Title: Understanding of gendered, classed, and racialized inequalities in higher education through exploration of Chinese international students' experiences in the UK

Mei Hu (PGR)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Soc)

School of Education, College of Social Science

University of Glasgow

Abstract

International education is thought to offer opportunities to gain high level of foreign language (English) proficiency, independent and critical thinking skills that are highly valued in the current global economy. However, given the rising focus of international education on economic concerns under the discourse of neoliberalism, it is becoming doubtful that Western universities and the field of international education can fulfil the expectations of international students. Drawing on poststructural and critical theoretical perspectives, I aim to examine the complex and detailed operation of power at multiple levels to understand the process of exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality of international students in UK higher education. I adopt a qualitative longitudinal research design to track 25 Chinese international postgraduates in several universities and record their experiences in the UK across one year. First, through the exploration of Chinese international students' emotional experiences in the UK, I argue that their emotions cannot seen as their personal possessions, rather being shaped by wider social, political, and structural discourses including the discourses (or metanarratives) of neoliberalism, individualism and postcolonialism, and also government policies enacted as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to illustrating how power relations and inequality operate in higher education, my thesis also reveals instances of subversion and resistance by Chinese international students against established power structures. Second, through the analysis of the interplay of social class, gender, and ethnicity on participants' study in the UK, my thesis sheds light on how middle-class students' academic and social advantages are reproduced through the early accumulation of various cultural capitals, and how family support on children's study is differentiated according to gender. Furthermore, my thesis also draws attention to instances of working-class participants' agency and reflexivity by actively engaging in various practices to 'improve' themselves. My thesis challenges the 'deficit' model of Chinese international students as passive learners and questions the discourse of the 'homogeneity' of international students by uncovering their multiple and contradictory social positions.

Keywords: international mobility, neoliberalism, postcolonialism, emotions, social class, gender, youth transition.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Acknowledgement

I extend my sincere gratitude to my dedicated supervisors, Professor Barbara Read and Professor Marta Moskal. Your unwavering support and guidance over the past three years have been instrumental in helping me discover and refine my research interests. Your professionalism and expertise have not only inspired me but also motivated me to continually strive for improvement.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the vibrant PhD community at the School of Education. The diverse opportunities provided by this community have allowed me to expand my networks and acquire new knowledge. The inclusive environment fostered by the School has made me feel a sense of belonging and warmth throughout my academic journey.

I am profoundly thankful to my colleagues in my office. Their collaborative spirit has contributed significantly to my overall experience.

To my friends and family back in China, your constant support has been a beacon of strength, especially during moments of loneliness. Knowing that you are there for me has been a source of comfort and encouragement.

Last but not least, my heartfelt appreciation goes to the participants of my research. Their willingness to open their hearts and share their lives with me has been a crucial aspect of this academic journey.

Thank you all for being an integral part of my academic and personal growth. Your contributions have shaped my experience, and I am genuinely grateful for each one of you.

Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that 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."

Printed Name: _____Mei Hu_____

Signature: _____

Abbreviations

CCP Chinese Communist Party

CERNET China Education and Research Network

FDA Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

HE Higher Education

HEIs Higher Education Institutions

IoC Internationalisation of the Curriculum

NPM New Public Management

OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SOEs State-Owned Enterprises

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TA Thematic Analysis

UK the United Kingdom

WHO World Health Organisation

Chapter 1 Introduction

International higher education is increasingly influenced by neoliberal perspectives, with higher education institutions placing a heightened importance on recruitment in relation to neoliberalised national economic imperatives, orientations, and concerns (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012). In 2021-2022, international or foreign student enrolment made up 20% of total tertiary enrolment in the UK. Sixteen percent of all bachelor's or equivalent students and 39% of all master's or equivalent students were international students in 2021-2022 (OECD, 2023); and postgraduate taught courses are currently the main factors driving the growth in the number of international students choosing the UK, with 48.0% of all international enrolments in the UK in 2021–2022 (IFAF, 2023). Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022) has shown that the UK has been the second most popular destination for international students, after the US. Furthermore, evidence from IFAF (2023) shows that the gross economic contribution that the 2021–22 cohort of international students provided to the UK was £41.9 billion, demonstrating that international students make a hugely positive contribution to the UK economy. Like many other emerging economies, China's higher education sector has struggled to keep up with middle-class demand (Jacob et al., 2018).

With 12% of the population aged 15–24 years old (WORLD DATA ALTAS, 2020), China is a leading source of international students for the UK and other Western nations. Particularly, Chinese students represented 22.8% of all non-European Union enrolment in 2021-2022 in the UK (IFAF, 2023). The highly competitive examination system in Chinese schools has led to much anxiety for Chinese students and their families. Transnational mobility is assumed to enable individuals to develop the 'cosmopolitan' and intercultural skills which are arguably needed for successful professional life in a globalising world (Cairns, 2015). Thus, for middle-class families in China, international education provides the opportunity to convert financial advantages into internationally recognised 'competence', mitigate their fear of being 'left behind', and legitimise their social status (Xiang & Shen, 2009).

In the current global economy, knowledge has emerged as an 'untapped source of wealth' (Thornton, 2012, p. 81), which has changed the nature of labour requirements. Different professional sectors are informed by global discourses

and policy doxa regarding the desirable individual characteristics associated with the employability of 'global professionals' in the knowledge economy (Marginson, 2013). University websites describe student outcomes as 'lifelong' learners and earners who are capable of critical thinking, intercultural awareness, teamwork, self-management, interpersonal skills, and communicative competence in the twenty-first century (Blackmore et al., 2017). According to Sin (2013), international education offers opportunities to gain a high level of English proficiency, as well as developing a sense of independence, critical thinking skills and 'hands-on' forms of knowledge. In the home country as well as the international labour markets, a Western credential is thought to generate higher cultural recognition as a result of accumulated cultural, economic, and social advantages (IIE, 2009).

However, given the increased international and national labour market volatility and policy changes, as well as the changing nature of the fields of higher education and professional employment, it is becoming increasingly doubtful that Western universities and the field of international education can meet the goals and aspirations of international students (Brown et al., 2010). Specifically, the pursuit of acquiring the nuanced professional skills and attributes outlined by Brown et al. (2010) appears increasingly uncertain in the face of these dynamic challenges. In addition, while international students are considered vital contributors to educational and economic development, the financial benefits they bring to institutions, companies, and local councils in the UK are also the result of a massive marketisation initiative. This not only promotes the perception of international students' status as 'cash vehicles', but also reproduces power and knowledge differentials between the so-called 'developed' and so-called 'developing' worlds (Findlay et al. 2012).

Furthermore, the rising focus of higher education policy on economic concerns has shaped the rationale underpinning policy discourses of international education, with universities expected to contribute to global economic competitiveness and moving further toward the marketization of higher education. Universities across the world strive for status in the global rankings via comparative measures to attract high fee-paying international students and compete for funds (Marginson, 2021). However, the notions of excellence that

‘elite’ or ‘global’ institutions embrace in this pursuit has been criticised as detaching institutions from the contexts in which they operate (Kamola, 2011). Marginson (2021, p. 6) argues that this ranking system, “embodies the cultures, values, lives and economic interests not of everyone, but tiny national elites in a handful of countries”. Additionally, in such settings, institutions must compete in the global market of higher education for 'world-class' students, personnel, and resources (Rizvi, 2007). However, as I shall discuss in this thesis, such a framework fails to take account of deeply embedded and complex histories of exclusion and inequality that are connected to gendered and classed subjectivities and epistemologies as well as forms of inequality.

The move to a new environment can be seen as one of the most impactful events in international students’ lives as in some degree, they may experience cultural and academic ‘shock’. The process of ‘fitting’ in a new environment through culture learning and individual change is defined as ‘adjustment’ (Thomas & Harrell 1994). Prior research on adjustment models mainly discussed two types of sojourners: long-term sojourners, such as immigrants (Lysgaard, 1955) and short-term sojourners, such as international students (Brown & Holloway, 2008). In general, long-term sojourners seek full acculturation including both psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and short-term sojourners are orientated to achieve short-term academic goals (Wu & Hammond, 2011). In this thesis, Chinese international postgraduate students are classified as belonging to the short-term sojourners group. Compared to three-year or four-year undergraduates' degrees in UK universities, adjustment experiences are especially intense for Chinese postgraduate students given that the average length of a full-time taught master’s degree is one-year in the UK (Arambewela & Hall, 2013). I argue in this thesis that while existing studies have well investigated Chinese students’ experiences in their host countries, they have primarily focused on undergraduate students’ adjustments (Schweisfurth & Gu 2009; Major 2005). These stage models may not be applicable to Chinese postgraduates. Acknowledging the gap in the literature on educational transitions, my thesis offers insights into how Chinese postgraduate students perceive their year-long experiences in the UK.

Also, as my thesis aims to record Chinese international students' dynamic changes over time, the term 'transition' is used in my thesis, being understood as a process of change (Quan et al., 2016). In my thesis, the timeline of transition is divided into two transitional processes, the first of which is the journey from home to UK universities and the second of which is the transition from the first semester to the second semester. In addition, unlike most adjustment studies, my study not only documented the academic and cultural adjustments experienced by international students, but also explored their social and emotional transitions and their personal growth while studying in the UK. Additionally, I am aiming to move away from a 'model' approach that suggests there exists some sort of stable 'true' process that 'explains' what is going on in the social world, rather focusing on the fluid and unpredictable processes involved in these students' lives.

Young people have traditionally utilised mobility as a symbolic and material resource to facilitate the transition to adulthood (Thomson & Taylor, 2005). However, the traditional understanding of youth transition as sequential and straightforward towards stable employment and independent living cannot capture the increasing spatial-temporal complexity and fragmentation of youth transition in a competitive global economy (Robertson et al., 2018). Already Wyn and Dwyer (1999) point out that linear models of transition to adulthood are no longer appropriate to understand youth experiences. They argue that global political and economic situations have constrained young people's capabilities to accumulate social goods such as stable employment and education, which are usually associated with transitions to adulthood. Young people nowadays are "compelled to 'create' their own futures" as traditional forms of development either vanish or are obstructed (Wyn, 2015, p. 12). Based on this, this thesis aims to shed light on the connection between the experience of transnational mobility and youth transitions. In addition, as Jeffrey and McDowell (2004) argue, young people's capacities for mobility and transition are differentiated along lines of social class and gender, which are also the core student characteristics discussed in this thesis.

Moreover, while there is already plenty of literature conducted on navigating the experiences of Chinese international students, most of these studies intended to

answer the academic challenges that emerged from the differences of academic conventions between China and UK and the language difficulty for Chinese students (Quan et al., 2016; Liu 2006). Concerns with power and recognition regarding international students' experiences are largely absent, with a discourse of social inclusion framing the focus. Social inclusion within an economically-centred view of international education ignores issues of 'difference' and celebrates 'diversity' as a key aspect (Ahmed, 2013). Such approaches lack a discussion of power concerns; diversity is portrayed as unproblematic, whereas difference is something that needs to be managed by standardization and monitoring procedures (like quality assurance) (Burke, 2017; Ahmed, 2013). According to this viewpoint, inclusion calls for those who are regarded to be 'different' from the 'standard' to undergo processes of self-improvement and self-discipline.

However, such an inclusive perspective overlooks the differential social positions that people hold, giving some privileged groups the necessary cultural and material resources to 'play the game'. Certain values and behaviours are assumed to be 'good' in higher education. It is common to individualize 'failure', justifying it in 'deficit' terms as a lack of skill, determination, or aspiration, when the ways in which some groups are unequally given access to material and cultural resources is not taken into consideration (Burke, 2017). Thus, underachievement among individuals in higher education is mostly thought to be caused by a lack of individual aptitude, effort, and motivation rather than by socially located unequal power relations.

Given the economic dependence of universities and local economies on the fees from international students, it is critical that universities have a clear understanding of factors and challenges faced by international students and provide appropriate services to them (Ryan, 2005). This will be fundamental to international students' retention, achievement and satisfaction, and hence more successful recruitment (Evans et al., 2018). While many studies have focused on the learning experiences of international students in the UK, there is less research investigating the sociological processes of exclusion and marginalisation of international students in the UK. In my opinion, it is not enough to identify some negative experiences and characteristics of 'vulnerability' of international

students. My research will explore the power relations that may put Chinese international students at risk in the UK higher education. My study asserts the significance of theorizing inclusion and diversity in relation to concepts of power and difference, to develop deeper understandings of the subtle and insidious operations of gendered, classed and racialized inequalities in higher education. In my examination of Chinese international students and the ways they reproduce and/or disrupt dominant discourses around international education, I will focus on the following overall research questions:

What are the Chinese international postgraduate students' perceptions of their experiences in the UK?

And the following sub-questions:

1. How do institutional cultures and wider social conditions influence Chinese international students' experiences and transitions in the UK?
2. To what extent do Chinese international students' experiences and transitions related to gender and social class, and in what ways?

In Chapter 2 I present the theoretical framework I will be using to address these research questions, which is based on poststructuralist and critical theory. Also, discussed are key aspects of theory that critiques contemporary neoliberalism. This theorisation is utilised to understanding the profound influence of neoliberal discourse on the processes of marketisation and commodification in higher education. It allows for an analysis of how neoliberal discourse constructs individuals as self-reliant, autonomous, and strategic agents, thereby shaping their roles within the educational field. Furthermore, the chapter outlines postcolonial theories that I draw on in order to unravel the complex interplay between current UK higher education and the legacies of colonial power/knowledge power. As part of this I discuss the perpetuation of Whiteness supremacy as a discursive practice that marginalizes diverse cultural and intellectual traditions, thereby reinforcing exclusionary discourses. The incorporation of Bourdieu's conceptual tools and intersectionality theory is instrumental in highlighting the material and structural inequalities experienced by specific groups. Overall, this theoretical framework enables a nuanced exploration of multiple forms of oppression and privilege, particularly focusing

on how social class and gender dimensions interact to shape individual experiences in the educational field. As such it provides an ideal lens through which to answer my overall research question and my two sub-questions.

Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature concerning the experiences of international students in their host countries, with a specific focus on their motivations and the perceived benefits of studying abroad within the contexts of neoliberalism and globalization. This review outlines literature that has explored the multifaceted challenges encountered by international students, including engagement with 'host' academic cultures, student emotional experiences, the prevalence of 'silent' behaviour in academic settings and students' racialised experiences. Additionally, this chapter discusses existing literature on the nuances of academic and cultural shock, alongside the predominance of Western knowledge, to elucidate the complex institutional cultures international students navigate. This chapter thus contributes to answering both research sub-questions, by providing context for the empirical data presented later in the thesis.

Chapter 4 delineates the methodological approaches employed to conduct the empirical research designed to address the research questions. The research is underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm focuses on the subjective interpretations of international students, providing a nuanced understanding of how they construct their experiences and transitions within the UK context. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the deployment of a longitudinal research design, which is significant in capturing the evolving dynamics of international students' experiences and transitions over time. In terms of data analysis, the chapter details a combination of thematic analysis with Foucauldian discourse analysis. This methodological synthesis is designed to unravel how the emergent themes reproduce dominant discourses and also identify discontinuities and ruptures within these themes, highlighting how such findings can challenge and resist dominant power relations.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to addressing the first sub-question, by delving into the emotional experiences of Chinese international students in the UK, elucidating the multifaceted aspects of their transitional experiences over the course of a

year. This exploration uncovers four main aspects of transition: academic, social, cultural, and personal development, all of which are articulated through the students' expression of emotions. Furthermore, the chapter offers a nuanced analysis of how these emotional experiences of international students are inextricably linked to the institutional culture and broader societal contexts. It examines the interplay between students' emotional journeys and the academic culture prevalent in UK higher education, contextualizing these within the overarching discourses of neoliberalism and postcolonialism. Additionally, the chapter investigates the impact of external factors, specifically government policies related to COVID-19 restrictions, on the students' emotional and transitional experiences.

Chapter 6 focuses on addressing the second sub-question, through a focus on the interplay between social class and gender, and the impact of this interplay on the experiences and transitions of Chinese international students. This chapter unpacks how these dimensions influence the students' selection of subjects for their overseas education, shaping their academic expectations, classroom performances, and broader educational mobility. It provides a detailed analysis of how social class and gender not only inform these educational choices and outcomes but also extend to affect the cultural consumption of participants in the UK.

Chapter 7 discusses the influence of neoliberalism, postcolonialism, academic culture and international students’ gender and class identity constructions on their experiences and transitions in the UK. As such it helps a further understanding of the broader social and institutional cultural context for participants’ gendered and classed experiences – thus helping to further address both sub-questions.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes by returning to the main research question and sub-questions of my research, summarising how my research has addressed these questions, as well as outlining the implications of the thesis, and offering some potential routes to change for institutions, organisations, and the government regarding Chinese international students’ education in the UK.

1.1 Research context

In this section, first, I am going to give a brief discussion of the formation of the new middle-class in China, the approach to define the middle-class in China compared to Western approaches, and contemporary patterns of social inequality in modern China. Second, I will review the national policies and approaches related to promote gender equality in China, and patterns of current gender inequality in the country.

1.1.1 The development of the middle-class in contemporary China

The post-Mao reform era (1978–present) marked a notable departure from the Mao era (1949–1978), which saw a substantial shift in the social stratification patterns in Chinese society. Maoist China was known for its social 'destratification', but post-Mao China has gradually seen the pre-1949 social stratification reappears. Chinese society has become more stratified and differentiated since 1978. Since the beginning of the post-Mao reform, four policy initiatives have contributed to the emergence and growth of China's middle-class. First, the private sector has re-emerged and expanded quickly in Chinese society as a result of the government's attempts to legalise the private economy and promote its growth since 1978. Many middle-class occupations have been made possible by the growth of the private sector (Chen, 2013). Second, the middle-class's development is significantly accelerated by education. Since 1978, the state has consistently and sincerely worked to improve and broaden higher education across the country, from reopening universities during the early stages of reform to increasing government spending on higher education in the years that followed (Zhang, 2005). Third, the inflow of foreign capital helped create more middle-class job positions in China. The establishment of special economic zones (SEZs), such as those in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, by the post-Mao administration in the 1970s marked the beginning of China's opening to foreign investment. Reduced tax rates streamlined administrative and customs processes, and, significantly, the exemption of duties on imported components and supplies served as incentives to promote foreign investment (Naughton, 2006). Finally, the establishment and expansion of the middle-class were also aided by the state-led reforms of State-

Owned Enterprises (SOEs), collectively owned businesses, and governmental organisations. Government agencies at various levels have increased their emphasis on merit and specialised skills in recruiting and promotion, transforming the managers of state-owned and collective companies into white-collar professionals (Chen, 2013).

1.1.2 The approach to define middle-class in China

There are two distinct theoretical traditions in the study of Western cultures that can be used to conceptualise and operationalize the middle-class as a sociopolitical group. One is the ‘subjective’ approach, and the other is the ‘objective’ approach. According to the subjective approach, an individual's belief or perception that they belong to the middle stratum of a particular society is how the middle-class is identified because a "social class is a psychological attachment that is part of an individual's overall self-concept" (Walsh et al. 2004, p. 470). However, in China, it was arguably only in the late 1980s that a middle-class comparable to the middle-class in the West slowly emerged in China, as mentioned above. According to Li (2003), only a small percentage of Chinese people understand what social class is and how to distinguish between its various subgroups. Many Chinese people still do not acknowledge the concept of class. Thus, the class consciousness of the Chinese middle-class is still in formation (Chen, 2013). In this study, when I asked the participants how they defined their class belonging, the majority of them said that they were unsure of how to classify China's working- and middle-class and instead talked about how they saw social class being constructed in the US and the UK, where the topic of "class" is frequently discussed.

On the other hand, the objective approach contends that some key objective socioeconomic indicators like income, education, and occupation primarily determine a sociopolitical class. Within this approach, there are two conceptual branches. One is ‘quantitative’ branch, which suggests that the most effective way to identify a person's social class is to create a quantitative index of their income, education, and occupation, and then classify them based on where they fall on the index. As a result, people who fall in the middle of the scale typically make up the middle-class (see Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Within the quantitative branch, a person's income has been regarded as the most prevalent social class

indicator (see Zheng &Li, 2004). However, in the Chinese context, Chen (2013) argues that there are many problems with this income-based, quantitative measure of middle-class status in both theory and practice.

First, it is quite challenging to come to any consensus on the criterion of income when defining middle-class. In China, there frequently exists a significant discrepancy between reported (or nominal) and actual salaries since the majority of wage earners frequently conceal their true incomes for a variety of reasons, such as tax evasion (Chen, 2004). In addition, formal incomes (such as a salary or wage) do not always reflect a person's true socioeconomic status in Chinese culture. For instance, most private entrepreneurs and government bureaucrats enjoy very similar living standards while private entrepreneurs earn much more than government bureaucrats (Chen, 2004). This is because bureaucrats can use their administrative power and government perks to achieve high living standards. Moreover, economic disparities between regions are substantial in China. For example, people from developed areas typically earn 2.5 times more per month than those from underdeveloped ones (Chen, 2013). Furthermore, urban dwellers in developed areas earn an average monthly income that is 5.4 times greater than rural residents in underdeveloped areas (Li, 2003). Therefore, it becomes difficult to use income as the criteria to classify social class in China.

To counteract these drawbacks of the quantitative branch of the objective approach, the qualitative branch of the objective method has provided some options that are more appropriate for the socioeconomic conditions of modern China. The neo-Marxist measurement is the one most often used (Chen, 2013). The neo-Marxist measurement employs three subdimensions to form class categories: means of production, position in authority structure (based on managerial and supervisory responsibilities), and possession of skills and expertise (Wright, 1997). Owners are defined as those who control the means of production in the first subdimension; bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie are two further kinds of owners based on the magnitude of the means of production. Managers are individuals who have direct responsibility for supervising other employees in the second subdimension. People with skills and competence are

defined as professionals in the third subdimension. The middle-class is defined as the petite bourgeoisie, managers, and professionals (Chen, 2013).

Drawing on the neo-Marxist measurement, Lu (2002, 2004) utilizes four dimensions—means of production, position in authority structure, possession of skills and expertise, and position within or outside the government system. Since the state or government has had a significant influence on the social stratification pattern in Chinese society, unlike Western societies, 'position within or outside the government system' is unique for Chinese context (Chen, 2013). By such, Lu have distinguished three positions in the government system in China today: the core of the government system, the periphery of the government system, and outside the system. Within this distinct sociopolitical environment, Lu (2002, 2004) identifies ten social strata by occupation see appendix 1.1. which shows the categories of the social strata and how these relate to the four dimensions based on the neo-Marxist measurement. However, from a poststructural perspective, which is the study's theoretical stance, my approach to understanding social strata diverges from the notion of uncovering a singular 'truth.' Instead, I view these categories as analytical tools that facilitate the nuanced examination of data, particularly in relation to social class distinctions. Also, these categorisations will always be in some way based on subjective interpretation.

Thus, in contemporary China, compared to personal income, occupations are simpler to measure, more regionally consistent, and likely to represent "groupings that are distinct and separate from one another" (Martin, 1985, p. 7). Based on the category of Lu (2002, 2004), Chen (2013) collapses the ten social strata into three social classes: upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class. The upper-class consists of administrative personnel of state affairs and social affairs, as well as private entrepreneurs. The service and industry workers, peasants, as well as the unemployed and partially employed, are considered to be members of the lower-class or working-class. The middle-class are operationalised into three types of occupations: managerial personnel, professionals, and office workers (see table 1-1).

	Occupations
Managers	The managers of state-owned, collectively owned, and privately owned enterprises; the managers of foreign and joint venture enterprises
Professionals	Research, educational, and medical specialists (e.g., scientists, professors, teachers, and doctors); engineers, technicians, and their assistants; economic and legal professionals (e.g., accountants, lawyers, and so on), cultural/art and sports professionals; creative intellectuals (e.g., writers, musicians, and consultants); all other kinds of self-employed professionals
White-collar office workers	The staff members in the government and party agencies; the office workers and staff members in public organizations and all types of enterprises

Table 1-1 Definition and Operationalization of the Middle Class in China
Source: this table is cited from Chen (2013).

The managerial stratum comprises three subgroups including the managers of SOEs and collective enterprises, the managers of private enterprises, and the managers of foreign-related enterprises. The professional stratum includes those occupations that involve specialized training and skills, which is characterized by the possession of human capital (e.g., specialized knowledge). The group of office workers mainly contains two subgroups including office workers and staff members in public organizations and in all types of industrial enterprises, and staff members in government and party agencies (gongwuyuan) (Zhang, 2005).

However, the new middle-class has been shrinking in recent years due to the global economic crisis, the inflation of higher education degrees, and the rapid increase in housing in urban China (Li, 2010). As a result, both the older and younger generations of the middle-class in post-reform China feel under pressure to advance in order to maintain their middle-class status in the face of rising

competition fuelled by both economic reform and globalization (Tsang, 2013; Zhai & Moskal 2022).

According to Chen's study (2020), the majority of resource reallocation in China currently occurs from parents to their offspring. A relatively large number of parents who were born during the high rate of childbirth in the 1950s and 1960s and are still at working age support a relatively small number of children who were born after the rate of childbirth decreased. The population of middle- and upper-middle class people who were at the height of their economically active years expanded as a result of economic prosperity. Chinese families invested more money in their children's education as their wages increased, including paying for their studies abroad (Chen, 2020). Additionally, the state of China's domestic labour market, which has been in part influenced by the population and labour force's aging demographics, have also contributed to student and subsequently skilled labour migration (Guo, 2010).

However, not all Chinese parents can afford to send their children abroad. Income inequality, or inequality in general, is a politically sensitive topic in China (Xie, 2016). This can be seen in relation to reporting the country's Gini coefficient (Gini coefficient measures the income inequality within a nation ranging from zero which reflects perfect equality to one which reflects maximal inequality among values). Once China's Gini coefficient crossed 0.4 in 2000, the level regarded as the international alert line, the Chinese government ceased reporting it (Xie et al., 2012). China's economic reforms since 1978 have resulted in notable rises in both individual income and income inequality in the country's overall income distribution. The richest 10% of income earners in China had an increase in their income of about 1,200%, compared to a 400% growth for the lowest 50% (Piketty et al., 2019). However, much of the Chinese public might not be aware of rising inequality or may underestimate its severity (McCall, 2013).

Some studies have investigated the reasons for the underestimated response to income inequality in China. The first and most prevalent view is that Confucianism and the imperial examination system, which emphasises meritocracy, have had an impact on Chinese culture (Elman, 2013). This is positive about the prospects for upward mobility and the opportunity to succeed

via skill, education, and hard effort. Such views help to legitimate the pattern of inequality as the public may still hope to achieve upward mobility through hard work, believing in equality of opportunity (Xian & Reynolds, 2017). Secondly, many Chinese people see inequality as a natural byproduct of economic growth and are open to it if it 'makes the overall pie bigger' (Xie et al., 2012). As Deng Xiaoping famously said at the beginning of the economic reform that we permit some people and some regions to become prosperous first, for the purpose of achieving common prosperity faster (Song, 2023). This notion is also used by the Chinese government, which uses state-owned media as a platform for print propaganda, portraying the idea that inequality facilitates development, and that this in line with essential Communist Party principles.

The Chinese government may also deliberately suppress the messages reporting on the income gap between the rich and the poor in Chinese social media (Song, 2023). Thus, this thesis hopes to draw attention to social and income inequality in China from the perspective of class influences on students' experiences in the UK, and how family background affects their motivations to study abroad, academic performance and future career plans.

1.1.3 Gender and educational development in contemporary China

The expansion of basic education infrastructure in rural areas and the 'one-child' policy (between 1979 and 2015) which resulted in the decrease of number of children, played an important role in promoting gender equality in education (Ye & Wu, 2011). Also, in China, the desire for education in a family was getting stronger. Parents were sometimes willing to spend all their savings, even borrow money, to send their academically stronger children to school, whether they were boys or girls (Ye & Wu, 2011). This was because 'going to school' was not only seen as a chance for students to obtain knowledge, but also to provide a way to help children to achieve upward social mobility, especially for rural students who could change their rural status into urban through attending college (Ross, 2011). However, some research still found girls' vulnerable positions in education and parents' preference towards their son regarding educational investment. When families cannot afford both girls' and boys' education beyond compulsory education, in most circumstances, parents would

prefer to invest in boys' education (Li & Tsang 2003; Zhang, 2007). In sum, in the reform era, education was regarded as 'the logic of developmentalism' both for families and state: educated girls became valued by parents because they could improve the social status of the whole family and enhance the family economy; educated mothers/wives became important for the state because their knowledge could promote gender equality in society and contribute to national development (Ross, 2011).

Nevertheless, with the expansion of higher education in China and the increasing enrolment rate of university students, the returns for higher education in terms of gaining a well-paid job has decreased (PDO, 2013). University graduates found it was getting harder to secure a job because of 'degree inflation' and fierce competition in the labour market. The skyrocketing housing prices and high living costs in the city made it difficult for them to repay the money that their parents once invested in education (Chen & Wu, 2008). These situations have discouraged parents from investing money in children's education, especially girls. A conception that 'education is useless' was prevalent and has again been seen to hinder the educational development of girls (PDO, 2013). Furthermore, with the opening-up of opportunities for non-farming occupations since the reform, more and more girls chose to work in the factories such as the textile factory or food processing factory rather than attending high school, which might not be the ideal decision for their long-term career development (Chen & Wu, 2008).

To respond to these challenges, accountability mechanisms were established to guarantee equal access to education for all children, with the central and local government taking joint responsibility for planning and promoting the quality of education and performance in basic education which is a criterion for local government assessment (Wang, 2012). Also, the Chinese government established a set of legal measures to promote gender equality such as the 'Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests', and the 'Marriage Law', and formulated a development plan to protect girls' rights in relation to compulsory education. They also developed policies designed to improve girls' education in poor and ethnic minority regions, such as the policy entitled 'Ten Opinions of Ministry of Education on Strengthening Girls' Education in Poor and Minority

Region' (Chi et al., 2014). Furthermore, the Chinese government established the student financial system from pre-primary school to college to support disadvantaged students and carried out the 'two exemptions and one subsidy' policy that exempted tuition, textbook and miscellaneous fees and provided subsidies for boarding students (Chi et al., 2014). To reach migrant girls from economically disadvantaged families, national organizations set up a series of projects that provided funds and training to support girls' educational development, for example, the 'Spring Buds Project' operated by the All-China Women's Federation (Wang, 2012). Also, to promote women's contribution and participation in the fields of science, technology, and management, the Ministry of Science and Technology introduced a policy entitled 'Opinions on strengthening the team building of female scientific and technical talents' to improve girls' interests in science activities and cultivate their career aspirations toward scientific research and technologies.

Despite the various measures carried out by the Chinese government towards equal access to education and gender equality, there are still multiple problems and forms of gender inequality in Chinese society due to many different factors, such as gender-unfriendly institutions, the persistence of strong patriarchal norms and low gender equality awareness in the family, schools and other public places (Chi et al., 2014). For example, politics is still dominated by men; women often reach their 'glass ceiling' in their career because they are seen to have a primary responsibility to care for their families; young women may be judged by their physical appearance in certain sectors; poor girls are still in vulnerable positions in education; son-preference threatens the survival of girl babies (Attané, 2012; Svensson & Wang, 2013). Moreover, while there is a strong feminist tradition in China to push for gender equality, this type of state feminism aims at a 'top-down' strategy, which sees the education of girls and the strengthening of women as the crucial catalyst for increasing the national economy and social development (Chi et al., 2014). The official development discourse on rural development in relation to gender aims at providing women's education, to make them more productive in economic terms, whilst paying little attention to women's agency and capabilities (Jacka, 2013).

This top-down and instrumentalist approach which focuses on quantitative outputs such as enrolment, drop-out rates, and academic grades, influences many official projects to simply meet with the required indicators rather than empowering students (Jacka, 2013). While the Chinese government facilitates instrumental empowerment to girls through providing access to education, the lack of intrinsic empowerment arguably fails to strengthen girls' self-confidence and resilience, improve their gender awareness, and enable them to work with others for change (Ross, 2011). Thus, the crucial issue is whether the educational system educates students about gender issues, teaches them how to challenge current gender norms, stereotypes, and discrimination in society. Otherwise, when women graduate from school, they may still face gender inequality in the labour market and traditional gender norms that imply women should prioritise taking care of their families. Simply providing education to girls does not guarantee their high status in society, and the current dominant gender norms and stereotypes – or discourses - could disadvantage them after school. Studying abroad therefore gives women the opportunity to experience a different educational system and culture, which may provide experience of different gender norms. My thesis aims to shed light on how Chinese students who study in the UK reproduce or challenge prevalent gender discourses in China and how the experiences of studying abroad in the UK shapes their perceptions and reflections about gender norms.

1.2 Personal background and motivation to undertake this thesis

> Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of my own experience, always in relation to processes that I saw as taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognize in the things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, cracks, silent shocks, malfunctionings … that I undertook a particular piece of work, a few fragments of autobiography (Foucault,1988, p. 156).

People usually conduct social or educational research out of their own interest and experience, as they would like to explore a particular issue in more depth (Burke, 2013). Although my parents both work in the government, by the time I was born and before I went to university, they were in a lower position in their department. I occasionally sensed their worry if I required money to participate in extracurricular activities. However, they always saved money for me and

supported me to attend various events including traveling and participating in cultural activities. My life was good up to the point when I developed pneumonia just before the Chinese university entrance exam (Gao Kao). My performance in Gao Kao was significantly impacted by my illness, and the grades I received fell short of my expectations and my typical academic results. I was forced to attend a public university in China and chose a field connected to computer science without giving it much thought because this university is a University of Technology, which is well-known for its strengths in computer science and communications. My parents hardly ever offered me subject-related advice. I had a very negative experience studying this degree, because I found I had no interest in technology or computers at all. I put a lot of effort into getting good results, and I even had the chance to enrol in the same university as a postgraduate student without taking the Postgraduates Entrance Examination, but I still felt like a 'study machine' with no prospects for the future. Thus, I turned down the chance to pursue my education further as a graduate student. My parents and friends were baffled by my decision to work in real estate after I graduated and thought I had wasted my four years at university.

When I left university and began figuring out what I really wanted and what kind of person I wanted to be, though, I felt liberated. Unfortunately, the path to self-discovery was not straightforward and linear. Over the course of three years, I held a few different occupations, including sales work in a cosmetics company and preparation for the Civil Service exams, which my parents supported. The whole journey was unstable and unpredictable, and even my father cracked a joke about not knowing what I would do next. Then, during a casual conversation I had with my mother one evening, I said how miserable my life had become and how I wished to travel and temporarily live in another country. My mother discussed my thoughts with my father while I was still thinking about it, and the following morning, he asked me if I wanted to study abroad and what field I wanted to pursue as a career.

By the time my father suggested I consider studying overseas, he had already been given a promotion within his department and had made a few profitable investments that would allow him to assist me financially. I was so happy to finally be able to pursue my passion as a subject of study. After I decided to

study in the UK, everything went smoothly. I received three offers from UK universities, I achieved the required level of English proficiency on the IELTS test, and I chose a field in education that I thought may be fascinating. When I went to the UK to pursue my master's degree, my life seemed to begin a new chapter. I cherished my life in the UK, and I wanted to utilise the opportunities it offered as much as possible. I worked hard and went to workshops to learn how to write a thesis, participated in group discussions, and actively answered teachers' questions because I knew I had never received training in education-related issues before. I also knew my English was not good enough to communicate with locals, so I tried to make local friends and took part in local festival celebrations.

But I discovered that not all Chinese international students behave and think the same way I do. I clearly recall being in a seminar with solely Chinese students. I ended up being the only one to actively participate in conversation with the instructor and ask my own questions. After the entire session, I got to know the instructor for that seminar, and she even penned a letter of recommendation for my PhD application. My classmates asked how I could act so fearlessly in class, and I questioned them as to how they could remain silent. They gave me a few explanations, including the fact that they believed that classroom speaking was too nerve-wracking or that they did not think their English was good enough to participate in discussions. Then, a female student from a well-off family confided in me that she was intimidated by everything in the classroom and that she was afraid to even look at the White lecturer. When she mentioned that the White teacher was ‘intimidating’ while the White teacher was acting friendly to us, I started to wonder about the complexity of the ‘silence’ and whether she was being silenced by the ‘White’ environment. Furthermore, even though we were both women and from middle-class families, I belong to the ‘working-class to middle-class’ while she was born into the middle-class. Therefore, I wondered if our varying classroom behaviour was related to our social class background and also if silence was gendered. At this time, I realized that we, as Chinese international students, had different experiences from each other in the UK, and started wondering what factors were affecting these experiences.

With further study in the educational field, I began to gain more knowledge about educational theories and policies including the theories of Bourdieu, Foucault and postcolonialism, I began to locate my concerns in a structural and political context. My master's dissertation looked at the influence of socioeconomic status on children's academic performance in the classroom, which facilitated my interests in exploring and examining further on wider social relations of power and inequality. Therefore, my personal experience influenced how I constructed my research topic and inevitably influences the ways I have interpreted my research data, as I will go on to discuss in the later chapters.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Education is never neutral but is always a site of struggle over meaning-making and knowledge (Lather, 1991). Universities are important institutional venues where particular forms of knowledge and identity are legitimised (Burke,2013). It is crucial for this study to have a conceptual framework that enables close attention to the complex and detailed operations of power at multiple levels, to understand the processes of exclusion and inequality in higher education. This calls for a conceptual framework that pays close attention to not only overt instances of oppression and discrimination but also to the covert, microscopic, relational, and insidious ways that power and inequality operate across, between, and within the educational domains.

In Chapter 1, I have presented research on current international education within the wider influence of discourses of neoliberalism and globalization. A further review of literature on international students experiences in the next chapter will also show the urgency of exploring the connection between international education and the complex ways that inequalities play out in higher education. This highlights the need to draw on the substantial corpus of theoretical and empirical research within the critical sociology of education that confronts the mechanisms underlying educational inequities in sophisticated ways, offering conceptual tools to think through ways to disrupt inequalities. In this chapter, I have attempted to draw on poststructural and critical theoretical

perspectives to develop a conceptual framework for this thesis, which may help to reveal these long-standing and enduring inequalities.

Foucault's concept of discourse and his conceptualisation of the way power operates are important here for comprehending how different individuals – or in poststructuralist terms, 'subjects', are recognised, or are 'misrecognised', in UK classrooms. From Foucault's perspective, power is unpredictable and complex, and instrumentalist and/or neoliberal perspectives on international education can overlook the subtler and more profound ways that power inequalities play out in the discursive fields of higher education. To understand how educational inequalities are reproduced, I also look at Bourdieu's capital and habitus theory, which gives insights into the ways in which students may be advantaged or disadvantaged in different ways relating to their experience and background [capital theory] and gives insights into how these advantages/disadvantages play out in a person's day-to-day life as an individual interacts with the social world [habitus theory]. In addition, postcolonial theory offers valuable insights to analyse the marginalisation and exclusion of the cultural and intellectual practices of international students, which may lead to their self-perception as inferior or unworthy. Intersectionality theory helps to highlight how material and social inequalities occur by recognizing that individuals hold multiple social identities (or subjectivities) that intersect and interact with each other. These intersecting identities shape individuals' experiences, creating complex systems of privilege and oppression. Finally, Ahmed's theory of affective economies helps me to understand the role of emotions in student experiences and relate individuals' emotions to the broader social and political contexts in which emotions are produced and circulated. Considering this, the critical conceptual tools I describe in this chapter aid in illuminating the underlying assumptions behind international education as well as the ways in which inequalities might be sustained, reformulated, and refashioned through such assumptions within material and structural contexts of social inequity.

2.2 Poststructuralism

In poststructuralist approaches, individual behaviour, speech, and thought can be seen as 'texts' which are constructed and performed through discourse (a

term I define below) (Burke, 2013). These texts are open to different meanings and interpretations. According to poststructuralist thought there is no single and essential meaning, but many, and researchers need to focus their research on the multiple perspectives that individuals may take, and to understand how meanings and knowledge are constructed, legitimised, and used (Cohen et al., 2002). As a consequence of this, poststructuralists reject the concept of the enduring social structures of base and superstructure, in preference to an approach which focuses on the micro-practices of lived experiences (Olssen, 2003). Thus, poststructuralism challenges the notion of fixed and stable meanings, highlighting the notion that meaning is contingent, context-dependent, and subject to power dynamics (Olssen, 2003). It questions the idea of objective truth and emphasizes the plurality of interpretations. Although I had not intended to adopt the perspective of poststructuralism when I first designed my theoretical framework, further analysis of the research data revealed the need for me to broaden my theoretical horizons in order to incorporate poststructuralism. This allowed me to theorise the participants' varied perspectives on their experiences in the UK as well as the unstable and fluid ways in which participants construct a sense of themselves. This construction process is known as ‘subjectivity’.

Subjectivity, according to Weedon (1987), is “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, their sense of themself and their ways of understanding their relation to the world."(p. 32). Poststructuralists investigate how human subjectivity is constructed through a person’s engagement with discursive processes and emphasize the role of language and discourse in shaping their understanding, rather than through notions of a pre-existent subject on which rules and behaviour are imposed (Waitt, 2005). The concept of ‘identity’ from the social constructionist perspective, focuses specifically on how identities are socially constructed (Allen, 2005). Similar to poststructuralism, constructionist perspectives reject the idea of fixed, essential identities. Instead, this perspective sees identities as fluid and subject to change over time and across different contexts. The key difference between the concept of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’ is that poststructuralism questions the stability of subjectivity and emphasizes the role of language and power (Waitt,

2005), while constructionist perspectives focus on how identities, including but not limited to subjectivity, are socially constructed and fluid (Allen, 2005).

The construction of subjectivities and identity formation both are important sites of potential transformation. For a greater understanding of how inequality and exclusion operate in educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities, identity formations and subjectivity constructions are key concepts. There are some identity formations that seem to be more prevalent than others, such as the notion of the inner self, which is a fundamental identity distinct from the social forces at play (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991) argues that individuals have the freedom to choose their ways of life based on their reflections on new information and new experiences. In other words, individual subjects seem to less be constrained by norms and social structures. Within such a perspective, individuals seem to be free to behave as they wish to in higher education settings. If their behaviour is 'wrong', it is due to problems within the individual, such as lacking talent and ability. Also, individual potential is viewed as something that is fundamental to who the person is rather than something that is socially constructed, contextualised, and closely related to subjective processes, such as learning and being a student (Burke, 2013).

Such presumptions are challenged by the perspective of poststructuralists, which calls into question some of the taken-for-granted ideas about self-reflexivity (Giddens, 1991). Poststructuralists posit that the individual identity, potential, and freedom are interconnected within historical inequalities and the institutional markers of differentiation (Olssen, 2003). To develop deeper-level understandings of inequality at play in universities as well as in the formation of pedagogical identities, a critical approach to the experiences of international students needs to question the taken-for-granted meanings and discourses at play in policy and practice. Through such viewpoints, injustices at the intersections of age, class, ethnicity, gender, and race are intended to be exposed on multiple layers (Mirza, 2009). These injustices revolve on the processes of identity formation and subjective construction (Mirza, 2009).

Therefore, poststructuralist theorists view identity as socially constructed and dynamic, emphasizing the influence of social and relational factors over individual traits (Zembylas, 2013). They reject the notion that identity is fixed,

instead seeing it as continually evolving. Identities are seen as incomplete and constantly changing (Butler, 2021). Through repeated social interactions, identity is formed, but this does not mean it is predetermined. Rather, it allows for reinterpretation and encourages self-transformation (Giardiello et al., 2024). Furthermore, feminist poststructuralism troubles the binary categories of male and female by revealing how language shapes our understanding of gender (and indeed all categories that are used to understand aspects of the world) and by breaking down the idea that these categories are fixed and inevitable (Davies & Gannon, 2005). It emphasizes that the way we talk about gender influences how we perceive it, and by deconstructing these linguistic practices, it opens up space for recognizing gender as more fluid and complex than simply male or female. Nevertheless, these binaries are often seen as ‘natural’ and inevitable, and in turn, are discursively connected to other binaries such as normal/ abnormal and rational/irrational (Davies & Gannon, 2005).

Feminist poststructuralism also examines how power dynamics operate by normalizing and privileging dominant terms in binary oppositions, while marginalizing and marking subordinate terms as "other" (Davies & Gannon, 2005). It critiques essentializing theories that construct individuals in fixed terms and shows how power not only shapes us but also influences what we perceive as desirable identities. This approach challenges traditional ways of understanding knowledge and agency, offering the possibility of rethinking and reclaiming agency in alternative ways (Pierre & Pillow, 2000). In this sense, agency is no longer defined by the traditional narrative of the lone, heroic individual, but it lies with the subject-in-relation, who remains open to new possibilities (Deleuze, 1994, cited in Davies & Gannon, 2005). This subject is ethically aware of the constitutive force of their discursive practices, and how their selves are influenced by social, historical, and material contexts. Thus, they are capable of disrupting the processes through which they are constituted (Butler, 2013).

More recently, some feminist poststructuralists have moved beyond just language to consider how physical spaces and material objects also influence our understanding of gender and identity (Deleuze, 1994, cited in Davies & Gannon, 2005). Deleuze (1994, cited in Davies & Gannon, 2005) suggests that that our sense of self (subjectivity) is formed not just by our thoughts but also by our desires and emotions, which flow and interact with other people, spaces, and

events. Instead of seeing the self as a fixed and unified entity, these theorists view it as a complex arrangement (an assemblage) of desires, emotions, and interactions, constantly changing and evolving. This means that the self is not a single, unified thing; it is always changing and adapting in relation to the world around it as a continuous process of becoming (Braidotti, 2013). Therefore, the use of categories in my thesis such as female/male, working-class/middle-class and China/the West need to be looked at from a poststructuralist perspective, which breaks down traditional binary concepts.

A subject's designation as a "student" does not guarantee that the subject will be understood by others to be one, because "every identity is constituted in relation to who may not occupy the subject position as much as who may occupy it" (Winstead, 2009, p. 132–33). This is an example of what Burke (2017) and others label ‘misrecognition’. An individual may or may not be recognised as a ‘student’ through complex processes of ‘doing’ and ‘being’, and this is shifting across space and time and according to the social, political, and cultural context (Burke, 2013), as Hall argues:

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modulations of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion. Above all … identities are constructed through, not outside, difference (Hall, 2000, 17).

In other words, we develop our subjectivities through the multiple, contradictory social positions that we undertake in and through time and place, and these different identity positions are not simply additive. Rather, these various positions intersect, are mutually constitutive, yet they may also contradict with one another and be in tension, which challenges the assumption of a ‘coherent’ united self (Windsong, 2018). Additionally, certain components of our identities could be more apparent or powerful at a certain point in time and space, and this is related to intricate relational processes of subjective construction (Burke, 2013). These theoretical insights are significant in understanding students' complicated experiences and how they navigate competing expectations, practices, and various identity positions such as student, mother, and daughter both inside and outside of higher education

sectors. Furthermore, these processes involve emotional as well as cultural, and discursive interactions and practices (see below for an outline of how I am theorising both emotions and discourse). Decisions, aspirations, desires, choices, and experiences in education are strongly shaped by the complex web of discourses, interactions, practices, and emotions (Hall, 2000). In terms of my research, this has involved paying close attention to the nuanced ways that various types of gendered, class, and racialized identities, as well as other categories of identification, substantially influence the processes of becoming a student in higher education.

A difficult situation for investigating social inequalities in higher education is to use descriptors such as ‘women’, ‘mature’ and ‘working-class’ which may problematize identity as fixed and fully knowable. However, according to critical theory, it is crucial to examine certain social groups and identities, even if they are not fully stable, in order to comprehend how power and inequality operate in relation to socially produced understandings of these categorisations (Burke, 2013). Also, feminism seeks to understand how people negotiate the forms of femininities and masculinities across intricate power relations and intersections of difference. Yet, poststructuralist conceptual tools are effective in deconstructing gendered subjectivity processes, understanding the subject as constructed through doing as well as being, and theorising the subject of gendered discourse as constantly in process and thus open to transformative ways of being.

Burke (2013) argues that the naming of a subject position does not constitute a definite identity position. Winstead discusses the challenge of naming the participants in her research in connection to certain social identities, but also drawing on poststructuralism, which challenges identity as stable and knowable. She argues that labelling a subject position does not guarantee its meaning because the grounds of differentiation are constantly shifting. Winstead suggests that promoting a singular identity is a political act tied to cultural norms and power struggles over social, cultural, and economic resources. She warns that such identities, while appearing homogeneous, often mask underlying differences and advises readers to see these identities as reflections of her own position in relation to her research subjects (Winstead, 2009).

Similarly, with my theoretical stance, classifying subject positions in terms of a person's race, class and gender helps me to uncover the social and material inequalities and power relations playing out in higher education. Yet, my aim extends beyond merely highlighting differences between women and men, working-class and middle-class, or China and the West, but to explore and expand the range of possibilities beyond traditional categories, involving breaking down rigid categorizations and embracing subjectivities that may not fit neatly into either category, or may encompass aspects of both (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Therefore, the aim of the thesis is about embracing fluidity and diversity in identity rather than adhering to fixed binaries.

2.3 Ahmed's social and embodied emotions

Chinese international students' negative feelings are often seen as their own difficulties in 'fitting into' the local context. From the perspective of host institutions, the notion of 'transition' is often underpinned by the discourse of 'deficiency' for Chinese international students lacking the necessary skills to manage their learning experience (Ploner, 2017). However, the discussion of a person's emotional (or 'affective') experiences cannot be reduced to the claim of merely presenting the vulnerable subjects and talking about Chinese international students' 'deficiency' when they enter an unfamiliar educational context. It is rather a way to expand our understanding of the effects of emotions and to retheorize them when we deal with social difference. Furthermore, poststructuralists such as Foucault did not look too much at things that are 'outside discourse' (i.e., outside language). In my opinion, it is important to also analyse the ways in which emotions are important in students' identity formations/experiences, therefore I am going to draw on Ahmed's work.

Ahmed's (2004a) theory of affective economies is adopted to analyse social and relational aspects of emotions in the wider context. Ahmed's theory (2004a) helps to emphasise on how social forms of emotions or affects shape persons' identities as well as come to enter the formation of social structures and social differences. In this sense, emotions are not simply personal or subjective experiences, but are also deeply political and social in nature (Ahmed, 2004a).

Ahmed (2004a) notes that affective economies are not just about the production and circulation of emotions, but also about the ways in which emotions can be used to shape and regulate social and political behaviour.

Ahmed (2004, p. 25) argues that "emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies". Her model of emotions suggests that while emotions do not positively reside in a subject or figure, they still work to bind subjects together. Indeed, to put it more strongly, the non-residence of emotions is what makes them 'binding', as she comments:

> Emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective (Ahmed, 2004, p. 26-27).

Additionally, bodily surfaces take shape through recognition or interpretation of sensations, which are reactions to perceptions of objects and other people, and transformation of such feelings into emotions and judgements (Ahmed, 2004). The way feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a history of reading. In this sense, the process of recognition of feelings is related to what we already know (Ahmed, 2004). Furthermore, to be felt a certain way by an encounter with another, may involve a reading not just of this encounter, but also of the other who has certain characteristics (Ahmed, 2004). These emotional reactions are readings that not only seem to be separating us from others, but also draw boundaries between ourselves and them. For example, racism is a specific type of inter-corporeal encounter: when a White racist subject meets a racial other, they may feel strong emotions (fear, hate, disgust, and pain). The "moment of contact" is influenced by previous histories of contact, which makes it possible for the presence of a racial other to be viewed as threatening while reshaping the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, emotions demonstrate how power shapes the very surface of bodies and worlds.

Emotions are closely linked to the power relations that characterise and permeate the social field (D'Aoust, 2014). From a Foucauldian perspective, emotions can be conceptualised as a form of knowledge associated with power (Popkewitz, 2000). In Popkewitz's (2000) sense, the mechanisms by which

individuals can act and engage in the world are established through the operation of power. This power-as-effect approach looks at schooling as a disruptive effect, searching for the dominant modes of thought. It closely investigates how the objects of schooling—student subjectivities—are made in this case, via emotionality practices (Li, 2022). Thus, to examine the process of the operation of power in the production of emotions in an educational context, the concept of power is tied to the concept of emotions as social and cultural practices (Ahmed, 2004a). The circulation of emotions becomes crucial rules for the (dis)qualification of action for the subject (Li, 2022). Which means, emotions play an important role in determining the eligibility or appropriateness of actions undertaken by an individual (the subject), influencing whether a particular behaviour is deemed acceptable or unacceptable by societal norms.

2.4 Foucault's concepts of discourse and power

2.4.1 Discourse

Foucault's (1972) approach to discourse can be seen as a 'critical approach' which provides possibilities for the social and historical critique and renewal. The term 'discourse' in Foucault's concept refers to relatively well-bounded areas of knowledge (or sets of ideas) that influence people's perceptions of reality, what is true and false (McHoul & Grace 1995). Discourses are pluralised and relativized (i.e. at any one time and place multiple, changing, discourses operate, and they are specific to these times and places), so that there is no single way to access to the truth (Foucault, 1972). Truth becomes what can be thought, said, and written (by drawing on an available discourse) (Foucault, 1981). While 'objects' are said to be discursively produced, it does not mean that physical reality is only the product of human consciousness. Rather, individuals' social productive imagination is both permitted and constrained by the material conditions in which humans are situated (McHoul & Grace 1995). A discourse can enable or constrain human subjects' thoughts and actions in certain specific ways (Foucault, 1972).

Binary divisions are generated through what Foucault (1997) refers to as 'dividing practices', which construct subjectivities (a person's conception of

themselves as a 'self') and normalise discourses that promote exclusionary practices. Various students in higher education are constructed through familiar discursive binaries, which impose normalising judgements, such as standard/non-standard and traditional/non-traditional (Burke, 2013). Such 'dividing discourses' shape dominant academic practices in higher education. Referencing to the standard, worthy student implies the opposite: the unworthy candidate, who is constructed as a threat to the quality of higher education (Williams, 1997). Burke (2013) uses the term misrecognition (defined briefly above) to refer to a failure of recognition or acknowledgment of the experiences and cultural backgrounds of marginalized groups in higher education. Discourses are crucial in determining and (re)producing social practices that are used in UK higher education to 'objectify' specific people who are labelled as the 'Other' and 'marginalized' (Burke, 2013), while also helping these subjects come to understand themselves as 'divided' from others. 'Dividing practices' thus are used to objectify individuals and provide them the tools to construct a sense of self.

In addition, Foucault's theorization of people as positioned in discourse can also explain the gendered nature of society as produced by gendered discourse (Skelton et al., 2006). Femininity and masculinity are produced by gendered discourse and sex itself is also discursively constructed (Butler, 1997). This position on gender differs from some social constructionists who view individuals as biologically sexed (outside of discourse), which leads to others interpreting them in different ways based on their bodily differences, perceived as objective/natural (Skelton et al., 2006). However, in the poststructuralist view that I am using in this study, the terms 'woman' and 'girl' imply a fixity and homogeneity that does not exist independent of discourse (Butler 1997; Skelton et al., 2006). In my research, I have asked participants to define their gender, rather than offering the pre-existing categories 'man' and 'woman' to let them choose.

2.4.2 Power

The focus of Foucault's (1980) theorisation of the concept of power highlights the relationship between power relations and their capacity to produce 'truth'

or knowledge. Foucault (1977) claims that power produces knowledge - there is no knowledge presupposed without the existing of power relations, nor any power relations without the constitution of the field of knowledge: power and knowledge imply one another. Furthermore, there are manifold relations of power which traverse, permeate, and constitute society (Foucault, 1980). Power is not owned or 'held' by certain people or groups and is not therefore something simply used by one individual/group over another (Foucault, 1980). Rather, according to Foucault, power is everywhere and exists within discourses rather than within people, groups, institutions, or other entities. The functioning and circulation of discourses are the basis of the establishment and implementation of power relations (Foucault, 1980). There is a strong association between the exercise of power and the operation of a certain discourse of truth, and individuals become subject to the production of these discourses of truth through the working of power (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault calls attention to a specific mechanism of discursive power that he calls 'disciplinary power', that works to subtly 'discipline' individuals into certain ways of being/doing. To explain this, he uses the example of a panopticon - a surveillance technique used as disciplinary power that relies on internal training of the self to produce 'docile' human subjects (McHoul & Grace, 1995). Panopticon is a particular prison design by Jeremy Bentham, where guards could always potentially view the prisoners, but the prisoners never knew at what times the guards were looking - therefore they had to act as if they were always being surveilled (McHoul & Grace, 1995). Thus, the individual self-regulates their behaviour and in time this becomes automatic rather than a conscious act (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power shifts analysis of power from the macro-level of structures into the micro-level of human bodies (Gore, 1995). Discipline is not merely the branches of knowledge learned at schools. According to Foucault's (1977) view, discipline are techniques of regulating and controlling bodies, a way of assigning each person in their well-defined place based on their ranks. On this basis, a mode of normalization of human actions and thoughts emerges (Larochelle, 2007). Just as Foucault argues:

> In thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their action and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. (Foucault, 1980, p. 39)

Panopticon is employed throughout society and has not only led to the formation of ‘disciplined’ societies, but also the production of new forms of knowledge (Roberts, 2005). The observation and control within, for instance, schools enabled the conduction of a variety of experiments upon human beings: to try out different educational strategies to produce the type of students with certain characteristics (Foucault, 1991a).

Foucault discusses a number of disciplinary techniques, including normalization and categorization. Foucault (1977) explains that disciplinary power can work to ‘normalise’ certain ways of being, doing and acting in the world, and certain knowledges, while others become unthinkable. In addition, through this form of power, human beings are categorised in certain ways to mark the similarities and differences between them (Foucault, 1991a). The technique of classification was historically used to tie human beings to specific identities and therefore ensure that human beings are subjected to certain forms of control (Gore, 1995). Hence, discipline engenders exclusion: not all human being can play in the disciplinary game. All newcomers must display the attitude of subservience incumbent to their position and demonstrate not only that they subject to the game but also possess practical knowledge of the rules of the game that they intend to play (Gerholm, 1990).

Higher education can be seen as a ‘social space’ (Lefebvre, 1991) which is constructed by and constitutive of social identities, practices, and power relations. Within this social space, individuals are conferred positions of power if their gendered, ‘racial’, or classed subjectivities are highly valued (Lefebvre, 1991). By enforcing "local codes of acceptable behaviour" which are constructed through discourse, these chosen individuals can facilitate the regulation and segregation of these spaces and, in doing so, restrict "certain social groups from particular spaces and places at particular times" (Mowl & Towner, 1995, p. 103).

Atencio and Wright (2009) note that the deployment of White people's practices and dispositions in the institutions are central to the long-term domination of ‘people of colour’. These institutional practices rely on essentialist categorization, which associates skin colour with characteristics like temperament and intelligence that appear to be fixed and discernible in society (Omi & Winant, 1994). This categorization has served to position ‘non-Whites’ as being naturally inferior and elevate ‘Whites’ status and privilege them as a dominant locus of power (Atencio & Wright, 2009). However, Gillborn (2006) argues that the ways in which the deployment of ‘White’ power to subordinate and othering ‘non-Whites’ are often obscured within the educational context. This perspective highlights the necessity to investigate how institutional practices that are seemingly "normal" or "ordinary" frequently have detrimental effects on students of colour in UK higher education, even though these practices may be unintentional or appear to be ‘race neutral’ (Gillborn 2006, p. 21). Also, Archer et al. (2007) argue that "schools can be experienced as alien spaces for the ‘other’ due to teacher and student relations related to gender, class, and race" (p. 558). Particularly, male students from ‘White’ middle-class can benefit from the university practices and policies, which regard them as being inherently ‘valuable’ and ‘respectable’ (Skeggs, 1997).

Foucault's focus on disciplinary power and the production of ‘docile’ bodies has been critiqued for failing to take into consideration how bodies "avoid and/or ignore inscription" and for positioning the body as passively receptive to signification (Caudwell, 2003, p. 375). However, the capacity of subject to actively engage with discourses and power networks in ways that are more favourable or ‘ethical’ was prominently addressed by Foucault (1997) in one of his later writings. He explains his conceptual shift away from the idea that people should be passive objects of discipline towards the idea that people can actively constitute and govern themselves:

> I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself [sic]. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group (Foucault 1997, p. 291).

For Foucault, there exists a tension between power and resistance, as circulations of power also involve discourses of resistance, causing disruption, contradiction and pushing back.

> Discourse is not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it . . . a discourse can be an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy . . . [it] transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but also undermines and exposes it . . . (Foucault 1978, p. 1).

Through the description of the 'practices of self', Foucault demonstrates how the subject actively participates in constructing itself through engaging with discourses, as opposed to merely being "acted upon". By idealising, contesting, and investing in discourse, power relations, and social practices in ways that are suggestive of a more 'ethical' relationship to their self and to others, subjects adopt certain modalities of self-governance (Foucault, 1997). The subject is dualistically involved in these processes even while such discourses and regimes of truth are disciplinary and regulatory of who and what the subject can be (Foucault, 1997). A person is both subjected to and active subject of the discourses that regulate them, as Edwards argues:

> It is through mobilization into discursive regimes that people become active subjects inscribed with certain capacities to act. Here the beginning of human agency does not entail an escape from power but consists rather of a specific exercise of power – one is empowered in particular ways through becoming the subject of, and subjected to, power. Capacities are brought forth and evaluated through the disciplinary technologies of observation, normalization, judgement and examination, the extent, criteria and methods for which are provided by the discourses at play (Edwards, 2008, p. 24).

2.4.3 Regimes of truth

Discourse (power/knowledge) creates 'regimes of truth' and integral to the regime of truth is the mutually interdependent relationship between power and knowledge (Waitt, 2005). Foucault (1980, p. 131) argues that "truth is not outside power...Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints". In other words, knowledge is formed within the practices of power. Consequently, because knowledge operates within a certain regime of truth in each academic discipline, one interpretation informed by one set of rules has the power to be considered "true" over another (Waitt, 2005).

The regime of truth has a significant impact on the process of exclusion and inclusion, which not only constrain what can be said but also what can be done and to whom (Burke, 2013). Regimes of truth regulate subjects and their actions, which are then reproductive of those same regimes of truth. As Jackson and Burke have argued:

> It is the constitution of knowledge claims as 'truth' that is linked to systems of power: those who have the power – institutionally as well as individually – to determine and legitimize 'truth' also have the power to determine dominant discourses. This exercising of power happens so thoroughly, so powerfully, and so ideologically, that the political nature of discourses becomes hidden. (Jackson & Burke, 2007, p. 6)

2.4.4 Discourse and power in neoliberal societies

In both classical liberal and neoliberal societies, the concept of freedom is less to do with the emancipation but appears as the "virtuous, disciplined, and responsible autonomy" (Dean 2010, p. 182). Foucault (2000, p. 322) points out that liberalism functions to discipline citizens through developing the "elements constitutive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state". Moreover, neoliberalism, the latest incarnation of liberal thought, is more tactical in controlling and shaping manipulatable citizens from a distance (Rose et al., 2006). Under the guise of emancipation, state control is transformed from explicitly overt forms to the more covert forms through being actively self-governing and self-regulating (Webb, 2011). Foucault (1980) states that disciplinary techniques such as classification, punishments, and rewards operate in more delicate and modest ways to inscribe new settings of hierarchy and obligation to citizens. In neoliberal discourse human beings are influenced to believe that freedom is derived from talents, capacities, and skills (Gordon, 1991) and can only be gained by becoming entrepreneurs themselves. However, this freedom is in the artificial form acting in a coercive manner, through which the neoliberal rationality works in 'multiple, diffusive, facilitative and empowering,' but simultaneously 'disciplinary, stringent and punitive' ways (Dean 2010, p. 200).

The term 'governmentality', as used by Foucault (1997, p. 225), refers to "the encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self". 'Governmentality' is used to analyse the techniques or strategies through

which power shapes and regulates citizens' behaviour in more invisible manners (Foucault, 1997). It explores the dual dimensions of government at macro- and micro-levels, investigating how the nation employs diverse governing rationalities to politically coordinate and exert power in shaping individuals' behaviour, desires, and aspirations (Gordon, 1991). This is the basis for the construction of policy discourse: policy discourse produces what can be talked and thought and sets limitations and constraints for the interpretation of policy document (Han, 2021). Therefore, citizens' freedom in thinking, talking, and taking up a variety of subject positions is constructed within discourses which is not only confined by but also leads to intensify the existing power (Han, 2021).

Thus, people's 'possible field of action' is structured by the state (Foucault 1983, p. 221). One instance is how the nation re-inscribes sovereign power (i.e. direct power that was traditionally exercised by monarchies) into self-government via a disciplinary technology known as performativity. Ball (2003, p. 216) defines performativity as a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) to make individuals/ organizations calculable. It introduces data monitoring systems to make complicated social process into numerical categories. For example, it problematizes those who are not governable and competitive and induces citizens to organize themselves based on the pre-set regulations (Ball, 2003). Through such performativity, state power conceals its domination and authority in shaping individuals' conduct (Miller & Rose 2008). For example, China's (re-)inscription of sovereign power into governmentality is based on its control over the personnel system by evaluating officials' performance, which sets foundation for officials' competition by determining the appointment, promotion and demotion of positions connecting to the benefits and privileges (Han, 2021).

Another neoliberal discipline is to extend market logic to all spheres by "making the market, competition . . . as the formative power of society" (Foucault 2008, p. 148). In this sense, the disciplinary systems have been outresourced to a system of enterprise to increase effectiveness and competitiveness (Han, 2021). Also, the inscription of responsibility and activism into citizens' subjectivities changes them from a passive object of administrative intervention to self-

regulated individuals with ‘enterprising spirit’ (Hoffman, 2014). For example, against worldwide neoliberal hegemony, the Chinese government initiated inter-governmental competition to produce ‘capable’ officials with an enterprise subjectivity (Han, 2021). Through this political contest, sub-national officials at similar levels are encouraged to compete by adopting the best strategies to meet the pre-setting standards. Thus, unlike traditional power, which emanates from the sovereign's existence and controls subjects through physical violence and threat, the modern era witnesses a shift to a new mechanism of power characterized by specific procedural techniques, surveillance, and material coercions (Foucault, 1980).

Neoliberal frameworks also shape higher education. In alignment with neoliberalist concerns with ‘employability’, the UK Coalition government announced a plan to build mixed economy of private, public and voluntary sector organizations to provide students with ‘comprehensive information about careers, skills and the labour market’ (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, p. 5-10). The design of these policies conforms to the idea that public organizations should serve the rights of citizens as consumers (Dunleavy, 1991). Browne (2010, p. 9) asserts that higher education funding and student finance prioritize 'more choice, more opportunities,' and aim to provide 'better information about courses,' emphasizing increased academic accessibility.

Similarly, the Task Force report underscored the significance of student choice as a lever for widening access to and participation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This approach seems to give students from diverse backgrounds the opportunity and freedom to pursue subjects that align with their abilities and talents. In addition, their parents will be well-informed of the potential of these decisions (DfE, 2010). These concepts of ‘choice’, ‘freedom’ and being ‘well-informed’ allude to the discourse of neoliberalism, wherein emphasis is placed on an imagery of student choice akin to an informed consumer pursuing individual goals. Students and their parents’ choices are considered to act on the basis of rational considerations for their future development, as self-responsible, independent and calculating agents. Viewed through the lens of 'governmentalization' (Foucault, 1979), this policy can be conceptualized as employing instruments and technologies that invoke

practitioners, service managers, and students as self-governing "willing selves" — characterized by traits such as being self-improving and aspirational. However, it is important to acknowledge that these entities operate within a predefined horizon of thought and behaviour.

2.5 Bourdieu's capital, habitus, and field

Although Bourdieu's theory (which is influenced by Marxist theory) is argued to be structuralist, his notion of habitus is structured but also fluid (Park, 2009). Habitus is structured because it is rooted in an individual's social background and experiences, but it is also fluid because it is constantly changing when encountering a new environment, particularly in response to conflict, social mobility, or conscious efforts to reshape one's dispositions (English & Bolton, 2016). Thus, I agree with Burke (2013) who argues that Bourdieu's theories are complementary to poststructuralism in that they emphasise difference and fluidity as well as the influence of broad/pervasive structures. Moreover, while Bourdieu has been criticised for his inadequate theorising of gender, feminists have worked through how his theories inform feminist concerns regarding agency and subjectivity (McNay, 1999). In addition, Bourdieu's theoretical approaches emphasise and highlight the positive traits of working-class students, such as their remarkable fortitude and dedication to their education, which is frequently in the face of negative institutional oppression and discrimination (Crozier et al., 2008). Thus, Bourdieu's theory helps to reframe working-class students' learning experiences and comprehend how sociocultural injustices are perpetuated inside educational settings and to uncover opportunities for transformation.

The conceptual ideas of 'field,' 'habitus,' 'capital,' and 'disposition,' as formulated by Bourdieu, have been systematically employed in scholarly discourse to interrogate the intricate dimensions of educational inequality and contemporary transformation within the domain of higher education (e.g., Marginson, 2013; Naidoo, 2004). Fields are networks or configurations that impose rules and regularities in a specific structured space such as the educational field and the cultural field (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). A field only has its own players or agents when those players decide it is worthwhile to participate in it, and this collusion forms the basis of their competition. As a result, fields are dynamic

since one agent's behaviour may have an impact on the field's entire structure (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993).

Also, Bourdieu (1990) argues that a field has its own specific logic, taken for granted practices and 'rules of the game', which favour the dominant groups and require certain levels of recognition and capacity to understand these logics. Historically, policies aligning universities with national economic priorities endowed higher education with a relative autonomy characterized by its distinct values, hierarchies, and behavioural imperatives. However, contemporary trends reveal a shift wherein the field of education is increasingly subordinated to the spheres of politics and labour, a phenomenon underscored by cross-field effects (Johnstone & Lee, 2017), as I will discuss more in the Postcolonial theory and Whiteness supremacy sections of this chapter. International education serves the interests of the dominant domestic field of higher education and is a subfield of the social field of education (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). Thus, strategic thinking and an agentic disposition, coupled with the ability to learn the rules of the game, are essential for international students. This enables them to successfully navigate the diversity of cultural values and power relations present in both universities and workplace policies, which can be notably distinct for individuals studying internationally.

Habitus is "a system of durable and transposable dispositions that mediates the actions of an individual and the external conditions of production" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Habitus is the accumulation of familial and personal experiences which are worked on over time as individuals are socialised into a certain manner under specific situation unconsciously without obeying rules (Bourdieu, 1990). Also, habitus is a set of dispositions that generate perceptions and actions that shape a person's life expectations, aspirations, and chances (English & Bolton, 2016). Habitus is not random but has patterns and is predictable in many ways. The development of habitus takes time, beginning in childhood, and is not available at the same base for everyone (Mills & Gale, 2009). Habitus is argued to be 'durable' as it lasts throughout individuals' lifetimes, and it is also 'transposable' to other fields and social spheres (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). The ability to 'play the game' and to exercise agency while also being shaped by a complex interplay of material and social circumstances are imperative for

reaping the benefits associated with the accumulation of diverse cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 166).

Bourdieu considers education to be not a neutral place, but rather as a central mechanism for transmitting and reproducing values, culture, and power relations from one generation to next (Burke, 2013). His thinking tools of capital help to explain how this mechanism works (English & Bolton, 2016). According to Bourdieu, capital, whether it lies in external things (i.e. in its objectified form) or within an individual (i.e. in its embodied form), can be accumulated by an individual and be, converted to other forms of capital. This accumulated 'profit' confers a form of power to its holders (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) argues that economic capital is "at the root of all other forms of capital" (p. 252) as it can 'buy' access to opportunities that help holders to accumulate their wealth and occupy privileged positions of influence or power (English & Bolton, 2016). Bourdieu (1986) also defines other forms of noneconomic capital that can be converted from economic capita: social capital and cultural capital.

Social capital is the actual or potential resources that social agents can possess or mobilize by virtue of their membership of social connections and networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Social contacts can 'open doors', allowing access to some social positions that may not be available to someone who lacks social capital, and confer other benefits, for example preferential loans or reduced rent bestowed by others in a person's network as a result of their shared connection.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in an embodied state that includes long-lasting dispositions, manners, perceptions, and tastes that are valued highly in a society; in an objectified state: in the form of owning or having access to culturally prestigious objects (like paintings, books, instruments); and in an institutionalised state - in the form of prestigious educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Also, Bourdieu (1993) defines cultural capital as

> A form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts (p. 7).

In Bourdieu's view, the culturally shared meaning and interest of a work of art is given (or 'encoded') by social agents who possess this cultural knowledge, and

can only be decoded by others possessing this knowledge or ‘code’(Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993).

The notion of cultural capital helps in thinking in critical ways about the unequal educational achievements of students from different social classes. Cultural capital in the academic market distributes disproportionately among different classes which breaks the commonsense view in human capital theory that attributes the failure or success of students’ education to their innate ability and investment (Bourdieu, 1986).

The examination of the correlation between educational investment and subsequent returns falls short in elucidating the disparate opportunities that distinct social classes possess to amass financial resources earmarked for educational investments (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu and Johnson (1993) argue that the possession and accumulation of cultural capital is a long process of inculcation and assimilation, costing time and labour, including the pedagogical practices of parents (family education), educated social members (diffuse education) and schools (institutionalized education). Symbolic capital refers to the degree of accumulated celebrity, honour, prestige, and consecration which is recognized by a particular social group or field, and hence gains legitimacy (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). In the context of higher education, middle-class privilege can manifest as symbolic capital through factors such as access to prestigious institutions, social networks, and cultural capital. For example, for a middle-class family with a history of attending a prestigious university, the legacy admission can be a form of symbolic capital (Zhang & Tang, 2021). The family's association with the institution becomes a source of prestige and honour. The legacy admission, in this case, is a tangible recognition of the family's symbolic capital within the context of higher education.

Bourdieu has been critiqued for developing a deterministic theoretical framework that exclusively considers education in terms of reproduction. For instance, Brooks (2004) argues that the examples of mobility within higher education and the reasons why certain people from working-class origins can obtain higher education cannot be explained by a theory of sociocultural reproduction. Furthermore, according to Paton (2007, p. 13), such a theoretical perspective is unable to account for "the changes in the social class profile of

particular universities over time." However, Mills and Gale (2009) argue that Bourdieu's work does present opportunities for educational transformation:

> There is a great deal of striving, resistance and action aimed at changing current circumstances as many of the poor and dispossessed, interviewed by Bourdieu and his colleagues, search around for ways of changing and transforming their lives (Mills & Gale, 2009, p. 17)

So, Bourdieu's approach also places an emphasis on struggle. His concept of ‘symbolic violence’, which is ‘the imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize and thus solidify structures of inequality’, illuminates ‘the social conditions under which these hierarchies can be challenged, transformed, nay overturned’ (Waquant, 1998, p. 217).

While conventional understandings of social class categorize people according to their employment, earnings, or savings (Zheng &Li, 2004), a Bourdieusian conceptualisation of social class emphasizes the social and cultural components of daily life alongside the economic ones. The growing importance of this type of class analysis pulls social science away from the "empty signifiers" of what we possess and towards the perhaps more significant but more value-laden notions of who we are (Lawler, 2005, pp. 804). A dominating economic class's position of superordination over other classes is justified if it has access to superior culture (such as high taste) (Tsang, 2013). Education increases the superior class's likelihood of social reproduction by allowing it to gradually seize the tools of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu 1977). Therefore, Bourdieu’s focus on the cultural tasks of consumption patterns, lifestyles, and identity of class formation, can help to explore class inequality in terms of different educational levels, family inheritance, and internally coherent sets of tastes.

According to capital and habitus theory, professionals, and manual labourers, for instance, have quite different levels of cultural capital from one another, which makes friendships between them less likely. People are more likely to become close friends if their cultures are similar (Tsang, 2013). The middle-class relies on social capital to sustain their position over extended periods, manifested through parental investments in their children's development of extracurricular interests, abilities, and skills. Moreover, comparable cultural capital, tastes, habits, distinctiveness, and status are typically characteristics of middle-class

families (Bourdieu, 1986). The taste that a person shows in goods can indicate their social class in a consumption culture (Featherstone 2007, p. 88). That makes consumption culture a 'field' to create, preserve, and replicate social differentiation and social disparities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Education impacts taste and consumption behaviour regarding social distinction and class borders if the dominant class uses education to maintain its culture and class status. This in turn affects how the consuming culture is characterised. This is how Bourdieu interprets class in cultural terms. Bourdieu's study of The Love of Art also argues that compared to the working-class, the middle-class is more likely and more comfortable to attend art galleries and museums due to habitus and cultural capital (Young, 2006). Bourdieu (1984) notes that art is implicated in the reproduction of inequalities, and that the relationship between culture and power is such that taste creates social differences. Certain kinds of art can only be decoded, and appreciated, by those who have been taught how to decode them (Burke & McManus, 2009).

2.6 Postcolonial theory and Whiteness supremacy

2.6.1 International education seen through the discourse of postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory emerged in the late 20th century, seeking to analyse and critique the lingering effects of colonialism on contemporary societies (Griffiths & Tiffin, 1955). This theory recognizes the complex and unequal relationships between the colonizing powers and the colonized peoples and how these relationships continue to shape contemporary politics, culture, and society (Griffiths & Tiffin, 1955). The motivations of students studying in European/Western 'world class' HE tends to reflect prevailing and incredibly complicated postcolonial power/knowledge structures (Brooks & Waters, 2022). While many studies consider international education a 'normal' byproduct of neoliberal globalization, employing postcolonial theory helps to reveal the contentious and uneven spheres of knowledge and power experienced and inhabited by international students (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Similarly, Rizvi (2007) asserts that postcolonial theory is helpful in examining how social,

political, economic, and cultural practices are still embedded in processes of cultural domination in international higher education.

The term ‘postcolonial heritage’ is frequently used to refer to ‘dissonant’ material manifestations and ‘uneasy’ memories of the control and violence colonial oppressors exercised over their colonial "subjects" (Giblin, 2015). However, postcolonial theorists emphasize that rather than being seen as a one-way domination, knowledge can be co-constructed reciprocally (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016). Culture and identity are constantly (re-)negotiated within the ambivalent and transcultural nature of such a heritage.
Furthermore, in the era of neoliberal globalization, the mobilities of people and knowledge, facilitated through migration, tourism, and international education, have given rise to new cross-cultural and hybrid spaces, where postcolonial geopolitics of power intersect with lived experiences of culture and memory (Delanty, 2017).

Postcolonial higher education is often characterised by uneven power relations and contentious historical processes of selection and evaluation which are or have the potential to be, strongly hegemonic and Eurocentric (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016). According to Lomer (2017), the nineteenth and early twentieth-century imperial networks facilitated the flow of colonial elites to Britain, engaging in bureaucratic training and cultural indoctrination of ‘native’ elites. These historical networks are considered residual effects, contributing to the current international reputation of the UK for high-quality higher education. Like this recruitment strategy, present-day international students flowing to the West has been criticised as a continuation of colonial power relations, now embedded in the ‘development’ discourse where economic, social, and political transformation in former colonies is still measured against ‘Western’ norms (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016). This criticism notes that higher education has been victimised by the forces of a neoliberal global market economy that emphasises performativity (Olssen & Peters, 2005). From this perspective, attracting internationals students has frequently been characterised as a way for Western institutions to generate revenue while replicating elitist colonial power and knowledge hierarchies on a global scale. This has been questioned as a form of postcolonialism which deepens inequality (Waters, 2012).

Altbach (2007, p. 124) argues that “globalized higher education is highly unequal”. He highlights differences between the powerful universities in the global core and weaker institutions in the periphery area. This distinction between university systems resembles postcolonial domination (Altbach, 2007). The global position of universities in the UK is a result of Britain's imperial and colonial past and the benefits that followed and still exist as a result of the era of Empire (Enslin & Hedge, 2023). UK universities are deemed to be leading institutions by occupation of high rankings located in international comparisons. According to the 2023 QS World University Rankings top 10, five are in the USA, four in the UK and one in Europe. These rankings demonstrate Kamola’s claim (2011, p. 148-149) of a “scramble to globalize which privileges universities from the USA, Europe and English-speaking advanced industrial countries”. The competitive global rankings which quest for global ‘excellence’ amplify systems and structures remaining from a colonial past (Enslin & Hedge, 2023). In addition, this ranking framework encourages a mimicry of systems and structure, which was designed to bolster a very limited number of ‘top’ universities (Lee & Naidoo 2020). Those in the global south are ‘more susceptible to this global pressure of mimicry for the sake of legitimacy and visibility’ (Lee & Naidoo 2020, p. 87). Shahjahan and Baizhanov (2023, p. 261) therefore argue that global university rankings both project a ‘universality of quality and excellence’ and reproduce ‘colonial knowledge/power relations.’

Thus, the globalization of education has been represented as the rational decision-making of individuals, families, universities, and countries seeking better cultural and economic opportunities. Critical theory views globalization as an ideological construct intertwined with neoliberalism and a neo-imperial agenda, as asserted by Rizvi and Lingard (2009, p. 25), who argue that contemporary expressions of globalization are historically rooted in colonial practices, perpetuating patterns of global inequality stemming from colonial conquest. By constructing uniform laws and using a vocabulary of universal good, imperial British propaganda claimed that their values and cultures were 'apolitical,' therefore justifying the imposition of them. There are some parallels in the modern era. The World Bank, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and other international organisations have arguably evolved into new imperial centres (Tikly, 2004).

Neoliberal concepts like individualism and the limited provision of services by the state are being spread together with a narrative of universal global benefit. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) specified what is an effective public administration. *Modernising Government: The Way Forward*, one of its studies, addressed the 'best' tendencies in public management learned from the 'developed world's' experience. According to this report, 'good governance' has fundamental and universal components that can be applied from successful nations to less successful ones" (Pal, 2012, p. xv). This new form of governance, which became known as New Public Management (NPM), may be viewed as 'applied neoliberalism' because it slashed taxes, privatised public services, and encouraged managerial dominance by increasing top executives' salaries and bonuses (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). Additionally, the commercial principles of quality control, and bureaucratic processes of accountability, standard enforcement, and product surveillance were developed (Connell, 2010). The characteristics of 'good governance' and 'successful/failed' governments are offered in this discourse, without any measurements, as irrefutable common sense and empirically supported 'truths' (Johnstone & Lee, 2017).

Additionally, the OECD serves as a neo-imperial power centre for the dissemination of global education policy. The neo-imperial order of Western supremacy in the knowledge economy is thus reinforced by the phenomena of international education. Meanwhile, neoliberal ideas of effectiveness and efficiency are established as the norm, with English as the primary language, as well as Western culture and education, as superior and desirable (Gordon, 2010). As articulated by Gordon (2010), the imposition of free markets by the affluent world, foundational to neoliberal civilization, is presented as the pathway out of poverty. Resistance to neoliberal dogma or the inability to overcome poverty is consequently viewed as a manifestation of irrationality. Thus, in the present global knowledge economy, internationalisation of education is not a natural, apolitical occurrence whereby the world becomes smaller due to globalisation via information and communication technology (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Human capital and resources are redistributed into the nations that wield global power and dominance (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

2.6.2 Whiteness supremacy

Therefore, Brooks and Waters (2022) describe that the concept of 'the international' in the context of international student mobility tends to elevate specific regions of the world as centres for knowledge production. Europe and North America are assumed to represent ‘international’ space. Stein and De Andreotti (2016, p. 229) describe this as the “colonial myth of Western supremacy”. Diangelo (2006) argues Whiteness as both ‘empty’, in that it is normalised and thus typically unmarked, and content laden, or ‘full’, in that it generates norms and reference points, and ways of thinking about oneself and others. Whiteness/White privilege is part of the legacy of domination when it is assumed that White people do not consider themselves as having a colour (Howard, 2016). Whiteness is a term that refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and that are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination (Dyer, 1997). In other words, Whiteness is symbolic rather than biological and therefore is best understood as a product rather than as an innate characteristic of a person.

Also, it is preferable to think of Whiteness as a discursive practice that upholds Eurocentric worldviews through laws and regulations and is secured by ingrained dominant-discourses and infrastructures (Ploner & Nada, 2020). In other words, Whiteness affects how power and resources are distributed, as well as how much social control is given to individuals. Ansley (1997) argues that it is a political, economic, and cultural system in which White people predominantly hold positions of authority and material wealth, and conscious and unconscious notions of White entitlement and superiority are pervasive. Therefore, relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are constantly played out in a wide range of institutions and social settings. These traditions have their roots in contemporary Europe and continue to have an impact on Higher Education (HE) pedagogies, curriculum, and academic practises worldwide (Ploner & Nada, 2020).

Ahmed (2007, p. 154) argues that “Whiteness is an orientation that put certain things within reach”. As Fanon (2016) suggests ‘doing things’ depends less on intrinsic capacities, competence, or dispositions, but the capacity to work given

the familiarity of the world that people inhabit. Colonialism makes the world ‘White’, which is available for certain kinds of bodies, as a space where they know where to find things, and hence Whiteness is inherited through the very placement of things (Ahmed, 2007). These things include not just physical objects, but also capacities, aspirations, styles, and techniques (Ahmed, 2007). Therefore, White bodies do not feel ‘stressed’ when they encounter with objects, as their Whiteness ‘goes unnoticed’ (Ahmed, 2007, p. 156). This phenomenon aligns with Bourdieu's examination of class privilege - that middle-class people can move through a field like higher education ‘as a fish in water’. Then, to not be White is to dwell the negative: it is to be ‘not’, and this negative emotion causes you to feel pressure on your body's surface, which limits what your body can perform.

Ahmed (2007) argues that Whiteness cannot be reduced to white skin, or even to ‘something’ we can have or be. Even white bodies may not be ‘in line’ with the institutions that they occupy in some cases. Institutions have meeting points, but there are different lines intersecting where lines cross with other lines, to create and divide spaces (Ahmed, 2007). To follow one line such as Whiteness may not gain people enough advantage if they do not follow others, as can be seen in the experiences of working-class White students in UK universities (see Read et al., 2003). Meanwhile, Ahmed (2007) notes that having the ‘right’ passport makes no difference if you have the wrong body or name. Even if she was born in the UK and obtained a UK passport, her Muslim name can cause her additional troubles at the border and make her feel like a ‘stranger’ (see Ahmed, 2007). Thus, White students or Western students in my thesis refer to bodies categorised as White, who can inherit the ‘character’ of the institutions and are familiar with the UK or Western education system and culture.

The comprehension of the Other in terms of deficit thinking is a component of Whiteness. The Other is portrayed as deficient due to personal deficiency (cognitive or motivational) or sociocultural deficiencies (family dysfunctions) that have evolved over time to serve as an explanation for their failure (Valencia, 1997). The emphasis is shifted from the economic, political, and socio-cultural infrastructures that have produced institutionalised injustices, such as unequal school funding, segregation, and curricular divergence

(Valencia, 1997). According to this viewpoint, all students should receive the same fundamental education regardless of their ethnicity, social class, or gender. The inferior Other will always require additional assistance to satisfy these identified demands if the fundamental model of education is not constructed within the dominant White ideology (Ploner & Nada, 2020). In this system, the Other will always be at a disadvantage, and it will be understood by all, including the Other, that the problem is theirs.

Western universities have been encouraged to 'internationalise' their curricula and have been prompted to develop more conducive and inclusive approaches to international HE, such as the Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) which is interpreted as the promotion of 'cross-cultural skills', 'intercultural understanding', and 'global citizenship' (Leask, 2009). This internationalisation has received criticism for its underlying neoliberal philosophy, which focuses primarily on graduate employability and student recruiting in increasingly competitive global labour markets (Waters, 2012). In this regard, approaches of decolonising of dominant knowledge have been reduced to the study of cultural or soft skills among (predominantly White middle-class) graduates.

2.7 Intersectionality of class, gender, ethnicity and other social differences, identities, and inequalities

Intersectionality is an area of research and theory developed from a critique of the invisibility of women of colour at the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity by scholars such as Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (2000). Crenshaw (1991) noted the absence of black women in domestic violence projects, as neither mainstream feminism nor race/ethnic scholarship adequately considered of the experience of women of colour. Crenshaw (1991) points out that gender equality projects often refer to a universal womanhood that is implicitly represented by White women, and anti-racist projects usually implicitly focus on racial inequality from the perspective of men of colour. Women of colour were asked to treat either gender or race as their dominant identity and were therefore asked to view their experiences as separable. Crenshaw (1991) argues that the experiences faced by women of colour are limited within the traditional understanding of gender or race discrimination.

This leads to the marginalisation of groups at the intersection of two or more identity categories such as Black women and minority women. In recent years, a large number of studies have argued that inequality should not be understood along just one social identity such as gender, race and social class. These identity constructions intersect and interlock into complex forms of inequality and social relationships (Windsong, 2018; Shields; 2008). The concept of intersectionality, therefore, refers to "particular forms of intersecting oppressions" since oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type (Collins, 2000, p. 18).

Intersectionality calls for research to move away from additive analysis (Windsong, 2018). From the additive perspective, people's characteristics such as gender, race and social class are experienced separately, and each characteristic/identity is assigned a 'score' relating either to being oppressed or privileged, and then added together to reach a total score of oppression or privilege (Collins, 1993). However, additive analysis not only fails to map out individual identity clearly, but also interactions and social structures do not exist solely along the lines of gender or race or social class alone (Windsong, 2018). Baca and Thornton (1996) argue that intersections create both oppression and opportunities in which each person experiences different forms of domination and oppression, rather than just being located within a single major system of oppression or domination. In other words, an intersectional position may be disadvantaged compared to one group but advantaged relative to another. For example, a person who is White and lesbian may be in a disadvantaged position because of divergence from the heterosexual norm and standard, but they enjoy racial privileges (Shields, 2008). Another important aspect of intersectionality is relationality, that intersectional identities are defined in relation to one other (Windsong, 2018; Shields, 2008). For instance, the gendered meaning of femininity and women are meaningless without corresponding meaning of masculinity and men (Baca & Thornton, 1996).

In this regard, intersectionality as an analytic framework shifts away from a sole focus on disadvantaged groups and guides researchers to take an intersectionality view to analyse both oppression and privilege (Windsong, 2018). The approach to maintain focus on the larger structures and capture the sight of

actions of the powerful groups was raised by McCall (2005). McCall identifies an approach to intersectionality named inter-categorical, which:

> Provisionally adopts existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions (McCall, 2005, p. 1774).

Instead of focusing on the intersection of gender, class and race within a particular group, the inter-categorical approach aims to examine relationships of inequality among multiple social groups with the goal of explicating these relationships. This study used inter-categorical approach to examine multiple social groups in terms of social class and gender.

Thus, intersectionality theory helps to uncover the deep relations and operations of class with gender, ethnicity and other social differences, identities, and inequalities. For example, Finch (1993) examines the ways in which 'working-class' as a category was conceptualized by the middle classes as a threat to social order and a departure from the 'normal' human type. This conceptualization was a product of middle-class political consolidation. The working-class came to be recognizable through moral measures such as individuals' language, manners, and children's behaviour by the end of the 19th century. This moral division positioned women at the core of discursive construction, with these moral observations being interpreted in relation to women's roles as mothers and wives. Consequently, their responsibilities to their families and the regulation of sexuality made women the primary group subject to observation and judgment. Women therefore have been positioned by the historical discursive construct of class which influences the ways that they understand and position themselves and others. This generation of class operated not only as an organizing principle to produce legitimate material inequalities, but also were reproduced at the intimate level as a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961). Within this framework, fear, doubt, and anxiety inform the construction of subjectivity, as working-class women were always afraid of doing something inappropriate. Thus, from the intersectionality perspective, understanding the effect of class on the construction of women's subjectivities and their experiences in social spaces such as education and the labour market is significant.

Furthermore, Burke (2013) argues that intersectionality is a useful lens for understanding how misrecognition operates in higher education. For example, an analysis of intersectionality might reveal how policies and practices that disproportionately affect low-income students also disproportionately affect 'students of colour', or how policies that perpetuate gender inequality also perpetuate racial inequality. Reay et al. (2001) argue that formal educational institutions are structured in relation to a male middle-class imaginary, treating its values as the norm. Conversely, female working-class students are often portrayed through a deficit model, depicting them as lacking aspirations, knowledge, or academic preparation. Thus, since it promotes forms of recognition that provide little pride and respect to gendered, working-class identities and practices, higher education works to pathologize female working-class experiences and identities. These processes of exclusion and misrecognition are fundamentally based on the conscious denial or rejection of working-class history and identity and characteristics of femininity. Thus, applying intersectionality theory helps to identify and address the structural, systemic, and individual factors that contribute to inequalities.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter draws on critical poststructural theoretical perspectives to consider the different conceptual tools offered to help to disrupt problematic assumptions and reconceptualise international education, emphasising the insidious workings of power and inequality across educational contexts. Additionally, it is important to pay attention to the various and conflicting ways that inequalities play out in local, institutional, regional, national, and international settings. In the end, practices of international education are needed to develop profound understandings that integrate practice-based perspectives, lived and embodied educational and pedagogical experiences, and critical theories of inequalities in higher education.

Foucault's work on the subject's constitution places a focus on how discourses regulate, define, and exclude bodies in institutional settings like schools and universities. Bodies are managed and made to appear "docile" through disciplinary practices and discourses. However, Foucault also theorises the ways

in which subjects participate in "practices of the self," both by being "acted upon" and by actively contributing to the self's constitution. The specific ways in which bodily conducts are controlled and shaped, as well as embodied practices and discourses, all contribute to the construction of subjectivities. Atencio and Wright (2009, p. 45) make the argument that schools and teachers must critically consider how they (re)produce hegemonic practices and power relations that only serve to support selected types of bodies and subjects while devaluing those constituted as 'Other'. These emphases how power and difference operate, how they are marked and inscribed on the body, and how they are resisted or subverted through "practices of the self." This is effective for considering the positioning, mobilisation, and regulation of different bodies in respect to complex inequalities across educational spaces and relations. Ahmed's theory of affective economies gives insight into how emotions influence identity formation (or in Foucault's term, the construction of subjectivity). Examining the emotions of international students from a social and cultural perspective elucidates the power relations underlying these feelings, ultimately contributing to the transformation of international educational practices.

Poststructural concepts of power are particularly generative for reconceptualizing international education. To understand the complexities of educational inequalities and fight for access to meaning making and being a subject, it is helpful to view power as relational, discursive, productive, and simultaneously regulating and restricting. This concept of power undermines binary notions of oppressor and oppressed, privileged, and disadvantaged, included and excluded, participant and non-participant, male and female, empowered and disempowered, agency and structure, which have significantly influenced policy discourses on higher education (Burke, 2013). Also, this disturbs rationalist discourses premised on binary distinctions, unsettling essentialist assumptions about class, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexuality.

However, Bourdieu's capital theory and concept of intersectionality remain important in addressing material and structural inequalities. For example, resources are distributed to a greater degree to some groups than to others, and some groups of students are therefore constructed in 'privileged' positions at certain times and places, and others are 'disadvantaged'. Bourdieu is concerned

with how different forms of capital – social, cultural, economic, and symbolic – benefit the dominant groups in society and how educational institutions play a crucial role in the perpetuation of (class) inequality. Also, the work of Bourdieu is beneficial for considering exclusion processes and power relations in fields related to higher education critically. The economic conditions of working-class international students still need to be paid attention to, in order to make sure that their intercultural and educational resources will not be impacted because of financial precarity. The concept of cultural or symbolic violence helps to draw attention to cultural difference, recognizing practices or dispositions are differentially valued. International education has a history of perpetuating cultural violence through the misrecognition of those constructed as excluded or lacking ambition, experience, and knowledge. Thus, it is crucial to provide a theoretical framework that allows for the destabilisation of regimes of truth, which constitute subjects through symbolic and discursive mis/recognitions. Yet, the impact of material inequality, which has a significant impact on the lives of individuals and groups, as well as the existence of particular social inequalities across intersections of class, gender, and race, must be acknowledged at the same time.

Chapter 3 Motivations and Experiences of International Students studying abroad: a review of the literature

3.1 Introduction

The dramatic increase in international student mobility worldwide in the last decade has resulted in many research studies on the topic. In response to new relevant questions, the most common questions include: 1) what the perceived benefits of are studying abroad 2) what the motivations students are having to study abroad 3) what the challenges are faced by international students when studying abroad, and finally 4) what are the factors that influence international students' transitions in the host country. This chapter considers and draws on the current research on international students around these broad research questions. While this study focuses on Chinese international students in the UK, some research findings on other groups of international students in various contexts have been included as they are also highly relevant to my study.

First, I will review the literature on the benefits, motivations and challenges of Chinese and other international students studying abroad and briefly discuss how neoliberalism and globalization has affected these aspects (a detailed discussion of how international education has been framed within the neoliberalism and globalization discourses has been included in the theoretical framework chapter). Second, I will discuss the factors influencing students' experiences of educational mobility, among which I focus more on discussing the impact of social class and gender on accessing to international education and the impact of intercultural experiences.

3.2 Benefits and motivations

3.2.1 Benefits of studying abroad

Research on the advantages of international student mobility has been mostly concerned with different forms of 'capital' that students can acquire. This broadly follows Bourdieu's theory of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). In relation to the literature on international students, four aspects of capital are usually

discussed: embodied cultural capital, which is acquired by students through exposure to the foreign-culture and language environment; institutionalised cultural capital which is represented by the overseas degree certificates or other forms of qualifications as well as the perceived values of the status or ranking of the universities which international students attended; social capital which is established within transnational social networks (Waters, 2011); and enhanced employment prospects where cultural capital and social capital are exchanged for economic capital (Waters, 2012). The fact of living in a different country for a time means that international students are immersed in a different culture. They can develop aspects of capital such as improving their fluency when speaking the host country language and becoming adept at local cultural aspects such as comportment, dressing styles and sense of humour (Ong, 1999). It is argued that Chinese elites think intercultural experiences can provide embodied cultural capital to fashion their children and help them to embody the 'hypermobile' middle-class lifestyle (Mitchell, 1997). These forms of capital could differentiate them from their peers who do not have such intercultural learning experiences.

Integration into the host community then potentially helps international students to be more engaged, interculturally competent and globally aware, which could help them successfully 'negotiate the richness of a world miniaturised by globalisation' (Sexton 2012, p. 5). In addition, Waters (2011) points out that as the result of living and studying abroad, international students may develop their capacities to solve problems, improve their self-confidence in their abilities and adopt a broader global outlook. These aspects are often promoted as essential for employability in the neoliberal global context. Chew (2010) has termed transnational mobility as 'linguistic migration', emphasizing the critical importance of language acquisition. She argues that linguistic migration is a way to search for linguistic capital, relating to acquisition of 'premium' languages such as English. International students are usually fluent in at least two languages, which potentially raises their value in the marketplace. This promotes the belief that good English skills are an indispensable requirement for success in the global market, which drives students to learn in English-speaking countries (Waters, 2011).

Significantly, Waters (2007, p. 480) claims that international students constitute "an exclusive club, formed through similar experiences of education and migration, which bestows various tangible privileges upon its members". They often possess a strong sense of group identity and maintain active connections to more than one country to benefit them in the working environment. Getting higher educational qualifications, especially from Western countries, arguably helps students to find the most decent and valued jobs in the competitive labour market (Zhang &Tang, 2021). However, while having an overseas degree can impress employers, Moskal and Schweisfurth (2018) find students perceive that intercultural experiences are more valuable than academic credentials for providing them labour market advantage. Li (2013) argues that, because of the global inflation of higher educational credentials, the perceived value of institutionalised cultural capital is declining. Thus, international students may care less about technical and specialised knowledge and are more concerned about the acquisition of social connections, intercultural competence, personal growth, and generic life skills.

Whatever the form of overseas degree or transnational experience, they tend to help to bring some international students successful employment outcomes. For instance, Holloway et al. (2012) discuss that the value of overseas education is realised through transnational social networks, leading to advantaged job opportunities to Hong Kong international students such as high-income occupations in transnational corporations, which enable them to maintain their middle-class status. Also, the Kazakhstani participants in Iorio and Pereira's (2018) study reflect that studying abroad helps them to access more professional positions in the labour market and obtain social class mobility. Chinese female international students in Bamber's (2014) study state that international qualifications will hopefully facilitate early and mid-career gains which may not directly relate to the value of money but give opportunities of promotion and progression ahead of their domestic peers.

3.2.2 Motivations of study abroad

The above benefits drive Chinese students to pursue their studying in another country. Moreover, education has always been viewed as a key project for many Asian families. The significance of education is argued to be rooted in the

importance of the heritage of Confucian philosophy in the region: recently, its central idea of filial piety has more often been used to consider the parent–child relationship rather than the marital bond, with children's success hugely related to their families' fame or prosperity (Lee, 2011). Meanwhile, the expansion in access to higher education in China, which moved from elite selection to massification, has limited the opportunities of students from middle-class families to enter local elite universities, leading to a certain degree of congestion in the transition to the labour market (Iorio & Pereira, 2018). Thus, students need to seek differentiating paths to increase their employability and equip them in the competitive labour market. Also, the nature of the global labour market is no longer just played out within national areas. For some jobs, an international background is a compulsory requirement (Waters, 2011). International students' mobility, which has been commonly advertised as a way of further enhancing students' educational competence, is therefore advocated through neoliberal discourse as an important experience for personal growth (Iorio & Pereira, 2018). Besides, for countries such as China, a university's reputation is considered as a critical signal that signals to employers about a recruit's eligibility for a job (Zhu, 2016). In other words, an overseas qualification with a high academic reputation helps students to improve their competitiveness in the local market.

In addition, according to a report published by the China Education and Research Network (CERNET) in 2019, Chinese universities have been actively seeking to internationalize their campuses and academic programs. This includes recruiting faculty members who have studied or worked abroad. These individuals bring a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and expertise, which can enrich the academic environment and contribute to the internationalization efforts of the university. This approach aligns with the broader goals of many Chinese universities to become world-class institutions and compete for the top in the global ranking as I have discussed in the Chapter 2 (page 43-44). This is an illustration of the influence of neoliberalism in higher education, which implicitly increases the value of overseas qualifications and international experiences.

Furthermore, world economic development has facilitated the desire of studying abroad and has subsidised the financial demand of an international education. Raised levels of financial prosperity created many middle-class and upper-class families who have the considerable economic resources to invest in their children's overseas education (Bamber, 2014). Also, such economic progress has given increasing chances for students to travel to other countries, which has a great impact on the inclination of some young people to consider studying abroad (Waters, 2011). Desforges (2000) maintains that during a particular period when young people's self-identities are open to question, travelling is a great opportunity to enable them to re-imagine themselves. He suggests that "travel played a relatively powerful role in helping them feel as though they were moving towards a rewarding self in the future" (p.935) by offering them a range of new experiences to draw upon to re-present and re-evaluate themselves. Students who have lived or travelled abroad prior to higher education studying are found to be more likely to participate in formal mobility schemes (such as Erasmus exchanges) during their time at university (Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2004).

Meanwhile, a growing number of studies has indicated that the motivation of pursuing international education can be associated with the desire to migrate permanently to another country (Baas, 2006). For example, Ong's (1999) study finds the desire of securing citizenship from Western countries has commonly driven students from Hong Kong to pursue international education, as this is part of a strategy to accumulate economic capital. Also, countries including Australia, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany have at different periods offered pathways to permanent or temporary citizenship for skilled migrants, benefitting international students studying in these countries (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). In particular, some countries such as Australia and New Zealand use points systems to effectively rank prospective migrants and make up for national skill shortages (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). The education-migration nexus becomes the key motivation for many international students to study in countries which have relevant migration policy such as the 'points system'.

In addition to the above external factors, the motivations that drive students to pursue overseas education can be analysed in relation to individualised life plans. International students can be considered in neoliberal terms as autonomous, self-determined agents whose decisions to study abroad are their lifestyle choices, guided by their goals of self-actualization, through a discourse of individualism (Ye, 2018). Some international students regard intercultural experiences as the experience of life exploration which provide valuable opportunities for personal development and engagement with other countries' cultures (Zhang & Tang, 2021). Also, a few international students reflect that their decisions of studying abroad are driven by their self-esteem, generated by the thought that this experience would be admired by others (Ye, 2018).

3.3 The experience of studying abroad and key challenges

3.3.1 International students' emotional experiences

Prior research indicates that international students often encounter challenges and difficulties in adapting into host academic and sociocultural environments, as well as difficulties with social integration and wellbeing, and linguistic problems (Ye, 2018). A common way of looking at the process of student adjustment in a foreign country has been from a psychological 'adjustment model' perspective. In Oberg's model (1960), adjustment is grouped into four stages: the first honeymoon stage where most individuals are fascinated by the new environment; a second crisis stage characterised by a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country; the third recovery stage as visitors succeed in getting some knowledge of the languages and norms and begin to open the way into the new cultural environment; and the fourth stage of complete adjustment, where individuals not only accept host cultural norms in relation to food, drinks and general habits, but actually begin to enjoy them. In a recent study, Quan & Sloan (2016) divide the process of adjustment of postgraduates into a process-based stage model which includes stage one (pre-arrival),where students feel (over-)confidence prior to entry; stage two where students experience stress from exposure to different academic conventions; stage three where students start actively engaging and changing to the new academic conventions; and the final stage where students gain academic confidence and

transition successfully to the existing learning context. As we can see, these cross-cultural adjustment models emphasise positive emotional experiences at the first and end stages of the adjustment process and the most negative experiences at some middle point between these two stages. These models are therefore called U-Curve Models.

These adjustment studies apply ‘cultural shock’ theories, in which international students’ emotional experiences are understood as psychological effects of experiencing the unfamiliar environment. It is assumed to be a pathological phase, from which international students gradually feel better as they increasingly adjust into the host environment (Li, 2022). Recent studies of emotions in international education examine how emotions of comfort and discomfort as well as repetition of everyday practices are productive for self-discovery and belonging (Prazeres, 2017). Wilson and Harris (2006) argue that young people use international mobility to move away from their ‘comfort zone’ with the aim to discover themselves and grow as individuals. This implies that emotional experiences are not a ‘phase’ which will pass, but rather fundamental components of navigating complex situations and self-formation. These studies argue that both positive and negative feelings co-exist when students explore the complexity of intercultural similarities and differences (Pederen, 2010), and re-question and (re)construct their own beliefs, values, and assumptions (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). Therefore, a growing literature on the complex self-discovery process partly criticises the ‘adjustment studies’ models that present international students' adjustment in a linear way that is not appropriate for a transnational context (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Furthermore, some criticism of the U-curve model of Oberg (1960) has appeared since its publication. For example, Church’s review (1982) argues that the support for the U-curve hypothesis is weak and over-generalised. He argues that not all individuals begin with the positive feelings of a ‘honeymoon stage’ or go through extreme depression due to culture shock. Also, the lack of use of a longitudinal method means that such models may not be able to be applied to the dynamic process of individuals’ transition in the host country. Kealey’s (1989) longitudinal study finds that only 10% of sojourners show a U-curve pattern of adjustment with the most negative feelings occurring between 3-6

months of entry and recovery occurring between 6-12 months after arrival. Meanwhile, in recent years, under the new hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism (see Chapter 2), and the unexpected condition of restrictions due to Covid-19, it is imperative to re-investigate international students' experiences and transitions from a social and cultural perspective to get a nuanced understanding of what comprises adjustment, and the possible sociocultural obstacles which come at different times and require different solutions and theories to understand them.

3.3.2 International students' silence in the classroom

Multiple studies have raised the issue of Chinese international students' silence and seeming invisibility in the classroom. Zhu (2016) argues that in addition to general language proficiency, Chinese international students often lack specific language knowledge related to their academic subjects and disciplines, leading to their insufficient confidence to share their opinions in group discussions. Byram (2003) observes that some aspects of cultural belief could influence international students' degree of adaptation. Jackson's (2002) study points out that under Confucian culture, which expects Chinese people to maintain harmonious relationships with others, Chinese international students may rather keep silent in the classroom discussion to avoid the awkwardness of arguing with their peers. Sometimes, these cultural values are hard to change to fit in the host culture, which can lead to cultural shock and academic shock for international students (Gu, 2009). For instance, Chinese students are educated to show respect to their teachers from primary school onwards, and the teacher's authority is not allowed to be questioned openly, so that they seldom ask questions during class out of fear of disrupting the instructor's rhythm. However, in the UK, students are encouraged to ask questions and express ideas in the classroom (Chan 1999).

To date, most studies on Chinese international students' experiences of studying abroad focus primarily on the differences between Chinese educational and cultural backgrounds and the host one, taking a binary position such as 'Eastern versus Western cultures', 'individualistic versus collective cultures' and 'dialogic versus didactic approaches to teaching' (Ye, 2018). Rodriguez (2011) argues that cultural differences are often 'addressed' by educators through pedagogical

learning approaches to accommodate difference. However, an emphasis solely on cultural diversity tends to veil the power relations at play, thus perpetuating dominant cultural norms. Thus, the cultural difference model runs the risk of reinforcing the stereotypes of particular cultural groups.

In addition, drawing on the differences between Confucian-heritage and Socratic cultures of learning to explain the challenges faced by Chinese international students leads to a general negative impression of them studying in the English-spoken countries (Quan et al., 2016). Chinese international students are often stereotyped as a homogeneous group of passive-receptive learners who contribute less to classroom discussions, lack critical thinking, prefer socialising with other Chinese peers and who prefer rote-learning (Quan et al., 2016; Ye 2018). Additionally, by utilising the example of Asian international students who speak English as a second language, Diangelo's study (2006) shows how the stereotype of a model minority group that is docile and silent is activated and perpetuates the perceived superiority of Whiteness. Regardless of whether they were raised as Asian Americans or new immigrants from Asian countries as international students, this stigma seemingly groups all Asian students together. Instead of investigating why they may have been silenced, the blame is placed on the international students since they are seen as culturally inadequate. The emphasis on the language barrier ultimately portrays the White students and teachers as neutral (and so unracialized), while portraying the international students as different (and hence racialized).

However, Coleman (2004) argues that within a range of factors influencing international students' experiences, many are not actually related to the cultural dimension. Also, culture is not the only determinant of students' learning practices, habits, and experiences (Gu, 2009). It is an oversimplification to label some educational systems as traditional and oppressive since the ideologies of education, curricula and pedagogies are culturally situated and framed by social, political, and historical factors (Giroux, 2001). Meanwhile, many assumptions made by Western scholars about Chinese learning and teaching practices are largely based on the Western cultural context, which is not the same as the Chinese context (Kim, 2002).

Through the study of students of colour in US classrooms, Rodriguez (2011, p. 112) argues that “silence and silencing are gendered, raced and classed”. For instance, Zhou et al. (2005) attribute Chinese students’ silence to unequal power relations between different languages, knowledges, and cultures. Participants in Zhu’s (2016) study reflect that in the German context, German students always dominate the group discussion and the other students, including Chinese students, have to carry out German students’ instructions. This makes Chinese international students feel that it is hard to express their ideas freely and communicate with local students equally, resulting in their silence during the discussion. In addition, an Asian Pacific American student reflects that her silence in the classroom, which was impacted by her racialized and gendered self, was interpreted by White teachers as demonstrating docility and obedience (Duncan, 2009). Her silence is perceived as ‘natural’ to Asian American women, which is a more subtle and insidious from of exclusion. Meanwhile, during the socialisation process in Western countries, Duncan (2009) argues that women are discouraged from speaking up or being assertive since these qualities are often constructed as ‘unfeminine’ and so dangerous to the status quo. Thus, silence is also gendered because of the societal expectations of gender roles and language.

According to Montoya (1999), the pauses, hesitations, and silences that punctuate people's speech serve as aural indicators of their race and ethnicity. These hesitancies, pauses, and silences can be readily interpreted by teachers as a lack of interest or a lack of understanding of the content being covered in class (Rodriguez, 2011). Due to the difficulty some students may have expressing themselves in their non-native language, bilingual and multilingual students whose first language is not English may occasionally be reluctant to speak in class and remain silent. Social scientists have frequently used cultural deficit models to explain the circumstances and institutional inequalities faced by students of colour. For example, Latino communities and students in the US frequently perform poorly academically because they are perceived to lack qualities valued by the education system, for example, they are raised in large, ‘disorganized’, female-headed families and Spanish or non-standard English is spoken in the home (Yosso, 2013). According to Haddix (2010), there is still an underlying ideology in educational research and practice that all students must

assimilate, becoming frequent and proficient speakers of a standard version of English to succeed in contemporary society. According to this philosophy, assimilation occurs at the expense of the student's native language and culture being diminished, forgotten, and destroyed (Rodriguez, 2011). In this way, it is argued that students who assimilate to dominant norms and values are more likely to succeed, and those who do not are more likely to fail.

International students can also often feel themselves being isolated and marginalised by mainstream pedagogical strategies in the classroom. For example, lecturers in the UK are likely to let students organize their own team to conduct group work, which may result in the exclusion of some international students (Koehne, 2006). Thus, international students not only face language difficulties and cultural differences, but also the hidden prejudices related to perceptions of otherness of both sides. Moskal and Schweisfurth (2018) have discussed that there is a tension between international students' need to adapt in the host community and their need to be loyal to some of their cultural beliefs and values. Thus, they may experience a sense of boundary or 'otherness' when they encounter the new identity of being a Western student.

Song (2019) describes "othering" as the process of making value judgments about another group and homogenizing its members, creating a social divide between 'Us' and 'Them'. This involves projecting essentialised characteristics onto the group, reinforcing distinctions and separations in society. In the process of othering, the culture of a dominant group implicitly subordinates other learners based on their ethnicity, gender and class and members of the dominant group may see these 'others' as different, problematic, and inferior. In Song's (2019) study, othering in the English-learning classroom essentialises international students by creating a uniform and normalised image of all the international students from different backgrounds to differentiate them from local students, emphasising and reinforcing their distinctiveness as others, leading to their marginalisation and lack of confidence in the classroom. Thus, people of colour are often silenced by the dominant majority who maintain racial hegemony (Montoya,1999).

Moreover, some authors have discussed silence as an integral strategy for survival for not showing one's feelings, in particular to White people, which

serves as a means of self-protection (Montoya, 1999; Rodriguez, 2011). For example, in Rodriguez's (2011) study in the US context, while African American students feel obligated to speak up in the classroom to correct any stereotypes or make White students aware of their racism, some students still remain silent in classroom. Rodriguez (2011) argues that some African Americans students' disengagement from classroom discussion can be seen to avoid any outward confrontation with White students. Also, they are protected from some of the psychological and physical damage of recurring racism by keeping their personal encounters with racism a secret. Therefore, students of colour may not be silenced, but rather, they may not have the desire to share their thoughts in the classroom.

3.3.3 Racialisation of international students

In higher education research, there is a growing literature on what is argued to be a widespread normalization of Whiteness, with entrenched notions of race and racism shaping institutional practices. Institutional racism, characterized by the failure to provide equitable services based on colour, culture, or ethnic origin, has been argued to significantly impact the educational experiences of students of colour (Macpherson et al., 1999). Numerous studies argue for the presence of institutional racism within predominantly White institutions, where historical exclusionary practices and limited opportunities for cross-racial interactions are seen to contribute to a hostile racial climate for minority students (Karkouti, 2016).

Collins (2006, p. 217) has examined the influences of the social media representation of Northeast Asian students in Auckland, arguing that they are presented as a 'singular racial identity that is known by stereotypical economic, cultural and social characteristics.' Such stereotyped representation serves to essentialise the difference and distance between local students and Asian international students, leading to harmful discrimination and racism in New Zealand (Collins, 2006). Further, Park (2010) explored the intersection of race and gender in response to some attacks on Asian female international students in British Columbia, Canada, arguing that these attacks are inherently racist, partly resulting from broad perceptions that promote the concept of the cultural and moral inferiority of Asian women. Zhang and Xu (2020) found that upon entering

new transnational HE fields, most student participants experienced a feeling of disappointment as their middle-class status in China was overridden by their identities as racial migrants. They worried that their privileged positions in China and the advantages of converting their possessed capitals into the recognised capitals in the new field will be diminished due to their transnational mobility. Their unequal status in terms of race may cause them to be given inferior study and work positions in the UK field (Zhang & Xu, 2020). Additionally, minority students often encounter heightened challenges during their initial years in college, experiencing a lack of belonging those results in increased stress and feelings of alienation (Harper & Hurtado 2007).

Lee and Rice (2007) utilized the concept of neo-racism to explore the discontent and discriminatory experiences faced by international students at a major public university in the southwestern United States. Neo-racism, also known as 'new racism,' refers to discrimination rooted in cultural disparities and national hierarchies rather than specifically through embodied characteristics such as skin colour (Barker, 1981). Their research revealed that students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported experiencing significant discrimination. Specifically, Mexican students often faced discrimination in Arizona due to border-related issues, compounded by negative portrayals in the media. Additionally, Sherry et al. (2010) found that some international students criticised the university's inadequate accommodation of specific cultural and religious needs. For instance, a female student from the Philippines talked about the poor consideration given to Muslim students' religious concerns, while a male student from Saudi Arabia noted the lack of recognition for cultural and religious holidays, such as Ramadan.

In Lee and Rice's (2007) study, several students expressed feelings of discomfort and exclusion from social circles, hindering their desired college experiences as they refrained from participating in typical peer activities. These sentiments were particularly acute in classroom settings, where international students often felt ignored or deliberately excluded by their peers. For instance, a young Chinese woman striving to assimilate into student culture recounted how she frequently overheard classmates making plans during breaks but seldom received invitations herself. Similarly, Sherry et al. (2010) observed Saudi Arabian

students in American universities facing isolation and rejection from classmates, with some White students displaying indifference towards their culture or background, and even ignoring them. Houshmand et al. (2014) also discovered that East Asian participants at a Canadian university, who faced ridicule for their accents, began to withdraw from certain academic activities. Consequently, they opted to remain within their racial and cultural communities, deliberately disengaging from broader social and academic interactions.

Jiang (2020) highlighted the challenge faced by Chinese students at Lakeside University, despite the prevailing Midwestern culture of ‘niceness’. Although interactions may appear friendly on the surface, they rarely lead to genuine friendships, leaving Chinese students feeling unwelcome. Furthermore, academic environments, often led by White instructors and teaching assistants, can marginalize non-White international students both inside and outside the classroom (Jiang, 2020). Chinese students reported feeling ignored when speaking in class, and they experienced similar marginalization in other spaces such as labs and libraries. Consequently, they became excessively cautious about their interactions with Americans, fearing they might inadvertently say something deemed inappropriate or offensive to White instructors.

In residential halls, the concept of Whiteness is also utilized as a determining factor to limit access for non-White individuals to predominantly White residential spaces (Jiang, 2020). Some Chinese international students discovered that domestic students often requested room changes upon learning that they were assigned an international student roommate. Additionally, incidents of physical attacks, including objects being thrown at students, occurred both on and off campus (Lee & Rice, 2007). However, Chinese students tend to attribute their marginalization to factors such as their perceived lack of proficiency in English and their unfamiliarity with American culture, rather than attributing it to the institution or domestic students (Jiang, 2020). When asked why Americans might not be interested in learning more about China, one student speculated that the presence of a large number of Chinese students might diminish Americans' interest in engaging with them. Some Chinese students also express pessimism about the possibility of challenging the existing racial hierarchy.

Some of the negative experiences recounted by Lee and Rice (2007) involved professors exhibiting unwelcoming attitudes, possibly due to their personal discomfort with international students limited English proficiency. Some international students even reported instances of direct insults from their professors, with several students recalling negative comments about their home country or culture made during class. Robertson et al. (2000) found that international students share a strong desire for acceptance and success but may hesitate to seek help due to sensitivity about their language abilities. The study revealed staff concerns about language proficiency but lacked empathy towards international students, criticising them for not taking responsibility for their academic progress and showing little appreciation for critical thinking. Additionally, staff appeared unaware of or unconcerned with international students' emotional and psychological struggles, such as homesickness and alienation, inadvertently perpetuating the challenges faced by these students.

Similarly, Beoku-Betts (2004) reported experiences of exclusion and lack of support among African female scientists in Western universities, with White professors questioning their competence, suggesting remedial classes, and criticising their accents. These students felt marginalised due to prejudiced attitudes, influenced not only by race and gender but also by the colonial history and economic marginalization of their societies. Also, in Kim and Kim's (2010) review of literature, they proposed that international students in the United States might encounter racial microaggressions, focusing on instances where they are perceived as unintelligent due to speech patterns and language skills. East Asian international students in the study of Houshmand et al. (2014) felt White peers' insensitivity towards the international perspectives and international needs. They also explored how professors could overlook or dismiss international perspectives and issues in both classroom discussions and course content. Heggins and Jackson (2003) found that Asian students in the U.S. relied heavily on informal social networks, as they felt uncomfortable using university support services. These students often perceived themselves as unwelcome and lack trust in professional avenues of assistance.

Conversely, in their study of international students in the UK, Li and Kaye (1998) observed international students from Western and English-speaking countries

experienced minimal to no discrimination and reported fewer difficulties in adapting to the cultural environment (Li & Kaye, 1998). Similarly, in Lee and Rice's (2007) study nearly a decade later, students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any direct negative experiences related to their race or culture. They felt respected within the university culture, responded positively, and encountered minor or no challenges in acclimating to the cultural context.

Furthermore, Olcon's (2020) research focused on the impact of a study abroad program in a West African country on American students' understanding of racial and ethnic diversity. Initially, some students displayed defensiveness and resistance towards their racial identity, while others approached the trip with a 'White saviour' self-conceptualisation, aiming to assist people of colour without acknowledging their own complicity in perpetuating Whiteness. While some students developed a deeper comprehension of racial relations in the United States at the end of the programme, many oscillated between constructing a non-oppressive White identity and resorting to behaviours that allowed them to retreat to the comfort of Whiteness. This underscores the ongoing struggle for individuals to confront and navigate issues of racial identity and privilege. In this section, while some of studies related to international students' racialised experiences are a little dated, it still provides an important context for my own empirical research.

3.3.4 The influence of institutional and personal factors on international students' experiences

Even though international students have been increasingly welcomed into Western higher education, Stein & De Andrepotti (2016) note that the hospitality of the host country and universities remained conditional. Biccum (2012) notes, ''while colonial theorists argued for a policy that eventually would lead to self-sufficiency, they never intended colonial populations to be on par with the economies of the colonizers'' (p.46). International students may be considered as a threat if they threaten Western entitlement to resources and opportunities. Other researchers argue that international students may cause anxiety as they may be seen as competitors for professional positions after post-graduation (Coloma 2017; Suspitsyna 2015). For example, Rhee and Sagaria (2004) discuss

that international education investment in the US was criticised as a bad public investment as ‘universities may be preparing foreign nationals to compete with the United States’ (p. 85). In this sense, international students are positioned as threatening outsiders who could overstay their conditional welcome and jeopardise native residents' rights, or who could return home and help their country better compete economically with the West. This argument featuring international students as competitors also occurs in Canada. Findlay and Köhler’s (2010) study highlight complaints from White students about the overabundance of Asian Canadian and Asian international students in Canadian universities and the pressure they feel to compete with Asian students. In addition, local students in the University of British Columbia (UBC) have expressed their dissatisfaction about the creation of a new college for international students whose English-language test scores do not meet admission standards (CBC News, 2014). They worry that international students in the new college may be given better teaching resources and services than other UBC students. This perception of foreign students as threats may cause local students to unite against and exclude foreign students, which then can have an obvious impact on the integration of international students (Stein & De Andrepotti, 2016).

One of the key elements that can affect how well international students learn is a lack of variety in the classroom. International students find there are limited opportunities to learn about different cultures within the classroom (Brooks & Waters, 2011). For example, Yu and Moskal (2019) argue that institutional arrangements, such as the overwhelming numbers of Chinese international students in some subject areas such as the Business Schools of UK universities, could restrict the interaction of international students with local students as well as their integration in the social community. The lack of a diverse environment in the classroom and the denial of intercultural contact may hinder international students’ engagement in cross-cultural learning and personal growth (Yu & Moskal, 2019). Similarly, participants in Bamber’s (2014) study point out that too many students in one classroom, especially in lectures, will impact their learning efficiency and academic performance. Social segregation of international students and prevailing contacts with co-national peers can limit their opportunities to know about other cultures (Zhu, 2016). Therefore,

institutional and structural conditions play an important role in the experiences of international students.

Moreover, some studies have stressed the importance of the influence of individual personality traits and biographical experience (Coleman, 2004). For example, Quan et al. (2016) note that students' prior knowledge of the new learning system obtained at the pre-departure stage, and personality variables such as students' ability of getting rid of stress and positive attitudes towards change could influence Chinese postgraduates' adjustment in the UK. Zhu and O'Sullivan (2022) found two Chinese students in their study were doing exceptionally well in the class and contributed to the class discussion, but this is because both participants received a Western-style education in China. Zhu (2016) also discovered that Chinese students' previous knowledge about German culture and university system can be considered as an important 'soft skill' to facilitate their adjustment in Germany. Her study found that because of the lack of previous intercultural experiences in Germany, Chinese international students can have difficulties in understanding and interpreting culture-based conceptualizations, as they have not been trained to recognize and engage in these new ideas. Furthermore, Zhu (2016) found that Chinese international students with an 'open-mind' and extrovert personality can blend into German community smoothly and quickly. For example, they are more likely to find a part-time job which gives them an opportunity to contribute to and have a link to German society and feel less like an outsider and a guest. Finally, others in the literature argue that it is important to note international students' experiences are also constrained by external structures such as immigration regulations, application systems and financial difficulties, resulting in feelings of insecurity and vulnerability (Moskal & Schweisfurth, 2018; Zhang & Xu, 2020)

While it is generally accepted that there are some common challenges encountered by Chinese international students, such as their relatively lower English proficiency, lack of familiarity with Western educational culture and the lack of opportunities to socialise with local people, some studies indicate that Chinese students can academically and socially adapt well in other countries. For instance, Chinese participants' narratives in Ye's (2018) study suggest that they were positive and resilient in overcoming the various problems they faced

during their PhD studying in the UK, thus challenging the widely held essentialised assumption that Chinese students are ‘problematic learners’. Zhu’s (2016) study found that Chinese international students actively seek to understand, reflect, and question knowledge just as their Western peers. They also make efforts to adapt to the new learning environment in a variety of ways, such as previewing and reviewing textbooks and reading materials, consulting tutors after class and taking language courses. Besides, Gu (2009) notes that with improved linguistic competence and increased self-confidence in relation to learning activities, the effect of cultural shock on international students will be mitigated and gradually stop being a source of confusion and conflict. Thus, the overgeneralisation of the group based on their cultural background fails to acknowledge the diversity among individual Chinese students.

3.4 The relation between social class and access to overseas education

Niraula and Triandafyllidou (2022) emphasize that individuals' decisions to study abroad are often influenced by their prior academic performance and competence. However, the accessibility to higher education and the resources available are significantly shaped by the familial social networks in which these individuals are situated. That means, family background plays a significant role in facilitating students’ educational mobility. Iorio and Pereira (2018) argue that migration in Brazil is a classed project, because individuals’ social status in the origin country has an impact on the decisions of destinations and the understanding of the importance of intercultural learning environment. For example, those students who have the resources to enjoy a private English education may be able to choose a destination other than Portugal. Some students regard overseas education as an adventure and an investment in a new lifestyle, while others consider it is an opportunity to create an alternative to their disadvantaged position in Brazil (Iorio & Pereira, 2018).

Bourdieu (1986) points out the importance of intergenerational transfer of educational cultural capital through membership of elite universities. Researchers in international student mobility have argued that exposure to sufficient cultural capital may also motivate children’s aspirations of studying abroad (Zhang & Tang, 2021; Zhu, 2016). Zhang and Tang (2021) found that

Chinese international students in their study who possessed high level of cultural capital shared a similar family background: most of their parents were part of the middle-class inside system such as professors, teachers, and government officers. Their parents' high level of institutionalized cultural capital influenced their decisions to study in UK higher education. Meanwhile, data from the Erasmus and HESA datasets shows that credit-mobile students' parents tend to come from more advantaged social classes and have more advanced degrees. King et al. (2011) found that students with university-educated parents in the UK are more than twice as likely as those without this advantage to be applying to study abroad. Also, Eccles (2014) found that children are more likely to have higher requirements for themselves if they believe their parents have high expectations for their schooling. The greatest determinant of Chinese university students' desire to study abroad appears to be their parents' influence (Sáinz & Müller, 2018).

Furthermore, Waters (2012) claims that the mobility of students has predominantly served to perpetuate and reproduce existing privileges rather than acting as a mechanism to question or challenge established hierarchies. Ye (2018) demonstrates that Chinese participants from middle-class families can draw upon their families' resources to stick with their desired plan of studying abroad even if they failed the examination of entering the elite universities in China. In this way they can still reproduce their family social status, which distinguishes them from other peers who cannot afford the educational mobility fee. Besides, a study by Findlay et al. (2012) which aims to investigate UK students' overseas education discovered that pupils from independent /private schools with high tuition fees are more likely to choose universities in other countries. This may imply that considerable financial resources are needed to undertake educational mobility in the first place. For some Chinese international students who come from well-off families, their parents' high level of economic capital enables them to spend money on finding networks or attending exclusive English training courses for the preparation of studying abroad (Zhang & Tang, 2021). Also, regarding family holiday patterns, students from better-off families in the UK have more opportunities to travel to other countries (King et al., 2011). These widely travelled students are almost twice as likely to think of

applying for overseas education, compared to those who have visited fewer (or no) other countries (King et al., 2011).

Research by Holloway et al. (2012) has discussed that the dramatic increases in enrolment in higher education in Kazakhstan has decreased the value of a local degree in that country. As a result, those families who are in privileged positions need to adopt new tactics such as paying for English-language courses and private schools to enhance their children's language competence in order to study abroad. Although the Kazakhstan government allocates funding to academically capable individuals irrespective of their ethnicity or family background, the practical outcome reveals that successful applicants predominantly hail from middle-class families (Holloway et al., 2012). This trend is attributed to the advantageous educational backgrounds of these individuals, including experiences such as overseas travel and participation in private English-language courses, which enhance their competitiveness in the application process. In sum, the ultimate purpose of these families is to facilitate the intergenerational transmission of class advantage (Roberts et al., 2009).

There are increasingly signs that international students mobility spaces are becoming more accessible to a larger range of students. Global scholarship has shown that mobility is becoming more common among students from all socioeconomic groups (Gaulter & Mountford-Zimdars, 2018; Lipura & Collins, 2020). In fact, individuals from working class and lower middle-class backgrounds are also occasionally pursuing international education. However, recent scholarship has indicated that international students' family backgrounds can influence the type of institutions that they can access. For example, when it comes to Chinese students who relocate to the US, Ma (2020) has argued that while participation has opened to international students from lower socioeconomic groups, those without parental college experience are more likely to attend lower status colleges and universities. Thus, international students mobility is an increasingly socially stratified space (Brooks & Waters, 2022). Yang's (2018) comparative research on student mobility from India to China and from China to Singapore makes similar points for whole degree mobility. He argues that although the demographics of mobile people have changed to

include people from lower-class backgrounds, these students are usually enrolled in less demanding programmes that have poorer job opportunities.

3.5 The impact of class on international students' experiences of studying abroad

Several studies have pointed out the influence of social class not just on access to international education, but also on the experience of international students once they are abroad. For example, a qualitative study by Iorio and Pereira (2018) investigates the trajectories of Brazilian PhD international students in higher education in Portugal. Their study indicates that even if low-income students can access government funding to acquire entry opportunities to international study, they may have a different financial experience to their counterparts from better-off families, such as saving, finding part-time jobs and relying on loans. Glass et al.'s (2021) study reflect how students' struggles to pool resources for their international education shape their goals and orientations towards their formal and informal experiences. They found well-financed, single-resourced students often described more cosmopolitan and intrinsic approaches to their education and received greater benefits from the intercultural coursework and learning environment, which facilitated mutual dialogue and discussion. In contrast, multi-resourced students from lower middle-class or working-class families reflected more career-minded and utilitarian approaches and preferred the coursework involved in problem-based learning and leadership programmes (Glass et al., 2021). Also, Zhu's (2006) study found that due to financial difficulties, some Chinese international students in Germany took part-time jobs at the weekend. They normally worked in Chinese restaurants or Chinese supermarkets, or they chose to live with other Chinese students to save money, which deprived them of opportunities to participate in social activities with diverse peers.

In relation to informal experiences, a description of sports events and participation in the intercultural organisations are common among single-resourced international students, whereas multi-resourced students regard attending community services, events celebrating festivals, and same-identity student clubs as contributions to their learning (Glass et al., 2021). Engaging predominantly with peers from the same cultural background may lead multi-

resourced international students to experience a sense of distance and indifference from local students, resulting in exclusion from the university community. In contrast, single-resourced students, who participate in diverse activities with a variety of peers, often report experiencing greater emotional support and reduced discrimination (Glass et al., 2021).

Igarashi and Saito (2014) point out that:

> Accessing to cosmopolitanism is unequal: students from different families, endowed with different volumes of cultural, economic, and social capital, have unequal abilities to pursue the kinds of educational tracks associated with large volumes of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital (p. 231).

International students from different social classes recognize different ways in which they need to capitalise their time at university and adopt different strategies to achieve their goals. Students who are financially insecure are more likely to view the resources and networks of the university itself (such as internships, workshops, and professors) as helpful to gain employability and subject mastery (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). However, international students from wealthier families tend to view social interactions (such as sports and intercultural communications) as significant ways to understand local culture, increase self-confidence, and improve their cosmopolitan capacity (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). The research of Zhang and Tang (2021) has shown that the main purpose of female Chinese international students from working-class backgrounds is to acquire institutionalised cultural capital, especially good academic performance, which can be crucial for them to achieve upward social mobility. Also, according to Pham et al. (2019), many international students from less affluent socioeconomic backgrounds have a strong desire to excel academically and were prepared to put in a lot of effort to do so. They often opt for practical subjects to enhance job prospects, while middle-class female students tend to choose fields where they can leverage their family's social capital for post-graduation employment (Zhang and Tang, 2020). Although international students differ in their tactics of advancing their goals, the eventual aims for both groups are to increase their opportunities and competence after graduation.

3.6 The relation between gender and access to international mobility

Studying abroad is viewed as crucial for middle-class status reproduction, with female students' expectations influenced not only by class but also by traditional gender norms in the labour market and local discourses on suitable heterosexual marriage (Holloway et al., 2012). In Holloway et al. (2012)'s study which investigates Kazakhstani students' experiences of educational mobility to the UK, they found that cultural capital is not a gender-neutral attribute but something women need to seek to deploy in the patriarchal culture of Kazakhstan. The realization of cultural capital is more difficult for female students than male students in the gender-based labour market. In Kazakhstani culture, the highly gendered segmentation and discrimination in the labour market means that women are expected to balance their employment obligations and domestic responsibilities. This is an ongoing concern to the female students in Kazakhstan, and hence, when they make career strategies, they will often consider how to maximize their cultural capital such as through overseas studying. Kazakhstani women in Holloway's study emphasized that an international degree allows them to showcase cultural capital to employers beyond personal or family networks, encompassing both institutionalized culture and physical manifestations. Thus, for some female students who lack local connections, they are keen to work in international organizations rather than national companies because recruitment policies in international companies are seen to be fairer and more transparent, valuing employees' competence over their connections (Holloway et al., 2012).

In addition to central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Ono and Piper (2004) also observe that a major motivation for Japanese female students studying abroad is that they feel a Western degree will provide them with more opportunities to work in a foreign company, where the treatment for female and male staff is assumed to be more egalitarian than with local Japanese companies. Indeed, in Ono and Piper's (2004) research, most of the Japanese international female students chose to work in a foreign-owned company after they come back to Japan. Habu's (2000) study also reveals that conservative social norms may constrain Japanese women's life plans and limit their career prospects. This can be regarded as an important push factor for them to study in the UK. However,

Habu (2000) suggests that it is not the prospect of financial betterment that facilitates Japanese female students' decisions to study abroad, but personal fulfilment - they view the journey of studying in the UK as a valuable experience for their lives. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou (2016) point out that while an increasing number of women have taken part in skilled migration in recent years, this does not mean a total detachment from previous social norms, networks, and expectations. Countries like China have experienced the liberalising effects of globalisation unevenly. Although the rate of women students' enrolment in higher education has exceeded the rate of male students, the job possibilities of women - even high-qualified women - are still limited in the highly gender-based segmented labour market (Isaakyan &Triandafyllidou, 2016). Their personal lives are still likely to be influenced by traditional social norms.

Furthermore, women's expectations of studying abroad are not only shaped by discrimination in the labour market, but also family influence, especially in relation to heterosexual marriage (Holloway et al., 2012). In some Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, "female education and labour-force participation coexisted with high fertility rates and an untransformed domestic division of labour" (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 607). Women are supposed to marry and give birth in their early twenties. Zhang and Tang (2021) also point out that once Chinese female students' age exceeds a culturally constructed 'age limit', she needs to make greater efforts to get approval of studying abroad from her parents. Meanwhile, Holloway et al. (2012) argue that some women's gender-perception is shaped by the discourse of heterosexuality. In these participants' opinion, an effective way to convert their cultural capital into class advantage is not through transnational social networks or maximizing their competence in the labour market, but to find a suitable husband who is well-paid and who has egalitarian thoughts about gender relations. Intercultural experiences are argued to increase this possibility to meet the 'right' person. Similarly, Moskal's (2020) study notes that for some Asian women postgraduates who pursue their degrees abroad, their motivations are often linked to the expectations of finding a suitable husband. Additionally, Xiang and Shen (2009) argue that Chinese women international students' positions in the marriage market can be improved after gaining overseas degrees.

By the same token, influenced by the norms of heterosexual marriage in Kazakhstan, men hold the advantageous positions in the labour market, but they also have more pressure to succeed if they want to meet the requirements of the 'good man' (Ro'I & Wainer, 2009). Also, in China, while men may enjoy more freedom than women, they are charged with more financial responsibilities such as buying houses and cars and looking after their older parents (Xiang & Shen, 2009)). Thus, the overseas degree as an important form of institutionalized cultural capital is recognized as particularly valuable for male students who need to find a decent job to earn enough to attract a wife and support a family. Indeed, in Xiang and Shen's (2009) analysis, they argue for a distinction between a male-dominated 'economic ladder' and a 'cultural ladder' which is more female-friendly in the process of social mobility. While male students expect a high economic return in their investments in overseas education, female students seem to expect higher social status, especially their positions in the marriage market in addition to financial power.

3.7 The relation between gender and the experiences of studying abroad

Models of curriculum and pedagogy in Western universities privilege dialectic lecture delivery, in which faculty members tend to adopt active learning methods to facilitate students' engagement in their own learning process and classroom community (Joseph, 2008). In an active-learning classroom, students may be asked to evaluate their peers' contributions to the classroom discussion, rate other students' performances in their team and even self-evaluate their own participation and preparation for the courses (Irvin, 2017). While effective in fostering student reflexivity, these methods may overlook gender-based variations in how female and male students evaluate their own abilities, participation, and performance in comparison to their peers (Irvin, 2017). The increasing global prevalence of female students in higher education, with instances of female outnumbering male enrolment on certain campuses, may lead educators to inadvertently neglect the nuanced role of gender in pedagogical settings, potentially perpetuating disadvantages experienced by women students (Leathwood & Read 2008). Irvin (2017) emphasizes that students are whole individuals navigating intricate gender-based social norms on a daily basis, and this does not cease when they enter classrooms.

Therefore, socially constructed gender identities may influence students' performance in the active-learning environment regardless of the proportions of male and female students in the classroom.

Furthermore, Irvin's (2017) study found that female students are constantly underrating their performances including disparaging their understandings of course contents, underestimating their ability and attributing their success to luck, effort, or support from others. In contrast, male students are more likely to overrate their performances, often awarding themselves full credit of understanding the course materials and attributing their success to their innate ability. Also, using the theory of gender status beliefs, Ridgeway (2011) argues that men tend to be seen as more capable and competent, especially in male-dominated fields. Thus, considering female students' lower expectations towards their own ability and performances, they may have internalized the stereotypical status belief that they are not as competent as men (Ridgeway, 2011), which may result in insufficient confidence in their studies.
Similarly, Irvin (2017), in the study mentioned above, found that success correlates more closely with confidence than it does with competence. Therefore, when women lack confidence compared to male peers, it is crucial to reconsider how teachers evaluate classroom practices which hugely depend on engagement, dialect discussion, and peer- or self-assessment.

In addition to the classroom environment, women students in male-dominated subjects are also faced with challenges in the university. Meyer and Strauß (2019) contend that negative self-assessment contributes significantly to the heightened risk of dropout among female students in gender-atypical subjects compared to their male counterparts in female-dominated disciplines. However, women generally exhibit high levels of social integration, as manifested in interactions with faculty members and peers, which can serve as protective factors offering emotional support. In contrast, Kronberger and Horwath (2013) assert that self-doubt and inadequate social integration, rather than poor academic performance, emerge as primary reasons for female students discontinuing engineering studies, whereas academic performance remains the predominant cause for dropout among male students. Severiens and Dam (2012) explain that for male students in female-dominated subjects, their fear of poor

job opportunities in the labour market and lack of support from families and friends are the main predictors for dropping out. Therefore, when international students enter the active-learning environment, or gender-atypical subjects, the implications of teaching practices and socially constructed gender roles should be paid attention to. However, while the above examples provide some evidence to highlight how gender dynamics may play out in higher education, instructors should be extremely cautious to avoid generalizing students based on their gender identities (Irvin, 2017). For example, not all men are confident enough to participate in discussions or speak up in the classroom, and not all female students have self-doubt or are silent (Irvin, 2017). Thus, not all men and women approach educational practices in the same way, and teachers need to be aware of differences as well as similarities in relation to aspects of identity.

Gender is regarded as a characteristic that involves the intersection of various discourses, including cultural, religious, and national (Song, 2019). Thus, any study looking at the construction of gender identity should include a study of the broader sociocultural and socio-political perspectives which may better explain students' internal conflicts and external constraints. Song's (2019) research focuses on the gendered experiences of a Saudi Arabian female student named Fay in a US higher education institution. Song recounts that Fay tried to distance herself from an essentialised Saudi women's identity, in which the dominant Saudi conception of gender and women's social and academic success are largely incompatible (see also Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). However, Fay then encountered the hurtful situation that her Saudi male peers refused to interact with her in the classroom because she did not wear her hijab and liked to socialize with others. In addition, Fay faced the new challenge that because of the language difficulties, she became silent and invisible in the American classroom. However, her American tutor attributed her poor participation in classroom activities to a Saudi cultural belief that 'Saudi women cannot speak up around men' (p. 156). The American tutor's narrow view towards Saudi women and this racialized discourse limited Fay's access to educational opportunities and success. Also, Park's (2010) study, which analysed the perceived vulnerability of South Korean female students studying in Canada, found that this vulnerability originates from the intersection of gendered and racialized discourses that ultimately undermine female students' self-confidence and independence. However, Fay's decisions of

moving forward and focusing on her academic and career goals demonstrate her agency and autonomy (Song, 2019), which may imply that Fay's construction of identity may be influenced by the totally different American culture involving goal-oriented and independent ideologies.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed several key areas present in the literature on international student mobility: 1) motivations and benefits of students to pursue international education, in the context of neoliberalism and globalisation; and 2) the challenges faced by international students in terms of cultural and academic shock, language ability and emotional experiences. The existing literature shows that there is an influence of social class and gender on the experiences of international mobility in terms of international students' access to educational mobility (previous educational experiences and knowledge, motivation) and overseas learning experiences (formal academic and informal experiences and experiences of adjustment).

Conducting the literature review has allowed me to identify some research gaps. First, most research only briefly mentions how social class or gender influence international students' motivations and experiences. While there are already plenty of studies adopting Bourdieu's thinking tools of capital, habitus, and field to discuss international students' experiences, the purpose of these studies tends to analyze the distinct differences of motivations, adjustment process and employment outcomes between international students with different family resources. Relatively few studies go further to explore the underlying power relations and unequal social dynamics that underly these students' experiences. Second, while a few studies have examined the emotional /affective experiences of overseas students from psychological angles, very few of them consider emotions in a broader social context or from a sociological perspective. Third, there seems to be a dearth of longitudinal research that examines postgraduates' experiences within the restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In sum, while many studies focus on the learning experiences of international students in the UK, there is less research investigating the sociological processes

of exclusion and ‘misrecognition’ (see Chapter 3 page 23) of international students in the UK. We need to provide deeper understandings of the subtle and insidious operations of inequalities in gender, ethnicity, and social class, to redress misrecognition and exclusion. Therefore, this thesis aims to address some of these current gaps by exploring Chinese postgraduates' experiences in the UK from a critical poststructuralist perspective.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In the Chapter 2, I outlined my theoretical stance - that a poststructuralist approach provides the mechanism for examining the ways in which experiences, meaning and events are the effects of various discourses operating within society. This provides a framework to interpret my research findings. In this chapter, I discuss my methodological approach. First, I outline the overall epistemological position and research paradigm that I chose to guide my research. Second, I detail the research methods including the recruitment strategy and chosen methods. Then, I evaluate the trustworthiness of the study and outline the ethical considerations. Finally, I discuss how I analyse the data.

4.2 Research paradigm

In my PhD thesis, adopting an interpretivist paradigm helped me to explore perceptions of Chinese international students' experiences and transitions in the UK. Instead of presuming the existence of a singular and unified model for their mobility and transition process, I sought to investigate this phenomenon by examining individual cases. This involved tracing their reflections and interpretations, which are intricately linked to the construction of their social identities (or, in Foucauldian terms, their subjectivities), and considering the impact of their unique backgrounds and contexts. I am particularly interested in how their processes of subjectivation are intertwined with various discourses and how particular discourses influence the ways they interpret the world.

The interpretivist epistemology (or philosophy of how knowledge can be acquired or constructed) emerged in contradiction to more objectivist epistemological approaches such as positivism. Positivism assumes there is an objective 'truth' that is empirically generalizable and existing independent to or outside of human thoughts and social conditions (Moon & Blackman, 2014). The interpretivist perspective is instead underpinned by an ontological position - a stance or perspective concerning the nature of reality and existence -of subjectivism which states that there is no single 'truth' independent of human beings (Cohen et al., 2002). From the interpretivist perspective, contrary to

atoms, chemicals, or even most non-human life forms, people interpret or assign value to their environments and to themselves (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Instead of seeking patterns and regularities of human behaviour, interpretivists see the world as multi-layered and complex, and that it can only be understood by looking at their interpretations and perspectives of individuals themselves on events and situations (Cohen et al., 2002; Moon & Blackman, 2014).

This shares poststructuralism's subjectivist ontology which emphasises the subjective interpretation of individuals in constructing and understanding the social world, not seeing people as 'simply the decentred bearers of given roles' (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 25). Both poststructuralism and interpretivism recognize the importance of understanding phenomena within their social and cultural contexts. Phenomena and situations are fluid and changing rather than static and fixed, and all the interpretations are richly affected by their specific historical and cultural context (Cohen et al., 2002; Moon & Blackman, 2014). Furthermore, interpretivist approaches acknowledge that researchers' values and perspectives are not free from their research and their inevitable subjectivity may influence data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). This echoes poststructuralists' stress on the importance of reflexivity and acknowledgement of the inevitable influence of the researcher on the research process.

Therefore, based on the connections between poststructuralism and interpretivism, I oriented the study through an interpretivist epistemological stance. This helps me understand international students' experiences from multiple perspectives, and to 'deconstruct' and expose layers of meaning. Also, it helps to explore how their identity formations are shaped by historical, cultural, and social factors, and how the intertwining of discourse and power influences their subjective constructions. At the same time, I also recognize my own perspectives, assumptions and positionality that will affect the ways in which I interpret the data, which I will discuss further in the 'Positionality' section.

4.3 Research design and methods

4.3.1 Research Questions

The main research question for this project is ‘what are Chinese international postgraduates’ perceptions of their experiences in the UK? To tackle this question, this research adopted a longitudinal design to record individuals’ unique experiences and transitions across time and factors influencing their experiences. This main, overarching research question comprises two sub-questions. First, how do institutional and wider social conditions influence Chinese international students’ experiences and transitions? Particularly, I specifically investigated Chinese international students’ experiences under the influence of discourses of neoliberalism, postcolonialism, and the further influence of academic culture in the UK and COVID-19 restrictions. Second, to what extent do Chinese international students’ experience and transitions relate to their gender and social class? Since students’ different experiences and transitions in higher education to a certain degree depend on their capacities to draw on resources, it is significant to analyse the association between their social positions and experiences.

4.3.2 Research Design

The longitudinal design is a form of research design which involves collecting data from participants regularly rather than a single time point (Clark et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies enable researchers to ‘analyse the duration of social phenomena’ (Ruspini, 2002, p. 24), and offer insights on the differences, similarities and changes over time in respect of a group of participants (Cohen et al., 2002). My PhD study aimed to track the same Chinese international postgraduates in several universities and record their experiences in the UK across one year. Through the one-year data collection process, first, I was able to observe participants’ fluid, changing and even unstable social and academic lives under the condition of mobility. Then, I identified the institutional and wider social discourses which influenced participants’ feelings, belonging and engagement as well as analysing the association between their unique experiences and their formations of social identity. Finally, I explored their subjective constructions which were influenced by their personal histories and

wider contexts that are embedded in social and material inequalities and differences.

4.3.2.1 Recruitment of participants

This study targeted one-year Chinese international postgraduates. Participants were picked in Glasgow and London from both post-1992 and pre-1992 universities. The QS 2022 Global Ranking range for the selected universities is from 73 to 750, although ranking is a contested way of understanding the value/status of institutions which I have discussed in the theoretical chapter (page 43-44). As I have mentioned, the study drew upon a poststructuralist theoretical stance and an interpretivist approach to generating and analysing data. As such, generated data were considered contextual, and the various features of universities were used to support multiple interpretations of participants' educational and social experiences and practices. The participant selection was based on two criteria: first, it required participants' postgraduate courses to start in September 2021; second, all participants are from mainland China. Chinese students from Hong Kong and Taiwan were excluded because of the different educational system and potential different sociocultural influences due to differences in ideological, political, and economic factors (Wang & Byram, 2011). The data collection process recorded the beginning of their overseas journey (September 2021) until the submission of their dissertation (August 2022). Thus, Chinese international postgraduates went through two stages of transitions in my project: first, from Chinese students to Chinese international students in the UK who are defined as persons who have 'crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin' (UNESCO, 2012); second, from semester one to semester two. In the first stage of transition, I focused primarily on how participants' social identity constructions influenced their aspirations of studying abroad, their subject choices, as well as their emotional experiences on entering a new educational and social environment. Regarding the second stage of transitions, I concentrated more on the educational performances, social and cultural experiences on and off campus, and emotional transitions as participants were familiarising themselves with the UK context.

Both purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit research participants. To be specific, a snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants because it "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981, p. 141). In this way, I initially sampled a small group of participants who matched the recruitment criteria via an advertisement I posted in WeChat groups and my own social networks. Then I relied on those sampled participants to recommend other participants who have the required characteristics (Clark et al., 2021). Additionally, I have two contacts in universities in London, and they helped me post my recruiting advertisement in the WeChat groups for London's Chinese international students. Snowball sampling is effective in reaching Chinese international postgraduate communities in Glasgow and London and helps in identifying potential participants who might not have been accessible or known to the researcher initially (Clark et al., 2021).

However, one of the challenges of using snowball sampling is that the selection of additional participants is largely determined by the initial participants. While I communicated with the initial participants the criteria of requirements in terms of the class belonging and location of the universities which were in Glasgow and London, most of the potential participants they recommended were from middle-class backgrounds and one of the potential participants' universities was located in Belfast. Thus, I had to use purposive sampling to look for potential participants from working-class backgrounds. Purposive sampling was used to select participants "on the basis of the kind of information they can provide, usually because they have the 'right' kind of life experience for the research" (Clark et al., 2021, p. 379). In my PhD project, since one of the sub-questions was to investigate the association between participants' gender and social class and their experiences, purposive sampling helped to ensure there was a spread in terms of gender identification and social class background in the resulting group.

Two female participants were my students when I worked as Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) for their course. When I talked with them about my project, they showed an interest in participating in my study and revealed some of their

working-class experiences. Thus, I invited them to participate in my project. It is important to note that as a GTA, my responsibilities did not include teaching or grading student assessments. This helped me to make sure that students' decisions to participate in my research are entirely voluntary, as I was able to emphasise that participation would have no impact on their academic performance. I was committed to upholding the highest ethical standards by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and maintaining a clear separation between my research and my GTA responsibilities. To address the concern regarding the potential biases for interpretating participants' class belonging in purposive sampling when I invited them, the study gathered demographic information during the first semi-structured interviews. This methodological adjustment allowed for a more nuanced and data-driven interpretation of participants' social class, enhancing the academic rigor of the sampling process.

I have discussed in the research context in Chapter 1 the approach I utilised to define the middle-class in China, recognising that there is no simple or objective way to make such categories. Drawing on studies of Chen (2013) and Lu (2002, 2004), the participants in my study who I categorised to be from middle-class families have the following characteristics: first, parents' occupations belong to managerial personnel, professionals, and office workers (see table 1-1); second, within the aforementioned categories, parents are categorised as upper middle-class if they have a college degree or more, and lower middle-class if they do not (as shown in table 4-1). According to Chen (2013), even within the middle-class Chinese system, the upper middle-class and lower middle-class system have accumulated different levels of social and cultural capital, which is also demonstrated in my thesis. Upper-class includes administrative personnel of state affairs and social affairs, as well as private entrepreneurs (Chen, 2013). The working-class (lower class) includes service and industry workers, peasants and unemployed and partially employed. However, it is noted that while there are some missing data regarding some of the participants' parents' educational levels, these are rough indicators and only approximate ways to interpret participants' locations in terms of social class, and they are just the tools to help me analyse data. In my thesis, I used the terms social class and family background interchangeably.

Pseudonym name	Gender	Age	Subject	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Father's educational level	Mother's educational level	Class
Hu Fan	Male	20-25	Electronic and Electrical Engineering	Deputy Manager in State-Owned Enterprise (SOE)	Deputy Manager in State-Owned Enterprise (SOE)	Masters	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Li Xian	Male	20-25	MA history	Leader in a public sector	Homemaker	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Tu Cheng	Male	20-25	Public policy	Province bank governor	Province bank second governor	Masters	Masters	Upper middle-class
Wang Xiaoming	Male	20-25	Tesol	Self-employed	office worker	Vocational school	Vocational school	Lower middle-class

Wei kaifeng	Male	20-25	Robotics & AI	Doctor	University professor	Don’t know	Don’t know	Middle-class
Li Lu	Female	20-25	Educational studies	Civil Servant	Civil Servant	Don’t know	Don’t know	Middle-class
Liu Fei	Female	25-30	International commercial law	Retired from the ministry	Public sector	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Xiao Wang	female	20-25	Educational studies	Driver	Prefer not to say	Junior High	Junior High	Working-class
Luo Xue	Female	20-25	Tesol	Businessperson	Office worker	Junior High	Primary school	Lower middle-class
Liu Mei	Female	31-35	Educational studies	Self-employed	Homemaker	Don’t know	Don’t know	Working-class

Huang Xiao	male	25-30	Educational studies	Retired from working in Government	Working in Educational department	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Liu Qing	Female	25-30	Inclusive education	Technician	Homemaker (before senior statistician)	Masters	College	Upper middle-class
Zi Shan	Female	20-25	Economy	Engineer	Teacher	Masters	Vocational school	Middle-class
Guan Tong	Female	20-25	Media development	Engineer	Homemaker	Undergraduate	Vocational school	Middle-class
Dong Hun	Male	20-25	Civil engineering	Manager in the construction company	Manager in the construction company	College	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Xiong ren	Male	20-25	Mechanical engineering	Civil servant	Scientist in agriculture	College	PhD	Upper middle-class

Xiao Xiao	Female	20-25	MA education	Middle leadership in bank	Middle leadership in bank	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Yang Yang	Male	20-25	Digital business	Driver in state-owned enterprise	Accountancy in state-owned enterprise	Junior high	Vocational school	Lower middle-class
Wang Qiang	Male	25-30	Media and development	Civil servant	Civil servant	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Tian Tian	Female	20-25	Music business management	Business	Civil servant	Ministry school	College	Upper middle-class
Zhang Xiaofan	Female	20-25	Digital Humanities	Business	Manager	College	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Xu Yiyang	Female	25-30	Marketing management	Within system	Within system	Vocational school	Don’t know	Lower middle-class

Wang He	Male	20-25	User experience engineering	Manager in Golf	Leader in a communication company	College	Undergraduate	Upper middle-class
Huang Zitao	Male	25-30	Diversity and media	Sales	Accountancy	College	Don't know	Middle-class
Mo Li	Female	20-25	Diversity and media	Teacher	Retired from bank	Undergraduate	Don’t know	Middle-class

Table 4-1 Participates' categorisation in terms of social class

Furthermore, I aimed to obtain a balance between people who identified as men and women, and to provide a space to include non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals. In this thesis, I started with an intersectionality orientation for examining gender and social class, particularly conducting an inter-categorical approach that allows for comparison between different social groups in terms of gender and social class (Windsong, 2018). In other words, my research aimed to recruit four different social groups including female participants from working-class backgrounds, female participants from middle-class backgrounds, male participants from working-class backgrounds and male participants from middle-class backgrounds, to examine their experiences and transitions within the context of the UK universities. It is worth noting again that these categorisations are not factual/ 'true' (Burke, 2013), but constructions designed to look for themes in the data. However, there are a relatively small proportion of working-class postgraduates studying in the UK and I found it difficult to connect with working-class male postgraduate students. Consequently, I invited male participants from lower middle-class backgrounds instead of working-class men. As I illustrate in the data analysis chapters (see Chapter 5 and 6), I found there were similarities in the experiences of lower middle-class and working-class participants in the UK. After meeting the required characteristics, I recruited participants from a broad array of disciplines to obtain more insights that would help me answer my research questions (see table 4-1). A total number of 25 participants were recruited (12 participants in Glasgow and 13 participants in London). In the context of poststructuralism, the emphasis is more on the depth and richness of the data collected. During the one-year period data collection, my research focused on collecting in-depth discussions with the 25 participants, focusing on their dynamic and unique transitions in the UK, and exploring the complexity, plurality, and constructed nature of their experiences.

While the participant cohort in this study embodies a diverse array of students across various demographics such as age, gender, and academic discipline, it is predominantly composed of individuals from middle-class backgrounds, with only two participants identifying as working-class. However, these working-class participants demonstrated significant eagerness to engage with the research, providing rich insights into their unique challenges, profound emotional

experiences, and their resilience and agency in the face of structural inequalities. Their contributions were significant in elucidating some of the specific inequities that previously literature has connected with working-class students. This then helped me in including data from participants that are usually obscured or marginalized, which I will illustrate in the data analysis chapters. Nevertheless, it remains imperative to broaden the inclusion of working-class student participants in future research, endeavouring to facilitate more comprehensive comparisons between the experiences of working-class and middle-class groups. Such an expansion is essential to explore the potential additional complexities within the working-class group, thereby enriching the study's contribution to understanding societal structures and individual agency within a poststructuralist framework.

4.3.2.2 Pilot study

Before I formally started the data collection, I conducted two pilot studies with one female participant at a university in Glasgow and one male participant at a university in London. There were three purposes for me to conduct these pilot studies: first, to check on the interview duration, place and the recording device; second, to receive feedback from participants and see how they felt about the interview process and interview questions; third, to develop and re-organize the interview guide via analysing the data from the pilot studies. The interview duration with the male participant and the female participant was 47 minutes and 39 minutes respectively, all within one hour which I presented in the recruitment poster. I used my telephone recorder to record the whole interview process, and the recording quality was good. When I transcribed the recordings, I could hear the interviewer's and participant's voices clearly. I gave three options to let the participant choose the interview places: online, the participant's home or the researcher's office. They were fine with all the options and eventually, the interview with the female participant was conducted at her home and the interview with the male participant was online. In terms of their feedback on the interviews, generally, they felt the interview environment was friendly and private and they were willing to share their thoughts with me and did not worry about being overheard. However, the female participant thought there were a few overlaps between some of the interview questions, and the male participant did mention about the order of the interview questions

that he thought they should be more logical and divided into different sections as some of the questions were totally independent from others. These suggestions were helpful to remove a few unnecessary questions and identify some themes before analysing the interview data.

The main research question revolves around the exploration of Chinese international postgraduates' experiences over time, considering various influencing factors. Through the analysis of trial interview data, distinct social factors emerged, such as the impact of academic culture and the significance of mental support from the students' friends and parents. However, regarding the discourses and structural forms of factors which may affect their experiences, the two participants did not discuss much that directly related, especially in relation to the influences of neoliberalism, globalization and postcolonialism. The reasons I concluded were first: I did not ask them specifically about these aspects; second, as for the impact of social class and gender, they seemed to know little about them, so I needed to give participants a notification that I would ask their thoughts about social class and gender during the interview, so they could prepare a little bit before the interview. Also, I needed to focus on asking how their family backgrounds and gender influence their overseas experiences, rather than asking their understandings about social class and gender in China which is not my research focus. In sum, in the new version of the interview guide (see appendix 1.3), I created seven topic areas to make questions flow logically and reasonably. In addition, I added a few new interview questions to help them answer my research question and deleted some overlapping questions.

4.3.2.3 Methods

Interpretivists argue that we need to understand the distinctive nature of people’s perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs to comprehend why they do what they do or why institutions operate in particular ways (Hammersley, 2012). Individuals engage in the interpretation of situations and the construction of meaning based on their subjective perspectives, subsequently shaping their actions (Cohen et al., 2002). Researchers should be attuned to this intrinsic process, recognizing the significance of individuals' unique interpretations in comprehension of the world. Such interpretation takes place in socio-cultural,

socio-temporal and socio-spatial contexts and in turn requires the researcher to abandon their prior cultural assumptions and attitudes and be willing to learn the culture of the people being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Due to this, qualitative methods are valuable for capturing the complexity and nuances of lived experiences and personal narratives, and help to explore issues related to gender, power, and social inequality (Harding, 1987). In this study, informed by my theoretical framework and epistemological position, I chose semi-structured interviews as my primary method of inquiry to capture the complexity of participants' narratives.

In the conventional approach to interviewing, the format of the conversation and its analysis are determined by the individual posing the questions and the people answering the questions are relatively powerless (Oakley, 2016). Oakley (2016) argues that information solely flows in one direction; there is no reciprocity in the relationship, rather, interviewers should work on building 'rapport', a technical tool that facilitates the collection of data. A poststructural understanding of social interactions regards the conversation between the researcher and participants as co-creation and refutes a regime of questioning techniques that could reveal an essential and core identity (Winstead, 2009). Denzin (1989, cited in Fontana & Frey, 2003. P. 89) also states that a poststructural frameworks is based on the need for the researcher to build collaborative, trusting, reciprocal relationships with participants. Similarly, feminist methodologies necessitate the cultivation of relationships with research participants, fostering a collaborative approach that eschews a hierarchical positioning wherein the researcher assumes an expert role in the lives of others (Shokooh, 2021). In other words, the method of interviewing is an interpretive process that relies on the collaboration between researchers and participants to construct meaningful interactions and interpretations (Shokooh, 2021).

Thus, while the 'non-hierarchical' interaction during the interview was hard to realize as the participants still saw me as the 'researcher' most of the time, I tried to build and maintain a friendly and equal status with participants. For example, I often asked participants to reflect on my interview questions and give me suggestions, as well as share their perceptions of the interview content and transcripts. Given my perception that the interviews I conducted with

participants were co-constructions, I maintained a respectful attitude toward their views and ideas. Embracing an approach in line with Murphy's (2015) proposition that a politics of care encompasses both critique and dissent, I remained open to any form of criticism or disagreement that might arise. This stance reflected my commitment to fostering an environment where diverse perspectives could be acknowledged and engaged with constructively.

Consistent with a poststructural perspective, participants were assumed to possess agency in the negotiation of their social identities and narratives but are shaped by the prevailing power structures and discourses of a given society (Foucault, 1998). Thus, the perceived contradictions of their identities and narratives were not seen as problematic, rather it opened a space for a richer and more complex interpretation which I will describe in the data analysis chapters. Haraway (1991, p. 193, quoted in Goodley & Roets, 2008, p. 249) also states “the contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positioning, is capable of resistance and construction”. In other words, the seemingly contradictory narratives or identities implied the reflexivity of participants and their interrogations of their positions.

Audio diary is the second method that I used to trace participants’ dynamic lived experiences. Audio diaries involve the audio recording of participants’ stories, responses and reflections over a period (Buchanan, 1991). Crozier and Cassell (2016) discuss the more convenient and easy nature of the audio recording for participants in their research compared to written diaries which are more troublesome for those who are less confident about their writing skills. Also, Crozier and Cassell (2016) argue that audio is potentially more accessible in capturing the cognitive processing involved in making sense of personal experiences, especially stressful experiences. The fluidity in speech enables an immediacy of response to minimise cognitive processing before recording the reflections in comparison to other methods such as written diaries which may rely on retrospective accounts (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Similarly, Hislop et al. (2005) note that the value of audio diaries is conceptually designed to record events as close as possible to when they occur to minimize recall and memory distortions and gather useful information on the time sequence.

Both Dangeni's et al. (2021) and Monrouxe (2009) mention the richness and diversity of audio recordings and the high completion and participant retention rates during their data collection. This is because of the intimate relationship between researchers and participants that can be developed via the frequent contact, and the convenience, accessibility, and flexibility of the recording process. Indeed, in my study, because of the frequent contacts between myself and my participants and the convenience and accessibility of the recording process, nearly all the participants completed whole data collection process. The only exceptions were a few participants, who did not send audio diaries for one or two months because they were either too busy with their studies, particularly in June and July when they were about to submit their dissertations, or because they felt they had no noteworthy experiences during that time. Because of the flexibility of the audio diaries, participants were welcome to send any missing stories to me in the next month or whenever they wanted to. The participant-friendly audio diaries method enables and encourages participants to record and reflect on their day-to-day experiences, feelings and thoughts effectively with the help of digital technologies and provides them great control over recordings of experiences (Dangeni et al., 2021).

However, in conducting the audio diary method, there were a few concerns that I encountered. First, the extent to which participants should be given guidelines: guidelines can provide participants the general instructions of how to organize their recordings. However, I found this may constrain their reflections and lead to a focus on the 'right' or 'wrong' answers, leading in turn to the rehearsal or pre-planning of their recordings (I found some participates recalled their messages in our chat box), thus losing the immediacy of the audio recordings. Second, whilst collecting hundreds of diary entries generated rich and diverse data, the data analysis process, especially the data transcription, was overwhelming and messy when I tried to acquire an in-depth understanding of the topics.

In sum, in my project, my participants as international students spent a huge amount of time not only adapting into the local community, but also dealing with large amounts of studying. Therefore, asking for written diaries in the research project would increase the pressure they felt in relation to managing

time and discourage them from participating in or continuing with the project. Thus, with the help of audio recording facilities, such as mobile phone software and chat apps (WeChat), the audio diary method was practically more convenient and handier for students to take part in the project. Furthermore, audio diaries helped to facilitate participants' meaningful reflections and perceptions on their experiences of educational mobility and transition to the UK, learning and engagement in the UK higher education context. Also,

There were two stages in my data collection process:

Stage 1: In-depth Interviews

The first stage consisted of a semi-structured interview with 25 participants collected over one month in March 2022. The purpose of this interview was to ask participants to talk about their experience and transnational stories starting from their first preparations in China to the time of interview in the UK, looking back retrospectively. By listening to participants' experiences in this period, I was able to obtain an overall picture of their transitions, motivations, newcomers' difficulties and challenges, and how they had been dealing with their adaptation during the first 6-months studying period. The interview lasted around one hour and took place online with participants in London, or with participants in Glasgow in my office or online depending on participants' preferences. This interview allowed me to build rapport with them, ask for feedback on the interview process and encourage them to construct the interview questions with me.

Stage 2: Audio diary method + Online Interview

Participants' audio diaries were collected monthly, from April to July. Participants were advised to use the WeChat App or telephone recording App to record their experiences and thoughts and send the recordings to me via WeChat App or email at the end of each month. Each month's recordings lasted an average of about 10 minutes, ranging from about 3 to 20 minutes. Apart from certain participants expressing enthusiasm for participating in this thesis study, and some potentially facing challenges in articulating their experiences through audio, there were few differences in the length of recordings between female

and male participants. Also, participants were provided with guidelines to help them navigate and organize their perspectives and reflections (see table 4-2). After collecting four months of audio diaries, I held a short interview session with participants in August to ask their reflections on their whole overseas journey and discuss some my interpretations of their previous sharing. This interview was conducted online and lasted around 20 minutes. Because after submitting their dissertations, most of the participants had left the UK either back to China or other countries, the online interview would be more ideal and convenient to both the participants and the researcher.

1, Talk about the social and academic activities inside or outside university you've joined, what factors may help you join or prevent you from joining. 2, Any changes through engaging in the learning and social activities. 3, Any challenges you encountered or improvements you saw yourself. 4, Do you ever feel that you are treated differently based on your ethnicity, family background or gender when you attend in courses, academic and social activities? If you did feel, can you tell me your experience? 5, Any support you receive for your plans (from university, families, friends, government, etc) 6, Anything happened to you that has an impact on your studying, career plan or your overseas experiences. Please feel free to share other experiences which relevant to your transition and mobility experiences. **There is no right or wrong answer.**

Table 4-2 Audio-diary suggestions

4.4 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one way that researchers can convince themselves and readers that their research findings are important (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refine the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability (that is based on a positivist research perspective). Based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, I utilised the member-checking method (Creswell & Miller, 2000) during data analysis. After each stage of data collection, transcriptions (in both Chinese and English), collected via interview or audio diary, were provided to participants to enable them to check whether my interpretations of our conversations were consistent with their views, and to identify any misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Participants were also asked to send back their comments and feedback to me and helped with the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data.

As Foucauldian discourse analysis was used for the data analysis, the intertextuality needs to be concerned to establish rigour as discourses can be expressed through a wide range of sources (Waitt, 2005). In my thesis, a range of academic articles which focus on international students' experiences, transitions and mobilities were reviewed to provide me with a general understanding of this field. Then I drew on documents, government reports, websites, and books to investigate the conditions of a particular discursive formation such a discourse of neoliberalism and postcolonialism in a certain historical period and context. As I need to 'unpack' the effects of discourses on individuals' thinking and acting, semi-structured interviews and audio diaries were adopted to provide qualitatively rich materials. As the research proceeded, new sources continued to be added in the data collection and analysis processes to provide different perspectives and insights.

Additionally, Fetterman (1989, p. 46) contends that "working with people day in and day out for long periods of time is what gives ethnographic research its validity and vitality". While this project is not ethnographic research, the longitudinal design in this research enabled me to have enough time (one year) to gather different sources of evidence and solidify them over time. Furthermore, during this period, I kept building rapport with participants. Participants occasionally sought my guidance regarding their assessments, occupation suggestions, or relevant social and cultural activities I could offer to

them via WeChat. One female participant from London asked me to assist her in delivering her diploma to China after she returned home. I felt happy when participants regarded me like one of their friends, and it made them feel more comfortable when they shared their personal lives with me (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that an auditing approach can help to establish the dependability of the research. I have kept an audit trail of completed records for all phases of the research process, including problem formulation, methods of participant selection, fieldwork notes, audio diary entries, interview transcripts, data interpretations, data analysis decisions, etc. Then my two supervisors acted as the auditors, during the process of my research and at the end, to examine research procedures and findings. In this way, the narrative account became more credible.

Finally, I conducted a peer review process. A peer review or debriefing is a review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the relevant research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A peer reviewer will provide comments and suggestions on the research topics, methods, and interpretations, challenge the researcher's positionality and assumptions and push the researcher to the next step methodologically (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this research process, I have not only shared my work and thoughts with my supervisors but also with my fellow colleagues in my office. Additionally, I actively participated in a few conferences where I presented aspects of my thesis -literature review, methodology, and data analysis. Throughout these conferences, peers and specialists gave me helpful advice. For instance, when I struggled to identify criteria by which to categorise participants' social class background, one professor in a conference suggested to me publications pertinent to the development and discussion of Chinese social classes. This truly helped me organise my thoughts.

4.5 Ethics

This project has been approved by the 'Ethics Committee for the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow'. Before I formally collected data, I personally delivered the consent form (see appendix 1.4) and the Plain Language

Statement to participants in Glasgow and emailed them to participants in London. I made care to specifically underline how lengthy the data collection process was and that they had complete freedom to withdraw at any point, without having to provide a justification. Also, I emphasised that while participants may use the WeChat App to record their thoughts and experiences, participants were informed that WeChat would only be used for recording and as a transfer tool for the data collection, but not for storing. Once all diary recordings are received, all audio files on the WeChat app were deleted after securely transferring them to the university-protected OneDrive Cloud storage area.

Some participants felt overwhelmed and uneasy since the interview involved talking about some emotionally charged topics, including talking about unfulfilled experiences and/or a sense of exclusion. In this instance, I made care to reassure them and check they were happy to continue. I glossed over the question that had caused discomfort and launched into a topic that was more enjoyable. One female participant, however, struggled to balance her identities as a student, wife, and possible mother. She did her entire master's degree online while living in China because she was concerned that Covid-19 would harm her uterus and she was getting ready to become pregnant. Based on what she shared throughout the year, she felt stressed and worried about her studies because she had few opportunities to interact with her classmates and teachers. She also regretted not travelling to the UK physically. She once mentioned a desire to extend her master's study and asked for my opinion. Since she was already seemingly displaying some symptoms of depression, I gently suggested her to seek out some professional help first (she went to the doctor following our conversation). I also provided some help with academic writing skills according to her course assessment feedback. As soon as I investigated how to extend master's studies, I also gave her the suggestion. Fortunately, she completed her degree on schedule, and this helped me better comprehend the difficulties and emotional hardships faced by international students.

4.6 Reflection on my own position in the research process

As I mentioned in the 'Methods' section, the interviewing process is a collaboration of participants and researcher to construct meanings together. During communication with my participants, I found it was hard to not be affected by some sensitive topics when they shared their economic, social and educational struggles and pain. As a Chinese international student, I shared some commonalities with my participants. On the one hand, I felt insincere and indifferent if I pretended to be neutral to the experiences that they felt could have some resonance with me. In this case, it would be counterproductive to build a rapport with participants if I was just being a 'researcher' and recorded what they said. Thus, sometimes, I would like to share some of my own experiences to make participants more comfortable or provide frank answers to queries. For instance, when some of the female participants talked about how their parents wanted them to work close by so that they could be the 'good daughter' to take care of them, I encountered a parallel situation and shared with them my experiences as a daughter.

However, it is noted that poststructuralism rejects the idea of fixed and essential identities, and that even though my participant and I may share some common social positions, this does not mean we had the same experiences and possessed inherently shared knowledge. In essence, despite shared social identities, it is imperative to acknowledge that my personal experiences and perspectives remain distinct and cannot serve as a direct reflection of the experiences and thoughts of the participants under study. On the other hand, I needed to be aware of the consequence of disclosing any of my own thoughts and identity claims as it could privilege my understanding and perspective over my participants. This could affect how the conversation developed since my self-perception would shape how I viewed the issue (Winstead, 2009). As a result, I found it challenging to change from the traditional idea of the 'neutral' objective researcher to a form of being a researcher that takes part in some reciprocal sharing of experiences to enhance rapport. Despite its flaws, it demonstrated how identity formation is a complex process that can never be entirely captured (Brown & England, 2005).

In addition, while I I treated my participants as co-workers with a shared power to understand and interpret the meanings of the world, they clearly still saw me as the ‘researcher’. Thus, I had to remain conscious of what poststructural theorists argue that researchers are, by definition, intrusive in the lives and activities of the communities they study (Winstead, 2009*)*. Also, the method of interviewing may serve to reinforce the power relations between participants and myself. This might direct participants to adopt situated identities or offer responses they believed would make a good impression on me. Also, even though I applied poststructuralist theory, I discovered that I frequently took on the position of ‘truth seeker’, trying to understand the rationales behind participants' reflections and actions with a "positivist insistence upon research neutrality and objectivity" (Lather, 1992, p. 92). Consequently, continual reflexivity is essential regarding not only academic connections but also my personal social, political, and economic relationships with research participants, as emphasized by Ackerly and True (2008). Recognition of the significance of diverse perspectives further underscores the nuanced approach required in the research endeavour.

4.7 Data analysis

A combination of thematic analysis (TA) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) was adopted to analyse data in this study. Thematic analysis ‘is a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data’ (Clarke & Braun, 2017). It provides accessible and systematic procedures for extracting codes and themes from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Through its theoretical and epistemological flexibility, thematic analysis can arguably be modified for the needs of numerous investigations, offering a rich and detailed but complex explanation of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). TA can be used to find patterns in data that relate to participants' lived experience, attitudes and perspectives, behaviour, and practices in order to seek to comprehend what participants think, feel, and do; TA can also be employed within a ‘critical’ framework, to interrogate patterns within personal or social interpretation of a subject, and to consider the implications of these (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Additionally, both realist/essentialist and constructionist paradigms allow for thematic analysis, albeit the results and emphasis may vary depending on which one is used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, since TA

does not require further theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches, it is more accessible for a researcher like me who is early in their research career (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

However, thematic analysis is argued to simply focus on cataloguing and observation of patterns and miss the critical dimensions of ‘meaning’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At first, I had not considered using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). With a deeper analysis of the data, I discovered that participants' perceptions of their experiences and the construction of 'meaning' were connected to the power relations occurring in higher education, and how one version of knowledge was perceived as the 'truth' while excluding other versions. FDA takes power into consideration during data analysis and allows for considering power as circuitous with multiple parties and relations, rather than being possessed by certain people, groups, or organisations (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). Adopting FDA analysis allows to me to look for differences and inconsistencies in the data instead of mainly seeking for similarities (Kaufmann, 2011). Also, it helps to interrogate “social legitimacy” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), by identifying the misrecognitions and aspects of social inequality in higher education and contradictory social positions of participants within the establishment and structure of social conditions.

Foucault’s genealogical analytical method was mainly used in the data analysis process. The main objective of Foucault's genealogical analysis is to identify and follow discourses over time, examine the internal structure of discourses and knowledge in terms of the processes of power relations (‘power/knowledge’) and the effects these processes have on specific people or societies (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). In his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault focused on the ways in which power operates and described the ‘history of the present’. This encompassed an examination not only of how truth is shaped but also the conditions under which specific utterances, statements, propositions, and a particular knowledge framework gain acceptance as truth, transcending a mere analysis of truth itself. According to Waitt (2005), the process of truth-making elucidated by Foucault is inherently discursive, intricately interwoven with power relations, wherein individuals actively engage in the construction of their subjectivity. Therefore. it is important to bring an "analytic gaze to the

condition under which we, as individuals, exist and what causes us to exist in the way that we do" (Mills, 2003, p. 25).

However, there are some tensions in using TA and a poststructuralist perspective. Poststructuralists assert that there is no single truth and no ultimate reality, but open to multiple interpretations (Agger, 1991). Within the realm of text analysis, poststructuralism accentuates the dynamic interaction between a reader and a text, underscoring the significance of context. This perspective posits that a text is not a passive entity but rather an active agent in the ongoing process of meaning creation (Han, 2013). By such, the use of TA may imply that I am looking for the 'truth' of data, which is not my intention. However, while TA can sometimes seem overly rigid, it helps me find certain thematic patterns which are useful for further analysis.

I tried to balance the deductive drive of the theoretical and methodological design with an inductive approach of data analysis. The process of inductive analysis helped to identify as many relevant aspects as possible and recognize certain codes that I had not anticipated, while the deductive approach provided more detailed analysis of some aspects of data including further examination of discourses and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are three main stages of the whole data analysis process.

First stage: this stage is a mainly data-driven process. I began immersing myself in the data by reading the transcripts of all the interviews and audio diary entries repeatedly to find interesting meanings and patterns based on the main research question. While I have focused on the 'transitions' of participants in the UK context, the standard transition framework is likely to position transition as a normative and linear process from an initial stage of struggling to the endpoint of settling into the local community (Quan et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2018). However, a poststructural understanding challenges linear and uni-directional transitional experiences and refutes the unitary interpretation of participants' experiences. Thus, although I had the interview questions to guide participants' focus on selected aspects of their experiences - for example, I asked participants about their lives in their department/university - I have also given participants spaces to tell their stories and give meanings to their lives which they thought were important to them, as well as giving them agency to

include their own identity perceptions in terms of gender, sexuality and class. By such, when I first analysed the data, I found participants described their experiences and transitions from various angles such as a range of factors influencing their transitions in the UK and their educational and personal growth during studying the UK. Thus, I decided to use an inductive approach to organize this seemingly messy and illogical data. Nvivo (version 12 plus) was used to help to generate initial codes, see figure 4-1:

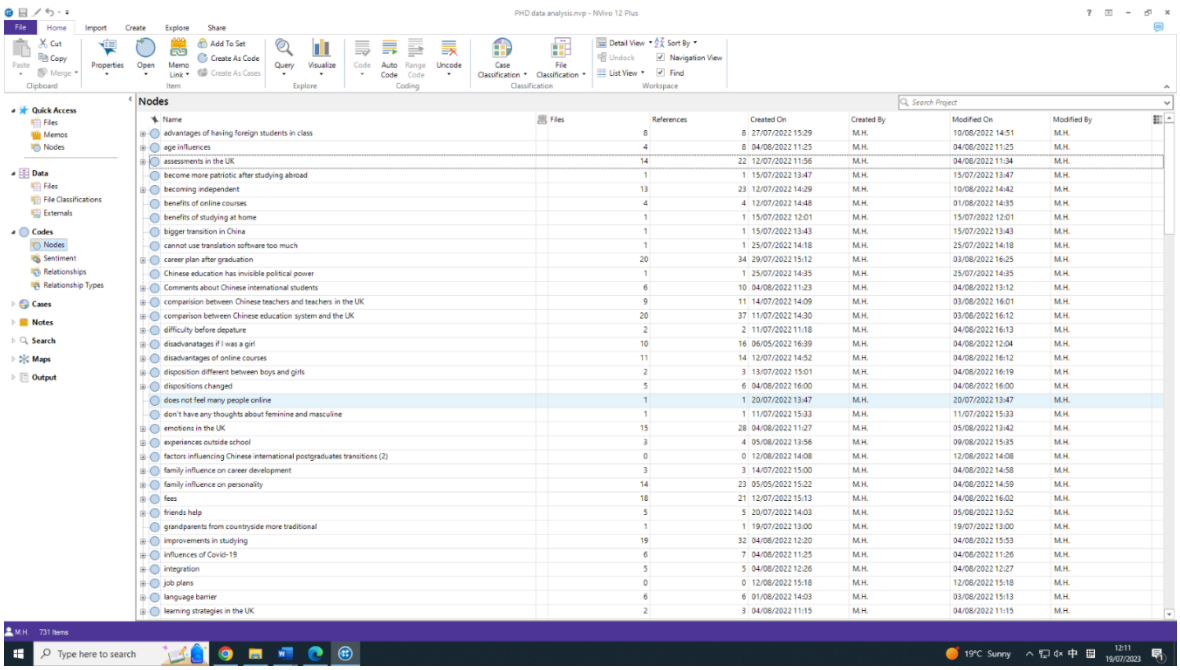
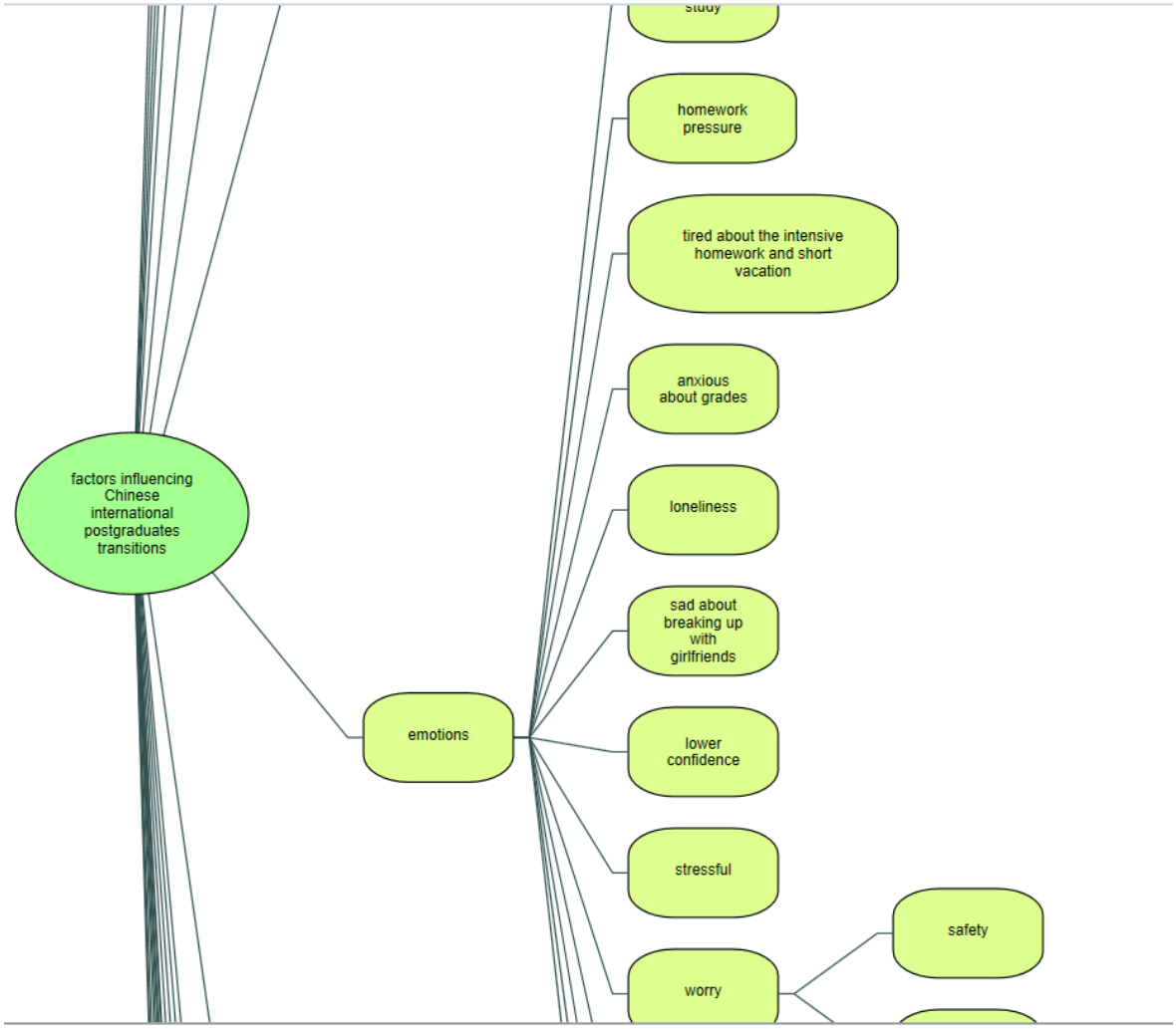


Figure 4-1

In this stage, I generated 731 codes due to the large amount of data, which helped me to have general ideas about what was going on in the data. When coding, I was able to spot key passages in the text and mark them with labels to index them in relation to a theme or issue (King, 2004). In this stage, I used the technique of thematic networks to identify three broad sections which include relevant codes in each section (see figure 4-2). First, factors influencing Chinese international postgraduates' transitions in the UK including previous intercultural experiences, language skills and motivations for studying abroad; UK educational culture such as curriculum, teaching and learning style, assignments, class proportion, grading system, activities and academic goals, language challenges and appropriate type of assistance from university; intercultural communication experiences including social and cultural experiences in the UK, social support

networks and friendship patterns; background factors including age, family background, gender; social and institutional factors including Covid-10 influences, marketization of international education and university locations; emotional experiences such as stress, shame and happiness~~,~~ Second, participants' perceptions of their growth including being/becoming independent, improvement in studying, changes they perceived in terms of personality and ways of thinking and behaving. Third, career plans after graduation.


study
homework pressure
tired about the intensive homework and short vacation
anxious about grades
loneliness
sad about breaking up with girlfriends
lower confidence
stressful
worry
safety
factors influencing Chinese international postgraduates transitions
emotions

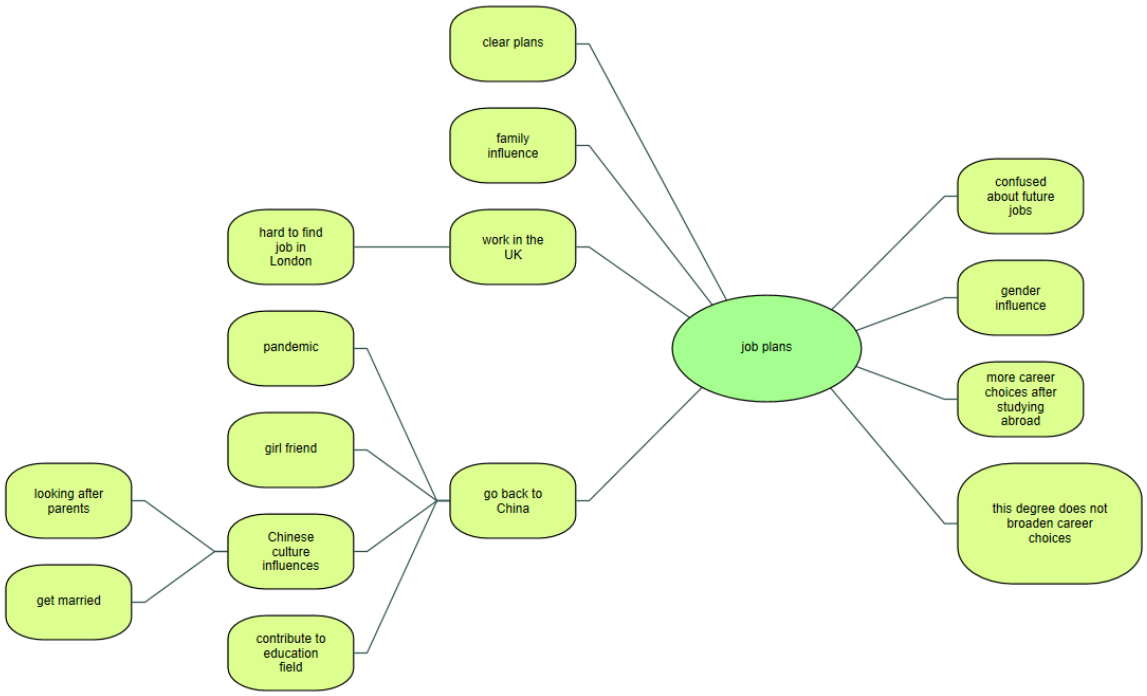


Figure 4-2

While this stage of coding helped me to identify interesting aspects in the data that formed the basis of themes across the data set, the themes were too big to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 2002). After a few meetings with my supervisors throughout the coding process, they helped me to re-concentrate on the research design that I used (longitudinal study) and asked me to think what kind of transitions that I wanted to highlight in my study. These meetings were documented to provide an audit trail and keep track of my evolving ideas about what the data means and how it relates to other data (Nowell et al., 2017). Then, I decided to change angles to track into participants' transitions based on the timeline they shared with me. This was one of advantages of using thematic analysis - sections of texts can be coded in as many different themes as they fit, and data can be examined from different angles (Nowell et al., 2017). This also echoes poststructuralism's emphasis on fluidity of meaning, that meanings are not fixed but are context-dependent and subject to change.

In stage 2, I mainly used inductive approaches to analyse data. As I used the longitudinal method to document participant experiences and transitions over the course of a year, I made documents outlining each participant's transitional timeline. Based on the date of the interview and the monthly audio diary entries, I outlined six main types of transitions to capture the dynamics in various time periods. For example, the first type is academic transitions. From each participant's interview data (their general experiences in the first semester from September 2021 to March 2022), audio diaries shared from April 2022 to July 2022, and the brief reflection in August, I extracted data items pertaining to their educational experiences such as the problems they faced in the first semester, their thoughts about the teaching methods and what they had achieved in the second semester. To better present the structure, I made a table to show the timeline that I organised to record the dynamics of each type of transition (please see Appendix 1.2). The other type of transitions including social transitions, cultural transitions, personal improvement, emotional transitions, and the job plan, were also organized in the same structure as academic transitions.

After I organized participants' timelines of their transitions, I started to generate new codes. During the coding process, I found participants expressed a lot of their feelings related to their academic, social, cultural transitions and their personal growth. Their emotions changed in different stages of their studying in the UK. For example, when I analysed participants' transcripts of their academic transitions, their reflections of their academic experiences were full of their sense of feelings, such as the feeling of exclusion and shame.

In a similar vein, when I looked at participants' extracts of their social transitions in the UK, their changing feelings tightly related to the restrictions of Covid-19. For instance, in the first semester, most of them felt socially isolated due to the limitations of Covid-19, whereas in the second semester, they talked more about their social and cultural activities, like travelling and visiting museums in a positive way due to the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions. In this way, I found participants' emotional transitions were closely related to their various transitions in the UK and were the effects of a range of social and cultural factors operating within higher education in the UK. Then, I found I

needed some additional theoretical ‘tools’ to understand the role of emotions in student experiences. Ahmed’s theory of affective economies (2004a) helped to analyse participants’ emotions in the broader social and political context, see Chapter 2 (page 25-27). Next, I used NVivo software to sort and organize data related to emotions and there were 90 codes to be generated, see figure 4-3. These open codes from stage 1 and stage 2 helped me to reflect on the overall patterns of the data, including identifying common themes. I then reviewed the open codes again and developed more focused and meaningful codes by grouping open codes together.

Stage 1 and stage 2 of thematic analysis helped me to find the patterns of participants’ emotional experiences in different transitional stages, and the influence of the intersection of their social class and gender on their experiences. For participants’ emotional experiences in the UK, my analysis led to the development of six themes in the first semester including: feeling confused about academic culture, feeling disappointed, feeling shame in the classroom, feeling excluded in the classroom, feeling pressure about the living expenses in the UK, and feeling lonely. Three themes emerged in the second semester: feeling stressful about the assessment, feeling happy to attend social and cultural events, feeling happy about their improvement. As for the influence of intersectionality of social class and gender on participants’ transitions in the UK, two themes were identified from the data: first, the interplay of social class and gender on Chinese postgraduates studying in terms of the subject choices of their overseas education, their expectations and performances in the classroom, and educational mobility; second, social class influences in relation to female participants’ cultural consumption in the UK. However, these themes lacked critical engagement by not recognising how participants’ construction of their experiences and subjectivities had been shaped by power relations, where universities, governments and families played a pivotal role in affecting their experiences. Also, thematic analysis did not point out how participants are expected to behave in certain ways, undergirded by common sense ‘truth’ emerging through discursive practices. Thus, the themes generated from stage 1 and stage 2 were further examined by Foucauldian discourse analysis, leading to stage 3.

Stage 3 of data analysis mainly adopted a deductive approach using different Foucauldian tools to identify discourses that may play a role in constructing participants' experiences in the UK. Texts within each theme were re-examined and reviewed to identify discursive constructions, and the discursive constructions were further analysed in order to identify the discourses that informed these constructions. As I have discussed in the theoretical framework chapter (page 28-29), discourse is defined as a regulated practice, implying the unwritten rules, regulations, cultural and value structures that produce utterances and statements (Foucault, 1972). Therefore, according to Foucault (1981), discourse is a complex set of ideas, and practices which try to keep statements and utterances of these ideas in circulation or try to seclude them from others and 'exclude' those statements from circulation (Mills, 2003). Based on Foucault's definition of discourse, I further distinguished Foucauldian discourses by using supplementary Foucauldian concepts, including power/knowledge, subjectification, resistance, common truth, and normalisation.

Through an iterative process of discussion, consultation, and engagement with different Foucauldian lens, I identified several dominant discourses underpinning participants' transitions and experiences in the UK. These discourses will be further discussed when they arise within the various themes emerged from the stage1 and stage2, including discourse of neoliberalism, individualism, postcolonialism, and resistance and gendered discourse. Thus, Foucauldian discourse analysis helped to reflect on how patterns within the themes reproduced and/or disrupted the dominant discourses.

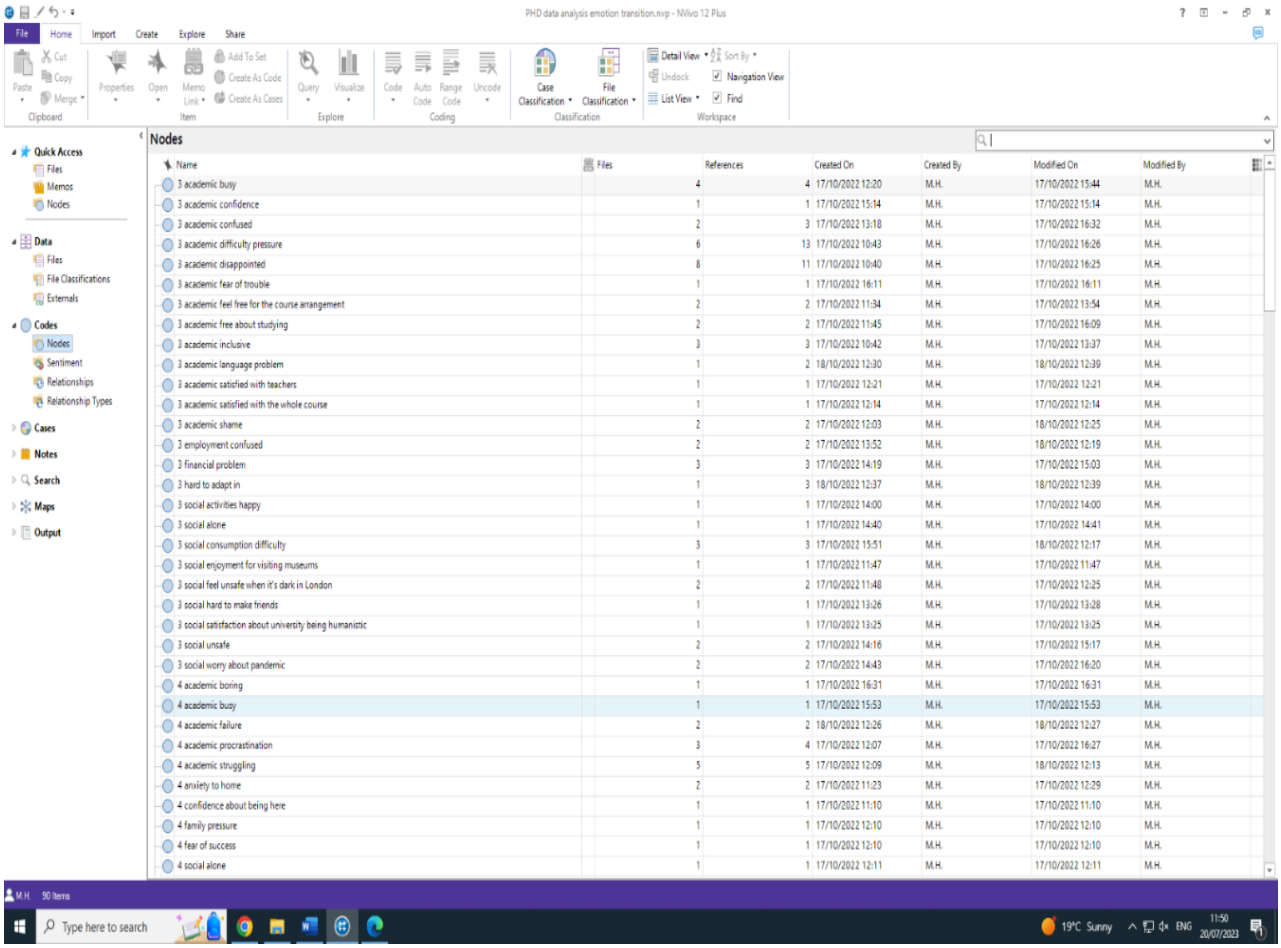


Figure 4-3

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the research paradigm which I used interpretivist approach to explore Chinese international students' experiences in the UK and how the process of identity constructions is shaped by various discourse. Then, I explained how I used the longitudinal design to track participants' dynamic experiences in the UK and the strategies to recruit participants. From a poststructural perspective, the utilization of qualitative methods, notably interviews and audio diaries, is scrutinized. These methods are elucidated not merely as data collection tools but as means to establish and nurture 'rapport' and reciprocal relationships with the participants. Particular attention is given to the researcher's positionality, recognizing its potential to influence data interpretation. Furthermore, the chapter outlined the intricacies of data analysis, employing a combination of thematic analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis, emphasizing its suitability for uncovering both overarching

themes and the subtle power dynamics embedded within the discursive construction of identities. This comprehensive methodological discussion serves to provide a robust foundation for the interpretation of research findings.

Chapter 5 Emotional experiences among Chinese international postgraduates in the UK

5.1 Introduction

The concept of ‘cross-cultural experience’ stresses boundary crossing, difference, and diversity while the concept of ‘intercultural experience’ ‘encompasses both domestic and international contexts and implies cultures interacting’ (Landreman, 2003). When Chinese international students enter the UK, they may experience both cross- and inter-cultural experiences simultaneously. This can be seen as one of the most difficult transitions in international students’ lives (Prazeres, 2017). As I discussed in the literature review, they are exposed to very different cultural surroundings and encounter new people, and their attempts to address cultural differences may result in conflicts and discomfort (Prazeres, 2017).

Emotional transitions constitute merely one facet of participants' experiences in the UK, but I have used this aspect of experience in this chapter as a focus point that also weaves in a broader analysis of their experiences. Subsequent chapters also delve more widely into other aspects of my participants’ experiences.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a longitudinal method was employed in this study to trace the transitions of a group of Chinese international postgraduate students in the UK. The research data delineate the emotional complexities encountered by participants as they navigate their journeys into a new sociocultural context and an unfamiliar academic context. This chapter describes two transitional stages and the emotional experiences that go along with them for participants, thereby illustrating their academic, social, and cultural transitions and subsequent personal development. In addressing the research sub-question regarding the influence of institutional cultures and broader social contexts on the experiences and transitions of Chinese international students in the UK, Ahmed's Affective Economies framework is utilized to scrutinize emotions within the broader sociocultural context. Additionally, the incorporation of Foucault's discourse, power, and governmentality concepts, along with Bourdieu's theories of capital and habitus, serves to elucidate the intricate dynamics of mis/recognition politics shaping the

emotional experiences for international students, thereby highlighting the intersection of affective experiences with broader power dynamics and inequalities. Moreover, the theoretical lens of postcolonialism is also invoked to elucidate wider operations of social power that have an impact on Chinese international students' feelings. Drawing upon the aforementioned theoretical framework delineating the social and political dimensions of emotions, I attempt to illuminate in this chapter the multifaceted affective influences of various discourses on participants' experiences and transitions.

The first stage of the study allowed me to explore participants' emotional experiences from home to the UK. The common emotions shown by the participants in the first semester were negative and included the words anxiety, nervousness, loneliness, stress, worry, shame, and fear. The experiences resulted in negative emotions which were related to three principal areas: academic challenges, social interaction, and financial pressure. It might be predictable that participants would experience such emotions as they were familiarising themselves with an unfamiliar environment and adapting to the local community under the restrictions of Covid-19 in the first semester. During the transition from the first semester to the second semester, a diverse array of emotional experiences emerged, encompassing terms such as bewilderment, stress, happiness, excitement, and fulfilment. The main themes that emerged from the second stage were: academic pressure, social and cultural interaction, and personal growth. Participants in this stage continued to discuss the pressures they were under to complete their exams and dissertations, but they were also able to find time to engage in social and cultural activities like travel, festivals, and sports, which allowed them to feel joy and enthusiasm.

5.2 Emotional experiences in first stage

5.2.1 Feeling confused about UK academic culture

Academic culture has been defined as ways of thinking and acting that are dominant in higher education (Read et al., 2003). However, as I discussed in the Chapter 2, cultures are neither neutral nor universal (Burke, 2013). For students who have accepted such education before, this knowledge and these practices come to be seen as the 'natural' way of thinking and acting. However, for

students who lack prior knowledge of UK academic culture - in this instance international students, but this can also relate to home students from working-class backgrounds - they may feel alien and unsettling.

In my study, most of the participants expressed feelings of confusion and stress in relation to the UK higher education system, and often contrasted these experiences with previous educational experiences in China. For example, participants had inquiries regarding the value of self-preparedness prior to exams and the role of self-learners in UK academic culture. Wang Xiaoming and Wang Qiang stated:

> After the class, the teacher told the students to start designing their own questions. How many students can know how to design them? Many people are in a state of confusion. And I have read the book for a long time before I can understand how to design a set of questions systematically (Wang Xiaoming, M, 23, middle-class).

> Sometimes what the teacher taught is different from what we want to learn, and the materials provided by the teacher may not help us pass the test. The difficulty of the exam is deeper, but the materials provided by the teacher will not be very guiding, more of a self-study process (Wang Qiang, M, 22, middle-class).

The above statements pointed to the culture shock of navigating an academic culture that expects students to be independent learners. Self-study is an important aspect of academic culture in the UK. In the UK's education system, students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and engage in self-directed study outside of the classroom (Marilyn & Lytleb, 2004). This means that students are expected to read, research, and engage with the material on their own time, and spend a significant amount of time outside of class preparing for exams. However, in China, students will be provided specific assistance, such as pointing out the focus for the examination, and teachers are expected to guide students to pass their examinations. As a result, it will be challenging for those who have never learned to think and act like self-learners to embrace UK academic culture.

Furthermore, international students are also challenged by the academic writing in the UK. The issue of engaging in academic writing seems to be many tensions, with comments like ‘When *I drafted the essay for the first time, I had no clue at*

all (Liu Mei, F, aged 31-35, working-class) and *'I felt that I was serious about writing essays, but the result was not good enough. Then my self-confidence was a little bit hit, still did not get used to the learning environment' (Li Lu, F, aged 25-30, middle-class),* and *'I was not very comfortable with academic writing (Luo Xue, F, aged 25-30, lower middle-class).* The common assessment for undergraduates in Chinese universities was the examination and many participants had very little experience of writing an essay, which is often required in UK universities. In addition, in the UK context, teachers always require students to engage with criticality in written assessment and the appropriate referencing style, which can be new concepts for Chinese international students (Evans et al., 2018). Critical writing requires students to evaluate the quality, validity and reliability of the evidence presented in the literature and develop their own arguments (Evans et al., 2018). Students need to reach a conclusion along with consideration of limitations and implications of the writing. In addition, the quality of evidence, acknowledgment of relevant literatures and objectivity of interpretation are argued to be consistent with particular ways of thinking and being which focus on the Western rationalist tradition (Lillis et al., 2018). Spivak (1999) highlights that this tendency to prioritize an Anglocentric writing style often reinforces colonial power structures by centring Western knowledge, resulting in the marginalization or exclusion of other cultural or non-Western knowledge.

The dominant of Western knowledge can let participants doubt their own talents and place the poor academic outcome solely on their own 'failings', which reflects the impact of neoliberalist discourse, that circulates the idea that citizens are responsible for their own success and failure (Webb, 2011). For instance, Liu Mei (F, aged 31-35), who is from a working-class family, voiced her frustration about earning a low essay grade, believing it was her fault for not having had UK education prior to adopting the UK way of thinking. Similarly, Huang Xiao (M, aged 25-30, upper middle-class) claimed that as academic writing was an enormous pressure for him, he chose to reduce his anticipation that earning the diploma would be a success, in order for him to reduce anxiety and safeguard his mental health. Huang Xiao's self-exclusion, of stopping working hard to achieve a high academic performance, echoes the study of Raphael Reed et al. (2007). The experiences of highly negative learning experiences including

shame and humiliation often contribute to the formation of a specific habitus, for example, what called ‘disengaged learning identities’, which represent in part self-protection strategies. These ‘disengaged learning identities’ tend to limit students’ educational expectations and even their life chances, which is an act of restriction that forms the basis of symbolic violence (Connolly & Neill, 2001).

Additionally, I have discussed in the Chapter 2 under the ‘Ahmed’s social and embodied emotions’ section, that the circulation of emotions is crucial for the appropriateness of action and the acceptance of participation. The prioritization of an Anglo-centric writing style and the portrayal of White students as the 'traditional' students within the UK higher education context serve to disqualify the identity of international students as legitimate participants, impeding their ability to actively invest in academic pursuits. This exclusionary dynamic is further compounded by the emotional practices of stress and pressure, constraining the agency and educational engagement of international students within this framework.

While traditional background students can often take academic norms as granted, like a ‘fish in water’” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 166), students from working-class backgrounds and/or minority ethnic groups are more likely to be intensely conscious of their differences in this type of academic milieu. Despite Huang Xiao's upper-middle-class background in China, neither he nor Liu Mei had prior exposure to the UK educational environment, and their shared feelings of bewilderment and alienation exacerbate their sense of ‘otherness’, precipitating self-doubt in their academic pursuits. This supports Zhang and Xu’s (2020) study (discussed in the Chapter 3 on page 65), which found that Chinese students worried that their middle-class advantages in China may be overridden by their identities as racial migrants.

In the university, habitus illuminates the ways that the unequal power of different groups become naturalized so that the negative experience and unsatisfied academic performance of international students become perceived as their own responsibilities. Sammel (2009) further elucidates that a pervasive and normalized belief involves the assumption that assimilation into the dominant discourse, and practices of the dominant culture represents the

remedy for a student's perceived deficiency (Gale & Densmore, 2000). This perspective posits that, irrespective of race, class, or gender, all students should adhere to the same fundamental educational model, inherently framed within dominant White discourse. Consequently, individuals deemed as 'deficient others' may consistently require additional assistance to fulfil predetermined educational requirements, highlighting the crucial role of power relations in understanding the nuanced negative emotions experienced by some international students in university settings.

5.2.2 Feeling disappointed

Seth (2002) notes that the global push for international students to pursue Western higher education fosters a prevailing norm that obtaining Western qualifications and proficiency in the English language is the most effective means to accrue cultural, social, and financial capital for achieving upward mobility. This Western education 'fever' has resulted in families willing to invest a large amount of money: tuition fees for international students vary from £11,400 - £38,000 in the UK which is much higher than that of local students. This big difference in tuition fees is a major source of inequality felt by many participants in my study, with comments including: '*I don't understand why there is such a big price difference between international students and local students' (Liu Qing, F, 28, upper middle-class)* and '*The tuition fee for international students is more than three times higher than the tuition fee for local students. I do not think it is fair, but there is no way*' (*Yang Yang, M, aged 25-30, lower middle-class*). As I have discussed in Chapter 2, in the postcolonial theory section (pages 43), the concept of empire is elucidated as the imposition of characteristics that designate something as imperial. These attributes encompass elements like inequitable treatment, hierarchical relations, and disparate forms of rule (Stoler & McGranahan, 2007). The predominant positions of authority and material wealth held by White people in the economic, political, and cultural systems contribute to the reconfiguration of cultural and economic disparities between developing countries and developed countries (Ansley, 1997), in this case, China and UK as hierarchical structures (although this hierarchical relationship is not fixed and monolithic but fluid and contextual). This hierarchical sense of difference likely informs the substantial

tuition discrepancies observed between local students and international students. This reflects a colonial mode where the Global North benefits from and engages in systematic plundering of the wealth and resources of the Global South (Gordon, 2010, p. 9).

This is also consistent with the report of OECD in 2013, focusing on the 'revenue-generating approach' of the expanding international education under the discourse of neoliberalism. The way that institutions in the global north use students as a revenue stream further illustrates how the unequal nature of the global political economy has influenced discourse on international student mobility (Mulvey, 2021).

However, most of the participants expressed that they were still willing to pay for international education. For example,

> In the Chinese postgraduate entrance examination, it is easy to fail the entrance examination. Thus, Going abroad to spend money to get a master qualification is very efficient (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

> The time in the UK is very tight, and you need to read a lot of literature (1 year of master) to improve your grades, and there is very little time to be lazy. You can also have the collision of thinking with White students and learn from their free thinking (Tu Cheng, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Despite perceiving the tuition system as unfair, I would argue that participants were significantly swayed by the notion of postcolonial supremacy, maintaining the belief that studying in the UK represented a cost-effective choice, given potential future employment rewards and opportunities for upward mobility. This perspective is reinforced by the 'West is best' discourse, particularly influential among employers in China, including elite universities. For example, Altbach (2007) notes that much of the 'non-Western world' has been imposed on the European university model, with non-colonized nations also adopting a Western academic model.

Additionally, most of the participants mentioned that global ranking is the important factor for them to study in their UK universities, with comments like '*the university I study ranks relatively high, so I chose to study here' (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class)* and '*my parents and I all emphasise the*

ranking of universities and I chose this university because it has the highest rankings among the offers I received' (*Zhang Xiaofan, F, aged 20-25, upper-middle-class).* As I discussed in Chapter 2 (page 43-44), universities in the UK are the leading institutions in the world already advantaged by wealth and power accrued during the colonial era (Enslin & Hedge, 2023). Also, Shahjahan and Morgan (2016) point out that through the adoption of a 'coloniality' lens to look through inequalities in the ranking competition, both universities and different countries are inequitably located geopolitically on an uneven playing field. Universities in the UK that employ colonial-era advantages to compete for higher rankings through comparative measures to attack high fee-paying international students risk perpetuating historical advantages and disadvantages.

However, it is important to note that many participants believed their study in the UK was not worth the high tuition fees. Hu Fan (M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class), for instance, felt that he did not learn as much as he had hoped to, and Wang Xiaoming (M, aged 20-25, middle-class) complained about too many students in his major and he doubted that university may lower the admission standard and teachers also narrow down the subject knowledge to look after students who have low English proficiency. Li Lu (F, aged 20-25, middle-class) had the similar opinion, believing that there were not enough classes compared to the quantity given when studying in Chinese postgraduate studies. Also, as Chinese international students' numbers have increased rapidly in recent years, the multicultural environment in some of the UK classrooms has changed. According to some participants, they perceived that there are many Chinese students nearby, and they seldom ever got the chance to interact with non-Chinese students, particularly in schools of education and schools of media. This phenomenon of 'Chinese schools' in UK universities (Yu & Moskal, 2019) makes some participants question the value of the overseas degree and the purpose of setting this subject, as reflected by Huang Xiao:

> The large number of Chinese people make me wonder what the purpose of this degree is. Is it to make up for the economy affected by the epidemic? The students in my major are basically Chinese, is there such a factor in increasing the country's income for setting up this major? (Huang Xiao, M, aged 25-30, upper middle-class).

These comments demonstrated that some participants were in agreement with critiques of international education as exploitative. The receiving country gets economic and social benefits from the international education business using source countries' human and economic capital for their own national wealth (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). Furthermore, participants' enthusiasm for employment in the UK that some of participants expressed their aspiration of working or building business in the UK after graduation, coupled with their exceptional academic achievements, may enhance the host nation's labour pool. This, in turn, enables the host nation to allocate resources for cultivating highly skilled human capital. As a result, international students may experience a sense of disappointment due to the business model of international education.

While some participants considered the high tuition charge and the education they received to be insufficient, they also considered that it was their obligation to make the most of the available resources and to justify the high tuition fee. For example, Liu Fei and Luo Xue talked about that:

> The value of a one-year master's degree in the UK is a bit depreciated in China. So, I do not think it is worth it. But I think it is my responsibility to make the most of the tuition fee (Liu Fei, F, aged 25-30, upper middle-class).

> I don't feel like I'm learning a lot. But if I worked hard and learned to self-study at the first place, the outcome would be better (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> The knowledge gained is not particularly high, because we need to self-study. The teacher doesn't teach much knowledge, but if you make good use of the resources (library, courses), you can still learn something (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

The prevalent discourse of neoliberalism, which holds people accountable for 'life-long productivity' can be used to explain participants' perceptions of their own self-responsibility for their study results. However, for Chinese international postgraduates who only have one year to study in the UK, this ability of self-learning may not be developed even after they have completed their courses. This would have a significant impact on their academic success and may generate feelings of regret for not understanding the value of self-study sooner, as Liu Fei commented:

> In the first semester, my overall learning state was not very good. I still expected teachers to give me specific guidance on my examination. However, when I saw the unsatisfactory grades of last semester, I felt that I had to learn how to study by myself and I hope I have more time to learn this skill (Liu Fei, F, aged 25-30, upper middle-class).

Therefore, if the figure of the international student continues to be depicted as a metaphor of absence (lacking knowledge and failing in the classroom) and source of local revenue, and they are not provided the educational environment or resources they think they have paid for, they may feel potentially exploited or duped, as my participant Huang Xiao felt (see above). In this situation, the international education field has become a site to produce or reproduce the colonial imperial power disparity between the global north and south. Thus, participants' feeling of disappointment and regret about their study in the UK cannot be just seen as an individualised psychological feeling but a social feeling that is impacted by the social dynamics (Ahmed, 2004), including the power inequality between global north and south.

5.2.3 Feeling shame in the classroom

Chinese international students are frequently characterised as quiet learners in the classroom as they are perceived as hardly taking the initiative to ask or answer any question, and participate in discussions actively (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). There is already much research conducted on Chinese international students' silent classroom behaviour in the UK, and the common argument to explain this is the cultural and academic difference between the UK and Chinese education environment, which I have discussed in the Chapter 3 (page 61-65) (Wang et al., 2017; Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022; Wang & Moskal 2019). Chinese international students may feel shocked when lecturers in the UK try to encourage a highly participative environment, while they grew up in a classroom environment where they were expected to be quiet (signifying obedience). As illustrated by Li Lu:

> After a shock, I realized that when I was studying in the domestic classroom, it seemed that I just listened to the teacher's lecture and didn't think about content (Li Lu, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

However, in addition to the cultural and intellectual shock that contributed to the behaviour of silence among Chinese international students, some female

participants in my study also experienced discomfort and even shame when they tended to ask questions in class, with comments like: '*I don't dare to say my own problem. I will feel that I may disturb other people's lectures, and I am afraid that my own problems will be very stupid' (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class),* and '*there are still some questions I dare not to ask and just listen carefully' (Li Lu, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).* This type of silence refers to the unintentional silence which means unwilling silence, that is frequently accompanied by frustration and shame (Kurzon, 1997). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the social and cultural factors of the unintentional silence of Chinese international students in relation to a larger context and the power relations that operate within this larger context.

Spaces like UK classrooms are orientated 'around' Whiteness, given its invisible and unmarked nature, whereas international students are exposed and visible when they 'walk into a sea of Whiteness' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157), making them feel shame and discomfort in speaking in this space. Here, Ahmed (2007) argues that 'a sea of Whiteness' or 'White space' is about the repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others. This is not just about how many bodies are 'in' the classroom, because, as I have mentioned, there is a lack of diversity in my participants' classrooms which are usually full of Chinese international students. Rather, what is repeated is a style of embodiment and a way of inhabiting space (Ahmed, 2007).

Therefore, Chinese international students from non-Western backgrounds may face challenges to 'fit' into this exclusive culture and to be the 'best' students, resulting in shame and lack of confidence about their own pedagogical behaviour and thinking. The lived and embodied experiences of symbolic violence, misrecognition and marginalization can emerge through the physical and bodily symptoms, such as feelings of nervousness and anxiety, connected to feeling of shame (Burke, 2017). As a result, the exercise of power within the UK higher education system especially impacts female participants who tend to ask questions in the classroom and perceive themselves as not conforming to the expected norms in formal academic settings. This influence manifests through emotional experiences marked by feelings of shame and a sense of being 'stupid', due to discourses of 'appropriate' gendered ways of being, intersecting

with nationality as I mentioned in Chapter 3 (page 63) that ‘silence and silencing are gendered, raced and classed’ (Rodriguez, 2011, p. 112).

In addition, as argued in the Chapter 2 (page 26-27), the perception of others depends on “histories of reading that come, as it were, ‘before’ an encounter between subject and another takes place” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 31). The colonial history of the UK, coupled with reports of discrimination and racism in the country circulated on social media, as noted by some participants such as a comment ‘*my parents worried about my safety as they saw a few attacks on Asian people in the universities during the pandemic* (Wei Kaifeng, M, aged 20-25, middle-class), can impact the initial interactions between Chinese international students, White students, and White teachers. This influence is notable in the perception of the proximity of White people being construed as 'intimidating' after ‘the moment of contact’, as posted by Xu Yiyang:

> I still remember the first time I went to a lecture and the lecturer is a White man from Glasgow. He talked about the assessment. While I cannot understand his words because of his heavy accent, I was afraid of asking him as he seems very serious (Xu Yiyang, F, aged 25-30, middle-class).

This impression is a sign of the persistence of Whiteness supremacy, making it difficult for international students to voice their thoughts in front of White teachers as well as White students who are in the classroom.

Meanwhile, this misrecognition may cause low self-esteem and self-confidence to Chinese international students and prevent them from pursuing higher academic achievement, as illustrated by one male participant, Wang Qiang:

> The learning mode is very passive and try not to speak in group discussions. Some Chinese students do not want to cause any trouble, just want to get their diploma, that’s enough (Wang Qiang, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Therefore, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter, silence might be mistaken for academic disengagement (Rodriguez, 2011). When discussing students of colour, it is even more crucial to comprehend the complexities of silence. Analysis should be developed to shed light on the subtle ways that misrecognition operate through the practices of emotions. This requires

additional attention to the affective, cultural, and subjective dimensions of pedagogical experiences and meaning making.

Furthermore, a few participants mentioned about the ‘distance’ between teachers and students as Xu Yiyang mentioned above, which echoes the argument of Read et al. (2003). They argue that the disparity in position and (whether real or perceived) knowledge between a student and a lecturer contributes to a sense of ‘distance’. This distinction accentuates students' recognition of their subordinate positions within the hierarchical structure of the academy (Read et al., 2003). According to Bourdieu (1988), lecturers have higher ‘authority’ to speak in the ‘field’ of academia than students because of the cultural and symbolic capital they have built through their academic credentials and their job status inside the institution. This may lead to the lack of confidence for students to express their ideas in the classrooms. Lacking familiarity with academic culture, and the effect of the unequal power relation between a lecturer and a student can work to increase international students’ feelings of fear of speaking in the classroom.

In addition, participants talked about the domination of Western students in the classroom. For example, Yang Yang noted as follows:

> During the discussion, when there are many Western students, they will talk and discuss more and proactively interact with teachers while Chinese students often keep quiet and listen to their talking (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class)

Diangelo (2006) argues that domination in the classroom is not only about who speaks and how often, but also who possesses the power to control the teaching rhythm and direct the course of discussion. Western students can meet their learning goals by active engagement with teachers and peer discussion, and teachers are able to affirm their participative behaviour and ideas while potentially failing to hear Chinese students' views. This may increase a feeling of entitlement on the part of Western students while legitimising the perception that learning from Chinese students is not significant. This can also make Chinese students worry about the ‘value’ of their contribution to the classroom and make them feel ashamed to participate. The Western dominance may cause

the resources in the classroom to slant towards Western students without being noticed by the students or teachers.

Western students' active participation and domination in class can be also seen as a form of comfort for them. Institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies but not others: in UK higher education, White bodies congregate and stick together to create the boundaries of these spaces (Ahmed, 2007). Therefore, this institutional space allows White students to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. They feel comfortable with the classroom space as it allows them to fit it, since "the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 158).

However, a few participants expressed appreciation for teachers who were being supportive to their perspectives and respectful to their ideas. Students in China are expected to be obedient to teachers' opinions and teachers are always regarded as the superior authority in school (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). Even parents will advise their children to pay attention to instructors because they are competent and must be persuasive in their arguments (Li Lu, F, aged 20-25, middle-class). Hence, Chinese overseas students are likely to feel more welcomed when they are encouraged to explore and openly express their viewpoints and thoughts, particularly when lecturers demonstrate an interest in their ideas. For example, a few participants described their positive experiences with teachers in classroom and illustrated how teachers show their respects to students' opinions.

> In the UK, I feel that the teacher listens to me and then I can express my opinion. No matter whether my idea is right or wrong, the teacher is willing to let me express it, which is more inclusive (Li Lu, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

> In the UK, teachers will encourage us to express different answers and ideas. No matter what we say, the teacher will say yes (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

Overall, as I have discussed, Foucault sees subjectivities as constructed within discourse, produced in specific historical and institutional sites, emerged within the play of power and are the product of marking exclusion and difference (Hall, 2000). The power dynamics I have discussed in this section impact greatly on

international students' subjectivities (or 'sense of self'). Chinese international students might find it problematic to reconcile academic success in British universities and their learning identities in home countries' universities. Thus, while the identity of 'quiet and obedient learner' is valued in Chinese educational contexts, it is contradicted by the UK dominant discourse of the 'good' student as being participatory and 'rational'. When the elements of White middle-class subjectivity, positioned as the norm, offer minimal respect or reject the academic literacy and values of other countries, this dynamic may contribute to misrecognition and a sense of inferiority in the subjectivity constructions of international students.

5.2.4 Feeling excluded in the classroom

As mentioned in the Chapter 1 (page 5), a critical theoretical perspective argues that, while diversity is a positive phenomenon in the university, it is underpinned by the hierarchical relations of difference and the construction of subjectivities within unequal power relations (Ahmed, 2013). For instance, one participant described how Chinese students were gradually marginalised because of their silence in class:

> At the beginning of the course, the teacher will encourage us (Chinese students) to speak in the classroom, but none of us did that. Then I found that she stopped encouraging us in the later classes and only talked to local students who were proactive in the classroom. I assumed that she just felt disappointed with us and thought this is our culture (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

As mentioned above, the cultural difference between China and the UK can position Chinese students' silent behaviour in the classroom as different, and teachers may think it is their cultural preference and stop adapting their teaching methods to these students.

Additionally, teachers' particular behaviour may support students' suspicions that they are being treated unfairly and intensify their sense of exclusion. Numerous participants mentioned how teachers' views toward Chinese and Western students vary, with some teachers coming across as very enthusiastic when dealing with local students but having an indifferent attitude toward Chinese individuals. For instance, Xiao Xiao (F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class) observed

that when White students asked questions in class, White lecturers would spend a lot of time responding or commenting on their views, whereas lecturers' responses to Chinese students' queries could only be one or two sentences. Based on the lecturers' behaviour, some participants believed that lecturers were more inclined to interact with White students because they must have superior ideas and ways of thinking than their own. This also demonstrates how those White students, who are the ‘standard’ students in UK higher education, were given power in certain ways. In a diverse classroom where White students and lecturers predominate, the utilization of racial privilege and structural advantages becomes evident in framing and internalizing international students as 'others’, aligning with Frankenberg's (2004) assertion that Whiteness constitutes a 'location' of structural advantage and race privilege. Thus, the dominance of Western knowledge and thinking can still emerge in UK classrooms, but it can be hidden by the positive marketing phrase of ‘diversity’.

Participants also mentioned that Chinese students found it difficult to establish acquaintances with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds because of the exclusion of local students:

> I think some local students in my elective courses are a little bit repulsive of Chinese people. I don’t know if it’s because there are too many Chinese in this major. When grouping, they will deliberately avoid the Chinese, and they will form groups themselves (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

> During the class, the classmates sit together by themselves, and they don’t sit with the Chinese very much (Zi Shan, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

Even though some participants mentioned that they made a concerted effort to interact socially with non-Chinese students and had no language barriers, they nevertheless found it difficult to join their groups since local students preferred socialising with other people from similar cultural backgrounds, as Xu Yiyang posted:

> In the first semester, I tried to integrate into different cultural backgrounds. For example, I would join the desks of European and Middle Eastern classmates, but after a semester of running-in, I found that I could not Blending in with another table. In the second semester, the group members have never been changed (Xu Yiyang, F, aged 25-30, lower middle-class).

The ‘stickiness’ of local students can highlight the ‘difference’ of Chinese international students, making them feel excluded and undesired in the classroom, echoes the ‘racialised experiences of international students’ that have discussed in Chapter 3 (page 65-68).

In Chapter 2 (page 26-27), I have discussed affective economies, where “emotions work to align individuals with communities through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119). The presence of Chinese international students may be imagined as a threat to the local students, for example in relation to securing jobs (see Literature Review chapter pages 65-66). Drawing on participants’ statements, they implied that local students’ ‘hate’ negativity was not expressed towards a particular Chinese student or a certain behaviour of Chinese students, but a tendency to ‘avoid the Chinese’ as a community. Chinese international students came to embody the threat of loss: lost jobs, accommodation, and other resources. Thus, ‘hate’ was not located in one subject, but worked to create the outline of different subjects to align them together as a common threat. This emotion of ‘hate’ also ends with the reconstitution of bodily space (Ahmed, 2004, p. 32) that Chinese international students work in one group, and local students in another group. Thus, White students’ emotional reactions to Chinese international students align them with the bodily form of the community. This supports Ahmed's (2004) argument that emotions substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination, where the body of a particular other comes to symbolize the broader concept of the 'other.'

Additionally, Wang He talked about how teachers like to group students of the same language together:

> Our project teams are assigned by teachers. Teachers tend to assign students of the same language together, so I have 5 or 6 classes that have not been exposed to non-Chinese classmates and are basically a group of Chinese (Wang He, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Chinese students' intercultural experiences are typically undermined by the treatment received from their peers and teachers, with the Chinese group frequently experiencing exclusion from interactions with other student groups. Thus, Western students and teachers consciously or unconsciously construct unspoken and unmarked classroom dynamics, norms and behavioural patterns

that may exclude international students. This will place Chinese international students in 'sealed boxes' and deprive them of opportunities to communicate interculturally. Consequently, students consistently position themselves in relation to the deficiency model associated with Chinese international students, fuelled by reluctance from other student groups to collaborate, nurturing misrecognition and shame, hidden within the discourse of diversity.

However, Wang He further expressed that he preferred to work with Chinese students because he felt comfortable and a sense of belonging with them, as shown below:

> I think we (Chinese students) have same pattern of thinking. We can understand each other well. Sometimes, I cannot catch up local students' thinking mode and I will feel worried (Wang He, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Wang He's subjectivity was maintained through working with his Chinese peers, which reflected a 'different ethical motivation' that was not simply about 'self-mastery' (Foucault, 1997). Rather, participants invested in an 'ethical' self that was aligned with and supportive of their peers. In response to 'White' dominance within the UK classroom, Wang He developed a 'sense of collective identity or sense of peoplehood' (Fordham & Ogbu 1986, p. 181) through recourse to the idea that Chinese students have same thinking pattern.

5.2.5 Perceptions of living expenses in the UK

A source of dismay for most of participants in my study was the high expense of living prices in the UK. Despite having previously stated that they can accept high tuition fees because studying in the UK gave them the chance to receive an elite education and improve their ability to obtain respectable jobs, they were shocked to confront the high local prices of necessities including clothes and food, as Luo Xue put:

> I can buy clothes on Taobao (Chinese App), choose the style and size, and the items are cost-effective. For example, when buying shoes, I think it may sell for about 10 pounds around 90 yuan in China, but it will sell 20 or 30 pounds around 300 yuan here. I feel that these small items are very expensive in the UK and have little value (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

Luo Xue's statement highlighted the precarious financial situation of some Chinese international students in the UK, which has received little attention in current literature. In my study, as I aimed to recruit participants from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds, their financial precarity was more prominent due to their generally more modest family income. Thus, participants' feelings of insecurity echo Ahmed's (2004a) argument that emotions are not just individual/personal/psychological but relate to the social circumstances of individuals and their experiences of social inequalities/injustices. In addition, as Luo Xue showed, the price impression from China persisted when they moved to the UK, and they frequently contrasted the price differences between China and the UK. They mentally exchanged pounds for RMB when they made purchases and believed that items in the UK were significantly more expensive than those in China. Thus, in the first semester, participants were cautious in their consumption in the UK, including dining out and attending cultural activities, as they were processing the price shock between China (a developing country) and the UK (a developed country). Participants mentioned that they preferred to stay at home and cook by themselves, rather than socialising with others and going out for activities, with comments including "*I cooked by myself, and it is quite expensive to eat out*" (*Xu Yiyang, F, aged 25-30, middle-class)* and "*I don't like online shopping here, it is not worthwhile, and I don't need new clothes. I spent most of my money on food" (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).*

Furthermore, according to the Office for National Statistics, the average price of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 2.9% between December 2020 and December 2021, caused by supply chain disruptions because of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. This exacerbates financial challenges for international students, underscoring the imperative to embed emotion analysis within a broader social and structural context. For example, Yang Yang expressed his concerns about basic consumption:

> There was a very big price increase in the UK. I really realized that all the takeaways, whether it was Chinese food or Western food, all increased by 1 or 2 pounds. Then I went to the supermarket to buy things, and the usual amount was about the same, but about 10 pounds more expensive. The pressure of rising prices is a bit big, because I am not [from] a particularly

> wealthy family, and I usually must be careful with my budget (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

Meanwhile, due to the pandemic, some participants stated that it was difficult for them to find part-time work as many businesses have had to close or reduce their operations due to the pandemic. Therefore, they cannot rely on part-time jobs to supplement their income and cover their living expenses, which increased their financial stress and uncertainty. While in general, Chinese international students are more likely to come from middle to upper-class families in China, even with this financial background, many students may still face financial challenges due to the high cost of tuition, accommodation, and living expenses in the UK, especially during the pandemic time.

5.2.6 Feeling lonely

Moving to a new environment, international students often experience impaired social networks due to the reduction in contact with their previous social support system, leading to feelings of loss and loneliness (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). For international students, making friends especially local students can be an important way to be 'recognized' as 'insiders' and feel included in the higher education. However, it can be difficult for them to make friends with local students, as Xiao Xiao shared in the following statement:

> My friend enjoys mingling. She will make every effort to strike up a conversation with non-Chinese students in class. But locals tend to stick together despite her best efforts to blend in. She speaks English extremely well, so there are no barriers to communicating. Perhaps the locals don't cherish our friendship too highly (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

According to Reay et al. (2011) and Crozier et al. (2016), the White working-class and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students are often denigrated as offering little of importance, or value in terms of capital accumulation, which can possibly be seen from Xiao Xiao's statement. The heritage of White supremacy, which includes White privilege, has given local students symbolic power in higher education. Local students seem to have the 'power' to choose who can be friends and international students, as the other, wait to be chosen as their friends. The discourse of White supremacy may also diminish the value of international students and lead local students to believe that friendships are

not mutually beneficial. Since international students are treated less favourably than domestic students, they may eventually quit attempting to establish friends with domestic students, as my participant Xu Yiyang (page 129) mentioned above.

While the language problems and unfamiliar social norms in the host country can hugely impact international students' communication skills and the self-confidence to make friends, these dynamics, societal relationships, and power relations make social mixing even more difficult, resulting in feelings of exclusion and loneliness.

Furthermore, developing new systems of social support can be extremely difficult for international students due to the restrictions put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic. A few participants mentioned how Covid-19 had reduced their prospects for friendship and socialisation:

> I really want to make friends and fall in love, but there is no feasible way. Because of the epidemic, the opportunities for socializing have been reduced. Many events have also been cancelled. Even if it is held, I don't dare to go (Wei Kaifeng, M, aged 20-25, middle-class).

> I don't have many dinners with my classmates, because I want to go home early, so I stay in my bedroom and cook by myself. Because I am afraid of infection, it is more threatening to take off my mask when I eat out (Dong Hun, men, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Also, online courses may make it more challenging for international students to connect with peers, converse face-to-face, and expand their social network, as shown by following statement:

> Maybe I like to take offline classes as I can get to know more classmates. For students who like to socialize, we cannot meet many classmates in online classes (Tu Cheng, men, aged 20-25, men, upper middle-class).

Most of the participants in my study reflected that they hardly engaged in any extracurricular activities in the first semester, which hugely deprived their opportunities of interacting with host nationals. Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) observe that international students who engage in on- or off-campus activities find it easier to garner social support, enhance language proficiency, and cultivate social competence. In my study, on the one hand, participants did not

have much opportunity to pursue their interests in social and cultural activities in the first semester due to the demanding academic workload and restrictions of Covid-19; on the other hand, the majority of participants revealed that, as newly arrived students, they were unsure of where to find information on extracurricular activities and were unsure of which clubs they were eligible to join.

In addition to friends and peers who make up the social support system in a foreign country, university staff, tutors, and lecturers also play an important role in international students' sociocultural and emotional adjustment. However, due to the power distance between students and teachers in Chinese schools, students rarely contact with teachers outside of the classroom since they see teachers as superior figures and representatives of power. But in the UK, teachers and students have a slightly more equal status. In the first semester, international students still exhibit a cultural orientation to the Chinese context and fear of social interaction with their teachers. For example, participants mentioned about the embarrassment of asking teachers to socialise:

> Sometimes I am embarrassed to ask the teachers if they want a drink or dinner. It is difficult. I think British teachers don't like to discuss learning-related matters with their classmates outside of class (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> Being comfortable with my classmates and worrying about saying the wrong thing with my teacher. I'm also afraid that I will be embarrassed if I don't understand the teacher's meaning or what the teacher is talking about (Zi Shan, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

By such, the loneliness of international students is not just their individual psychological 'problem', but also links to the wider social context in terms of the influence of Whiteness supremacy, Covid-19 restrictions, and multiple cultural differences.

5.3 Second stage

Even though participants continued to experience pressure and stress related to their academic studies in the second semester, their feelings improved over the first semester and became more varied and positive due to the growing

opportunities of attending social and cultural events, and their own personal developments.

5.3.1 Feelings generated by the assessment process

In the second semester, while most of the participants still showed signs of high levels of stress related to their studies, the audio diaries shared by the participants revealed that their main academic stresses were related to their grades, strict deadlines, and academic procrastination. Participants started receiving their course grades from the previous semester at the start of the second semester, and some of them displayed disappointment and dissatisfaction with the outcomes. The following two situations were typical: Liu Mei (F, aged 30-35, working-class) expected a better grade than a 'C' from teacher's feedback and she felt frustrated that her hard work was not rewarded and reflected in the grates. Similarly, Xiao Xiao (F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class) expressed her feeling of failure and explained that it was possible she picked the wrong topic for her assessment, leading to an unsatisfactory grade of 'E'.

While these two participants showed their frustration and shame due to their grades, they both placed the responsibility on their own academic shortcomings, including the incorrect topic that Xiao Xiao believed she had selected and Liu Mei's erroneous assumptions about what the teachers expected. International students blame their failures on their own incapacity and deficiencies as a result of the hegemonic individualism discourse in higher education in the UK, resulting in low self-esteem and self-confidence in oneself. For example, Liu Mei also believed that her lack of prior Western education and lack of knowledge of the UK-based ways of thinking needed to achieve high levels of grades were her own fault. Liu Mei's thought was also a reflection of the colonial heritage and Whiteness supremacy within UK academic culture. As I discussed in Chapter 2 (page 45-46), Whiteness has been normalised in Western education, so that people naturally regard Western thinking as the norms and reference points and the appropriate ways of thinking about themselves and others. Also, students' values are continuously measured based on these norms which implicitly derive from dominant practices and ways of thinking in 'White' cultures (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Thus, Liu Mei's belief of Western knowledge as the key to success

assumed the superior status of Western education which supports Foucault's (1977) claim that power produces knowledge.

Furthermore, the performance indicators provided by the OECD are utilized by universities to formulate their corresponding teaching and grading systems for generating requisite test results to enhance their rankings in diverse league tables. This may contribute to the 'datafication' of students' abilities. This process underscoring a systematic influence on how students' capabilities are quantified and assessed within higher education contexts. In this context, international education has been seen as an economic source to improve the reputation of institutions, helping them compete for funds and ensure the competitiveness of the national economy. However, it may also limit international students' development in the wider context. Using disciplinary techniques including categorisation, examination, ranking, and grading has the effect of making gendered, classed, and racialized subjectivities invisible, due to a perception that all grades are meritocratically and fairly achieved. Nevertheless, these subjectivities are deeply felt through lived, emotional experiences and misrecognition (Burke, 2017). Thus, this sense of failure becomes misrecognized as a classed, gendered, and racialized property of individuals, rather than an institutional or social problem. This problem can be easily turned into a perceived deficiency of self.

After receiving a poor grade, some individuals in my study began to doubt their own talents. For example,

> The grade was very low, which made it difficult for myself to accept this reality, why I wrote so bad. It could also be that I am not doing well. I think academic writing in the UK is very difficult (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

Female participate Liu Mei also expressed a feeling of self-doubt and even believing that she would not be able to complete her studies in time. As a result, she wished to request an extension. Shame and shaming are argued to underlie the lived and embodied overseas experiences of inequality and exclusion, which seem to be veiled by the mainstream discourse of 'inclusion' in higher education that locates the responsibility of overcoming barriers at the individual level (Burke, 2017). The discourse of 'inclusion' implicitly requires that the person

must fit into the dominant framework or be excluded either through self-exclusion as Huang Xiao (M, aged 25-30, upper middle-class) mentioned above (page 116) that he thought getting a diploma was a success for him, or through institutional exclusion. In other words, the discourse of ‘inclusion’ works as a form of symbolic violence to make those who are not familiar with the dominant education system feel excluded and coerces them to transform themselves into ‘standardized’ personhood. For instance, this includes, becoming ‘adaptable’ to the Western academic requirements of being critical and independent, and thus being recognized as a qualified pedagogical participant, regardless of the educational and cultural differences between different countries. Therefore, the discourse of ‘inclusion’ may unconsciously perpetuate the problematic deficit model of Chinese international students described in Chapter 1. Experiences of shame may play out in ways that Chinese international students regard these academic deficiencies as their personal failures. Some believed they were not ‘good’ enough to merit success, nor were they the ‘right’ person to study in the UK. as reflected by Li Lu:

> Even though I put in a lot of effort and learned a lot over the course of a year, I don't seem to have enough professional skills, and I don't know how to describe the professional skills I've acquired in my graduate program when writing my resume and I don’t think I deserve the master's degree (Li Lu, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

The second source of stress was from academic procrastination. Procrastination is the intentional delay in task completion despite awareness of negative consequences, often associated with chronic procrastinators who irrationally postpone tasks and experience anxiety (Ferrari, 2010; Steel, 2007). However, in addition to highlighting students' poor time management skills and their psychological issues, it is critical to consider the sociocultural factors that lead to academic procrastination and consider why students purposefully delay their work. In my study, a few participants expressed their concerns about having a major procrastination problem, but they also implied what the causes might be. For example, a few participants admitted that they were uncertain about the advantages this task can have for their future work and what they can learn from this assessment. Even though they were aware of how important the assessments were and that deadlines were approaching, for example:

> Very serious procrastination, I clearly know in my heart that this paper is very important and needs me to do it, but I just can't get the energy to do it. Because I didn't know what I will take this thing for, so my subconsciousness kept rejecting me to continue this work, Instead, move on to something that I find more meaningful (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-25, working-class).

Given that Liu Mei could not perceive the worth of the paper and did not enjoy the writing process, we can see little intrinsic drive for her to finish, which led to procrastination. In addition, participants' fear of academic failure can lead to their delay in completing assessments, as Huang Xiao put:

> I didn't manage my time well, and I was a little bit resistant to writing papers. Things that I learned from the paper are forgotten quickly after I finished the essay. And I didn't get high grades from last semester. So, I don't see the point why I need to read papers and write paper since I fail anyway (Huang Xiao, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Due to his perceived failure in class during the previous semester, Huang Xiao began to doubt his skills and talent, which negatively impacted his self-assurance about passing tests. Also, Huang Xiao internalised the learning process and results as his own responsibility and blamed himself for forgetting things easily. This led to his resistance to writing and procrastination. Therefore, academic procrastination can be examined from a social-cultural perspective in addition to being seen as a psychological phenomenon.

5.3.2 Feeling happy to attend social and cultural events

For international students, engaging in extracurricular activities can be considered as a valuable opportunity to meet with people from diverse backgrounds and expand their horizons (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). While it is often assumed that international students spend much time involved in academic activities as they regard academic success as one of the top priorities, international students also have non-academic interests, goals and motivations.

In my study, participants had more free time in the second semester as they were more accustomed to their surroundings, including the usage of transportation, and access to diverse information on social and cultural events. Most crucially, their master's courses were about to complete in April. For example, many participants in London discovered certain museums and galleries which were free to visit. They also figured out the admission to many shows

were less expensive than they had anticipated and offered discounts, as illustrated by the quote below:

> I usually watch some exhibitions and musicals. For example, I went to see the musical named ‘see the male and female thieves’ two days ago. All course papers have been basically completed. London is rich in art and cultural resources. The British Museum, many museums are free to enter, and some musicals also have discounts for young people, providing young people with a lot of rich resources that can broaden their horizons. I love this (Mo Li, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

In addition, participants were happy with the physical environment in the UK compared to China after touring the surroundings. Participants were emphatic in their praise of the greenness of the landscape, fresh air, and the lack of pollution and of crowds, as expressed by Huang Zitao:

> Compared with China, the natural scenery in the UK is different. I prefer the environment in the UK. The sky is very blue, the view is very wide, there are no crowds of people and cars, there is less noise and light pollution, there is not a lot of garbage, and it is well protected. incredibly beautiful (Huang Zitao, M, aged 25-30, middle-class).

An aesthetically pleasing environment, defined by Milligan et al. (2004) as a therapeutic landscape, positively influences residents’ physical and emotional well-being with less urban density and stress. Another major source of pleasure comes from attending a variety of cultural events including travelling and participating in local festivals and sports. Participants noted that travelling allowed them to learn more about UK culture and history, grasp the diversity of the UK, and get familiar with regional customs and values. For example, several participants emphasised their gains through travelling:

> This month, I travelled to Europe with my friends, Switzerland, France, Italy, Greece, and Spain. During the tour, we went to many famous scenic spots, took some photos, and enjoyed the food. It was considered to broaden our horizons, and we also learned about some history and culture, such as some famous paintings in the Louvre Museum. In the past, these sights were just heard about or saw some pictures, but they are very meaningful to me after seeing them (Tian Tian, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

> Traveling has given me a better understanding of the UK. This is my first time to visit other cities. I have a better understanding of the diversity of the UK. I used to think that all cities are similar, but I went to In Scotland, the feeling is still quite different. I have a better understanding of the United Kingdom, including Europe, as a whole (Zhang Xiaofan, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

The experience of diverse cultures and languages through traveling and visiting various museums can also help to enhance individuals' competence in the labour market. Moreover, participating in cultural events allowed participants to shatter prejudices about some groups and express their enthusiasm and satisfaction at getting to know people from other backgrounds. For instance, Luo Xue expressed her happiness while interacting with people at social events and local festivals since she could learn from and share in their lives. Some participants also discussed how their perceptions of certain people and places changed as a result of getting to know their culture and people.

> I don't feel any discrimination as I saw on the news such as shouting and yelling at Chinese people. During travelling, we also encounter some local people in England to help us on the road. I don't feel any discrimination, they are all friendly (Tian Tian, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

> I thought Morocco was very unsafe before, but now I don't have that kind of thought at all. I think it's a very good place, and the people are very friendly. If there is a chance, I may go there again (Zi Shan, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

According to what the participants shared, international students who are interested in engaging in various types of activities outside classroom including travelling, participating local festivals and sports, and socializing with friends are more likely to learn local customs and values and become more inclusive to the different culture. Some participants even gained confidence through interacting with other people, as explained by Xiao Xiao that while travelling, she noticed that even those who were not fluent in English spoke it with confidence, so she decided she should adopt this attitude and speak English with confidence.

For international students, staying abroad serves a variety of goals, including acquiring new skills and social and cultural capital. International students can contribute to the cultivation of social skills and networks, enhance cultural understanding, foster inclusivity, and acquire new perspectives on the world through exposure to diverse social and cultural events.

5.3.3 Feeling happy about perceived improvement

Another motive for international students to study abroad is personal growth. Mobility to a new place can bring about a powerful journey involving reflecting and reconstructing one's own values, habits, and assumptions (Prazeres, 2017). And the feeling of discomfort can lead to a critical reflection of these practices and beliefs and realise personal changes (Prazeres, 2017). Participants in my study reflected on their personal growth as a result of leaving a comfortable place:

> In the UK, I need to take care of life and study. Before in China, I only need to take care of study as my parents will look after my life. Learn to live by myself here (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> I think I'm gradually becoming more independent. Studying abroad, I feel that I can go abroad, I can do some things myself, manage my own house, cook, and sweep the floor. I'm getting increasingly accepting of the world and things around me (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

> I remember I just got off the plane and lost all my luggage. But I was calm, went to ask how to get to the city centre, and went to the city centre to buy all the necessities, even to activate the bank card. I didn't feel flustered, sad, didn't call my family, hurry up to buy things, get everything done. This is the moment I feel I have grown. I'm strong enough to deal with a sudden shock from the outside, and I feel like I'm great. This problem-solving ability, I have grown (Wang Qiang, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Stepping outside of their comfort zone encourages international students to discover new aspects of their selves and foster self-development. Participants believed that by relying less on their relatives and friends, they were able to become more independent and gain the problem-solving skills which are promoted under the neoliberalism discourse, as Foucault notes, discourses consistently govern the implementation of ideas into practices. Furthermore, Li's (2010) study finds that time spent in a different culture enables individuals to revise and expand their sense of self and discover emotions that were previously hidden in more familiar contexts. For instance, Xiong Ren (M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class) acknowledged that he grew more sensible after studying overseas, as he started remembering his parents' prior assistance and comprehend their love and concern. In a similar vein, Li Xian (M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class) began to understand the affection from this father, following his father's valiant efforts to purchase a plane ticket to return his son

to China during the Covid-19 period. These two participants can re-evaluate their relationship with their parents and experience the affection that may have been concealed if they were still living at home. Additionally, by studying overseas, participants might change their personalities and add fresh insights to existing traits. For example:

> Personality has changed. In the past, before speaking, I would consider the feelings of the others, but now I will consider my own feelings more (Wang Xiaoming, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> I have a stronger sense of boundaries now, that is, if someone wants to talk about and express some of their negative emotions when I am not in a good mood, I may choose to keep a certain distance. Everyone is focused on their own business here (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

The UK's more individualist culture has had an impact on participants' increased focus on their own sentiments as they chose personalities that they believed to be suitable or desirable for them. This example also demonstrates that the bodily desire (for maintaining emotional distance with others, like the locals do) is reasoned as an appropriate emotional action to be ascribed to the non-Western body, which is the form of self-knowledge that is allied to appropriateness of actions (Ahmed, 2004).

Additionally, many female participants found that their beliefs about their bodies and health had evolved. They were now more concerned with what is known as ‘natural’ beauty, which refers to not worrying about one's appearance or figure as long as one's body is in good condition. A few female participants reported feeling more at ease and confident with their appearance.

> Before I came to the UK, I just wanted to lose weight and lose weight, but after I came to London, I dressed in a different way. In China, I felt that my legs were thick. I didn’t even wear shorts, and I thought I would not show my legs. But after coming here, I bought a lot of shorts, and I think other girls with thicker legs than me are wearing them. The reason I want to stay in London is also this very free and confident feeling. Even if someone tells me I'm beautiful, I'm skinny, I still can't be confident, I really see them on the street, they're confident, they don't care about other people's eyes, it makes me confident (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

> Before I came to UK, I’m a little worried about my figure because in China, girls are expected to be very slim. However, in the UK, although I’m a little

> fat, my friends think I have a beautiful figure. They always told me my health is the most important (Luo Xue, women, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

The more inclusive environment of body acceptance in the UK, as seen in the excerpts, increased participants' self-assurance. Thus, international students have the chance to actively re-evaluate themselves and resistant to the 'feminine' discourse in China as they enter a new culture, which encourages self-exploration and the discovery of a more ethical relationship to their self and to others (Foucault, 1997). In other words, the different social perceptions of beauty/ 'acceptableness' of body shapes facilitate female participants to find a more comfortable way of being themselves. This, in turn, engenders positive emotions among them, emphasizing the relational and social nature of emotions.

In addition to the pleasure of personal development, participants also felt happy about their improvement in relation to study. For example, participants spoke of improving their language abilities in terms of their ability to comprehend lectures and communicate in English, with comments as 'the *English level is better than before, there is no problem with simple conversations, and there is no obstacle to living here', 'English must be improved, and can do presentation now'*, and *'because I listen more, I will not be afraid of communicating with foreigners'*. Simultaneously, some participants perceived an enhancement in their capacity for independent study and an increased confidence in academic writing as they became more acquainted with UK academic standards, shown as:

> The ability of self-learning has been improved. The British teaching model, the teacher assigns a task, but will not help you plan, I will make up for it myself. I will find out the knowledge I need by myself, and then I will complete my own projects, to cultivate my ability to think independently and do things independently (Xiong ren, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

> I felt that after writing the first two papers, I felt more familiar with the whole process and method of the layout requirements, how to write the paper, the general framework, and how to find materials (Zhang Xiaofan, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

From the above statements, we can see that studying abroad has impacts on individuals' construction of their personal, social, and cultural identities. They are not just passively adjusting to unfamiliar social and educational

environments, but actively utilise mobility to invest in discourses such as neoliberalism and institutional practices, which echoes Foucault's (1997) description of the 'practices of self'.

5.4 Conclusion

Through analysing data from the one-year longitudinal study, this chapter has explored Chinese international postgraduates' emotional aspects of transitions in the UK. The initial stage of student's transition was not that traditionally depicted, of excitement and a positive frame of mind (Oberg, 1960; Wu & Hammond, 2011), as I discussed in Chapter 3 (page 59-60). It was found that stress was intense at the beginning of the stay, a stage marked by the experience of academic confusion, social and cultural difference, a hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism and individualism in UK higher education, the dominance of Western knowledge and the impact of the restrictions due to Covid-19. Some feelings of excitement were experienced in relation to the teaching methods of the UK teachers, but these were far outweighed by the more negative feelings of stress, disappointment, confusion, and shame. While international students were familiarising themselves with the new educational and cultural norms from the first semester to the second semester, their negative feelings of shame and stress did not vanish because of their 'adaptation' to the academic environment. Instead, the sources of these feelings transformed into the worry of low grades, the shame of a 'deficient' self, academic 'failure' and academic procrastination. In the second semester, the negative feelings less centred around academic integration, but with the rigorous testing and preparation for the final dissertations, the academic problems grew, especially for international students who had trouble "adapting" to the new academic system.

Thus, for one-year master students, the lowest point occurred not just between three and six months of entry as described by the previous authors as the 'crises or 'disintegration' stage (Oberg, 1960) (page 59-60), but it follows with international students to the next stages. As a result, transition is not the linear and finite process which can be summarized by a single 'adjustment' model, rather it is non-linear, fluid, and contextual. The social and institutional obstacles can emerge at different stages, requiring different responses from

international students. Thus, it is important to develop a more nuanced understanding of international students' transitions and not over generalize their experiences.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I have emphasised the importance of reconceptualising emotions as relational and related to the wider social context. Drawing on the work of Ahmed (2004a), it is important not to see emotions as things or possessions that a person 'has', but rather to find out the social, cultural, and relational aspects of emotions. In other words, Chinese international students' emotions cannot be seen as their personal possessions and solely individualised, psychological problems. Instead, emotions can be traced back to the social and cultural differences, structures, and institutional cultures in UK higher education. In this chapter, I have argued that we should pay specific attention to analyse how social and embodied forms of emotion work to exclude and control in higher education, shaped by government policies of restrictions due to covid-19, as well as broader hegemonic discourses of individualism, neoliberalism and postcolonialism.

Chapter 6 The interplay of social class and gender on Chinese international student's experiences and cultural consumptions in the UK

6.1 Introduction

Economic reform in China has led to the increased economic prosperity for middle-class and upper middle-class families, and as their incomes rise, they can allocate more financial resources to their children's education (Yao, 2004). Moreover, China's one-child policy (implemented between 1979 and 2015) made it possible for parents to invest even greater in one child (Fong, 2004), including funding for studying abroad. Middle-class families in China are argued to utilise the social and economic capital at their disposal to enhance their children's cultural capital to preserve their social status (Tsang, 2013). In response to heightened competition driven by economic reform and globalization, international education emerges as a beacon of hope for middle-class families in China. It promises to empower students with essential skills such as critical thinking, intercultural awareness, self-management, and communication competence, deemed vital for success in professional fields amidst evolving job markets (Blackmore et al., 2017), as I discussed in Chapter 3 (page 55-56).

According to Guo (2010), most Chinese students studying abroad are children from middle- and upper-class families since the costs associated with studying abroad can be prohibitive for working-class families. However, Fong (2011) also notes that receiving economic support from families does not necessarily mean that Chinese international students belong to a high social class. Increasing numbers of low-income families have come to see international mobility as a means of achieving upward social mobility, like I mentioned in the Chapter 3 (page 70-71) (e.g. Waters, 2012). Indeed, some families in my study were found to borrow money or sell their apartments to pay for their children's studies in the UK. Furthermore, National Statistics indicated a disproportionate representation of female Chinese students studying abroad, a trend attributed to the impact of the one-child policy in China (Ye & Wu, 2011) (see page 13). While this policy reduces disparities between boys and girls in educational resources and opportunities, it has also been observed that gender plays a significant role

in influencing the educational mobility and transitions of these students (Cao, 2016).

As I have discussed in the Theoretical chapter (page 22-23), from a poststructural perspective, there is a concern that an emphasis on individual potential and freedom might lead to a neglect or downplaying of the significant role that social structures play in shaping and constraining individuals' actions and choices (Mirza, 2009). Individuals' identities are developed through multiple and contradictory social positions and are deeply tied into historical inequalities (Burke, 2013). From this perspective, we need to pay close attention to the insidious ways in which various types of identities substantially influence individuals' decisions, desires, aspirations and experiences in the higher education. In this chapter, I will draw on Bourdieu's thinking tools of capital and habitus, Foucault's concepts of discourse and power, and the theory of intersectionality to look specifically at the interplay of social class and gender in Chinese international students' experiences in the UK and how power and inequality operate.

In this chapter, two themes were identified from the data: first, the interplay of social class and gender on Chinese students' study in terms of the subject choices of their overseas education, their expectations and performances in the classroom, and educational mobility; second, the social class influences on female participants' cultural consumption in the UK.

6.2 The interplay of social class and gender on Chinese students' study

6.2.1 Sub-theme one: family influence and gendered choices of subjects

The process of choosing which subject to study was found to be closely influenced by my participants' family background as well as participants' gender. Most female participants whose parents have a low educational level are more likely to choose majors by themselves. For example, Luo Xue's father's educational level is junior high, and her mother graduated from primary school. She reflected on her experience about choosing a master's subject:

> It's my own idea. I prefer to be in the education industry. My university major is English, and I also want to teach English in the future. Tesol just happens to be my specialty. The UK context can help me engage in an English-speaking environment. My parents would say that being a teacher is suitable for me, but it's more of my opinion (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

Another example from the group is Xiao Wang (a female participant from a working-class background), Her parents' educational levels are both junior high, and she said her parents did not advise her on what major to pursue since she preferred to make her own decisions, and they would respect and support her choices.

Even though Luo Xue and Xiao Wang both picked majors in education, their motivations seemed to differ. Xiao Wang expressed that her choice of studying an education-related major and being a teacher were due to her own interest, not just because teaching is a stable job like Luo Xue expressed. Also, Xiao Wang had clear plans for career development:

> I can go to an international school (only foreign students), as an administrator or as a primary school teacher after I get overseas qualification. After working for a few years, I want to take the foreign teacher qualification certificate, go to Europe or teach in a country in the Middle East which a friend recommended me (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

However, Luo Xue appeared to view an education major as an appropriately 'feminine' subject option. She believed that schools are nice and suited for women and that teachers can take summer and winter breaks, giving her time to care for her family while advancing her career. In a similar vein, another female participant named Xiao Xiao, who is from an upper middle-class family, discussed that even though engineering was her undergraduate major, she and her parents felt she should switch to a subject that would be more 'suitable' for women and less dominated by men when she studied abroad. As a result, she chose educational related subjects which may help her to secure a stable job after graduation. Luo Xue and Xiao Xiao are both from middle-class families which can provide them with sufficient financial support. Thus, they did not have much economic pressure and attached more significance to the comfortableness of the job and to the balance between future career and family.

However, Xiao Wang's parents are workers and they borrowed money from others to pay for Xiao Wang's tuition fee. Xiao Wang seemed not concern herself too much with gender-related issues when choosing her subject for overseas study because her primary concern was to find a decent and high-salary job and repay the borrowed money. Participants from middle-class households, exemplified by individuals like Xiao Xiao and Luo Xue, exhibited more explicitly gender-based perceptions regarding their future goals. In contrast, those from working-class backgrounds, typified by Xiao Wang, tended to prioritize the practicality of their chosen majors, supporting the findings of Zhang and Tang (2021) that underscore the interplay between subject choices, gender, and social class. Also, Luo Xue talked about her caring and gentle personality influencing her choice of being a teacher. This is a socially gendered characteristic as it is somewhat easier for girls/women to adopt such a demeanour because it 'fits' with dominant discourse of femininity (e.g. Cuddy et al., 2008)

While both Xiao Wang and Luo Xue's pursuit of future studies are chosen out of interest (either '*I also want to teach English in the future*' (Luo Xue) or '*being a teacher is my interest*' (Xiao Wang), their motivations for studying abroad are motivated by different considerations. Xiao Wang mentioned that she wished to work in Europe, which may imply her potential meaning that the overseas qualification could open a pathway for her to work or live in a country which may have better social welfare and higher living standards than China. Since Luo Xue comes from a middle-class family and her parents can provide her financial support, she mentioned little about the instrumentalist motivations of studying abroad but paid more attention to the intangible benefits. Luo Xue's wish of being a teacher, which can accommodate women's caregiving needs, reflects current gendered discourses in the Chinese labour market.

After the dismantling of the state's collectivist care settings in China such as the childcare and health care centre (Ji et al., 2017), the burden of childcare has fallen disproportionately to women. Women are frequently framed as 'unreliable' due to employers' awareness of women's additional care responsibilities within the family (Ji et al., 2017). Also, women's risk of losing jobs is greater in profit-motivated private sectors because companies are far less

inclined than state-owned enterprises to meet female employees' caregiving needs (Cook & Dong, 2011). Therefore, in consideration of the gender bias in the labour market, women prefer to work in public sectors such as public schools or government. However, because Xiao Wang's priority is linked to financial advantage, she still tended to be motivated by instrumentalist reasons for her educational mobility, such as better job opportunities and migration to a wealthier country. This orientation suggests a potential resistance on Xiao Wang's part to succumbing to the gendered discourse prevalent in China, which often imposes challenges on females aspiring to compete in the labour market. Her focus on economic outcomes and debt repayment may reflect a conscious decision to navigate beyond traditional gender roles and expectations, positioning herself as an individual motivated primarily by financial success rather than conforming to prevailing societal gender norms.

Due to Xiao Wang's defined employment goals after graduation and her quest of upward social mobility, her attitudes towards the subjects she chose could have an impact on her transitions in the first semester. She saw excellent academic accomplishment as the main job for her overseas studying. She described how she worked hard and used coping mechanisms to overcome obstacles in her study:

> I made some friends who focus on studying and go to library often, and I can study with them which helped me to work hard (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

> I will ask my teacher for advice on how to study properly. I will learn how to read effectively, take notes during lectures, and divide the time into several learning components (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

High level of academic performance can be seen as a dimension of professional habitus which can demonstrate students' subject knowledge and high standards of learning outcomes in the professional field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Students with merit or distinction qualifications will be positioned distinctively for some large multinational companies (Blackmore et al., 2017). Thus, overseas qualifications with a prominent level of performance can be seen as transportable forms of Western capital with a high exchange value in the global labour market. For working-class students who want to have a 'respectable' job with a good wage and experience upward social mobility, they may emphasize

the value of the academic performance and put out significant effort to achieve their study goals, like Xiao Wang did.

When Luo Xue was asked about her challenges in studying and how to overcome them, she dithered and instead discussed the distinctions between the Chinese educational system and the UK educational system. Luo Xue was likely still familiarising herself with the environment and looking for her own study methods, whereas Xiao Wang was compelled by instrumentalist goals to take the initiative to look for assistance and wanted to quickly 'fit' into UK academic norms. Additionally, Xiao Wang seemed to think the problem in studying was her lack of ability to study properly, which reflects an individualist perception of academic culture. As I discussed in the Chapter 3 (page 33-35), academic culture in UK higher education places a strong emphasis on self-responsibility for academic success and failure under the discourse of neoliberalism, which may have pushed Xiao Wang to find an effective way of learning on her own. However, this also brought Xiao Wang intense pressure, as she put: '*I felt stressful about study, and I even scheduled a session with a school mental health counsellor for support.*'

In contrast, most of the male participants revealed that their parents would give them advice on choosing majors for master study, no matter whether their parents' educational levels are high or low. Also, it was interesting to observe that their parents all recommended them majors related to the fields where their family members are or once were working into. For example, Yang Yang (M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class), whose father's educational level is junior high, and mother's educational level is high school, said his parents recommended him to pick a business-related major. His mother is an accountant although she is not very knowledgeable about this major. Tu Cheng (M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class) said that his parents (both of whom are educated to master's level) urged him to pursue financial studies because they both work in the bank, and they want him to carry on their professions. Huang Xiao (M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class), whose father and mother's education was to undergraduate level, reflected that he planned to become a teacher after graduation. Because his mother works for the government's educational sector

which can assist him in finding employment, his parents suggested that he should study in an education-related field.

Thus, supporting Schoon's (2010) study, compared to girls, boys tend to be more dependent on their parents' encouragements and supports for future career plans. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, men are usually the primary breadwinners in Chinese traditional Confucian families, and they have greater financial responsibilities than women. Men must therefore have a decent career with high pay, and hence, their parents will make great efforts to help them in making the 'correct' decisions for their future. The main difference was that Yang Yang did not mention any job assistance from his parents, possibly because his mother is a worker in the company at a relatively junior level and lacks social networks and pertinent knowledge to support Yang Yang. In contrast, Tu Cheng and Huang Xiao both mentioned their parents would give them assistance for their career development after graduation because their parents were already in high positions in their working fields. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that parents with higher levels of education would be inclined to guide their children toward fields where they have already forged a 'secure' path. This inclination is rooted in the belief that their children can leverage the social and cultural capital endowed by their parents in those chosen fields.

Also, a few middle-class female participants mentioned that their parents wanted them to study a subject where they already had social networks, as Xiao Xiao put:

> My parents both work in the bank and they wished me to study economic-related subjects, so that they can use their networks (guanxi) to help me find a job in the bank. But I wanted to study education and my parents also supported me (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

As shown above, middle-class male and female participants Tu Cheng, Huang Xiao and Xiao Xiao discussed support their parents provided by using their networks (guanxi) which they have built for years. Lin (2001) states that building and maintaining guanxi is a dynamic and lifelong process for Chinese people. The relatively high positions in the fields can help to facilitate the formation of social capital inside class boundaries in China (Tsang, 2013). These close

relations have the potential to facilitate exchanges and favours between members including helping friends' children find jobs and providing essential information for a particular position. Thus, network (guanxi) plays a crucial role in the upward generational mobility for the Chinese middle-class.

6.2.2 Sub-theme two: family background and gender influence students' study expectations and performance in the classroom

In China as well as in Western contexts, middle-class families are more likely to focus on children's study by transmitting a high level of cultural capital inside the family (Zhang & Tang, 2021). Within the cohort of participants hailing from middle-class 'inside system' families, characterized by parents in governmental positions, public school and university teaching roles, or managerial positions in state-owned enterprises (Chen, 2013; Wang, 2004), the heightened institutionalized cultural capital of their parents significantly shapes participants' aspirations for studying abroad, extending to pursuits at higher education levels. The influential impact stems from the wealth of institutionalized cultural capital accrued within these families, fostering a predisposition toward international education and advanced academic endeavours. For example, Wang Qiang, Xiong ren and Tu Cheng who are from middle-class 'inside system' families, and with their parents' educational levels being postgraduates, talked about how their parents had high expectations of their study and asked them to apply for PhD study.

Their reflections support Eccles's argument that if children perceive their parents have high expectations of their education, they are more likely to have higher aspirations for themselves (Eccles, 2014). Among participants from middle-class families outside the state system, characterized by parents holding entrepreneurial or managerial roles in non-state-owned and foreign enterprises (Wang, 2004), possess a high level of economic capital translating into robust support for their educational trajectories. The ample financial resources provided by their parents were transformed into both institutionalized cultural capital and embodied cultural capital, further influencing and facilitating their educational pursuits. For instance:

> My parents really focused on my study. Since I was a child, I attended the top 10 schools in Taiyuan City which my parents spent lots of money to find some relationship to help me enter in (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> My parents paid much attention to my education. All the way, I went to the best primary, junior high school and high school in my hometown, and then the key university in China (Wang He, M, aged 20-25, middle-class).

We can infer from the excerpts that the parents of the male participants gave much consideration to their boys' school arrangements and spent a significant amount of money doing so. In contrast to the West where aristocrats and plebeians were traditionally separated into distinct classes by birth, in China, instead of direct inheritance, one way to pass on family advantage was to invest as much as possible in sons so that they can make money by themselves in the future (Xie, 2016). In other words, in Chinese traditional culture, Chinese society placed less emphasis on inheritable social status and power succession but more on future social mobility. The family place an enormous amount of hope on sons to increase the family's fortune and improve their standard of living.

In contrast to the substantial educational investments made by the parents of male participants, female participants from middle-class families often described more constrained financial support. While some acknowledged parental backing for their studies, the extent of financial contributions was typically limited to covering course fees or expenses related to extracurricular activities. For example,

> My mother would urge me to study, watch English Movies or English books, etc, and ask me to study hard (Tian Tian, F, aged 20-25, middle-class)

> I took some classes in college out of my own interests, such as pottery and a foreign language, and my parents were very supportive (Guan Tong, F, aged 20-25, middle-class).

> My parents often ask to read more books no matter in Chinese or English, also ask me to practice my writing (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

It seems like that the parents of the female participants are not actively involved in their children's schooling. Mostly, the ways through which female participants' parents showed their attention to children's study were through oral reminders, rather than fully involving themselves in the planning of

children's educational paths like male participants' parents or making a huge financial investment.

There are two implications that emerged from this sub-theme. First, gender seems to still play an important role in young people's study and career choices, leading to some gender differences of participants' different educational and occupational options (supporting the arguments of a range of scholars including Eccles, 2009; Breda et al., 2020). Influenced by dominant gendered discourses, societal expectations are that women should conform to traits such as warmth, care, gentleness, and communal behaviour (Cuddy et al., 2008). In contrast, men are anticipated to embody characteristics of competitiveness, competence, goal-oriented behaviour, mathematical proficiency, and agency (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2008). Importantly, individuals endeavour to conform to their prescribed gender roles, as deviating from established norms can lead to adverse consequences, including discrimination and harm (Master & Meltzoff, 2016).

In my thesis, female participants are more likely to be asked by their parents to read more books and their subjects are mostly related to languages and reading such as Education and Law, while some male participants discussed science-related activities supported by their parents when they were children. For example,

> My father once worked in a train factory, fixing the head of train, my grandfather was a train driver, influenced by them, I'm a big fan of train. They took me to their working places often. My major is 'Electronic and Electrical Engineering', kind of impacted by my childhood experiences (Hu Fan, M, aged 20-25, middle-class).

Parents in my study seem to act as an external social factor that influences participants' major choices. Consistent with the investigation by Breda et al. (2020), middle-class parents engage in the utilization of gendered discourses concerning their children's proficiency in math and English. The findings of Breda et al. (2020) suggest a prevalent belief among parents that daughters, in contrast to sons, exhibit greater aptitude in English rather than maths, fostering the perception that daughters may face comparatively diminished success in careers demanding mathematical skills compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, gender differences in parents' beliefs will influence their choices

on providing which kinds of activities to their children. My interview data showed that girls tend to show less interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related activities and perceive them to be less useful than boys, while they develop higher interests in reading and literature-related subjects and prefer to work in these fields. Moreover, STEM-related subjects, often linked to competitive and lucrative employment opportunities, afford men enhanced prospects for amassing wealth, thereby alleviating future financial pressures as primary breadwinners within their families. Conversely, for the girls as said by Luo Xue and Xiao Xiao, even if they fail to enter the labour market, they would not 'violate' gendered role expectations.

Second, in China, education is still an important pathway to the elite success. Higher education qualifications are often regarded as a decisive factor in securing advancements to prominent positions within government, including appointments to the higher ranks in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Zhang, 2004). Walder et al. (2000) argue that there are two ways to gain elite status in China: one generated by ideological conformity and political appropriateness which leads to political appointments; another one determined by the education degree leading to the professional and intellectual positions. There is no doubt that education is the necessary condition for entry into the political elite. Hence, Chinese parents exhibit a pronounced inclination to prioritize the education of their sons, driven by the overarching objective of optimizing the probability of attaining upward social mobility. This emphasis stems from the notable gender imbalance prevalent in political leadership in China, characterized by a historical scarcity of women in the political elite (Chi et al., 2014).

Realising the importance of a good job, male participants were seemingly more likely to suffer from stress and find ways to enhance their competence in the labour market. They showed great passion on gaining working experiences in the UK and actively looked for part-time jobs during their study. For example, Huang Zitao (M, aged 25-30, upper middle-class) reflected that through being a bartender in a restaurant in London, he could have a better understanding of UK culture, such as what British locals like to drink or the food they like to eat. He also had more opportunities to communicate with local people and learn more

situational dialogues. Moreover, Wang Qiang (M, aged 25-30, upper-middle-class), diverges from conventional gender expectations in China by engaging in part-time housework, expressing his aspiration for a formal caring role in the UK after graduation. This departure from the prevailing notion of 'appropriate' masculinity (Cuddy et al., 2008), which often dictates that men should pursue science-related and high-paying occupations to underscore their competitiveness, suggests a resistance to traditional gender discursive norms. The prospect of opting for an alternative career path may be influenced, to some extent, by his affluent family's perspective, which potentially prioritizes values beyond mere financial gain, challenging established societal expectations associated with masculinity in China.

Male participants in my study tended to strengthen their professional skills through conducting practical work in the second semester, and some of them kept a definite career path. They were more likely to learn generic skills such as communication abilities, problem-solving techniques, and building cultural knowledge, through actively engaging in varied job experiences. These skills are associated with desirable graduate employability in terms of twenty-century lifelong ‘learner-earners’, which will positively benefit their transitions in the UK. This also complies greatly with the neoliberal conception that success is the responsibility of the individual, who must constantly keep ‘improving’ themselves.

During the transition to the UK educational culture, I found female participants from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds were more likely to experience considerable ambivalence about their competence in academia, supporting Loveday’s (2015) findings in England. They have already acquired a large amount of capital by virtue of their working experiences and professional positions, yet they still constantly questioned themselves, as Luo Xue and Liu Mei put:

> I don’t think I can achieve the image of an educational research scholar in my mind through these courses. I may have learned some skills, but I don't think I deserve to be a graduate student (Luo Xue, F, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

> It is obvious that I will achieve success soon, but I feel that I am not worthy of this good result or feel unworthy of the ability to achieve good results (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

While I have discussed relevant quotations in the previous chapters, it is worth highlighting the quotation here to focus on the gender/class inequalities in the data. Burke (2017) contends that gender, along with other identities, can induce public anxiety in universities about perceived standards decline with students from non-traditional backgrounds. Excellence in higher education often reinforces masculine ideals, sidelining knowledge associated with femininities. Consequently, women and working-class students may face a social devaluation of their academic credentials, which may explain the uncertainties in their skills and diminished perceived value of their academic achievements felt by individuals such as Luo Xue and Liu Mei.

Thus, the experiences of international students need to be analysed from an intersectional perspective, for example, exploring the complex intersections of gender, ethnicity/race, nationality, and social class, otherwise their specific experiences risk becoming marginalized or invisible.

6.2.3 Sub-theme three: gender and social class influence educational mobility

Chinese female students' choices of studying abroad are also constrained by their gender and family backgrounds. The thoughts and concepts that middle-class participants' parents discussed with them arguably influence their motivations for pursuing higher educational degrees abroad. For example, Zhang Xiaofan reported below:

> My parents wanted me to go abroad when I was very young. When I was in elementary and junior high school, if the school had a study tour or the opportunity to go abroad, they would encourage me to participate. It was very helpful for me to choose to study abroad, including when I was an undergraduate student, I also went abroad for exchange (one semester in Australia), which had a great impact on me (Zhang Xiaofan, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Exposure to activities such as going for educational visits and exchange projects help middle-class participants think of more educational choices, shaping their aspirations of achieving educational success in other countries, not just limiting

themselves to China. The cultivation of thoughts of going abroad also helps middle-class participants weaken the concept of the boundary between countries, giving them more opportunities to find the best way to pursue their studying. However, female participants from working-class families are less likely to receive sufficient educational resources when they were young to open their horizons and accumulate cultural capital. For instance,

> My original family didn't give me the opportunity to accept better education during my 7-18 or expand my knowledge (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

These two excerpts from Zhang Xiaofan and Liu Mei illustrate the role of cultural capital within middle-class families in facilitating students' aspirations for international education, specifically the inclination to pursue tertiary studies in the United Kingdom. The concept of middle-class reproduction emerges as a key factor, enhancing the internalization of the desire to engage with the United Kingdom's tertiary education system. Thus, most of the middle-class participants in my research went to the UK to embrace master's education as soon as they completed their undergraduate studying. In contrast, some working-class or lower middle-class participants did not realize or were given the option of studying a master's degree abroad after they graduated from universities, rather than choosing to enter the labour market or study further in China.

The above statements support the finding in Chapter 3 (page 69-70) that impact from parents is the most influential factor of Chinese university students' interests in educational mobility. Chinese parents with higher educational degrees show significant strong desires to send their children abroad, contributing to an increase in their children's interests and intentions to pursue overseas education.

As a result, a few middle-class students (who had intercultural experiences prior to study in the UK) appeared to be more open to experiencing diverse cultures and values. They also had more possibilities to observe different cultures. They did not seem to have much trouble adjusting to the UK educational system and discovered that the courses are not as challenging as they had anticipated, as shown as '*I feel that the overall learning rhythm is okay, like my undergraduate rhythm, or even easier' (Zhang Xiaofan, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).*

However, because working-class individuals were unfamiliar with the UK educational system prior to their arrival, they found it challenging to participate in this academic setting, as discussed in the previous chapter on Emotions. For example:

> From the perspective of students, I think it is difficult, very difficult. I have too many unfamiliar words in the first semester. I feel as if I have taken lecture, but I don't feel like I have taken it (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

The financial cost of international mobility is still seen as the most important factor limiting Chinese students' ability to study abroad, as China is a developing country and most Chinese families are not able to afford the high educational investment (Cao, 2016). Thus, in terms of financial support, participants' families, particularly from working-class or lower middle-class, sometimes needed to make sacrifices to support their children to seek an overseas education. For example,

> My parents hesitated about my plan of studying abroad in consider of the economic issue. But finally, they supported me by borrowing money from others (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

Xiao Wang's working-class family had to cover the huge financial burden caused by high tuition fees and living expenses in the UK. However, even if they are in difficult conditions, Chinese culture encourages people to look forward to the next generation (Xie, 2016). As elucidated earlier, the correlation between privilege, wealth, and one's social origin extends beyond mere inheritance, intertwining with an individual's demonstrated performance and abilities. In the context of Chinese societal discursive norms, parents exhibit a willingness to allocate substantial financial resources to their children's education, often at the sacrifice of immediate interests and satisfaction. This financial commitment is rooted in an aspirational belief in upward social mobility and the notion that educational opportunities serve as a universal avenue for advancement, aligning with Chinese ideological frameworks (or dominant national 'metanarratives' in Foucauldian terms). Thus, parents are willing to utilise all their funds to help their children pursue higher education, even if that means borrowing money. Also, because of the lack of sufficient economic capital, participants from working-class or lower middle-class need to consider the large expense of the

overseas education. Some students had to give up on their dreamed university or delay their plans to apply for a three-year PhD programme. For instance,

> If my parents could help me, I would be studying in University College London (UCL) now. If my parents have enough money, I don't need to consider tuition fees, I could go to the university I wanted to go to the most (Xu Yiyang, F, aged 25-30, lower middle-class).

> I want to apply PHD after I complete my master's degree, but I need to gap a few years because I don't have enough money to study PHD degree. The saving of my husband and I can only support me to finish my master studying (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

This is consistent with the findings in Chapter 3 (pages 69–70), while lower middle-class and working-class students are increasingly able to pursue higher education abroad, their options for colleges and programmes appear to be constrained by the educational background and financial resources of their parents. While Zhang Xiaofan, Liu Mei, Xiao Wang, and Xu Yiyang have the same gender identity, the intersection of gender and family background unequally constructs their complex social relationships and unequally affects their mobilities, supporting Zhu and Tang's (2021) findings (see page 72). Additionally, working-class individuals are more likely to feel pressure because they must spend their money carefully, create budgets, and have fewer opportunities to interact socially and participate in activities (discussed further in the next section), that may negatively impact their social and cultural transition.

Furthermore, constrained by marital status and by discourses of perceived reproductive responsibilities, it is not seen as desirable in China for women to work or study far away from their families if they consider having children. For example, Liu Mei revealed the reason why she decided to stay at home and study online courses instead of going to UK,

> If I was a boy, I would physically go to UK, not stay at home and study online courses. Because I plan to be a mom after I graduate, and I'm worried about the impacts of covid-19 on my unborn child (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

As articulated by Liu Mei, her role as a mother and the associated responsibilities acts as significant impediments to her transnational mobility, despite her equal financial investment in education compared to her peers

physically studying in the UK. This constraint profoundly impacts her overseas experiences, particularly in terms of being able to immerse herself in local culture and engaging in peer socialization. Liu Mei further notes that if her gender were male, she would not confront the same concern, underscoring the gendered dimensions influencing her access to and experience within international education. In addition, women are expected to take care of their parents in China, which narrows down their choices of work location. For instance,

> If I were a boy, I would stay in Beijing after I completed my bachelor's degree, rather than coming back to my hometown (third-tier city), as in that time, my dad had a heart attack, and my younger sister was just a kid, so I was expected to come home and look after my dad. Since then, I lived and worked in my hometown and until now I still feel pity. If I were a boy, I would be more ambitious (Liu Mei, F, aged 30-35, working-class).

> My parents wanted me to go back to China after I graduate here, because they want me to look after them when they are older (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

The observation is noteworthy, as female participants from working-class backgrounds consistently highlighted their perceived obligations as women to care for their parents. In contrast, most female participants from middle-class families and male participants did not articulate discussions regarding parental social expectations for them to assume responsibilities for their parents. This divergence highlights the intersectionality of class and gender, revealing distinct societal expectations and familial roles based on both class background and gender identity among these participants. One female participant (Xiao Xiao) from upper middle-class family did mention that her parents want her to come back to home after her graduation in the UK because she is the only child in the family, but her parents will still support her if she wants to work in the UK. Xiao Xiao has already made some progress in looking for jobs in London. For example, she has paid money for an agent in London to help her pass the job application examinations.

There were initial expressions of open-mindedness among certain female participants in the study, indicating a desire to work in the UK or establish their own businesses, with subjectivities seemingly constructed towards embracing new life opportunities. Nevertheless, a shift in career plans became evident as

they approached graduation. Some of these individuals including Xiao Xiao ultimately opted to return to China, as revealed in their monthly audio diaries, engaging in endeavours such as pursuing teaching or civic service examinations. The analogy of the panopticon (Foucault, 1991a) may be a helpful theoretical tool for illuminating how subjects are entangled in complex relations of power both within and beyond institutional spaces. In my study, I found female participants identified studying in the UK as a potential for the transformation of gender subjectivity, and some of them become more confident in their physical attractiveness as I discussed in the emotional chapter. However, their subjectivities which are constructed to be a ‘good daughter’ are still maintained and policed in the home. In China, a ‘good daughter’ is often portrayed as having a stable job such as working as teachers or civil servants, and working close to home so that parents and daughters can look after each other. Female participants’ accounts suggest that in the struggle for a space of their own outside the home, the space within it still regulates and controls their thoughts and behaviour.

Prevailing perspectives tend to characterise Chinese female international students as privileged individuals, particularly in a context where international education contributes to enhanced independence and competitiveness in future employment markets (Martin, 2016). However, in contrast, my thesis unveils a nuanced picture. It emphasizes the persistent influence of traditional gender discourses, dictating the roles of being a 'good' daughter, wife, and mother. These discourses continue to exert varying degrees of impact, shaping the perceptions of female students and imposing constraints on their prospective career and life choices. Thus, gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identity constructions, and individuals’ understanding, and experiences of gender should be investigated from an intersectionality perspective.

6.3 Social class influences on participants’ cultural consumption in the UK

Cultural consumption refers to the consumption of cultural goods and services, such as music, art, literature, and theatre (Zhang & Tang, 2021). This consumption is not only for entertainment purposes, but also for the

construction and expression of identity and the acquisition of cultural capital. By conducting regular cultural and physical practices and by accumulating pricy durables and branded goods, middle-class families can distinguish themselves from the 'mass'. After studying in the UK, most of the participants from middle-class families tend to participate in the local cultural events frequently and consume cultural goods to accumulate cultural capital, as they put:

> Anything that broadens my horizons, including watching musicals and going to museums, is supported by my parents. Also, I will travel to Europe next month (Xiao Xiao, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).
>
> I usually watch musicals, and my parents are also very supportive. My parents said that I need to participate more cultural activities when I am in the UK (Zhang Xiaodan, F, aged 20-25, upper middle-class)
>
> I went to Europe this month, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. I played with my classmates for seven days. We booked the hotel, and the itinerary was made by me, and did not follow the tour guide (Wei Kaifeng, M, aged 20-25, middle-class).
>
> This month, I travelled to Europe with my friends, Switzerland, France, Italy, Greece, and Spain. During the tour, we went to many famous scenic spots, took some photos, and enjoyed the food. It was considered to broaden our horizons, and we also learned about some history and culture, such as some famous paintings in the Louvre Museum (Wang He, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

Bourdieu (1984) argues that this difference in cultural consumption contributes to the reproduction of social inequality, as cultural capital is unequally distributed among social classes and is highly valued in many social and economic fields. Therefore, individuals from higher social classes have an advantage in accessing and navigating cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres, and concert halls, which can lead to further opportunities and advantages in life. From participants' perspectives, visiting local museums or watching musicals is one of the benefits of studying in the UK.

Additionally, they talked about how their parents supported them not just financially but also by predicting the advantages of various cultural activities. This acted in accordance with middle-class participants' individual habitus that attending various cultural activities is part of their life experiences, as Xiao Xiao put '*I also watched musicals with my parents in China, so it is normal to me*',

and 'I liked to visit museums in China and also travelled a lot in China' (Hu Fan, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class)'. Thus, this self-assurance of middle-class participants has been a disposition developed over time, and by the time of their transition to the UK when they have more chances to take part in the cultural activities, it has become 'second nature'. For example, some participants from the middle-class either already had travel experiences abroad or knew what kinds of musicals they wanted to watch, and which musicals were in 'good taste'. Thus, although Xiao Xiao and Hu Fan lived in another country, their previous cultural experiences have become part of their own habitus, affecting their everyday practices in the UK, and they knew 'how to play the game'. Their class privilege was reinforced by social environment as UK is a rich environment in which to accumulate cultural capital. Additionally, several participants noted how they frequently travelled with their Chinese friends who are also from middle-class households, demonstrating the collective habitus of being ready to engage in shared activities.

In contrast to the middle-class participants who intended to accumulate more cultural capital abroad, it seemed that it was more important for working-class female participants to obtain international institutionalized cultural capital, to achieve upward social mobility. They were more likely to attend practical activities to improve their skills and enhance their competitiveness in the labour market as illustrated by the quote from Xiao Wang:

> In the classroom, I will take the initiative to meet some students with better academic performance and hope that I can do better in my courses. Chinese classmates get along well with each other. We can play together after returning to China and accumulate some resources and contacts… I sometimes attend volunteer activities and I also participate in debates (Xiao Wang, F, aged 20-25, working-class).

To compete in the labour market, Xiao Wang actively invests in and accumulates her professional habitus to enhance her ability. Similar to my participants' experiences, the study conducted by Zhang &Tang (2021) found that many international students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were highly motivated to succeed academically and were willing to work hard to achieve their goals.

Xiao Wang also pointed out her financial constraints as she put '*I'm frugal and want to save money for future plans, so traveling and other activities are out of my consideration*'. Financial precarity affected her ability to fully engage in the cultural and social aspects of international education, which are important for personal growth and development. In this vein, we can see that middle-class participants could use their economic advantages to become more involved in cultural consumption, while working-class participants may not have been brought up to attach the same importance or value to these social and cultural activities. Bourdieu (1984) applies this to 'taste' in Distinction, noting differences in cultural consumption between middle-class and working-class participants. While the former see it as investment, the latter often frame it as 'making a virtue out of necessity' (Reay, 2004). However, Xiao Wang's dedication to her studies and great resilience in the face of structural inequality are examples of how Bordieuan theoretical approaches highlight and emphasise the strengths of working-class students (Crozier et al., 2008).

In the context of financial precarity, exemplified by the account of a male participant from a lower middle-class background, it can be seen that despite facing constraints in familial support for travel expenditures, proactive measures were taken to alleviate this burden. For example, Yang Yang reflected:

> I earned my travel money by working part-time for a few months because my parents cannot support this kind of consumption … I went to Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium and the Netherlands respectively (Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

However, notwithstanding his efforts, the sustained expenditure incurred during his travels, averaging around 100 pounds daily, underscored the pervasive financial challenges. Notably, while expressing a desire to explore more places, Yang Yang considered the imposition of financial limitations, having to give up this aspiration.

Yang Yang's strategy of decreasing his financial pressure through part-time employment, notably as a waiter in a Western restaurant, reflects a proactive approach informed by his prior exposure to diverse studying environments. He gained a scholarship for an exchange program in the United States during his undergraduate study, and seemingly fostered an adeptness and confidence in

navigating English-speaking labour markets, thereby facilitating his employment prospects within the UK context.

In terms of attending practical activities to improve employability, as the female working-class participants did, male participants from upper middle-class, middle-class and lower middle-class backgrounds showed their passion to attend academic seminars and listen to public speeches, as illustrated below:

> This month, I participated in some school activities and academic seminars such as improving presentation skills organized by the college. The activities will have a positive impact on my future work and life (Xiong Ren, M, aged 20-25, upper middle-class).

> I usually went to the school to attend workshops related to my subject or listen to some speeches. These activities can constantly inspire me to work hard ((Yang Yang, M, aged 20-25, lower middle-class).

This proactive engagement in activities geared towards bolstering employability can be contextualized within the broader socio-cultural context wherein men are traditionally construed as the primary breadwinners within Chinese families. The imperative to secure ‘decent’ and respectable jobs, achieving the societal image of the 'good' man, imposes considerable pressure on male individuals. Consequently, the earnest involvement in practical activities aimed at enhancing competitiveness in the labour market emerges as a pragmatic response to these entrenched societal expectations.

In terms of making friends, I have already mentioned that Xiao Wang (from a working-class background) made friends with other Chinese students who were good at studying. Xiao Wang also talked about using social apps to make local friends to practice her English. She connected her desire for friendship with the need to strategically accumulate social capital that could be helpful for her future development. This kind of friendship was presented as a social relationship which was not driven by any feelings of mutual love, pleasure, and intimacy (Read & Crozier, 2020), but more an advantageous move to improve her linguistic and academic performance under the neoliberalist discourse of constantly self-improvement.

When some female middle-class participants talked about friendship, they tended to emphasise on the affective and companion function of friendship, with comments including: '*I like my friends here and we often go out to eat and travel together*' (*Tian Tian*, F, *aged 20-25*, *upper middle-class*) and '*my friends are good comfort and when I feel depressed, we will go to bar or other fun things together*'(*Liu Fei,* F, *aged 25-30, upper middle-class*). Middle-class female participants were more concerned with their emotional wellbeing and having friends nearby to avoid loneliness and isolation than networking to advance their careers. Also, to have fun together, their friends must share similar hobbies and material advantages. In other words, people from the same social class might easily become friends since they have common habitus that are recognized in their groups.

There were not many differences between male participants from upper middle-class, middle-class and lower middle-class in making friends. Male participants talked more about having friends to travel around, work out and meeting friends in parties. Nevertheless, the lack of male working-class participants in my research limited my ability to compare students from middle-class and working-class backgrounds more closely and examine the nuanced construction of subjectivities and interpretation of their experiences.

By participating in social and cultural events, middle-class students are more likely to broaden their horizons, learn more about Western society, and encounter local norms and values, which are important abilities for employability in neoliberalist discourse. This may reflect the process of 'structured individualization' (Roberts, 2019), that while international students can be seen as free agents to study and make their own way in the UK, their development and opportunities continue to derive from their family backgrounds in terms of the sorts of social and cultural capital they have access to and can develop.

The aspirations and experiences of working-class female participants in my study diverge from their middle-class counterparts, characterized by a comparatively lower accumulation of cultural capital. Instead, working-class participants typically prioritized the acquisition of social capital and practical experiences, reflecting a strategic emphasis on tangible and relational resources in their

pursuit of personal and professional development. Some studies in the Chapter 3 (page 74-75) argue that the accumulation of cultural capital can help women enhance their competitiveness in the marriage market, especially for middle-class women, but in my research, none of the female participants mentioned the benefits of consuming cultural goods for success in the 'marriage market'.

6.4 Conclusion

Student experiences cannot be fully understood by looking at any one aspect of identity or positioning in isolation. By considering how different aspects intersect and interact with one another, intersectionality provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of how systems of power and privilege operate in the lives of international students. Analysing international students' experiences through an intersectionality lens is important because it recognizes that people experience multiple forms of oppression and privilege simultaneously. In this chapter, I have discussed how middle-class participants were more likely to choose subjects in areas where their parents had already accumulated social capital, which could help them to find jobs after graduation. Also, because of the dominant gender roles in Chinese society, where men are expected to be the primary breadwinners in families, male participants would generally receive more guidance and attention from their parents to decide their future working direction than female participants.

In addition, middle-class participants were found to have high expectations for their educational levels and for male participants, their parents were highly involved in their studying arrangements by using economic and social advantages. Influenced by gendered discourses, middle-class parents provided different forms of activities to their daughters and sons, resulting in male participants showing greater interest in STEM-related activities while female participants were more likely to study in reading and literature-related subjects. Moreover, working-class and lower middle-class participants generally had less access to intercultural experiences as children due to restrictions on economic and cultural capital, which resulted in their lack of knowledge of Western culture. As a result, they had a harder time adjusting to the UK educational system than middle-class participants. Furthermore, the educational mobility and prospective professional career mobility of the female participants were

hampered by their marriage status and parental responsibilities. Finally, participants' family backgrounds influenced their capacity to convert and accumulate various forms of capital. Taken together, gender and social class intersect and interlock into complex forms of inequality to influence Chinese international postgraduates' experiences both on- and off-campus.

Chapter 7 Discussion

My exploration of Chinese international students' emotional experiences in higher education, indicates the fluid and unstable transitions of participants, which contradicts the traditional model of transition following an incremental model, appearing as a sequential transition (Oberg 1960; Major 2005; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Using a longitudinal research design, I have identified four aspects of transition that the participants experience during their one year of study. These include academic transitions, social transitions, cultural transitions and their personal growth, which were presented through individuals' expressions of feelings. For the academic transition, in the first semester, most participants expressed their confusion, disappointment, shame, and exclusion about the academic culture in the UK, academic writing, tuition costs, instructional strategies, educational standards, dominance of Western students in the classroom, and the absence of an intercultural learning environment; participants continued to show signs of pressure during the second semester, including poor academic performance, demanding exams, stringent deadlines, and procrastinating on assignments. Regarding the social transition in the first semester, the participants' predominant feeling was loneliness due to the fact that they had less touch with their old social networks. They found it difficult to establish friends locally, participated in few extracurricular activities, and had infrequent interactions with teachers; during the second semester, some of they were pleased with themselves for participating in more extracurricular activities, establishing friends through activities, and learning about regional social customs.

As for the cultural transition, as they did not attend many social and cultural activities in the beginning, participants did not comment much about their cultural experiences, with the exception of how pressured they felt due to the UK's unexpectedly high cost of living; they expressed delight in the second semester as they were able to navigate various cultural contexts, dispel stereotypes about particular groups, and learn about various civilizations. Regarding personal growth, they hardly talked about it in the first semester, while in the second semester, they were able to reflect on gaining problem-solving skills, discovering a more comfortable way of being 'themselves' and the

improvement in language abilities and academic writing. The sense of becoming more independent and confident filled them with happiness and joy. I argue that international students transitional process is infused with and shaped by a variety of emotions. Since emotional analysis from a sociological perspective is currently limited, paying attention to the emotional lives of international students is helpful for taking affect more seriously in a broader context.

In the following sections, I will have an overarching discussion of the influence of neoliberalism, postcolonialism, academic culture and international students' gender and class on their experiences and transitions in the UK.

7.1 International students' experiences within the discourse of neoliberalism

One of the ways in which neoliberalism reproduces itself is by promoting the notion that individuals are solely responsible for their success and well-being and must take it upon themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success (Sardoč, 2021). The need for constant 'self-improvement' is important under the discourse of neoliberalism. This incentive of 'self-improvement' was also well reflected by my participants. Bissell (2008, p. 1697) argues that "to remain within our 'comfort zone' is something that we are led to believe will at best impede our progress". International students often chose to pursue study abroad with the primary objective of augmenting their employability. In neoliberal discourses of employability, a premium is placed on the cultivation of independent and problem-solving skills, perceived as indispensable attributes for achieving individual success within the competitive dynamics of the marketplace. Although moving to a new and unfamiliar place has brought about physical and emotional discomfort, participants in my study were fulfilled by seeing their own perceived 'growth' and development during overseas studying. This attitude of actively seeking ways of improving oneself can be understood through Foucault's (1990) notion of the 'practices of self', that conveys the idea that individuals are not the passive recipients of dominant discourses such as neoliberalism, but actively engage in constructing themselves through the influence of such powerful discourses.

Chinese international students' perceived needs for self-improvement also align with broader Confucian philosophy. In Chinese schools, influenced by the Confucian perspective of self-cultivation, there is a strong advocacy for learners to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning journey (Tan, 2017). This perspective encourages Chinese students to undergo self-improvement and moral development, where education is viewed as a means to cultivate one's character and intellect. In addition, the competitive environment within Chinese schools, epitomized by the gaokao (national college entrance examination) and the scarcity of top-tier university slots, reinforces the ideal of self-improvement and academic development. Students are driven to excel academically not only for personal advancement but also due to societal expectations and the limited opportunities available within the higher education landscape.

Hence, Chinese students are discursively influenced to hold a profound sense of accountability for their academic achievements, stemming from the Confucian discourse emphasising self-cultivation, the competitive environment discursively constructing their educational culture, and the influence of the pursuit of employability within neoliberal discourse. This confluence of discursive influences underscores the imperative for students to not only excel academically but also to cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving aptitudes, and a global perspective. My participants seemingly felt happy about such self-improvement goals, aligning with the evolving demands of the contemporary professional landscape.

To maximise the benefits of living and studying in another country and improving their abilities, most of participants actively attended various social and cultural activities to accumulate social and cultural capitals. For example, middle-class participants conducted regular cultural practices such as traveling and watching musicals by using their economic advantage. In contrast, working-class participants actively engaged in attending practical activities and expanding their social networks such as voluntary projects and workshops to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market. While the capacity of working-class participants to conduct cultural consumption may be limited by their financial precariousness, they seemed to have a strong desire to make full use of their resources. This included making local friends to learn about local social norms

and working hard to get a high level of institutional capital and develop their professional habitus.

Meanwhile, as Foucault (1997) argues, individuals are more likely to invest in discourses and social practices in ways that are more favourable or 'ethical' for themselves. Participants in my study actively constructed their subjectivities when they were exploring their new contexts. For instance, participants altered their performance of personality to focus more on their own sentiments, which was impacted by the individualist culture in the UK.

Another example was observed among certain female participants in response to varying gender discourses pertaining to the aesthetic standards of body shapes. Notably, certain individuals exhibited an increased sense of self-assurance in relation to their body shapes and subscribed to the notion that health holds greater significance. For international students, learning to 'fit in' a new social and cultural environment created a sense of discomfort that can act as a catalyst for transformation and 'improvements'. By engaging in the discourse of neoliberalism, international students became seemingly active subjects, while also being discursively regulated and disciplined with certain characteristics such as the desire for continual self-improvement and cultivating individualist desires and outlooks. In other words, international students are given agency in particular ways, though they are also subject to the discourses that regulate them (Edwards, 2008).

However, the emphasis on the discourse of neoliberalism regarding aspects of individualism can lead to a neglect of social and structural factors that contribute to social problems. In line with what Foucault (1980) asserts, disciplinary techniques like examination, classification, punishments, and rewards operate in more circumspect, delicate, economical, and modest ways to impose new hierarchies, obligations, exceptions, and authorities on citizens in this seemingly 'free' society. In other words, individuals are taught that freedom belongs to someone who has certain talents, competences, and skills. Therefore, the discursive influence of responsibility changes an individual's subject positions from a passive object of administrative intervention to a self-regulated subjectivity (Hoffman, 2014). Contemporary societies in the Western world are

built on a base of discourse of individualism where ‘successes and ‘failures’ are attributed to individual’s own capability, motivation, and resilience (Burke, 2017). In my study, the discourse of individualism influenced the way in which my participants perceived their academic abilities. Some of them felt their poor academic performance remains in their own perceived deficiencies, including lacking a ‘Western’ style of thinking. This made them feel ashamed and stressed as they were not able to link their difficulties to the wider social structures and power relations in higher education. Thus, shame is argued to be hidden through the individualism discourse, that attributes deficiencies in educational systems to problems with individuals within these systems (Burke, 2017). This is deeply entangled with gendered, classed and racialised identities (Skeggs, 1997; Burke, 2017).

Within the influence of neoliberal discourse, the concept of diversity has become intricately linked to the portrayal of universities as global entities (Ahmed, 2007). This linkage is particularly evident in the pursuit of international reputation for research, notably among research-led universities. However, the goal of diversity in this context is not to value the diversity of cultures, beliefs, and subjectivities; rather, it serves as a tool or technique to attract students who exhibit characteristics associated with Whiteness in the UK higher education sector, to move institutions into, or maintain institutions within, ‘elite’ positions in the rankings (Ahmed, 2007). In this context, diversity is the process of handling differences by excluding or sidelining those who do not fit with the image of Whiteness as staff or students (Burke, 2013).

Hence, the principal objective of the university's diversity initiative can manifest as an endeavour to convey an impression of diversity through the amalgamation of individuals with distinct skin tones. However, this ostensibly inclusive approach may inadvertently perpetuate the supremacy of Western cultures, knowledge paradigms, and values.

The concealed nature of the differentiation process is encapsulated by the ostensibly 'positive' terminology of diversity, wherein identities are forged within the contextual framework of hierarchical distinctions (Ahmed, 2007). The asymmetrical power relations between Chinese international students and their

local counterparts engender hierarchical structures. Within these structures, Western culture and knowledge assume a position of perceived superiority and dominance within the academic setting. Consequently, the encounters of Chinese students with experiences of misrecognition, shame, and exclusion may be obscured by the ostensibly ‘positive’ term, diversity.

Furthermore, Deem and Ozga (1997, p. 33) argue that the word ‘diversity’ “invokes difference but does not necessarily evoke commitment to action or redistributive justice”. Ahmed (2007) suggests that ‘diversity’ should be considered to attach to the struggle for equity and equality. Promoting diversity through marketing under the discourse of neoliberalism may be problematic because it can "cut off" diversity from initiatives that seek to solve inequalities inside institutions (Ahmed, 2007). Within this context, the institutional preference for the term "diversity" can serve as an indicator of a potential deficiency in genuine commitment to transformative change. It raises concerns that institutions, including universities, might exploit datafication instruments to conceal systemic inequalities by emphasizing numerical proportions of diverse student populations. Despite instances where participants note the prevalence of 'Chinese schools' in UK universities, wherein approximately ninety percent of their peers are Chinese students, the persistence of 'Whiteness supremacy' remains palpable. This underscores the phenomenon whereby individuals, despite being part of a seemingly homogenous cultural group, still encounter experiences of exclusion and alienation within the classroom environment. Therefore, the capacity of diversity in this case works to conceal such forms of privilege, rather than challenging social advantage and dominance.

In addition, teachers and local students' behaviours of excluding or marginalising international students may sharpen Chinese international students' perceptions of their ‘difference’ from other students who are not Chinese. This is an example of Foucault's (2001) conceptualization of 'dividing practices,' wherein the segregation and regulation of 'non-White' students are substantiated. The observable manifestations of such practices, exemplified by instances where White students occupy distinct tables from their Chinese counterparts, can be interpreted as acts of 'othering.' The spatial demarcation of students based on racial or ethnic lines arguably reflects a deployment of power within educational

institutions (Harwood & Rasmussen, 2003). The act of physically separating students based on racial identities contributes to the construction and reinforcement of social hierarchies, with implications for the unequal distribution of power and privilege within the educational setting. Such practices not only underscore the persistence of 'Whiteness supremacy' but also serve as tangible expressions of institutional power dynamics that perpetuate a stratified social order.

However, some participants did not fight for ‘diversity’ in the classroom, rather, they preferred working with Chinese peers and even actively looked for the Chinese group members as they felt it would be more efficient and comfortable for them. The active negotiation undertaken by these students in response to pedagogical practices underscores their agentic capacity to disentangle themselves from the prevailing paradigm encapsulated by the mainstream term 'diversity.' This negotiation extends to a deliberate distancing from the pursuit of the purportedly 'superior' Western thinking that may be associated with collaboration with their White peers. The conscientious choice to engage independently reflects a nuanced form of agency and resistance exercised by these students, challenging the presumed intellectual supremacy of Western perspectives within collaborative endeavours. This is also linked to their desire to resist or avoid disciplinary bodily practices, demonstrating that bodies are not just ‘passive’ and ‘compliant’ (Grosz, 1994). Rather they can possibly become "centres of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, and agency" (xi) that are used to oppose institutional efforts to construct "docile" bodies and "normalised" persons (Foucault & Sheridan, 1979).

However, some participants’ contradictory opinions of wanting a more diverse class so that they can learn ‘Western’ ways of thinking from White students while choosing to work with Chinese peers, reflect the ‘conflicts and ambivalence’ in their overseas experiences (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). While they want to succeed in UK higher education in order to graduate, and gain employability related to intercultural experiences, the emotional, structural, and cultural factors make their experiences more complex.

7.2 International students' experiences within discourses of postcolonialism

Although OECD does not have any legal power, it arguably operates through 'soft power' measures including datafication and normalization to establish its own language, values, and systems as the standard and superior ones (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This influence has rendered the field of international education as a perceived 'place' of White people, which promotes Western ways of thinking and Western cultural capital as superior and desirable, and English as a preferred language (Johnstone & Lee, 2022). The mastery of such knowledge systems is often expected of and imposed on international students, and many see this as a means of preparing for the increasingly competitive nature of the global job market. Therefore, the infrastructures of international education continue to display a pattern of White supremacy in education.

In my study, participants' lived experiences reveal complex processes in which postcolonial power dynamics are being constantly constructed, reinvented, and performed through everyday social practices and cultural encounters in UK higher education. In the global knowledge economy, sending children abroad is often labelled as 'upward mobility' within the discourse of the 'universal worth' of Western education, a concept shaped by the dynamics of postcolonialism (Waters, 2006). However, we can see, some international students become even further consolidated as Others in White dominant societies.

The ability of the dominant culture to understand, locate, and categorise the Other—in this example, Chinese international students—is reliant on its capacity to understand, locate, and categorise itself (Sammel, 2009). Dominant culture can powerfully define who we are as well as who we are not (Diangelo, 2006). Before White students and the attention they receive are normalised and valorised, it is necessary to portray students of colour as uninterested in attention (Diangelo, 2006). Dominant discourses within Western international education programmes arguably colonise the minds of international students, powerfully influencing them into constructing subjectivities that valorise Western discourses of success, whether they are conscious of it or not (Sammel, 2009). As a result, they "embrace the fact of White domination and their own

powerlessness"(Mangan, 2012, 6). Thus, White students gained greater cultural capital because of the Chinese international students providing them with the vital cultural context they required in the classroom.

Furthermore, echoing the colonial heritage of European higher education, the recruitment of the ‘best and brightest’ to bolster the knowledge economy of the West serves as a mechanism to perpetuate imperial White supremacy, veiled within the discourse of neoliberalism (Waters, 2012). However, those ‘best’ and ‘brightest’ students are students who can decode university practices and are normally in a privileged position with access to resources, capitals, and networks (Burke, 2017). In other words, only certain pedagogical behaviours and practices can be recognized as legitimate in higher education. For example, these might include participation in seminars and discussions in particular ways, such as the cultural expectation that the arguments students craft should be conducted ‘rationally’ and be supported by ‘evidence’ (Burke, 2017). This necessitates students to adopt hegemonic forms of White, masculine dispositions, constructing their subjectivities through the socially valued characteristics of independence and rationality within the realm of higher education (Leathwood & Read, 2008).

Therefore, while international students are argued to bring diverse perspectives in the classroom, the domination of Whiteness highlights a narrowing Westernisation and Anglicisation of higher education at the same time (Saarinen & Ennser-Kananen, 2020). White students are therefore highlighted by the presence of international students, which facilitates the normalisation of their standing and the monopolisation of the educational resources in the classroom such as teachers’ attention and the domination of discussion in the classroom. This encapsulates the quiet power identified by Fine et al. (1997), questioning how Whiteness accumulates privilege, status, protective resources, and ‘benefits of the doubt’, repelling gossip and voyeurism while demanding dignity. In other words, the quiet power associated with Whiteness acts as a shield against the potentially damaging narratives that might arise from gossip and voyeurism. The Western students (especially those from middle-class backgrounds) are not likely to be penalised by the dynamics of exclusion but are instead elevated by them.

In addition, the study of Lee (2015) which investigated the lives of Asian American high school students found that teachers commonly blamed cultural differences for the problems of racial and ethnic minorities. Because of the cultural differences between Western countries and China, Chinese students are frequently portrayed as meek, feminine, and preferring to be quiet, which may serve to make them invisible in the classroom (Quan et al., 2016). Positioning them as culturally deficient ignores the social factors that may have influenced their potential silence, in favour of blaming them as homogenous cultural group. Despite their prior academic success, students internalise these negative associations as a perceived personal weakness since these deficit constructs are so powerful. Thus, international students' feelings of shame can be seen as forms of epistemic violence, i.e., the assumption that established Western forms of culture are superior to non-Western forms (Diangelo, 2006). In this context, adjustment difficulties and negative feelings are constructed as culturally deficient and as personal failures, rather than the structural and systematic inequity that international students experience. Thus, international students' emotions should be understood with reference to larger social structures which are reproduced in everyday social practices. These practices can be hidden through the dominant discourse of normalised Whiteness.

I have discussed the colonial heritage of HE in the UK, which is characterised by normative and disciplinary power-knowledge relations where Western standards and norms are applied when it comes to judge, evaluate, and educate the 'Other' (Brooks & Waters, 2022). However, the lived experiences of international students reveal a more nuanced picture in which HE becomes a meaningful site for the negotiation of, and even resistance to dominant discourses. Regarding the learning methods and government policies relating to Covid-19, the attitudes of some participants still tended to be influenced by collectivist cultural discourses dominant in China. By the time I interviewed my participants in 2022, most countries had loosened or even lifted the Covid-19 restrictions. However, the Chinese government continued to implement restrictive Covid-19 policies like lockdown and quarantine in some cities where the situation with Covid-19 was serious. The Chinese government's strict control

was being criticised for its disregard for human freedom. One participant, Wang Xiaoming (M, aged 20-25, middle-class) reflected that in contrast to Western countries where many people advocate for freedom and personal interests, collective interests are paramount In Chinese dominant discourse. If one infected person goes out, they may affect ten or even hundreds of people, hence this cannot be criticised from a collectivist standpoint.

Additionally, some participants believed that by being silent in class, they were demonstrating their respect for the teachers by not interfering with their teaching rhythm and for their classmates' opinions by refraining from engaging in debate. In this instance, when it comes to navigating these contested spaces of culture and power, participants showed their reflexivity, agency, and resilience while (re-)centring their national identities as part of their subjectivity, as opposed to conforming to the dominant culture in the UK. This de-subjectification proposes alternative strategies for navigating diversity in higher education by fostering new ways of being and doing, encouraging students to bring their unique identities into the educational space, and empowering individuals to critically engage with their education. This stands in contrast to the traditional approach of producing 'docile bodies' or enforcing a unitary standard through disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1991a). Also, this implies that power does not simply repress or limit individuals' actions but also generates and shapes their subjectivities (Foucault & Sheridan, 1979).

As I discussed earlier, Foucault & Sheridan (1979) argue that power relations are not solely negative or oppressive but can also enable and produce positive effects. Some participants discussed how leaving their home nations and moving to another country allowed them to critically examine and challenge social norms and values that they felt limited their ability to grow personally. For example, some of them claimed that they learned to evaluate the reliability and validity of articles and analyse their quality, and that they became more critical than they had been in China, where they were required to listen to authority figures. According to Nada et al. (2018), this development of alternate identity constructions is a type of transformative learning that takes place both formally and informally. It plays a significant role in the student migrant experience. Therefore, educational migration has a significant impact on how students

construct alternative identities, or in poststructuralist terms, construct subjectivities through drawing on alternative discourses.

International students present different forms of identity formation which arise in between ‘home’ and ‘away’ and allow them to make educated and meaningful decisions about their personal and social values in connection to previously taught or culturally inherited views. They showed that learning processes (which Connell et al. (2016) refer to as ‘intellectual labour) involves a construction of knowledge that is constantly used, developed, and contested within and between specific contexts rather than being bound to an apparent fixed epistemic heritage system. This intellectual labour plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of international students.

Seen from a critical perspective, on the one hand, Chinese international students who study in the UK despite the expensive tuition fees may have done so because they believed that the knowledge and skills they would acquire there would be more valuable than those they would acquire in their home country. As such, they seem to be influenced by the postcolonial discourse that is infused with the conception of the Whiteness supremacy of Western higher education, which holds that the only way to bring about social, political, and economic change is by using such superior knowledge. On the other hand, however, a strong motivator for the student as "centring self," who actively manages unfamiliar knowledge systems and ambivalent emotional experiences, is the sincere desire to use their international education to positively contribute to future development. This can be seen as example of Foucault’s concept of ‘practices of self’ (1990), which holds that rather than passively being ‘acted upon’, the subject actively participates in constructing themselves through engaging with discourses.

Thus, the theory of postcolonialism is helpful for reframing the experiences of international students as it makes clear how power works insidiously and subtly on the self and the body. However, this also makes it possible for us to imagine alternatives, such as ways of being and acting that actively challenge dominant discourses. These might focus on transformative relations and practices that aim to alter subjectivities and knowledges.

7.3 The influence of UK academic culture on international students' experiences

Higher education can be seen as a 'social space' which is constructed by and constructs social identities, practices, and power relations (Lefebvre, 1991). Within this social space, individuals are conferred positions of power if their gendered, 'racial' or classed subjectivities are highly valued (Lefebvre, 1991). By enforcing "local codes of acceptable behaviour," these chosen individuals can regulate and segregate these spaces and, in doing so, restrict "certain social groups from particular spaces and places at particular times" (Mowl & Towner 1995, p. 103). Meanwhile, through an arbitrary curriculum and pedagogy which is regarded as 'naturalized', higher education becomes the social space to disseminate dominant discourses and culture (English & Bolton, 2016). However, cultures are neither neutral nor universal. Grant (1997) uses Foucault's idea of institutional 'disciplinary blocks' to demonstrate how undergraduates are guided in two different ways to adopt particular dispositions and behaviours. The student first encounters institutional 'controls' through, for instance, the lecture, the essay, the exam, and the 'controlled communications' of the grades. Second, the student is limited by their own conception of what it means to be a 'good' student. This conception is formed as a result of socially dominant discourses, including those created and upheld by the institution (Grant, 1997).

At the root of Bourdieu's use of the term 'cultural arbitrary', education is perceived as 'neutral' by incorporating a particular cultural form as an exercise of symbolic power (English & Bolton, 2016). Students who want to enter higher education or to secure a position in that field require a certain quantity and quality of capital which is valued and recognized in that field. Individuals who are unfamiliar with the rules might produce feelings of discomfort, ambivalence, and uncertainty. Thus, a lack of the legitimated form of cultural capital may make it less likely for international students to achieve good grades, that then generates concerns about their academic competency and self-exclusion. In my thesis, participants believed that their lack of motivation and 'proper' study techniques were to blame for their unsatisfactory academic results. This propensity to blame oneself rather than institutional structures and policies for the failure of international students highlights how institutional discursive

practices have historically worked to disadvantage non-White students in UK higher education through subtle and insidious methods rather than crude and obvious ones (Rollock, 2018; Gillborn, 2006).

These institutional practices ignore the wider influence of sociocultural factors and emphasize the distinction between the public and the private, constructing emotions as private inner possessions of individuals rather than as constructed in relation to, and circulating between, others (Leathwood & Hey, 2009). As Bourdieu (1986) argues the dominant group in society have the power to impose their definition of culture and meanings on other groups. the ways the White students are constructed as the ‘traditional’ and ‘privileged’ students, and others as ‘non-traditional’, reflects a particular power relation in higher educational context. Individuals not coming from the 'traditional' background frequently grapple with a questioning of their sense of belonging in university environments, where a prevailing norm may cast them as 'other,' prompting introspection on their rights within such academic spaces (Burke, 2013).

Most participants expressed their pressure to write an ‘appropriate’ essay under the requirement of norms in the UK higher education. Lillis et al. (2018) argue that academic writing frequently reproduces and legitimizes the dominant power structures and knowledge systems of Western colonial powers. According to Said (1978), the west has historically portrayed the east as exotic, backward, and in need of Western intervention and control. This perspective has shaped academic writing, where Eurocentric scholars have often depicted non-Western cultures, histories, and societies through a Western lens, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating power inequalities. Bhabha (1994) asserts that Eurocentric biases in academic writing perpetuate a hierarchy of knowledge, wherein Western theories and perspectives are positioned as universal, while non-Western knowledge is marginalized or treated as exotic. In addition, the dichotomies, such as rational-emotional, objective-subjective, and mind-body, often assign lower prestige to the elements culturally marked as feminine/female, including the emotional, subjective, and corporeal aspects (Lillis et al., 2018). The specific standards such as argument over poetry, or linearity over circularity and digression, and ‘standard’ language over vernacular have been criticized as ‘masculinist’ discourse (Elbow, 2012). Thus, academic writing is argued to

privilege traits culturally presented as ‘masculine’ such as boldness, individualism, and competitiveness (Lillis et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2001). As discussed in the Chapter 2 (page 30-31), knowledge generated by power is followed by the emergence of new norms and classifications. These tie human beings to specific identities and ensure the human beings are subjected to a certain degree of control (Foucault, 1991a).

Hence, discipline engenders exclusion: not all human beings can play in the disciplinary game. All newcomers are expected to adopt an attitude of ‘subservience’ incumbent to their position and demonstrate not only that they subject to the game but also possess practical knowledge of the rules of the game that they intend to play (Gerholm, 1990). Universities have been the places to produce 'students’ who are disciplined in certain ways to uphold the moral standards of school norms. Thus, Chinese international students may be barred from this academic system if they do not understand the standards of academic writing in the UK and do not have specific writing skills, such as the ability to be critical and use the right citation style.

Furthermore, the academic culture in the UK higher education of ‘independent’ learning is also problematic for many participants. Leathwood (2001) argues that the concept of independent learning is founded on an ethnocentric masculinist ideal of a ‘traditional’ student free from household obligations, destitution, or the need for help. This type of student can be successful in the shortest time with less need from the institutional resources (Read & Leathwood, 2003). In the contemporary discursive and material environment, the shift from "fat" to "lean-and-mean" pedagogies, characterized by reduced tutorials, increased tutorial size, and diminished student contact due to under-resourcing of teaching, has elevated and legitimized the concept of the 'independent learner' within universities (Blackmore, 1997; Freire, 2021). This trend reflects a broader emphasis on self-directed learning in higher education.

However, the position of independent learning as ‘normative’ serves to marginalize other learning methods and behaviour with different cultural and ethnic associations within higher education. For example, as I have mentioned, Chinese international students are accustomed to receiving comprehensive

guidance from teachers during examinations in China and are often categorized as passive and dependent surface learners when studying in the West (Ryan & Louie, 2007). This classification suggests a propensity for plagiarism and a perceived deficiency in critical thinking abilities within Chinese international students.This discourse considers the 'Western style' of learning as "universal movement languages … that can (and have been) adopted 'universally'" (Kaeppler, 2000, p. 117), and thus directly benefits students who have been raised in the Western educational system. In contrast, international students who have not received the Western style of education before are subjected to marginalising and excluding practices because they are associated with a devalued form of learning behaviour and attitudes. They therefore found it difficult to be an 'appropriate' student in UK higher education. Thus, it is important to identify the underlying educational inequalities associated with the process of classification and marginalisation.

However, from a poststructuralist perspective, the identity formation process is fluid, and identities are socially constructed and contested through discourses (Hall, 2000). While Chinese students' behaviour of being quiet and obedient may not be recognized as 'normal' students in the UK classroom, it can be seen as 'normal' student learning behaviour in China. Therefore, we need to understand the identity of being a 'student' as constructed in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices (Hall, 2000). It shifts over time and space, and depending on the social, political, and cultural context (Burke, 2013). Due to misrecognition that occurs in higher education, these processes frequently involve feelings of alienation and otherness among Chinese international students.

As poststructuralists highlight, the process of identity formation is an important locus of potential transformation, and international students' ongoing identity development makes them susceptible to transformational ways of being. Also, Foucault (1980) argues that individuals are both subject to and a subject of the production of truth through power. At the end of the second semester, some participants shared their happiness about being capable of self-study and being more confident in critical writing. In other words, some participants participated in re-constructing themselves through actively engaging in the discourse of

independent learning and critical thinking, as these are important abilities for securing a job in neoliberal society. Thus, poststructural perspectives help to understand the subject as produced through doing as well as being and open to transformation.

7.4 The influence of social class and gender on international students' experiences

"Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (Kuhn, 1995, p. 98). In other words, class is displaced onto individual persons (Lawler, 2008). In addition to the economic aspects of daily living, a Bourdieusian conceptualisation of social class places particular emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of everyday life. According to a number of studies, class distinctions are perceived as differences in 'lifestyle' or 'taste' as well as inequalities in the type and amount of capital that people own (Bourdieu, 1984; Flemmen et al., 2018). Yang and Gao (2016) argue that economic reform in China pushed for the development of a new consumer society, which was further supported by post-socialist ideologies that emphasised quality of life.

Thus, social class plays a significant role in cultural consumption, as individuals from different social classes often have different tastes and access to cultural materials. Those from higher social classes are more likely to consume 'highbrow' cultural goods and services, which are frequently associated with education, refinement, and status, whereas those from lower social classes are more likely to consume 'lowbrow' cultural goods and services, which are frequently associated with popular culture and entertainment (Bourdieu, 1984). Additionally, the middle-class can lead social and cultural trends and has the resources to perpetuate particular social discourses through their attitudes and values (Donald & Zheng, 1970; Yang & Gao, 2016). Yang and Gao (2016) state that this group, which is distinguished by its possession of cultural capital, can take control over what Bourdieu referred to as the symbolic markets. By possessing the dominant forms of culture and preferences, one can reproduce their social status.

In my study, the consumption of participants from middle-class families or parents with higher educational levels was characterised by intensive aesthetic cultural practices such as visiting museums, going to the theatre, or attending the opera. Their habits of practicing cultural activities are influenced by their parents' high cultural capital, which enabled them to distinguish themselves from working-class participants or from participants whose parents have lower educational levels. Thus, it can be suggested that the middle-class participants' attitudes toward culture is a product of their class's habitus, defined as the internalised form of class condition (Bourdieu, 1990). Also, middle-class participants' practice of attending various cultural activities is built up over time (the whole past) to form a habitus that makes it feel 'natural' for them to consume 'highbrow' cultural goods (English & Bolton, 2016).

Furthermore, the well-off economic background of many middle-class families could provide their children with financial support to access cultural events and consumptions. For participants coming from working-class families and some of the lower middle-class families, financial constraints may serve as a hindrance to engaging in cultural events and travel during their study abroad experiences. Given that participation in cultural events and travel constitutes a significant aspect of the international student experience, such limitations can deprive opportunities for these students to explore and deepen their understanding of the host country's culture and traditions. This could restrict their ability to fully immerse themselves in the host country's culture and could limit their overall experience studying abroad.

In my study, developing and maintaining friendships is also tied to social identities. For example, middle-class individuals who frequently travel or see musicals are more likely to have a network of friends who are also from the middle class as they are more culturally similar with the support of the financial privilege. However, I do not mean to imply that one can only make acquaintances from the same social class. In contrast, working-class participants in my study discussed their friendship experiences, noting that they also have middle-class friends who enjoy going to the library together. They also made local middle-class friends who worked on the same project and then found they can learn from each other in terms of language and culture. Burke (2013) argues

that certain components of our identities could be more apparent or powerful at a certain point in time and space. In the light of Burke's argument, participants' identity of being a student is particularly influential in expanding their social networks. Chinese students' primary focus at school is often academic success as I have mentioned in the Chapter 1 that Chinese people wish to work hard to realise the upward social mobility under the Chinese culture of meritocracy; therefore, anyone who shares this objective of jointly developing their skills may become friends with another person, regardless of their class affiliation or cultural preferences.

Archer and Leathwood's study suggest (2003. P. 190), that women students are frequently more prone than men students to discuss "feeling alienated by the academic culture within the university". Particularly, in the realm of academic practices, conventions, and language, the contradictory experiences of higher education participation become particularly evident, shedding light on the intricate interplay between educational engagement and identity formations. According to my project, working-class and lower middle-class female participants were more likely to feel ambivalent about their academic competency and found formal educational institutions daunting environments where they do not feel like they 'fit in' (Burke, 2002; Stuber, 2017). However, working-class, and lower middle-class female participants in my study also expressed a stronger desire than lower middle-class male participants to work hard and make full use of the educational resources. This may also support the argument of Archer and Leathwood (2003) that working-class women, in comparison to their male counterparts, exhibit a higher likelihood of framing higher education participation positively. For these women, pursuing higher education is often seen as a means to enhance and reshape the self in alignment with images frequently portrayed as more desirable in hegemonic discourses of 'success,' encompassing traits such as education, middle-class identity, and aspirational attitudes.

Furthermore, according to Reay (2001) and Stuber (2017), the "problematic of reconciling academic success with working-class identity" is one of the main challenges for working-class students as they enter in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly the pre-1992 'elite' HEIs. Reay highlights the way

in which working-class HE applicants engage in complicated practices of “trying to negotiate a difficult balance between investing in a new improved identity and holding onto a cohesive self” (2001, p. 337). However, in my study, working-class participants all showed their aspirations for their future development and to keep improving themselves rather than maintaining established identities. This arguably springs from my participants’ positioning and experience as international students. My participants’ working-class identities have arguably been weakened due to their stronger instrumental purpose of realizing upward social mobility, which was the main reason of paying so much money for overseas education.

What seems to matter in overseas experiences is the individual’s capacity to transfer some of their capital into more valuable capital that can be recognised for future development. This process is not only influenced by their social subjectivities and experience of local environments, but also their agency to perform in the field. Participants from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds are involved in demonstrating various capitals, attempting to learn the rules of this game, and adopting strategies to accumulate benefits. As I have discussed, middle-class participants were more likely to draw on their economic advantages to attend social and cultural events such as travelling, watching musicals, and visiting. These cultural consumptions are arguably shaped by the individual and collective habitus and their social position. By doing so, middle-class participants were able to convert their economic capital into cultural capital, which helps them to land ideal jobs, as well as social capital, that will work to secure their social status by establishing connections with friends from similar family backgrounds (Lefebvre & Khezami, 2020).

Although working-class participants and lower middle-class’s capacity to accumulate cultural capital may be restricted by their financial circumstances and previous experiences, their individual agency is emphasized here to pursue their own life pathway. Female working-class participants tend to work hard to achieve high academic performance as well as actively participating in workshops and seminars, which can assist them in developing a high level of institutionalised cultural capital. These are transportable forms of Western cultural capital that have a high exchange value on the global labour market. As

such, while some of the middle-class participants are still familiarising themselves with the new educational system in the UK, working-class participants have actively sought help from either teachers or peers to learn new learning strategies and improve their performance. Also, male participants from lower middle-class actively found part-time jobs to support their cultural consumption such as traveling. This dynamic can be seen through the lens of Foucauldian theory as shifting dynamics of power that are sometimes advantageous for working-class students. As I outlined in Chapter 2, Foucault (1977) saw power not as a static entity possessed by individuals or groups, but rather a dynamic and productive force that permeates all aspects of social life. As power relations are fluid and relational, constantly shifting and negotiated within different social contexts, individuals from underrepresented backgrounds are not always in disadvantaged positions.

In addition, employers in China gave a lot of weight to the symbolic capital of English language proficiency for its symbolic power and practical utility (Johnstone, & Lee, 2017; Blackmore et al., 2017). An important factor in English language acquisition for individuals from non-English speaking countries is the investment in language capital via English training courses together with other intercultural experience and study activities (Tsang, 2013). In my study, parents of some middle-class participants had ensured their children learn English systematically at an early age and created chances for them to travel abroad or attend exchange projects to other countries. This can be considered a way of providing their children with a form of cultural capital that will allow them to acquire further advantage in an international education setting. While working-class participants' experiences of learning English may have been limited by their family background when they were young, they tried to improve their English skills through proactively making local friends and attending voluntary activities to practice their English and improve their communication skills. This involved a continuously changing habitus – as Maton notes 'habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences' (Maton, 2008, p. 132). We must therefore comprehend students' experiences in light of their diverse identities in a particular place and time. Both Foucault and Bourdieu's theories help to challenge the problematic focus on individual attitudes, that tends to portray

the working-class as inadequate and in need of (middle-class) experts' engagement for remedial treatment.

In addition, I found that participants' social identities sometimes contradict with one another. The example of Liu Mei (F, aged 30-35, working-class), which I have discussed in the data analysis chapter, shows that female participants' negotiations of their identities (for example as wives, potential mothers, and students) were not necessarily easy to manage. Rather, they may result in pain, fragmentation, contradiction, and limitation by the women's (hetero)sexualized identities at home (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Such insights are crucial for understanding the intricate processes by which different subjects in higher education get fashioned and refashioned through incompatible discourses, practices, and policies. Identity formation is a fluid process, that is influenced by changing contexts, micropolitics, and wider struggles over thinking, being and doing (Atencio & Wright, 2009).

This poststructuralist perspective challenges essentialist and cohesive ideas of identity and sheds light on the importance of recognition processes in the continuing construction of the gendered and classed subject. Also, this disrupts institutionalized categorizations of dividing, classifying and homogenising groups of people, in which such classifications are always enmeshed in power, reconstructing power relations and social differences that make a difference. In addition, intersectionality emphasises how power and difference operate, how they are marked and inscribed on the body, and how they are rejected or subverted through "practices of the self." This is a useful way to think about difference and transformation, when it comes to higher education policies and practices as well as the positions, mobilisations, and controls that various bodies have in relation to complex inequalities across space.

7.5 Conclusion

While most literature on international students' experiences focuses on the cultural differences between the home country and the receiving country, culture is not the only factor affecting international students' experiences in the UK. This chapter has shown that international students' experiences in the UK

should be understood with reference to larger social structures, which are reproduced in everyday social practices. These practices can be explained through the discourse of neoliberalism, and through classed, gendered and racialised power relations that playout in international education in the UK.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis endeavours to comprehensively grasp the intricate interplay of racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities within the landscape of higher education, focusing on the experiences of Chinese international students in the United Kingdom. Employing poststructural and critical theoretical perspectives, the research sheds light on the covert and insidious manifestations of power and inequality embedded in the UK higher education system.

Gendered subjectivities and the privileging of certain epistemological and ontological ideas in higher education create ongoing conflicts with dynamic power relations at play (Burke, 2013). To be recognised as an ‘appropriate’ student from a non-traditional background, international students need to take up specific ways of being and doing.

Through the investigation of international students’ emotions in the wider social and cultural context, my thesis provides an understanding of the operation of power between Western students, teachers and Chinese international students, and a set of practices of White supremacy performed in the classroom. The thesis sheds light on how the dominance of Western knowledge in academic settings can contribute to the silencing of Chinese international students, fostering feelings of shame and diminishing confidence in expressing their ideas. A central theme explored in this thesis is the manifestation of practices rooted in White supremacy within the classroom environment. The pervasive influence of Western-centric perspectives not only impacts academic discourse but also significantly influences the emotional experiences of Chinese international students. The thesis argues that this dominance of Western knowledge contributes to a prevailing 'deficit' view of the cultures and values of Chinese students. One key emotional dynamic scrutinized in this thesis is the role of shame. Contrary to being a momentary emotional response, shame is revealed as a sociologically significant force that permeates various aspects of the academic journey. The research demonstrates that shame is not solely generated in isolated encounters but can unexpectedly resurface in different situations. Importantly, shame becomes ingrained in the habitus through implicit or explicit

judgments from others, thereby normalizing a perception of personal deficits within Chinese international students.

Drawing on Ahmed's (2004a) framework, the thesis argues against reducing students' emotions to mere personal experiences. Instead, it emphasizes the interconnectedness between individual emotions and the broader socio-cultural context. By elucidating the emotional dimensions of the educational experience, the thesis aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of power dynamics, White supremacy practices, and their repercussions on the academic and emotional well-being of Chinese international students. Furthermore, through examination of the interplay of gender and social class, my findings shed light on how middle-class students' academic and social advantages are reproduced through the early accumulation of various cultural capital, how parental involvement on children's study is sometimes differentiated by gender, and how international students' own overseas experiences are both gendered and classed.

However, my thesis not only illustrates the power relations playing out in higher education and how individuals are expected to be thinking and acting in a certain way within the constraints of discourses. My research also uncovered instances of resistance and subversion by Chinese international students against dominant power structures. The resistances of the participants in my study permeate their daily lives, which is consistent with Foucault's conception of resistance as involving local conflicts that oppose institutions and norms rather than revolutionary attacks on the state. There is a potential opportunity for wider structural sociocultural change if we can better understand the ways in which power is circulated, and the mechanisms that maintain certain structures and rules of discourses (Waitt, 2005)., Participants in my study expressed their agency by actively improving themselves through participating academic writing courses, attending various cultural and social events and communicating with local students, which questions the 'deficit' model of Chinese international students as passive learners. Thus, this thesis advocates for the application of a poststructural lens to critically analyse the experiences and subjectivities of international students in higher education. By employing a poststructural perspective, the thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate power dynamics inherent in the academic landscape, offering a critical

reflection on international students' encounters and empowering them to navigate these dynamics effectively. While my focus is on the UK higher education system, the insights derived from this analysis are intended to be applicable to universities in various global contexts.

8.1 Sub-question 1 ‘how do institutional and wider social conditions influence Chinese international student’s experiences and transitions?’

Through my engagement with participants’ data, I have identified students’ experiences and transitions in the UK were influenced by broader hegemonic discourses of individualism, neoliberalism and postcolonialism as well as government policies of restriction due to Covid-19. Also, I have demonstrated how discourses are used to regulate the experiences of international students, and the ways in which international students respond to neoliberal ways of thinking. This thesis employs a postcolonial lens to scrutinize the power dynamics, cultural practices, and social norms that have arisen as a consequence of colonialism in the context of UK higher education. I have critiqued the exorbitant tuition fees imposed on international students in the UK, which frames them as a revenue stream. The study delves into how the discourse surrounding international students is deeply influenced by power imbalances between nations, characteristic of the postcolonial setting.

Central to this analysis is the exploration of the presumed superiority of Western knowledge and the symbolic value attached to Western qualifications. The thesis contends that these assumptions underpin the willingness of international students to invest substantial financial resources in accessing Western education, even in the face of expressed disappointment with the educational environment and teaching content. The postcolonial framework reveals how the historical context of colonialism continues to shape contemporary higher education practices, contributing to a discourse that perpetuates unequal power relations. By examining the economic aspect, particularly high tuition fees, the research illustrates how international students are positioned within the broader narrative of global power inequalities. Through this exploration, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ongoing impact of colonial legacies on higher education systems and to prompt critical reflections on the discourses

and practices that perpetuate these power imbalances. Additionally, this thesis has demonstrated that White supremacy is not isolated in discrete incidents that some people 'do' while others do not (McIntosh, 1986), rather is shaped by a constellation of processes and practices, and it is within this constellation that consciousness of supremacy are established (Diangelo, 2006). By such, my thesis contributes to the critique of the ‘reification of Whiteness’ (Ahmed, 2007), that uncovers what Whiteness does and what allows Whiteness to be done.

Furthermore, my thesis provides critical reflections on the contentious historical legacies of UK HE as a key facilitator of dominating colonial power structures that appear to be resurfacing in the contemporary neoliberal atmosphere. A critical awareness of neoliberalism, characterized by the marketization and competition within international education, complements an analysis of postcolonial institutions. This implies that decolonization of the university necessitates extending beyond curricula reform to a comprehensive critique of the material and structural practices inherent in the institution (Enslin & Hedge, 2023). Also, my study found that academic neo-colonialism exerts influence on academic environments in non-colonized countries, such as the Chinese mainland. In this context, elite universities in China display a preference for recruiting educators with overseas study or work experiences, reflecting a professional habitus valued in neoliberal society.

In addition, my thesis highlights the importance of mobility in youth transitions by discussing their use of ‘techniques of the self’ when they study and live in the UK, which develops understanding on the mutually constitutive nature of mobility and transition in international students’ lives. My thesis destabilises traditional linear notions of how transition occur, such as from education to work, and from work to marriage, as some participants in my thesis simultaneously engage with both study and work (part-time jobs, internships and voluntary work), or study and marriage. Additionally, my thesis provides insights into international students’ reversible and multidirectional transitions such as education to work and then to education, which demonstrates transnational mobility provides opportunities for young people to find new ways of self-exploring and discovery. Also, normative transitions may be disrupted or redirected by mobility through delays or accelerations, for example, studying in

the UK can be used by students as a way to avoid family and cultural pressure around marriage. These findings critique the conventional linear transition models which see the sequential passaging into adulthood as an ‘end point’ through “‘successful’ shifts from education to employment, and family of origin to family formation” (Robertson et al., 2018. P. 207). Also, my research found that the choices students make and opportunities they have around work and study depend on their capacities to be mobile including the capacity to apply to universities, obtain student visas and pay for the fees. These capacities, as I have demonstrated, is strongly influenced by students’ gender and social class positioning in addition to national government policies.

8.2 Sub-question 2 ‘to what extent do Chinese international students’ experiences and transitions relate to their gender and social class?’

Intersectionality offers a more sophisticated and nuanced view of the workings of power relations by considering how social class and gender cross and interact to affect Chinese international postgraduate students studying and transitioning in the UK. Working-class and lower middle-class female participants in my study are more likely to have mixed feelings about their academic ability and perceive formal educational institutions to be intimidating environments where they do not feel like they 'fit in'. However, they also demonstrated a stronger desire to put in extra effort in study and utilise the available resources than lower middle-class male students, which led to a quicker academic transition in the UK. Participants from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds are interested in converting and gaining different capitals, trying to understand the rules of the game, and adopting methods to amass gains regarding maximising the benefit of international experiences. Middle-class participants strategically converted their economic capital into cultural capital through active participation in diverse social and cultural events, enhancing both their cultural norms and English proficiency. Simultaneously, they sought to uphold their social status by cultivating social capital through connections with individuals from comparable family backgrounds. While working-class participants’ financial situations and prior experiences may limit their ability to accumulate a certain type of cultural capital, they tended to work hard to achieve higher academic outcomes. For example, they attended pragmatic activities to improve their

employability as well as expanding their social networks, including making local friends and making friends who have good academic performance.

Using descriptors such as ‘women’, ‘mature’ and ‘working-class’ helped me to examine certain social groups and identity constructions and understand how power and inequality operate. However, my study also found Chinese international students constructed their subjectivities through actively engaging in practices involving ‘techniques of the self’. Given the discursive quality of identity construction, social identities are unstable and open for reinterpretation and refashioning. Thus, the identity of ‘student’, ‘middle-working’, ‘working-class', ‘female’ and ‘male’ have no single meaning but depend on a wide range of contextual factors. Thus, Chinese international students’ construction of subjectivises challenges the discourse of the ‘homogeneity’ of international students underpinned by a stable and cohesive self.

My findings show some Chinese international students react positively to overseas study. They see overseas study as an opportunity to acquire knowledge and experience new ways of learning through actively ‘improving’ themselves. Thus, the resilience, hard-working and international perspective that Chinese international students brought to the UK should be paid attention to. These findings challenge the ‘deficit’ model of Chinese international students as passive learners, instead they actively engaged in various practices to improve themselves. It is obvious that not all Chinese students fall into the negative stereotypes, which suggest that pedagogical researchers should broaden understanding on international students’ transition by considering the variability of context.

Furthermore, the discourse of globalisation and neoliberalism is widespread in Chinese social media, promoting the idea that students should be intercultural and have overseas studying experiences and intercultural competences. Additionally, some elite Chinese universities look for applicants who have international experience when hiring them, reinforcing the neoliberal discourse while ignoring the applicant's financial circumstances. Less wealthy families might not be able to afford to send their children to study abroad. In my thesis, I have demonstrated how middle-class families spend a lot of money sending their children to exchange schools where they can study English and develop their

cross-cultural awareness. The media's and employers' emphasis on the value of foreign degrees may make socioeconomic inequality in China worse. Middle-class families continue to protect their social standing by sending their children abroad, and the preference for international degrees in the labour market gives their children more access to privileged positions. Working-class individuals may lose their opportunity for upward social mobility because study abroad supports this intergenerational social reproduction.

Finally, my thesis contributes to the literature on educational transitions in the UK by incorporating students' pre-arrival experiences which were influenced by participants' gender and social class. Prior knowledge and experience play a crucial role and has a considerable effect on Chinese students' later social, cultural and academic transitions, indicating pedagogy is context dependent.

8.3 Potential routes for change

While it is essential for universities and teachers provide academic support and optimum services for international students to improve their academic performance, my thesis suggests that it is unrealistic to expect institutions and tutors to mediate all the problems faced by international students. It is important to analyse their transitions in a wider context and explore the subtle and insidious way of power operations in higher education. With this in mind, I discuss below what is being done and what more could be done to address the issues raised in this thesis.

8.3.1 Creating an inclusive learning environment in the UK universities

UK higher education has made a variety of efforts to address the structural, systemic, and lived racial inequities experienced by students of colour in HE (Campbell et al., 2022). For example, University College London has created the 'Teaching Toolkits' for 'Creating an inclusive curriculum for BAME students' in 2020 (UCL, 2020). Practical tips are provided to help teachers assess and improve the inclusivity of the curriculum, including using a diverse range of resources, contextualising course materials, acknowledging any limitations in the demographic representation of course material, avoiding stereotypes in course content and celebrating diversity. In another example, the University of

Aberdeen has created a section called ‘What We Teach’ on its university website to provide an overview of approaches that support decolonising the content of their courses and programmes to reflect a more inclusive and diverse curriculum. It provides guidance on how to decolonise a reading list for teachers, such as providing an audit tool to help teachers conduct a full reading list audit and encouraging teachers to work with students to create co-curated reading lists. However, as Kemiche and Beighton (2021) argue that racial inequalities in higher education nevertheless persist as a consistent and ‘predictable’ aspect of the experiences of students from minority ethnic origins in UK HEIs, despite more than 20 years of anti-racism work and the introduction of several race equity interventions. Therefore, as decolonising the curriculum is an ongoing process, institutions need to make continual, sustained efforts to address the inequalities arising from the historic and ongoing impact of racism and colonialism.

First, institutions can encourage diversity among faculty and staff by actively hiring people from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly those with knowledge of colonial history and postcolonial studies (see Ahmed, 2007; Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018). UK black and minority ethnic (BME) staff are underrepresented in UK higher education and the proportion of professors in BME groups is lower than the proportion of White professors in comparison to the percentage population of BME citizens nationally (Advance HE, 2018). However, institutions need to also be aware of the illusion of tokenistic inclusion, of recruiting one or two BME staff to meet the buzzword of ‘diversity’ in the neoliberal context (Doharty et al., 2021). Ahmed (2006) describes this as ‘non-performativity’ of anti-racism which acts to leave structural racism intact. Also, Doharty et al, (2021) suggest that racial microaggressions in the UK higher education should be taken seriously and that institutional racism is maintained by adopting the work of a few BME academics while exploitatively draining what is useful from their scholarship. Second, universities and institutions should encourage and support research that examines the historical background and ongoing effects of colonialism and Western supremacy in education and society. Specifically, research should be done in areas such as teaching methods and pedagogical styles and practices, not just curriculum.

Third, while certain universities have established mechanisms to gather students' feedback on courses through forms, there is a notable lack of communication regarding the specific changes to be implemented in response to this feedback and the procedures for addressing the issues raised by students. Transparency in outlining solutions is crucial; students are more likely to engage in providing feedback if universities establish clear and communicative systems for sharing their responses and adjustments to enhance the learning experience. Fourthly, institutions can promote cultural exchange activities within the school or university, where Chinese students can share their culture with classmates, fostering mutual understanding. Finally, institutions must also make sure there are sufficient resources allocated towards evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of ongoing decolonization efforts, determine whether they will have the desired impact, and to continuously review and update the pertinent work.

8.3.2 Teacher Professional development

When working with Chinese international students, teachers should foster empathy, understanding, and cultural sensitivity to create a positive and inclusive learning environment. First, universities can organize workshops or seminars to educate teachers about Chinese culture, history, and societal norms, which could help teachers to relate to their Chinese students more effectively. Specifically, institutions can foster inclusivity by encouraging teachers to integrate and welcome the cultures of international students into their daily practices. For instance, teachers can incorporate elements such as playing Chinese songs or showcasing Chinese poetry before class begins. Inclusivity should extend beyond occasional events, like major cultural festivals, and become an integral part of teachers' daily practices, creating a continuous and supportive environment for diverse cultural engagement. To obtain a greater knowledge of what students of colour are thinking, saying, and talking with one another and gain insight into their daily lives, educators are encouraged to step outside of the classroom and to participate in students’ cultural activities and festivals to better understand their cultures.

Second, teachers can be asked to be transparent about assessment expectations. According to feedback from my participants, even though some courses have provided guidelines and criteria for assignments and assessments, sometimes

they are too generic, and they may not have understood the rules correctly. Departments/Schools should provide resources, including workload allocation, for teachers to provide office hours in this situation to answer and address students' unique questions. In addition, instructors must critically reflect on how they (re)produce hegemonic practices and power relations that only serve to support specific sorts of bodies and subjects while denigrating others constituted as the 'Other'. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and universities can organize sessions to allow lecturers to reflect on their teaching practice and how the domination of Western students in the classroom may unwittingly be happening and provide them with suggestions of alternative teaching strategies to challenge this.

Also, teachers can organize group activities that promote collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds. This allows students to learn from one another and work together. Furthermore, teachers are suggested to frequently give their students praise for their verbal contributions during class. This may include remarks or questions made by students during a discussion or presentations made in class on a research topic. The incorporation of forms of non-verbal participation in the classroom is one option that the teachers can pursue. Students who might be shy to speak up or engage can still make a contribution in other ways, including by making weekly journal entries in class (see Rodriguez, 2011).

8.3.3 Improving international students' academic writing skills

Improving the academic writing skills of Chinese international students in the context of Eurocentric writing conventions in UK higher education can be complex. Plenty of UK universities have provided workshops, tips and writing activities to improve students' academic writing skills. For example, the University of Essex provides the booklet to list some of the most common mistakes in academic writing for students as a reference guide. The Academic Writing Skills Programme (AWSP) in University of Glasgow provides an online course and a multiple-choice assignment to teach students academic/scientific tone and style, integrity and plagiarism, and the reading and research process. It also provides students with feedback on ways to improve their work. While

students' writing skills have greatly benefited from this effort, Chinese students without prior exposure to Western writing styles or for whom English is not the first language may need additional support. For example, teachers can give illustrative writing examples and essays that follow the UK writing conventions and discuss these examples in class while highlighting important elements such as argument structure, citation, and use of evidence. Also, teachers need to emphasise the potential cultural differences in communication styles and approaches to argumentation and encourage students to be flexible while preserving their individual viewpoints.

8.3.4 Financial support

While there are many types of scholarships are available in the UK for international students including Great Scholarships, Chevening Scholarships and Erasmus Mundus Scholarships, the process of applying for the scholarship is complicated and the eligibility requirements vary depending on the scholarship type, amount and institution providing the scholarship. For Chinese students who may never had access to this information, it would be very helpful for institutions to include a list of the different kinds of scholarships available to Chinese international students in their offers, along with instructions on how to apply. Also, universities can facilitate on-campus part-time job opportunities for international students in order to provide them with additional income. In addition to the extra financial support provided from universities or government, pre-arrival information is a vital prerequisite for proper preparation for the sojourners. It is suggested that universities can provide basic information on cost of living in the offer or on their institutional website, so that students and their families may get a broad idea of how much living expense they should budget each month. In addition, universities can organize ‘financial plan’ seminars in the initial stage to provide information on how to live in the UK including how to get transportation discount, which supermarkets serve less expensive food and where they can find part-time jobs.

8.3.5 Chinese government should create an equitable environment for graduate employment

First, the Chinese government needs to pay attention to the content of social media dissemination and provides a greater support of media that communicates the value and benefits of studying abroad. Second, the Chinese government should issue regulations that restrict discriminatory language in job advertisements. Chinese employers should not be allowed to establish a demand for a certain sort of qualification (such as a degree from abroad) unless it is required for the position. Third, the government can establish mechanisms for monitoring job advertisements and social media platforms for discriminatory content in terms of gender and qualifications. Establishing accessible channels for individuals to report instances of discrimination to designated platforms or would enhance accountability in addressing discriminatory practices.

8.4 Final reflection of the whole research process

Throughout the research process, I constantly questioned my status with participants, and whether/how far I was an insider or outsider. At the start of the field work, I considered myself as an insider because my participants and I are all from China, we all grew up within the same Chinese educational system and culture, and they were going to have master's degree in UK universities, which I myself had. By such, we might be expected to share similar perspectives, experiences and subjectivities when living and studying in the UK. Indeed, in the first interviews with my participants, I did feel a connection between myself and some of my participants and this helped me build rapport and trust with my participants, especially when we talked about the differences of education system between China and UK. However, this so-called ‘bonding’ and feeling of ‘familiarisation’ was disrupted when I reflected on my feelings about one participant’s experience. He mentioned losing all his belongings when travelling by plane from China to Glasgow. He was forced to reprint his bank cards and purchase all his basic requirements on his own. I expressed my sorrow after hearing about his experiences and thought that this must be horrifying. He disagreed with me, saying that this experience had given him the chance to tackle issues on his own and to be more courageous.

After further conversation, I learned that he comes from an upper middle-class family. His parents put a lot of effort into helping him gain independence. He was able to apply to UK universities and prepare for the IELTS exams on his own, as opposed to asking the 'Study Abroad Institution' to do so like most of my participants. He said that these experiences had contributed to his personal development. Then, I realised I also need to consider myself as an outsider because in many ways, we are dissimilar in terms of life experiences, expectations, values, and worldviews. I realised I must be extremely careful when I brought my own perspectives and reflections to the research process. Even if some of my participants and I seemed to share common identities or experiences, such as identifying as female or coming from a middle-class family, we had different educational paths. Most of the middle-class participants had linear transitions from undergraduate study directly to postgraduate study in the UK, while my educational path was non-linear and reversible (education-work-education), as I talked about in the Introduction to this thesis. This was somewhat similar to the working-class participants' educational transitions, which I discussed in Chapter 7. It should be mentioned that my class affiliation, which has transferred from working-class to middle-class, is not fixed. This has aided in my ability to comprehend and interpret the variable and occasionally contradicting experiences of my participants. The entire research process made me realise that my status as an insider/outsider was fluid and not fixed.

The entire PHD research journey has left me with the strong impression that the research process is not linear but instead necessitates that researchers return to all study phases again for further analysis and evaluation. My initial PhD proposal to my supervisor listed international students from middle-class families as my research subjects of choice. I eventually understood, though, that it would be unrealistic to ask students from every country to take part in my research. Additionally, the negative portrayal of Chinese international students that is prevalent in contemporary literature and the disparaging remarks that I overheard from several lecturers and other international students truly upset me. In addition to expressing my empathy and resonance with some of the difficulties faced by Chinese international students, I also emphasised my ambition to learn more about the underlying causes rather than the commonly used justifications of "cultural differences" and "English proficiency." Upon my

supervisor's advice, I chose to focus primarily on Chinese international students to focus my research. It helped to depict a more comprehensive picture of one context, connect to wider social and cultural histories, questions, debates, and discourses, and come up with more specific solutions. Also, as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), I spoke with one female student, shattering my ‘common sense’ that all Chinese international students come from middle-class households. She stated that her parents had to take out a loan to pay for her year of studies in the UK. I was a little shocked, and then I started to think that it might be valuable to research the experiences of working-class Chinese international students and in doing so to help make their exclusion, marginalisation, and agency more visible. Indeed, I was so impressed and touched by their resilience and hard work.

Based on the experiences of working-class participants, I revisited my planned theoretical framework in order to include Bourdieu’s sociological theory in the research. In Bourdieu’s analysis of the acquisition of social identity through practice and habitus, he emphasized corporeal sedimentation: that taste, speech, and feeling were almost impossible to learn or consciously imitate as they were never fully under self-surveillance and control (Bourdieu, 1986). Although I recognised the structural constraints on my participant’s experiences, I can see their resilience, reflections, and resistance to their social positions. Additionally, despite the structural constraints, working-class participants were not always at a disadvantage. Some of them even 'fitted in' to the UK educational system faster than middle-class participants, who were thought to have greater cultural capital, such as previous cross-cultural travel, and strong English language skills. By such reflections, I began to consider utilising Foucault’s thinking in relation to discourse, power and knowledge, to analyse power as relational and circuitous.

For my next research step, first, I might build upon my existing work to track my participants over an extended period to see how the experiences of studying abroad and their social class and gender influences their later transitions after their master’s graduation. Second, I would like to investigate the impact of the decolonisation work of some institutions in the UK, investigating whether and how far it achieves the intended outcomes. Third, it might be interesting to

apply same theoretical framework and methodologies to analyse the educational transitions of UK students who study in Chinese universities to see the similarities and differences of their experiences. In sum, I hope my thesis can make a contribution to research that aims to improve Chinese and other international students' experience from an intersectional perspective.

Appendices

1.1 A model of social stratification in China

	Position in Labor Division	Position in Authority Structure	Means of Production	Inside/Outside the Political System (tizhinei/tizhi wai	Major Resources
Administrative personnel of state affairs and social affairs	High- and middle-level professional and technical rank	High- and middle-level management	Agents (do not possess means of production, but control or dispose)	The core of the political system	Political
Managerial personnel	High- and middle-level professional and technical rank	High- and middle-level management	Employees (do not possess means of production, but control or dispose)	The periphery of the political system or outside the system	Cultural or political
Private entrepreneurs		High-level management	Employers (possess means of production)	Outside the political system	Economic
Professionals	High- and middle-level professional	Self-managed or managed (independent	Employees or self-employed	Inside the political system or	Cultural

	and technical rank	to some extent)	(do not possess means of production)	outside the system	
Office workers (banshi renyuan)	Middle- and low-level professional and technical rank	Managed or middle- and low-level management	Employees (do not possess means of production)	Inside the political system or outside the system	Some cultural and political
Self-employed labours (ge'ti'hu)		Management or self-managed	Self-employed or employers (possess means of production)	Outside the political system	Some economic
Commercial and service workers	Skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled labours	Managed or low-level management	Employees or self-employed (do not possess means of production)	Inside the political system or outside the system	Some cultural or political
Industrial workers	Skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled labours	Managed or low-level management	Employees or self-employed (do not possess means of production)	Inside the political system or outside the system	Some cultural or political

Peasants	Skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled labours	Self-managed	Employees or self-employed (possess some means of production)	Inside the political system or outside the system	Some economic or cultural
Unemployed	—	—	—	—	None

Table 1-1 A model of social stratification in China (Appendix)
Source: this table is cited from Chen (2013).

1.2 Participant's Diary Excerpts

Participant: Ena	
Academic transitions	
9.2021-3.2022	Example: This semester's courses, the teacher's teachings are more organized. For example, in the [xxxxx] class, there are different teachers to teach each part. Some teachers will tell us what to read first, how many minutes to read, how to take notes, [and very detailed combing how much time will be spent, quantify the time, know when my efficiency is not high enough], and how to improve. The teacher will give you a table, you can summarize the meaning of this passage yourself, and you can preview it in advance. Let me know how to study by myself. I didn't have this feeling last semester. This semester, the teachers are using their methods to influence me subtly and let me improve my learning efficiency.
4.2022	Example: In terms of study, by writing papers, my thinking has become clearer, and my work is more organized, especially searching for literature. Including compliance with the rules. I'm not a person who likes to follow the rules, and I'm even a little rebellious. Someone lets me do this, I won't go. If I write papers according to this standard,

	I sometimes don't read them. But now I learn something from this, and started to follow the standard, I have corrected some of my shortcomings.
5.2022	Example: The difficulty may be the difficulty in learning, that is, in the process of learning, there may be some knowledge that are not clear, and then look for literature, um, I always feel that I can't find a very suitable literature, it is the publish time is new, the number of citations is large, and it is published in a good journal (I don’t know the criteria of a good article).
6.2022	Example: The study is to practice oral English, and then talk to different people on the software, and it is about the study of the thesis, about 2/3 of the completed.
7.2022	Example: In terms of study, the main thing is to write the thesis, then the thesis, and now basically the second draft is almost finished, so there is still learning to watch some teachers' classes, there are some teachers' classes on station B, and then see how they teach and study. Let’s talk about teaching methods, because I didn’t know much about practice because of the educational studies I studied before, and then I really encountered these problems in the process of applying for

	jobs. Well, the teacher will think that I have less experience, and then the teaching skills are not enough.
8.2022	Example: During my one-year master's program in the UK, I wrote a lot of papers, and these papers had a certain influence on my thinking, including the way of doing things. I feel that teaching a class or doing some other work seems to be similar to writing a thesis. You need to go to a well-founded way, either to persuade others or to do one thing. All need to be organized, and then things will be clearer, students will understand better, then lectures will be clearer, students will understand better, or you will understand this matter more clearly, feel that some things are interoperable, and then you can learn from the learning process and put it to work.

Table 1-2 participants' diary excerpts (Appendix)

1.3 Interview guide

Ice-breaker questions: Could you please tell me your name? Could you please tell me about your major and why you choose this? Could you please tell why you choose this particular university?

Section 1: preparations before departure.

1, What did you do to prepare your overseas education before you left China?

Prompts: what was your families' reaction to your plans? Did your parents have any expectations on you such as grades or job arrangements? Did you receive any support/challenges from families/friends when making the decision? What advice you have received? Have you attended any English Training institutions? What was the experience of applying for a visa like? Were you aware of support that the university could give you (e.g. in response to Covid -19 challenges?) If so, what were you aware of and what was your opinion of it?

Section 2: existing experiences in university.

2, What issues have you encountered when you started your courses – any particular positive or negative experiences?

Prompts: what has studying been like? How do you think of your course arrangement such as class size and compositions and assessments? How do you think of the differences between the Chinese educational system and UK educational system? Could you tell me a little more about your experiences regarding making friends? How have you felt regarding feeling comfortable or uncomfortable at university? How do you use library resources and services and how you feel about them? How do you think of the ranking of university? How about the tuition fee? How do you think of the international education becoming more market-valued.

Section 3: university/department culture.

3, Can you now tell me a little about the life of your department/university?

Prompts: do you think it is a friendly and inclusive place? Do you find diversity in your department? Do you hang out with your classmates? Do you see much of the teaching staff outside class? Is there any social activities linked to your course? Have you ever attended the university club?

Section 4: transitional moments.

4, Do you think you have ever changed during your studying time in the UK?

Prompts: is there any particular moment when you feel change is occurred? Are there any things or people making you change? Do you have some thoughts or strategies to deal with the changing moment? Did you receive any support? What kind of support? How do you think your experience of transnational mobility (moving from China to the UK) influencing your transitions and life trajectories?

Section 5: the influence of Covid-19.

5, What are your views on how Covid-19 restrictions influenced your transnational experiences?

Prompts: what are your expected overseas experiences? how do you think of online courses? How is your social lives, traveling? Other counties visa application? Does Covid-19 influence your job imagination after graduation? If so, how? If not, why, do you think? difficulties with keeping in touch with their home country while studing at Glasgow?

Section 6: thoughts about social class.

6, Do you think your family background has ever influenced your studying in the UK? (: parents occupation, parents education, parents income)

Prompts: Could you tell me a little more about day-to-day cost of living in Glasgow – how have you experienced it? How are your accommodation conditions and your roommates (private house or student accommodation)? Have you ever considered of doing part-time job? If so, how has that experience been? How are your parents thinking of you studying abroad? Have your parents ever involved in applying overseas university with you? Have your parents helped you to decide your major? Apart from the economic support, what else they may support you? (family environment, parents' social networks?) Have you ever travelled in the UK, been to any museums or galleries? Shopping or not? Do you think your experiences you've been through here related to your family background?

Section 7: thoughts about gender.

7 Do you think being a women (for men and vs versa) would have change anything in your experiences?

Prompts: how you think of these characteristics of masculine or feminine? Do you think you have some characteristics of either masculinity or femininity? If so, could you please tell me what is that? Do you think your gender has had an influence on your choices, for example what subject you choose, when you get married or what is your ideal job? Whether your parents, friends, teachers, or your relatives such as your grandparents and aunts expect certain things from you because of your gender? Could you explain your answer? Have you ever been treated differently because of your gender (attending clubs, academic conferences, activities)? How is the gender proportion in your course? And has this ever affected your studying and social lives (making friends).

Do you have any suggestions for your university based on you studying experiences?

Prompts : lecturers ? Tutors ? Courses arrangements ? Feedback channels? for the international student office?

At the end of the interview, I will gather participants' personal information via surveys. According to the feedback from these two participants, they felt acceptable about the demographic survey.

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

1.3 Consent Form

Title of Project: ..... What are the Chinese international postgraduates' perceptions of their experiences in the UK? .....

Name of Researcher: .....Hu Mei.....

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

I agree that:

Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research 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 ……

…… End of consent form ……

List of References

Ackerly, B. and True, J., 2008. Reflexivity in practice: Power and ethics in feminist research on international relations. *International Studies Review,* 10(4), pp.693-707.

Advance HE. 2018. *Equality + higher education, Staff statistical report 2018.* https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2018/.

Agger, B., 1991. Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance. *Annual review of sociology,* 17(1), pp.105-131.

Ahmed, S. 2004a. *Affective economics. Social Text* 22. no. 2: 11739.

Ahmed, S., 2004. Collective feelings: Or the impressions left by others. *Theory, culture & society*, 21(2), pp.25-42.

Ahmed, S., 2006. The nonperformativity of antiracism. *Meridians*, *7*(1), pp.104-126.

Ahmed, S. 2007. The language of diversity. *Ethnic and racial studie*s, 30(2), pp. 235-256.

Ahmed, S., 2007. A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist theory*, 8(2), pp.149-168.

Ahmed, S., 2013. Embodying diversity: Problems and paradoxes for Black feminists. In *Black and Postcolonial feminisms in New Times* (pp. 41-52). Routledge.

Alexander, M.J. and Mohanty, C.T. eds., 2013. *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. Routledge.

Alhazmi, A. and Nyland, B. 2013. The Saudi Arabian international students experience: From a gender-segregated society to studying in a mixed-gender environment. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education,* 43(3), pp. 346–365.

Allen, B.J., 2005. Social constructionism. *Engaging organizational communication theory and research: Multiple perspectives.* pp.35-53.

Altbach, P.G., 2007. Globalization and the university: Realities in an unequal world. In *Tradition and Transition*. (pp. 23-48). Brill.

Ansley, F.L., 1997. White supremacy (and what we should do about it). *Critical white studies: Looking behind the mirror,* pp.592-595.

Anzaldúa, G. and Keating, A. eds., 2013. *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. Routledge.

Arambewela, R. and J. Hall. 2013. The Interactional Effects of the Internal and External University Environment, and the Influence of Personal Values, on Satisfaction among International Postgraduate Students. *Studies in Higher Education,* 38 (7), pp. 972–988.

Archer, L. and Leathwood, C. 2003. Identities, inequalities and higher education, in: L. Archer, M. Hutchings & A. Ross (Eds) *Higher education: issues of inclusion and exclusion* (London, RoutledgeFalmer).

Archer, L., 2003. *Race, masculinity and schooling: Muslim boys and education*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Archer, L., Halsall, A. and Hollingworth, S., 2007. Inner-city femininities and education:'race', class, gender and schooling in young women's lives. *Gender and Education, 19*(5), pp.549-568.

Atencio, M. and Wright, J., 2009. 'Ballet it's too whitey': Discursive hierarchies of high school dance spaces and the constitution of embodied feminine subjectivities. *Gender and Education, 21*(1), pp.31-46.

Attané, I., 2012. Being a woman in China today: A demography of gender. *China perspectives. 2012*(2012/4), pp.5-15.

Baas, M., 2006. Students of migration: Indian overseas students and the question of permanent residency. *People and Place, 14*(1), pp.8-23.

Baca Zinn, M. and Thornton Dill, B. 1996. Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism. *Feminist Studie*s. 22, pp. 321–331.

Bakker, A.B. and Bal, M.P., 2010. Weekly work engagement and performance: A study among starting teachers. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology, 83*(1), pp.189-206.

Barker, M., 1981. *The new racism: Conservatives and the ideology of the tribe*. Junction Books.

Ball, S.J., 2003. The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of education policy, 18*(2), pp.215-228.

Bamber, M., 2014. What motivates Chinese women to study in the UK and how do they perceive their experience? *Higher Education*, 68, pp.47-68.

Beoku-Betts, J., 2004. African women pursuing graduate studies in the sciences: Racism, gender bias, and third world marginality. *NWSA journal*, pp.116-135.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *Location of culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bhopal, K. and Pitkin, C., 2018. Investigating higher education institutions and their views on the Race Equality Charter. *Birmingham, UK: Center for Research of Race and Education*.

Biccum, A., 2012. *Global citizenship and the legacy of empire: Marketing development*. Routledge.

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. 1981. Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research, 10*(2), pp. 141–163.

Bissell, D. 2008. Comfortable Bodies: Sedentary Affects. *Environment and Planning* A, 40 (7), pp. 1697–1712

Blackmore, J. 1997. Disciplining feminism: a look at gender-equity struggles in Australian higher education, in. L.G. ROMAN & L. EYRE (Eds) *Dangerous Territories: struggles for difference and equality in education* (London, Routledge)

Blackmore, J., Gribble, C. and Rahimi, M., 2017. International education, the formation of capital and graduate employment: Chinese accounting graduates' experiences of the Australian labour market. *Critical Studies in Education*, *58*(1), pp.69-88.

Boler, M. and Zembylas, M., 2003. Discomforting truths: The emotional terrain of understanding difference. In *Pedagogies of difference* (pp. 107-130). Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. & Johnson, R. 1993, *The field of cultural production: essays on art and literature*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D. 1992, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press in association with Blackwell, Oxford.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge : Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. "The forms of capital," *in Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Educatio*n, ed. J. G. Richardson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood), pp. 241–258.

Bourdieu, P. 1988. *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. 1977. *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (No. 16). Cambridge university press.

Bourdieu, P., 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford university press.

Bourdieu, P., 1993. *Sociology in question* (Vol. 18). Sage.

Bourdieu, P., 2000. Pascalian Meditations (Cambridge: Polity). *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *137*.

Bourdieu, P., 2005. *The social structures of the economy*. Polity.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), pp.77-101.

Braidotti, R., 2013. *Metamorphoses: Towards a materialist theory of becoming*. John Wiley & Sons.

Breda, T., Jouini, E., Napp, C. and Thebault, G., 2020. Gender stereotypes can explain the gender-equality paradox. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *117*(49), pp.31063-31069.

Brooks, R. & Waters, J. 2011, *Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education,* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Brooks, R. and Waters, J., 2022. Partial, hierarchical and stratified space? Understanding 'the international' in studies of international student mobility. *Oxford Review of Education*, *48*(4), pp.518-535.

Brooks, R., 2004. *Friendship and educational choice: Peer influence and planning for the future*. Springer.

Brown, L. 2009. The Transformative Power of the International Sojourn. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 36 (3), 502–521.

Brown, L. and Holloway, I., 2008. The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university: An ethnographic study. *Journal of research in International Education*, *7*(2), pp.232-249.

Brown, P., Lauder, H. and Ashton, D., 2010. *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs, and incomes*. Oxford University Press.

Browne, J., 2010. Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education [Browne Report]. *Online at: https://www. gov. uk/government/publications/the-browne-report-higher-educationfunding-and-student-finance (accessed 30 October 2015)*.

Buchanan, D.A., 1991. Vulnerability and agenda: context and process in project management. *British Journal of Management*, *2*(3), pp.121-132.

Burke, P.J., 2013. The right to higher education: Neoliberalism, gender and professional mis/recognitions. *International studies in sociology of education*, *23*(2), pp.107-126.

Burke, P.J., 2017. Difference in higher education pedagogies: gender, emotion and shame. *Gender and education*, *29*(4), pp.430-444.

Burke, P.J. and McManus, J., 2009. *Art for a few: Exclusion and misrecognition in art and design higher education admissions*. National Arts Learning Network.

Burke, P.J., 2001. *Accessing education: a feminist post/structuralist ethnography of widening educational participation* (Doctoral dissertation, Institute of Education, University of London).

Burke, P.J., 2002. *Accessing education. Effectively Widening Participation*.

Burke, P.J., 2015. Re/imagining higher education pedagogies: Gender, emotion and difference. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *20*(4), pp.388-401.

Butler, J., 1997. *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford University Press.

Butler, J., 2021. *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. routledge.

Butler, J. and Scott, J.W. eds., 2013. *Feminists theorize the political*. Routledge.

Byram, M., 2003. On being 'bicultural'and 'intercultural'. *Intercultural experience and education*, *2*, pp.50-66.

Cairns, D., 2015. International student mobility in crisis? Understanding post-diploma mobility decision-making in an economic crisis context. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, (79), pp.9-25.

Campbell, Paul Ian; Ajour, Ashjan; Dunn, Andrew; Karavadra, Heena; Nockels, Keith; Whittaker, Sarah. 2022. Evaluating the Racially Inclusive Curricula Toolkit in HE': Empirically Measuring the Efficacy and Impact of Making Curriculum-content Racially Inclusive on the Educative Experiences of Students of Colour in the UK. University of Leicester. Report. https://doi.org/10.25392/leicester.data.21724658.v1

Cao, C. 2016. A survey of the influencing factors for international academic mobility of Chinese university students. *Higher education quarterly*, 20(2), pp. 200-220.

Caudwell, J., 2003. Sporting gender: Women's footballing bodies as sites/sights for the (re) articulation of sex, gender, and desire. *Sociology of sport journal*, *20*(4), pp.371-386.

CBC News. 2014, November 7. *UBC's vantage college: Canadians need not apply*. Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ubc-s-vantage-college-canadians-need-not-apply-1.2826142.

Chan, S., 1999. The Chinese learner–a question of style. *Education+ training*, *41*(6/7), pp.294-305.

Chen, J. and Wu, Z., 2008. Gender differences in the effects of self-rated health status on mortality among the oldest old in china. *Healthy longevity in China: Demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological dimensions*, pp.397-418.

Chen, J., 2004. *Popular political support in urban China*. Stanford University Press.

Chen, J., 2013. *A middle class without democracy: Economic growth and the prospects for democratization in China*. Oxford University Press.

Chen, S., 2020. Parental investment after the birth of a sibling: the effect of family size in low-fertility China. *Demography*, *57*(6), pp.2085-2111.

Chew, P.G.L., 2010. Linguistic capital, study mothers and the transnational family in Singapore. *Globalization of Language and Culture in Asia: The Impact of Globalization Processes on Language. London, England: Continuum*, pp.82-106.

Chi, J., Bu, W. & Liu, W. 2014, *Education, media and sexuality health services for girls and women: 20 years' experience of China's policy and practice*, Paths International Ltd, Reading, England.

Church, A. T. 1982. Sojourner Adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin* ,91 (3), p. 540 572.

Clark, T., Foster, L., Bryman, A. and Sloan, L., 2021. *Social Research Methods 6E*. Oxford University Press.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. 2017. Thematic analysis. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 12(3), 297–298. https://doi. org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2002. *Research methods in education*. routledge.

Coleman, J. A. 2004. *Study abroad, in: M. Byram (Ed)*, Routledge.

Collins, F.L., 2006. Making Asian students, making students Asian: The racialisation of export education in Auckland, New Zealand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *47*(2), pp.217-234.

Collins, P.H., 1990. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. routledge.

Collins, P. H. 1993, Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis and connection. *Race, Sex, & Class*, 1, pp. 25–45.

Collins, P. H. 2000, Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Connell R. 2010. Understanding neoliberalism. In: Braedley S and Luxton M (eds) Neoliberalism and Everyday Life. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, pp. 22–36.

Connell, R., Collyer, F., Maia, J. and Morrell, R. 2016. Toward a global sociology of knowledge: post-colonial realities and intellectual practices. *International Sociology,* 32(1), p. 21–37.

Connolly, P. and Neill, J., 2001. Constructions of locality and gender and their impact on the educational aspirations of working-class children. *International studies in sociology of education*, *11*(2), pp.107-130.

Cook, Sarah, and Xiao-yuan Dong. 2011. Harsh Choices: Chinese Women's Paid Work and Unpaid Care Responsibilities Under Economic Reform. *Development and Change,* 42 (2), p. 947–965.

Crenshaw, K. 1989, Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*, pp. 137–197.

Crenshaw, K. 1991, Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, vol.43, pp. 1241–1299.

Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L., 2000. Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice*, *39*(3), pp.124-130.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J. and Colliander, L., 2008. *The socio cultural and learning experiences of working-class students in higher education*. Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Crozier, S.E. and Cassell, C.M., 2016. Methodological considerations in the use of audio diaries in work psychology: Adding to the qualitative toolkit. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, *89*(2), pp.396-419.

Cuddy, A.J., Fiske, S.T. and Glick, P., 2008. Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS map. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, *40*, pp.61-149.

Dangeni, Elliot, D.L. & MacDiarmid, C. 2021, Audio diaries: a creative research method for higher education studies in the digital age in, eds. X. Cao & E.F. Henderson, Routledge.

D'Aoust, A.M., 2014. Ties that bind? Engaging emotions, governmentality and neoliberalism: Introduction to the special issue. *Global Society,* 28(3), pp.267-276.

Davies, B., & Gannon, S. 2005. Feminism/post-structuralism. In Bridget Somekh and Cathy Lewin (Eds.), *Research methods in the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Dean, M. 2010. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage.

Deem, rosemary and Ozga, J 1997 'Women Managing Diversity in a Postmodern World' in Carolynn Marshall (ed.), *Feminist Critical Policy Analysis,* London: Falmer.

Delanty, G., 2017. *The European heritage: a critical re-interpretation*. Taylor & Francis.

Deleuze, G., 1994. *Difference and repetition*. Columbia University Press.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., 2008. Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DfBIS). 2011. Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System. London: Crown Copyright.

Department for Education (DfE). 2010. Towards a Strong Careers Progression. an Independent Report to the Department for Education. London: Crown Copyright.

Desforges, L., 2000. Traveling the world: Identity and travel biography. *Annals of tourism research*, *27*(4), pp.926-945.

Diangelo, R.J., 2006. The production of whiteness in education: Asian international students in a college classroom. *Teachers College Record*, *108*(10), pp.1983-2000.

Doharty, N., Madriaga, M. and Joseph-Salisbury, R., 2021. The university went to 'decolonise'and all they brought back was lousy diversity double-speak! Critical race counter-stories from faculty of colour in 'decolonial'times. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *53*(3), pp.233-244.

Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk, and Yi Zheng. 1970. Introduction. Post-Mao, PostBourdieu: Class Culture in Contemporary China. *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies,* 6 (2), p. 1–11. doi:10.5130/portal. V6i2.1390.

Duncan, P., 2009. *Tell this silence: Asian American women writers and the politics of speech*. University of Iowa Press.

Dunleavy, P. 1991. *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice: Economic Explanations in Political Science*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Dyer, R. 1997. *White*. New York: Routledge.

Eccles, J. S. 2009. Who am I and what am I going to do with my life? Personal and collective identities as motivators of action. *Educational Psychologist*, 44, pp.78–89.

Eccles, J. S. 2014. Gendered socialization of STEM interests in the family. *International Journal of Gender, Science, and Technology*, 7, pp. 116–132.

Edwards, R. 2008. 'Actively Seeking Subjects?' in A. Fejes and K. Nicoll (eds) Foucault and Lifelong Learning: Governing the Subject. Oxford: Routledge.

Elbow, P., 2012. Reflections on academic discourse: How it relates to freshmen and colleagues. In *Negotiating academic literacies,* pp. 145-169. Routledge.

Elman, B. A. 2013. *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

English, F.W., Bolton, C.L. & ProQuest (Firm) 2016, *Bourdieu for educators: policy and practice*, Sage, Los Angeles.

Enslin, P. and Hedge, N., 2023. Decolonising Higher Education: The University in the New Age of Empire. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, p. qhad052.

Evans, C., Nguyen, T., Richardson, M. and Scott, I., 2018. Managing the transition from undergraduate to taught postgraduate study: perceptions of international students studying in the UK. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *23*(2), pp.249-265.

Fanon, F., 2016. Black skin, white masks. In *Social Theory Re-Wired* (pp. 394-401). Routledge.

Featherstone, M., 2007. Consumer culture and postmodernism. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, pp.1-232.

Ferrari, J. R. 2010. *Still procrastinating. The no-regrets guide to getting it done*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Fetterman, D.M., 1989. Applied social research methods series. *Ethnography*, *17*.

Finch, L., 1993, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality*, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Findlay, A.M., King, R., Smith, F.M., Geddes, A. and Skeldon, R., 2012. World class? An investigation of globalisation, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *37*(1), pp.118-131.

Findlay, S. and Köhler, N., 2010. The enrollment controversy: Worries that efforts in the US to limit enrollment of Asian students in top universities may migrate to Canada. *Maclean's*, *10*.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Powell, L.C. and Wong, L.M., 1997. Of white: Readings on race, power, and society. *Florence, KY: Routledge*.

Flemmen, Magne, Vegard Jarness, and Lennart Rosenlund. 2018. Social Space and Cultural Class Divisions: The Forms of Capital and Contemporary Lifestyle Differentiation: Social Space and Cultural Class Divisions. *The British Journal of Sociology,* 69 (1), p. 124–53. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12295.

Fong, V., 2004. Filial nationalism among Chinese teenagers with global identities. *American ethnologist*, *31*(4), pp.631-648.

Fong, V., 2011. *Paradise redefined: Transnational Chinese students and the quest for flexible citizenship in the developed world*. Stanford University Press.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J.H., 2003. *The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* h. NK Denzin and YS Lincoln.

Fordham, S. and Ogbu, J.U., 1986. Black students' school success: Coping with the “burden of ‘acting white’”. *The urban review*, *18*(3), pp.176-206.

Foucault M. 1981. The order of discourse. In Young R. (Ed.), *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader,* pp. (48, 78), Routledge.

Foucault M. 1991a, *Discipline and Punish*. Penguin, London.

Foucault, M. & Sheridan, A. 1979, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison,* Penguin Books, London.

Foucault, M. 1972, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Tavistock [Fr 1969].

Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. Sheridan.

Foucault, M. 1980. *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. 1983. Subject and power. *In Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (ed. by H.L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow), pp. 208–226. The Harvester Press, Hemel Hempstead, UK.

Foucault, M., 1988. Technologies of the self. In *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (Vol. 18).

Foucault, M. 1997. The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom. In Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth. The essential works of Foucault, vol. 1, ed. P. Rabinow. New York: The New Press.
Foucault, M. 2000. *Power. Vol. 3 Of the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. New York: New Press.

Foucault, M. 2008. The Birth of Bio-politics: Lectures at the College de France 1978–1979, Edited by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, M. and Nazzaro, A.M., 1972. History, discourse and discontinuity. *Salmagundi*, (20), pp.225-248.

Foucault, M., 1978. The history of sexuality, volume 1: An introduction.

Foucault, M., 1979. On Governmentality, Ideology and Consciousness 6: 5–21. *HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL CHANGE*.

Foucault, M., 1990. The history of sexuality: An introduction, volume I. *Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage*, *95*.

Foucault, M., 1998. The will to knowledge: The history of sexuality vol. I.

Foucault, M., 2001. " The Birth of Bio-Politics"–Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality. *Economy and Society*, *30*(2), pp.190-207.

Freire, P., 2021. *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Francis, B., Robson, J. and Read, B., 2001. An analysis of undergraduate writing styles in the context of gender and achievement. *Studies in Higher Education*, *26*(3), pp.313-326.

Frankenberg, R., 2004. On unsteady ground: Crafting and engaging in the critical study of whiteness. *Researching race and racism*, pp.104-118.

Gale, T. and Densmore, K. eds., 2000. *Just schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gaulter, J. and Mountford-Zimdars, A., 2018. The power of 'unrecognizable habitus': Inclusion and exclusion among 10 British low-socio-economic status students abroad. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(6), pp.876-890.

Gerholm, T., 1990. On tacit knowledge in academia. *European Journal of Education*, pp.263-271.

Giardiello, M., Cuervo, H.I. and Capobianco, R., 2024. How Young Italians Negotiate and Redefine Their Identity in the Mobility Experience. *Societies*, *14*(2), p.20.

Giblin, J., 2015. Critical approaches to post-colonial (post-conflict) heritage. In *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research,* pp. 313-328. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Giddens, A., 1991. Self-identity and Modernity. *Cambridge: Polity*.

Gillborn, D., 2006. Critical race theory and education: Racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, *27*(1), pp.11-32.

Giroux, H.A., 2001. *Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Glass, C.R., Streitwieser, B. and Gopal, A., 2021. Inequities of global mobility: Socioeconomic stratification in the meanings of a university education for international students. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *51*(1), pp.43-60.

Gonzales, S. M. S., and C. M. Shields. 2015. "Education 'Reform' in Latino Detroit: Achievement Gap or Colonial Legacy?" Race Ethnicity and Education 18 (3): 19. doi:10.1080/ 13613324.2014.911170.

Goodley, D. and Roets, G., 2008. The (be) comings and goings of 'developmental disabilities': the cultural politics of 'impairment'. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, *29*(2), pp.239-255.

Gordon, C. 1991. Government Rationality: An Introduction. In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, pp. 1–51. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gordon, T., 2010. *Imperialist Canada*. Arbeiter Ring Pub.

Gore, J.M., 1995. On the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *5*(2), pp.165-188.

Grant, B., 1997. Disciplining students: The construction of student subjectivities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *18*(1), pp.101-114.

Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H., 1995. The postcolonial studies reader.

Grosz, E. 1994. *Volatile bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gu, Q., 2009. Maturity and Interculturality: Chinese students' experiences in UK higher education. *European Journal of Education*, *44*(1), pp.37-52.

Guo, F. 2010. Demographic structure and international student mobility: An investigation of Chinese students in Australia. *Asian and Pacific migration journal: APMJ, 19(1), pp.* 143-156.

Habu, T., 2000. The irony of globalization: The experience of Japanese women in British higher education. *Higher Education*, *39*, pp.43-66.

Haddix, M., 2010. No longer on the margins: Researching the hybrid literate identities of Black and Latina preservice teachers. *Research in the Teaching of English*, pp.97-123.

Hall, S., 2000. Who needs' identity' 'in du Gay, P., Evans, J. and Redman, P.(eds.) Identity: a reader.

Hammersley, M., 2012. Methodological Paradigms in Educational Research, British Educational Research Association.

Han S. 2013. Structuralism and post-structuralism. In Elliott A. (Ed.), *The handbook of social and cultural theory,* pp. 39–55. Taylor & Francis.

Han, X. 2021, Disciplinary Power Matters: Rethinking Governmentality and Policy Enactment Studies in China. *Journal of education policy,* ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), pp. 1-24.

Harding, S., 1987. The method question. *Hypatia*, *2*(3), pp.19-35.

Harwood, V., and M.L. Rasmussen. 2003. Performativity, youth, and injurious speech. *Teaching Education,* 14(1), pp. 25–36.

Harper, S.R. and Hurtado, S., 2007. Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New directions for student services*, *2007*(120), pp.7-24.

Hechanova-Alampay, R., Beehr, T.A., Christiansen, N.D. and Van Horn, R.K., 2002. Adjustment and strain among domestic and international student sojourners: A longitudinal study. *School psychology international*, *23*(4), pp.458-474.

Heggins, W.J. and Jackson, J.F., 2003. Understanding the collegiate experience for Asian international students at a Midwestern research university. *College Student Journal*, *37*(3), pp.379-392.

HEFCE, 2004. International Student Mobility: Final Report. London: HEFCE Issues Paper 30.

Hislop, J., Arber, S., Meadows, R. and Venn, S., 2005. Narratives of the night: The use of audio diaries in researching sleep. *Sociological Research Online*, *10*(4), pp.13-25.

Hoffman, L. 2014. The Urban, Politics and Subject Formation. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 38 (5), p. 1576–1588. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12145.

Holloway, S.L., O'Hara, S.L. and Pimlott-Wilson, H., 2012. Educational mobility and the gendered geography of cultural capital: The case of international student flows between Central Asia and the UK. *Environment and Planning A*, *44*(9), pp.2278-2294.

Houshmand, S., Spanierman, L.B. and Tafarodi, R.W., 2014. Excluded and avoided: Racial microaggressions targeting Asian international students in Canada. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *20*(3), p.377.

Howard, G.R., 2016. *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. Teachers College Press.

Igarashi, H. and Saito, H., 2014. Cosmopolitanism as cultural capital: Exploring the intersection of globalization, education and stratification. *Cultural Sociology*, *8*(3), pp.222-239.

IIE. 2009. The value of international education to U.S. business and industry leaders: Key findings from a survey of CEOs (IIE Briefing Paper). New York, NY: Institute of International Education.

International Facts and Figures, 2023, International Facts and Figures 2023 (universitiesuk.ac.uk)

Iorio, J. and Pereira, S., 2018. Social class inequalities and international student mobility: The case of Brazilian students in the Portuguese higher education system. *Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie*, (3).

Irvin, A.L., 2017. The female “confidence gap” and feminist pedagogy: Gender dynamics in the active, engaged classroom. *Critical approaches to women and gender in higher education*, pp.259-276.

Isaakyan, I. and Triandafyllidou, A., 2016. Female high-skill migration in the 21st century: The challenge of the recession. In *High-Skill Migration and Recession: Gendered Perspectives* (pp. 3-21). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Jacka, T., 2013. From spectralization to participation and reconstruction: a feminist critique of contemporary Chinese discourses on rurality, gender and development. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *40*(6), pp.983-1007.

Jackson, J., 2002. Reticence in second language case discussions: Anxiety and aspirations. *System*, *30*(1), pp.65-84.

Jackson, S. and Burke, P.J., 2007. *Reconceptualising lifelong learning: Feminist interventions*. Routledge.

Jacob, W.J., Mok, K.H., Cheng, S.Y. and Xiong, W., 2018. Changes in Chinese higher education: financial trends in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *58*, pp.64-85.

Jeffrey, C. and McDowell, L., 2004. Youth in a comparative perspective: Global change, local lives. *Youth & Society*, *36*(2), pp.131-142.

Ji, Y., Wu, X., Sun, S., & He, G. 2017. Unequal care, unequal work: Toward a more comprehensive understanding of gender inequality in post-reform urban China. *Sex Roles*, 77, pp. 765-778. doi:10.1007/s11199-017-0751-1.

Jiang, S., 2020. Diversity without integration? Racialization and spaces of exclusion in international higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *42*(1), pp.32-47.

Johnstone, M. and Lee, E., 2017. Canada and the global rush for international students: Reifying a neo-imperial order of Western dominance in the knowledge economy era. *Critical Sociology*, *43*(7-8), pp.1063-1078.

Johnstone, M. and Lee, E., 2022. Education as a site for the Imperial project to preserve whiteness supremacy from the colonial era to the present: A critical analysis of international education policy in Canada. *Whiteness and Education*, *7*(1), pp.1-17.

Joseph, C., 2008. Difference, subjectivities and power:(De) colonizing practices in internationalizing the curriculum. *Intercultural Education*, *19*(1), pp.29-39.

Kaeppler, A.L., 2000. II. Dance ethnology and the anthropology of dance. *Dance Research Journal*, *32*(1), pp.116-125.

Kamola, I.A., 2011. Pursuing excellence in a ‘world-class African university’: The Mamdani affair and the politics of global higher education. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*, *9*(1-2), pp.147-168.

Kandiyoti, D., 2007. The politics of gender and the Soviet paradox: neither colonized, nor modern? *Central Asian Survey*, *26*(4), pp.601-623.

Karkouti, I.M., 2016. Black students' educational experiences in predominantly white universities: A review of the related literature. *College Student Journal*, *50*(1), pp.59-70

Kaufmann, J., 2011. Poststructural analysis: Analysing empirical matter for new meanings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(2), pp.148-154.

Kealey, D.J., 1989. A study of cross-cultural effectiveness: Theoretical issues, practical applications. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *13*(3), pp.387-428.

Kemiche, Z. and Beighton, C., 2021. " It's like very white-winged": students' perceptions of the image and reality of Internationalisation in UK Higher Education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, *19*(1).

Khan, T.H. and MacEachen, E., 2021. Foucauldian discourse analysis: Moving beyond a social constructionist analytic. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *20*, p.16094069211018009.

Kim, H.S., 2002. We talk, therefore we think? A cultural analysis of the effect of talking on thinking. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *83*(4), p.828.

Kim, S. and Kim, R.H., 2010. Microaggressions experienced by international students attending US institutions of higher education.

King, R., Findlay, A., Ahrens, J. and Dunne, M., 2011. Reproducing advantage: the perspective of English school leavers on studying abroad. *Globalisation Societies and Education*, *9*(2), pp.161-181.

Koehne, N., 2006. (Be) coming, (Be) longing: Ways in which international students talk about themselves. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, *27*(2), pp.241-257.

Kronberger, N. and Horwath, I., 2013. The ironic costs of performing well: Grades differentially predict male and female dropout from engineering. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *35*(6), pp.534-546.

Kuhn, A. 1995. *Family Secrets:* Acts of Memory and Imagination, London, Verso.

Kurzon, Dennis. 1997. *Discourse of Silence*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Landreman, L., 2003, November. A multidimensional model of intercultural consciousness: A reconceptualization of multicultural competence. In *annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Portland, OR*.

Larochelle, M., 2007. Disciplinary power and the school form. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *2*, pp.711-720.

Lather, P., 1991. *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. Psychology Press.

Lather, P., 1992. Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory into practice*, *31*(2), pp.87-99.

Lawler, S. 2008. Identity: Sociological perspectives. London, England: Polity Press.

Lawler, S., 2005. Introduction: Class, culture and identity. *Sociology*, *39*(5), pp.797-806.

Leask, B., 2009. Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of studies in international education*, *13*(2), pp.205-221.

Leathwood, C. and Hey, V., 2009. Gender/ed discourses and emotional sub-texts: Theorising emotion in UK higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *14*(4), pp.429-440.

Leathwood, C. 2001. The road to independence? Policy, pedagogy and the independent learner in higher education, in: L. WEST, N. MILLER, D. O'REILLY & R. ALLEN (Eds) *31st Annual Conference of SCUTREA: The Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults*, University of East London, Pilgrim College, University of Nottingham.

Leathwood, C. and Read, B., 2008. *Gender And the Changing Face of Higher Education: A Feminized Future? A Feminized Future?* McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Lee, J., 2011. Education and family in conflict. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *15*(4), pp.395-401.

Lee, J.T. and Naidoo, R., 2020. Complicit reproductions in the global south: Courting world class universities and global rankings. *World class universities: A contested concept*, pp.77-91.

Lee, S.J., 2015. *Unraveling the" model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth*. Teacher College Press.

Lee, J.J. and Rice, C., 2007. Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher education*, *53*(3), pp.381-409.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. The production of space, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Lefebvre, M., & Khezami, L. 2020. Dynamics of Diversity Capital in Global Business: The Case of Canadian Companies Operating in Brazil. *In Globalization and the Dynamics of International Business,* pp. 77-92. Springer, Cham.

Li, C., 2003. Zhongguo dangdai zhongchan jieceng de goucheng ji bili. Z*hongguo renkou kexue*, 6, pp.25-32.

Li, D., & Tsang, M. C. 2003, Household education decisions and implications for gender inequality in education in rural China. *China: An International Journal*, 21(2), pp. 224–248.

Li, J.H., 2022. How am I supposed to feel? Female students' emotional reasoning about academic becoming in transnational higher education. *Gender and Education*, 34(5), pp.561-576.

Li, M. Z., 2010. The Voyage of the Self: Experiencing the Subjective Zone of International Travel. *Annals of Leisure Research,* 13 (1–2), pp. 191–217.

Li, S. 2010. Comparisons of Motivation of Different Chinese Background Students in Australian Tertiary Education. *The International Journal of the Humanities,* 8 (7), pp. 49–56.

Li, R.Y. and Kaye, M., 1998. Understanding overseas students' concerns and problems. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *20*(1), pp.41-50.

Lu, X.Y, ed. 2002. *Dangdai zhongguo shehui jieceng yanjiu baogao [Research Report on Contemporary China's Social Classes].* Beijing : Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.

Lu, X.Y ed. 2004. *Dangdai zhongguo shehui liudong [Social Mobility in Contemporary China].* Beijing : Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.

Li, Z., 2013. A critical account of employability construction through the eyes of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK. *Journal of Education and Work*, *26*(5), pp.473-493.

Lillis, T., McMullan, J. and Tuck, J., 2018. Gender and academic writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *32*, pp.1-8.

Lin, N. 2001. Guanxi: A conceptual analysis. In A. Y. So, N. Lin, & D. Poston (Eds.). *The Chinese triangle of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Comparative institutional analyses, pp.* 154–167. Westport: Greenwood.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Lipura, S.J. and Collins, F.L., 2020. Towards an integrative understanding of contemporary educational mobilities: A critical agenda for international student mobilities research. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *18*(3), pp.343-359.

Liu, J. 2006. From Learner Passive to Learner Active? The Case of Chinese Postgraduate Students Studying Marketing in the UK. *International Journal of Management Education,* 7(2), pp. 33–40.

Lomer, S., 2017. Soft power as a policy rationale for international education in the UK: a critical analysis. *Higher Education*, *74*(4), pp.581-598.

Lorenzini, D., 2020. Governmentality, subjectivity, and the neoliberal form of life. In *How capitalism forms our lives* (pp. 50-62). Routledge.

Loveday, V., 2015. Working-class participation, middle-class aspiration? Value, upward mobility and symbolic indebtedness in higher education. *The Sociological Review*, *63*(3), pp.570-588.

Lysgaard, S. 1955. Adjustment in a Foreign Society: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin,* 32 (4), pp. 347–58.

Ma, Y., 2020. *Ambitious and anxious: How Chinese college students succeed and struggle in American higher education*. Columbia University Press.

Macpherson, W., Cook, T., Sentamu, J. and Stone, R., 1999. *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, CM 4262-I*. Stationery Office.

Madge, C., Raghuram, P. and Noxolo, P., 2015. Conceptualizing international education: From international student to international study. *Progress in Human Geography*, *39*(6), pp.681-701.

Major, E. M. 2005. Co-national Support, Cultural Therapy, and the Adjustment of Asian Students to an English-Speaking University Culture. *International Education Journal,* 6 (1), pp. 84–95.

Mangan, J. 2012. Images for Confident Control: Stereotypes in Imperial Discourse In *The Imperial Curriculum,* edited by J. Mangan, pp. 6–23. New York, NY: Routledge.

Marginson, S., 2008. Global field and global imagining: Bourdieu and worldwide higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 29(3), pp. 303–315.

Marginson, S., 2013. Global field and global imagining: Bourdieu and worldwide higher education. In *The sociology of higher education,* pp. 6-18. Routledge.

Marginson, S., 2021. Globalisation: The good, the bad and the ugly. *Keynote for centre for global HE 2021*.

Marilyn, C.S. and Lytleb, S.L., 2004. Practitioner inquiry, knowledge, and university culture. In *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices,* pp. 601-649. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B., 2014. *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.

Martin, O., 1985. White collar politics.

Martin, F., 2016. Overseas study as ‘escape route' for young Chinese women. *University of Nottingham China Policy Institute Blog, June 22*.

Master, A. and Meltzoff, A.N., 2016. Building bridges between psychological science and education: Cultural stereotypes, STEM, and equity. *Prospects*, *46*(2), pp.215-234.

Maton, K., 2008. „Habitus “, u: Michael James Grenfell, ur., Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.

McCall, L., 2005. The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, *30*(3), pp.1771-1800.

McCall, L. 2013. The Undeserving Rich: American Beliefs about Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McHoul, A. and Grace, W., 1995. A Foucauldian primer: Discourse, power and the subject.

McIntosh, P. 1986, April. White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. Paper presented at the Virginia Women's Studies Association conference, Richmond, VA.

McNay, L., 1999. Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity. *Theory, culture & society*, *16*(1), pp.95-117.

Meyer, J. and Strauß, S., 2019. The influence of gender composition in a field of study on students' drop-out of higher education. *European Journal of Education*, *54*(3), pp.443-456.

Milbrath, L.W. and Goel, M.L., 1977. Political participation: How and why do people get involved in politics? (*No Title*).

Miller, P. and Rose, N., 2008. *Governing the present: Administering economic, social and personal life*. Polity.

Milligan, C., Gatrell, A. and Bingley, A., 2004. 'Cultivating health': therapeutic landscapes and older people in northern England. *Social science & medicine*, *58*(9), pp.1781-1793.

Mills, C. and Gale, T., 2009. *Schooling in disadvantaged communities: Playing the game from the back of the field*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Mills, S., 2003. Routledge Critical Thinkers: Michel Foucault. *London: Rouledge*.

Ministry of Education (China), 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1095134/number-of-colleges-and-universities-in-china-by-type/ .

Mirza, H.S., 2009. *Race, gender and educational desire: Why black women succeed and fail*. Routledge.

Mitchell, K.1997. "Transnational subjects: Constituting the cultural citizen in the era of Pacific Rim capital." In *Ungrounded empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism*, edited by A.Ong and D.Nonini, 228–56. New York, NY: Routledge.
modern? *Central Asian Survey*, *26*(4), pp.601-623.

Monrouxe, L.V., 2009. Solicited audio diaries in longitudinal narrative research: a view from inside. *Qualitative research*, *9*(1), pp.81-103.

Montoya, M.E., 1999. Silence and silencing: Their centripetal and centrifugal forces in legal communication, pedagogy and discourse. *U. Mich. JL Reform*, 33, pp. 263.

Moon, K. and Blackman, D., 2014. A guide to understanding social science research for natural scientists. *Conservation Biology*, *28*(5), pp.1167-1177.

Morley, L., 2007. Gender and UK higher education: post-feminism in a market economy. In *Women, universities, and change: Gender equality in the European Union and the United States* (pp. 133-144). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Moskal, M. and Schweisfurth, M., 2018. Learning, using and exchanging global competence in the context of international postgraduate mobility. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *16*(1), pp.93-105.

Moskal, M., 2020. Gendered differences in international graduates' mobility, identity and career development. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *21*(3), pp.421-440.

Mowl, G. and Towner, J., 1995. Women, gender, leisure and place: Towards a more 'humanistic'geography of women's leisure. *Leisure Studies*, *14*(2), pp.102-116.

Mulvey, B., 2021. Conceptualizing the discourse of student mobility between "periphery" and "semi-periphery": The case of Africa and China. *Higher Education*, *81*(3), pp.437-451.

Murphy, M., 2015. Unsettling care: Troubling transnational itineraries of care in feminist health practices. *Social studies of science*, *45*(5), pp.717-737.

Nada, C.I., Montgomery, C. and Araújo, H.C., 2018. 'You went to Europe and returned different': Transformative learning experiences of international students in Portugal. *European Educational Research Journal*, *17*(5), pp.696-713.

Naidoo*, R., 2004. Fields and institutional strategy: Bourdieu on the relationship between higher education, inequality and society. *British journal of sociology of education*, *25*(4), pp.457-471.

Naughton, B.J., 2006. *The Chinese economy: Transitions and growth*. MIT press.

Niraula, A. and Triandafyllidou, A., 2022. Highly Skilled Migrant Decision-Making Under Uncertainty: A Literature Review.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. and Moules, N.J., 2017. Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *16*(1), p.1609406917733847.

Oakley, A., 2016. Interviewing women again: Power, time and the gift. *Sociology*, *50*(1), pp.195-213.

Oberg, K. 1960. Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environment. *Practical Anthropology, 7, pp.* 177–182.

OECD, 2023. Education at a Glance 2023, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/e13bef63-en.pdfexpires=1695898789&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=73C6003FF11753EF571EED30D06333D3

Olssen*, M. and Peters, M.A., 2005. Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of education policy*, *20*(3), pp.313-345.

Olssen, M., 2003. Structuralism, post-structuralism, neo-liberalism: assessing Foucault's legacy. *Journal of Education Policy*, *18*(2), pp.189-202.

Olcon, K., 2020. Confronting Whiteness: White US social work students' experiences studying abroad in West Africa. *Journal of teaching in Social Work*, *40*(4), pp.318-335.

Omi, M., and H. Winant. 1994. Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s. New York: Routledge.

Ong, A. 1999, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*.

Ono, H. and Piper, N., 2004, June. Japanese women studying abroad, the case of the United States. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 101-118). Pergamon.

Ozer, S., 2015. Predictors of international students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment to the context of reception while studying at Aarhus University, Denmark. *Scandinavian journal of psychology*, *56*(6), pp.717-725.

Pal, L., 2012. *Frontiers of governance: The OECD and global public management reform*. Springer.

Park, D.W., 2009. Critical Concepts: Pierre Bourdieu's' Habitus' and the Political Economy of the Media. *Democratic Communiqué*, *23*(1), p.1.

Park, H., 2010. The stranger that is welcomed: Female foreign students from Asia, the English language industry, and the ambivalence of 'Asia rising' in British Columbia, Canada. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *17*(3), pp.337-355.

Paton, K., 2007. Conceptualising 'Choice': A review of the theoretical literature. *School of Education, University of Southampton*.

Patton, M.Q., 2002. Qualitative research and evaluation methods. Thousand Oaks. *Cal.: Sage Publications*, *4*.

Pedersen, P.J., 2010. Assessing intercultural effectiveness outcomes in a year-long study abroad program. *International Journal of intercultural relations*, 34(1), pp.70-80.

People's Daily Online (PDO). 2013, '*Dushu wuyong lun' Juantu chonglai (The thesis that 'Education is useless' comes back*). Available at https://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/363551/368857/ index.html. Accessed on August 1, 2018.

Pham, T., Tomlinson, M. and Thompson, C., 2019. Forms of capital and agency as mediations in negotiating employability of international graduate migrants. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *17*(3), pp.394-405.

Piketty, T., Yang, L. and Zucman, G. 2019. Capital accumulation, private property, and rising inequality in China, 1978–2015. *American Economic Review*, 109, pp. 2469–2496. doi:10.1257/aer.20170973.

Pierre, E.S. and Pillow, W.S. eds., 2000. *Working the ruins: Feminist poststructural theory and methods in education*. Psychology Press.

Ploner, J. and Nada, C., 2020. International student migration and the postcolonial heritage of European higher education: Perspectives from Portugal and the UK. *Higher Education*, *80*, pp.373-389.

Ploner, J., 2017. Resilience, moorings and international student mobilities–Exploring biographical narratives of social science students in the UK. *Mobilities*, *12*(3), pp.425-444.

Popkewitz, T.S., 2000. Globalization/regionalization, knowledge, and educational practices. *Educational knowledge: Changing relationships between the state, civil society, and the educational community*, pp.3-28.

Prazeres, L., 2017. Challenging the comfort zone: self-discovery, everyday practices and international student mobility to the Global South. *Mobilities*, *12*(6), pp.908-923.

Quan, R., He, X. and Sloan, D., 2016. Examining Chinese postgraduate students' academic adjustment in the UK higher education sector: A process-based stage model. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(3), pp.326-343.

Raphael Reed, L., Croudace, C., Harrison, N., Baxter, A. and Last, K. 2007. Young Participation in Higher Education: A Sociocultural Study of Educational Engagement in Bristol South Parliamentary Constituency. Research Summary; a HEFCE-funded Study. Bristol: The University of the West of England.

Read, B., Archer, L. and Leathwood, C., 2003. Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of'belonging' and' isolation'at a post-1992 university. *Studies in higher education*, *28*(3), pp.261-277.

Read, B., Burke, P.J. and Crozier, G., 2020. 'It is like school sometimes': Friendship and sociality on university campuses and patterns of social inequality. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(1), pp.70-82.

Reay, D., 2004. 'It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British journal of sociology of education*, *25*(4), pp.431-444.

Reay, D., 2001. Finding or losing yourself? working-class relationships to education. *Journal of education policy*, *16*(4), pp.333-346.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and James, D., 2011. *White middle-class identities and urban schooling*. Springer.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M. and Ball, S.J., 2001. Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology*, *35*(4), pp.855-874.

Rhee, J.E. and Sagaria, M.A.D., 2004. International students: Constructions of imperialism in the Chronicle of Higher Education. *The Review of Higher Education*, *28*(1), pp.77-96.

Ridgeway, C.L., 2011. *Framed by gender: How gender inequality persists in the modern world*. Oxford University Press.

Rizvi, F. & Lingard, B. 2010, *Globalizing education policy,* Routledge, London.

Rizvi, F. and Lingard, B., 2009. *Globalizing education policy*. Routledge.

Rizvi, F., 2007. Postcolonialism and globalization in education. *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies*, *7*(3), pp.256-263.

Roberts, K., 2019. Structure and agency: The new youth research agenda. In *Youth, citizenship and social change in a European context* (pp. 56-66). Routledge.

Roberts, K., Kamruzzaman, P. and Tholen, J., 2009. Young people's education to work transitions and inter-generational social mobility in post-soviet central Asia. *Young*, *17*(1), pp.59-80.

Roberts, M., 2005. The production of the psychiatric subject: power, knowledge and Michel Foucault. *Nursing Philosophy*, *6*(1), pp.33-42.

Robertson, S. and Runganaikaloo, A., 2014. Lives in limbo: Migration experiences in Australia's education–migration nexus. *Ethnicities*, *14*(2), pp.208-226.

Robertson, S., 2019. Migrant interrupted: The temporalities of 'staggered 'migration from Asia to Australia. *Current Sociology*, *67*(2), pp.169-185.

Robertson, S., Harris, A. and Baldassar, L., 2018. Mobile transitions: A conceptual framework for researching a generation on the move. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *21*(2), pp.203-217.

Robertson, M., Line, M., Jones, S. and Thomas, S., 2000. International students, learning environments and perceptions: A case study using the Delphi technique. *Higher education research & development*, *19*(1), pp.89-102.

Rodriguez, D., 2011. Silence as speech: Meanings of silence for students of color in predominantly White classrooms. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 4(1), pp.111-144.

Ro'i, Y. and Wainer, A., 2009. Muslim identity and Islamic practice in post-Soviet Central Asia. *Central*

Rollock, N., 2018. The heart of whiteness: Racial gesture politics, equity and higher education. *Dismantling race in higher education: Racism, whiteness and decolonising the academy*, pp.313-330.

Rose, N., 1999. *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge university press.

Rose, N., O'malley, P. and Valverde, M., 2006. Governmentality. *Annu. Rev. Law Soc. Sci.*, *2*, pp.83-104.

Ross, H. 2011, "Challenging the gendered dimensions of schooling: The state, NGOs and transnational alliance", In T. Jacka & S. Sargeson (Eds.), *Women,* pp. 143–167. Gender and Development in Rural China: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Ruspini, E., 2002. *Introduction to longitudinal research*. Psychology Press.

Ryan, J. 2005, The student experience. In J. Carroll, & J. Ryan (Eds.), Teaching international students. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ryan, J. and Louie, K., 2007. False dichotomy? 'Western 'and 'Confucian 'concepts of scholarship and learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *39*(4), pp.404-417.

Saarinen, T. and Ennser-Kananen, J., 2020. Ambivalent English: What we talk about when we think we talk about language. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, *19*(3).

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Sáinz, M. and Müller, J., 2018. Gender and family influences on Spanish students' aspirations and values in stem fields. *International Journal of Science Education*, *40*(2), pp.188-203.

Sammel, A., 2009. Turning the focus from 'other' to science education: Exploring the invisibility of whiteness. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *4*, pp.649-656.

Sardoč, M., 2021. The language of neoliberal education: An interview with Henry Giroux. In *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education* (pp. 223-230). Routledge.

Schoon, I., 2010. Planning for the future: Changing education expectations in three British cohorts. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, pp.99-119.

Schweisfurth, M. and Gu, Q., 2009. Exploring the experiences of international students in UK higher education: possibilities and limits of interculturality in university life. *Intercultural Education*, *20*(5), pp.463-473.

Seth, M.J., 2002. *Education fever: Society, politics, and the pursuit of schooling in South Korea*. University of Hawaii Press.

Severiens, S. and Ten Dam, G., 2012. Leaving college: A gender comparison in male and female-dominated programs. *Research in Higher Education*, *53*, pp.453 470.

Sexton, J., 2012. The global network university: Educating citizens of the world. *Going global: The landscape for policy makers and practitioners in tertiary education*, pp.5-12.

Shahjahan, R.A. and Baizhanov, S., 2023. Global university rankings and geopolitics of knowledge. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, *2*, pp.1-25.

Shahjahan, R.A. and Morgan, C., 2016. Global competition, coloniality, and the geopolitics of knowledge in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *37*(1), pp.92-109.

Sherry, M., Thomas, P. and Chui, W.H., 2010. International students: A vulnerable student population. *Higher education*, *60*, pp.33-46.

Shields, S.A., 2008. Gender: An intersectionality perspective. *Sex roles*, *59*, pp.301-311.

Shokooh Valle, F., 2021. "How will you give back?": on becoming a compañera as a feminist methodology from the cracks. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *50*(6), pp.835-861.

Sidhu, R.K. and Dall'Alba, G., 2012. International education and (dis) embodied cosmopolitanisms. *Educational philosophy and theory*, *44*(4), pp.413-431.

Sin, I.L., 2013. Cultural capital and distinction: Aspirations of the 'other' foreign student. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *34*(5-6), pp.848-867.

Skeggs, B. 1997. Formations of class and gender. London: Sage.

Skelton, C., Francis, B. and Smulyan, L. eds., 2006. *The SAGE handbook of gender and education*. Sage.

Smith, R.A. and Khawaja, N.G., 2011. A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of intercultural relations*, 35(6), pp.699-713.

Song, J., 2019. “She needs to be shy!”: Gender, culture, and nonparticipation among saudi arabian female students. *Tesol Quarterly*, *53*(2), pp.405-429.

Song, Y., 2021. ‘Uneven consequences’ of international English-medium instruction programmes in China: a critical epistemological perspective. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *42*(4), pp.342-356.

Song, X., 2023. Understanding subjective inequality in China. *European Sociological Review*, *39*(4), pp.545-568.

Spivak, G.C., 1999. *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard university press.

Steel, P. 2007. The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, *133*, pp. 65–94.

Stein, S. and De Andreotti, V.O., 2016. Cash, competition, or charity: International students and the global imaginary. *Higher Education*, *72*, pp.225-239.

Stoler, A., and C. McGranahan, Eds. 2007. *Imperial Formation*. Oxford Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Stuber, J., 2017. Class and Campus Life: Managing and Experiencing Inequality at an Elite College.

Suspitsyna, T. 2015, Cultural hierarchies in the discursive representations of China in the Chronicle of Higher Education. *Critical studies in education,* 56(1), pp. 21-37.

Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, and the Centre for Applied Population Research, University of Dundee. 2004. International student mobility. *Issues Paper* commissioned by HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW, DEL, DfES, UK Socrates Erasmus Council, HEURO BUTEX, and the British Council.

Svensson, M. and Wang, H., 2013. Gendering Investigative Journalism. C*hinese Investigative Journalists' Dreams: Autonomy, Agency, and Voice,* p.91.

Tan, C., 2017. A Confucian perspective of self-cultivation in learning: Its implications for self-directed learning. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *23*(2), pp.250-262.

Tang, R., Yang, J., & Mazzola, J. T. 2021, Revisiting Culture Shock: A Study of International Students in the USA. *Journal of International Students*, 11(1), pp. 205-224.

Thomas, K., and T. Harrell. 1994. Counseling Student Sojourners: Revisiting the U-curve of Adjustment. In *Learning across Cultures*, edited by G. Althen, pp. 89–108. Washington, DC: NAFSA.

Thomson, P., 2014. Field. In *Pierre Bourdieu* (pp. 65-80). Routledge.

Thomson, R. and Taylor, R., 2005. Between cosmopolitanism and the locals: Mobility as a resource in the transition to adulthood. *Young*, *13*(4), pp.327-342.

Thornton M., 2012. *Universities upside down. The impact of the new knowledge economy*. In: Luxton M, Mossman.

Tikly, L., 2004. Education and the new imperialism. *Comparative education*, *40*(2), pp.173-198.

Toyokawa, T. and Toyokawa, N., 2002. Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: A study of Japanese students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *26*(4), pp.363-379.

Tsang, E.Y.H., 2013. The quest for higher education by the Chinese middle class: Retrenching social mobility?. Higher *Education*, *66*, pp.653-668.

UCL. 2020. Creating an Inclusive Curriculum for BAME Students. Retrieved from https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/publications/2020/apr/creating-inclusive-curriculum-bame-students.

UNESCO. 2012. "UNESCO Institute for Statistics Glossary." Accessed 18 December 2018. http://glossary.uis.unesco.org/glossary/en/term/2242/en.

University of Aberdeen. (n.d.). What We Teach. Retrieved from https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/strategy-and-governance/what-we-teach-2634.php#panel2971.

Valencia, R.R., 1997. Conceptualizing the notion of deficit thinking. *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*, *19*, p.1.

Wacquant, L., 1998. *Pierre bourdieu* (pp. 215-229). Macmillan Education UK.

Waitt, G.R., 2005. Doing discourse analysis.

Walder, A.G., Li, B. and Treiman, D.J., 2000. Politics and life chances in a state socialist regime: Dual career paths into the urban Chinese elite, 1949 to 1996. *American sociological review*, pp.191-209.

Walsh, K.C., Jennings, M.K. and Stoker, L., 2004. The effects of social class identification on participatory orientations towards government. *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(3), pp.469-495.

Wang Dinghua. 2012, Studies on the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education in China, *Basic Education Review*, 7, pp. 25-28.

Wang, C., Shim, S. S., & Wolters, C. A. 2017, ''Achievement goals, motivational self-talk, and academic engagement among Chinese students'', *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 18(3), 295–307. https://doi. org/10.1007/s12564-017-9495-4.

Wang, L. and Byram, M., 2011. 'But when you are doing your exams it is the same as in China'–Chinese students adjusting to western approaches to teaching and learning. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *41*(4), pp.407-424.

Wang, S. and Moskal, M., 2019. What is wrong with silence in intercultural classrooms? An insight into international students' integration at a UK university. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, *11*, pp.52-58.

Wang. 2004, Middle-class: definition and boundaries. *Acad. Forum* 1, pp. 146–150.

Waters, J.L., 2011. Time and transnationalism: A longitudinal study of immigration, endurance and settlement in Canada. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *37*(7), pp.1119-1135.

Waters, J.L., 2006. Geographies of cultural capital: education, international migration and family strategies between Hong Kong and Canada. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *31*(2), pp.179-192.

Waters, J.L., 2007. 'Roundabout routes and sanctuary schools': the role of situated educational practices and habitus in the creation of transnational professionals. *Global Networks*, *7*(4), pp.477-497.

Waters, J.L., 2012. Geographies of international education: Mobilities and the reproduction of social (dis) advantage. *Geography compass*, *6*(3), pp.123-136.

Webb, P.T., 2011. The evolution of accountability. *Journal of education Policy*, *26*(6), pp.735-756.

Weedon, C. 1987. Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory. London: Bl.

Williams, J., 1997. Negotiating access to higher education: the discourse of selectivity and equity. *(No Title)*.

Williams, R., 1961, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Windsong, E.A., 2018. Incorporating intersectionality into research design: An example using qualitative interviews. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *21*(2), pp.135-147.

Wilson, E. and Harris, C., 2006. Meaningful travel: Women, independent travel and the search for self and meaning. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 54(2), pp.161-172.

Winstead, T. 2009. 'The Transformative Possibilities of Higher Education: A Study of Working-class Women' s Strategies of Hope and Resistance at a U.S. Community College'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

WORLD DATA ALTAS, 2020, China Population aged 15-24 years, 1950-2022 - knoema.com.

Wright, A., 2012. Fantasies of empowerment: mapping neoliberal discourse in the coalition government's school's policy. *Journal of education policy*, *27*(3), pp.279-294.

Wright, E.O., 1997. *Class counts: Comparative studies in class analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Wu, W., and M. Hammond. 2011. Challenges of University Adjustment in the UK: A Study of East Asian Master's Degree Students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 35 (3), pp. 423–438.

Wyn, J. and Dwyer, P., 1999. New directions in research on youth in transition. *Journal of youth studies*, *2*(1), pp.5-21.

Wyn, J. 2015. Young People and Belonging in Perspective. *In Handbook of Child and Youth Sociology*, edited by A. Lange, C. Steiner, H. Reiter, et al., pp. 1–14. Dordrecht: Springer.

Xian, H. and Reynolds, J. 2017. Bootstraps, buddies, and bribes: perceived meritocracy in the United States and China. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 58, pp. 622–647. doi:10.1 080/00380253.2017.1331719.

Xiang, B. and Shen, W., 2009. International student migration and social stratification in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *29*(5), pp.513-522.

Xie, Y., Thornton, A., Wang, G. and Lai, Q., 2012. Societal projection: Beliefs concerning the relationship between development and inequality in China. *Social Science Research*, *41*(5), pp.1069-1084.

Xie, Y., 2016. Understanding inequality in China. *Chinese journal of sociology*, *2*(3), pp.327-347.

Xu, C.L., 2021. Time, class and privilege in career imagination: Exploring study to-work transition of Chinese international students in UK universities through a Bourdieusian lens. *Time & Society*, *30*(1), pp.5-29.

Yang, Yang, and Xuanyang Gao. 2016. Social Transformation and Cultural Reproduction: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Post-Reform China. *In The Anthem Companion to Pierre Bourdieu,* edited by Derek Robbins, pp. 227–47. London: Anthem Press.

Yang, P., 2018. Understanding youth educational mobilities in Asia: A comparison of Chinese 'foreign talent' students in Singapore and Indian MBBS students in China. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *39*(6), pp.722-738.

Yao, L. 2004. The Chinese Overseas Students: An Overview of the Flows Change. Paper presented at the 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Canberra, pp. 15- 17 September.

Ye, H. and Wu, X., 2011. Shengyulv xiajiang yu zhongguo nannv jiaoyu de pingdenghua qushi (Declining fertility and the gender equality in education in China). *Shehuixue Yanjiu (Sociological Studies)*, *155*(5), pp.153-177.

Ye, L.L., 2018. *Intercultural experience and identity: Narratives of Chinese Doctoral students in the UK*. Springer.

Yosso, T.J., 2013. *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*. Routledge.

Young, D.A., 2006. The Fine Arts of Distinction: Bourdieu on Society and Art. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, *7*(2), pp.23-44.

Yu, Y. and Moskal, M., 2019. Missing intercultural engagements in the university experiences of Chinese international students in the UK. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *49*(4), pp.654-671.

Zembylas, M., 2003. Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and teaching*, *9*(3), pp.213-238.

Zhai, K. and Moskal, M., 2022. The impact of place of origin on international and domestic Graduates' mobility in China. *International Migration Review*, *56*(1), pp.123-154.

Zhang, H.Y. 2004, "Jinru xinshiqide Zhongguo saying qiyezhu jiceng" ['Private entrepreneurs in China enter a new era'] in 2004 nian: Zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce [Blue Book of China's Society 2004: *Analysis and Forecast of China's Social Development*]. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.

Zhang, L. 2007, uifu gaokao de yiyi quanshi (Interpreting the meaning of restoring university entrance examination), Nanjing shida xuebao (shehui kexueban, *Journal of Nanjing Normal University* (Social science edition), 6, pp. 74–78.

Zhang, S. and Tang, X., 2021. Cultural capital as class strength and gendered educational choices of Chinese female students in the United Kingdom. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, p.584360.

Zhang, S. and Xu, C.L., 2020. The making of transnational distinction: An embodied cultural capital perspective on Chinese women students' mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *41*(8), pp.1251-1267.

Zhang W., 2005. *Chongtu yu bianshu: Zhongguo shehui zhongjian jieceng zhengzhi fenxi [Conflict and Uncertainty: Political Analysis of the Middle Stratum in Chinese Society]*
. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.

Zheng Hangsheng, and Li Lulu. 2004. *Dangdai zhongguo chengshi shehui jiegou [Social Structure of the Cities in Contemporary China]*. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe.

Zhou, R. Y., Knoke, D., & Sakamoto, I.2005, 'Rethinking silence in the classroom: Chinese students' experiences of sharing indigenous knowledge, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 9 (3), pp. 287–311.

Zhu, H. and O'Sullivan, H., 2022. Shhhh! Chinese students are studying quietly in the UK. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *59*(3), pp.275-284.

Zhu, J., 2016. *Chinese overseas students and intercultural learning environments* (Vol. 9). London: Palgrave Macmillan.