobility. In doing so, I attempt to answer **RQ(4): What is the relationship between the social mobility and spatial mobility of graduates in China?**

The results of the multi-regression analysis (Chapters Six and Eight) highlight the significant impacts of spatial mobility on social mobility. The mixed analyses of social and spatial mobility indicate the likelihood that social mobility is linked to the place of origin and positively associated with parental socio-economic status. The spatial scale is linked to capital conversion efficiency and to the total value of capital. The international cultural capital makes the capital conversion system more complicated. Although the social mobility results produced by the quantitative research indicate that international graduates do not perform as well as home graduates, more detailed information is necessary to explain and investigate the causes of this phenomenon. Weber's individual lens provides methodological support for this study employing a mixed-methods approach. Focusing on the whole of society in social mobility research leads to missing information about the individual stories, experiences and practices. Through the

individual stories in this study, I have been able to conduct mixed-data analysis for understanding spatial and social mobility. Thus, the RQ(4) was answered through mapping analysis and thematic analysis.

Social mobility is an important issue in sociology. Indeed, over the last decades, a rich body of research has investigated how to measure social mobility and its determinants; yet the geographical variation of social mobility has not received much academic attention, especially the within-country variation (Borck & Wrede, 2018). In contemporary China, the uneven development of the country's regions has contributed to talent mobility. The geographical flow of talents is not only related to spatial mobility, but represents a kind of social mobility (Wang, 2014). Talent mobility takes place within the intermediary of space. The unbalanced regional development and the *Hukou* system are two variables that affect an individual's social status and life chances. Drawing on capital theory, spatial scale is crucial for capital convertibility, and Weber's concept of market provides sound explanations for the spatial mobility of talents. Space is a provisionally fixed territorial scope of social actions or relations (Xiang & Shen, 2009: 514). From the research discussed above, it can be found that the university graduates' spatial mobility is closely connected to their individual success and further social mobility. The cumulative effect of individual mobility choices is often associated with opportunity and wealth accumulation.

The analytical results of the mixed data reinforce the correlation between social mobility and spatial mobility (Borck & Wrede, 2017). In this study, the graduates' spatial mobility can be noticed from their moving from their places of origin to their current residences, while the interview data explain their motivations for moving. In particular, in China today, spatial mobility plays an important role in shaping interregional differences in terms of segregation, inequality and social mobility, due to the institutions (i.e. *Hukou*, talent policies) (Bian, Shu & Logan, 2001; Wu & Treiman, 2004) and regional economic imbalance (Chen et al., 2018). Weber's notion of market provides a sound explanation for Chinese migration after

the 1978 reform and the country's opening-up. The significant impacts of *Hukou* can be noticed in the Chinese pre-reform era. Before the 1978 reform, China had a planned economy, and the notion of markets did not matter in the Chinese context (Bian, 2002). However, following the economic reform, the restriction of urban-rural mobility was prohibited, and massive numbers of rural migrants flooded into urban areas. The Chinese socialist market economy also started to experience free spatial mobility of individuals. In the Weberian sense, the market becomes the venue for the class struggle and status advantages can be seen as the determinant factor in social stratification. More importantly, the market can provide motivations and opportunities for the spatial mobility of talents. The monetary return and value of spatial mobility is also determined by the market (Wang, 2014).

Political power produces a series of institutions, and these institutions influence individual decisions regarding spatial mobility. As a political institution, *Hukou,* together with the market, encourages or hinders individual spatial mobility, which extends the application of Bourdieu's theory to the Chinese context. The graduates' motivations for moving mainly depended on their career development and future success (Li, Li & Chen, 2010). The *Hukou* system is a representative and key institution that influences Chinese graduates' spatial mobility. Citizenship is interlocked with the *Hukou* system (Zhang & Wang, 2010), and determine an array of government-provided benefits, including housing, job opportunities, education, and medical care. Although massive numbers of rural migrants now live and work in cities, they cannot enjoy the same benefits as urban citizens (Song, 2016). During both the pre-reform and post-reform eras, the *Hukou* system has experienced a series of transformations and changes, yet remains potent in contemporary China (Wang, 2005). The *Hukou* system has not been abolished (Chan & Buckingham, 2008) nor does its importance in metropolitan areas appear to be weakened (Li, Li & Chen, 2010). As stated previously, China's major cities have launched a variety of policies to attract talents and act as "talent hubs". These cities can provide more opportunities for university graduates as they have

greater wealth. In line with the cities' developmental needs and plans, they have continuously raised the entry threshold to obtain *Hukou*. Thus, only top talents, such as international graduates and university graduates from Chinese top universities, can get a Shanghai or Beijing *Hukou*. As a home graduate respondent said: 'If you are an international graduate, there is no problem getting a Shanghai or Beijing *Hukou*, and the *Hukou* policy for international graduates is also a signal that they are welcome. If you are a home graduate, like me, you can never secure a Shanghai or Beijing *Hukou*. A Chinese PhD might do so, and, for a master's graduate from a top Chinese university, it's worth trying, but it is out of the question for an undergraduate.' Therefore, the reformed *Hukou* system still affects graduates, and it mainly impacts those who plan to work or have worked in major cities. As a result, international graduates and home graduates have different trajectories of spatial mobility and enjoy different benefits linked to their spatial mobility.

Mapping analysis shows Beijing and Shanghai are the two cities where international graduates concentrate; there is a cluster identified based on the hotspot analysis results. Market reforms in China have pushed the country into a situation whereby the market determines supply and demand, and capital can flow freely. The market reforms have brought largely uneven regional development, because FDI and policies have helped the eastern regions to rapidly develop their local economies (Gaubatz, 1999; Ma, 2002; Liu & Shen, 2014). From the perspective of capital theory, spatial scale determines the efficiency of capital convertibility and total value of capital (Xiang & Shen, 2009). Due to the dramatically unbalanced development among regions, the capital convertibility varies in different cities. As Bourdieu and Randal (1993) point out, any social formation is structured by a series of hierarchically organised fields, with its own laws of functioning and with its relations to other fields. If one wants to enter a field, the person must possess the habitus predisposing one to enter this field. This person is required to possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, skill or talent to be accepted as a member in this field (Bourdieu & Randal, 1993).

The interview data further explain the mapping results. The international graduates tended to live and work in the major cities, whose multicultural environments are suitable for international graduates' lifestyles and working preferences. A neighbourhood perspective can explain the spatial aggregation of high-end talents. From the neighbourhood perspective, the clustering of talents has a direct impact on individual perceived social status and mobility, and the neighbourhood itself can be seen as a kind of symbolic status and capital (Emily, 1999). Relocation from less to more prosperous neighbourhoods can increase the possibilities of upward social mobility (Chen et al., 2018). Additionally, neighbourhood can impact individual perceived social mobility. Neighbourhood determines unique social environments, and it can also be regarded as an exclusion mechanism within the neighbourhood. Residents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are less likely to get mutual social assistance or high-valued educational opportunities (Chen et al., 2018). Moreover, in cities with ample employment opportunities, international graduates have more opportunities for career development and future upward social mobility. The residents' social mobility is closely related to the characteristics of the cities (Chen et al., 2018). Therefore, different types of graduates have different clustered patterns in terms of their space. The home graduates were found to be at a disadvantage in terms of obtaining *Hukou* in large cities (Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou). Although there is a greater chance of success in the core cities, they chose to return to their hometowns or to second-tier cities to start their careers. Some home graduates stayed in the cities in which they had studied their master's programmes, due to the social connections they had established, the local economic development conditions, and the career opportunities (Wang, 2014).

The mapping analysis results also support the "local adherent mode" of university graduates. The graduates tended to stay in the places they had studied their master's degrees. The cities in which the top universities are located show clustered patterns of talent immigration (Nie & Liu, 2019). Additionally, the location of Chinese universities also shows a clustered pattern, determined by

place stratification (Wang, 2014). Universities, especially top universities, tend to be located in cities with high administrative levels. The inequality within higher education widens the place stratification, and thus deepens the already dramatically unbalanced economic and social development. The cities with a low administrative level struggle to attract talents and meet the challenges of the "brain drain". The vicious cycle results in the graduates' poor performance in terms of social mobility. Moreover, due to place stratification, more and more talents move to major cities, resulting in another, invisible, brain drain. In these major cities, the talent supply exceeds demand, so the professionals cannot take full advantage of their skills (Wang, 2014). Hence, spatial mobility is determined by administrative power. Central and local governments assign educational resources, and the unbalanced development between regions also aggravates the inequality. Therefore, many home graduates stay in their universities' cities, while international graduates concentrate in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

The majority of the international graduates came from major cities or province capitals, while the home graduates were mainly from small or remote cities. There was a relationship between the graduates' places of origin and their family backgrounds: international graduates usually came from families with a higher social level than the home graduates. The family background determined the graduates' spatial mobility, because of the unbalanced economic development and high housing prices. The international graduates enjoyed more freedom than the home graduates when choosing the location for their individual career development. With their family support, the international graduates could focus on their career development, while the home graduates were afraid of moving to major cities due to the very high housing prices and living costs. The uneven development gaps between cities determine the talents' spatial mobility, but the expensive mobility costs exclude plenty of university graduates (Wang, 2014). Family support becomes an important factor in shaping university graduates' spatial mobility. Nie and Liu (2019), drawing on employment data from China's Ministry of Education, found that many talents wished to move to Beijing,

Shanghai and Guangzhou, with the exception of except those who stayed in the places of their master's universities. The talent migration is strictly related to regional development levels, with the developed regions having a strong "local inherent mode" (Nie & Liu, 2019). Although some home graduates reported that they were now working in core cities, they struggled to get by due to the exorbitant living costs and house prices. Thus, spatial mobility cannot secure the labour market prospects of new migrants (Fan, 2002; Howell, 2011). The new migrants also hold negative attitudes regarding their future development and social mobility. By contrast, the international graduates living in the major cities expressed their optimistic attitudes regarding their future development and upward social mobility.

This study divided the master's-level graduates into international and home graduates so as to provide more nuanced research results for each cohort. However, Nie and Liu (2019) included all graduates together in their study of labour market outcomes and did not notice large differences between international and home graduates.

In summary, due to certain Chinese institutions (i.e. *Hukou, Bianzhi, Tizhi*) and the enduring economic imbalances, major cities act as talent hubs (Moskal, 2019) and have abundant resources with which to maintain their advantages. High-end talents will face much more competition in the labour market, in terms of their work outcomes and social mobility. More importantly, plenty of graduates are precluded from living in major cities due to the institutions and talent policies, as well as the expensive living costs. Although the core cities can provide more opportunities for upward social mobility, the majority of the home graduates moved to second- or third-tier cities, while the international graduates were found to concentrate in Beijing, Shanghai, the main cities in the Yangtze River Delta area and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Spatial mobility has strong links to graduates' social mobility through a mixed mechanism of institutions (*Hukou, Bianzhi, Tizhi)*, talent policies, the unbalanced spatial distribution of education

resources, family background support, and capital convertibility efficiency. The clustered patterns of international graduates settling in core cities may bring about new place stratification. In addition to the equality of social mobility, equality of spatial mobility should also draw our attention.

8.4 The role of international graduates in China's social changes

This section responds to **RQ(5): What roles do international graduates play in social class formation and culture and lifestyle change in China?**

Due to the results found for their social and spatial mobility, international graduates seem to have more opportunities and advantages in the labour market and for upward social mobility. Although China is now becoming an open society and experiencing dramatic absolute social mobility, relative mobility remains difficult, and the privileged upper and middle classes have established a new mechanism of capital conversion and elite reproduction, which has resulted from the mixed forces of social and spatial mobility. The interview data offer evidence that indicates the international graduates enjoy more freedom and opportunities than the home graduates. More importantly, due to the inequality of social and spatial mobility, the international graduates and home graduates may encounter segmentation in terms of their future lifestyles and life outcomes.

Competing for high-quality education resources has become a strategy in contemporary China, which has been experiencing dramatic urbanisation and rapid but unbalanced regional development. As international higher education is regarded as a higher quality of cultural capital than Chinese domestic higher education, many Chinese see international education as a means of gaining extra advantages in the competition for resources and opportunities (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The offspring of middle-class families study abroad in order to maintain their social advantages (Tsang, 2013). In turn, the international graduates bring international cultural capital to China's existing capital conversion mechanism

(Xiang & Shen, 2009) and accelerate capital conversion (Chen, 2015a). Meanwhile, the international graduates also contribute to the innovation and knowledge spillover in China (Filatotchev et al., 2011; Liu, Lu & Choi, 2014). With the increase in the number of international graduates in China, their roles in the country's social stratification has attracted the interest of social scholars (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The international graduates' and the Chinese elite's reproduction of social capital increases the likelihood of class solidification. Thus, this section looks at how this inequality reproduction and China's future social stratification is related to the rapid increase in international graduates.

The key and positive role played by achieved status in social mobility has been widely acknowledged in social mobility research; the best measure of achieved status is considered to be education (Blau, 1977; Fang & Feng, 2005; Wang, 2010). By acquiring different kinds of education, individuals can move up different ladders and achieve upward social mobility. In this process, family support is found to be the fundamental factor by which international graduates acquire higher education and individual sequential development. Fang and Feng (2005), in their study of educational mobility, found that students who study at the best schools also attend the best universities. More importantly, family status is closely linked to school enrolment. Thus, families with a higher social class have more chances of enabling their offspring to study in the best schools. Although education is seen as the most effective means of promoting social mobility, the ways and the speed of upward social mobility differ between individuals. Fang and Feng (2005) find class privileges impact the ways and paths of educational attainment and produce a new and covered mechanism. Hence, education is not a tool for social mobility; instead it reproduces the current social structure. Thus, the overall expansion in higher education enrolment cannot secure individual upward social mobility, as the quality of education is crucial for upward social mobility. This is why middle- and upper-class families strive to send the next generation abroad to study, where they can obtain more advanced human capital. The international graduates in this study did not perceive their families as being directly involved in, nor as directly

helping, their employment, despite the fact that their parents had provided financial support to study abroad (Ganzeboom, Treiman & Ultee, 1991; Tsang, 2013; Liu, 2016a; Fan & Cheng, 2018). Marx pointed out that it is material production that determines social structure, and, according to capital theory, economic capital is also the basic capital used for capital conversion. With their families' financial support, international higher education can lift individuals to a higher level of capital conversion. More importantly, for employment, middle-class graduates are found to have better access to job information and parental guidance (Liu, 2016a). Similarly, the international graduates experienced more parental involvement than home graduates. Based on the interview data, it can be found that the parents of the international graduates were more extensively involved in their employment, helping them with their social ties and by providing internal industry information that is not available to students from lower-class families. Although the survey results show that the home graduates had higher employment rates than the international graduates, based on the interview data, the international graduates were more competitive in the labour market and in social mobility. Therefore, the labour market segmentation resulting from parental involvement is also an important factor in social stratification, possibly contributing to a new mixed advantage of international education degree and family support.

Finally, the increase in the number of international graduates also contributes to the employment competition taking place between international graduates and home graduates. As discussed above, large cities can attract more high-end talents, and the migration of international graduates has a great impact on the job market (Chen, 2015a). The employment competition between international and home graduates has become increasingly intense in large cities. Chen (2015), analysing the employment outcomes of Shanghai's master's graduates, finds the number of employed international graduates greatly exceeded that of home graduates. However, with the increasing numbers enrolling in home universities, more and more graduates are entering the labour market, yet there is no

immediate increase in the number of employment vacancies. This places great pressure on the labour markets in major cities (Mok, 2016). The interview data in this study also reflect the current reality in major cities. The majority of the home graduates perceived that they were not as competitive as international graduates, so they chose to work in second-tier cities. The mapping analysis results also support this argument, showing that home graduates clustered in non-central cities.

Analysis of the interview data supports Marx's assertion that economic capital is the main determinant of social mobility. Social and spatial mobility are concentrated within a smaller group of the population (Xiang & Shen, 2009: 521). Xiang and Shen (2009) divided the development of international student migration into three stages based on the capital conversion modes. There is a triangular reading among different forms of capital. During the first stage, from the 1970s to the 1980s, politically and professionally qualified students were selected by the Government to learn advanced technologies and were given key political positions after returning. From the 1980s to the 1990s, a large number of Chinese students studied abroad at language colleges. During this particular stage, financial capital was directly and easily transformed into cultural capital, and, thus, many Chinese people perceived that studying abroad was equal to buying a degree. Nowadays, China is experiencing its third stage. In this stage, high-valued cultural capital cannot be directly bought with money. Without the accumulated human and cultural capital, it is hard to obtain cultural capital; but once cultural capital has been obtained, individuals can gain other forms of capital easily.

In the third stage, a transnational scale of capital conversion emerges, which excludes the home graduates. More importantly, a hierarchy has been established for ranking the symbolic capital. Chinese middle-class parents make full use of their social capital to ensure their children's cultural capital by securing places at international higher education institutions in the hope that they will maintain their upward generational mobility and reproduce their advantaged class status

(Tsang, 2013). Although Li and Zhu (2017) argue that although Chinese contemporary society is open for social mobility, they are also worried about the potential class solidification. The interview data from this study show that the international graduates consciously differentiate themselves from the home graduates regarding their education, their perceived labour market outcomes, their perceived upward social mobility, their lifestyles, their values, and their social circles. Based on the survey data, the international graduates were also different from the home graduates in terms of their preference of workplace, their employment quality, and their spatial mobility. These differences may in turn intensify the differences between the two groups of graduates in terms of their social and spatial mobility. After obtaining cultural capital through international higher education, cultural and human capital and social class origin work together to maintain and promote social class structures, reinforcing Bourdieu's theory that sees social and cultural capitals as hugely influential factors. Moreover, Weber's notion of market and individual agency can well explain the inner dynamics of Chinese master's-level graduates' spatial mobility. The inequality mechanism may also differ between international graduates and home graduates. Bourdieu's theories are helpful here to explain the reproduction mechanism of social class and status determined by economic and cultural factors, where economic differences affect individual opportunities for higher education. These differences result from the uneven access to different levels of educational resources and study environments, while culture influences the intergenerational educational transmission.

To summarise, this thesis combines classical social stratification theories and Chinese societal institutions (*Hukou, Bianzhi, Guanxi*) to provide an adequate account of the contemporary social mobility of international graduates in China. Western social class theories (Marxian, Weberian and Bourdieu's) cannot alone provide an adequate explanation of Chinese contemporary social mobility. By connecting Marx's economic determination, Weber's market- and individual-level lens and Bourdieu's capital theory with Chinese long-standing and ongoing

institutions, this study discusses the comparative positional and socioeconomic advantages in access to quality education, and the role of education in spatial and social mobility. The established theoretical framework provides a sociocultural perspective of how graduates move, convert different forms of capital, and achieve labour market and social mobility success. The persistence of Chinese institutions continues to affect the life chances and social and spatial mobility of graduates.

8.5 Originality of the study

While social stratification and mobility have attracted much scholarly attention, in the Chinese context, only a few empirical studies have explored university graduates' social mobility. This thesis, drawing on a mixed-methods research design, explores master's graduates' social and spatial mobility based on a comparative study. Based on the major findings and discussions presented in this chapter, I will now make reflect on the originality of the study.

Firstly, this thesis combines a series of social mobility theories to provide an adequate account of the contemporary social mobility of international graduates in China. The existing Western theories of class, including Marxian, Weberian and Bourdieu's social class theories, cannot on their own provide an adequate explanation of Chinese contemporary social mobility. Acknowledging that a large number of differences among the three sociologists' theories exist, I argue that they can be used and integrated in such a framework, to decipher social stratification, class and mobility – particularly in China - from different perspectives. By connecting the three Western social class theories and Chinese long-standing and ongoing institutions, this study discusses the comparative positional and socioeconomic advantages endowed by receiving quality education, as well as the role of education in spatial and social mobility. The established theoretical framework provides a sociocultural perspective on how graduates move, convert different forms of capital, and achieve labour market and social

mobility success. The pertinence of Chinese institutions continues to affect the life chances and social and spatial mobility of the graduates.

Then, this study employs a mixed-methods research approach. The existing research on social mobility mainly employs quantitative data, as the large sample was viewed as providing strong empirical support. However, there is long-standing criticism of survey research, in terms of its alleged inability to adequately model attitudes, values and identity. Therefore, subjectivity has become a key focus of social mobility researchers. In order to provide a comprehensive map of international graduates' social and spatial mobility, I adopted a mixed-methods research design and a pragmatic paradigm in my attempt to answer the research questions. The mixed-methods research design can ensure that this study collects and analyses as much data as possible. The application of the mixed-methods research approach in this study contributes to producing detailed explanations of social and spatial mobility, based on robust empirical evidence to answer the proposed research questions.

Thirdly, this study contributes new knowledge and empirical evidence for social mobility research. International graduates can still maintain their advantaged social class and status through a mixed mechanism (cultural, economic and social capital). Although the home graduates showed higher employment rates than the international graduates, their employment quality and long-term career development were not as good as their counterparts. The existing research argues that China is an open society, where social mobility frequently and easily occurs, but where there is still an invisible mechanism of inequality reproduction. An international higher education degree is still an efficient tool for capital conversion in China's globalised labour market. More importantly, spatial mobility is closely connected to social mobility, success and labour market outcomes. Space determines the efficiency and value of all kinds of capital. The inequality in spatial mobility influences one's social mobility, as well as one's success and labour market outcomes. More importantly, as an emerging group, international

graduates are seen to have an advantaged position in China's socioeconomic context.

8.6 Implications for policy and future research

By investigating the social and spatial mobility of international graduates compared to home graduates, this study contributes to knowledge on social stratification and development in China and the role of international and China's domestic higher education.

The findings present policy implications. The sustained expansion of China's domestic higher education enrolment has resulted in intense labour market competition. Moreover, the role of education in promoting social mobility has become weak. The increasing number of international graduates has added to the intense competition in the labour market in China's core cities. The expansion of employment opportunities is fundamental in order to address this problem. The gap between the rich and the poor in China has widened during the country's rapid development after its economic reform and opening-up policy. China has one of the world's highest levels of income inequality. As a result of this inequality, the different social classes receive different qualities of education (Fang & Feng, 2005). Therefore, if equality of education opportunities were improved, especially the chances of studying abroad, the gap between the social classes could be weakened. According to the research results, most of the international graduates' families provided financial support to pay for their overseas tuition fees. In order to shrink the gap resulting from international higher education, the Chinese Government might encourage and financially support "merit" students to study abroad. Lastly, the spatial mobility of talents intensifies the unbalanced regional development. Core cities can act as talent hubs due to their efficiency of capital conversion and opportunities for personal success. Talents flow into these cities and contribute to their development, which can form a virtuous cycle. However, although sub-core cities are now experiencing greater opportunities, they still

struggle to attract high-end talents. The unbalanced spatial distribution of talents intensifies the imbalance of spatial mobility. The high costs of living in the core cities and family support become new exclusionary mechanisms in spatial mobility to core cities. In addition to international higher education, institutions such as *Hukou and Bianzhi*, established in the Maoist era, should also be understood in terms of their impact on social stratification. Urban study policies should focus on developing social security and institutions to support high-end home graduates.

For future research on Chinese social mobility, a more robust research design is needed. The mixed-methods research approach still represents the best approach, as it can bridge the gap between different research paradigms. The size of the sample to be studied should be larger and more interviews should be carried out so as to enhance validity, generalisability and reliability. More importantly, as social mobility is a dynamic process, a longitudinal study would be helpful to follow the individual experiences and practices of social success. In terms of methods used to measure social mobility, future research might consider establishing a mixed model incorporating occupation, salary and perceived social status to assess social class. Contemporary China is experiencing great changes, and the emerging industries are contributing to new occupations. Therefore, there is an acute need for an updated standard for assessing social mobility.

Appendixes

Appendix one-Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Social mobility and international graduates in China

Name of Researcher: Zhai Keyu

Supervisors: Dr Marta Moskal; Dr Barbara Read

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent to interviews being audio-recorded. (I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.)

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.
I acknowledge that participants will be identified by name in any publications arising from the research.

·All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
·The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all

times.

·The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research

·The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

·I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant……

Signature……

Date ……

Name of Researcher ……

Signature ……

Date ……

Appendix Two- Plain Language Statement

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Plain Language Statement

The study title: Social mobility and international graduates in China.

Researcher: Keyu Zhai, School of Education, University of Glasgow.

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand the aims and content of it. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of the study is to investigate experiences of social mobility (the chances people have to increase their work/life opportunities) in relation to international graduates in China and to home graduates. It is important, because this research can provide a comprehensive analysis of Chinese higher education students in relation to their future opportunities. If you agree to take part, you will be invited to fill in a questionnaire. You may also have a chance to be invited to an interview, if you leave your contact details and tick yes box for the interview at the end of the questionnaire). In the questionnaire, you will be asked to fill some information about your background, and your opinions on your experiences after graduation. The questionnaire will take up to 20 minutes. In the interview, you will be asked about your educational experiences and attainments, family background, your career development and chances for graduates to improve their lives. The estimated time commitment for the interview would not exceed 60 minutes. With

your permission, the interview would be audio-recorded so that I can ensure that I make an accurate record of what you say.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. Any information already given to me would be destroyed at your request. Your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses will be protected to the fullest possible extent. Your name and other personal details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. In the final PhD thesis, you and the other people in the research will be referred by pseudonym only. Any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity will be removed. The data collected will be presented within a PhD thesis, and in papers for conferences and publications. The data will be openly available via a data repository. The data will be kept securely in the College of Social Science for 10 years before being destroyed.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies. This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns please contact . You can also contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston for any concerns or complaints, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk , or my supervisors: Dr Marta Moskal, email: Marta.Moskal@glasgow.ac.uk; Dr. Barbara Read, email: Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk.

Appendix Three-Questionnaire in English

University of Glasgow

Questionnaire

This is a survey for Chinese Master graduates both from China and abroad. It is important to understand the experiences different Master graduates have in relation to their career development. By completing this questionnaire, you will help me to understand graduate perspective on their chances to increase the work/life opportunities and the issues policy makers in China should think about based on the direct views of young people.

The survey is part of my PhD research at the University of Glasgow on the topic of social mobility and international graduates in China. Your help is of great importance to my PhD research. I will keep your information confidential, in my password protected electronic storage. I do not collect the information that identifies you (like your IP or home address) and your information will be anonymous in my PhD thesis.

Please ***answer all questions*** and tick the most appropriate answer according to your current situations.

1.Your age:_____

2.Place of origin:_____(please specify it, for example, city, county or village)

Place of residence:_____(please specify it, for example, city, county or village)

3.Your undergraduate university and programme:_____

GPA:_____

4. Your Master university and programme: _____

GPA:_____

Question 1: Are you the only child in your family?

A. Yes B. No

If "NO", how many siblings do you have_____

Question 2: What is your gender?

A. Male B. Female

Question 3: Are you from one-parent family?

A. Yes (if you select this option, please ignore either question 4 or 5, either 6 or 7)
B. No

Question 4: What is your father's occupation?

A. State & society administrator (cadre in governments)
B. Manager (Manager or department leader in state company, private company, foreign company and joint company)
C. Private enterprise owner (having large scale company)
D. Technological specialist (teacher, engineer, doctor, academic researcher, lawyer, culture worker)
E. Clerk & office worker (secretary, accountant, computer operator)
F. Individual entrepreneur (one-person company with unlimited liability)
G. Commercial & service worker (tertiary industry workers)
H. Industrial worker (worker in factory, mining and transport industry)
I. Farmer
J. Unemployed
K. Other (Please specify)_____

Question 5: What is your mother's occupation?

A. State & society administrator (cadre in governments)
B. Manager (Manager or department leader in state company, private company, foreign company and joint company)
C. Private enterprise owner (having large scale company)
D. Technological specialist (teacher, engineer, doctor, academic researcher, lawyer, culture worker)
E. Clerk & office worker (secretary, accountant, computer operator)
F. Individual entrepreneur (one-person company with unlimited liability)
G. Commercial & service worker (tertiary industry workers)
H. Industrial worker (worker in factory, mining and transport industry)
I. Farmer
J. Unemployed
K. Other (Please specify)_____

Question 6: What educational has your father obtained?

A. Higher education
B. Vocational qualification or High school
C. Secondary school
D. Primary school
E. No formal qualification

Question 7: What educational has your mother obtained?

A. Higher education
B. Vocational qualification or High school
C. Secondary school
D. Primary school
E. No formal qualification

Question 8: What is your current work situation?

A. I am employed

B. Unemployed

C. Other, please specify_____

Question 9: If you already work after Master graduation, what is/ was your occupation? (Please write all them down. If you have never worked after Master graduation, please skip this question):

Your current job:_____(If you are unemployed now, please skip this question)

Your previous job(s):_____(Please write your previous job(s) if your current job is not your first one)

Question 10: If you are employed, what is the place of your employment?

A. International company

B. Chinese private company

C. Chinese public company or institution

D. Family business

E. I have my own business

F. Other, please specify_____

Question 11: Please tick the most appropriate choice according to your ideas and experience.

	Very positive	Positive	Any	Negative	Very negative
Does your Master course have effects on your career development?					
Do you think your Master supervisor has played a role in your career development?					
What role do China's employment, entrepreneurship and talent introduction policies have in promoting your career development?					

*Thank you very much for your assistance and completion of this questionnaire. If there is anything else you would like to tell us, please write it in below. We shall be most interested to read what you have to say.*_____

Do you want to volunteer for the next stage?

I am looking for volunteers to take part in the next part of the project - interview. If you would like to be part of the next stage of the project, please tick this box and leave your contact details, I will contact you if you are selected ☐

Email:_____**Wechat or QQ:**_____**Tel. NO.:**_____ *(Please choose one of contact ways to write down, thank you a lot)*

Appendix Four-Questionnaire in Chinese

University of Glasgow

中英硕士社会流动比较研究

这是一份关于中国硕士和英国海归硕士的调查问卷。事实上，理解不同硕士的职业发展是一项非常必要的研究。通过此调查问卷，您将帮助我了解不同硕士毕业生对于增加就业 / 提高生活质量的机会等，也会帮助中国的政策制定者以年轻人的观点作为导向。此外，对于研究中英比较教育，高等教育的选择和硕士毕业生的社会流动研究有重要意义。

此项问卷是我在英国格拉斯哥大学博士研究的一部分，您的帮助对于我的博士研究至关重要。我会对您的信息保密，存储在密保电脑中。此问卷不会涉及住址等可以追寻到您的信息。您的信息如果出现在我博士毕业论文中，将会化名处理。

请您回答下列问题

1. 您的年龄是：

2. 您的出生地是（请具体到市或旗县或村镇）

   您的现居地是（请具体到市或旗县或村镇）

3. 您本科学校的名称和您本科专业是

您本科的成绩是（请您具体到分数）

4. 您硕士学校的名称和您硕士专业是_

您硕士的成绩是（请您具体到分数）

问题 1. 您是家里的独生子女吗？

B. 是　　B. 否

如果您回答了否，您有多少兄弟姐妹呢？_____

问题 2. 您的性别是：

B. 男　　B. 女

问题 3. 您是来自于单亲家庭吗？

A. 是（如果您选择了此项，请您忽略问题 9 或 10， 11 或 12）　B. 否

问题 4.您父亲的职业是：

L. 国家和社会管理者（中央政府各部委和直辖市中具有实际行政管理职权的处级及以上行政级别的干部；各省、市、地区中具有实际行政管理职权的乡科级及以上行政级别的干部）

M. 经理人员（原来的国有和集体企业干部；较大的民营企业的企业主聘用的职业经理人或从业主型的创业者转变成的职业经理人；三资企业的中高层管理人员）

N. 私营企业主

O. 专业技术人员

P. 办事人员（由党政机关中的中低层公务员、各种所有制企事业单位中的基层管理人员和非专业性办事人员等组成）

Q. 个体工商户

R. 商业服务业员工

S. 产业工人

T. 农业劳动者

U. 无业失业半失业

V. 其他（请您填写）_____

问题 5.您母亲的职业是：

A. 国家和社会管理者（中央政府各部委和直辖市中具有实际行政管理职权的处级及以上行政级别的干部；各省、市、地区中具有实际行政管理职权的乡科级及以上行政级别的干部）

B. 经理人员（原来的国有和集体企业干部；较大的民营企业的企业主聘用的职业经理人或从业主型的创业者转变成的职业经理人；三资企业的中高层管理人员）

C. 私营企业主

D. 专业技术人员

E. 办事人员（由党政机关中的中低层公务员、各种所有制企事业单位中的基层管理人员和非专业性办事人员等组成）

F. 个体工商户

G. 商业服务业员工

H. 产业工人

I. 农业劳动者

J. 无业失业半失业

K. 其他（请您填写）_____

问题 6. 你父亲所获教育水平是

F. 高等教育（包括本科、硕士、博士）

G. 职业教育或高中

H. 初中

I. 小学

J. 未获得正式教育

问题 7. 你母亲所获教育水平是

A. 高等教育（包括本科、硕士、博士）

C. 职业教育或高中

D. 初中

E. 小学

F. 未获得正式教育

问题 8. 您目前的工作状况是：

A. 就业中

B. 未就业

C. 其他_____

问题 9. 如果您在硕士毕业后工作了，您做过哪些工作呢？（请写下您所有的工作，如在小学做老师 / 在国企做职员 / 在市政府为办事员等 ,根据您的实际情况填写即可。如果您毕业之后没有任何工作经历请写无）

您目前的工作为：_____（如在小学做老师 / 在国企做职员 / 在市政府为办事员等，如果您现在处于未就业状况，请写无）

问题 10. 如果您目前处于就业状态，请问您的工作单位为：

A.外企或中外合资企业

B. 中国私企

C. 国企或事业单位

D. 家族企业

E. 个人创业

F. 其他_____

问题 11. 根据您的情况，请选择最适合您的选项（1 分为最消极影响，5 分为最积极影响）:

	5	4	3	2	1
您的硕士课程对您职业发展的影响					
您硕士导师对您职业发展的影响					
中国各方面政策对您职业发展的影响					

非常感谢您的帮助。您有任何对此问卷的建议请您写在下方的空白处。我们会认真对待您的反馈。再次感谢。 _____

您愿意继续志愿参与我的进一步访谈吗？

我正在寻找参与下一步访谈的志愿者。如果您愿意参与，请写下您的联系方式。需要您的帮助时，我会联系您。请注意，您的任何信息都会保密处理，不会泄露给任何第三人或第三方机构。 **Email、Wechat、QQ、Tel. No 您可任选一个联系方式提供给我**

In-depth interview Questions

The in-depth interview is complementary to quantitative research in my PhD thesis, so before in-depth interview, I have obtained all interviewees' basic information from questionnaires.

After the questionnaire survey, I selected the participants for the interview among these who declared the readiness for the interview in the questionnaire and left their contact information there. During the meeting with interviewees, I reminded them of my research aim and main content and all ethical rules of confidentiality and anonymity.

Questions for home students:

1. Could you tell me about your experience of studying at your Master university? What were your perceptions before you enter your Master university about the 'pros and cons' of going to this university?

2. Why did you choose your Master university? Who and what influenced your choice? Were you told that going to your Master university would benefit you in particular ways? If so, what do you think of this advice now? Were you encouraged towards doing certain subjects or getting involved in particular extra-curricular activities whilst at university? If so, what do you think of that advice now?

3. What were your expectations in terms of the future life and career when you chose to go to particular place and subject to study?

4. When you look back, would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?

5. [*If not covered fully in question 3*] Could you tell me (in more detail) why you decided not to choose to study a Master course abroad? Would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?

6. What is your current work situation? How satisfied are you with the employment outcomes resulting from your Master degree? [*Probe for reasons*]

7. Moving on to the factors that have influenced you in terms of your current employment/situation:

A). could you recap and give some more details on the factors you have indicated in your questionnaire as influences?

B). In addition to these, what other factors (if any) do you think have influenced you in terms of your current employment or current situation?

8. What is your parents/ family's situation? Have you noticed any changes in your situation in comparison to your parents or other family members?

9. Some people think that international and national Master graduates are thought of differently, or gain different social status or opportunities – would you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add that you think we should cover in relation to this?

Thank you for your time and concern.

Questions for international students:

1. Could you tell me about your experience of studying at your Master university? What were your perceptions before you enter your Master university about the 'pros and cons' of going to this university?

2. Why did you choose your Master university? Who and what influenced your choice? Were you told that going to your Master university would benefit you in particular ways? If so, what do you think of this advice now? Were you encouraged towards doing certain subjects or getting involved in particular extra-curricular activities whilst at university? If so, what do you think of that advice now?

3. What were your expectations in terms of the future life and career when you chose to go to particular place and subject to study?

4. When you look back, would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?

5. [*If not covered fully in question 3*] Could you tell me (in more detail) why you decided not to choose to study a Master course in China? Would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?

6. What is your current work situation? How satisfied are you with the employment outcomes resulting from your Master degree? [*Probe for reasons*]

7. Moving on to the factors that have influenced you in terms of your current employment/situation:

A). could you recap and give some more details on the factors you have indicated in your questionnaire as influences?

B). In addition to these, what other factors (if any) do you think have influenced you in terms of your current employment or current situation?

8. What is your parents/ family's situation? Have you noticed any changes in your situation in comparison to your parents or other family members?

9. Some people think that international and national Master graduates are thought of differently, or gain different social status or opportunities – would you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add that you think we should cover in relation to this?

Thank you for your concern and time.

Appendix Six-Examples of transcript process

Interview—Zhou (26 years old, female, a home graduate, a high school teacher now)

This interviewee has graduated from Shanghai University of Science and Technology, and her undergraduate university was Xuzhou Normal University. This interviewee, whose age is 26 years old, has been working as a high school teacher in a third-tier city over 2 years after her graduation. This interview took place at her workplace on 2nd Sep 2017.

1. **Interviewer: Could you tell me about your experience of studying at your Master university?**

Interviewee: I think master study is very worth. Unlike undergraduate, studying master programme requires you to have more academic training. I was required to read a lot of literature in my first year, including some translations, like *Moment in Peking*. After reading this book, I found I became interested in translation studies, so my master dissertation focused on translation issues. I acquired some knowledge while more importantly, I think my skills of translation and independent study were improved. My undergraduate major was not translation, so to me, master programme was a new study area, which forced me to study much professional knowledge by myself. Supervisor plays important role in supervising my master dissertation and promoting my translation techniques and encouraging me to publish my work. Instead, master supervisors are not in charge of teaching basic knowledge. Thus I needed to study many knowledge by myself.

2. **Why did you choose your Master university? Who and what influenced your choice? Were you told that going to your Master university would benefit you in particular ways? If so, what do you think of this advice now? Were you encouraged towards doing certain subjects or getting involved in particular extra-curricular activities whilst at university? If so, what do you think of that advice now?**

Interviewee: The university is not bad, so I felt the admission competition was not

too fierce. The entry competition of top universities scared me. If I cannot successfully pass the entry examination, I would have a year gap and take entry examination again. After I analysing the test papers of my master university, I found it was not too hard for me. In order to have the largest opportunities of making it, I chose my master university. It is not a top university, so the competition is completely fine for me.

This university has a long history and strongly academic atmosphere. It has good academic reputation and academic staff with high quality. Before I was admitted into a university, I looked for some information from the Internet. According to the online information, it is a nice choice.

I chose it because it is located in Shanghai, the largest and the most developed city in China. Shanghai has a lot of foreign companies and can provide rich opportunities for internship and academic exchanges. You know, Shanghai has a large number of top universities, which provides the chances for frequent academic exchanges between universities. Because the university aggregation, many talents tend to work in Shanghai. I can feel studying in Shanghai promotes my skills in all aspects.

When I was in the last year of my undergraduate, I also tried to look for a satisfying job. However, after I got some labour market information, I found I must have a master degree. You know, I planned to be a high school teacher at that time. After talking with some HRs, I found the minimum requirement of a high school teacher is a master degree. Without the degree certificate, I would not be considered at all.

For master degree holders, they would have more salary than undergraduates. Postgraduates and undergraduates have different starting salary levels, so the degree is directly connected to starting salary.

One of my undergraduate teachers graduated from a Shanghai university. He suggested me studying my master programme in a Shanghai university. The opportunities and skill promotions are determined by a city. The spatial factor is an important one for individual development and horizon.

In addition, my programme is Master of Translation and Interpretation, which is a 2-year professional degree. Unlike academic degree, the professional degree is full of practical studies. Apart from the short time of master programme, I think I chose the master programme in my master university resulted from the curriculum design. It focuses on promoting students' practical skills for future working. Personally, I prefer to study some practical knowledge, because I did not plan to study PhD.

3. What were your expectations in terms of the future life and career when you chose to go to particular place and subject to study?

Interviewee: My supervisor recommended me to select some optional modules related to psychology. Because my career plan is to be an English teacher, my supervisor advised me to strengthen my knowledge of psychology. After I became an English teacher in a high school, I found that psychological knowledge is very useful in my working. At the beginning of my working, I needed to know how to get along with teenagers. Especially, young teachers are required to do the responsible position in which teachers need to take charge of the daily affairs of a class. The psychological is very useful for dealing with these issues.

The module leader of Consecutive Interpretation told us the best knowledge of consecutive interpretation can only be learnt in practice. He led us and encouraged us to do some practical training in some foreign exhibition. If Shanghai would host some international exhibition, he would suggest us to take part in it as an interpreter. Every practice was a valuable experience. There were a lot of different exhibitions, including automobile exhibition, home textiles show and etc. These different exhibitions required interpreter to understand specific knowledge

in this area. Facing different kinds of interpretation, I always learnt a lot of relevant terms and professional knowledge. These activities are really useful in improving my skills of interpretation and interpersonal communication. There were a lot of foreign guests in these exhibitions, so understanding other cultures is also important for an interpreter. Through these activities, I think I opened my horizon and can easily accept the diversity. More importantly, I am now an English teacher, so proficient spoken English is very crucial. I think my spoken English was improved a lot in these exhibitions. In job interview, I can speak fluent English, which is the most important for employer to recruit me.

4. **When you look back, would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?**

Interviewee: At that time, I wanted to be a teacher. Actually, I am interested in teaching and learning. Teacher is a stable job with stable salary. Optimistic salary is an important factor for me. In addition, in China, a public school is a decent job. Everyone respects teachers. Of course, the welfare of a teacher is very good as well.

Interviewer: Regret?

Interviewee: No.

What I have now meets my previous expectations, so I do not regret.

My master supervisor helped me a lot with academic writing. Now I am a teacher and required to contribute to publications. Publications are related to my future promotions. How to write academically is a very important assessment for my job now. I learnt extensive skills in academic writing, so I think my master study is rather worth.

Besides the degree is valuable when I was looking for a job. Because of the master degree, I got the interview opportunity of a high school. I found the interviewer had strong interests in my master study and outcomes. If I did not hold a master

degree, I would not secure my current job. In some public departments, degree is necessary for entry and important for promotion.

5. **[If not covered fully in question 3] Could you tell me (in more detail) why you decided not to choose to study a Master course abroad? Would you change your mind if making the choice again? If so, why, if not, why not?**

Actually, I wanted to study abroad in my final year of undergraduate. However, I had no time for IELTS. You know, preparing for IELTS is time-consuming. It costs you a lot of time and money. It is a totally different examination compared with China's examination. Chinese IELTS candidates need a ton of time for preparation and practice. I was busy with my undergraduate paper, so I gave it up.

You know, I got married at that time and was busy with wedding, so considering my family, I gave it up. I enjoyed my marriage life, so I stayed in China for master study. I prefer stable life.

6. **What is your current work situation? How satisfied are you with the employment outcomes resulting from your master degree? [Probe for reasons]**

Interviewee: No.

Interviewee: My current situation is not bad. I meet all my expectations and have a happy family. I now have a satisfying and stable job in a high school, getting good salary and much respect from the mass. In my working, it is pleasant to get along with colleagues and my students.

One of my colleagues cannot bear the study pressure in Australia, so she quitted and came back. I felt studying abroad is not an easy job. If I cannot bear the pressure of living and studying abroad, I would not quit. Instead, I will persevere, because I cannot image the financial lost. If I persevere, I will feel frustrated and lonely. I was not willing to suffer from the pressure. If I met problems in my master study, I can talk it with my friends, families and teachers, but I will be lonely in a

foreign country.

I have some colleagues who returned from overseas universities. Yes, they have a lot of advantages. For example, their spoken English sounds more like native. However, we, local graduates, have our advantages. We are very familiar with China's high school education and Gaokao, but these returnees know nothing about the new trends of Gaokao. Thus, in my working context, there are not evident points proving returnees have much more advantages than local graduates. I think it is also the main reason that I do not regret.

Yes, I am very satisfied with the employment outcomes resulted from my master degree. You know, in some key high schools, the minimum requirement is a master degree. Without degree, you have no chance of interview. After you have a master degree, then you may be interviewed. In addition, my salary is much higher than some undergraduates. About three years ago, my school still recruited undergraduates. However, although these undergraduates have worked for three years, my starting salary is higher than their current salary. I have to say my master degree brings me a lot of substantial benefits.

7. **Moving on to the factors that have influenced you in terms of your current employment/situation:**

   A). could you recap and give some more details on the factors you have indicated in your questionnaire as influences?

   B). In addition to these, what other factors (if any) do you think have influenced you in terms of your current employment or current situation?

Interviewee: My master university plays important role in my employment. Without a master degree, I would not have the interview. In addition to the degree, what I learnt from my master university is helpful in my interview. You know, the interviewer required all interviewees to speak English. My supervisor trained my professional knowledge and provided a lot of help in English studies. More importantly, I got a lot of spoken English training from practice of international

exhibitions. In these part-time jobs, I improved my spoken English and interpersonal communication skills, which was used in my job interview. The school leader was very happy with my performance in the interview.

I am very young compared with the rival when I applied for this job. Moreover, I got married, so I did not face gendered issues. A lot of companies, as far as I know, do not want to recruit females, because their marital leave and maternity leave would bring about loss to employers. However, I am an exception. I got married when I was s student, so I do not need marital or maternity leave. For female, getting married and having a baby before applying for a job can increase the success rate of making it. Getting married gets rid of gendered issues for females in looking for a job.

I am the only one child in my family. Thus, I chose a city close to my hometown. I need to care my parents. If I live and work in a city far away from my hometown, it will be inconvenient for me to care them. In China, caring parents is a major task for young adults.

8. **What is your parents/ family's situation? Have you noticed any changes in your situation in comparison to your parents or other family members?**
   Interviewee: My parents are workers, so I think my social status is better than them. In terms of salary, mine is higher than them. In sum, I think my current working outcomes are better and more than their ones. My parents always hope me to be a teacher, and now they are very satisfied with my current situation.

9. **Some people think that international and national Master graduates are thought of differently, or gain different social status or opportunities – would you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?**

Interviewee: International graduates have better and more employment and social upward mobility opportunities.

To be honest, international graduates would get more training opportunities. Take my working place as an example. My leaders will think of international graduates when our school welcomes some foreign guest for visiting and experience exchange. Many good opportunities are always given to international graduates, because of their proficient English language skills.

Returnees are valuable human resources for employers. Thus, when international graduates and their peers come for competing for a same job, employers would prefer to recruit international graduates. For a company or an institution, returnees can be seen as symbol capitals. The number of returnees can be regarded the strength and economic power of a company or institution. Although the number of returnees in China is very large, compared with home graduates, it is a small number. Thus, in China's labour market, returnees are scarce and valuable resources.

Appendix Seven-Examples of coding and thematic analysis

Example one-coded interview transcripts

Fan | Zheng Li | Xiao Zhong

Study experience

I wanted to experience the different study pattern. You know, in China, you are required to have many modules that are not professional modules and cannot interest you. You have no options facing optional modules. However, the UK runs a wide variety of optional modules, and you can select anyone you like. China university modules aim to provide general knowledge, but the UK focuses on students' interests. I, through 1-year master programme, selected some modules I am really interests in.

Also, I love the academic atmosphere of the UK. I met some problem in my experiments. I sent an email to a researcher whose research interests are similar to mine. I did not expect him to reply, just a try. Surprisingly, I got his reply. I got the academic exchange with a prestigious scholar. In China, it would never happen.

Studying in the UK can substantially promote individual abilities while China's higher education puts knowledge instructions in first place. Precise expression is a key skill in study and working. Through presentation and group talk, my English and abelites of expressing myself are improved a lot. More importantly, I changed my ways of thinking. You know, the research thinking between the UK and China is totally different. The UK researchers are more based on logic and rigorous arguments, but China's researchers lack robust methods and strong rationale. My independent study abilities were strengthened as well. Some knowledge I did not get in class, I would study it by myself. I also overcame the English barriers. At the beginning of my master study, I cannot totally understand teachers, and after two months, I forced myself to improve English. In the process, the intendent study capacities were promoted.

Pros and cons

Pros

Master degree can determine you can have a higher level of position in labour market compared with undergraduate. Moreover, an overseas master degree is more valuable than China's master degree.

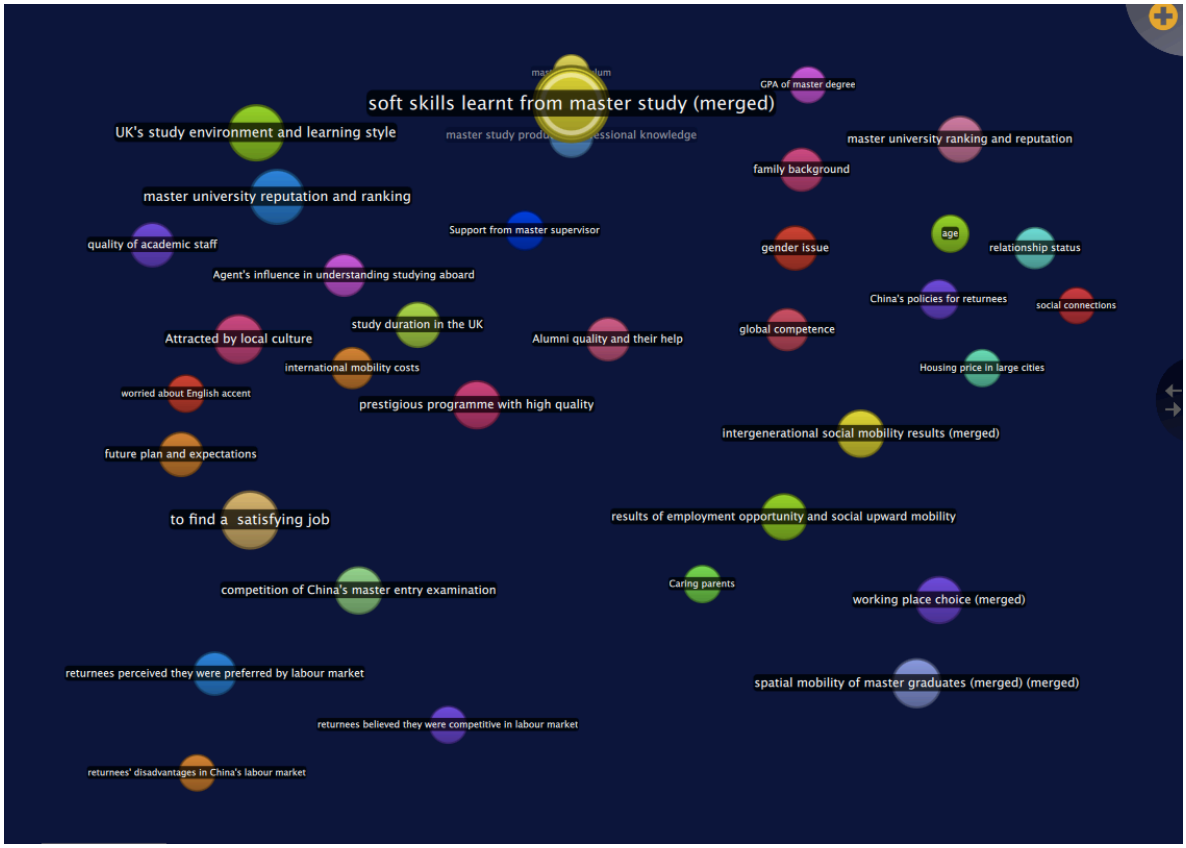
Actually, at that time, I received many offers. Among the universities issuing me offers, University of Sheffield is not the best one in terms of university ranking. However, University of Sheffield is known as its strength in engineering. Out of interest in engineering, I chose University of Sheffield. The quality of master programme is more important than university ranking for me. At that time, my career goal was to be a mechanical engineer, so I focuses on the quality and reputation of research field of a university.

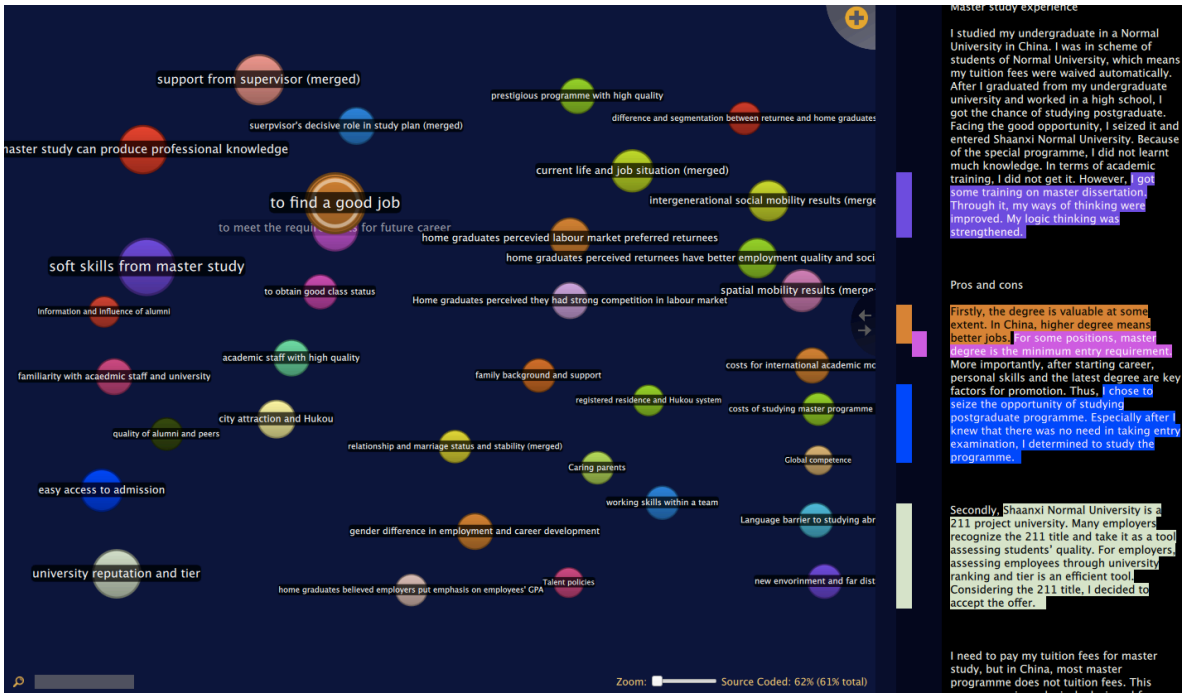
I considered the living costs and compared it between London and Manchester. I found the living costs in Sheffield is much cheaper than the two cities. Thus, I chose University of Sheffield.

Cons

Chinese master students can get financial support every month, but international students need to pay expensive tuition fees

Example two-themes developed from codes





Glossary

Bianzhi	tenure
Danwei	work-unit
Guanxi	social connections/capital
Hukou	registered permanent residence
Tizhi	public sector
Gaokao	college entrance examination

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