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**Exploring the link between studying abroad
and student employability: a study of
international students in a Chinese university**

Fangyi Guan

Thesis submitted for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

2023

Abstract

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the link between international student mobility and employability. The findings are from the perspectives of international students based on their perceptions of undertaking degree-level study in a university in China in relation to their employability.

Two key research questions are posed for exploring that link. The first research question explores the reasons why individuals choose to do Master's studies in China, particularly with respect to their perceived value of overall educational and international student mobility (ISM) experiences to their future career prospects. The second question looks at how international students develop employability by understanding their reported study and living experiences in China.

To those ends, this study examined international students' mobility experiences by employing qualitative research methods: semi-structured, in-depth interviews and document analysis. Research participants were a group of 23 international students from 20 different countries across the six continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Australia), and undertaking a Master's degree in one of eight disciplinary areas (Education, Medicine, Agriculture, Economics, Public Affairs, Politics and Chinese studies, Chemical Engineering, Bridge and Tunnel Engineering).

The findings were analysed and discussed from the theoretical perspective of a capability approach in order to capture and frame students' perceived value of mobility experiences to employability beyond the human capital or positional conflict conceptualisations. The findings, drawing on students' perspectives, indicate that students linked study abroad in China with their employability development either explicitly or implicitly. First, students perceived the link between valuable elements of ISM and its corresponding aspect of employability differently in relation to internal capabilities and external conditions. Second, findings suggest that these variations in students' perceptions are due to a wide range of influential factors (i.e. individual or contextual). Third, by looking at their subsequent study

and living experiences in China, students managed to develop internal capabilities and seek external opportunities through a combination of resources and internal and external conversion factors. Based on these findings, the study further proposes implications for government and university policies to support individuals by expanding their freedoms (capabilities and agency).

Key words: international student mobility, employability, capability approach, internationalisation, higher education, China

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that the work is my own, and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: _____

Date: June 2023

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of people for supporting me personally and professionally during my thesis:

My dad, my mum, my sister, and all my close friends. Without their financial and emotional support, completing this project would not be possible.

Professor Richard Andrews, my current first supervisor at the University of Edinburgh.

Professor Ming Cheng, my first first supervisor at the University of East Anglia.

Dr Kuang-Hsu Chiang, my current second supervisor at the University of Edinburgh.

Professor Yann Lebeau, my valuable second supervisor at the University of East Anglia.

Thank you for contributing your expert knowledge and guidance throughout the doctorate without reservation.

All the international students who participated in my study.

Thank you for giving your precious time and sharing your study and life experiences.

Fangyi Guan

June 2023

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CPEC – the China Pakistan Economic Corridor

DLHE – Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education

EMI – English-Medium Instruction

HCT – human capital theory

HE – higher education

HEIs – higher education institutions

ISM – international student mobility

PRC – People’s Republic of China

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the context: the issue of student employability

In the context of higher education (HE) expansion and the changing labour market conditions, student employability has become a subject of policy concern as well as a scholarly debate worldwide.

Theoretically, informed by the human capital theory (HCT), policy makers (i.e. international organisations, governments, universities) tend to see the role of higher education as being for human capital and labour market productivity worldwide (Tomlinson, 2012, Nilsson, 2017) rather than an end in itself. Human capital, in the form of knowledge/skills, no doubt is more valuable than other forms of capital (e.g. physical or financial capital) for the current rising knowledge economies (Lauder et al., 2012). Thus, education is seen as an investment for generating professionals with appropriate employability skills in meeting that need. Nevertheless, concerning the assumptions on employability from this linear education-work relationship as the knowledge/skills approach assumes, there are also concerns seeing that the concept of employability contains a relative dimension owing to the social and labour market conditions (Brown et al., 2004). That is, on the supply side, we see an increasing number of the graduate population competing for limited graduate jobs, and on the demand side, the changing spheres of workplaces (i.e. technological advancement and changing occupational structures). Those who pursue higher education (and their families) consequently may bear much responsibility for preparing themselves for future careers and expect commensurate labour market outcomes from their higher education participation (Tomlinson, 2012).

Nevertheless, researchers point out that both theoretical understandings have limitations in interpreting the role of HE simply as economic reward, either individually or collectively, in relation to employability (Walker and Boni, 2013, Walker and Fongwa, 2017). They argue that HE could play its role of being more inclusive (i.e. for human development), and preparing future professionals for public good in an increasingly globalised and diverse world

(ibid.). What is more important, how policy makers understand the link between education and employability may influentially affect many other stakeholders' attitudes and practices, such as those of universities, employers, and consequently individual students (Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2020, Burke et al., 2017). Individual students' experience of ISM should be seen as a process of self-formation, which needs a proactive human will for coping with constant "transformations and disequilibrium with the host society" (Marginson, 2014, p.8). I thus agree with this viewpoint and would argue that the two theoretical aspects are yet limited on framing individual students, who are active agents, linking international student mobility (ISM) experiences to employability enhancement. It would be valuable knowledge for institutional/national policymaking if further investigation is conducted to expand our understanding of the topic.

Despite its various theoretical understandings, the link between ISM experiences and employability is indeed increasingly of interest to different stakeholders. As part of an important internationalisation agenda, institutions of higher education globally compete for international students, either for generating more economic profits, developing their institutional reputation, or cultivating foreign talents (Zajda, 2020). Linking to the current Chinese context, the Chinese government's interest in the intake of international students seems to be less about the revenue-generating issue in comparison to those traditional destination countries (e.g. the US, the UK, and Australia). ISM is vital to China's HE internationalisation to enhance the country's national development, soft power, and international competitiveness (Wen et al., 2018, Qi, 2021). The fast growth of international students enrolled in China has been clearly a policy issue of the Chinese state government since its efforts made in the 1980s (Jokila, 2015). There are different government-initiated projects — i.e. the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the plan for the Modernisation of Education in China 2035, and the Double First-Class University Plan — indicating important investments in various aspects in the sector (Yan et al., 2019). Also, it has been noticed that there is a policy shift in the focus of international student enrolments for the Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs): from its quantity aspect to the quality aspect (Gao and Liu, 2020). In these policies, the Chinese state government sees the importance of attracting and

cultivating international talent and levelling up the quality of its international student education. Moreover, by understanding the policy discourse of the BRI (e.g. MOE, 2016, MoE, 2019c, MOE, 2019b), researchers notice a subtle change in China's view of its international student education: from a soft-power approach that serves the global geopolitical competition as its national priority, to a cultural dialogue approach that sees the role of international students for promoting 'mutual exchange' (Mulvey and Lo, 2021).

However, the employability issues of international students are less well understood and those from the international students' perspective in Chinese settings. Thus, my principal focus is to understand and explore how international students link ISM experiences in China to their employability. From the theoretical aspect, I use the capability approach to gain an expansive understanding of the concept of employability. I consider that conceptualising international students' approach to employability is beyond the possessive approach (i.e. gaining knowledge/skills or other types of capital to win positional advantages) driven by economic/social incentives. My focus of employability, drawn on this theoretical framework, foregrounds the ultimate goal of expanding a person's freedom, or in other words, capability expansion and agency empowerment.

To give a general picture of the contextual understandings, I will briefly provide more background information about international student education and ISM in China in the next section.

1.2 The picture of international student education in China

China has become the biggest regional host country for international students and takes the third place after the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) in the global list of host nations. Concerning the latest information available from the Chinese Ministry of Education website about international students in China (MOE, 2019), figures show that there were 492,185 international students studying in Chinese HEIs in the year of 2018. These international students were from 196 countries across five continents. Notably China has become the most popular country of destination for Asian students (Xinhua-Net, 2019a); its international students from the Asian continent (60 per cent) were more than those from

countries within other continents. As can be seen in the lists of sending countries, South Korea tops the list, totalling 50,600, with Thailand (28,608) and Pakistan (28,023) taking second and third place respectively.

Linking these statistics to the political aspect, the international students' country of origin as well as their subject choice also closely connect to the BRI (Gong et al., 2020). As the figures indicated, 52.95 per cent of the international students were from sixty-four BRI countries (MOE, 2019a, Xinhua-Net, 2019b). Besides its scale, enlarging the international talents pool through its international student education has become important in order to "produce a number of talents in the fields of science, technology, education, diplomacy, management" (MOE, 2014, p.1). Then, as for their degree choices, more than half of the international students were doing degree-level programmes (258,100), which was 6.9 per cent higher than those in 2017. The proportion of international students undertaking postgraduate studies increased at a higher rate (12.3 per cent). Moreover, a growing number of international students chose to do a wide range of programmes (i.e. Engineering, Management, Science and Agricultural Science) other than studying those more popular programmes for Chinese language learning previously. 12.81 per cent of them were funded by government scholarships.

1.3 Research rationale

In the review of the relevant literature, I find several gaps concerning international students' voices on linking ISM to their employability. Firstly, concerning the literature more broadly, exploring international students' employability is a recent phenomenon, and a focus is largely on ISM streaming from developing to developed or within developed countries (Huang and Turner, 2018, Crossman and Clarke, 2010).

Secondly, existing literature tends to pay attention to graduates' (un)employment issues after graduation. The theoretical conceptualisations underpinning this focus are, as proposed by Holmes (2013), either the possessive approach or positional approach. Findings from these studies are indeed insightful in understanding how individual students handle propositions and approaches to their educational and employment experience, particularly

for those who are new graduates not having any formal work experience and who will be facing their first job-hunting experience after graduation.

However, the sole focus on international students' education-work transition as well as the economic value of HE in relation to their employability may limit our understanding of students' perspectives and experiences. More importantly, these are international students with different social-economic, cultural, and professional backgrounds. Thus, their decision-making and aspirations in relation to ISM might be better understood based on expanded understandings of the concept of employability. That is, a robust theoretical approach to employability should take students' broader life goals and values into consideration in understanding their education-work trajectories.

Thirdly, a context-specific issue is that more comprehensive research is needed on understanding how international students, as active agents, interact with the external/structural factors in their decision-making and subsequent study and life experiences regarding employability enhancement. Enhancing international students' employability is increasingly becoming a matter of policy concern. However, as indicated in my review of the literature (in chapter 3), relevant empirical studies either investigate the link from a macro perspective or look at international students' satisfaction or language learning experiences in general. Although there is increased engagement in providing quality education for international students, relevant employability-related support at institutional/national level are still designed for domestic students only. Little attention has been paid to the impact of factors from various aspects, be it relational (e.g. peers, staff, local people within the community), institutional/organisational (e.g. HEIs, companies) or national/international (e.g. the Chinese state government, BRI), on individual students regarding their employability enhancement, thus limiting our understanding of how individual agents interact with external/structural factors.

Relevantly, the last rationale suggests that there is little empirical evidence of employability-related issues in international students who are undertaking Master's degree studies in China. Prospective postgraduate students tend to have more industry experience

or continued part-time experience than those who pursue their first degree. Understandably, these students tend to have a stronger sense of taking advantage of living and studying abroad and deferring their career pressure (Moskal and Schweisfurth, 2018). Thus, it would be interesting to understand how these international students bridge the study and/or future mobility abroad in relation to their career prospects.

Undertaking this study is also for my own research interest in the area of ISM and employability. It is due to a perspective derived from the fact that, prior to my current PhD study, I studied and lived in the United Kingdom (UK) as a Master's student. My own personal experience as well as an understanding of the shared views from other international students, as a whole, motivated me to study a group of students who moved abroad and were expected to learn and live in a culturally and linguistically diverse environment. Instead of international students studying in traditional English-speaking countries, I turned my focus on investigating a group of international students at a Chinese university. I hope to provide findings which could benefit future prospective students in considering taking a study abroad degree.

Thus, research that is reflective, theoretically informed, and contextualised — i.e. the emergent rise within the Chinese HE context — for understanding a link between employability and ISM based on the voices of international students is well worth investigation.

1.4 Research aim, research questions, and contribution

I aim to explore the link between ISM experiences (i.e. international education and international mobility experiences in general) and employability, with a particular focus on how international students perceive the value of ISM experiences for enhancing valuable capabilities/functionings concerning their future career prospects or other broader life goals. The participants in the present study are international students who are relatively mature (ranging from 24-34) and undertaking degree studies at Master's level.

To achieve this aim, I consider two aspects in relation to employability: first, international students' motivations to and aspirations for undertaking a Master's degree at

the selected university in China; second, their study and life experiences during their Master's degree study in China.

Thus, I have proposed two key research questions (1,2) (with sub-questions):

1) Why do international students choose to undertake a Master's study at a Chinese university?

1-1) To what valued capabilities have international students aspired and what has motivated them to study abroad in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

2) How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

2-1) What activities do international students attend to enhance their employability during their degree study in China?

2-2) What are the constraining and enabling conversion factors that influence international students' employability enhancement?

I consider that a study on understanding the link between ISM and employability from the international students' perspective in the Chinese context would enrich both practical contributions and theoretical understandings. Findings from this study would go some way to cover the gaps in knowledge in the area. More importantly, understanding international students' perspectives of the link could help improve legal systems and education quality.

1.5 Thesis structure

I structure this thesis into nine chapters. In the introductory chapter, I have discussed issues around student employability by focusing on the theoretical and the context-specific aspects. I then presented research rationales, a research aim, research questions, and the significance of this study.

There are three literature review chapters (chapter 2, chapter 3, and chapter 4). In chapter 2, I have presented my argument for why I use the capability approach as the conceptual

framework of the study. I present my argument by understanding the limitations of the two existing approaches to employability and argue that this more expansive framework should be more appropriate in understanding international students' employability when linking to their ISM experiences. In chapter 3, I turn my focus to relevant issues, more specifically in the Chinese context. I begin with understanding different actors in shaping international student education in China and looking at relevant internationalisation policies as well as institutional practices. I then review relevant empirical studies on understanding employability from the international students' perspective in the Chinese context in chapter 4. I conclude that, although there are increasingly supportive policies and practices implemented, concerns about international students' study and life experiences in China and research focusing on employability issues from the perspective of international students are limited.

In chapter 5, I have discussed my overall methodological considerations in the study. I firstly have positioned this study within the critical realist ontological stance. Guided by my research aim and questions, I apply the phenomenology methodological approach with relevant rationales provided. I then discuss in detail the research methods (i.e. interviews, document analysis), data collection procedures, data analysis, and related ethics of this study.

Chapter 6 and chapter 7 are the findings chapters and arranged according to the proposed research questions. In chapter 6, I present results related to the international students' motivating factors and attempt to understand how international students linked ISM to their employability. In chapter 7, I look at the reported experiences of international students to understand how they managed and developed their employability through the Master's degree study in China.

I have presented my discussion of the findings in chapter 8. I begin by revisiting the research questions. Based on the findings identified in previous chapters, I discuss and compare those key themes. As for the first part of the discussion, I argue that international students either explicitly or implicitly link their ISM in China to their employability enhancement. Moreover,

as I use capability theory to understand their perceived motivating factors which could be beneficial to their employability, I find that international students aspire to gain a wide capability set as well as seek external opportunities to enhance their employability. I discuss this in the second part of the chapter and find that capability expansion as well as their agency could be enhanced or contained by the combination of resources and the conversion factors of various aspects. In the third part of the discussion, I look at how Chinese HEIs could support international students' employability.

I conclude my study in chapter 9. I outline the research significance and originality of the thesis. I propose pertinent implications both for internationalisation policies and future research in the Chinese context. I recommend that policy makers should recognise that international students aspire to a wide range of capabilities concerning their employability. Moreover, both policy makers and HEIs should be aware of the importance of relevant resources and enabling conversion factors which could contribute to international students' employability. I end the thesis by giving my own reflections on the whole process of conducting the study as well as on the results that I have presented.

1.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have introduced some background information on my research (i.e. the general setting concerning the issue of student employability, ISM in the Chinese context) and the role of my personal position in informing this research. Through introducing this relevant information, I indicate the significance of my study in the context and the present foci of my research. A central argument is that more expansive understanding is needed for thinking about the link between international students' employability and ISM and its implications on policies and practices. In the next chapter, I will critically review literature on the related theoretical lenses.

Chapter 2 Review of conceptual frameworks on understanding employability: human capital theory, credentialism, and the capability approach

2.1. Introduction

I aim to explore the link between international students' study and living experiences in China and their employability, and more specifically, from the perspective of interviewed international students. I critically review related key theoretical understandings and concepts underpinning my research questions and guiding the data analysis. I begin by introducing two broader theoretical perspectives that attempt to conceptualise the relationship between education and the world of work/economy (in section 2.2.1): human capital theory and credentialism. Closely linked to these two theories, section 2.2.2 discusses further critical points on understanding current approaches adopted by individual students in their educational experience and work trajectories. Next, I turn to introduce literature on understanding the concept of employability in section 2.2.3. I look at the concept's changing perspectives over time and space, followed by a review of the existing theoretical approaches to employability and their limitations in framing individual agents in the HE context (in 2.3.2). In the last section 2.4, I introduce an alternative theoretical perspective — the capability approach — and suggest an expansive understanding of higher education in relation to students' employability.

2.2. Broader theoretical understandings of the relationship between education and its contribution to the social and economic outcomes

2.2.1 Two contrasting theoretical perspectives of education–social-economic link: the conflict approach and the consensus approach

To understand international students' decisions to undertake a Master's degree abroad, subsequent study and living abroad experiences, and their perceived relevance of decision-making and these experiences to employability development, I begin by reviewing existing theoretical understandings which attempt to conceptualise the relationship between education and the wider social and economic prospects.

Considering it more broadly, existing theoretical understandings of the role of education and its linkage to wider social and economic matters can be framed in two contrasting approaches — a consensus approach or a conflict approach — as they interpret different social-economic causes and results in the consequences of the education–economy interaction (Tomlinson, 2013, Lauder et al., 2006). That is, a consensus approach views that the educational expansion, seen as a fair and effective process of socialisation (for developing social, job-related, or life skills) and selection (for the job distribution), could positively meet the economic and social needs of the society (e.g. Becker, 2009, Hyslop-Margison and Sears, 2007); but a conflict approach sees this interplay as conflicting in relation to the wider social structures that the role of the educational system tends to reinforce including the reproduction of structural inequalities (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 1988, Collins, 1971).

In representing the two polarised theoretical positions (the consensus and conflict approach) respectively, it is worth noting that there are two frequently cited key theories, namely, the human capital theory (HCT) and credentialism (Baker, 2009, Tomlinson, 2013).

HCT shares much in common with a consensus approach that sees education as economically productive (Tomlinson, 2013, p.65). The form of human capital, as the author Becker (2009) has clarified in his book chapter 'Human Capital Revised', is distinguished from

other forms of capital (i.e. financial and physical capital) which cannot be separated from a person; rather it is the embodied “knowledge, skills, or values” that yield financial and social return (ibid, p.16). Moreover, Becker (2009) argues that education and work training is the most important kind of human capital investment. Investments in human capital through education for in-demand skills to the need of technological advancement would contribute to individual job opportunities, and to social-economic status (at microeconomic level) as well as the labour market productivity and the national economic growth (at macroeconomic level) (Becker, 2002; Schultz, 1961).

For HCT, the skills function of education also indicates its view on another role of education — *selection*: allocating an individual employee to an occupation that is commensurate with one’s skills. Moreover, this rule linking to labour market distributions based on one’s educational achievement, as many scholars have pointed out, is the meritocratic approach to competition (Brown et al., 2001, Tomlinson, 2013).

Thus, underpinning the economic reasoning, HCT has been favourably endorsed by national governments globally for economic and social empowerment through policy responses (e.g. employability policies) (Olssen * and Peters, 2005). Under these government statements and policies, universities, as producers of intellectuals and knowledge, have taken a critical role in enhancing national economic competitiveness (McArthur, 2011). Further, it has been argued that universities have become sites of governing students and academics to be self-governed as human capital (Heaney, 2015).

In contrast, credentialism rejects a fair, direct, socially just, and economically productive role of education (as HCT has indicated). Baker (2009) uses the concept of ‘education-as-myth’ to describe the conflict approach (on which the credentialist theory is mapped) and indicates that this theoretical approach attempts to posit a limited role of education in skill development (as interpreted by the consensus approach). Instead, education-as-myth assumes that the allocative function of education, directing people to different occupations, is based on their innate abilities and attitudes. Moreover, as guided by many sociological analyses concerning the linkage between education and social structure, a key feature of

this theoretical approach is that it sees education as a site that involves power play from an external social structure.

Representing this conflictual tradition are two theoretical perspectives for understanding what the mechanisms are in enforcing and reproducing the structural inequalities in society and how these mechanisms impact on social systems (e.g. the educational system). That is, the capitalist correspondence theory, drawing from the Marxist perspective, focuses on issues of class conflict and ideological control (see Bowles and Gintis, 1988). Elaborating on these issues further work, drawing from the neo-Weberian perspective, focuses on social closure (see Murphy, 1984, Parkin, 1979).

The concept of social closure is to understand monopolising and controlling resources to secure social groups' rewards and privileges and at the same time restrict those of groups of others (Parkin, 1979). In addition to the exclusionary power that comes out of one form — the institutions of property (i.e. the ownership control of the means of production and wealth creation opportunities that follows Marxist analyses), exclusionary rules of various forms in the process are recognised, be they social, economic, or cultural (e.g. educational credentials, race, gender, etc.) (Weber, 1968, p.926; Parkin, 1979; Murphy, 1984). According to Parkin (1979), there is a change in the rules for the purpose of gaining advantages over and closing off opportunities to others. That is what Parkin describes as a shift from the 'collectivist' to 'individualist' criteria of exclusion which legitimises individuals' or groups' (and at the same time, denies some others') access to social and economic rewards. More specifically, the 'individualist' rules indicate an indirect and (ostensibly) fair competition (e.g. competing for educational credentials) for advantages; the 'collectivist' rules manifest a direct transmission of advantages based on the collective characteristics of a group of people (e.g. gender, race, religion, etc.).

Therefore, drawing upon the neo-Weberian position and its principles of social closure, credentialism theorists such as Collins (1971), and Hirsch (2005) do not see that the rising demand for education is for developing work-related skills as a technical issue for the needs of society (as HCT explains). Rather, according to Collins (1979), the expansion of higher

education (in the USA) is mainly the exclusionary practices of competing for educational goods in defending a social group's further access to social and economic opportunities. There are two main aspects in understanding social groups who are involved in this process (ibid.). That is, employers, representing a social group who have the power in taking advantage of the educational system and setting the job requirements to exclude job entrants whom they wish not to belong to them. Job entrants need to obtain certain types of educational goods as advantages over others in order to win a position (seen as scarce resources). Thus, to this end, Collins (1979) argues that it is the unequally valued educational goods (academic credentials), individuals, or social groups taking advantage that legitimises their further access to other rewards (e.g. jobs and income), to maintain or enhance their social and economic status, and to exclude those who cannot meet the sets of job entry requirements.

Consequently, under this credentialist assumption, there are more dire social or economic consequences to educational expansion. Unlike seeing it as a lead to an increased human capital, some worry about the expanded population of credential holders for fierce job market competition. Moreover, they purport that it is likely to cause issues like 'credential inflation' or 'diploma disease' (Dore, 1976; Berg, 1971).

As such, the two theoretical analyses are helpful in gaining some understanding regarding the education– social-economic link; however, as frequently discussed in literature, the interplay between the educational expansion and social and economic outcomes tend to be more complicated (Baker, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013; Lauder et al. 2008; Hansen, 2011). Despite having received many criticisms — deriving from the sociological perspective — of overlooking the power play of different social groups, HCT is nevertheless viewed as simplistic for viewing education as economically productive. The role of education, more broadly, is meant to have both intrinsic and instrumental roles (Saito, 2003).

Many critics are concerned about the extent to which universities can contribute to those economic demands and whether this end, in facilitating national/individual economic gain, should be the ultimate goal of university education (Schuller et al., 2000, Lloyd and Payne,

2003; Young, 2009). Baker (2014) further notes that both theoretical positions underestimate the power of education as a social institution in thinking about its impacts on people's beliefs and values of how education could 'transform' (not only train and allocate) individuals in terms of capabilities, expectations, and qualities, as well as those of economies (e.g. the nature of work and workplaces) and wider societies (p.127). Education as a social opportunity sees that "human beings are by nature social, but also that the social wellbeing of human beings is one of the prime ends and purposes of education" (Nixon, 2012, p.22). Therefore, both theoretical analyses are inadequate in capturing this dimension of human development.

Concerning the aim of the thesis — i.e. exploring the link between international students' mobility experiences and their employability — in the next section, I will focus on how these theoretical understandings can inform individual students' aspirations for and experiences of ISM in relation to their employability.

2.2.2 Interpretations of individuals' approaches to formal educational experiences and subsequent labour market outcomes

As these two theoretical perspectives (HCT and credentialism) manifest contrasting interpretations of the role of educational experiences in contributing to labour market productivity and distributing social and economic opportunities, there are distinctive explanations assumed regarding individuals' attitudes, incentives, and expectations towards achievements from formal educational experiences (Tomlinson, 2013; Barker, 2009; Brown et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the competition for educational credentials does take a role in distributing individuals into occupations. As both theoretical positions agree, using educational credentials as screening-devices is important for job entrants (Brown et al., 2003). Although the perceived value of these educational credentials may vary, educational credentials show one's gain of human capital (from the perspective of HCT) or other social values and benefits (from the perspective of credentialism).

Again, HCT has pictured the positive and productive role of education reflecting the meritocratic characteristics of achieving social-economic gain. It is the individuals'

responsibility and capacity in investing and applying themselves in the educational system (Tomlinson, 2013, Brown et al., 2001). Thus, the implications of this conceptualisation of individuals' approaches to education for human capital are that individuals' educational behaviours and choices are logical and rational (as educational decisions are made from careful planning or an economic calculation for self-interest) and utilitarian (by investing in human capital for financial return) (Tomlinson, 2013). In other words, as Brown et al. (2001) have commented, these assumptions emphasise that individuals expect longer economic return from investing in education, as opposed to getting immediate gratification.

While HCT can cast light on individuals' approaches to education for job skills from the monetary perspective, there are problems with the interpretation as such. For instance, following the credentialist analysis, Brown and his colleagues indeed criticise the explanatory value of the human capital perspective on understanding individuals' experiences of skill formation from the supply and demand side (Brown et al., 2001). On the supply side, they agree with one limitation captured by Block (1990) that most economic analyses have underestimated the human capacity to work being "socially created and sustained" (p.75), as opposed to characteristics of raw materials and financial capital. These authors further clarify that the HCT perspective of skill development is individual-focused, and devoid of a social and cultural dimension in the aspect of "identity, motivation, and high trust" (Brown et al., 2001, p.15). For instance, the motivational factors for understanding individuals' educational and future career experiences, as Tomlinson (2013) has pointed out, are more socially and culturally contextualised and cannot be narrowly viewed as economic incentives.

In a similar vein on the demand side, Brown et al. (2001, p.15) points out that more influential factors — the attitudes towards gender differences, managerial practices, and industrial relationships — need to be considered for understanding how labour markets and employers value job skills of necessity and their potential implications for social and economic consequences on individuals. For instance, employers may have their preferences for the type of employees and then set the job entry requirements for pursuing and meeting their interests. This segment within the process, in turn, is likely to affect individuals' or

social groups' approaches to the educational experiences and labour market trajectories, which is not the decontextualised and linear logical thinking of the analysis of skills that HCT assumes.

Nevertheless, Brown, as well as other scholars, also see limitations in the credentialist perspective for understanding a process of how individuals apply themselves within the educational system (Brown, 1995, Baker, 2009, Tholen, 2017, Brown, 2000). Again, these credentialist theorists (e.g. Collins, 1971), drawing on the existing social closure theory, seem to exclusively consider that a growing number of credential holders are simply the result of exclusionary tactics on the educational system. In other words, this credentialist view sees developing human capital and applying social closure mechanisms as incompatible purposes of the process (Baker, 2009, Brown, 2000).

Reasons have been given concerning some weaknesses in the existing social closure theory that underpins the credentialist theory. Indeed, Parkin (1979) recognises that exclusionary power to the means of production and wealth distribution based on the institutions of property differs from that based on other rules of closure (e.g. educational credentials). However, as Murphy (1984) emphasises, Parkin's broad definition of property obscures understandings of the interrelationships among different sets of exclusionary rules; that obscurity may lead to a view of educational credentials as rules of exclusion being equally powerful to property. In effect, as Murphy argues, the power and advantages that educational credentials indicate for position entry are determined by "the market-dominated property classes" (ibid., p.551). Brown also notes that issues such as what the exact relationships between the means of control and the monitoring of key positions on the one hand (e.g. educational credentials), and the means of productivity and its distribution on the other are, based on these rules. How the exclusionary power is actualised is not a matter of concern to Parkin (Brown, 2000). To this point, however, he further claims that it is essential to clarify these aspects, as how the nature of rules being organised may have significant implications on individuals' subsequent educational experiences and labour market trajectories for livelihood as well as the understanding of social justice issues (Brown, 2000).

Thus, a related problem to this lack of clarity is that it overlooks the changes in the relationship between credential competition and the changing spheres of workplaces (technological advancement and changing occupational structures) (Brown, 1995, Brown et al., 2001). That is, there are increased needs for workers with higher levels of professional, managerial, and technical skills due to technological innovation and occupational structure change. In relation to Brown's argument, Tholen (2017) also suggests the perceived value and significance of educational credentials needs to be understood in relation to the changing social and economic contexts. Concerning the UK graduate labour market in the early twenty-first century, Tholen sees that there is a more flexible connection between "graduate jobs, skills, careers and rewards" in the consequences of these contextual changes (p.1071, *ibid.*). This author further outlines five key trends: graduates' labour market competition in a global context, the emergence of new graduate jobs, the increased need of soft skills, the divergence in income, and a focus to individual talents and competencies for recruiting the talented/best graduates (Tholen, 2014, Tholen, 2017). Thus, these authors contribute additional understandings (in addition to the mere exclusionary tactics by social groups or employers) of the less effective exclusionary power of educational credentials for one's labour market success at the current time. These contextual changes, in Brown's words, will drive individuals' credential competition for the purpose of maintaining one's employability in order to cope with a "more intensive struggle for competitive advantage in education and labour markets" (1995, p.32).

I have discussed both theoretical perspectives as well as their limitations in understanding individual educational and labour market behaviours. These theoretical perspectives are useful for understanding the concept of employability and my choice of defining the term in this study.

2.3. Understanding the concept of employability in relation to higher education

2.3.1 Historical perspectives on the concept of employability

I have discussed the alternative ways (the consensus approach and the conflict approach) that theoretically interpret the role of education in individuals' social and economic

outcomes. In this section, I look at the related literature and theoretical analyses on understanding the concept of employability: the historical development of the term in its use, purposes, and components over time.

The concept of employability is complex with its changing meaning and use over time. It is derived and much debated as a scholarly and policy issue within literature in Western contexts (i.e. the UK, countries in Europe, and North America). By reviewing literature in these contexts, the concept of employability can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century (Marilyn, 2008; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Overall, three main changing perspectives of the concept of employability have been distinguished — ranging from the societal level, organisational level, to the individual level (Thijssen et al., 2008, Vanhercke et al., 2014).

Concerning the social and labour market conditions at that time, employability emerged as the ‘dichotomic employability’ to distinguish those who are unemployable (the disabled and disadvantaged groups) from the employable (Feintuch, 1955). This version of the concept of employability, as the first of the three waves, is seen as a simplistic emergency distinction, and less than a tool in the labour market policy (Gazier, 1998). It was followed by a second wave in 1960s, when it was known as ‘socio-medical employability’, the ‘manpower policy employability’, and ‘flow employability’ at the policy level to measure and identify the distance between individual characteristics (mainly the disadvantaged) and the labour market needs. Therefore, the concept of employability was conceived mainly at the societal level concerning demand-side issues of employment rates, social, and economic issues within societies.

Later, in the 1980s, the third wave came to the fore, incorporating three distinctive versions: the outcome-based ‘labour market performance employability’ for policy evaluation, the individual-focused ‘initiative employability’ in the human resource development literature, and the more consensual ‘interactive employability’ concept beyond individual considerations. At this stage, it marked a change to the perspective at the organisational level. Employability, therefore, was approached by employers to enhance the organisational

competitiveness and efficiency in light of organisational changes (organisational restructuring and downsizing) (Ekinsmyth, 1999, Thijssen et al., 2008, Vanhercke et al., 2014). Consequently, employees faced growing challenges and risks in experiencing a changing sphere in that lifelong employment was expected to be replaced by other flexible types of careers (Ekinsmyth, 1999).

Consequently, with concerns on (un)employment brought by the economic, social, and technological changes in the post-industrial society onwards, the individual perspective of employability focusing on personal skills and knowledge development came to the fore. In the late 1980s, owing to these changes in the workplace, there was an increasing demand for workers with transferable and flexible (technical, managerial, and professional) skills moving between different jobs (Brown, 1995). Meanwhile, the labour market policies in the West (e.g. the UK, Europe, and North America) turned the focus on fostering employment (a state obligation) towards fostering employability (an individual obligation) (McCowan, 2015). Then, more dynamic, adaptive, and even interactive characteristics of the concept of employability were recognised (Grazier, 1998).

As such, overviews of its history indicate that the concept of employability has no single accepted meaning, despite its importance in surrounding issues both individually and collectively (i.e. the individual employment, labour market productivities, and national economic growth).

In setting employability in the HE context in the current twenty-first century, a focus on students' employability is even more central to HE policies worldwide (Tomlinson, 2012, Nilsson, 2017). Concerning issues in the context include the employment crisis for graduates. Particularly since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen a more focal role for Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) in human capital development for the national and regional economy when facing the current labour market situation (European Commission report, 2020). In addition to the awareness of these related issues, for many stakeholders involved (e.g. governments, international organisations, students, governments, and HEIs), students' employability, on the other hand, can be an effective approach to

solving these issues. However, in the HE sector, the concept of employability is confusing partly due to the fact that there are multiple perspectives from different stakeholders, various disciplinary understandings (career studies, education, psychology) (Vanhercke et al., 2014), or the multidimensional nature of the term itself (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007). Stakeholders have their own economic and/or political aims to the development of student employability (Burke et al., 2017). Indicators of students' employability vary from the graduates' employment outcomes and gaining a list of employability skills to other wider aspects. Thus, despite a general consensus on the importance of students' employability, agreement on the conceptualisation of employability in the context has not been reached (Behle, 2020). However, the clarification of the concept of employability is still important for understanding the relevant issues pertinent to the focus of this study. I will discuss this aspect in the next section.

2.3.2 Two contrasting perspectives on understanding student employability

2.3.2.1. *A possessive approach for developing human capital*

It would be helpful to introduce the different and evolving theoretical perspectives of student employability first. Two distinctive understandings of student employability are frequently discussed: the 'individual content' as the mainstream approach, and the 'relational, contextual, and conflictual' as an alternative approach (Tholen, 2015, Burke et al., 2017, Holmes, 2013). Holmes (2013) also frames these two as the possessive approach and the positional approach respectively. Moreover, these theoretical underpinnings are closely linked to the two contrasting understandings of the education–work link that I have discussed in previous sections.

Considering the context of HE policies more generally, the individual content approach to employability, premised on the ideas that developed from HCT, is dominant (Clarke, 2018). That is, HE policies place education as a key role in developing human capital (preparing students ready for a future career with appropriate skills and knowledge) for individual and national economic prospects. To implement such policy-level approach to employability, governments create departments such as the Department of Education, Employment, and

Workplace Relations (in Australia), and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (in the UK). HEIs in many countries incorporate a list of specific skills and attributes into a wide range of academic and non-academic activities (Daniels and Brooker, 2014, France et al., 2016).

This approach concerns many scholars in the aspect of what employability outcomes students could get out of their educational experiences (Marginson, 2006, Tholen, 2015, Clarke, 2018, Bridgstock, 2009). Some are worried that HEIs simply view the graduate employment rate as important as learning outcomes. They express suspicious feelings on using this measurable way for indicating students' employability or their institutional performance (Burke et al., 2017, Molesworth et al., 2009). For instance, in the UK (the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)) or Australia (Graduate Careers Australia's Graduate Destinations report), one determined indicator is the graduate employment outcomes shortly after course completion.

As for an emphasis of the skill gap, many critics have doubt about the extent to which universities can contribute to those economic demands, and whether this end, in facilitating national/individual economic gain, should be the ultimate goal of a university education (Schuller et al., 2000, Lloyd and Payne, 2003; Young, 2009). More importantly, under such an instrumental approach, it concerns scholars that there is a potential omission of the wider benefits that HE could bring to societies (Mtawa et al., 2021). Others consider the nature of the skills (or attributes/competences), namely effectiveness, transferability, and contextualisation (Cranmer, 2006). It has been questioned whether HEIs should take the role of cultivating student employability skills in response to the labour market needs; or indeed have the ability to develop employability skills, which can be further applied into the workplaces across different national/regional contexts (Campbell, 2010, Cranmer, 2006, Tymon, 2013, McCowan, 2015, Speight et al., 2013, Rooney and Rawlinson, 2016, Boden and Nedeva, 2010, Kalfa and Taksa, 2015).

This neglect is indicated in the commonly used definitions (Cox and King, 2006, Yorke et al., 2004, Rothwell and Arnold, 2007) of models of employability — e.g. Understanding, Skills,

Efficacy and Meta-cognition (USEM), and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT), which have received much criticism for their individual-focused thinking on employability (Small et al., 2018, Cashian, 2017). For instance, the ESECT definition is:

A set of achievements — skills, understandings, and personal attributes — that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Yorke et al., 2004, p.4).

Drawing on a critical realist perspective, Cashian (2017) posits that employability encompasses multidimensional aspects, which should be seen as a “multifaceted phenomenon” for researchers to explore and understand (p.123). Cashian (2017) further clarifies this idea by examining this ESECT definition and argues that it is nevertheless simplistic for neglecting multidimensionality from two main aspects. Firstly, students gaining employment and being successful in their chosen occupations indicate different aspects of employability. Thus, secondly, the differences in the corresponding skills/attributes, and influential factors for meeting the different aspects of employability should be acknowledged. Student employability encompasses more than gaining employment or a list of skills (Holmes, 2013, McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Understandably, the sole employment outcomes could not represent the genuine value and aspirations of the individual graduates. Also, the emphasis on narrow skills cultivation tends to neglect the multidimensional aspect of employability (Tomlinson, 2007, Cashian, 2017).

More pertinent to the context of international student education, this individual content approach to employability is an important aspect in explaining how national governments and individual students view or approach ISM. Although there is a considerable disparity of national internationalisation policies and practices for accommodating international students (de Wit and Altbach, 2021), to many host countries, the human capital perspective is still evident in their national policies for competing international students to develop an international pool of talents. However, this approach’s underlying assumption — that students are exclusively motivated by private incentives and human capital development

through ISM — is still simplistic and conventional and certainly not sufficient in understanding the link between ISM and employability.

2.3.2.2. *The positional approach for understanding the relative dimension of employability*

In contrast to the possessive approach, the alternative view, understands the conflictual, relational, and contextual aspects of employability (Brown et al., 2003, Brown, 2000). It sees employability as a social construct and includes an understanding of the relative dimension of employability (involving the social and economic conditions of labour markets) in addition to the absolute dimension (focusing on the individual attributes, knowledge/skills) (Brown et al., 2003).

Extending from the existing social closure theories of conflict tradition, Brown (2000) proposes a positional conflict theory to conceptualise how individuals and social groups experience *positional competition*, particularly, in a changing context of economic globalisation and rising knowledge-based economies (Brown et al., 2003). The concept of positional competition, developed from Hirsch's work, is to give an understanding of the 'relative' position of individuals (or organisations/nations) due to 'social congestion' (Brown, 2000). For instance, the competition among graduates rises as a growing number of graduates entering the job market compete for limited job opportunities available. As Hirsch (2005) emphasises, the competition contains a social aspect that individual competition is for place and position rather than a competition for performance. More specifically in relation to the value of education, Hirsch speaks about two dimensions of the quality of schooling: "an absolute dimension, in which quality is added by receptive students, good teachers, good facilities, and so on," and "a relative dimension, in which quality consists of the differential over the educational level attained by others." (2005, p.6) Therefore, the graduates' absolute achievement, for instance, having a certain type of educational credential, is less valuable than gaining extra advantages and outracing the others to compete for limited employment opportunities.

What is more, traditionally, the understanding of positional competition mainly considers a domestic labour market. As the interplays involve changes in the educational, social, and economic context, Brown (2000) argues that positional completion has reached a global level due to the increasingly important knowledge-based economies, globalised societies, and expanded higher education opportunities. One noteworthy and extended focus in his work is that Brown distinguishes two forms of positional power: ranking — individuals/social groups mobilising resources to stay ahead in the competition, and rigging — the mobilisation of social groups to monopolise the competition rules over markets (e.g. entry requirements of an occupation, structure of occupational competition) (Brown et al., 2003). Arguably, ranking is more useful to understand individual students' approaches to their educational and living experiences abroad while acknowledging that rigging may give some understanding of the potential impact of structural factors in students' behaviour and thoughts.

Based through a Bourdieusian analytical lens (Bourdieu, 1986), further definitions and models of student employability are proposed as comprising different forms of capital (Tomlinson, 2017, Clarke, 2018). These models indicate that education should not be seen as human capital investments, but also as cultural capital, social capital, or other more specific types of capital proposed such as psychological capital, identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017) and mobility capital (Clarke, 2018). Accordingly, unlike the direct convertibility of economic capital, Bourdieu notes that cultural capital could exist in three forms: embodied (people's long-lasting dispositions), objectified (e.g. books), and institutionalised (e.g. educational qualifications). Thus, cultural capital also requires certain conditions for individuals to capitalise for it being the "best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment" (1986) (p.17).

Empirically, this line of thinking is further well-applied in the stream of literature on understanding various influential factors in relation to international student employability (Blackmore et al., 2017, Findlay et al., 2012, Kim, 2011, Tran, 2016, Waters and Brooks, 2010, Pham et al., 2019, Prazeres, 2019). A common understanding based on their findings indicates that students expect to gain elements which are perceived as higher cultural

capital in domestic labour markets of the source country or a necessity for transiting from HE to labour markets in the host country: the educational certificates from the top universities (e.g. certificates, international work experiences, etc.) (Blackmore et al., 2017) (Kim, 2011), gaining cultural and social difference through ISM (Findlay et al., 2012).

As such, the positional approach to employability would provide an insightful theoretical understanding into how individual students manage their employability by gaining positional power (beyond the human capital gain) over others through ISM experiences in the current era. It adds more understanding of how agency and structure interact than the possessive approach posits. Indeed, both the possessive and positional approaches to employability capture how individual students could capitalise on different forms of capital from investing in higher education and then transiting successfully to the workplace. The positional approach, as Brown et al. (2003) notes, aims “to capture is ... in the recruitment process” (p.120). Both perspectives thus can help understand this crucial transition stage being one aspect of employability.

However, what has been neglected and needs further consideration is a more robust understanding of the concept of employability rather than the one which the positional/possessive approach indicates. First, as critiqued by scholars, it is a more powerful understanding that employability should be seen as processual and interactional, reflecting how individual agents interact with a wider structure (Pegg et al., 2012, Holmes, 2013). Firstly, considering employability, assuming that individual agency is solely driven by financial incentives or labour market needs over other values when facing the structural constraints, it nevertheless tends to be inadequate (Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2020, Tholen, 2015). Secondly, this critique links to my understanding of various aspects of employability that I have suggested in the present research, which could complement the sole focus of obtaining the employment aspect of employability. When understanding the link between individual students’ employability and their ISM experiences, I consider employability from three key aspects: obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and becoming self- or multi-employed. I will discuss this point in more detail in section 2.4.2 combining the theoretical approach chosen in this study.

Therefore, in the next section, a more expansive understanding of the concept of employability based on the capability approach will be introduced. The rationale for choosing this theoretical perspective is that it looks at the role of higher education beyond the human capital and positional conflict conceptualisation; it enables researchers to capture and frame the individuals' subjective value in one's international mobility experiences in relation to employability.

2.4. The expansive conceptualisation of the link between employability development and international student mobility drawing on the capability approach

2.4.1 A focus on human well-being and agency

In recognising the role of higher education that is not confined by the narrow economic purposes for training individuals as human capital, the expansive conceptualisation of the concept of employability from the capability approach perspective has been given increased prominence (Walker and Fongwa, 2017, Walker and Boni, 2013). In contrast to seeing HE as human capital affirmative, this approach emphasises individual well-being and agency and understands the role of HE as transformative, and a public good (Walker and Fongwa, 2017).

The capability approach is a normative framework for making "value judgments" (Robeyns, 2017, p.23). In general, it can provide information for two ways of evaluation (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009). That is, in its narrower way of use, it assesses human well-being and agency to understand how a person's life is going; in its broader way, it evaluates the influences of what Sen calls the "social and economic arrangements" on human well-being and agency (Sen, 1999, p.525). By social and economic arrangements, Sen means the formal rules (e.g. policies, laws) and informal rules (e.g. social norms) (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009). Thus, the capability approach is sensitive to the role of social and structural influences of different aspects on individual agents.

The focus on human well-being and agency also indicates the capability approach's ultimate end goal of human-being development: human beings having expanded freedom (Sen, 1999, Robeyns, 2005, Sen, 2003). Sen (1985, p.206) claimed that there are two different and

related aspects of freedom: the human well-being aspect, which evaluates individual persons' "*advantage*"; the agency aspect, which evaluates a person's ability to choose and act according to what the person's "*conception of the good (italics in original)*" is (more will be discussed below).

Thus, I use this expansive perspective of human development to frame the concept of employability and guide my understanding of how international students link ISM to their employability. To summarise several reasons for choosing this approach: briefly, first, as explained, the capability approach contrasts with the narrower view of human capital/economic development, which concerns economic sufficiency at the collective/individual level. Resources sufficiency, as will be discussed below, is essential (as a means kind); however, the mere measurement of these resources or taking them as the end of human development, seem to be inadequate.

Second, the approach recognises the crucial aspects of human well-being and agency that highlight the limitations of the other two approaches to employability (i.e. the possessive approach and positional approach) overlooking these aspects. As found in this present study, students' self-reported aspirations to and motivations behind the decision-making of studying abroad, relate to employability. Thus, recognising the active agency of international students is critical for understanding their employability-related aspirations and goals further, which are not limited to skills development for gaining employment or financial return.

Finally, the capability approach takes the interactions between the agency and the social-economic structures into consideration when understanding how individual agents enhance their capabilities or exercise their agencies. Human freedom is influenced by the collective aspects of human diversity and social and economic constraints and opportunities (Sen, 1999, p.525). As such, informed by the capability approach, international students' employability should be seen as a social commitment. I will pay attention to these related aspects — i.e. the diverse individual agents, and the socially constructed individual freedom — and more will be discussed in the mechanisms of this framework below (in 2.4.4).

2.4.2 Employability comprising a wide capability set

The two key and distinctive concepts — i.e. capability and functioning — conceptualise human well-being, or more specifically, well-being freedom and well-being achievement respectively. Accordingly, each concept provides different types of information. As Sen argues (1992), knowing a person's capability enables us to know the type of information concerning one effectively chooses to do/be, while information from functionings indicates how one is being/doing. More specifically, a person's capability is the freedom to choose a combination of functionings (beings/doings) that he/she has reason to value; it concerns the "deciding and choosing" part for understanding the freedom aspect of well-being (Sen, 2003). Functionings, on the other hand, concern the achieved being or doing of one's values (the state of human beings) constituting the well-being achievements (ibid.). If we consider students' functionings only, in some cases, it may omit more information on their well-being. To give an example, functionings can be understood as students gaining foreign language proficiency skills, interpersonal skills, or intercultural awareness. Then, the corresponding capability is the real opportunity to improve the range of skills/attributes. I may also describe a capability in this way — e.g. to be able to improve language proficiency/skills.

Yet, knowing the functionings (the achieved beings/doings) is also important in the educational context (Walker and Fongwa, 2017). Walker (2006) claims that the capabilities denote the potential, however, they cannot show whether individual students successfully enhance their capabilities. Thus, it is important to look at functionings in this study as well, for it helps understand: how they are doing or being, whether they have achieved what they value doing or being from their ISM experiences, and what could be the social–structural enablers and constraints in the process of functioning conversion. Therefore, these two aspects of well-being are for understanding the link: first, international students' well-being freedom (capabilities), which empowers them to pursue real opportunities to achieve their career-related goals through ISM experiences; second, their well-being achievement (functionings), which mainly focuses on how the valued beings and doings are achieved from ISM experiences.

To help clarify a working definition in this study, I agree with the viewpoint that employability is combined capabilities comprising both the internal capabilities and external condition aspects (Walker and Fongwa, 2017). Put in capability/functioning terms, both concepts (capability and functioning) are applied to understand international students' decision-making to study abroad in relation to their employability: 1. one's aspiration to and motivation for expanding capabilities (or a wider capability set) consisting of a range of functionings (beings/doings), and 2. seeking the social and contextual conditions for career-related opportunities.

Additionally, I focus on three different aspects of employability in order to understand students' value differences towards different capabilities/functionings. Responses from the participants indicate that there are three related aspects of employability-related issues/challenges — obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and becoming self- or multi-employed. For instance, international students are motivated by enhancing the capability of being able to gain foreign language proficiency from ISM experiences. Indeed, their responses indicate that they perceive the value of capability differently depending on their different focus of employability. Some students may speak mainly about gaining foreign language proficiency/skills as positional advantages over other competitors for obtaining employment in future job application processes. Some others may consider they need to gain foreign language proficiency/skills for communicating with foreign counterparts at workplaces (e.g. clients, colleagues).

2.4.3 The role of agency

Agency is broadly defined as a person bringing up changes to achieve a goal that is judged by his/her "own values and objectives" (Sen, 1985, Sen, 1999, p.19). Again, Sen views that the concepts of agency and well-being are distinguishable however interrelated; this is seen in his two main uses of the capability approach (Claassen, 2017, p.7). The first use denotes a person's capacity to choose and exercise functionings from his/her capability set (Walker, 2006). Related to this is in its second use, as argues Sen, agency accounts for individual agents pursuing goals that are either altruistic or egoistic (Claassen, 2017). That is, individual

agents could act for the well-being of others, however, reducing one's own.

Capabilities/functionings are concerned about an individual's own well-being, gain, or advantage. This is why, to capture individual agents' proactive human will, Sen adds another pair of notions — agency freedom/agency achievement. According to Sen, agency freedom refers to “what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important”; agency achievement, on the other hand, refers to one's achieved goals or values (Sen, 1985, p.203). These ideas are helpful for understanding a person's decision-making and actions more thoroughly (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009).

In the present study context, the first use of the notion of agency is for understanding the role of agency in individual students' capacity of making choices and actually taking up actions to study abroad for employability enhancement. As for its second use, I do not see that international students' well-being freedom and agency freedom would necessarily move in contrary directions. The notion of agency helps explain the individual agents' motivations, values and experiences of ISM regarding their broader career goals for increasing the well-being of a wider community. In other words, there is a critical role of agency in the students' goal of enhancing well-being freedom (capabilities) and gaining more agency freedom from ISM experiences for the consideration of the lives of others. Thus, to understand the link, I will look at whether, and in what ways, international students' agency would be excised or empowered through ISM experiences concerning their employability.

By acknowledging the notion of agency, I further introduce these important considerations (i.e. human diversity and structural factors) to the capability approach.

2.4.4 Freedom, diverse human agents, and the forces of social influences

As indicated earlier, the capability approach is adopted for acknowledging the diversity of human beings and being sensitive to social factors when understanding individual agents.

Sen puts it this way:

There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of

individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the reach of individual freedom (Sen, 1999, p.xi-xii).

In relation to this context, Sen's simultaneous recognition that there is the "individual agency" on the one hand, and "the force of social influences" on the other, is important when thinking about the employability-related issues of international students. On the side of individual agency, the capability approach recognises that human beings are diverse in their nature concerning individual capacities and needs (Robeyns, 2017, Stewart, 2006) or in "choosing how to employ these 'functionings' and to what end" (Nixon, 2012, p.71). Thus, diversity is recognised both in the plurality of capabilities and functionings that one has, as well as different people having different abilities in converting resources into valuable functionings. From the influences of a social-arrangements side, this framework also acknowledges that individuals are restricted by reality so that one could make choices or converse as one entirely freely wishes (Robeyns, 2017).

This simultaneous recognition is crucial in the current study. It provides a more thorough theoretical and analytical perspective for understanding: international students as agents both individually/collectively making the decision to study abroad and participate in a range of activities in their subsequent university lives to pursue their employability-related goals with ISM in China.

2.4.5 The conversion factors

The *conversion factor* is a key concept of the capability approach for its critical role in influencing the achievement of functionings (Sen, 1999, p.70-72). Here, the capability approach does not focus on the amount of resources that one could have, but rather, on understanding whether these resources are effectively used by individual agents, as individual agents are diverse, with different abilities of converting these resources into their valued being/doings (Sen, 2003-3).

Generally, conversion factors are understood as different aspects ranging from the personal, social-environmental, and institutional, to physical-environmental factors. More specifically, in this education-related context, the conversion factors are adapted and categorised into

three main groups. Personal conversion factors are understood as elements in relation to the person him/herself (i.e. individual attributes, social-economic background, field of study, and different forms of capital). Social/relational conversion factors are concerned about those people who are the significant others who influence the academic and/or social lives of the student (i.e. peers and academic staff). Social-university conversion factors relate to the facilities and activities available to the person (i.e. institutional practices, policies, values).

The resources, as a means, should be of “interest to people” in developing the valued capabilities and functionings (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009). In other words, resources should be essential for individual students’ employability. The resources thus in this context can be either educational or non-educational, depending on which functioning is the focus. They could be services of various types (e.g. the Master’s degree programme, career services), physical goods, or materials (e.g. studying materials, financial support).

The combination of resources and conversion factors facilitates an understanding of how conversion factors of various aspects influence international students’ employability. It recognises the limitations of considering the mere presence of resources or one type of conversion factor in the process of employability enhancement.

2.5. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I end with clarifying my understanding of the concept of employability drawing on the capability approach in consideration of my research aim. This theoretical aspect provides a broader perspective on understanding individual students’ subjective needs from undertaking a Master’s degree study abroad for employability enhancement. These understandings are presented by discussions on the two polarised theoretical perspectives that conceptualise the education–work link more broadly, and distinctive assumptions made on individuals’ approaches to their educational experiences. The capability approach conceptualises the role of education as a space for human development and flourishing through an expansion of freedom (capabilities and agency enhancement). In

the next chapter, I will focus on reviewing relevant literature on ISM and employability-related policies for international students in the Chinese context.

Chapter 3 Review of literature on employability in the Chinese higher education context

3.1. Introduction

China's higher education (HE) is moving from the periphery to a more central position: the increasing number of inward international students and emerging international activities within Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) (e.g. internationally joint programmes/institutes, academic exchanges, and cooperation), and the dissemination of Chinese knowledge, language, and culture (Hayhoe and Liu, 2011). To understand the link between international student mobility (ISM) and employability in the context of Chinese internationalisation of higher education, there is a need to understand how different actors give shape to international student education in the context. Thus, drawing on relevant policy documents collected, I aim to provide a critical review connecting the dots between the Chinese HE sector, the nation's geopolitical, social-economic, and cultural backgrounds, and also the sector's worldwide trends in the following sections (section 3.2 and 3.3). There are four key aspects of section 3.2. First, I briefly discuss the key actors (i.e. Chinese state government, Chinese HEIs) involved in the HE internationalisation process (in section 3.2.1). Second, I provide an overview of the historical development of HE internationalisation in terms of its changing intentions, strategies, and trends and their impact on ISM to China (in section 3.2.2). Then in the next section, I focus on the approaches adopted by, and issues faced by, HEIs concerning the intake of international students. Last, in section 3.2.4, I review relevant literature on the link between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and international student education. By acknowledging the little-noticed employability issues of international students, I explore these by searching and reviewing the relevant policies and literature (in section 3.3).

3.2. Internationalisation of Chinese higher education

3.2.1. The important actors in the process of Chinese higher education

internationalisation development

Education in contemporary China has strong linkages with the nation's interests: the economy and comprehensive strength (Pan, 2007, Henze, 2014). Pan (2013) argues that the rise of China's educational competitiveness in the international market cannot be understood from the neoliberal ideology or market-driven perspective, but rather from a developmental-state thesis perspective. That is, the importance of the Chinese state government's efforts in linking a country's political rationale with its building of international student education. For instance, to fulfil the aim of government-initiated policies, we saw the dramatic increase in the number and changes of the origin of international students (Jokila, 2015). As for understanding how the Chinese state government governs its HE sector, scholars suggest that a top-down approach, "Wenjian zhengzhi" (or "document politics"), is a useful concept (Wu, 2019a, Qi, 2021). That is, for instance, HE internationalisation policies are structured: first, from broad national plans; second, down to more specific implementation 'notices' and 'measures' (ibid.).

As the internationalisation process develops, some scholars, however, notice that the description of China's HE internationalisation development, as Pan posits, is not adequate (Han and Ye, 2017, Wu and Li, 2021). These authors recognise both the role of the state government on internationalisation agendas (with its decreasing power) and other actors (e.g. HEIs, market forces) gaining increased influence in guiding the process. More specifically, the Chinese state government has gradually delegated the power to HEIs, shifting from a "micro-manager", controlling in regard to international student recruitment, teaching, and management, to "strategy designer, regulator, and supervisor" at a macro-level (Ma and Zhao, 2018, Li and Lowe, 2016). At the same time, the roles of HEIs, local governments, and other private sectors are important (Wu and Li, 2021). It is worth noting, there are levels of government — the local governments and state government — being responsible for the different aspects of governance in the HE sector (Mok, 2002).

Within HEIs, the secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and the university president (i.e. a dual political–administrative line) are both responsible for the university governance (Jokila, 2015).

While state government’s direct interference into HE internationalisation has decreased since the 1980s, its presence is still critical in the HE internationalisation policy decision-making and practices guidance (Huang, 2007, Mok, 2002). Therefore, before giving a closer review on the mobility experiences of international students in China, it is necessary to understand the structuration of the relationship between the Chinese HE sector and state government, and how this critical relationship affects its international student education development. Relevant literature is reviewed in the following section.

3.2.2. Policies and approaches of China’s higher education internationalisation

One important group of studies is to understand the changing policy rationales for and the development of HE internationalisation in China throughout the historical timeline. This interplay has been well documented in literature investigating the impact of both worldwide trends and the country’s social-economic background (Huang, 2003, Wang, 2013, Wu, 2019b, Li, 2020, Wei and Hu, 2018).

HE internationalisation is linked to the import of modern HE systems into the Chinese context since the 1850s (Huang, 2003). This action was understood as an effort for “self-strengthening” purposes (Liu and Liu, 2021, p.782). The nineteenth century in China was the period in which a century of humiliation occurred. Known as a period of colonialism and imperialism by the Western powers, officials and reformers began to realise that they need to “give courtesy to the barbarians” and “learn from those barbarians to ward them off”. Thus, China (Qin dynasty) adopted the science and technology and HE models from the West (i.e. Germany, France, The United Kingdom), and Japan; later, the US HE model was adopted under the Republican Government (1912–1949) and the Soviet model under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (1950s) (Wu, 2011). As Yang argues (2013), the origin and characteristics of modern universities in China were borrowed from Western counterparts. However, tensions existed in this acceptance and integration of a Western HE system into

China, as ancient China's higher learning was traditionally reserved for the aristocracy; Confucian values were one significant feature underpinning the learning that disregarded the knowledge and values of the rest of the world (Yang, 2013, Wu, 2011). Moreover, ISM either inward or outward was rarely encouraged.

Correlated with more major policy changes since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, HE internationalisation activities in various forms began to develop. For instance, the country started to recruit international students from socialist countries or those having a good relationship with China, although this was limited and was mainly to fulfil the country's political and diplomatic goals during the pre-reform period (1949–1978) (Yang, 2016).

Since 1980s, internationalisation became a target that was explicitly stated as an important component of China's open-up policy to achieve China's socialist modernisation (Yang, 2016). HE was paramount to the nation's rise as the notion posited by the Reform of Science and Technology Systems: "science and technology constitute the primary productive force" ("keji shi diyi shengchanli"). The economic policy reform ("reform and opening-up"), was announced to drive the country from class struggle to economic development: achieving the nation's goal of 'four modernisations' (in the area of agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology). Economically, China started to transit from a planned economy to the incorporation of market principles into the economy. Educationally, this policy shift directed HE development towards a key role of making China prosperous and powerful through strengthening the country's science and technology development ("kejiao xingguo").

As for the implication of these policy changes to China's HE internationalisation, Huang (2003) understands there were two phases of internationalisation at this stage. From 1978–1992, internationalisation mainly was about learning more advanced Western knowledge and technology through sending Chinese scholars/students abroad and inviting foreign scholars and experts (CCP CC Decision on Educational System Reform (CCP CC 1985), (hereafter, the 1985 policy)). After 1993, HE internationalisation shifted its focus to the

development of transnational education and curriculum internationalisation of Chinese universities and hoped to exert its own cultural influence on the world. Chinese HEIs were encouraged to attract those Chinese overseas scholars back, host more international students, and engage in international cooperations with foreign HEIs (Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China (CCP CC and State Council 1993), (hereafter, the 1993 policy)).

In the last two decades, the objectives of HE internationalisation, led by the central government, has continued to develop China's international influence and competitiveness. Through discourse analysis of five guiding and comprehensive educational policies (the 1985 policy, the 1993 policy, the Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century (MOE and State Council 1999) (hereafter, the 1999 policy), the 2003–2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education (MOE 2004) (hereafter, the 2004 policy), and The National Outline for Mid- and Long-Term Education Planning and Development (2010–2020) (State Council 2010) (hereafter, the 2010 policy)), Wang (2014) identified three changing stages within the HE internationalisation process, starting from the: “awareness of the changing context in the 1980s, to the facilitation of economic competitions in the 1990s, and to the enhancement of international status in the new millennium” (p.23).

Consequently, HE internationalisation approaches, informed by these critical policies, demonstrate an “outward-oriented” interaction between the Chinese HE system and its foreign counterparts (Wu and Zha, 2018, p.260). According to their definition, the outward-orientated approach refers to “the process and activities of exporting domestic knowledge, culture, HE models, and norms to the world through HE internationalization,” aiming to enhance a nation's soft power (ibid., p.260). Based on the neo-Marxist theories of the centre-periphery model and the world system theory, the author further claims that efforts that the Chinese central government has put into the internationalisation process are for leading China from the “periphery” to the “core” of the world culture and knowledge system” (Wu, 2019b, p.92).

The Chinese state government aspired to build world-class universities ('World-class 1.0', later known as Project 985) by enacting supporting strategies for Chinese HEIs to attract outstanding academics, build comprehensive programmes for Chinese and foreign academic exchanges, and introduce online learning (the 1999 policy). In addition to the strategies stated in previous policies, a newer internationalisation strategy was introduced in the 2004 policy to promote the Chinese language and culture by establishing Confucius Institutes overseas, standardising the Chinese proficiency test (HSK), and training teachers of the Chinese language. The 2010 policy set an even more ambitious 10-year-long plan for the internationalisation agenda. In addition to continuing to level educational quality up (as stated in the 2004 policy), more comprehensive strategies were proposed to enhance China's international profile and competencies: attracting talented academics from home and abroad to make "a country with rich human resources, encouraging more academic exchange and cooperation by undertaking international joint institutes and programmes, and increasing the scholarship opportunities for international students studying in China" (the policy 2010). In this policy, it was emphasised that international students from developing countries would be prioritised for receiving scholarship opportunities, indicating China's commitment to offering educational aid. A related scheme set China's aim to become the biggest host country for international students in the region by the year 2020 as a response to the guideline policy (MOE, 2010).

In 2015, the 'Double World-Class Project', a critical policy as well as a funding scheme, was announced by the Central Party Committee and the State Council to promote world-class universities and world-class disciplines among top or elite Chinese HE institutions (Guo Fa, 2015, No. 64). In comparison with the previous 'World-class 1.0' announced earlier, this project (originally known as 'World-class 2.0') is more systematic with a clear timetable for achieving its goals at each stage (Peters and Besley, 2018, Song, 2018). In practice, HEIs are regulated by both domestic (e.g. the National Subject Evaluation, the Quality Evaluation of Undergraduate Teaching) and international benchmarks (mainly international rankings) to stay qualified to receive 'Double World-Class Project' funding.

As indicated in the literature, the role of the Chinese central government has been well acknowledged in the changing rationales for and approaches to HE internationalisation, and its impact on the pattern of ISM (i.e. number, countries of origin) (Jokila, 2015, Ma and Zhao, 2018). However, less discussed are the relevant national policies concerning, more specifically, international students' employability. Indeed, having received an increasing number of inward international students, China understands the importance of improving the quality of its international student education as a policy solution (Zhang and Liao, 2021). I thus consider this study, concerning international students' employability, is relevant and that its findings could contribute to this policy issue. In section 3.3.1 I will look at relevant policy documents and reports.

3.2.3. Chinese universities' internationalisation strategies and practices

In the guidance of these internationalisation policies, current literature also provides some insights into why and how Chinese universities enrol and manage the increasing number of international students with aspects of motivation and strategies for recruiting international students (Oladipo and Sugandi, 2021, Gao and Liu, 2020, Shi, 2021), management of international students (Liu and Liu, 2021), and construction of international programmes for international students (Metzgar, 2016, Kuroda, 2014).

It is worth noting several features of how Chinese universities engage with internationalisation activities more broadly. First, in the Chinese HE system, gaps of the level and capacity of internationalisation exist (e.g. participation of internationalisation activities, support from the government) across regions and different types of universities (Zha et al., 2019, Guo et al., 2021). Second, universities have their own preferred approaches in response to the internationalisation agenda. In their two representative cases of Chinese universities (one is a comprehensive university and the other one is a polytechnic university, also as the two major types of university in China), Zha and her colleagues interviewed 12 university staff and 2 senior officials (from the Ministry of Education) (Zha et al., 2019). The participants were either involved in or knowledgeable about internationalisation programmes, projects, and activities, or held portfolio work at institutional/system level.

This research used two analytical frameworks: the glocal agency heuristic (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) to explore the interplay among local, national, and global dimensions; and the resource dependency theory to analyse further “drivers and forces” (p.4) behind actions, especially to capture the local actors’ responses and behaviours at the local level. Based on these two frameworks, research findings indicate that: 1) for HE internationalisation motivations, China’s HEIs are enthusiastically engaging in the HE internationalisation process to achieve the national development goal and compete for resources from the Chinese government; 2) in practice, Chinese universities have their own preference for internationalisation activities (e.g. recruiting international students, developing English-medium degree programmes or bilingual courses) and take their own strategic choices in response to the external factors (e.g. the government-led internationalisation agendas). However, the authors express concerns in the instrumental approaches taken by Chinese HEIs’ research (e.g. a focus on research outcomes and performance for catch-up purposes in HE international rankings) which could potentially lead to education as commercialised product and a form of academic colonialism — towards so-called “Western education and knowledge superiority” (p.13).

Recent research indicates that, among those top universities, increasing the proportion of international students is responding to the national priorities (i.e. China’s international development and foreign policies) and the institutional internationalisation agenda (Song, 2018, Marginson, 2018). Partly, top universities in China strive to enhance their institution’s status and then to gain an expanded budget from the government or other external funding bodies through recruiting international students (Huang, 2007, Zha et al., 2019), which seems to be in contrast with the majority of non-elite universities’ direct economic incentives of gaining revenue from international students (Wen et al., 2018).

On the other hand, top universities play an important role in serving national strategies. In a case study of three top-tier universities in China, Gao and Liu (2020) conducted semi-structured interviews with faculty and academic staff and analysed institutional policy documents to understand these universities’ motivations to and strategies used for recruiting international students. As for the motivations, findings indicate that, to serve the

national strategies, prestigious universities are shifting their focus in the recruitment of international students: from previously making the country the largest study abroad destination by expanding the scale of the international student body, to improving its quality aspect, e.g. by raising the admission requirements for international students (p.674). As for the recruitment strategies, there are common strategies adopted that are seen as effective ways to deal with issues concerning some features of international student education in China (i.e. limited international students at the postgraduate degree level, limited choices of subjects for international students). These include the “development of programs in English, scholarship provision, and targeted support services” (p.9). By employing Bourdieu’s field and capital theories and Marginson’s further extension of incorporating a global dimension into these theories, authors further point out that participants acknowledge that international student recruitment manifests itself as having a critical role in Chinese universities serving national strategies where there is a need of political and symbolic capital; the presence of the international students would bring much cultural, economic, and educational capital; however, these benefits have not yet been taken advantage of (ibid.).

There are more controversies and tensions identified concerning universities’ capacity for accommodating international students: Western values programmes that use English as a medium of instruction from the soft-power perspective (Kuroda, 2014), accepting the Western knowledge or values however negating the Chinese ones (Guo et al., 2021), and educational quality and inequality that may be triggered by lowering the entry requirements for international students to enrol in the elite universities (Song, 2018). However, the potential impact of some of these challenging issues regarding institutional practices on international students’ employability, particularly from the students’ perspective, have gone largely unexamined. This may indicate the neglect of the important role of universities in international students’ employability development. Thus, I will look at the influential factors from the institutional side and understand how these factors have affected international students’ motivations to and experiences of studying and living in the selected university.

3.2.4. The impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on international student education

Like many host countries, the Chinese central government and universities have shown increased interest in recruiting and cultivating future international talents. One related and noticeable line of literature links the international students' education with the BRI. It is important to note, by looking at the policy discourse of the BRI (e.g. MOE, 2016, MoE, 2019c, MOE, 2019b), it may indicate a subtle change in China's view of its international student education: from a soft-power approach that serves the global geopolitical competition as its national priority, to a cultural dialogue approach that sees the benefits of 'mutual exchange', 'mutual understanding', and 'mutual respect' through recruiting international students (Mulvey and Lo, 2021).

More specifically, BRI, as an ambitious economic globalisation policy, does attract proliferating attention from media, national governments, international organisations, and researchers worldwide (Cao and Alon, 2020). This mega-project was initially announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at Astana, Kazakhstan, in 2013, with some key guiding directions and a less detailed roadmap. There are two major trade routines linking China with countries and regions in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe: the Silk Road Economic Belt, an over-land Eurasian economic belt, and the twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road, a Maritime Economic Road. Later on, the initiative was further supplemented by additional routines — the Polar Silk Road, Pacific Silk Road, and Digital Silk Road (The Economist, 2018, Xinhua Net, 2017). There are five major priorities of the initiative outlined: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and the people–people connection (National Development and Reform Commission et al., 2015). It aims to promote openness, common development, and prosperity that all countries can participate in, disregarding the geographical location or economic profile of a nation, to improve global economic governance, and build a community with a shared future for all mankind (China Daily, 2015). Many scholars positively see the BRI as a 'new inclusive globalisation path' to counteract the negative effects brought by neoliberal globalisation (i.e. the mere interests of

financial capital) in order to serve more social interests (e.g. people's livelihood) (Liu et al., 2018, p1208, Wang, 2017, Peters, 2019a).

More importantly, the BRI is increasingly seen as an emerging feature of theoretical discussions about its impact on Chinese HE and HE globally. In much of his work, Michael Peters highlighted the important relationship between education and the BRI that, firstly, could potentially fulfil "the Chinese Dream" — the ultimate goal of the Two Centenary Goals (Peters, 2019b, p.2). Secondly, Peters (2019a) argued that the BRI would lead to a new stage of globalisation that facilitates networks and partnerships for HEIs in countries of Eurasia and promotes work on sustainability, people-to-people exchanges, and talent cultivation. Beyond the trading and infrastructure building, Kirby and Van der Wende (2018) summarised three potential aspects of global higher education that this initiative could contribute to: 1) the mutual people-to-people, ideas, and knowledge exchange; 2) geopolitical events and trends in the region and globally; 3) the development of China's HE in terms of its size, research and development system, and aspiration for international standards.

Indeed, we see policy implications in the context of international student education to strengthen ties and share Chinese experiences between China and other countries along the BRI routes through educational aid and cooperation (Ha et al., 2020, LI et al., 2017). The "Educational Action for Promoting the Construction of the BRI", issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2016 (MOE, 2016c), proposed several initiatives including co-cultivating vocational elites, setting up standards for teacher education, and building mutual recognition for academic qualifications. These initiatives aim to create a similar educational system for educational exchanges and cooperation within the regions and beyond, as education is the key to the people-to-people connection and talent pooling for actualising the other four priorities of the BRI.

Linking to this study more specifically, the BRI has reshaped Chinese HE internationalisation in some characteristics of the inward international students and greater Sino-foreign HE cooperation (Kirby and Van der Wende, 2018, Cai and Zheng, 2020). Over the years, the

international students' country of origin has been associated with China's political, economic, and social situation and relation with the rest of the world (Jokila, 2015). As has been discussed (in section 3.2.2), in the 1950s, the international students' country of origin was from the Sino-Soviet alliance when the majority of the international students were from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. It then changed as there was a shift in the country's foreign aid policy priority from ideology and politics to domestic economy in the 1970s when there were international students from both developing and developed countries, except countries of Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. Following a similar logic, in 2016, the BRI scholarship was introduced to support more international students from the BRI countries studying in Chinese HEIs (Lu et al., 2018). Thus, by the end of 2016, government statistics show that the number of inward students from 64 countries alongside the BRI routes reached more than 200,000, with a 13.16 per cent average increase per year from 2012. Among the top 10 sending countries, seven of them are members of the BRI (Thailand, Pakistan, India, Russia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam) of (MOE, 2017).

Moreover, in a quantitative study on exploring the influences of the BRI on Chinese HEIs' expansion in the international education market, several factors are pointed out as influencing the growing number of inward international students from countries along the BRI routes: the amount of trade, infrastructure, the ratio of China's GDP to that of BRI countries, unemployment rates, geographic and cultural distance, and university quality (Gong et al., 2020).

As d'Hooghe (2021) notes, it should be borne in mind that international students are important actors when connecting the BRI to China's HE internationalisation. Indeed, career-related issues of international students have captured an increased interest in many Chinese scholarly discussions (e.g. Wang, 2020, Lu and Wu, 2020). However, less discussed is the potential influence of the BRI on ISM experiences regarding the aspect of employability from the international students' perspective. Therefore, I will also pay attention to the impact of the BRI on international students' motivation to and mobility experience of studying abroad in China in relation to their employability.

3.3. Relevant employability policies in the Chinese higher education context

In comparison with domestic HE students, international students' career-related issues have seemed less of a policy concern, until recently. More broadly, in 2019, China introduced its modernisation and development plan in the educational sector for 2035 (Xinhua-Net, 2019c). A related policy goal was to build world-class universities and opening education further to the world through its HE internationalisation (ibid.). Thus, a more sophisticated legal system and policy foundation were subsequently introduced with the purpose of improving the quality of international student education (Wen, 2018, Zhang and Liao, 2021). There are different forms of guidelines within the plan, ranging from administration and teaching, to management and the service of international students (MOE, 2018, MOE et al., 2017). One important message from these policies is that Chinese HEIs aspired to converge their administration, teaching, management, and service for both international and domestic students.

Despite the key ISM policy goal at the national level, there are other important policies indicating the government's great interest in attracting and producing qualified foreign professionals who were willing to start businesses and work in China (China Daily, 2018). In 2016, there were more supportive immigration and entry/exit policies introduced for international students if they would like to work in China after graduation (MOE, 2016b, MOE, 2016a, MOE, 2016c). For example, international students are now allowed to apply for two- to five-year residence permits, among which recent graduates (within two years after gaining a Master's degree or beyond) from top universities can have the residence permits up to two years; however, previously, a stricter criterion for international students was that they needed two years' work experience at a minimum before the application (STATE COUNCIL, 2019). In addition, supporting systems are gradually constructed for international students during their study in China. International students firstly had the legal rights to work part-time both on/off campus in 2013 (Xinhua-Net, 2013). In 2017, there was general guidance introduced for international students undertaking part-time work during their study in China (MOE et al., 2017). In 2021, a more well-rounded legal system was established specifically for international students participating in part-time work (MOE, 2021). Again, as

noted, the Chinese state government governs in a top-down approach, and then the local governments implement in specific ways. In implementing policies from the top, there were other administrative supports implemented for supporting international students/graduates at the local government level.

Thus, I will reflect on international students' perceptions and experiences of employability enhancement by looking at these policy foci on international students' identified career-related issues.

3.4. Chapter summary

A review of relevant national policies and literature on international student education in the Chinese HE context makes it clear that there is importance in undertaking a study on international students' employability. The policy-level focus on international student education has shifted from a quantitative focus to a qualitative one: from the focus of internationalising through the numerical increase of international students in the 2010s, to an endeavour to enhance the quality of HE internationalisation at the beginning of the 2020s. Thus, employability issues for international students would increasingly emerge as a policy issue. In the next review chapter, to further clarify and strengthen the research questions proposed, I turn to identify relevant empirical works on employability-related issues from the international students' perspectives in different HE contexts.

Chapter 4 Review of international student employability experiences in China

4.1. Introduction

Key studies on international students' employability-related issues internationally are identified to understand what has been researched and what questions remain in the area. I firstly look at the empirical studies exploring international students' employability in different HE contexts. I then turn to discuss relevant literature in the Chinese HE context.

4.2. International students' experiences of employability enhancement

There has been increased interest in exploring international students' experiences regarding their employability. However, relevant empirical studies tend to draw upon international students' perspectives in the UK (e.g. Huang and Turner, 2018, McGrath et al., 2017, Fakunle, 2021), Europe (e.g. Soares and Mosquera, 2020), Australia (e.g. Nachatar and Jasvir, 2020, Blackmore et al., 2017, Mueller and Robert, 2021), North America (e.g. Wu and Wilkes, 2017), and other countries in East Asia (e.g. Collins et al., 2017). Thus, there is limited scholarly work on understanding employability-related issues from the perspectives of international students in the Chinese HE context (Singh, 2022). Hence, my research could provide valuable knowledge in understanding international students' experiences in the Chinese HE context regarding their employability.

By reviewing these relevant empirical studies, a key aim is understanding the issue of international students' employment outcomes in HE-to-work transitions (Collins et al., 2017, Blackmore et al., 2017, Nachatar and K. Jasvir, 2020).

For example, Blackmore and her colleagues examined transition experiences of 13 Chinese accounting graduates from three Australian universities to employment in the Australian labour market (2017). By employing a longitudinal research design, this study consists of three phases of interviews, that is, six months prior to, six to nine months after, and twelve

to eighteen months after graduation. Drawing on a Bourdieusian analytical lens, the authors revealed findings concerning how these Chinese participants strategically gain and convert various forms of capital (i.e. cultural, social, linguistic, and economic capital) to gain positional advantages in the labour market in Australia. However, findings concerning how international students constrained by resources or factors of various aspects (individuals, institutions, or relationships) for gaining relevant capital, and thus their employability during their study programme, were not scrutinised. My study, thus adopts capability theory to understand international students' transition experiences regarding their employability. Rather than looking at their transition experiences of three phases, my focus is mainly on looking at the duration of their Master's degree studies prior to graduating. More specifically, I will look at their experiences of programme learning, part-time job searching, interactions with peers, academics, faculty/university staff, and others who have contact in the community.

Contrasting with the studies on international students' HE-work transition, a few empirical studies explore international students' perceptions and experiences of employability enhancement during degree studies abroad (Huang and Turner, 2018, Fakunle, 2021, Wilson-Gürler et al., 2022).

Huang and Turner (2018) focused on exploring the institutional support received for developing international students' employability opportunities during the mobility study. Drawing on the survey data collected with 449 Mainland Chinese students who were undertaking degree studies at UK universities, the authors found that the participants tended to appreciate activities in formal learning contexts and thus underestimated other support services and activities for developing their employability. Thus, the authors suggested raising the importance of grabbing these opportunities for developing employability among the international counterparts.

In contrast to the quantitative study by Huang and Turner (2018), Fakunle (2021) conducted a qualitative interview study exploring non-EU students' experiences of employability development during their Master's degree studies at a UK university. She provided insightful

qualitative evidence on how these student participants engaged in the variously and unevenly constructed work-related activities from the study programmes (e.g. work-integrated learning, volunteering, career services, etc.). The author thus suggested that, to support international students' work experience both inside and outside the University, the host country should take the perspectives of international students into consideration when designing the relevant policy discourses. The findings are useful for guiding my study on understanding international students' experiences of relevant employability-related experiences during their Master's study in China.

4.3. Employability as a key motivating factor for studying abroad in China

The review of relevant empirical studies on international student mobility (ISM) in China draws from two streams of literature: exploring international students' motivating factors (Biney and Cheng, 2021, Wu et al., 2019, Yue, 2013, Yu, 2010, Song and Liu, 2014, Jiani, 2017, Ahmad and Shah, 2018) and the subsequent international mobility experiences in China (Gong et al., 2021, English and Chi, 2020, Song and Xia, 2020, Wen et al., 2018, Ding, 2016).

Lu et al. (2018) further divide the motivation stream of literature into two groups according to each group's approach and focus: a macro-level perspective and a micro-level perspective. Studies of the macro perspective, based on macro-level statistics analysis, attempt to understand the factors around China's attractiveness to prospective international students (Wang, 2013, Song and Liu, 2014, Yue, 2013). In other words, these studies try to find the possible correlation between the growth of yearly international students' numbers and other potential factors (e.g. China's economic and social power, improved technological and educational levels, enhanced bilateral trade relations and mutual recognition agreement of degrees). Taking a quantitative study as an example, Yue links each year's total number of international students between 1980–2011 to nine other variables that indicate the nation's development and finds that there is a positive relation between the increase of international student's enrolment and each of the three variables (i.e. the ratio of R&D to GDP, the gross HE enrolment ratio, and the gap in GDP between China and international students' home countries) (Yue, 2013). As such, researchers then assume and propose suggestions, based on

the findings, to promote the continual institutional/national recruitment; a related suggestion is the important linkage between international students' motivation with regard to career incentives and China's rising economic and social strength (see Wang, 2013). However, drawing from the statistical analysis, these assumptions and suggestions made are not based on the student perspective.

On the other hand, studies drawing from a micro perspective have conducted qualitative interviews and/or used survey questionnaires to collect data on international students' decision-making to study abroad in China (Lu et al., 2018, Biney and Cheng, 2021, Ahmad and Shah, 2018, Wen and Hu, 2018). Findings from the international students' perspective indicate a wide range of motivating factors in relation to the economic, educational, and social conditions in China. A common finding among these many factors identified is that international students generally have strategic thinking in their preference for and choices of studying in China concerning future career prospects. Not surprisingly, students are aware of China's growing economic and social power internationally; thus, they value opportunities such as learning the Chinese language and culture to support future business or work opportunities (Ahmad and Shah, 2018, Lu et al., 2018), and gaining international certificates from top Chinese universities (Biney and Cheng, 2021). Concerning the limitations in current Chinese HE, pertinent implications are also proposed concerning the enhancement of attractiveness of China as a destination to study for international students (Jiani, 2017, Ding, 2016). Arguably, these findings could offer, from the student perspective, more informative data on international students' intentions of gaining benefits for future careers through ISM that studies from the macro perspective do not provide. However, what these studies have not demonstrated is a more systematic view linking international students' employability with motivating factors and experiences. Moreover, the agency aspect is under-explored when understanding international students' motivations to study abroad. My study will to some extent address this aspect by using the relevant theoretical perspectives.

4.4. International students' employability-related experiences in China

Despite the empirical studies on international students' motivations, the other stream of recent empirical studies explores international students' experiences in China. I further discuss this stream of empirical works by dividing them into two groups.

The first group of literature is concerned with international students' challenges and strategies adopted in the course of sociocultural adaptation (English and Chi, 2020, Wen et al., 2018, Gong et al., 2021, Ran and Chiang, 2015), interactions between international and local students (Song and Xia, 2020), language learning (Gong et al., 2021), programme study and daily lives in China (Ding, 2016, Dady and Sang, 2022), and students' experience of supervision (Wang and Byram, 2019).

These studies could shed light on understanding how international students experience sociocultural adaptation or academic study and develop a range of intercultural competency skills. Relevant findings are important for encouraging my further reflection on how a group of international students experience their employability enhancement during a Master's degree study in China. As informed by the theoretical approach, I will look at international students' lived experiences, be them social, cultural, or academic.

As an example, Gong et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study by analysing data from reflective journals and group interviews with 15 New Zealand students who participated in a six-month Chinese language learning programme. More specifically, the authors focused on understanding how students confronted challenges in their experiences of cultural adaptation in China. Based on the findings, the authors highlighted the important role of cultural adaptation in foreign students' communication competence development and language learning during study abroad. The authors further suggested that new pedagogical activities should be incorporated in facilitating international students' language learning. However, the findings are limited to a group of New Zealand students' cultural adaptation experiences during a Chinese language programme study in China. As for understanding the language and cultural aspect of their employability, my study investigates further to understand

degree study experiences of postgraduate international students with various cultural and national backgrounds.

Wang (2019) interviewed international students and their supervisors to explore how these students experienced and understood the supervision of a doctoral study at a Chinese university. Instead of looking at the relations in a formal context, Wang focused on informal interactions and argued that mode of supervision could influentially affect international researchers' relationships with their supervisors, Chinese language proficiency, and identity development. However, the extent to which the supervision experiences influence Master's students' learning and life experiences and thus their employability was not discussed. My study will attempt to address this point by using the theoretical lens, for instance, the role of relational conversion factor (e.g. the relationship between the supervisor and student) in converting relevant resources (e.g. courses) into valuable beings (e.g. gaining subject knowledge/skills).

In their narrative interview study, involving 20 international students from two Chinese universities, Song and Xia (2020) focused on international students' intercultural experiences and the impact of linguacultural resources thereon. The discussion of the relevant findings is valuable for understanding the significance of these resources available for developing students' linguistic and cultural competence as well as the agentic role of international students in taking advantage of these resources. Nevertheless, findings are limited to international students who undertake programmes of English-Medium Instruction (EMI). I will investigate further to understand how international students experience programmes either structured in the Chinese and English language. Drawing on capability theory, I will explore more influential factors of various aspects in the conversion of linguacultural resources into students' valued beings/doings as well as their individual agency.

The second group of empirical studies exploring international students' study abroad experiences focus on certain aspects of international students' employability (Li, 2014, Sun et al., 2015, Ma and Bennett, 2021, Singh, 2022, Kir et al., 2021).

In their quantitative survey study on understanding a group of African students' perceived impact of study abroad in China on their employability, Kir et al. (2021) found that there was a strong positive relationship between students' personal professional ability, university curriculum and social support, interpersonal and communication ability, social support, and perceived employability. Thus, the authors proposed implications in several areas to emphasise the importance of institutional support for international students developing a range of skills or attributes and thus their employability. Those areas include the facilitation of network building, the involvement of business sectors in the curriculum design, and more connections with academic staff and stakeholders in industries. Concerning their chosen participating African students from different degree levels, the authors suggested that future studies could explore international students' employability from other developing or developed countries.

Singh (2022) conducted semi-structured interviews with international students undertaking Bachelor's and Master's degree studies at two Chinese universities. Similarly to the study (Blackmore et al., 2017) drawing on the capital theoretical lens, Singh explored how international students strategically develop their employability by looking at different types of capital (i.e. human capital, cultural capital, psychological capital, social capital, and identity capital). The author mainly discussed findings through making comparisons between these two groups of participating students. The author argued that, contrasting with undergraduate international students, postgraduates had more work experience prior to their studies. Thus the participating postgraduates were more inclined to return back to seek employment opportunities in their home countries, and tended not to develop certain type of capital (i.e. career adaptability skills, the workplace culture). I will, particularly look at the international students' experiences at Master's level.

Two of the few empirical works published in the Chinese language have been reviewed. Drawing on quantitative data mainly, Li (2015) investigated the impact of social capital on 668 Korean graduates' job search experience in China. Findings revealed that the institutional social capital (i.e. international students' social relationships with peers and academic/university staff) could influentially affect these international students'

employment opportunities in China. The author thus proposed recommendations on supporting international students' social campus activities and social activities to strengthen their social relationships.

In a mixed-method study (Sun et al., 2015), the authors examined challenges in part-time work experiences of international students from the African continent at eight universities in Nanjing, China. The authors further identified several key reasons for understanding African students' challenging experiences regarding part-time work search. These key reasons involve factors in relation to individuals (i.e. a lack of relevant work experience, and academic pressure), organisations (i.e. low salaries, unsatisfying work and social environment, and limited types of occupation), HEIs (i.e. insufficient career guidance, and poorly designed career services), and social/political systems and recognition (i.e. the underdeveloped social system, the chaotic labour market, and bias from the public).

As discussed, these empirical works are conducted either to explore a group of international students with the same ethnic/racial background or their Chinese language learning only. Thus, these studies do not address the increasing complexity in issues around international students' employability with regard to the diverse international student body (e.g. national origin, ethnicity, race, professional background, etc.). More importantly, for the individual differences, various challenges may emerge in students' subsequent employability experiences (e.g. interactions with teachers/students/other local people from different cultural backgrounds, the accessibility to various learning and social resources). These are the aspects that I will pay attention to in this study by adopting capability theory.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a review of relevant empirical literature on employability from the international students' perspectives inside and outside the Chinese HE context. Thus the discussion of relevant literature helps understand how my research questions and focus are shaped and framed. Employability is an important motivating factor for international students seeking mobility study in China. However, there are limited understandings into international students' decision-making and experiences regarding employability,

particularly in considering the role of different actors within the process. Thus, consistent with the theoretical framework chosen, I will explore and pay attention to these aspects in the next chapter concerning the methodological design of the study.

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present my overall methodological design for this study. I begin by explaining the research paradigm for guiding my methodological design. Then, I turn to the procedures of the methodology by introducing my choice of methods for data collection, giving justification for choosing those methods, discussing the process of data interpretation and analysis in detail, and evaluating the purported strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research methods. Finally, I discuss relevant ethical issues.

5.2. Research questions and analysis overview

Before I turn to the discussion, it would be useful for me to reiterate my research questions here as the overall research design is seeking information to answer them. As explained in the previous chapter on the nature of my study, my research interests, and the perspective that I want to draw lead me to focus on international students' motivating factors to and experiences of study abroad in China regarding their employability enhancement. To fulfil my research aim and interest, I have proposed two overarching research questions with their sub-questions as follows:

1) Why do international students choose to undertake a Master's study at a Chinese university?

1-1) To what valued capabilities have international students aspired and what has motivated them to study abroad in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

2) How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

2-1) What activities do international students attend to enhance their employability during their degree study in China?

2-2) What are the constraining and enabling conversion factors that influence international students' employability enhancement?

5.3. Research paradigm

Research paradigms, more broadly, are beliefs or worldviews that guide researchers through the research process. These beliefs or worldviews of a research paradigm, more specifically, indicate a set of assumptions that concern the nature of social reality, knowledge of that social reality, and the appropriate approaches to bring about that knowledge. As framed, a research paradigm has four main aspects: "ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (Creswell, 2017, p.19-20). Further, Scott and Usher (2011) helpfully remind us of the importance of these philosophical assumptions made in the research process. They claim that these assumptions help understand that the conduct of research is a social practice and thus methods and procedures of a research process should not be seen as technical but rather as embedded/embodyed (ibid.). Furthermore, these epistemological and ontological issues guide thoughts of the qualitative–quantitative distinction (however, not the level of methods and strategy) (ibid., p.97-98). Thus, I will discuss issues regarding ontology and epistemology in the current research setting.

Firstly, linking to my stance and topic area, I take a critical realist perspective as my ontological position in understanding the nature of reality. It would be helpful to introduce the two contrastive positions — positivism and subjectivism — first. Grix (2002) noted that the reality is assumed to either exist independently along or within the social actors by the two ontological positions respectively. However, the critical realist position sits somewhere between the two polarised positions. Within the context of social research, the critical realist position problematises the relationship between agency and structure as interdependent; (pre-)existing social structures exist independently, regardless of individual agents' consciousness (Cashian, 2017). Pring (2004) categorised social structures into two forms: tangible ones, which are the institutional aspects of politics, law, organisations, etc.,

and less tangible ones, which are informal, such as ethics, morality, society's general attitudes. An important point linking to this interdependent agency–structure relationship is that individual agents do make active choices and actions; however, they could be enabled or constrained by these social structures, practices, or conventions. I consider this ontological perspective appropriate for providing an agency–structure view for my study. That is how international students, as individual agents, make decisions to experience international student mobility (ISM) in China regarding their employability within their social–structural constraints. Moreover, this theoretical understanding also complies with the theoretical framework — the capability approach — chosen in this study.

It is worthwhile to mention another meaning of ontology here as it helps understand my theoretical conceptualisation underpinning the exploration of international students' employability experiences. In contrast to the meaning of ontology focusing on the nature and structure of reality from the philosophical discipline, this meaning of ontology locates in the context of the Computer Science discipline referring to the network of relations between concepts (Guarino et al., 2009). Thus, my study aims to find and understand such a network of relations between concepts (i.e. ISM and employability) by employing the capability approach.

As for my epistemological position, I consider interpretivism fits my research's concern about people's values, perceptions, and experience rather than the numerical differences regarding a particular phenomenon in which people are situated. There are two contrastive positions — positivism and interpretivism — regarding the context of social research. Positivism understands that the acceptable knowledge of the social world should be as objective and value-free as that of the natural world; interpretivism, on the other hand, validates the subjective meaning of our social actions (Punch and Oancea, 2014, Bryman, 2016). Social realities impose meanings onto human beings, and human beings, in turn, act based on these meanings. This interpretive stance thus fits my research aim and the type of data that I want to collect. More specifically, other than the objective form of knowledge from the sense experience, the interpretivist position enables me as the researcher to research individual students' life experiences: my participants' interpretations of the social

world around them, and my interpretations of their interpretations, drawing on concepts or theories that I have chosen within the subject area.

5.4. The phenomenology approach

In line with the philosophical perspectives discussed, I applied the phenomenology methodological approach, which locates itself in the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2017). Generically, phenomenology methodology is for “understanding the lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2017, p.122). This facilitates my exploration into living subjects concerning a phenomenon, that is, a group of international students’ experience of study abroad in China regarding their employability enhancement. The phenomenology approach sees that the “reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual” (Creswell, 2017). This methodological approach rejects the objectivity–subjectivity dichotomic ontological perspective.

There are several features of the phenomenology approach which guided me as a researcher to understand and interpret individual students’ experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). First, the phenomenology approach tends to involve the use of qualitative data from various sources (i.e. in-depth interviews, observations, documents, etc.). Second, the researcher must be aware of what Neubauer et al. (2019) called the “*situated freedom*” (p.94, italics in original) when interpreting individuals’ narratives. To be more specific, individual agents are not free from their past experiences, as well as the external conditions at different levels in their decision-making. Third, as the researcher brings his/her own past experience/knowledge and actively picks the topic, the researcher is not completely bias-free in the interpretation process. Last, phenomenology is used for understanding the shared experiences of those who have experienced a particular phenomenon. These understandings which are meaningful for contributing to relevant policymaking.

5.5. Research methods

In accordance with the methodological approach chosen, I applied a qualitative research design and used data from two research methods: the semi-structured in-depth interview, which is for understanding the perspective of participating international students; and

document analysis, which is used for collecting relevant data and information at an institutional/national level.

5.5.1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Among the different conceptions of interviews (see Roulston, 2010), I chose neopositivist interviewing as its underlying theoretical assumptions fit my research questions and aim of the study. The theoretical feature of a neopositivist is that the researcher would impose limited influence on interviewees and try to be as unbiased as possible when interpreting the interview data (ibid.).

I used semi-structured interviews as a primary method tool. I acknowledge several advantages of adopting semi-structured interviews in this study. First, this form of qualitative data collected by using semi-structured interviews is sufficient to answer my two proposed key research questions. That is, I consider this research method helps capture international students' perceptions, motivating factors, and study/life experiences of studying abroad in China regarding their employability.

Second, the semi-structured interview allows me to use sets of questions with a greater degree of flexibility. This is the type of interview in which the researcher has general understandings of the things to cover in the interview; meanwhile, the use of open-ended and probing questions, as well as their flexible sequencing, would enable unexpected ideas to emerge from the interviewees (Scott and Usher, 2011). Thus, before going to the field, I had designed a general structure of my interview questions informed by the theoretical framework chosen. There were several key questions in order to collect information about my participants' experiences prior to and during their studies, and their expectations for the future after the degree study in China (see appendix 5). During my interviews, I actually was relatively flexible in terms of having the sequence, number, or the exact wording of interview questions in each interview.

Pilot study

A pilot study could potentially enhance the quality and efficiency of the main research (In, 2017). My choice of conducting a pilot study was to gain further guidance for this research. Thus, before undertaking the main research in China, I firstly did a pilot study involving two interviews with two international students (one Chinese and one Japanese student) from a UK university. I collected the relevant information on these two students (i.e. age, gender, nationality, major, educational as well as career trajectories). Initial interview questions and some interviewing techniques were pilot tested with these two students. Based on the findings from the pilot interviews, I rephrased some questions and emphasised others. For instance, I became more aware of the various types of students' work experience that existed including formal work, internships, and volunteering prior to and/or during their study abroad mobility in China. More importantly, these different types of work experiences may potentially provide interesting data on individual students' motivating factors to study abroad in China regarding their employability.

Sampling

I used purposive sampling for it enables me to strategically recruit relevant participants in my study. As discussed in the literature (Kuzel, 1992, Patton, 2002), purposive sampling is deliberative and non-random, which aims to retrieve richer information on the cases according to the research aim. Considering my research focus, I have argued that the perspective of international students is pertinent and of central importance. Thus, to be eligible participants in this research, I recruited international students who meet the following criteria listed: 1) studying at postgraduate degree level, and 2) being enrolled in the academic year of 2018. Moreover, I considered the necessity of recruiting a greater number of international students with various disciplinary and professional backgrounds for gaining rich information from the particular phenomenon of interest. For some participants, I recruited them on sites such as university accommodation and lecturing buildings. For some others, I purposefully asked some of the participants if they could kindly introduce their international friends who met the criteria to join this research.

My participants were a group of 23 international students from 19 different countries across the six continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Australia) and undertaking a Master’s degree in one of eight disciplinary areas (Education, Medicine, Agriculture, Economics, Public Affairs, Politics and Chinese studies, Chemical Engineering, Bridge and Tunnel Engineering) (see Table 4-1 for a summary of the participants’ information). These international students were between the ages of 23 and 34. One noteworthy point is that after approaching potential participants, I found that not all international students may consider one’s own national identity as that which their passport nationality showed. In other words, some participants’ national identity cannot be neatly mapped. Thus, when I interpreted their data, what seemed to be more important was to understand their own perceived nationality or cultural background as they expressed it and to investigate how that had impacted on their study and life experiences in China.

Name	Nationality	Academic terms	Age	Gender	Major	Funding
Inamnl	Indonesian	2 nd	24	Male	Agriculture and Biotechnology	Y
Maleeya	Malian	2 nd final	28	Female	Public Health	Y
Maria	Malaysian	2 nd	25	Female	Crop Cultivation and Plant Breeding	Y
Auban	Australian	2 nd final	26	Male	Chemical Engineering	N

Uzra	Uzbekistani	6 th final	30	Female	International Trade	N
Coe	Columbian	2 nd final	24	Female	International Affairs and Global Governance	Y
Thaily	Thai	2 nd final	26	Female	International Business	Y
Teri	Thai	2 nd final	26	Female	International Business	Y
Ugo	Ugandan	2 nd final	29	Male	International Affairs and Global Governance	Y
Guana	Guyanese	2 nd	34	Female	Master of Crop Science	Y
Bryan	British	2 nd final	23	Male	International Affairs and Global Governance	Y
Madu	Mauritian	6 th	27	Male	Paediatrics	Y
Bejide	Beninese	2 nd	28	Male	Bridge and Tunnel Engineering	Y
Sika	Sierra Leonean	2 nd final	28	Male	Politics and Chinese Culture	Y
Zina	Zimbabwean	2 nd	27	Female	Master of Crop Science	Y

Amanda	American	2 nd final	25	Female	International Affairs and Global Governance	Y
Palank	Pakistani	2 nd final	29	Male	International Affairs and Global Governance	Y
Patman	Pakistani	2 nd final	30	Male	Politics and Chinese Culture	Y
Kyung	Korean	2 nd final	29	Female	Public Administration	Y
Huboi	Hungarian	2 nd final	32	Female	Politics and Chinese Culture	Y
Kwan	Korean	2 nd final	28	Male	International E-commerce	Y
Janeru	Japanese	2 nd final	25	Female	Chinese Education	Y
Trevor	Thai	2 nd final	27	Male	International Management	N

Table 4-1 A summary of participants' information

5.5.2. Document analysis

Document analysis has several features as an important qualitative research method. First, it requires systematic procedures for interpretations; second, the forms for data (either printed or online) exist regardless the researcher's will (Bowen, 2009). I will discuss how I used this method in the present study by looking at its types and places of use.

I collected two main types of documents for analysis in this study: first, a number of institutional prospectuses, regulations or policies relevant to my data analysis from the University website; second, the government policies and projects related to China's HE

internationalisation from the government's websites (e.g. the Chinese Ministry of Education: <http://en.moe.gov.cn/>). I collected the first type of documents, for these were useful data which could provide information about the selected university's ethos and approaches towards international students' enrolment criteria, their availability of degree programme choices, and management. As for the second type of documents, I mainly used them as important data for analysing China's national policy approach to international student employability (in chapter 3).

5.6. Data collection procedure

5.6.1. The selected university as the field site

The selection of this university as the research field site is purposive for achieving the aim of the research. I firstly considered a university with a high level of internationalisation. Among the Chinese universities, the status of institutional internationalisation is uneven depending on the university's type, academic discipline, and academic level (Ma and Yue, 2015). This selected university is one of the oldest and elite research universities in China. It was previously selected into both "Project 985" and "Project 211" groups; now it is also selected for the national "Double First-Class Initiative". These four important initiatives in which this university is historically involved or is currently involving itself, indicate that this university is a prominent university and enjoys relatively better resources for its HE internationalisation or developing international student education. I found that this university enrolled more than 5,000 international students in the academic year of 2018 and its statistics were available from its university website (the English version).

Secondly, I considered the different disciplinary areas that international students could choose. This university is a comprehensive university which has seven faculties (i.e. Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Social Science, Science, Engineering, Information and Technology, Agriculture, Life, and Environmental Sciences, and Medicine and Pharmaceutical Sciences) comprising 39 schools. Thus, international students who aspired to undertake Master's degree studies could choose to study either English- or Chinese- taught (mostly)

programmes in a wide range of disciplinary fields. The Master's programmes last for two to three academic years.

Thirdly, I also considered the location of the University as this could be a potential motivating factor concerning students' future careers. This university locates at a major city within the southeastern part of China. It commits to function as a world-class university which cooperates with other Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide, cultivates talents with a global outlook and social responsibility, and contributes to China's social development and technological advancement.

The selected university has an independent faculty — the International College, a common model of international student management adopted among Chinese universities (Liu and Liu, 2021). The International College consists of two main units: as an academic unit, it is concerned with international students' Chinese language; as an administrative unit, it oversees their recruitment and management. Knowing this model of international student management was adopted by the selected university is helpful for understanding the potential institutional factors of international students' study and life experiences regarding their employability enhancement.

5.6.2. Access, ethics, and informed consent

I acknowledge ethics being an important part of the research process. At the outset of my fieldwork, I followed the required ethical procedures for applying ethical approval at the University of East Anglia where I was studying at the time. I obtained permission from the University Research Ethics Committee with an ethics approval letter (appendix 1). Then, I began by looking up the contacts from the selected university website and approaching those personnel managers who were relevant via emails and in person (after I arrived at the field site). The email sent was a request for conducting research on the site with informative documents attached as well as a letter from my supervisor. In this way, I considered that I did the process at this stage according to the guidance of university research protocols. Finally, instead of getting formal permission via email contact, I got permission from a member of staff whom I approached in person and was in charge of international students'

overall study and life concerns. This member of staff told me that I would be able to approach international students individually, if they would be happy to join; however, the University or the International College would not help me to send my invitation letters out to their students. Therefore, I decided to contact my potential participants directly as they were international students as well as responsible adults.

I approached my potential participants by sending out my participant information sheet (appendix 2) and participant consent form (appendix 3). I thus conducted interviews with students who were willing to join with informed consent. More importantly, my participants were informed that they joined the study on a voluntary basis and could withdraw from my study at any point. At the end of each interview, I also asked my interviewees that if they wanted to share more about their study and life experiences, I would be very happy to hear from them. One particular reason for making such a request was that some participating students still needed to do another academic year required by his/her Master's degree programme study. Thus, with 8 out of the 23 participants, I conducted a second interview at a later stage of their degree study. For some of them, they spoke more about the job-seeking experience in China. For some others, their study and life may have been and still is, to some extent, affected by the disruptive Covid pandemic. I kept a time range, about 30 to 120 minutes long, for each interview. I used pseudonyms so as not to reveal my participants' true identities. I conducted all the interviews online.

5.7. Qualitative data analysis

Interview data

To write up the data analysis section, Burgess (1984) proposed pertinent questions for researchers to consider the relationship between data analysis, research access, data collection, and theory building; that is, the data analysis is not merely showing a set of procedures in an isolated section but a continual process throughout the research process. Thus, in this section, I will write about my reflection on the process of data analysis as recursive.

The concepts of informal and formal analysis are helpful to describe and distinguish the differences in the data analysis strategies used at different stages (Burgess, 1984). For example, during the stage of data collection, I wrote some notes and summarised interviewees' narratives after conducting and transcribing each interview as a more informal means of data analysis. This strategy helped me to begin to get familiar with and gain an overview of the data. I also made a note of interesting themes and ideas, and I considered to investigate them further in subsequent interviews.

In the more formal process of data analysis after I finished the data collection, I began to do thematic framework analysis (Ritchie and Spencer 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006) — familiarisation, sorting data, coding (or indexing) data into categories, charting and summarising, and mapping and interpretation — which involved much more logical and intuitive thinking. In this process of data conceptualisation, I looked at the relationship between data analysis and theories more closely. The initial process of coding and sorting the codes into different categories and themes was more data-driven. As Bryman (2016) has argued, the coding strategy helps to generate theories within the data rather than from any prior hypothesis. Moreover, Ritchie and Spencer (1994) pointed out that this strategy for analysis requires the researcher to make decisions on which text is meaningful and significant. Therefore, after getting familiar with the data, I began by underlining words, phrases, as well as paragraphs that I perceived as important and then collated them into bigger codes or themes. For instance, the initial codes or integrated codes were mostly descriptive such as 'academic credentials' and 'foreign language proficiency/skills', which were grouped and developed into more meaningful theoretical concepts (e.g. 'institutional conversion factors,' or 'individual conversion factors') linking to the theoretical framework chosen later.

Document analysis

Analysis of the relevant materials provided additional information for research purposes. At the early stage of the fieldwork, I considered that the collection of relevant documents was to inform the general context of the research (Bowen, 2009). For instance, the relevant

documents collected from the University website (i.e. institutional prospectuses, regulations, or policies) were important to help understand the case university at the site where the participating students operated.

Later on as my research proceeded, I identified relevant documents to help answer some pertinent questions raised concerning institutional factors of international students' employability. For instance, a question could be: Are there any national/institutional policies for supporting international students' employment opportunities? As my research focus is on understanding international students' experiences of employability enhancement, I mainly drew on the capability theory to analyse interview data and attempted to explore conversion factors of various aspects and the availability of relevant resources. Thus, data resources (i.e. arrangements, notices, and policies both at institutional and national levels) were reviewed and analysed to facilitate my further discussion on how could universities support international students regarding their employability in the 'Discussion' chapter 8.

I thus analysed the relevant documentary texts systematically and thematically from these collected materials to supplement the interview data according to my research questions. Moreover, this part of data analysis helped my further reflection on how international students experienced their employability advancement and universities and the government supported their employability-related issues. In line with my theoretical lens, I categorised the university/government website information into two key aspects: institutional/national arrangement (i.e. information about the International Student College, policies for supporting international students' employability) and resources (i.e. the Master's degree programmes, career services).

5.8. Ethical considerations

Despite some of the ethical considerations mentioned earlier (in section 4.6.1), another related issue was the extent to which I can relate to my participants' responses. In addition to the key role as a researcher, I introduced another important role of mine in being an international student at a UK university before each interview. During interviews, I could feel that some international students expected me, if not necessarily to agree, at least to

respond to them. On the one hand, it would be advantageous for my participants to express their feelings more openly. On the other, I was struggling with how I positioned myself as a researcher, trying to be impartial. I shared my experience when my interviewees would like to know, for instance, how the administration worked in the UK universities. However, I tried not to actively give my opinion on their responses.

5.9. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I set out my overall methodological considerations of the study. I positioned this study within the critical realist ontological stance with my arguments presented. Guided by my research aim and questions, I applied the phenomenology methodological approach with relevant rationales given. I introduced the selected university as the field site. I described my adopted research methods (i.e. interviews, document analysis), data collection procedures, and data analysis. I lastly discussed related ethical issues of this study.

Chapter 6 Why do international students choose to do a study abroad Master's degree in a Chinese university?

6.1. Introduction

It seems hard to pin down a specific type of motivation for international students to undertake a Master's degree study in China, as they generally perceive their choice of studying and living in China as based on a range of values. Those perceived values of international student mobility (ISM) may vary related to: gaining various types of educational and cultural experiences that could facilitate their employability for future career prospects, travelling to and living in another place which is geographically away and culturally different from their home countries to become more independent, experiencing the enjoyable, exotic, or adventurous ISM experience itself, etc. As the focus of study is on employability, I have to make it clear that I am focused on the instrumental aspects/value of ISM experiences rather than their innate interests when understanding their decision-making to and subsequent study/life experiences of study abroad.

In this chapter, I address my first key research question: Why do international students choose to do a study abroad Master's degree in a Chinese university? As indicated in chapter 2, I apply the capability approach to analyse how international students perceive their ISM experiences in relation to their employability. Employability is understood as combined capabilities consisting of both a range of internal capabilities and external conditions. I have a sub-question: To what valued capabilities and external conditions have international students aspired, and what has motivated them to study abroad in China in relation to their employability enhancement? Thus, I present the findings by understanding various types of capabilities and the external conditions these students valued and hoped for towards enhancing their employability from ISM in China.

Moreover, I divide ISM experiences into two broader categories — educational experiences and ISM experiences in general — to present these findings. I use the term ‘educational experiences’ mainly to describe individual students’ engagement in activities related to the degree study. ISM experiences in general mainly concern the other life or work activities students participate in. In this way, I can flesh out students’ various perceptions and values towards the range of capabilities/functionings through ISM experiences concerning different aspects of employability. Moreover, it enables us to gain more effective implications which could potentially improve practices concerning each type of experience.

6.2. Perceived value of quality educational experiences for future career prospects

6.2.1. Enhancing education-related capabilities from quality educational experiences for future career prospects

To begin with, education-related experiences, activities, or achievements make the ISM unique from other categories of migrants (e.g. migrants who seek political asylum). Not surprisingly, when asked about their decision-making to study abroad in relation to future careers, students generally spoke about the critical role of quality educational experiences. They aspired to enhance those capabilities — real opportunities to develop a range of functionings (e.g. gaining quality knowledge/skills required for future careers, gaining a Master’s degree from a higher education institution with high ranking/reputation) — from educational experiences. For example, one Pakistani student, Palank, reflected:

Because in my country, ... if you want to do a PhD you have to do a Master’s by research. My first Master’s degree was not a research degree For this, because I was looking forward to do a PhD, ...you have to do a Master’s by research degree.

Palank also considered the choice of university was critical. He went on to explain:

I actually got the scholarship in Sichuan (a southwestern Chinese province). Even the scholarship is lower here; the university ranking is higher worldwide. The ranking matters, in my opinion. (Palank, Pakistan, Male, Public Administration)

These comments above indicated that Palank's decision-making in undertaking a Master's degree abroad was closely related to his considerations for future career prospects. That is, in the context of higher education in Pakistan, to successfully become a PhD candidate, Palank was required to do a research-based Master's degree, though he had already got a Master's degree (which was not research-based) in Pakistan. He valued a Master's degree and the university ranking which thereby influenced his subsequent decision-making to study abroad in China.

Despite the different types of things that are valued, I found that more investigations into international students' aspirations for enhancing their employability were needed. In the case of Palank, his perceived value of gaining a Master's degree by research and gaining the degree at a high-ranking university in tandem with his career considerations was demonstrated as one line of thinking. Arguably, there were other perceived valuable capabilities/functionings from different types of educational experiences and therefore different interpretations of the value of these experiences in relation to employability. Indeed, these perceived links help understand how students interpreted the underlying values regarding various aspects of their career goals (i.e. the focus on obtaining employment, maintaining the employment or other aspects) and how they managed their subsequent study/living experiences in China, be they social and/or academic. Therefore, to provide a full picture, I will explore their reported motivations, aspirations, and values for pursuing relevant education-related experiences at the selected university in China in sections below.

6.2.2. Perceived value of gaining an international Master's degree as a positional advantage

Like Palank's comment, students linking these valuable capabilities/functionings with educational experiences in consideration of their future careers was the typical response.

The first frequently reported capability was the real opportunity to gain a Master's degree. For example, Kwan, a year 2 student from Korea explained:

Compared with getting a domestic (Korean) degree, I feel like studying abroad seems different: giving people a good impression, one kind that attracts an admiring look from others.

因为是外国留学，感觉不一样，和国内读的。感觉留学是比较好的印象，让人羡慕的那种。

For Kwan, his immediate response was that the Master's degree gained abroad could make a difference compared with getting a degree domestically; the difference was perceived as a positive outcome. As in his description, gaining a Master's degree abroad could attract "a good impression" or give "an admiring look". However, these advantages were beyond mere impression and 'look', as he continued to explain:

Of course, graduating from a famous university would be good for me finding a job too. (Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce)

当然，就是名牌大学毕业之后，找工作也有一定的帮助。

Kwan's comments suggested that gaining a Master's degree from a high-ranking university abroad could bring positional advantages for obtaining employment in the job application process. This was an important consideration when he made the decision to study abroad. It appeared to be, to Kwan, that a Master's degree gained from a foreign university with a good reputation or high ranking was perceived as scarce, and its scarcity could potentially benefit his subsequent job-hunting experience. It was also evident in his later comment that he spoke about the usefulness of being a Master's student from this selected university with his part-time work experience in China.

Interestingly, if getting a degree from a high-ranking university abroad seemed advantageous to Kwan, to Bryan, there were nuanced understandings of what counted as scarcity when valuing a Master's degree gained abroad. He recollected:

I would say, the actual studying would help my degree in a smaller extent. I wouldn't say a huge extent. I think, in the specific field, I'm interested in working in the politics and civil service, quite a lot of people have Master's; so I think it's now

common for people to have a Master's. I think studying in China is obviously interesting. In the UK, it's still relatively small number of students who study degrees in China. ... I'm having a bit more experience that would be advantageous to my future applications to jobs. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Bryan's explanation might give a more explicit example in understanding students' strategic thinking in gaining the right type of Master's degree, which is scarce in the job application process. Moreover, the understanding of what counted as advantages appeared to be how individual students interpreted the value of a Master's degree in a wider social context. For example, in the UK job market, according to Bryan, a Master's degree seemed to be a prerequisite (at least in his disciplinary area), as most of the graduates were supposed to have a degree at that level. Simply having a Master's degree, for example, from a UK university, cannot guarantee Bryan to stand out from the crowd. Thus, due to coming from a non-Asian ethnic background, Bryan considered that a Master's degree from a Chinese university would be more useful to distinguish himself from other competitors who were less likely to have one. It was worth noting that he even deliberately compared the value of gaining a Master's degree with the actual learning of the degree programme and emphasised that the latter tended to be less valuable to his future job applications in the context of the UK job market.

Despite his focus on the role of a Master's degree as a positional advantage for job hunting, Bryan also mentioned another valuable aspect — “having a bit more experience” — through ISM experiences. This linkage indicated that gaining a Master's degree was not the only form of positional advantage through ISM experiences, but that there were also other forms. More findings concerning this point will be discussed in detail in sections below.

Although gaining a Master's degree from a foreign university with a high ranking appeared to be valued as a positional advantage, others shared more thoughts on this point. For example, Guana, a student studying Agriculture in year 2, commented:

But for me, I don't think that will do because the impacts are on the individual. Let's say, if you are not studying enough, and still you have the certificate, when you go out in the field of work, the employer, he or she will realise that you are not qualified for the job; you might not be knowledgeable enough, (or) fully prepared for the job. As stated in the certificate, you are a qualified Master's student in the field of biotechnology, as an example, if you are in the lab to do some simple work to carry out some simple lab protocols, if you have not done so much lab experiment, you are not ready enough. I don't think you would be able to execute the task that is given to you. So, there we would see that you are not fully prepared. ... So, I think it will have a negative effect, and there might be even slow of production rate. ... So you work with high qualified people, also work in a company, and you're not doing well, that would affect the production of the company. ... Then there will be no progress on a country, or simply in a company. So, why are you there, just for earning money? We need to see some results. (Guana, Guyana, Female, Crop Science)

Guana reached an understanding that the value of a Master's degree in the form of a certificate was to show employers that one could potentially undertake a position and complete those job tasks. She then turned to discuss the importance of gaining those requisite subject knowledge/skills for job performance. As in the example she gave, Guana believed that, as a biotechnology graduate, essential professional knowledge/skills, either technical or collaborative, were essential in completing tasks in the workplace; however, for those who were not well prepared with that knowledge/skills as their certificates indicated, they may face serious consequences (at the individual, organisational, or national level). Thus, it was reasonable to assume that, to Guana, her focus of employability seemed to be the actual process of undertaking job tasks rather than the job application process. By understanding this interpretation, her choice to study abroad in China seemed to be highly motivated by the enhancing capabilities — e.g. to be able to gain required subject knowledge/skills or other collaborative skills/competencies — through the degree study.

It was interesting to see the different viewpoints towards the role of a Master's degree from different students in their decision-making. As discussed above, compared with Guana's understanding, both students (Kwan and Bryan) saw an international Master's degree as giving them positional advantages for the job application process due to its scarcity. However, I do not mean that students who see a Master's degree from a foreign university with high ranking/reputation as giving them positional advantages would not value the actual degree study and its impact on further job performance. Here, as noted in the description from Bryan, the Master's degree study, in comparison to the Chinese Master's degree, would seem to help "a smaller extent" in the job application process. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that students perceived the value of educational experiences in relation to the employability issues of various aspects differently. Indeed, these different perceptions and interpretations to some extent had imposed different constraints on their subsequent employability development experiences in China. For example, by looking at their time commitment for different types of experiences/activities, Bryan and Kwan engaged relatively more in other activities outside the formal educational experiences, whereas Guana focused on the degree study solely. These findings will be further discussed in chapter 6.

I then looked at each student's case (Guana, Kwan, and Bryan) and attempted to understand why these students tended to hold various values towards the gain of a Master's degree regarding employability. I found two noticeable aspects, which seemed to be helpful in understanding this variation. First, Guana had much more professional experiences compared with the other two students (Kwan and Bryan). Before she did the degree study in China, she was a lecturer in a college and a regional supervisor in a rice company. In addition, she received a scholarship from the Guyanese government for doing this degree study in China. In her scholarship contract, she would be assigned a job at a government department in her country (Guyana) immediately after graduation. Unlike Guana, neither Kwan nor Bryan had undertaken any full-time job before, nor would be allocated with guaranteed jobs after graduation. To this point of contrast, Kwan and Bryan were likely to bear much pressure from the competition of getting employed after graduation.

Another important factor seemed to be their different disciplinary areas. In Guana's case, she was from a science background and her Master's study was closely linked to her professional background. Arguably, Guana's professional career in the area requires much in the way of technical knowledge/skills, which could be the reason why Guana's focus tended to be on how she could develop herself with appropriate professional knowledge/skills for her future career. Yet, for the other two students, their subject choices were not the exact same field of study as their previous Bachelor's degree and seemed to be less technical compared to Guana's.

Having recognised the differences in students' perceptions, in the following section, I will turn to another finding regarding students' desired capability (i.e. to be able to gain quality knowledge/skills from the degree programme abroad required for undertaking job tasks). Moreover, I will look at how students valued gaining the quality knowledge/skills from the degree programme at the selected university in China.

6.2.3. Perceived value of gaining quality subject knowledge/skills required for undertaking job tasks

In this finding, students expressed the importance of enhancing the capability — to be able to gain quality knowledge/skills from their educational experiences — required for undertaking future job tasks. To discuss this finding in detail, I identified three key aspects concerning how students valued the role of educational experiences in enhancing this type of capability. There were three aspects of gaining quality subject knowledge/skills within the Chinese context: learning more advanced knowledge/skills by taking advantage of relevant educational resources available, gaining knowledge/skills of an international aspect, and researching in the Chinese context.

6.2.3.1. *The opportunity to learn more advanced knowledge/skills by taking advantage of better educational resources available*

Concerning the first aspect, students acknowledged that there would be opportunities for learning more advanced knowledge/skills by taking advantage of relevant educational

resources available from their postgraduate degree study in China. The following comments are from Inamnl:

Actually, you know, Yuan Longping (a Chinese agronomist known for pioneering the kind of hybrid rice). Because in Indonesia, everywhere, people eat rice. And it would be great if I can learn something about planting rice; it would be useful for myself in the future. You can create hybrid rice with high quality, high production.... And China is the biggest rice production country in the world.

For the choice of the selected university, he went on to explain:

I just searched on the internet before. The Agriculture College in [the selected university] is the best in China; [it has] a lot of teachers; it has high reputation in publication. So this is my reason that I choose to study in [the selected university].

(Inamnl, Indonesia, Male, Agriculture and Biotechnology)

Inamnl's comments suggested that students would consider the availability of educational resources at different levels (the academic resources, course, faculty, university, or country) when making decisions to study abroad. As stated above, Inamnl perceived that the subject area with a good reputation (or high ranking) at the faculty, institution, or country level tended to be equipped with greater resources (e.g. qualified academic staff, networks) for quality teaching and higher research capacity. These valuable resources were perceived to affect their opportunities of gaining more advanced knowledge in the subject area.

Although Inamnl did not make an explicit comparison between the educational resources in China and those in Indonesia, it was reasonable to assume that he expected to make best use of those better educational resources in China, whereas he was unlikely to get them in his home country. As in his understanding, he selected China as the destination country for it being a country with high rice production owing to hybrid rice technology and having the best Agriculture College at the selected Chinese university. Indeed, when he recalled his non-degree study experiences in a Japanese university, he referred to the contrasting academic resources like staff and research provided by universities in the two countries (Japan and Indonesia). As was told in Inamnl's own words, academic staff in Japan were

likely to be “more professional and have lots of experiences in publications and research”; however, in Indonesia, “they didn’t graduate from good universities; ... they have few experience in the research, or the publications.”

Similarly, by looking at Maleeya’s education–work trajectory, her experience may serve as a much clearer example for understanding her expectation of better educational resources available for more opportunities for gaining advanced subject knowledge/skills from the degree study:

For the Master’s, because I did my Bachelor’s here [in China], I did enjoy it and I did learn a lot. So, when I went back, I spent one year in a hospital after [my] Bachelor’s. And then I was also working with a Chinese medical team. ... So, I used to work with them since I studied the Bachelor’s in China. I did like the Bachelor’s experience here. So, I would like to continue my Master’s degree here. ... In surgery, I met a lot of teachers who really taught me a lot. We did a lot of surgery together. So, I really enjoyed the internship there. ... Compared to my country, here, the infection control is really, really strict; you have to stick to the rules. In my country, we don’t have those rules for infection control. So, it makes me to learn a lot about this. ... Here, also, the technology, lots of technology for me to learn. Back in my country, we don’t have these technologies. I did learn a lot. (Maleeya, Mali, Female, Public Health)

As indicated in her comment, Maleeya emphasised the critical role of gaining professional knowledge/skills in her decision-making in undertaking a Master’s study in China. She perceived values of this degree study in reference to her previous Bachelor’s degree study in China and relevant work experiences. Before this Master’s study, Maleeya had completed a Bachelor’s degree as a medical student in China; after that, she returned to her home country and worked at a local hospital as a medical worker.

Notably, Maleeya was making comparisons in terms of the educational resources between the two countries (China and Mali). She pointed out several valuable resources from the

previous degree study, which were unlikely to be available in her home country. Generally, she thought the degree study in China was satisfying and fruitful: the supportive academic staff, from whom she learned a lot, the meaningful internship experience being part of her degree study that allowed her to learn more professional knowledge/skills, and technologies.

In addition, Maleeya mentioned her work experience with a Chinese medical team in her country (Mali) after finishing her Bachelor's. It was noteworthy that she took the credit for her previous work experience with Chinese medical workers from the degree study at another Chinese university. This seemed to be one related and decisive reason for Maleeya returning and continuing her degree study in China. Moreover, although Maleeya mainly ascribed her capability of being able to work with a Chinese medical team to the application of the professional knowledge/skills learned from the degree study, I would like to pose another tentative assumption here about the role of other valuable capabilities (e.g. to be able to gain interpersonal skills, Chinese language proficiency/ skills, or other communication skills) gained from ISM mobility experiences in general. These links will be discussed in other findings.

Maleeya further expressed her preference of this type of education–work trajectory: gaining requisite professional knowledge/skills from the degree study experience in China, applying the knowledge/skills in her work experience, and seeking more opportunities to learn and gain knowledge/skills she lacked. She explained:

Personally, I prefer having work experiences and then to continue my study. I know what I am doing because when I finish my Bachelor's, I did my one-year internship here in China, and then I went back, I also worked for one year there. So, I compared these two experiences, and I know like what my country needs, what is good for my country, what I'm learning in China. So, that's why even after Master's study, I'd like to work in my country for two years. In this way, I would also get more experience about my country's situation. And I know, also, from PhD, what should I do to bring to my country. (Maleeya, Mali, Female, Public Health)

These comments (by Inamnl and Maleeya) seemed to illustrate much clearer examples for understanding how study abroad could expand their capability set and empower their agency regarding employability. As both students had much study abroad experience before this Master's degree study, they seemed to have more empowered agency — i.e. the capacity of making decisions of and actually acting to study abroad and the capacity of pursuing the goal of contributing to their home countries within the professional area. Based on their response, both valued their previous study abroad experiences as an effective way of enhancing capabilities (e.g. to be able to gain subject knowledge/skills). Here, Maleeya also expressed that this choice of education–work trajectory seemed to fulfil her goal of contributing to a wider community: seeking what her country would need, what capabilities she needed to contribute to her country, and how the study abroad degree could meet those needs. Thus, it appeared that ISM experiences could expand individual agency regarding these aspects. Inamnl also shared a similar goal concerning the lives of others and I will present the relevant finding in section 6.3.2.

6.2.3.2. The opportunity to gain knowledge of an international dimension

The second aspect to some students, was one's aspiration of seeking opportunities to learn more about the international aspect of the subject knowledge/skills through degree mobility.

Below is the comment from Thaily:

Yeah, I worked there [a bank in Thailand] immediately after I graduated. During that time, the place that [where] I worked required a lot of financial models. And because I graduated from Economics and International Trade, it's not that directly [connected]. So, I'd like to do more study. ... You know, for Economics, it's kind of a study — more metaphor. So, working in the organisation, its kind like micro, ... I don't get that that much. I think, maybe studying here, I would get something more, and know more about the business — those international ones. (Thaily, Thailand, Female, International Business)

Thaily indicated that her decision to study abroad was to seek opportunities of learning relevant knowledge in the subject area for the needs of work. She also shared her past

experience regarding knowledge/skills acquisition in relation to its context: the previous degree study experience at university, where the knowledge gained tended to be more metaphoric or theoretical; or experiences in the workplace (a bank in Thailand), where knowledge learned was limited to its micro scope within organisations. Then, she expressed a need to gain a type of contextualised knowledge through transcending country borders.

Like Thaily's understanding of an international dimension of subject knowledge/skills, Ugo demonstrated this consideration in his choice of degree programme learning, selected university, and destination country:

I have been passionate about global affairs since my childhood. ... By studying this major in China it gives me more insights about this global economic giant, good relation with Uganda, Africa, and the globe. That's why my major is International Affairs and Global Governance. So, this has to do with the relations between another country, and how the world can be governed. ... But, in most universities in China and around the world it's only the International Relation. ... So, the course is a little bit expanded. (Ugo, Uganda, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

The comment from Ugo indicated the link between his consideration of the opportunity of gaining subject knowledge/skills in the subject area and the subsequent decision-making to study abroad. His consideration on the value of gaining subject knowledge/skills with its international dimension appeared to reflect how he understood the nature of the subject area. In his own words, his major (International Affairs and Global Governance) was "to do with the relations between another country, and how the world can be governed". Then, this consideration further suggested that the degree study in China could potentially enrich his disciplinary understanding, as he also expressed that "by studying this major in China ... more insights ... good relation with Uganda". His perceived value of an international dimension of the disciplinary knowledge was further evidenced in his subsequent programme choice.

6.2.3.3. *The opportunity to do research in the Chinese context*

Finally, the third point — researching China — was shared by a student, Kyung. Here Kyung explained:

I think, nowadays, the world is really paying attention to China. So, if I continue study in the Chinese area, maybe it can be helpful for my future study. ... Because I thought, it's still easier to get information about China if you're in China rather than being outside. So, if you study the Chinese, its politics, or Chinese social problems, I think it's better to choose to study in China. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

For Kyung, her decision-making to study in China was in part because of her research interests: studying China linking to her career goal of becoming an academic in the future. She perceived that link as beneficial and meaningful. As Kyung emphasised, her perceived benefits of researching China were due to China's growing influence globally and “the world is really paying attention to China”. Given her reasons for researching Chinese-related issues, it seemed understandable that Kyung expected the direct experience from or access to relevant resources from the country and further made this decision to undertake the degree study in China. From this finding, I could see that the rise of China had to some extent influenced international students' decision-making to China in relation to their careers. I will present more related findings in the following sections concerning their aspired capabilities from the international mobility experiences in general.

6.3. Perceived value of international student mobility experiences in general

6.3.1. Developing a range of capabilities through international student mobility experiences in general

To my participants as international students, they generally yearned for ISM experiences, moving to another place to: attend a wide range of activities, meet and make friends with people from different cultural backgrounds, learn a country's history, language, and culture,

etc. Furthermore, they were motivated to enhance a range of capabilities through these ISM experiences. As Coe explained:

you can change the environment, you can meet new people, broad your mind-set, learn a new language, just a good way to make yourself improve in other aspects, other fields, not just a professional one. So, humans, we should be something, hmm, we are more than just the job, like others are important in life. That's why I decided to study abroad. (Coe, Columbia, Female, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Likewise, another student, Trevor, put it this way:

For me, I try to get some life experiences, which will make me more mature. (Trevor, Thailand, Male, International Management)

As the two comments above illustrated, individual students' interests in studying abroad appeared to be seeking opportunities more broadly for self-discovery and self-development. This finding further suggested that individual students aspired to and were motivated by the enhancing of capabilities/functionings for broader goals and values. In line with the theoretical approach selected in this context, conceptualisation of the concept of employability is expanded and allows for understanding individual students' broader goals and values. I identified a wide capability set to understand students' perceived value of ISM experiences in general in relation to their employability.

More specifically, when discussing about how these ISM experiences in general could benefit their future careers, they valued these experiences for enhancing various types of capabilities. For instance, a student, Maleeya shared her father's opinion on her decision-making to study abroad in China:

Then my dad said, oh yeah, I think China would be good for her: because in China, people work hard; they are strict about everything. (Maleeya, Mali, Female, Public Health)

In a similar vein, another student, Guana stated her point of view:

To start of it, the first president for my country was from a Chinese descent. He was a Chinese. So, I read his history and learned his history in the schools. He was the type of the person — he was a very friendly person: like the kind of person always look out something; he was dealing with the people as a president for a country. That was one reason that motivated me that someday I wanted to go.
(Guana, Guyana, Female, Crop Science)

In addition, students spoke about that ISM experiences in general could potentially enhance capabilities in relation to the business aspect. For example, Sika articulated:

As a young person, I think that would help me in my field to improve my entrepreneurship, to have an (international) exposure and also meet people from different backgrounds, across cultures, and also getting to know China, people from China, also, some opportunities to be networking, to be friendships, which would continue to grow, even out of China. So, those are the things motivated me to study abroad. ... And it also helps to build my human capacity in terms of the way I think, the way I do things. It gives me kind of critical thinking. It helps me in that way. (Sika, Sierra Leone, Male, Politics and Chinese culture)

These comments suggested that international students perceived and aspired to a range of valuable capabilities which could potentially be enhanced from ISM experiences in general: to be able to develop good attributes from Chinese people, to be able to improve entrepreneurship, to be able to network with foreign counterparts, to be able to become more culturally aware, and to be able to think critically.

6.3.2. Seeking career/business opportunities in China due to the country's rising economic power

Besides gaining different types of internal capabilities, findings indicated that they aspired to seek some external conditions through ISM experiences in general concerning their employability. Specifically linking to the choice of China as the destination country, students

aspired to seek more potential business and career opportunities available in China. As Ugo explained:

In addition, China is a business world, which also provides me with a lot of business opportunities. (Ugo, Uganda, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Like Ugo, another student, Palank from Pakistan, perceived that there would be more potential career/business opportunities when he considered China as the destination country. He explained:

China is very close to Pakistan, like best friends. So, it's like more opportunities and more respect. And I got the scholarship, then I came here. I also got admission in another country too, New Zealand, but I came here due to these reasons. (Palank, Pakistan, Male, Public Administration)

It was clear that concerning his future career prospects here, Palank considered the bilateral relationship between both countries (Pakistan and China) for choosing China as the study destination. He interpreted the benefits of the two countries' good bilateral relationship for his future career: in his own words, "more opportunities and more respect". He also mentioned about a family reason for choosing China in that he wanted to stay close to his family members who were doing business in another city in the same province, within which his current university was located. Thus, for these considerations, he chose to study in China and rejected the offer from another university in New Zealand.

Another related comment is from Kyung's observation. She reported:

I found that in China, there are different kinds of international students. Many of them try to find business opportunities. So, they are working, also, they are students.

At the end of the interview, she also made a further recommendation for study abroad in China for those international students who wanted to seek more business opportunities:

And also, there is another student who really wants to initiate their own business. I think then they can choose China. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

These comments above suggested that students who selected China as a destination country did not do so for mere educational experiences. They aspired to seek more career/business opportunities due to the increased political and economic activities between China and their country of origin. As the comments illustrated above, international students were undertaking degree studies while looking for other career/business opportunities in China.

In recognising the potential positive impact on their future career prospects as a result of China's rising economic power, understandably students further perceived the importance of knowing more about China. To achieve that, they were motivated by enhancing capabilities such as to be able to gain Chinese language proficiency/skills, cultural understanding, and more connections with people. etc. This finding will be discussed in the next section.

6.3.3. An understanding of the significance of gaining Chinese Language and culture

In this finding, students generally recognised the importance of knowing more about China with regard to the country's rising economic power and potentially more career/business opportunities. This was evident in one's aspirations in enhancing relevant capabilities (e.g. to be able to gain the Chinese language proficiency and Chinese cultural understanding). A student, Kwan, from Korea, reflected:

China had experienced rapid economic growth when I graduated from the high school. So, I thought it would be useful, and China is close to Korea. And my first degree was International Business. Korea is an export country; China as Korea's main export country, about 25 per cent of the total. So, learning Chinese is useful as well. (Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce)

因为我高中毕业的时候，中国经济发展起来了。然后，发展得很快，我觉得学了之后肯定有用的。而且中国离韩国很近。我本来的第一个专业是国际贸易。韩国本来就是出口贸易国，百分之 25 主要是出口中国。所以，我觉得学习中文还是有用的。

Kwan's comment suggested that he interpreted the link between the economic condition at the national level to his future career prospects and gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills through the ISM experiences in general in China. Kwan saw China's growing economic involvement within the region and the good relationship between both economies (China and Korea) and recognised its significance to his future professional area (international trade and business). As Kwan noted, there were many economic activities in which both economies were involved, and then inevitably, more career/business opportunities. Then Kwan valued gaining Chinese language skills. Indeed, Kwan previously did a one-year Chinese language course in China as an exchange student before this Master's degree, which was a Chinese-language structured programme.

There were different kinds of Chinese language learning opportunities, such as Chinese learning courses at the students' countries of origin (e.g. Chinese language courses at high school), or Chinese language courses provided by educational institutions in China. Nearly half (10) of my participants had studied the Chinese language in a formal language learning programme prior to their degree study; some of them studied the Chinese language in their own country of origin, and most chose to study in China. Generally, students spoke positively about the overall Chinese language learning experience, and that was a starting point for them seeking further degree studies in China.

Kwan and Palank were not alone in linking a good trade or bilateral relationship at national level to one's career prospects. Another Pakistani student, Patman, also commented on this point; in his case, we may gain a more detailed understanding of how individual agents interpreted and reacted to that perceived link.

I did not quit the job, I'm on leave. The reason I came here especially was because of this programme. First of all, as you would be aware of the Belt and Road Initiative. This programme is under the BRI; so this programme is part of that initiative. They were inviting the governments and us from the participating countries. China and Pakistan also cooperate in the project — the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). I was really motivated. There are a lot of activities and

projects going on. Because of that, I thought that I should come to China and learn more from the programme. I will have a better chance to connect with my Chinese counterpart. I will be able to understand them. I will be able to relate them

(Patman, Pakistan, Male, Politics and Chinese culture)

The comment by Patman suggested how he perceived the benefits of a good bilateral relationship between the two countries for his future career. This perception then affected his subsequent decision-making to study abroad (e.g. the university, destination country, degree programme). As for the perception of a good bilateral relationship between the two countries, Patman foresaw that there would be more opportunities for economic cooperation and activities between the two countries. As he pointed out, Pakistan was a participating country in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects; the current degree programme was one of the BRI projects among participating countries in the HE sector.

As he perceived more cooperation between the two countries, with regard to himself at an individual level, he understood that taking the educational opportunity of doing a degree study in China seemed to benefit his future career. More specifically, by taking this study opportunity in China, he expected to enhance the relevant capabilities to learn and understand more about China. He thought it would benefit him in getting familiar with his Chinese counterparts for the potential contact or cooperation with them in future. Thus, it seemed reasonable to see Palank's aspiration for seeking opportunities to know more about China and make himself more prepared for his future career through the ISM in China.

Another student, Ugo, from Uganda, was also aware of the increased economic involvement of his Chinese counterparts and acknowledged that knowing more about China may have a positive impact on his future career prospects. He explained:

I expected to come and learn the Chinese culture that would allow me to interpret the way they do their things. That was the most feeling that I had. Because, when I return home, (I) should be unbiased when engaging with people from different cultures. So, when I know the culture, I would be in a better position to advise people in our country. This is because, currently, there are so many Chinese

companies that are already operating in Uganda, Africa. And these companies have their own company culture — how they operate. (Ugo, Uganda, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Here, considering his future career prospects, Ugo's comment revealed his interpretation of the economic condition at an institutional level, and subsequently, his expectation of enhancing the relevant capabilities to know more about China from the degree study. Ugo noticed that there were many Chinese companies in his home country. He then aspired to become more culturally aware and thought that he could learn more about Chinese culture during his degree study in China. In that way, as for himself, he would be able to have a better understanding of the behaviours of Chinese people or company culture; then as a professional, he would be able to advise other people who were lacking that cultural understanding.

As the comments illustrate above, these students understood the trend of rising power of China's economy, and how they, as future professionals, could take advantages of this trend. They reached the perception that there was a need to know more about China through enhancing relevant capabilities for their future career prospects.

6.3.4. Gaining foreign language for obtaining employment as a positional advantage

Nevertheless, some students considered the capabilities (to be able to gain a foreign language or cultural knowledge) that could be potentially enhanced from the degree study in China as positional advantages for job competition. For example, Bryan, who tended to emphasize the scarcity of doing an Asian degree study in section 4.2.1, now expressed his viewpoint towards the value of the Chinese language:

There is a lot of people who study History or Social Science in universities in the UK; there are not so many people who do Asian languages; so then, it would be useful. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

In this response, Bryan seemed to reiterate the point and considered the job competition in the UK context: gaining positional advantages from the degree study in China appeared to be more useful for job hunting. As in his understanding of gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills, he valued the Chinese language for being an Asian language that was likely to help him gain some advantages over other English speakers in the UK job market.

Similar to Bryan, Maria also spoke about the role of gaining a foreign language (the English language proficiency/skills) for job competition:

I think for people to get career, I think for people who study abroad, they speak English better. ... When you are with other foreign friends, you speak English, that's how you speak English day by day. It's a good thing when you go back home. In Malaysia, they prefer interview people in English. So, sometimes, people who can speak English better, they can have better chance to get the job. (Maria, Malaysia, Female, Crop Cultivation and Plant Breeding)

In Maria's case, she pointed out the importance of gaining English language proficiency for job competitiveness. She perceived study abroad as an effective way for international students to develop and practise their foreign language skills from daily communication. She perceived that gaining English language proficiency/skills were advantageous for her to compete in the Malaysian labour market. As she observed, employers in Malaysia preferred job applicants with good English language proficiency/skills. To add more information, Maria chose to enrol in a degree programme structured in the English language rather than the Chinese language due to her lack of Chinese language proficiency/skills.

6.3.5. Gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills to understand and communicate with Chinese counterparts

While to some students, when making the decision to study in China, they referenced their past work/life experiences and emphasised the importance of enhancing relevant capabilities (i.e. to be able to gain foreign language proficiency/skills to understand and communicate with their Chinese counterparts in the workplace). Most of these participants

were professionals before studying abroad. This shared feature also sparked my interest in understanding why they left their job in the middle and chose to do degree study in China. Thaily, whom I introduced in previous section for understanding her perceived value of gaining quality knowledge/skills from educational experiences to her future career, also commented on this point:

Oh, because that time, I was working in the bank. I cannot speak Chinese that time. So, the companies, they are always Chinese or English. And I think it would be great, if I can speak Chinese. My family also want me to speak Chinese. So, [I] choose to study in an original place. (Thaily, Thailand, Female, International Business)

Thaily indicated the importance of seeking the opportunities of gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills in her decision-making of doing a degree study in China. This perception was closely linked to her previous work experience. As she pointed out, at that time, she was working in a bank in Thailand, and her clients were mainly Chinese or English companies; however, she could not speak any Chinese. Then, with the support from her family, she decided to study its language in the original place while undertaking a Master's degree study in China.

Like Thaily, Bejide also faced a similar situation in the workplace with the language issue: not being able to communicate with Chinese counterparts in the workplace. He perceived an effective way of gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills was through a degree study in China. Here, he explained:

When I was doing my work on site, I had some knowledge of the Chinese people. But I couldn't understand what they were saying. Sometimes, I just needed to try, so we couldn't communicate. From that time, I decided, maybe, I could come to China to do a Master's degree; through the degree, maybe I could also learn Chinese language. Then, when I go back, I can communicate with them.

Bejide further described the workplace, which seemed to be a critical reason for his perceived importance of mastering the Chinese language:

So, it's like I wanted to continue my study in Bridge Construction. In my country, in a lot of countries in Africa, we assign Chinese people full-time jobs. We are the few engineers in the field of engineering in my country. (Bejide, Benin, Male, Bridge and Tunnel Engineering)

Bejide's comments demonstrated that gaining Chinese language proficiency/skills appeared important for him to communicate with his colleagues in the workplace who were Chinese and the majority of speakers in the professional field of engineering. He later on was enrolled in a Chinese-language structured degree programme. Prior to this degree study, Bejide had learned the Chinese language for one year at a local educational institution in China.

Here, I brought together the comments from these three students because they were experienced professionals, unlike a traditional student who did not have a professional background before enrolling in a degree. Moreover, their aspiration to gain Chinese language proficiency/skills and cultural understanding through degree study appeared to be closely linked to their previous work experiences. It suggested that students aspired to gain Chinese language proficiency/skills for working with Chinese counterparts (either as clients or colleagues) in the future. Study abroad in China seemed to be important with different opportunities available for fulfilling that need: learning the Chinese language from a degree programme that was taught/assessed in Chinese, daily communication, or a Chinese language course. One student, Trevor, from Thailand, called it a "win-win game", that he could practise his Chinese language in everyday life, but at the same time, he chose a degree programme that was structured in English at the selected university (Trevor, Thailand, Male, International Management).

I present the range of capabilities and external conditions in Table 5-1 below:

Aspect of focus	Capabilities	External conditions
To be able to obtain employment after graduation	To be able to gain foreign language proficiency/skills (English, Chinese), an overseas Master's degree from an elite university, extra work, or	To be able to gain more job opportunities in different labour markets

	international experiences as positional advantages	
To be able to be self-/multi-employed	To be able to create job opportunities for self/others To be able to gain entrepreneurial skills	To be able to seek innovations and business ideas
To be able to maintain employment	To be able to gain quality subject knowledge/skills from the degree study required for undertaking job tasks (advanced, Chinese context, international) To be able to gain foreign language proficiency/skills (English, Chinese), intercultural communication skills with colleagues and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, cultural awareness To be able to think critically, develop some good attributes (e.g. being independent or hardworking), network with foreign counterparts	To be able to gain more job opportunities in different labour markets

Table 5-1: A summary of the aspired capabilities from ISM in China

6.4. Chapter summary

Based on their subjective perspectives, it was evident that international students linked ISM experiences in China with their employability either explicitly or implicitly. Findings in this chapter provided insights into why international students choose to do a Master's degree at a university in China regarding their employability. I argue that international students aspired to develop a wide capability set and to seek desirable external conditions through ISM experiences (i.e. educational experiences and ISM experiences in general). Moreover, students emphasised the values of capabilities concerning different aspects of employability (obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and being self- or multi-employed). This

variation, as discussed within each finding, was closely related to individual students' previous work and life experiences and professional/disciplinary areas.

In the next chapter, I will turn to findings of how international students managed and enhanced these capabilities during their degree study in China.

Chapter 7 How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have presented findings of their aspirations to and motivation for international student mobility (ISM) experiences (i.e. educational experiences and ISM experiences in general) in China in relation to employability. Further investigation into these international students' reported study and life experiences could offer us more insights into the topic. Thus, in this chapter, I aim to explore how international students linked the actual study and life experiences in China to employability. I address my second key research question: How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement? My sub-questions are: What activities do international students attend to enhance their employability during their degree study in China? What are the constraining and enabling conversion factors that influence international students' employability development?

More specifically, I focused on gaining understandings of how students converted resources with other conversion factors into valuable functionings. As one important theoretical aspect of the capability approach, the conversion factors are influential for understanding individuals having different abilities of converting resources into functionings (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009). Therefore, I interviewed my participants by encouraging them to recollect various aspects of their university lives (i.e. social, academic), and express their reflections as well as future aspirations. I focused on the relevant resources available (e.g. courses/programme, study materials, etc.) and explored different types of conversion factors, be they individual (in relation to the individual attributes, skills and agency), institutional (in relation to institutional arrangements), or relational (in relation to students' relations with their peers, supervisors, lecturers). More importantly, I explored the

influences of the combination of resources and conversion factors on students' capability enhancement.

7.2. The academic learning experiences

7.2.1. Perceived valuable aspects for developing a range of functionings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many students interviewed aspired to and were motivated to enhance a wide range of capabilities through undertaking a Master's degree programme in China (see Table 5-1). Based on their responses, they considered that the capability-enhancing process involved a range of activities (e.g. learning the degree programme, interacting with their peers, conducting research, interning, etc.) in academic settings. These academic activities varied as each Master's degree programme may differ in terms of its duration, structured language (in either English or Chinese language), and the course design (depending on the disciplinary area).

In general, students shared different viewpoints towards their academic study experience in China. In this section, I first look at students who spoke positively about their academic learning experiences and attempt to understand what the valuable resources and conversion factors were from the degree programme, and how these resources and conversion factors worked in contributing to the enhancement of capabilities they valued.

7.2.1.1. *Resources available from the degree programme fieldwork, real cases, internships, and advanced technologies*

To look at their reported academic learning experiences, a related finding was that students spoke about some valuable aspects of their degree programmes. For example, Inamnl, who studied Agriculture and Biotechnology, said:

During my courses, we also have some field study — like we go to the fields to do the observation; some of the activities, we go to visit the farmers, to see what the farmers are planting, what are the problems they face. (Inamnl, Indonesia, Male, Agriculture and Biotechnology)

For students whose subject area was not within the science field, they also commented on this point. Kyung, who studied Public Administration, explained:

It was eye-opening experience. I searched online and I contacted by myself. So, I went to the village, and I stayed for a week and did kind of an ethnography research. ... At some point, I learned the rural China and the government policy in the classroom. And when I went to the field, I could see, so it was a great that I could see what's going on in the rural space. So, at some point, I could prove what I have learned; but also, I could listen to the real voices from the villages and also from the people who migrated from the cities to the villages. So, I think it's really better to track at first hand rather than read some articles and take lectures.
(Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

Another student, Trevor, spoke about the importance of learning the real cases from the degree programme:

I've learned the things that I haven't learned before. ... Because we learn the cases, the cases which are happening in the real world. So that helps a lot. It is not that theoretical thing. In Bachelor's degree, you may learn theories, but in Master's degree, we learn the actual cases. (Trevor, Thailand, Male, International Management)

Another student, Madu, from Paediatrics, he spoke about the internship experience at local hospitals:

From year one to year three, as my professional area is dealing with the medical care of infants, children, I need to do shifts in every department at a children's hospitals. For each shift, it would take about two months.

因为我是儿科的，然后这是第一年到第三年我一直都要在儿童医院轮转。然后轮转的话，你每一个科都要去两个月。

Then, he continued to talk about how he valued the internship experience:

For example, I already know what kind of issues would happen when I communicate with those parents, what I should say, what I shouldn't say, etc. And, if I work back in my country, it seems easier to deal with those issues, right? If someone complains, I would communicate with people and let them calm down. ... If I did a degree study in my country, then when it comes to the age of 27, I might not be able to deal with a particular issue. But, after living and studying in China and facing a lot of issues, I would handle most of the issues; if I get a job where I could face some difficult issues, they wouldn't affect me a lot for I have solved those issues even tougher. (Madu, Mauritius, Male, Paediatrics)

比方，你跟家长沟通的时候会出问题什么的，你这个已经使用了对不对？你也知道什么东西好说，什么东西不好说什么之类的。所以回去以后，比如说有一个人吵脾气的什么的，很正常的了，对不对？很正常的了，而且是你自己国家的，所以你更会把它要处理，对吧？让他安静下来，对吧？好好跟他讲一下。... 比如说我在自己国家读了一个学位，然后可能我这个年龄我今年就是 27 岁，二十七岁，我不一定能处理一个问题。但是你到中国以后，然后经过了这么多的困难以后，那就是什么问题，基本上会处理的；那么如果以后找到了一份工作，那边有一些不顺畅的或者有一些问题的，它基本上不会影响到你生活，因为你已经处理过比这还要严重的问题。

The comments above seemed to suggest that international students valued various aspects from their degree programmes. More specifically, they valued these aspects from the degree programme for having many real opportunities to exercise their functionings — e.g. gaining communication skills, problem-solving skills, and knowledge/skills that are experiential, practical, or contextual. These activities may vary in the type of activity depending on the chosen subject area — studying real cases within particular contexts, internships, and undertaking research work in the field. More importantly, a shared viewpoint from the respondents who were in different disciplinary areas was that they valued gaining knowledge/skills which incorporated context-specific aspects within the field. As informed by the framework, resources are seen as essential within the process of

capability formation (or exercising a functioning). Thus, I considered these valuable aspects as various resources available from the degree programmes in question.

A different type of resource, which some students valued from their degree programme, was advanced technologies. Guana replied:

Because, here, for example, my field that I choose, we can see there are many new technologies that we are exposed to. ... So, here, in China, it's more developed, so here are many, many new technologies that I would be taking back with me to see how I can apply, improve our production in my country in the field of agriculture. I think it would ... help to improve my knowledge, skills, and also my practical abilities.

This comment suggested that Guana experienced those more advanced technologies from the degree programme and their importance for gaining subject knowledge/skills in her area. She further pointed out several aspects that indicate how she valued the advanced technologies available and subsequent gain of the knowledge/skills in relation to her employability:

As I said, the economic activity in my country is agriculture. So, we have the Agriculture College and also university where we study the programme Agriculture. So, most likely, if you are prepared in this field of Agriculture and Biotechnology, you will be better scored as an individual, so, have better job opportunity. If you're more qualified for the theories, you will be selected, for example, to be a professor at the university. Also, you can do consultancy, because there are many farmers would need advice and guidance to do their production. (Guana, Guyana, Female, Crop Science)

Due to the nature of her subject area and labour market conditions in her country (Guyana), Guana considered that the professional knowledge/skills gained from the degree programme could result in more job opportunities in the area.

7.2.1.2. *Resources available from the programme public compulsory courses*

In addition to these resources for gaining disciplinary knowledge/skills, it is worth noting here that two compulsory courses were also mentioned and valued by some students. Bryan shared more information about the courses:

You have to do some specific classes, which include a basic Chinese class, 中国概况, you have to do like 公共素质课程, like public quality something they call it. And the rest of them have to be from your own degree subject. [...] the 中国概况, 公共素质课程, those were taught in Chinese. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

As indicated from Bryan's comment, these courses were about introducing various aspects of China for every international student irrespective of one's disciplinary area. Moreover, another student, Guana, also mentioned one of these mandatory courses:

We also do a course, which is called Introduction to China, which is a very important course. The structure of the course would have different headlines or topics about China. For example, the geography, people, the landmarks, history. ... I think it's very helpful. First, the Chinese culture is considered very rich. When you actually learn about this, it makes a lot of sense. Because coming to a country, you must have some basic knowledge of the country; it doesn't make sense that if you just come and learn a few things. It's important knowing the background and history of the country; so, you can also compare with your country's culture and history, or, likewise, with other country. (Guana, Guyana, Female, Crop Science).

Here, Guana appeared to value the opportunities of learning more about Chinese culture from these two courses. More specifically, she pointed out the valuable point of these courses that they were structured and included many aspects of China. This, arguably, could be understood as a more systematic knowledge which would be helpful for a foreigner to know about China.

7.2.1.3. Relational conversion factors peer interaction of a diverse student group

As discussed, advances in this area are indicated by the impact of resources and conversion factors in understanding individual students' abilities in converting these resources into valued functionings. I further identified different types of conversion factors together with the presence of the degree programme and other relevant resources provided in relation to their academic learning experiences.

The first aspect of this relational conversion factor, reported and perceived as contributing to the learning process by students, was a supportive peer learning environment. For example, Maria replied:

We have like six or seven students. So, we are helping each other, it's combination. We have Chinese and foreign students. ...They are very nice, you know, today, foreigners will help Chinese and Chinese will help foreigners. ...Yeah, very supportive. (Maria, Malaysia, Female, Crop Cultivation and Plant Breeding)

Maria's comment suggested that peer interaction among all student groups contributed to a friendly and supportive learning environment. Similarly, another student, Inamnl, spoke positively about the supportive environment of peers. Compared with Maria's response, Inamnl talked about more specific benefits of peer interaction among a diverse student group regarding academic learning experiences:

After that (field study), back to the University, we discuss the things with the scientists and students to get some recent ideas to those problems, and things like that. ... Every student would prepare critical reading in a group; this might be a presentation. This is a good way for students to improve things like communication in the science. Actually, there are a lot of international students, like India, Pakistan, Egypt. So, this is kind of a global society: I can talk with different people, from different countries, different perspectives, languages. ... We are working together on the project, we help each other. (Inamnl, Indonesia, Male, Agriculture and Biotechnology)

His comment suggests that peer interaction among a diverse student group appeared to be an important conversion factor contributing to developing functionings (i.e. gaining intercultural communication skills, different perspectives, thinking critically in a scientific learning context). As he pointed out, a diverse student group could take advantage of their different sociocultural resources and share different perspectives in a scientific learning context. Moreover, there were several good practices for building a supportive and friendly learning environment (i.e. students supporting each other, engaging in critical discussion and working on projects collaboratively).

Both comments suggested that the supportive learning environment in terms of peer interaction seemed to be important for students gaining a range of academic-related functionings. I consider these are valuable academic learning experiences which would have some implications for teaching and institutional practices and I will discuss these implications in chapter 8.

7.2.1.4. Relational conversion factors support from academic staff

Students also spoke of the support from academic staff. This was considered as another important relational conversion factor. Here is the response from Sika:

Yeah, it has been really wonderful. They are really, really friendly, very mature, focused on the work. We have the face-to-face interaction. They could call you to their office to have an office time, personal meeting. They also provide books relating to my research. Also, they provide academic seminar, which covers what you should do for research, how you could get the material, is it a reliable source or not. Also, the ethics application for doing the research. (Sika, Sierra Leone, Male, Politics and Chinese Culture)

Similarly, Maleeya also shared her experiences on this point:

I've already learned from my supervisor ... she teaches me how to research, how to write articles, she helps us to write articles. If I go back home, I already know this. I can even go to the university. ... Because a Master's student in Mali, they don't do

publications, articles, like me here; I have to publish. I do learn how to publish. So, when go back, I can be a professor assistant, since I did publish some papers, but they don't. Yeah, on my CV, it will be shown. ... Each time, when I have ideas, I go to her, she helps me to improve those ideas. She works a lot with international students. She interacts with them, also, in normal life. She cares about the social life of the students. Yeah. We go to the restaurant to eat together, we jog around, even if you have a boyfriend, she would invite your boyfriend over. She really cares about us. (Maleeya, Mali, Female, Public Health)

Both Sika and Maleeya spoke about receiving academic support from their supervisors. This academic support was related to guidance for accessing relevant resources, conducting research, and publication. Moreover, Maleeya valued getting the social support from her supervisor.

7.2.2. Perceived challenges in developing valued functionings: resources, individual, or institutional conversion factors

7.2.2.1. *Resources the course design*

However, there were challenging experiences, sometimes even frustrations in dealing with their learning experiences. Thus, the process of functioning development could also be limited by the combination of resources and the conversion factors of various aspects. Among various factors reported, some students spoke about the unsatisfying course design. For example, Maleeya explained:

I'm not satisfied with the course design. Because first, as a medical student and I was studying Public Health, most of my courses, I get from the School of Management, not from the School of Medicine. So, what they teach is not really about Medicine; it's more about managing a company, not like managing the hospital, health care, or health system. It's completely different. For me, I thought it would be how to create a health system; but no, I get Public Economics; it's

different from health economic. I get some general stuff, but not really what I was expecting.

I then asked how she managed to deal with such situations, and she replied:

I learn by myself: I download books, I look videos on YouTube, I go there to get knowledge about Public Health. The teachers are good. ... I talk it with my professor, my supervisor; yeah, she agrees, but she is not the one who decides the course design, she also reported it. But, maybe in the future, they will change. I don't know. (Maleeya, Mali, Female, Public Health)

Maleeya pointed out the challenging issue from the degree programme in relation to the course being inappropriately designed. She considered this issue as problematic and having a negative impact on her study experience. More specifically, her opportunity of gaining quality subject knowledge/skills seemed to be constrained by this course, as a resource aspect of the conversion factor. This seemed to be an issue that the institution or faculty should take much responsibility. I assumed that the institution/faculty may weigh the effectiveness of other economic factors when designing courses. Another student, Auban also commented on this point:

To tell you sincerely, I didn't learn anything, I just learned Chinese. In terms of my major, I can say I didn't learn anything; I didn't understand anything. So, it's like it's hard for me to do the experiment. Because when I was an undergraduate, we needed to do CAD (computer-aided design). [But] the foreign students don't need to learn it, just go back home; only the Chinese students need to learn it. For me, it's quite hard to write the thesis for the Bachelor's [degree]. So, I need to find some friends to help me to design my chemical plan. So, to tell you, really, I didn't learn anything. (Auban, Australia, male, Chemical Engineering)

This comment also indicated that issues related to the course design, as a constraining factor, affected Auban's gaining of subject knowledge/skills. He spoke about the unsatisfying degree study experience by recalling his undergraduate degree study experience at the same university.

From this point, what could be different from Maleeya was that Auban seemed to imply that the course considered less about the needs of international students. Understandably, more considerations needed to be taken when designing courses for students who came from different cultural backgrounds or labour market systems. In contrast to Maleeya, there were some noticeable factors: Auban was the only international student enrolling in both Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in Chemical Engineering, and both of Auban's degree programmes were Chinese-language structured programmes. Thus, by looking at Auban's explanation, we could suggest that more consideration might be needed when designing courses for students who come from different cultural backgrounds or labour market systems.

Trevor reported some issues regarding the newly developed degree programme. He explained:

The intention to deliver the course is good. ... Because it is a new programme. Not well organised. Just like a lot of errors here, very hard to say. ... It is not comfortable to intern or to do anything else, [as] we are not in Shanghai or in Hangzhou. Our major is Business, right. [The location is] not convenient, and we are not allowed to move because it's within the visa conditions: the entry and exit regulations. The professors, they may try to solve the problem, but how to say, in Chinese style ... they just try to get us graduated. It's like you help with the dust: you don't clean it up, you just put a dirty carpet. It turns out that I'm not that lucky, my supervisor, he is in Singapore. So, we use WeChat to keep in touch, which is not that good. ... So, I go to another supervisor instead. (Trevor, Thailand, Male, International Management)

Trevor problematised the degree programme being a newly developed one. As he pointed out, there were several issues that occurred due to its isolated campus location. Trevor considered that these issues constrained his opportunities for involving himself in wider society in China (e.g. interning, networking) and getting meaningful support from the academic staff.

7.2.2.2. *Institutional conversion factor issues concerning the academic certificate*

Another shared concern reported among international students was about the degree certificate. As discussed (in section 5.2.2), international students valued gaining an overseas degree at a top university. The following comments were from Kyung:

I think it's the main concern of international students because we registered as a student of the Department of International Education. So even though I majored in Administration and the Diploma, uh, but my school is International College. ... I'm not from the School of Public Affairs, I'm from the International Education. I think it is due to the efficiency of school in terms of the administration. But, for [international] students, [it] can be quite, yeah, quite big challenge. ... Because now I can print out the certificate, it was written in International Education School. I was surprised because I studied the Public Affairs, but apparently, I'm a part of the International Education.

What Kyung was worried about, from this comment, seemed to be from which school the academic certificate would be issued. As has been pointed out (in section 4.7.1), the selected university has its independent school — International College — for managing international students. Kyung expressed her concerns further about how this certificate issue could impact her future career prospects:

I'm not sure, because I'm pursuing further study, this will have impact[s] on my future study. My PhD should be related to my current study. When I apply for a PhD, they would not see my diploma, but they see the International Education, they may feel *oh, there is no link*. I just talked about this with other seniors, but they also don't have any proper answers, and then I talk with other teachers, some other teachers, but they are not the head of school. So, I feel disappointed. Because I found that they cannot change. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

Another student, Kwan, also reported his concern at a later stage regarding the degree certificate. He explained:

Not graduated, because of the Covid. It has been postponed until June. So annoying. ... I haven't got the certificate yet and don't know when. If I find one (in Korea), it would be troublesome to come back to China. But now, I am preparing and working hard to get different types of qualifications, like foreign language tests, etc. I just arrive in Korea, however, I had two exams already. (Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce)

没毕业。因为病毒的原因，延迟到 6 月份。烦死了。... 还没毕业，证书还没拿到，不知道什么时候才能好。（在韩国）找到工作了，回中国的话也很麻烦。但是，在准备各种资格证，语言证考试。我刚来韩国，已经考了两个考试了。

From his comment, Kwan was worried about gaining the degree certificate due to the delay of graduation during the disruptive Covid-19 pandemic. As Kwan said, he will not be able to seek job opportunities without getting the degree. At the same time, he chose to get more qualifications to make himself more competitive. I could feel how stressed out Kwan was at the time.

The comments above suggested that both (Kyung and Kwan) perceived the influential role of a degree certificate in their job application process. Moreover, they were concerned about the factors at the institutional/faculty level, which could constrain their gain of a Master's degree.

7.2.2.3. Individual conversion factor insufficient Chinese language proficiency

Another constraining conversion factor reported by students that affected their learning experiences was the lack of Chinese language skills/proficiency. For some of these international students, they did not have a high level of Chinese language skills/proficiency, or even did not speak any Chinese at all. For example, one student, Sika, spoke about some challenges as a result of the lack of Chinese language skills/proficiency:

Yes, of course, challenges are there. Having access to materials, I mean textbooks. Because these books are written in Chinese. And the language barriers also, when we go out at the library, if we need certain books, we need to speak in English, but

the librarian is Chinese, there's always disconnection. But they try to help us anyway. Also, when we go to the field to do the research. Most of the people, some of them, they gave me information. But sometimes as a foreigner, the language barrier, it is difficult for me to get the information from them. (Sika, Sierra Leone, Male, Politics and Chinese Culture)

Sika's comment indicated that due to the language barrier, the effective access to relevant resources and information was constrained, which affected his learning experience. The issue mainly focused on communication with people (e.g. librarians, Chinese citizens). Another student, Bejide, who had a short period of the Chinese language learning experience, added more to this point:

So, it's not easy to understand, sometimes, what they are saying, how it works, to understand some Chinese theories by Chinese. I have to spend a lot of time to understand what I'm doing. Sometimes, it is stressful, they can do it in one hour; I can spend four hours. (Bejide, Benin, Male, Bridge and Tunnel Engineering)

Bejide seemed to speak about the challenging experience of understanding the academic materials or textbooks in relation to his lack of Chinese language proficiency. As Auban, another student who had a much higher Chinese language proficiency, also reported on a similar issue:

Last time, I failed one course, it's because I didn't understand some questions, they were all in Chinese. [...] Most of my courses are in Chinese. So, I just go to the class and I don't understand anything. Most of the words they use are technical words. I can understand like simple Chinese, the intermediate Chinese. But the technical words are quite difficult for me. (Auban, Australia, male, Chemical Engineering)

Auban's comment indicated that the language issue was problematic in his learning experience. Unlike Sika, Auban was enrolled in a Chinese-language structured degree programme and his Chinese language skills were sufficient for him to engage in daily communication with others. However, he pointed out the difference between the use of daily Chinese language and more technical language within academic settings.

By looking at these comments, the lack of Chinese language skills/proficiency could be seen as an individual conversion factor, which may pose the respondents difficulties in converting the relevant resources/services into valuable functionings (e.g. gaining subject knowledge/skills). As such, international students may experience frustrations and constraints in their academic learning in aspects of understanding academic reading materials in Chinese, accessing the relevant academic resources and information, and learning courses.

I also noticed some other students' responses who enrolled in programmes structured in the Chinese language. Similarly, they reported challenging experiences in learning for the degree. For instance, Madu replied as follows:

Yes, there are challenges because all the courses are taught in Chinese language. In the beginning, I had to translate all the subjects such as Chemistry, Maths, Physics, word by word.

However, it seemed that Madu had managed to overcome these challenges. He continued to explain:

Then, in my third year, things were getting better. I could basically read through a book without translating the language, much better. But, in the beginning, there were certain challenges. Honestly speaking, I just stayed in the library, not going anywhere, so there were few social activities for me that time. Things were getting better when I started to do the Master's degree: I could have a break on weekends if I do not have to work on a shift. But there was no social life during my undergraduate years, I just spent time preparing exams in the library, even on the New Year's Day. (Madu, Mauritius, Male, Paediatrics)

The comment from Madu indicated that at the beginning, the Chinese language was a constraining factor to his academic learning. At the same time, he made many efforts such as time commitment and dedication to the process.

It seemed to be an interesting comparison when looking at both students' responses (Auban, Madu). Both students had similarities with their overall situation being the minority within a Chinese-language structured programme. Moreover, they all encountered many challenging experiences in learning partly due to the language issue. However, they ended up in gaining completely different types of functionings such as gaining subject knowledge/skills. Arguably, this difference is a result of one's personal qualities/attributes (i.e. resilience and determination) as the individual conversion factor.

7.2.2.4. Relational conversion factor competition

Some international students spoke about peer interaction in an academic learning setting being less cooperative, but more competitive. For example, Beijide explained:

They don't have time to say, "What do you need? What do you want?" At the beginning, I asked them for help. They always say, "We don't have time; we don't understand them either." ... I can try to manage it by myself, or I can ask some of my foreign friends. ... But for most of my classmates, they are always saying, "I don't know, I don't know." So, we don't ask them. But I know there is the competition; they don't like to share the things. But, for us, we are not like that. We feel free . (Beijide, Benin, Male, Bridge and Tunnel Engineering)

Another student, Auban, described a similar situation when talking about his learning experience with his Chinese classmates:

My courses are in Chinese. I'm the only foreigner in my class. So, it's like, for me, I can't talk to my classmates. I think [university name] students are more competitive. Also, like some questions, they won't share anything with me. So, I need to study by myself. No one will help me for anything. ... Last time, I was asking my Chinese classmates to see if they can help me with one stuff. They say they don't have time. So, they don't want to help me. (Auban, Australia, male, Chemical Engineering)

From these comments, it seemed that peer interaction could be one relational conversion factor which constrained students' gaining of knowledge/skills. As indicated in their comments, these students all perceived that competition was the reason why their peers were unwilling to share their knowledge and time with someone who was in need of help. Partly, it seemed to be the selected university being a top university in China as they had observed. I could feel that these respondents felt frustrated when they spoke about the interaction with their lab mates or classmates. Besides their feelings, this kind of experience could influentially affect students' learning experience. This type of experience seemed to be one of individualistic learning rather than cooperative learning (reported in 6.2.1.4).

7.2.2.5. Relational conversion factor the teacher–student relationship

Some students reported that teacher–student relationships constrained their academic learning. For example, Kyung revealed:

the teachers, they are interested in Chinese students more, because there is no language barrier, of course. ... We hope Chinese, our supervisors, could have the similar standard and also similar treatment to the international students. ... So, I did the thesis defence. There are only international students. For my supervisor, there are Chinese students [as well]. International students and Chinese students are separated (to do the thesis defence). ... Also, for the international students, when we joined the pre-defence, we got prejudged; we could see that they didn't read our papers. ... Sometimes, good questions were really related to my research, but some were already answered in the paper, they (examiners) just gave the questions again. So, we were quite surprised at this situation.

She continued to share her thoughts about her supervisor:

You know when I want some guidance from the supervisor, I can feel, my supervisor, she is busy. So when I write the thesis, apparently, I need the guidance from the supervisor. But she's still busy, whenever I meet her, she just sees the paper, the content, and just gives the comments; she doesn't know what I have written. I also did a presentation, [and] I could feel [that] she didn't read my paper.

At some point, they [her supervisor and examiners] don't really care about the quality of our research, [and] our theses. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration).

These comments from Kyung indicated that there were perceived different academic criteria when academic staff were supervising and assessing each group (i.e. international and domestic). Kyung shared her experiences in relation to the ways in which her "thesis defence" was organised and examiners assessed her work to support this point. For the structure of her "thesis defence", she observed that international students and Chinese students presented their work separately. The absence of their Chinese counterparts seemed to make international students like Kyung more suspicious of the criteria. She pointed out that the examiners were thoroughly prejudicious against international students' work and thus did not take their work seriously.

In addition, Kyung talked about her supervisory experiences and perceived that each group of students was treated differently regarding the academic criteria. She had the impression of her supervisor who appeared not to spend enough time reading and commenting on her work (the thesis and presentation) as she had expected.

7.3. The social experiences

In addition to the educational experiences, international students were also motivated by pursuing ISM experiences in general, outside the formal learning context. As discussed in chapter 6, the students interviewed aspired to develop a range of capabilities (e.g. to be able to gain foreign language skills/proficiency, cultural understanding, and develop critical perspectives) from ISM experiences in general. Based on their reported experiences, I have identified a variety of social activities in non-academic settings, including the on-campus social activities (e.g. language exchange events or other cultural exchange events), and off-campus social activities (e.g. internships, business activities). More importantly, I focused on whether students were constrained or enabled through joining these activities. That is, I looked at different types of relevant resources (i.e. a range of social activities on campus, or

those in the local communities) and conversion factors that were influential in international students' practising these valued functionings.

7.3.1. Perceived valuable aspects for practising/exercising a range of functionings

7.3.1.1. *Resources language/cultural exchange activities*

Some students spoke positively about the language leaning and cultural exchange activities.

For example, Kyung stated as follows:

Another Chinese friend I met in [university name] she took a course about learning Korean. So, we study from the language exchange. So, I think language exchange is the kind of possible way to get to know the Chinese friends. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

Likewise, Janeru also shared her experience of language exchange activities:

So I usually go to the language corner, either organised by the University or people from outside to practise my Chinese language, to make more Chinese friends. (Janeru, Janan Female, Chinese Education)

所以我经常去学校举办的，或者外面的汉语角。就练习汉语口语，认识中国朋友。

Guana spoke about other cultural exchange activities that she had joined on campus:

One very important activity is very organised by the University, for the international students. During the spring festival, Chinese New Year, they would have some activities, like calligraphy, people would also tell us histories, different kinds of food. So, you learned about that. (Guana, Guyana, Female, Crop Science)

These comments above suggested that international students valued and attended activities for language learning and cultural exchange. Moreover, by taking part in these activities, they practised and exercised a range of functionings — i.e. gaining foreign language proficiency, gaining cultural knowledge, and networking.

7.3.1.2. Resources information about internship opportunities

Students reported other social activities organised on campus. Ugo, being a member of the student association at the selected university, shared his experience:

The University has departments and associations that are also helpful. Now, I'm part of the student association. This one, we call it IDEA, it's an entrepreneurship association that involves students — Chinese students, and foreign students — and some teachers to help and guide the students; the majority are foreign students. This association is also a part of the entrepreneurship department of the University. They make sure that students form themselves into this association, in a way that they can be easily reached by the companies, say, for internships. And the companies can pass the information to students.

Ugo spoke about a recent activity organised within the association:

So, the University as well, sometimes invites some companies. Last night, we had [Huawei] here. They were carrying out job hunt for graduate students. Students went there to meet them and get some services like how they can learn to work; most students applied from here. There were available positions; they are recruiting foreign students who would go and work for Huawei in their respective countries or regions. We pass information through WeChat. We have associations for countries from Asia, Europe, Africa. (Ugo, Uganda, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

This comment from Ugo suggested that international students were supported to access information about internship opportunities. By looking at Ugo's case, these internship opportunities available were from international companies and for international students as prospective professionals.

7.3.1.3. Resources involvement in part-time work or internships

As pointed out (in chapter 5), some international students aspired to gain more work experience. This was evident in their subsequent study and life experiences in China. As

reported by some international students, they worked outside the University alongside their degree study. For example, Kwan talked about some part-time work experience:

Currently, I am doing some part-time work: teaching Korean, and doing some Chinese–Korean translation work (Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce).

兼职的话目前也有，当老师教韩语，还有中韩语翻译。

Kwan's response indicated that in addition to the degree study, he was also involved in some part-time work. He valued this part-time work for practising his Chinese language proficiency/skills. Likewise, Bryan also spoke about his internship experience. He began by explaining how he organised his life during his degree study in China:

I just intern in a company three days a week. I kind of organise my classes, because I was very keen to gain more work experience, I mostly meet people outside the campus. ... So, actually, I didn't have much free time. It was just classes and interning. That's it.

He further described more about his internship experience in terms of the work content and work environment:

I would say that is a very good work environment, very diverse..., two thirds are Chinese, one thirds are, second-marriage children Dutch. ... I think I did practise Chinese a little bit; I was doing a lot of translation as well like Chinese–English translating contracts, other resources. It's very good balance between international and Chinese work environment. ... The relationship is very good. Those are my main friends actually, those colleagues in the company. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Bryan's comments seemed to echo his earlier response that he was more career orientated towards degree study in China. As indicated in the comment, Bryan allocated three days a week for his part-time work in an international company in the local area.

These students' comments suggested that international students were keen to undertake internships outside the campus. Through joining these activities, they could develop various

valued functionings (e.g. gaining foreign language proficiency in the workplace, networking with foreign counterparts, working in a diverse work environment, etc.).

7.3.1.4. Relational conversion factors the diverse student group

Linking to the range of social activities available (as resources), the interviewed students frequently mentioned the benefits of having a diverse student group. For example, Ugo stated as follows:

So generally, we have 43 foreign students, among them 2 of us from Africa, the rest from other countries in Asia, Middle East, Europe, South America and US. We have the facilities that can allow us to socialise outside the class. We are all students from different parts of the world and so we need to know the different cultures, and how they do their things. China is kind of the base of our engagement like a platform that is provided to help us know each other, countries, and cultures (Ugo, Uganda, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

Another comment was from Maria. She explained:

I have friends from Zimbabwe, Vietnam, Pakistan, Italy. ... I think for people who study abroad, they speak English better. ... When you are with other foreign friends, you speak English. That's how you speak English day by day. It's a good thing when you go back home. (Maria, Malaysia, Female, Crop Cultivation and Plant Breeding)

Both comments indicated that international students celebrated a multicultural/multilingual setting consisting of people of diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds within the degree programme. This diversity aspect was considered as a relational factor for it involved interactions with others in the learning or socialisation process. They appreciated the opportunities for them to communicate with their foreign counterparts, and develop functionings (i.e. gaining foreign language proficiency/skills, cultural understanding, etc.).

7.3.2. Perceived valuable self-employment experiences

The experiences shared by a student, Inamnl, may serve as a good example for understanding how individual students perceived the value of ISM experiences in general as beneficial for employability. Here, he explained:

After I go abroad, I mean lots of experiences like seeing the foreign farmers. Because the farmers, you know, especially in Indonesia, it is hard for them to be rich. So they hope that we can bring some innovations. So, after I go to some places like China, Japan, Europe, I see the online marketing, [and] visit the local farmers. This is the kind of inspiration. So, why I didn't do this kind of thing in my country to help the local farmers.

Inamnl further shared some of the business activities involved during the degree study period:

Now, I, with my friends in Indonesia, we start a platform, ...the agriculture online marketing ...to help farmers to sell their products, to increase the profits. If they work with us, we can help them to sell their products internationally: we contact farmers all around Indonesia, and we also find marketing even in China, Japan, Singapore.... The real intention is to help the farmers. My study is in Agriculture, then that can help these farmers. This platform also has a lot of activities, like farmer school, so they can deal with some of the diseases. We are not only selling their products, we are also empowering the farmers and improving their products through the farmer school. (Inamnl, Indonesia, Male, Agriculture and Biotechnology)

By looking at Inamnl's comments, it seemed that his consideration of employability was not simply to meet his own interests, such as the needs of employers or gaining positional advantage over others for obtaining employment. His entrepreneurial experience and aspirations of becoming self-employed were obviously interesting as a different career choice to that of many other students interviewed. Moreover, Inamnl perceived the value of ISM experiences was beyond enhancing capabilities in an academic setting (as discussed in

section 5.2). He also valued the opportunities to seek innovative ideas and enhance other types of capabilities (i.e. to be able to gain entrepreneurship skills) from ISM experiences in general.

As for the agency side, similar to Maleeya, Inamnl seemed to gain empowered agency through the mobility experience. Based on his response, I could see that Inamnl gradually enhanced his capacity in deciding and taking actions towards his career-related goals that he valued through ISM experiences in general. What is more, these career-related goals related to his strong agency and desire to contribute to the wider community.

7.3.3. Perceived challenges in developing valued functionings: resources, individual, or institutional conversion factors

7.3.3.1. Individual conversion factors insufficient foreign language proficiency

There were challenges reported when some international students spoke about the interaction with their foreign counterparts. The opportunity to gain foreign language skills/proficiency was important to their decision-making to study abroad. However, for some international students, the lack of Chinese language skills/proficiency seemed to be one obstacle in communicating with their Chinese peers. For example, Palank commented on this point:

When it compared to Chinese [friends], I would say many [of my friends] are international friends. Maybe because I don't speak Chinese; maybe that's the problem that I don't have many Chinese friends.

Palank first thought about the reason from his own side. That is, Palank admitted that he did not have sufficient Chinese language skills/proficiency to communicate with his Chinese peers. He also described a situation when he had to use the translation on WeChat to communicate with other Chinese people. Besides, Palank perceived an issue from the Chinese students' side. He explained:

I feel like they are busy, [and] busier than us, that would be the second reason.
(Palank, Pakistan, Male, Public Administration)

By looking at these comments above, Palank took both sides into account. In addition to the insufficient Chinese language skills/proficiency, Palank observed that the Chinese students tended to have an occupied student life, which might be another reason. Surprisingly, in many international students' responses, this was a common description of their Chinese counterparts. I discuss and present this finding as an individual conversion factor in the next section.

7.3.3.2. Relational conversion factors busy student lives

I then looked at international students whose level of Chinese language proficiency was sufficient for communicating with their Chinese peers. While they showed great willingness, these students claimed that there were limited opportunities to interact with their Chinese peers. One student, Kyung, who had one year of Chinese language learning in China prior to this degree study, observed a similar situation and shared her viewpoints:

But still there is lack of interactions with the Chinese students. In the course, there are some (Chinese), but the majority are international students. And I found that most Chinese students are really busy with their studies and future career, so they hang out with other Chinese students. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

From her observation, Kyung perceived two reasons for the lack of interaction with her Chinese peers. She described that those Chinese students were “really busy” with their study and careers. Similarly, Kwan said:

Very limited [interaction]. Chinese students socialise with Chinese students; foreign students socialise with foreign students. Just like this. Very few Chinese students interact with us, most of them don't.

好少。中国的学生和中国学生玩，外国学生和外国学生玩。就这样。少数的中国学生和我们交流，但是大部分的中国学生不是。

Kwan further perceived that:

I think, ...maybe, they are having a difficult time like doing internships. Or they already have their Chinese friends and no need to make friends with foreigners. Or maybe, they think that foreign students have a lot of problems like how to do deal with this work/assignment or that, which is quite troublesome. (Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce)

我觉得他们害羞，不好意思和外国人交流。可能自己的生活很难，实习什么的。然后已经有中国朋友，不需要外国朋友。还是感觉外国朋友很麻烦，问题很多，这个作业怎么做，那个作业怎么做。

Kwan's comments indicated that students of the two groups (international students and Chinese students) tended to cluster together within each group. To this observation, Kwan perceived some reasons from the Chinese students' side for not being able to socialise with their foreign counterparts. As indicated, it may be that socialising with international students may cause Chinese students to devote more time and attention and thus divert them from their studies. This situation was likely to burden Chinese students with more needs from international students.

To Kyung, I could feel the frustration when she spoke about the limited opportunities to interact with her Chinese peers. This frustrating feeling was evident in her further comment:

Yeah, I can understand a bit. Because when I was an undergraduate, I also, my classmates, me also were busy. But, still, as an international student who decided to come to China and to learn Chinese culture and Chinese [language], I think the interaction with the local people is the most important thing. But the situation is not like that. That's why the international students are quite frustrated. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

In this comment, Kyung considered that interacting with her Chinese counterparts was an important way for international students to gain deeper language and cultural understandings.

However, by looking at these comments above, we could see that the reality was very different from what international students had expected. The limited opportunity to interact with Chinese peers could constrain their gain of related functionings. The constraining factors, based on the international students' responses, could be related to both sides. On the Chinese side, students tended to have a busy academic and social life; therefore, they would rather save more time and energy for their own business. On the international student side, the obstacles may be their insufficient Chinese language proficiency/skills, or being more needy with their Chinese peers than the other way around.

7.3.3.3. Institutional conversion factors the separation of the accommodation and administration

Another noteworthy point mentioned by Kyung was that there were limited opportunities to meet Chinese students from the same courses, which could be one reason for the limited interaction between the two groups. She explained:

But still there is lack of interactions with the Chinese students. In the course, there are some [Chinese], but the majority are international students. (Kyung, Korea, Female, Public Administration)

For international students like Kyung, they were enrolled in Master's degree programmes which were only for international students. In some courses, as Kyung explained, the international students and Chinese students were mixed; however, there were not so many Chinese students on the courses. This point seemed important and could be understood as an institutional conversion factor. Bryan pointed out the separation of the administration being a constraining factor on their interaction with their Chinese peers. Bryan described:

I think obviously, compared to the UK, there is a bigger gap between Chinese and international students, you know, not just in terms of the daily life, but also in terms of the administration work. In the UK, when you are arriving at your university, you probably standing in the same land as the local students, to many offices, follow many things. You know it's just you, and there is a British student,

and there is Indian student. In China, it's very much like the international student office handles everything for international students, and the Chinese students' kind of separately. So it is very different in terms of that. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

These comments indicated that combined with relational conversion factors, there were factors at the institutional level which could constrain students' functioning development through interacting with their Chinese peers.

7.3.3.4. Resources career service website

Generally, the international students who participated in my study did not have much experience of using the career service or looking for job opportunities from the University website. One of the few students, Bryan, shared his experience of using the University website:

I did use some platforms to look for companies and stuff. That system, not bad, but when I emailed student office to ask internships. I think those internships are mostly targeted at Chinese students. ... The career website, some resources I've seen from [the university name] are for foreign students, but some are all for Chinese. (Bryan, the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance)

This comment from Bryan indicated that he expected to seek job opportunities from the University website. However, there seemed to be less internship opportunities from the University website for international students. Another student, Auban, shared the experience of applying for a summer school through the University:

I applied for the summer school, like going to France for one week. But, I got rejected because of my nationality. This is like for Chinese students who can represent for China. The summer school is a French company; it's about the chemical stuff. After I went for the interview, they said, "No, all your performance was perfect, but the problem is that your nationality is not Chinese." ... So, that was like a big argument with the company. The message I replied was like, I said, "You

guys are not what I have expected to be an international or multicultural company.” ... I think nothing can be done for this. Like the post about the summer school. They didn’t write anything about it is for Chinese student only. But, for the lecture about the summer school, the lecturer thinks that we prefer Chinese students other than any student to go to for the summer school. After the lecture, I said I want to go there. She said, “Ok, maybe you can see if they accept your application.” Then I went for the interview, they said it’s only for Chinese students. I think even if I report it to [the university name], they won’t do anything for me. So, I think the best thing is to have some internships for international students. But most of the jobs or internships are for Chinese students. (Auban, Australia, male, Chemical Engineering)

This comment from Auban seemed to indicate that he did not have equitable work opportunities in international companies given the job opportunities and resources available from the University. Auban shared his application experience with regard to the summer school, an opportunity that was announced in the classroom. However, his application experience seemed to be frustrating as he failed to take this work opportunity. More importantly, Auban perceived that his failure in applying to this job opportunity was not because of his ability to tackle such work, but the lack of clear information about the post provided by the University and the company. He also spoke about the unequal work opportunities available provided by the University for international students compared with his Chinese peers.

What could be worse is that international students could face difficulties if they attempt to find work opportunities by themselves. For instance, an Uzbekistani student, Uzra, shared her experience of seeking internship opportunities at the local labour market:

They [employers] want to hire me, but they won’t guarantee my work visa. They may feel troublesome, and they are E-commerce business companies, for about 4–5 years, small companies. If I work there, I need to find a place to stay. They wouldn’t give me high wages; they prefer Chinese. One time, I went for an

interview, they said that they would give me a post. Then we exchanged our contact on WeChat. I helped them for about two months as they wanted to know more about Russia. They also promised that I could start to work in November or December. I accepted the offer. Then, they actually rejected me in December and gave me the reason that they has employed another male employee, who studied in Ukraine before. Another time, I went for an interview, two hours away from home. The employer wanted me to do the interview and I said OK. Then, he was strange that he asked me if I would know other American or Arabic friends; he said he needed some help from them. I said I would not just give others' contacts to random people. Then I knew that he wanted me to do the interview just because that I was a student from [the university name] and I may know a lot people. I just thought why didn't you say that directly? (Uzra, Uzbekistan, female, International Trade)

他们（雇主）要我，但是他们不给签证。他们会觉得麻烦。还有他们都是电子商务嘛；他们开了 4-5 年；他们的钱也不多。如果我在那边上班，需要住房什么的。他们不想给我很高的工资；他们觉得中国人上班比较好。有一次，我去面试；他们就说，我们要你什么的，然后加了微信。差不多两个月，我帮他们忙，他们想要了解俄罗斯情况。然后他们说，你可以 11, 12 月份来上班。我说好的。然后，12 月的时候，他们说找到了一个男生，在乌克兰留学过，我们不需要你了。还有一次，我去面试，离家两个小时。他（雇主）说你来；我说好吧。然后，他跟我聊：问我你有没有美国的朋友，阿拉伯的朋友；他说需要他们的帮忙。他很奇怪。我说我不可以随便给别人的微信。然后我知道他找到我是因为我是浙大的留学生，认识的人多。然后我就想，你为什么不和我直接说。

The comment indicated Uzra's unsatisfying internship-seeking experience with being a foreigner in the local labour market. She faced several challenges in the job application process: visa and housing issues, being unfairly treated, or even exploitation. Uzra's case thus demonstrated that international students tended to be positioned at a disadvantaged place when seeking opportunities to work in a foreign country. On the one hand, for Chinese

companies, it seems to be a more complicated process of hiring foreign employees and dealing with the work visa issue. Thus, those companies, particularly those small ones, may hesitate to recruit foreign workers. On the other hand, international students could be easily exploited especially when they are vulnerable and desperate to grasp any possible job opportunity they could.

The comments presented above may indicate the importance of supporting international students' employability by providing them with pertinent resources. In the discussion chapter, I further discuss relevant implications regarding the resource aspect for institutional practices and policymaking.

7.4. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I mainly deal with the findings of these international students' subsequent study and living experiences in China. Based on their reported ISM experiences (i.e. academic and ISM experiences in general), I present findings which suggest that these students' experiences of capability enhancement were affected by a combination of resources and internal and external conversion factors. In the next chapter, I will discuss the key findings from the two results chapters.

Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1. Introduction

In chapters 6 and 7, I have presented qualitative findings that help understand subjective views of international students on the decision-making in undertaking degree studies in China and their subsequent living and studying experiences concerning their employability enhancement. The capability approach expands an understanding of employability to human diversity. More specifically, this expanded understanding could be learned from four inter-related aspects. First, there are individual differences concerning a person's characteristics (e.g. age, nationality, gender, ect.). Second, the capability approach considers an external environment regarding social, political, and cultural arrangements in which one is located. Third, the conversion process presents individuals' different ability of converting relevant resources into valued functionings. Lastly, the capability approach posits that people perceive the meaning of a good life differently. Thus, I apply the capability approach to understand students' perceptions and approaches to enhancing employability by considering these four theoretical aspects. By adopting this approach, I can look at how both sides — individual agents and other influential factors of various aspects involved — interact when understanding international students' decision-making, as well as subsequent academic and life experiences during their degree studies in China. However, I find that relatively little previous research literature has explored international students' perspectives on linking employability to international student mobility (ISM) experiences by using this theoretical framework.

In this discussion chapter, I will discuss and interpret some of the key findings in relation to the relevant literature and hope to provide valuable insights into the values, motivations, and experiences of those international students regarding employability. More specifically, I aim to address the two questions (outlined below) analytically. I organise the discussion into three parts. I present part 1 (in section 8.2) and part 2 (in section 8.3) according to the two key research questions proposed. For part 1, I begin by revisiting my findings on the first key

research question briefly. Then I turn to discuss these findings by reflecting on how international students value and understand the link between ISM experiences and employability enhancement, and how these perceptions are shaped by influential actors at different levels. For part 2, I focus on understanding and reflecting on how individual students managed and experienced employability enhancement during their degree study in China (concerning findings of my second key research question). More importantly, I further discuss the role of ISM experiences in enhancing their capabilities and agency by looking at the different resources available and conversion factors involved. In the last part, I discuss relevant findings to offer some practical implications for how Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) support international students' experiences of employability enhancement.

I present the two key research questions below:

- 1) Why do international students choose to undertake a Master's study at a Chinese university?
 - 1-1) To what valued capabilities have international students aspired and what has motivated them to study abroad in China in relation to their employability enhancement?
- 2) How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement?
 - 2-1) What activities do international students attend to enhance their employability during their degree study in China?
 - 2-2) What are the constraining and enabling conversion factors that influence international students' employability enhancement?

In addition, I also list two analytical questions for guiding the discussion of the key areas that emerged as a result of this research:

- 1) How does international student mobility influence international students' perceptions of the value of employability enhancement?
- 2) How could universities support international students regarding their employability?

8.2. Why do international students choose to study abroad at a Chinese university?

8.2.1. Revisiting research question 1: an expansion of capabilities

To discuss and interpret findings of my first research question, I acknowledge that individual students' aspirations to and motivations of pursuing ISM experiences (i.e. educational and ISM in general) in China relate to their employability. This point resonates with findings from previous empirical evidence, either from a micro (e.g. Biney and Cheng, 2021) and macro perspective (e.g. Wang, 2013), that shows the importance of career-related motivating factors for international students undertaking mobility studies in China. However, drawing on the capability approach, findings shed more light on how international agents aspired to and valued ISM experiences in relation to their employability and how the wider structural factors of relevance were involved. Thus, put in capability terms, the findings indicate that international students aspire both to an expansion of capabilities and the search of external career/business opportunities from ISM experiences concerning their employability.

According to the participants' responses, I identified a wide range of valued capabilities/functionings, which could be potentially enhanced through these ISM experiences (see Table 2). Moreover, I suggest discussing findings by looking at three main aspects of employability (i.e. obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and becoming self-/multi-employed). In this way, I found how international students valued these capabilities/functionings differently, linking to their different aspects of concern with regard to employability.

Another linked and important aspect informed by the capability approach is the notion of agency. Again, agency is understood as individual students' capacity in making choices and acting to bring up changes to achieve the object of these changes, as well as achieving objectives concerning the lives of others. This notion of agency further supports a need to understand international students' employability expansively. By looking at their reported capabilities/functionings, findings indicate the influential impact of ISM experiences of their agency, of making choices, and of acting to bring about changes to achieve career goals through their professional practices.

Thus, the first part of the discussion below further highlights the perceived value of ISM in China regarding their employability enhancement in respect of: enhancing the wide range of capabilities (including the external economic/business opportunities) and empowering individual agency.

8.2.2. International students link ISM experiences to employability

Through the analysis of the findings concerning the first key research question, I found that international students, either explicitly or implicitly, linked the ISM experiences in China to employability in their decision-making to study at a Chinese university. This link is evident in the result of the study which identifies different types of capabilities and sheds light on international students' values towards the ISM experiences in China in relation to their employability enhancement. Students aspired to opportunities to develop both education-related capabilities (e.g. quality subject knowledge/skills, an overseas degree) from their educational experiences as well as other capabilities (i.e. language proficiency/skills, cultural understandings, and relevant career/business opportunities) from ISM experiences in general. This result, in general, is in line with the empirical studies which found that international students were motivated by enhancing their employability to undertake a degree study abroad. However, these studies demonstrate findings in different HE contexts: for example, groups of students undertaking the Erasmus Programme (Soares and Mosquera, 2020), or undertaking degree studies in the UK (Fakunle, 2021, Huang and Turner, 2018). While there are studies pointing out the significance of international students' intention of career purposes in the Chinese context (see Gbollie and Gong, 2020), these understandings seem to be general rather than offering a focused view on employability. Moreover, my analysing the findings based on the capability approach could offer new insights into the issue.

8.2.3. Divergent views of the value of ISM experiences and understanding employability

In general, the result of the study provides us with some new insights which are more context specific to international students' purposeful aspirations from ISM experiences with regard to their understandings of employability.

What the findings suggest is that there are divergent views from individual students valuing the ISM experiences in relation to employability. For example, in section 6.2.3, there are nuances in which an aspect or type of a cultural capital (e.g. an overseas degree, foreign language proficiency/skills) is valued as advantageous for getting employed (see Bryan's and Kwan's comments) and the students' different viewpoints towards the value of cultural capital (see Guana's comment). These findings are consistent with the observations by other researchers who found that respondents reported different approaches to employability (Li, 2013, Huang et al., 2014). Thus, these authors attempted to group these respondents according to their reported approaches. For instance, through a longitudinal interview study of a group of Chinese international students at a top UK university, Li (2013) identified the participants who adopted a positional approach to enhancing employability as 'players' and those who adopted a possessive approach as 'purists'. However, these studies, I found, were mainly concerned with the employment aspect of employability — gaining positional advantages for obtaining employment (e.g. the degree certificate, foreign language proficiency/skills, studying at a top university, etc.), gaining professional knowledge/skills, foreign language proficiency/skills, or cultural knowledge as important for meeting the needs of employers. One related and insightful caveat by Li (2013) was that it seemed not adequate to homogenise international students' perceptions of viewing the link between a particular type of cultural capital and students' employment outcomes. Based on the findings of my study, I fully agree with this argument; moreover, I would like to add more insights to this point. Comparatively, the participants of the study are more diverse in aspects of nationality, disciplinary area, and professional or family backgrounds. Therefore, their life trajectories in terms of education, profession, or ISM previously tended to be

influenced by these aspects. The findings show that international students, indeed, aspired to capabilities not limited to the value of having positional advantages or enhancing professional knowledge/skills for improving individuals' recruitment processes. As presented (in section 6.2), findings indicate that there were three different aspects of employability — obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and becoming self- or multi-employed. These three aspects seem to indicate the different stages in which individual students' career foci differed among students. Some international students (e.g. Bryan, Kwan, Maria) emphasised the importance of gaining, for instance, an overseas degree, or foreign language proficiency/skills, for the employment aspect of employability, while some showed less concern over this issue due to having a job granted after graduation and/or having considerable work experience already (e.g. Guana, Bejide, Thaily). Thus, simply assuming that students' employability equals employment and labelling them differently based on this assumption seems to be inadequate in understanding the employability goals and needs of a group of students, particularly those who exhibit greater diversity. By acknowledging these individual differences, it would help understand international students' employability-related goals and needs more adequately when linked to the undertaking of a Master's degree study in China.

8.2.4. Enhancing capabilities in the Chinese context for employability

Despite the divergent viewpoints and values, the findings suggest that both the educational and ISM experiences in general are important in understanding how ISM in China influences international students' decision-making concerning their employability. In other words, it seems hard to tell whether the educational experiences or ISM experiences should be the more important link to the students' intention of employability enhancement. Moreover, the result in my study would add understandings of how international students value ISM experiences in various aspects, be it educational, social/cultural, political, or economic, that are more pertinent to their employability enhancement.

Previous studies have revealed findings on exploring the education-related motivation factors in international students' decision-making to undertake degree studies in China (Wu

et al., 2019, Wen and Hu, 2018). The results from these studies vary in the importance of these motivating factors. Wen and Hu (2018) illustrated that among the four aspects (i.e. educational, economic, cultural/social, political), the educational rationale (i.e. HE systems, academic staff, institutional reputation) and the economic rationale (direct economic and indirect economic) were weighted as the most important in motivating international students who were undertaking degree studies at eight universities in China. Although the focus of these studies was not on their employability, my analysis suggests that more consideration is needed when understanding international students' motivations regarding their employability. As presented (in section 6.2), international students speak about the significance of education-related capabilities for enhancing their employability — i.e. the real opportunity of gaining quality knowledge/skills (Guana, Kyung, Inamnl, Maleeya), or an international Master's degree (Palank, Bryan, Kwan) — in their decision-making. The analysis further suggests that there are three key aspects regarding the gain of quality knowledge/skills: the better educational resources available, the international dimension, and researching in the Chinese context. Thus, by looking at their categorisation approaches (Wen and Hu, 2018), I consider that the authors offer no way of perceiving the international students' benefits of educational experiences for their career prospects, or in other words, it seems less clear to me whether students value these education-related factors intrinsically or instrumentally concerning their career prospects. Moreover, international students valuing ISM experiences in relation to one's future career should not be seen as economically motivated only.

While my findings lend some support to studies concerning the impact of regional differences of the perceived value of ISM experiences, owing to the limited number of interviewees, I cannot draw any substantial conclusion between international students from developing countries and developed countries (e.g. Wei, 2013, Cantwell et al., 2009, Hu et al., 2016). For example, in Cantwell et al.'s study, the researchers found that international students of different regions were concerned about different aspects of ISM experiences: education-related factors for students who came from developing peer countries, cultural experiences for students who came from Europe, and costs for North American students

(2009). Indeed, it is found in my study that students (e.g. Guana, Ugo, Maleeya, Inamnl) who come from developing peer countries are concerned about the accessibility of relevant educational resources domestically and emphasise the importance of education-related factors at the selected university (e.g. quality programmes, resources, and academic staff). Nevertheless, what my analysis clearly shows is that the international students' country of origin seems not to be determinant in their decision-making to study in China. To be more precise, the students' evaluation of studying in China appears to be a result of their consideration of potential factors of employability from various aspects: not limited to the education-related factors, but including other factors such as the bilateral economic relations between China and their home country (e.g. Ugo) or the prospects of Chinese language/culture learning (e.g. Inamnl), etc. This is evident in the findings that international students express their expectations of enhancing a wide range of capabilities from both the educational experiences and ISM in general.

In addition, the findings contrast with the observation by Jiani (2017) who found that quality education seemed to be less important than other factors at micro-level (i.e. promoting career development, exploring new lifestyles/culture, searching cultural identity) or macro-level (i.e. China's rising social-economic power, the significant role of the Chinese language, scholarships). This is an insightful finding by Jiani who looks at how the micro- and macro-levels interact when individual students choose to study abroad in China. Yet, this conclusion seems not to be the case in my study and, again, interpretations into these motivating factors are general, rather than understanding the specific impacts thereof, regarding the issue of employability.

Nevertheless, findings seem to be consistent with the observation in recent research (Jiani, 2017, Wu et al., 2019, Ahmad and Shah, 2018) that highlights the importance of a macro-level factor — China's rapid development and future prospects — in driving international students to study in China. However, findings of this study offer new insights concerning how international students link this as an appealing factor to their employability enhancement. Drawing on the capability approach, I found international students indicate this link both in their range of capabilities aspired to as well as seeking favourable external

conditions — seeking more career/business opportunities, researching China, and the importance and prospects of Chinese cultural and language learning (e.g. Kyung, Thaily, Bejide, Trevor, Inamnl).

Noticeably, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as a related factor to China's prospective future, is frequently cited by international students' in understanding the link. There are discussions around how the BRI contributes to the growing number of inward international students, or cultivating international students as prospective professionals who could either work for their home country or expand China's foreign talent pool (i.e. Ma and Zhao, 2018). My related findings add to the literature with qualitative evidence for understanding how individual agents perceive the value and influence of the BRI when making decisions to study abroad in China. Thus, I suggest that concerning employability, international students are motivated by factors as a whole and aspire to gain a wide range of capabilities from ISM experiences in China.

Findings drawing on the capability perspective further illustrate that international students aspire to enhance the capability of being able to gain foreign language proficiency/skills or cultural knowledge through ISM in China. More importantly, findings indicate that international students understand foreign language proficiency/skills or cultural knowledge as a medium concerning their employability. This argument is in line with Tran and Pham (2016) claim that the international students' motivation of gaining extra foreign language proficiency/skills and understanding cultural knowledge of others could not be simply viewed as an outcome of one's pure linguistic or cultural interest, but rather relates to the students' employability. As has been reported, my respondents generally recognise the importance of being able to communicate with or understand their international/Chinese counterparts in future workplaces (e.g. Thaily), enhance their networks with foreign counterparts (e.g. Bejide), and gain extra language proficiency/skills or cultural understanding as advantages within the job application process (e.g. Maria). Particularly concerning their aspiration to gain Chinese language proficiency/skills, my findings add more insight into Xu et al.'s study on international students who link language motivation to their employability and come from countries within the African continent (2022).

8.2.5. International student mobility experiences for enhancing individual agency

By looking at their aspired capabilities/functionings as reported, the finding concerning international students' aspiration to capability enhancement or seeking more opportunities from ISM experiences in China associate with their agency aspect. It has been recognised that individual agency is particularly important for decision-making during and in subsequent experiences of ISM. This finding on the students' agency aspect could provide valuable knowledge into the existing literature which focuses on understanding international students' motivations to study abroad in China and indicates that students link mobility studies abroad with their future careers (e.g. Yue, 2013, Wen and Hu, 2018). The first part of analysis, drawing on the capability approach, helps capture how individual agency is enabled when they perceive the value of and make choices to study abroad concerning their employability enhancement. Findings reveal that their agency is empowered as they value the capability expansion for contributing to their goals of making the lives of others better within the professional area. This argument seems to be supported with more convincing evidence in the case of students who had several mobility experiences prior to this particular degree study in China (e.g. Mayleeya, Inamnl).

This agency aspect further indicates that both theoretical approaches (i.e. the positional and possessive approach) to employability are limited in capturing human agency. Discussing the discrepancy in individual students' perceived value of the ISM experience, as well as their search for career/business opportunities being influenced by social resources, inevitably lead to an understanding of employability as a social construct. Thus, the findings reveal the critical role of individual agency in understanding individual students' considerations of employability within such a construct. Their considerations could be seen from the supply side (the increased competition due to the growth of the graduate population), or the demand-side (the changing spheres of workplaces due to technological advancements and changing occupational structures) (Brown, 1995, Brown et al., 2001). More importantly, there is the inner side of individual agency, which is situated socially and contextually, concerning career-related values and goals.

8.3. How do international students develop their employability during their study in China?

8.3.1. Revisiting research question 2

As for the findings concerning my second research question, I focus on understanding how international students manage and experience their employability. Drawing on the capability approach, I consider the international students' experience of employability enhancement as a complex process of capability formation that involves a combination of resources and conversion factors of various aspects. As indicated in the findings, international students attend a range of education-related or other social activities to develop a range of functionings. Within the process of functioning development, I have identified conversion factors of various aspects, be they individual, relational, or institutional, that impact on the students' ability to convert resources or opportunities into valuable functionings. Therefore, my discussion will focus on these resources and conversion factors of relevance which constrain or enable students' capability formation and agency empowerment. The discussion then will add more insights into individual students' experience of employability enhancement and offer pertinent and valuable implications for HEIs and government policymaking.

8.3.2. Valuable activities (resources) and conversion factors for enhancing capabilities

In this first part of the discussion, I acknowledge that international students aspire to gain a range of capabilities and career opportunities from both the educational experiences and ISM experiences in general. Based on their responses, I firstly reveal findings that international students attend various activities (or take advantage of different resources) to enhance their employability. These resources include education-related activities (i.e. learning quality courses from the degree programme provided by a reputational institutional/faculty, using advanced technologies, conducting research in the Chinese context, joining group discussions with students from various cultural backgrounds,

undertaking internships, and receiving supportive supervision) and other social activities (i.e. attending language/culture exchange events, undertaking part-time/internships work in an international company, interacting with peers/people in the local community, and joining activities for providing job opportunities). Secondly, by using the theoretical lens of (constraining) conversion factors, I find that international students have divergent views towards their ISM experiences in China with regard to the employability enhancement. This finding indicates the complexity and diversity of the international students' experiences of employability. These relevant findings seem to present more important aspects that previous studies on the students' satisfaction with their study and life experiences in China could not address (Ding, 2016, Tian et al., 2022).

To begin with, I identify various aspects they value regarding their achieved functionings through attending different forms of activities. In the finding, international students who perceive the importance of degree programme learning consider it incorporates the practical aspects and contributes to their gain of academic knowledge/skills or other generic skills/attitudes, which also echoes findings of the existing literature (e.g. Fakunle, 2021). Furthermore, this finding suggests that this valuable aspect is commonly expressed by students across different disciplinary areas, though the form of activity may vary. The different forms of activities reported seem to extend our understanding of what could be the valuable part perceived by students in different disciplinary areas for capability formation. Here, I could see nuances in the students' perceived value of these context-specific aspects. Not limited to the type of work experience for gaining more practical understandings, I find a commonly valued aspect of those activities is that international students are able to approach and learn the context in academic settings such as studying real cases within a particular context or undertaking research work in a local area. One reason may be that international students themselves may perceive the degree study in the Chinese context interesting and meaningful for gaining context-specific knowledge/skills (e.g. Thaily, Ugo). Another possible reason is that international students consider the context interesting and useful in the eyes of people who are important others like employers or supervisors, which in turn would benefit their future careers (e.g. Kyung).

Despite the significance of education-related resources available, analysis of the findings indicates that some conversion factors play a critical role in achieving those valued functionings through educational experience. I outline in what I have labelled as relational conversion factors — i.e. learning within a diverse student group and getting support from academic staff. Understandably, students speak about the supportive environment by learning within a diverse student group (e.g. Maria). More pertinent to their academic learning, students also speak highly of the diversity of the international student group, for it enables them to gain intercultural communication skills, different perspectives, and to think critically in a disciplinary learning context (e.g. Inamnl, Ugo). As for gaining benefits from a good relationship with their academic staff, students appreciate their achieved functionings such as gaining different perspectives within a supportive learning environment, receiving guidance for accessing relevant resources, conducting research, and producing publications.

In addition to those education-related activities, international students weigh the social activities on/off campus highly for providing real opportunities for developing a range of functionings (i.e. learning foreign language proficiency/skills, cultural knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, and networking). These social activities include language/culture exchange events, part-time work/internships in an international company, interacting with peers/people in the local community, and activities for providing job opportunities.

Similar to the benefits of their academic learning, students value the diverse student group which contributes to international students' achieved functionings (i.e. gaining foreign language proficiency, cultural understanding, and intercultural communication skills). Moreover, findings reveal that, for some students (e.g. Bryan, Kwan), the diversity is valued not only in the student body, but also in the workplace (e.g. an international company), where international students are enabled to exercise these functionings through undertaking some internship work. That is why those students devote much time commitment for internships/part-time work, aside from the time for degree learning.

8.3.3. Constraining resources

Further analysis of the findings of international students who reported challenging experiences also reveals that their study and life experiences concerning employability enhancement are not just the result of their individual efforts.

In general, findings indicate that there are various issues concerning individual students' unsatisfying study and life experiences. To uncover these issues, I explore how individual students are impacted by factors in their conversion of relevant resources into achieved functionings. The findings of my study further provide a qualitative explanation to what Huang and Turner (2018) have concluded: namely, that international students regarded the academic or social activities as less effective regarding their employability. I have identified those constraining conversion factors: at the individual level, a person's attributes/skills; at the institutional level, the structural condition or administration system; from the relational aspect, peers, staff, people in the community, or colleagues. However, I have to point out that, although I present and discuss the relevant resources and conversion factors separately, understandings of the impact thereof should be considered with the conversion process as a whole. This viewpoint is underpinned by the theory discussed earlier (in section 2.4) and supported with empirical evidence below.

To begin with, the educational resources aspect mainly concerns issues around the course design from the degree programme: the mismatched course (e.g. Maleeya), the lack of consideration for the needs of international students when designing a course (e.g. Auban), and the newly developed degree programme (e.g. Trevor). I consider that the faculty/school side may bear much responsibility for making these challenging issues happen, thus constraining those students' freedoms to gaining the important functioning (i.e. gaining subject knowledge/skills). Understandably, faculties/schools within the University may give careful consideration to finance and management efficiency when designing programmes or courses. The finding, nevertheless, reveals that these insufficient considerations do not fulfil the needs of a diverse student body (even though, sometimes, international students seem to be the minority within a particular programme). Furthermore, this issue has adversely

affected international students' learning experiences. For some of them (e.g. Auban), they failed to achieve their educational goals and have a negative perception of their educational experiences as well as career intentions (i.e. seeking job opportunities) in China with regard to their employability. Even for those students who overcome these challenging issues and finally gain subject knowledge/skills (e.g. Madu), they make a great deal of effort in achieving their goals. Understandably, for these students, this could be seen as an individual conversion factor indicating one's quality/attributes (e.g. their great resilience and determination) in addition to other external constraining conversion factors. However, I have to point out, based on the finding, that those students indeed bear much pressure. As in the case of Madu, he would refuse to continue to work in the local community after graduation due to the depressing study experience from both degree studies in the selected university, even though he has the capacity to do so. Madu also shared some of his international friends' experiences, which seem even more depressing. What Madu seems to be really appealing is that the University could care more about international students' well-being.

Findings also reveal that the constraining resource aspect is understood as problems in international students' access to relevant information about job/internship opportunities. Firstly, in the present study, the majority of international students do not have experience in getting career services from the universities (i.e. receiving career guidance, and gaining information about the job/internship opportunities). It seems important to inform international students of those valuable job opportunities available (e.g. internship opportunities at international companies).

Secondly, students who have looked up information at the University career service website or gained internship opportunities through the University point out a major issue: that there seem to be few job opportunities targeted at international students (e.g. Bryan). What could be worse, for some international students (e.g. Uzra), they are exposed and less protected in a disadvantaged place when seeking job opportunities in the local labour market. The finding thus suggests that the universities could take more responsibility, in which the necessity of a

provision of more reliable, useful, and formal information about internship/job opportunities is required.

8.3.4. Constraining individual conversion factor

For one type of the constraining conversion factors, the results indicate that international students' degree programme learning experiences are affected by their insufficient Chinese language/proficiency. Seen as an individual conversion factor, this language issue helpfully indicates that diversity of the international student group is within individuals' ability to convert resources into valued functionings. These international students encounter challenges in understanding academic reading materials in the Chinese language, accessing the relevant academic resources, and learning Chinese-language structured courses. This language issue is challenging not only in the aspect of students' oral Chinese language skills in their daily use and communication, but also with regard to their overall Chinese language proficiency/skills for academic communication, reading, and writing.

Despite Chinese as a language for academic use, the language issue also applies to the students' reported challenging social experiences. As some international students indicate, the lack of Chinese foreign language/skills seem to be an obstacle in interacting with their Chinese peers. Consequently, their opportunities for gaining foreign language proficiency/skills, cultural knowledge, and intercultural communication skills are constrained.

8.3.5. Constraining relational conversion factor

Findings also indicate that there are international students whose learning experience is constrained by a type of relational conversion factor, that is, interactions with their peers or academic staff. Unlike those students' valuable learning and social experiences with regard to their achieved functionings, due to the diverse student body, this finding reveals that some international students experience less meaningful interactions with their Chinese peers. These international students are largely from degree programmes that are structured using the English language and are for international students only (e.g. Kyung, Palank), or

Chinese-language structured degree programmes that are specifically designed for Chinese students (e.g. Auban, Coe).

This finding is in accordance with Ding's interpretations, reliant on a mixed-method research design (questionnaires as the primary research method tool) with international students from (non) degree programmes at different levels (2016). Moreover, my finding adds more insight into Ding's focus on international students' satisfaction and understanding of the interaction between international students and domestic Chinese students. More importantly, this unsatisfying experience seems to influence international students' freedom to gain valued functionings (i.e. gaining intercultural communication skills, different perspectives, and critical thinking in a disciplinary learning context). Participating international students give their explanations by considering the issue from both sides. From their own side (as the individual conversion factor), it is perceived that international students tend to lack sufficient Chinese language proficiency/skills or need more support from their peers for dealing with academic learning problems. From their Chinese peers' side, international students perceive a high degree of competition among their Chinese peers. This second point is commonly mentioned by international students that their Chinese peers are busy, competitive, and unwilling to help if their foreign peers ask for some academic support.

In the same way, the finding indicates that the relationships among students from the degree programme also influence students' interactions in their social lives. Students seem to turn away from their Chinese peers and make friends with other international students. This finding further demonstrates the importance of the type of relational conversion factor and the intercultural engagement between the two student groups. Moreover, I consider that voices offered by the international students seem to be limited when understanding the perspective of Chinese students with regard to the interactions between the two groups of students.

Another relational conversion factor is about the international students' relationship with their academic staff (i.e. supervisors and examiners). The finding reveals that international

students express a perceived double standard in how academic staff supervise or assess their work. This point problematises international students' experiences of supervision, the type of supervision mode, and its impact on students' employability by looking at findings from Wang's (2019) study on understanding international doctoral students' supervision experiences in China. Again, as mentioned earlier, international students who share such perceptions are likely enrolled in degree programmes that are specifically targeted at international or Chinese students. This perception seems to constrain international students' learning experience as they feel their academic learning is less supported. These findings may lead to a consideration of how academic staff, Chinese HEIs, or the central government look at these inward international students in China, both in policy discourse and practices. In their discourse analysis study, Mulvey and Lo (2021) conclude that there are inconsistencies in how international students are constructed in the Chinese HE policy context. More specifically, the authors outline several key themes regarding the contradictory construction of international students: "para-diplomats", "a point of mutual exchange", "future elites", "insufficient quality", and "public security threat" (p.550, *ibid.*). Thus, my findings of the constraining relational conversion factors of their employability offer some understanding concerning the international students' perceived experience of learning, teaching, and assessment practices at a top Chinese university.

8.3.6. Constraining institutional conversion factor

There are also several constraining conversion factors identified at the institutional level concerning international students' challenging academic learning and social experiences at the selected university.

Firstly, international students reported the academic qualification issue. This problem links to the selected institution managing the enrolment and academic work of international students at its independent International College. Such an arrangement adopted in the selected university is for centralising their resources for international students (Qi, 2021). However, international students express their concerns about the quality of their Master's degree certificate in the eyes of their future employers. Students seem to be suspicious

about the value of a degree certificate issued by the International College rather than gaining one issued by a school under the name of a discipline. Students express another related issue that without a degree certificate, they had to put off their job hunting in the job market due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The University had to delay the graduation and leave the dates for thesis examination undecided.

Secondly, findings indicate some constraining conversion factors at the institutional level that contribute to the lack of interactions between international students and their Chinese peers. These points add to the empirical literature on understanding international students' intercultural experiences and the impact of pertinent linguacultural resources thereon (Song and Xia, 2020). Particularly, the related conversion factors at the institutional level are identified: the segregated classrooms, accommodations, and the administration system. These issues may entail discussions around improving the quality of international student education among Chinese universities in aspects of converging management, teaching, and administration.

Thirdly, another constraining factor is related to the lack of institutional or legal support for supporting and protecting international students' part-time work/internships experiences during their mobility studies. The finding echoes the challenges reported in a previous study on exploring a group of African international students' part-time work experiences (Sun et al., 2015). By reviewing relevant policies (e.g. MOE, 2021), I acknowledge that measures have been enacted concerning international students' rights to undertake part-time work. The finding highlights some issues that international students, as the ethnic minority, may encounter in seeking work opportunities in the Chinese labour market. I will discuss more on understanding the diversity of this student cohort and how HEIs in China could support students' employability in the next section.

8.3.7. Empowering and constraining international students' agency

The findings reveal that international students' agency can be enabled or constrained depending on how they experience a range of activities for enhancing capabilities or seeking opportunities available.

Findings of this study demonstrate international students' enhanced agency freedom in understanding their changed views on employability. These findings are contrary to a finding revealed by Mueller and Robert (2021) that a more conventional view of employability was generally adopted by students when they perceived the value of mobility degree study. More specifically, authors found that students tend to give priority to "minimal time spent in HE, minimal disruptions, immediate full-time employment and a priority accorded to employer perceptions of the degree as [a] sort of black box rather than the experiences or learning therein" (p.29, *ibid.*).

By contrast, based on the findings from the present study, I identify several aspects for understanding individual students' changed views on employability. First, the finding of students' education–career trajectory shows that international students value their time spent on degree study experience abroad regarding their employability enhancement. They consider that the knowledge/skills learned from the learning and life experiences during their degree study meet(s) the needs of becoming more qualified professionals and further contribute(s) to achieving their career goals. Certainly, they would spend a period of time undertaking a degree study abroad, the process of which interacts with their career path. This point is evident in international students who prefer such a path that allows them to seek opportunities to enhance employability from a degree study abroad while away from their previous job positions.

Second, in addition to the choice of returning back to their home country, analysis of the findings indicates that international students begin to consider the option of working internationally or in the Chinese labour markets after their initial degree study (e.g. Patman, Janeru, Palank). They show interest in working and living in China or in gaining more international mobility experience. They become more confident with the expanded capabilities regarding their foreign language proficiency/skills, cultural knowledge, and intercultural communication skills.

Similarly, with regard to the third point, for some students, their expanded agency allows them to be capable of aspiring to experience other forms of careers (i.e. multi- or

self-employed). Many of them gain capabilities from the ISM experiences regarding professional knowledge/skills and acknowledge different forms of career/business opportunities within their professional areas. More importantly, findings show that with their enhanced agency freedom, international students further aspire to pursue more educational and career goals for contributing to a wider community. This point can also help explain the first point that some of the international students choose such an education–career trajectory.

However, there are factors from various aspects (i.e. pedagogical relationships, learning, institutional practices, relevant policies) constraining individual agency. For instance, international students who experience difficulties realise that it tends to be a difficult decision for foreigners to work in China. For some, they find out that there are fewer job opportunities available for foreigners. Some others indeed have tried hard to find job opportunities in China; however, are under much pressure through confronting issues (i.e. restrictive work visas, different work cultures). As my study mainly focuses on their study and life experiences during their degree study in China, international students' post-graduation experience in the Chinese labour markets or beyond is not the focus of my study. However, further research could investigate international students' job-seeking experience in the Chinese labour markets.

I have presented and discussed a nuanced and differentiated picture of international students' employability enhancement experiences during their degree studies in China. Next, I will discuss and propose relevant advice and suggestions for improving the institutional practices from some key aspects of the current research.

8.4. How could Chinese universities support international students' employability enhancement?

Having presented the empirical findings and discussed a theoretical analysis based thereon, now I go further to present a discussion about how Chinese universities could support international students with regard to their employability during their degree study in China (concerning the second analytical question listed). With regard to the analysis regarding how

international students link ISM experiences to their employability, their divergent views of the valuable ISM experiences, and employability highlight the importance of a provision of both quality educational experiences and ISM experiences from universities. I hope the discussion presented below might shed light on how Chinese universities improve their quality international student education.

Overall, drawing on the discussion of students' perceived valuable and challenging ISM experiences regarding employability enhancement (in section 8.2 and 8.3), I suggest and argue that universities could support further international students' capability formation and agency empowerment during their degree study in China by improving resources and conversion factors from various aspects. I thus emphasise that there is a need to focus on the individual students' active agency and to strengthen agency freedom (Marginson, 2014), which points to different observations and findings than when international students are positioned in a more passive or compliant role.

8.4.1. A provision of educational, social and career-related resources for supporting employability enhancement

By looking at the case of a top university in China, I first consider that several aspects of the resources are critical in improving universities' practices in enhancing students' employability. I begin with the education-related resources. When considering what the attractive or valuable educational resources are, findings reveal that these educational resources are: learning quality courses from the degree programme provided by a reputational institutional/faculty, using advanced technologies, conducting research in the Chinese context, joining group discussions with students from various cultural backgrounds, undertaking internships, and receiving supportive supervision. It would be advantageous for universities if they improved resources in these aspects. I also suggest that top universities (like the selected university) need to strengthen their strong subjects or powerful programmes, which would be unique and pertinent to the professional needs of international students and their wider career and life goals.

The constraining issues concerning educational resources at the selected university can also provide some implications. As identified, these constraining issues are mismatched courses, newly developed degree programmes, a lack of consideration to the needs of international students when designing a course, and the accessibility of library services. Overall, I recommend that universities need to pay attention to these aspects when considering their educational resources and provide international students with more pertinent resources which facilitate their capability formation. More specifically concerning the resource aspect of the accessibility of library services, I point out two aspects that university librarians could further elaborate on: the cultivation of the librarian's English language proficiency/skills and cultural sensitivity, and diversifying academic materials (Zhou et al., 2018). To complement these library services, I recommend universities or faculties could employ students with different disciplinary backgrounds to facilitate international students effectively accessing the library services or other materials they need for academic purposes, particularly for those students who do not have sufficient Chinese language proficiency/skills, and enrol in English-medium programmes.

As for the social resources, there seems to be a similar logic in that Chinese universities may need to think about how to take advantage of the Chinese language and culture. Although universities have Chinese language and learning culture as compulsory courses as well as the availability of language schools, the data indicates that international students' language/cultural knowledge may still be an issue constraining international students' study and life experiences in China. Alongside these issues concerning international students with different abilities in mastering the Chinese language both in academic and social settings are suggestions that universities could offer students language training or preparatory courses related to their subject matters (Li, 2015, Larbi and Fu, 2017). Based on students' responses, I thus suggest that universities/faculties should organise more language/culture exchange activities or academic Chinese/English writing workshops. In this way, it could help international students with their capacity for accessing and/or understanding relevant academic materials in foreign languages, interacting with their peers or supervisors in both academic and social settings, and working within the local community.

I also acknowledge the important role of universities or facilities in providing international students with relevant career services and resources regarding their employability enhancement. Concerning this aspect at the selected university, I suggest that Chinese HEIs, including those institutions with greater potential capacity to achieve their internationalisation goals in particular, could construct a more sophisticated career service system for managing international students' career-related issues. Firstly, I agree with Pham et al.'s recommendation that universities need to support international students' employability by considering their career goals and needs (2019). As reiterated in this study, students tend to have different career goals and intentions. For instance, students could make different decisions about where to work after graduation, for example returning back to their home country, preferring to stay in the Chinese labour market, or work internationally. Thus, it is important for universities to offer possible choices available from the career service website in order to meet students' diverse needs. Secondly, drawing on the capability approach, I further consider that individual faculties or schools need to provide tailored career services by taking factors at different levels into consideration. To take an institutional conversion factor as an example, those international students who are allocated to a relatively isolated campus area could be offered more useful information about career opportunities within their professional areas. Thirdly, Huang and Turner (2018) suggest promoting the value of relevant activities or resources available (e.g. social activities, career services) to international students. I consider this suggestion is also important based on findings from the current research context that the majority of participants do not use the career service website for seeking potential job opportunities or developing their career management skills. However, I have to note that universities should develop a sound career service system first for meeting the various needs of a diverse student cohort.

By looking at these Master's students' employability experiences at the selected university, these recommendations, by considering the source aspect, could add more insights into Wen et al.'s suggestion of developing a quality assurance system for improving the quality of educational programmes for international students and their experiences (2018).

8.4.2. Supporting the social relationship of a diverse student group

By understanding international students' learning and social experiences, I find some other important messages for Chinese universities concerning individuals' agency interactions with people or communities in the conversion process of employability enhancement. More specifically, these messages include how international students interact with their Chinese peers and academic staff. The relationship between the two groups of students tends to be concerning for there is limited interaction, cooperation, and mutual respect among those students. More importantly, the international students' responses indicate that such a relationship can have an adverse impact on the students' capability enhancement in both academic and social settings. This also applies to how international students interact with their supervisors and the impact thereof on the students' employability enhancement. Consequently, to mitigate these issues, I agree with Larbi and Fu's suggestion concerning challenges identified in relation to China's HE internationalisation, that academic staff should strengthen their relationship with international students to support their academic learning in the aspect of research collaboration and facilities at the workplace (2017). However, I would go further and introduce a supportive role of institutions or faculties with regard to these different parties involved.

My key considerations are based on some reflections on how the collective approach advanced by scholars (Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2020) could be applied in international student education in China. Although there are nuances in the key constraining social-structural factors — the neoliberal government policies in the European HE context and the absence of economic incentives in Chinese HE policies (Mulvey and Lo, 2021) — I consider this approach is important for it emphasises "human values and social relations" (Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2020, p421). This approach thus could help remedy the relational conversion factors that constrain the students' employability enhancement. Moreover, the collective approach focuses on collective agency which aims to serve interests of a larger community rather than merely gaining personal economic growth. This point thus coincides with the findings of the international students' aspirations for

empowering their agency freedom and expanding their capability set for the interests of a larger community.

Thus, my suggestion based on the collective approach is that HEIs could support academic staff to enhance their intercultural sensitivity and encourage them to celebrate a diverse student group as cultural resources in the disciplinary area. In practice, universities could encourage the promotion of social relationships between students and academic staff and help academics form a more appropriate pedagogical relationship with a diverse student group. There is a need to shift seeing international students, based on a predetermined view, as para-diplomats or academically inferior, to viewing them as active agents (Mulvey and Lo, 2021). More specifically, universities could encourage both groups of students to engage in activities of cultural integration both in academic and social settings, and regard both groups of students as co-creating learners in the curriculum design in aspects of: designing group discussions, choosing course materials from various perspectives, and organising practical learning activities. It is important to note that academic staff, with an expanded understanding and enhanced capacity to manage a multicultural setting, tend to construct a good environment for all students to engage in cultural integration and work collaboratively.

In addition, findings of my study also highlight that converging teaching, management, and services tends to be an approach to international student employability enhancement concerning the constraining issues identified (i.e. the separated accommodation, administrative management system, assessment) for international students' learning and social experiences. As mentioned (in section 7.3.6), Chinese universities with an ambitious goal of improving quality international student education should make some efforts in converging provision for international students with the management system for all students. As reviewed (in chapter 3), such direction is also a policy goal in recent policies (MOE, 2018, MOE et al., 2017).

8.4.3. Supporting students' employability during uncertain times

In view of findings from this study, I offer some implications for Chinese HEIs supporting their international students' employability concerning some external conditions (i.e. the

Covid pandemic, the economic condition). I consider that some practical implications, proposed by Nachatar and Jasvir (2020), which aim to enhance international students' employability with regard to generating more useful information about job opportunities in different labour market contexts, are relevant. The author suggests that universities could provide more internships or part-time work opportunities in organisations which have linkages to students' home countries (ibid.). Linking to some findings in this study, I reflect on this implication and would highlight the important role of the BRI in contributing to international students' employability enhancement in the Chinese labour market or beyond. I reckon that universities could take part in projects involved in the BRI and further set up alumni networks or social networks which could bring organisations into direct contact with students and the university/faculty.

I also suggest that institutions could offer more support for meeting the needs of international students due to the disruption caused by the Covid pandemic. These needs may range from international students aspiring to continue their degree study in China, and more support for their transition to the labour market due to the delay of graduation, to the effective access to relevant facilities.

8.5. Chapter summary

Drawing on the capability approach, I have discussed the international students' motivating factors for and experiences of studying and living in China regarding their employability enhancement. I firstly discussed findings of the range of aspired capabilities by international students and their capability formation in the subsequent study and life experiences in China. I then turned to a discussion which proposed practical implications for Chinese HEIs supporting their international students' employability enhancement. More importantly, I highlighted institutions' responsibilities for cultivating students with the essential capabilities and expanding their agency for achieving more public good through their professional practices. I will draw conclusions from my study in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by synthesising and presenting a summary of my research aim and findings. I then discuss and propose pertinent implications for further research, policies, and practices. Finally, I consider some limitations of the study and reflect on the process of conducting the research.

9.2. Summaries of the research aim and key findings

My concern about the existing studies on conceptualising the link between international students' degree study experiences abroad and their employability is that these studies tend to draw on either the possessive or positional approach. The two approaches, as I have indicated throughout the thesis, are insufficient in conceptualising the link. Thus, I draw on the capability approach to understand how international students link their international student mobility (ISM) experiences in China to their employability. By focusing on the perspective of international students, I explore the gap that limited studies have looked at by incorporating the voices of international students in understanding the link in the Chinese HE context.

I thus proposed two key research questions (with sub-questions) that have guided my empirical analyses of the study:

- 1) Why do international students choose to undertake a Master's study at a Chinese university?
 - 1-1) To what valued capabilities have international students aspired and what has motivated them to study abroad in China in relation to their employability enhancement?
- 2) How do international students study and live in China in relation to their employability enhancement?

2-1) What activities do international students attend to enhance their employability during their degree study in China?

2-2) What are the constraining and enabling conversion factors that influence international students' employability enhancement?

Based on the findings, I have argued that international students linked the ISM in China to their employability enhancement either explicitly or implicitly (concerning research question 1). As for their experience of employability (concerning research question 2), I found that international students attended a range of education-related and social activities to enhance their employability. Moreover, their experience of employability enhancement is a complex process of capability formation that involves a combination of resources and conversion factors of various aspects, be they individual, relational, or institutional.

I then discussed the answers concerning another two analytical questions, based on the empirical findings:

1) How does international student mobility influence international students' perceptions of the value of employability enhancement?

2) How could universities support international students regarding their employability?

My findings have demonstrated that ISM in China influences international students' understanding of employability, their perceived value of capabilities and external career/business opportunities more specifically in the Chinese context, their agency expansion, and thus their decision-making in approaching subsequent experiences of study and life experiences in order to achieve their career or life goals.

Drawing on the discussions, I propose several practical implications for how Chinese universities could support international students' study and life experiences regarding their employability. More specifically, I suggest universities could focus on improving pertinent resources of various kinds (i.e. educational, social, and career-related resources) for enhancing the social relationship of a diverse student group, and on remedying some

external conditions, which will contribute to students' capability enhancement and agency expansion.

9.3. Research originality and contributions

I consider this study makes several contributions to the literature. First, this study is one of the few which examines employability issues of international students in the Chinese HE context. The study highlights the importance of ISM experiences in motivating individual agents undertaking degree studies at a top Chinese university, concerning their employability enhancement. More importantly, the study investigates the impact of their subsequent study and life experiences at the selected Chinese university on their employability. Thus, exploring that link in the context of Chinese HE is worthwhile in making an original contribution to the existing literature.

Second, I employ the capability approach to explore the link, contributing to the conceptual application of this theoretical framework. Firstly, I consider this theoretical conceptualisation of employability allows a focus on the crucial and expanded aspects of human well-being and agency as the ultimate goal of human development. More specifically, by understanding the international students' perceptions, my study further outlines a range of context-specific capabilities and career/business opportunities that have motivated them to undertake degree study in China. By exploring their subsequent study and life experiences, the study further emphasises the important role of the university in the international students' capability enhancement and agency expansion. Secondly, by using the conceptual framework of the capability approach, the emphasis is to understand how individual students enhance their employability, or in capability terms, how international students convert the relevant resources into valuable functionings during their Master's degree studies at the selected university in China. Thus, a powerful aspect of this theoretical approach is that it recognises the diversity of a student group, not only in their various career-related goals and needs but in one's ability to convert resources into valuable functionings. Therefore, finally, applying this approach to understand international students' employability helps identify both valuable and constraining resources and conversion factors.

More importantly, these resources and conversion factors as identified, based on the capability approach, could further contribute to institutional practices and national policymaking.

9.4. Research implications

9.4.1. Policy implications

The quality of international student education exists as a policy concept in the Chinese HE context. Since the year of 2017, the central government has been working on setting up a more comprehensive quality standard for its international student education by converging teaching, management, and services for Chinese domestic students and international students (MOE et al., 2017). Moreover, as Mulvey and Lo (2021) note, the subtle change in the policy discourse associated with the BRI (e.g. MOE, 2016) indicates the important role of international students for contributing to ‘mutual exchange’, rather than economic or political gain. Therefore, concerning such policy and direction, I offer some useful policy insights based on the findings and discussions presented.

By looking at the prominent policy (MOE, 2018), I consider that there are many forms of guidance relevant for enhancing international student employability. Concerning the education-related aspect, this policy encourages constructing curricula with a particular focus on science, engineering, agriculture, and medical subjects, that are compatible and comparable with international standards. Concerning the management and service aspect, there are items such as facilitating activities among and forming networks for international alumni and increasing international students’ rights of various aspects (e.g. privacy, security, etc). These forms of guidance are important in improving the overall quality of international student education. Moreover, I consider these elements would be particularly important to international students’ employability if more explicit considerations could be given to such aspects. For instance, the establishment of alumni contact for international students could be used for generating resources for providing international students with more job opportunities for working in China or beyond. In addition, I suggest that a more secured legal system could be developed in order to set a safer environment for meeting those

international students' rights to seek part-time jobs in the local Chinese labour market during or after their degree study. With regard to another important right concerning students' employability, I suggest some regulations or guidance in quality policy could be stressed by encouraging international students to offer their voices in the organisation of activities like teaching, learning processes, internships, and social events. Therefore, international students' interests concerning their employability enhancement would be ensured.

9.4.2. Recommendations for prospective international students

For prospective international students, I would like to offer several suggestions by looking at the findings and discussion presented earlier. Overall, I recommend prospective students to study abroad if they are agentic about making some changes regarding their further career path through such decision-making. As discussed, in the course of the degree study, international students could have their understanding of employability changed, have real opportunities to enhance capabilities, and gain external career/business opportunities, and thus expanded individual agency. Particularly, I highly recommend international students who aspire to seek opportunities of improving their Chinese language proficiency/skills and cultural knowledge, networking with Chinese counterparts, and working in the Chinese labour market. In addition, I would like to bring up one individual conversion factor which is important in their subsequent study and life experiences regarding employability enhancement. That is, prior to the mobility study, I suggest that international students, particularly those who will be enrolled in programmes of Chinese language instruction, need to achieve a certain degree of proficiency in their Chinese language for the use of both daily communication and academic purposes. In this way, students could be more prepared for the degree study in China.

Within the mobility study, I firstly encourage international students to engage in a range of activities available on/off campus, be they academic or social, to enhance capabilities that are valuable to their own career needs. Meanwhile, as the findings indicate, the relational conversion factors are also vital in how individual agents convert relevant resources into

valued functionings. Thus, I then recommend international students to be more appreciative and sympathetic toward people they have contact with (i.e. peers, academic/university staff, or others within the local community). I would also encourage international students to make their voice heard and needs understood by relevant personnel if students feel there are factors constraining the study process.

After their period of study in China, I suggest that international students could be more proactive in seeking and using the internship/job opportunities or other information provided from different parties (i.e. the faculty, university, international companies, and alumni networks). I consider these resources useful for international students concerning their various needs. For instance, as a part of one's career path or due to the perceived tight job market after the pandemic, international students who would like to continue their degree studies in China or other countries could look for information about relevant educational resources. I also suggest students communicate with and to receive proper guidance from the university or faculty at an early stage concerning some issues after graduation (e.g. the issuer of the degree certificate, graduation time).

9.4.3. Limitations of the study

I now reflect on some limitations considering the focus of the current study. My focus in this study is largely on understanding how international students study and live during degree study in China concerning their employability enhancement. Thus, my understanding of the influence of students' pre- and post-degree study on their employability is limited. However, I consider that further studies on the two stages could be conducted to add more useful insights by identifying the type of resources and conversion factors in students' capability formation processes. More specifically, by employing the capability approach and paying attention to the importance of individual agency aspect, I suggest future researchers look at the combination of resources and various conversion factors that could affect graduates' job-seeking experiences and how they interplay between various forms of capital in different labour market contexts (Pham et al., 2019).

Given that the study limits its scope to one university and that the sample size is relatively small, I suggest that caution is merited in generalising these results. I excluded international students who are enrolled at different degree levels. Neither did I include the other types of higher education institutions (HEIs) such as vocational colleges or polytechnic colleges in the context of mainland China. I thus consider further exploration on the topic at different types of Chinese HEIs is worthwhile. Moreover, I consider a line of research that makes comparisons among different types of institutions would be invaluable for gaining more understandings of the impact of institutional practices, policymaking, and international students' motivations on students' employability.

Another limitation relates to the single perspective of a group of international students. My research questions are addressed by empirical data from the voices of international students; however, they may add invaluable insights into our understanding of the link between their ISM experiences and employability if other perspectives (i.e. the domestic peers, academic or faculty staff, etc.) are explored. As discussed earlier, concerning issues arise from the interactions between international students and their peers or academics. Thus, I consider that different perspectives gained are important to explore further for more pertinent implications made to support social relationships among these stakeholders.

Finally, I consider my chosen methodological approach is limited by the research focus on understanding the perception and experience of international students. While I am confident in the methods underlying this study, I encourage researchers to replicate and extend this study by adopting other types of research methods (e.g. observation, questionnaires) considering their own research settings.

9.4.4. Further research implications

I further propose some new areas for future research by adopting the capability approach to explore how individual agency interacts with the structural factors regarding their employability enhancement. As indicated in the current study, the agency aspect is crucial when understanding individual students' aspirations to and motivations of a wide capability set as well as their capability formation process. This aspect is particularly relevant when

researchers attempt to find solutions to support a group of students in different educational settings. However, little is known about international students' experiences of employability enhancement by considering the agency aspect.

First, given the new spotlight of online or hybrid courses within the HE context worldwide, future research could draw on the capability approach by looking at the how students experience their employability enhancement and what are the constraining conversion factors involved in these modes of course delivery in different HE contexts.

Second, I consider it worthwhile to replicate this study with Chinese students studying at universities in countries alongside the BRI, or with international students studying in Chinese HEIs. Particularly, I recommend recruiting students who are enrolled in exchange programmes associated with the BRI. Findings from such research could potentially contribute to the building of platforms for educational cooperation exchanges, networks, and visa application procedures as the BRI policies emphasis.

9.5. Individual reflections

In the end, I would like to take the chance to reflect on my research (i.e. the research process, the topic, and the theoretical approach chosen). Regarding my experiences of this doctoral study, I appreciate experiencing the whole process of my doctoral study. I consider it is a learning journey that offered me a range of valuable opportunities to gain and practise my essential research skills and enjoy being a researcher in the educational field.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the study was conducting interviews with my participants. I appreciate that my interviewees, who were complete strangers, had kindly accepted my interview invitations and shared some deep thoughts on the topic in or even after interviews as our friendship developed. I also appreciate that interviewing offers me real opportunities to learn by interacting with people, either in a more formal research context or informal communication context. In interviewing, I could feel that I can relate to what my participants have shared due to my own couple of roles (i.e. an international student, a postgraduate research student, and a Chinese citizen). As an international student studying and living in a foreign country, I could generally understand the challenges or

difficult situations they had faced during their degree studies abroad. I thus consider my understandings based on these different roles to help gain trust, mutual understanding, and respect from my participants. However, not limited to the mutual understanding aspect, I appreciate those new ideas generated as the interview continued, which may or may not have been thought about before by both the interviewer and interviewees. These are invaluable understandings and ideas for my research on this particular topic. More importantly, reflecting on such research experience, I would become more aware of the importance of my various roles alongside the role of a researcher in conducting future research in the field.

Another aspect, in relation to these understandings and new ideas generated from interviews, is that I became more convinced that I needed to find an expanded and nuanced theoretical approach beyond the positional and possessive approaches to frame the concept of employability and understand their motivations and experiences of ISM. On the one hand, data from participating students indicates the importance of viewing employability as human development which emphasises their well-being (i.e. the expanded capabilities and enhanced agency), on the other hand, by understanding their views, I constantly reflect on my own study and life experiences abroad. This aspect has helped guide my choice of this expansive understanding of the concept of employability and data analysis based thereon.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter by University of East Anglia

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2018-2019

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Fangyi Guan
School:	EDU
Current Status:	PGR Student
UEA Email address:	nsv16zfa@uea.ac.uk
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	2019_03_FG

Approval details	
Approval start date:	22/03/2019
Approval end date:	01/04/2021
Specific requirements of approval:	
Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.	

EDU Deputy-Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Fangyi Guan

Faculty of Social Sciences

Postgraduate Researcher

School of Education

January 2019

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Exploring the link between studying abroad and student employability: A study of international students in Chinese universities

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – INTERVIEW (STUDENT)

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about international student employability. I am interested in understanding how you experience studying abroad and develop your employability. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are an international student in China at Masters level. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about. Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher: Fangyi Guan, Postgraduate Researcher, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia.

Supervisors: Professor Richard Andrews, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, UEA; Dr Yann Lebeau, Senior Lecturer, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, UEA.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

Your participation will involve one semi-structured interview with me. The interview will take place in an appropriate space in consideration of the research anonymity and confidentiality, and also the safety of you and the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded if you permit. You will be asked questions relating to experiences of developing your employability and relevant institutional supports. You will be able to review a summary of the interview within the next 6 months to ensure if it is an accurate reflection of the discussion.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

It is expected that each interview will take between 30-45 mins.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by letting me know by email or by phone (07447893005). You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to

withdraw from the study your information will be removed from the records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analyzed and submitted my thesis.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Discussing issues relating to your student experience might bring up issues of concern. We are able to stop the interview at any time you feel uncomfortable and I will also have access to information about Student Support Services if you require them.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

I would hope that by talking about your experiences that it will allow you to reflect on those areas that have helped as well as those areas that might need additional support. The study will also contribute to the effectiveness of provision for future international students.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2015). Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Fangyi will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. You can contact her on _____ or 07447893005.

(10) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell me that you wish to receive feedback by providing a contact detail on the consent section of this information sheet. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary of the findings. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(11) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Fangyi Guan

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisors: Professor Richard Andrews, _____ Dr Yann Lebeau,

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Director of Postgraduate Research Programmes, Dr Agnieszka Bates at .

(12) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and give to Fangyi before the interview is conducted. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.

✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

✓ *I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.*

✓ *I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.*

✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?**

YES NO

- **Audio-recording**

YES NO

- **Reviewing the summary of interview**

YES NO

.....
.....

Signature

PRINT name

Date

Appendix 4: Interview Letter

Dear officer,

As a PhD student in School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, I am doing a research study to explore how international students' experiences in China affect their perceptions and experience of developing their employability. With the guidance of my supervisors, Professor Richard Andrews and Dr Yann Lebeau, I am interested in finding out how international students in China perceive and experience the influence of studying abroad on their employability. I select Zhejiang University because it ranks at the top in China and has high international reputation internationally.

For this reason, I would like to request your permission to conduct research at Zhejiang University. The key proposed method to collect data is the semi-structured interview. I plan to interview four international students and one staff member in each school. And, I will search relevant documentation for my research. The institution's and participants' identity will be anonymized by following the regulations of UEA Research Ethics Committee. This research study will have an exploratory nature rather than evaluating the research outcome. The Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms approved by UEA Research Ethics Committee are attached.

I hope that this research will help international students in the selected institution and beyond to reflect on their experiences of developing employability and to engage with relevant employability activities that are provided by the university.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Fangyi Guan

PhD student in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

Appendix 5: Semi-structured Interview Questions (students)

Part1 Questions about some general profiles of the interviewees (family background, previous mobility, work/educational experiences)

- Where are you from?
- What did you do before you coming to China?
 - o Did you work before you came to China?
 - o What was the major for the Bachelor's degree?

Part2 Perceptions on the reasons underlying their educational choices. (pre-mobility)

- What motivated you to study abroad?
- Why this institution/ what are the reasons that affect your choices?
- What did you expect from study abroad? Were the expectations met?

Part3 The general experience (Social, cultural, academic). (mobility)

- And how is your Master's study experience in general?
- How is the programme?
 - o What are the good learning experiences? Why?
 - o Any challenges?
- How is the social life in China?
 - o Have you tried any activities organized by the university?
 - o Are challenges? How did you manage that?
 - o What are the most enjoyable experiences?

Part4 Experiences of developing employability and relevant institutional supports. (mobility)

- What institutional support does the university/school offer to help you with developing your employability?
- How could your institution do in order to enhance your employability?

Part5 Future plan. (post-mobility)

- Do you have any future plan after this degree study?
- Do you want to work or study in China or go back to your country or internationally?

Appendix 6: Examples of Transcripts

Bryan: the UK, Male, International Affairs and Global Governance

Part1: Questions about some general profiles of the interviewee (e.g. family background, previous mobility, previous work and educational experience)

- Interviewer: Which part in the UK are you from?
- Interviewee: Uh, Hammersmith, near London.
- Interviewer: Are you the only child in your family?
- Interviewee: One sister.
- What do your parents do?
- Interviewee: My mom is a teacher. My dad is a theatre manager.
- What was the major for the bachelor's degree?
- Interviewee: Chinese and history.
- Where did you do that?
- Interviewee: SOAS University of London.
- Why did you choose that major?
- Interviewee: I've always been interested in history, but I cannot find my career. There is a lot of people who would expect that. There is a lot of people who study history or Social Science in universities in the UK. There is not so many people who do Asian languages; so, then, it would be useful. And also, I just took since high school of Cambridge Chinese a little bit and read books about history. So, yeah, that's it.
- Interviewer: Did you work before you came to China?
- Interviewee: I've been in internships, but basically came to China for my Master's immediately after my bachelors.
- Interviewer: Are you funded by the government or self-funded?
- Interviewee: Yeah, CSC (Chinese scholarship council).
- Interviewer: Is it competitive to apply that scholarship?
- Interviewee: I mean, it's hard to tell. The process is quite long. But in terms of the competitiveness, I think in the UK, it's probably not very competitive. I remember, there is a reception that can help the scholarship recipients in the Chinese embassy

in London. And, it's only about thirty of us. The question was in the UK, the number of scholarship recipients was relatively small. For example, there was four of us who applied for my university, and we all got it. But, I think, our university automatically allocated a certain number of places. Well, I would say not so particularly competitive.

Part2: Perceptions on the reasons underlying their educational choices.

- Interviewer: What motivated you to study abroad?
- Interviewee: So, I think I was keen to spend some more time in China after my bachelor's. Also, in terms of the major, I'm studying here, I've always wanted to work for civil service in the UK, so that ended up something like that. So, I felt that the courses fit. And, also, I'm having a bit more experience that would be advantageous to my future applications to jobs.
- Interviewer: So it seems like it's mainly about the future career, right?
- Interviewee: Yes. Definitely.
- Interviewer: Why [the selected university]?
- Interviewee: [the selected university] was not my first choice. Coz, we have to choose three universities. I think, I can't remember, maybe [University 1, University 2], then [the selected university]. So, [the selected university] is actually my last choice, because the scholarship council chose the university for you, depending on the number of people, actually it wasn't my choice, as just was allocated. And I notice that the first two universities are in Beijing, the capital city, and [the selected university] is in [the selected university].
- Interviewer: Did you choose the university by location?
- Interviewee: Well, [University 1] has better reputation in Social Sciences and Humanity, which is the stuff probably the main reason why I was going to London University. Also, the three friends from my bachelor's were also applying to universities in Beijing. So that were just the factors. But, uh, yeah, I would say I think I was slightly more joyful to Beijing as a city that study there during my bachelor's ad one-year abroad as well.
- Interviewer: How did you know [the selected university]?
- Interviewee: I knew [the selected university] before, of course, it's a famous university. That was the reason.
- Interviewer: What did you expect from study abroad before you came to China?

- Interviewee: I think it's hard to pin down what I expected. I think for study perspective, I kind of do expect, perhaps, bigger classes, compared to the UK. Uh, because it's [the selected university], specifically, it's a prestigious university. Obviously, I expect it to be high quality, regarding the teaching, resources, facilities. Yeah, I didn't really have many specific expectations.
- Interviewer: How about life?
- Interviewee: Life? Because I've lived in Beijing for study, I think I expected life to be similar, in terms of having a decent amount of free time to do all the stuff. Uh, you know, I think in general, international students in China do have a comfortable life in a way. I think I expected life to be very good.
- Interviewer: And you have mentioned that you lived in Beijing before, could you say a bit more about that?
- Interviewee: Yes, since my bachelor's degree was in Chinese and history. So, it's part of my degree. I had to go to Beijing Normal University for one year, that was just Chinese study. And, although this was very good, it's just learning Chinese. Yeah, I have enjoyed it. It was very useful to my study, obviously, I learned a Dual Bachelors course to China, so not language degrees. To go abroad for the third year, it's a little long, but it's probably useful for giving you a Chinese kick-start really. It's very good.
- Interviewer: How is your Chinese language proficiency?
- Interviewee: I would say my Chinese is not improved much, looking to do HSK six. Actually, I tried to do HSK six before I came to [the city name], I failed, I got six marks off the past rate. I would say in terms of Chinese, since I am doing the same degree as well, most of our degree is in English. I would say my Chinese is kind of stayed the same since my bachelor's, hasn't changed huge amount. In my spare time, for example, I intern in a company, it was an international company and the customers all English. So, obviously, I didn't really get to practice my Chinese though as well.
- Interviewer: Will you be able talk to local Chinese people?
- Interviewee: Yeah, you know, I've read books in Chinese about my course, international relations stuff. Obviously, it's slow process, and I have to, you know, regularly each page, there's a few words that need to check. It's possible.

Part3 Study and life experience during the current mobility.

- Interviewer: How is the programme study?
- Interviewee: For the course, you have to gain certain number of credits, I think it's 26 credits to graduate, and dissertation. You have to do some specific classes, which include a basic Chinese class, 中国概况, you have to do like 公共素质课程, like

public quality something they call it. And the rest of them have to be from your own degree subject. I think most people do all the classes in the first year, and then in the second year, they, pretty much just writing the dissertation. In terms of how much time the classes take, in first year, most weeks, you have like four days of class, each day, you'll have maybe like four periods, so four times, fifty minutes. Because our course is taught by international college. Most of them are in English, some of them are in Chinese. Some professors, say their English is so good, they speak some Chinese as well. Then you can choose some, there are some courses available to us, they are taught in Chinese. In addition to that, the 中国概况, 公共素质课程, those were taught in Chinese.

- Interviewer: Are those international students the majority?
- Interviewee: in those classes, they are the majority. There are some specific classes where they are minority; but in general, in most classes, courses, they are majority.
- Interviewer: How about the interactions among students?
- Interviewee: Yeah, I mean we have to work on some like group presentations and things like that. So, kind like, we have to interact with each other. We do have some discussions as well. Sometimes, the teacher, obviously, we have a diverse class in terms of nationality, possibly, is able to ask someone from a country relevant to the topic we are discussing to explain something.
- Interviewer: How about the communication with the local students?
- Interviewee: I think, personally, I haven't really been very involved with campus life, because I start interning outside campus like in my second semester, I focus on that sort of campus life. But, I think there is probably a lot of international students who don't really interact with Chinese students. I think obviously, compared to the UK, there is a bigger gap between Chinese and international students, you know, not just in terms of the daily life, but also in terms of the administration work. In the UK, when you are arriving at your university, you probably standing in the same land as the local students, to many offices, follow many things. You know it's just you, and there is a British student, and there is Indian student. In China, it's very much like the international student office handles everything for international students, and the Chinese students' kind of separately. So it is very different in terms of that. Especially, since our course is one of the International College ones and students, actually, some Chinese students in our classes and then obviously, some of classes are available to people from different programmes. So, as I said before in some classes, they are actually majority Chinese students, like Public Budget Administration. This is definitely one noticeable gap compared to the UK.
- Interviewer: How is the guidance from the supervisor?

- Interviewee: In terms of my dissertation supervisor, I think I like my supervisor, actually, he offers very good guidance, he is very well-known in his field; he is too busy, compared to the UK, many many times more students than supervisors from the UK would, in term of access to him, is very limited. It's just a few office hours a week; and then in terms of emailing, I can tell he is really busy, he can rarely sort of engage in long form email conversations, just, “好的，是的，星期六或者星期五来我的办公室吧” . Sort of quite short sentences. Yeah, I would say very good supervisor, very helpful, but overworked.

- Interviewer: Are there any challenges in your study?

- Interviewee: I would say, obviously, because I'm a native speaker, many courses are taught in English. I'm kind of an advantage compared to other international students. I would say, in terms of the, for example, the essay writing, you know, writing papers, its standards, I would say it's easier than my bachelor's, in some ways; but obviously, I have a huge advantage coming from the UK. Because it's in English. Yeah, there was class like 中国概况， 公共素质课程， the Chinese stuff, I would say, the peppers, are easier than the classes, essentially, just listening to the lecturer and then usually for each class, you do one or two presentations. Uh, I wouldn't say any of it is particularly challenging, compared to what I was doing in the UK.

- Interviewer: How is the social life in China?

- Interviewee: It's good. The international students I think, you under more pressure to make friends in a way. Because especially if like me, you came on your own, you don't know anyone, you under pressure to make friends. In terms of making international friends, it's a very good environment, because, you have like your international dormitories. Just being abroad, it's easier to engage people in a way, because you know, you automatically have something to talk about. And in terms of making friends with the local, it's also pretty decent; obviously, there's no barrier, the university is organized. Again, I was involved more stuff outside the campus, I didn't experience so much myself, but I have few friends who you know, participate to do activities within campus like, uh, take Judo or whatever, it would be easy to meet people, local and international.

- Interviewer: Why you didn't involve the activities?

- Interviewee: I just intern in a company three days a week. I kind of organize my classes, because I was very keen to gain more work experience, I mostly, meet people outside the campus. I think one of the big things living in a big campus like this is very easy to just stay in campus. You know everything here, canteens, restaurants, coffee shops. So, I think I was very keen to live on campus and start interning in a company. So, actually, I didn't have much free time. It was just classes and interning, that's it.

- Interviewer: Could say a bit more about your internship?
- Interviewee: It's basically like a recruitment company. They organize activities for universities coming to China. So, it's a Chinese language school, but they also act as recruiter, organize internships for foreign students in China or foreign students coming to China. It's kind of exchange internship because I joined the company when [the city name] company was opening. My boss, he has another company which was an auto industry marketing firm. So, it's kind of mostly doing tasks for him. This company the auto industry as much as doing tasks in this future school. I was doing that three days a week. Therefore, I think it's over six-months part-time.
- Interviewer: It seems that you are quite career-oriented?
- Interviewee: Yeah, I would definitely say so. You know I'm not so interested in doing more academe after this, the very least need a break.
- Interviewer: How is the work environment in that company?
- Interviewee: I would say that it's a very good working environment, very diverse because of the team was, I would say two thirds are Chinese, one thirds are, so they second marriage children Dutch. So there are occasionally some other foreign interns. Most in the teams are Chinese. I think I did practice Chinese a little bit, I was doing a lot of translation as well like Chinese English translating contrasts, other resources. It's very good balance between international and Chinese work environment. And, the boss worked abroad in the US, and other countries many times. So, yeah, he had a very good perspective.
- Interviewer: How is the relationships among the colleagues?
- Interviewee: The relationship is very good. Those are my main friends actually, those colleagues in the company. The second time I was interning in a company in Qingdao. So, this is the third time, so, I've already spent probably a year in China in total. So, there won't be any cultural bias for me.
- Interviewer: Because you've been different places in China, Beijing, [the city name], Qingdao, so you see any differences in terms of the local cultural, social, work environment?
- Interviewee: I think [the city name] is the most business oriented. You know the business environment, it's very welcoming to foreigners, it's very welcome to entrepreneurs. One thing that is very exciting about [the city name] is just the opportunities available to people to start small business. And, through my internship, I was available to things like a little bit activities and events and stuff. And, in Beijing is not that business friendly anymore, like a few friends who they have their own companies, are considering leaving Beijing to go down south. And, Qingdao is a lot more relaxed. [the city name], the pace is kind of slower. Obviously, the services are

higher tech in Beijing, Qingdao, in terms of the faculties, the payment systems. But the electric vehicles here is very high as well.

- Interviewer: What is the most enjoyable experience?
- Interviewee: I think in my own life in [the city name], visiting parts of [the city name] is very enjoyable. You know the [a famous local sightseeing site], temples; [the city name] has many places. I think there are some events that I attended through my internship, I enjoyed very much. I wouldn't say there is specific event on my course that I enjoyed a lot. I think just the extraordinary experience of meeting my classmates was enjoyable. Because they come from a wide range of countries, like and you know, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Uganda, Indonesia, it's very diverse.
- Interviewer: How did you get the internship job?
- Interviewee: It is from the career website, Summer Jobs, running by the German Chambers of Commerce. I also looked on other sites, but I found the job there.
- Interviewer: Have you experienced any cultural barriers?
- Interviewee: Well, I think because I was in Beijing before, to be honest, nothing. When I came here was actually my third time in China. Because the first time was for a year abroad in Beijing.
- Interviewer: What support would you want to get from the university or your department?
- Interviewee: And the main support I would appreciate is better information about the course and the dissertation process. I think this is the biggest issue I have had it. So, compare to my bachelor's and the information provided about, you know, when we have to submit things, how these have to be done, it's quite bad, to be honest. Usually, it's just like a "Banzhang" who tells us something, whereas I think in the UK usually the dates would be chosen in advance. But here, often the "Banzhang" always tells us, you need to do this, you need to do this, maybe they give you a few days to do the task, that's probably the biggest issue, lack of information. I, someone who studied Chinese before, when I go to the university website, the Chinese version, and I'm trying to find information, often it's like 2017 year; the calendar of my course on the website might be too old. The information in Chinese is not super clear. It's very much the "Banzhang" told us what to do.

Part4 Relevant institutional supports for employability enhancement

- Interviewer: Do you see your experience of study abroad would help your career prospects, like career choices or career development?

- Interviewee: I would say, the actual studying would help my degree in a smaller extent. I wouldn't say a huge extent. I think, in the specific field, I'm interested in working in the politics and civil service, quite a lot of people have Master's; so I think it's now common for people to have a Master's. I think studying in China is obviously interesting. In the UK, it's still relatively small number of students who study degrees in China. But, I have to admit my interpersonal experience is probably useful to my career. It's the course I think I have learned some skills, you know, met interesting people. I would think both are equally useful.
- Interviewer: Have you tried any career service given by the university?
- Interviewee: I would use the system to look for internships recently. Because apart from finishing my dissertation, I want to find internships; I did use some platforms to look for companies and stuff. That system, not bad, but when I emailed student office to ask internships. I think those internships are mostly targeted at Chinese students. So, I did email them if those companies specifically needed translators. The reply was quite slower. The resources are specific to Chinese students. The career website, some resources I've seen from [the selected university] are for foreign students, but some are all for Chinese.
- Interviewer: What would you suggest your institution?
- Interviewee: If there was a list of companies who specifically looking for all interns. But, actually, on the career website, I did find those, like overseas interns in Chinese; but obviously, because it's all the same list, you just have to look through each kind of list to find out. So, if I haven't been like looking through each option, I wouldn't have found this. So, I think, if there was possibility of a separate list. To be honest, international students probably be like, make more efforts to learn Chinese here.
- Interviewer: Have you tried the career service in your previous university in the UK?
- Interviewee: I actually go to the career service and talk to them. I just email them, go to the website; I think in the UK, it's probably slight easier to get an appointment with the service and talking about the opportunities. I went to the career service a couple of times in the UK.
- Interviewer: The way they do things is different?
- Interviewee: Yeah, obviously, one of the benefits in the UK in general is the staff to student ratio, the number of students, and the number of staff; the smaller the class, the access you have to the teacher, obviously, because they are less busy, there are less students to deal with. And, as the same, the students service, more students and then the staff are less, it's harder to get access.

Part5 Future plan.

- Interviewer: Do you have any future plans after the Master’s study?
- Interviewee: I don’t want to stay in academia. I don’t want to study anymore. I think, I want to go back to the UK, look for jobs related to politics and civil servants, that kind of staff.
- Interviewer: Do you want to work in another country, internationally?
- Interviewee: I would think about in terms of my industry, you know, politics, civil servants, I can apply for it in my own country. I cannot really apply for a civil servant in other countries. In the case of other countries, you can actually apply, if it’s from another commonwealth country. But, obviously the UK is the best for the civil servant and stuff. I would stick to that. I was considering going abroad in my future, I wouldn’t mind having you know working for the foreign office future, which will maybe involves going abroad. But, for the next two years I would see myself in the UK.
- Interviewer: Would you recommend other international students coming to China for a degree study from your perspective? Any suggestions?
- Interviewee: I think, in comparison with the UK, the teaching, organization, I would say it’s quite as good. As my own experience, it’s worth it. If the students are motivated, and they’ll do interesting stuff outside of the class; obviously, there are interesting opportunities. But if you’re talking about just the course itself, maybe not, that’s from my own experience, depends on the person.
- Interviewer: Any suggestions for those foreigners who want to study abroad in China?
- Interviewee: Obviously, just improving your Chinese as much as possible, because there are many opportunities, also, trying to leave campus. I think there are lots of students, they stay in campus for weeks without leaving, so you can leave campus as much as you can and experience other things.

Second interview:

Part 6 Post-graduation experience

- Interviewer: Do you have to go back to [the selected university]?
- Interviewee: No, I have graduated in June 2019, so it’s basically two years. I came back to the UK in July, 2019; I’ve been back here for about 8 months. I spent 2 years in [the selected university] doing my Master’s degree, some of my classmates decided to stay for the third year. But I just did two years.

- Interviewer: Are you satisfied with the study in China regarding your job-hunting experience?
- Interviewee: I would say that I'm sort of neither satisfied nor unsatisfied by my study experience. I think it was inspiring, enjoying most of it. The classes were perhaps not particularly practical. I wouldn't say that I necessarily have used that much the information that I've learned in class in my job. So, I think, perhaps, gaining research experience and having to carry out sort of a large piece of research was useful as an exercise, did give me sort of useful experience. As I said the classes, they were OK, but I would say that they were not necessarily great. There were some OK like trips to some places, visiting some companies and some office.
- Interviewer: You mentioned previously that you wanted to be a public servant? So, what you are doing now is still the same thing?
- Interviewee: Yes. I'm a public servant. I am a policy advisor in Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- Interviewer: And you mentioned the classes were not practical? Did you get various perspectives?
- Interviewee: Actually, I think I did feel that I got various perspectives. I think in the field that I was studying, international relations, a majority of the ideological scopes are still western. For example, in the international relations theory class, most of the time, we were looking at international relations theories from the west. But I would still say we got an interesting range of perspectives. I think, as a westerner coming to China, having Chinese professors and Russian professors as well, I had perspectives maybe I wouldn't get in the UK. I mean, I think it's hard to say where an area of study comes from. I think in the area of studying international relations, most of the time, I think in most countries, they still spent looking at a lot of western, or lot of theories that were developed in the west still. While I think of my course, so the professors we looked at in general tended to be from the Europe or North America. So, the theoretical background we intended to look at, the theories were very much western. But, in terms of the international Asian tools we looked at, those obviously more focused in China, China Asia specific issues.
- Interviewer: How about the practical aspect that the course can do better?
- Interviewee: I think the degree is fundamentally more theoretical and more academic, for example, the Public Administration degree, it's not the same thing, but perhaps more case studies, perhaps more aspects of Public Administration, things like that would be more useful. It's like more model of UN, things like that.
- Interviewer: How is your work life now?

- Interviewee: I was fine with my job. I was offered very early for what I'm doing now. I was actually offered the job very soon after I came back from China. So I was offered the job in July because of the, I'm working for the government, I had to pass the security clearances, which meant I had to wait many months' time to start my job. The job hunt wasn't too difficult.
- Interviewer: Were you confident at the time you were looking for a job?
- Interviewee: I wouldn't say that I was particularly confident, I was average.
- Interviewer: How do you see being a public servant?
- Interviewee: I think firstly, personal interest, I've always been interested in politics, and policy. So I wanted to have a job related to those things. I think, secondly, having a job like this, I felt like I was making a positive contribution to society. Thirdly, I guess also salary and job security.
- Interviewer: Is it getting quite competitive now finding the job?
- Interviewee: I think in general in terms of the jobs in my area of policy, that's due to the Brexit, there were more jobs in the past few years as the government hire more people to work on Brexit-related issues. I think in general, the job market, I both see the public and private sector, seeing and people laid off, people are getting fired, things like that.
- Interviewer: Did the degree study play a role in what you're doing now like daily job responsibilities?
- Interviewee: My daily job responsibilities, I carry out research on policy areas. I take part in the plan of strategies for implementing policies. It's quite a broader role. My role is related to the Brexit. In terms of getting the job, it didn't really play a role. But, that's more due to the application process of that job. It's relating to passing the examination system instead of your specific qualifications. But obviously in other jobs, I think studying abroad can be seen as an advantage. Because I think not many people in the UK study abroad in China long term for degrees like masters. That probably sometimes people notice on your CV.
- Interviewer: Does that mean there is no close relation between your previous study and the things you are doing now?
- Interviewee: No. I wouldn't say there was a particularly close relation. I mean there are some aspects of research from my Master's which were useful, but other than that, my current role doesn't particularly have a strong relation to my Master's degree.
- Interviewer: What does having a career mean to you?

- Interviewee: I guess career means finding success in a role that I find it satisfying where I gain enough financial reward. I think for me the most important thing is that I find the job satisfying is a thing. If I don't, I won't be good at it.
- Interviewer: Will you take this job as a lifelong job?
- Interviewee: I think, definitely, I think it's possible that I work in this area for a lot of my life. I think it's very possible. I think there are a lot of people work in civil service for a long time because they find it's enjoyable and the benefits are good things like that. And they find what they are doing satisfying.

Kwan, Korea, Male, International E-commerce

Part1: Questions about some general profiles of the interviewee (e.g. family background, previous mobility, previous work and educational experience)

- Interviewer: 你是家里的独生子吗? (Are you the only child in your family?)
- Interviewee: 有一个妹妹, 两个小孩。 (I have a younger sister; two kids.)
- Interviewer: 父母是做什么的? (What do your parents do?)
- Interviewee: 老师。 (They are teachers)
- Interviewer: 本科是在韩国读的吗? (Did you do your first degree in South Korea?)
- Interviewee: 是的。 (Yes.)
- Interviewer: 你中文很好, 本科的时候就学了中文? (Your Chinese is excellent. Did you learn it in your first degree?)
- Interviewee: 本科的时候, 我在中国学了一年的汉语, 交换学生。两个学期。 (I learned Chinese language for one year when I was an undergraduate exchange student.)
- Interviewer: 所以读硕士不是你第一次来中国长期的学习。 (So this Master's study is not your first time to study in China.)
- Interviewee: 对。本科的时候来过一次, 还有旅游来过几次。 (No, once when I was an exchange student. I also came here for several times for travelling purposes.)

- Interviewer: 在韩国读本科你为什么会选择那样的专业? (Why did you choose that major for your bachelor's study?)
- Interviewee: 因为我高中毕业的时候, 中国经济发展起来了。然后, 发展得很快, 我觉得学了之后肯定有用的。而且中国离韩国很近。我本来的第一个专业是国际贸易。韩国本来就是出口贸易国, 25%主要是出口中国。所以, 我觉得学习中文还是有用的。(China had experienced rapid economic growth when I graduated from the high school. So, I thought it would be useful, and China is close to Korea. And my first degree was International Business. Korea is an export country; China as Korea's main export country, about 25% of the total. So, learning Chinese is useful as well.)
- Interviewer: 一个是中国的发展的情况, 还有就是对自己今后的就业的一个考虑。(It's your consideration of China's future prospects and that on your future careers.)
- Interviewee: 对。(yes.)
- Interviewer: 本科之后有工作经历吗? (Have you worked after your bachelor's.)
- Interviewee: 兼职的话目前也有, 当老师教韩语, 还有中韩语翻译。在韩国的时候教中文。利用自己的知识。(I did some part-time jobs and am doing some as well, teaching Korean, doing some Chinese Korean translation. I taught Chinese in Korea, by using my own knowledge.)
- Interviewer: 你是拿奖学金的吗? (Are you receiving any scholarship?)
- Interviewee: 对。中国政府奖学金。(Yes, CSC.)

- Interviewer: 当时本科做交换生的时候有没有经历什么文化上的冲突或者一些困难的事情? (Did you experience any cultural shocks or other difficulties when you were an exchange student previously?)
- Interviewee: 文化上的冲突没什么, 因为韩国中国没什么差太多. 没什么困难, 很方便。(No cultural shocks, I think it is because that there is no big cultural difference between South Korea and China. No difficulties. It is convenient.)
- Interviewer: 当时在哪个城市呢? (Which city did you go, that time?)
- Interviewee: [the city name] 。 (The same city as the current one.)
- Interviewer: 所以你已经很熟悉 [the city name] 这个地方了? (So you are quite familiar with this place already?)
- Interviewee: 对。所以没什么问题。会说中文再来的话就没什么问题。我身边不太会说中文的韩国同学第一次来中国, 就是语言方面有问题。(Yes. So, I don't have many problems. And I don't have language problems. My friends who came here for the first time may encounter some language problems.)
- Interviewer: 还有和当地人的一些交流什么的, 有没有不适应的地方? (And when you communicate with the locals, anything inconvenient?)
- Interviewee: 我的印象中, 大家都很亲切。大家都很亲切, 没什么矛盾, 没吵架过。(In my impression, people are really kind, really nice. No conflicts, no fights.)

Part2: Perceptions on the reasons underlying their educational choices.

- Interviewer: 为什么会选择来中国读硕士呢?
- Interviewee: 就是我大三的时候, 我觉得在中国挺好, 想有机会的话再来体验下。然后大四的时候, 我知道中国政府奖学金。然后, 我就申请来了。(My previous study experience in China was good, so I wanted to experience it again if given the opportunity. Then there was Chinese scholarship in my fourth year. I applied and here I am.)
- Interviewer: 当时怎么知道 [the selected university] 呢? (How did you know [the selected university] that time?)
- Interviewee: [the selected university] 的话, 因为我对中国比较感兴趣, 就比较了解中国文化。在中国, 名牌大学, 对我来说比较熟悉的一个城市, 所以在[the city name], 最好的大学就是[the selected university]。([the selected university], because I'm interested in China; I am relatively familiar with the Chinese culture. In China, ([the selected university]) is a top University. And I'm familiar with [the city name], this university is the best one in [the city name].)

Part3 Study and life experience during the current mobility.

- Interviewer: 课程如何? (How are/(is) the courses/programme?)
- Interviewee: 硕士两年。第一年主要是上课, 第二年主要是实习, 论文。(It is a two-year Master's. Mainly, we had courses in the first year, then internships, and dissertation in the second year.)
- Interviewer: 你对这样的课程满意吗? (Are you satisfied with the courses/programme?)

- Interviewee: 说实话吗? 上课的质量有点不好。不是我想象的那种。有些课是有帮助的, 大部分的课程没什么帮助。教学内容, 讲课方式。学生不听的有很多。比如说讲师一个人讲, 不管学生, 没有互动。(To be host? The quality of courses is not good, not as good as I expected. Some of the courses are helpful, majority not, in terms of the course contents, and teaching style. Many students don't really listen to those lessons. For instance, the lecturers just teach without giving much attention to the students, not interactions.)
- Interviewer: 课程是什么语言教授的呢? (What is language use of these courses?)
- Interviewee: 大部分都是中文课程。(The majority are Chinese language structured courses.)
- Interviewer: 你班里的留学生中国学生比例如何? (What is the international-Chinese students ratio?)
- Interviewee: 大部分是中国学生。不过, 我们专业留学生比例还比较多的。6.5/3.5 的比例。可能人数多, 互动会比较限制了。(The majority are Chinese students. However, we have relatively more international students in this major. Maybe it is the number of students, then interactions could be limited.)
- Interviewer: 和当地的学生交流多吗? (Do you interact with the local students often?)
- Interviewee: 好少。中国的学生和中国学生玩。外国学生和外国学生玩。就这样。少数的中国学生和我们交流, 但是大部分的中国学生不是。(Very limited (interaction). Chinese students socialise with Chinese students; foreign

students socialise with foreign students. Just like this. Very few Chinese students interact with us, most of them don't.)

- Interviewer: 为什么呢? (Why?)
- Interviewee: 我觉得他们害羞, 不好意思和外国人交流。可能自己的生活很难, 实习什么的。然后已经有中国朋友。不需要外国朋友。还是感觉外国朋友很麻烦, 问题很多。这个作业怎么做, 那个作业怎么做。(I think, maybe they are too shy to interact with foreigners. maybe, they are having a difficult time like doing internships? Or they already have their Chinese friends and no need to make friends with foreigners? Or maybe, they think that foreign students have a lot of problems like how to do deal with this work/assignment or that, which is quite troublesome.)
- Interviewer: 作业布置什么的没有在网上公布什么的? (Didn't you get your assignment online or somewhere else?)
- Interviewee: 我们有一个微信群。微信群会通知的。老师上课也会说。我觉得没什么问题。(We have a group on WeChat, in which we will be noticed. Lecturers will tell us as well. I don't see that as a problem.)
- Interviewer: 导师的帮助如何? 学习上的, 生活上的? (How is the support from your supervisor? Study? Life in general?)
- Interviewee: 基本上没有。我不知别的导师怎么样, 我自己的导师对外国学生没什么兴趣, 很关注中国学生。导师会和中国留学生聚餐什么的, 我们留学生就不会。经济学院办公室里的老师态度很差的。我们去问什么问题, 就是态度太差了, 不想说话。我真的不喜欢那样的态度。感觉每天生气的状态, 很烦的样子。有态度好的, 有几个态度完全很差。(Not some

much support. I don't know other supervisors. Mine is not interested in international students but care much about the Chinese students. My supervisor would have meals with Chinese students, not us. Teachers at the economics school are not so friendly. We go for them for some help, and they are being quite rude and refuse to reply. I really don't like such attitude. I feel that they are angry every day, upset. Some are nice, but some are extremely horrible.)

- Interviewer: 在学习上有什么困难? 怎么克服? (How is your study? Any difficulties? How did you handle those difficulties?)
- Interviewee: 就是论文, 用中文写, 就是最大的困难。先自己写, 然后让中国朋友帮我改一下。只能这样吧。就是在写的过程中, 会经常找导师确认下吧。这边改一下, 那边改一下。对我态度好的, 就是联系少而已。
(The most challenging thing is writing dissertation in Chinese. I firstly write and ask my Chinese friends to do proofread. When I'm writing, I often ask my supervisor to check and make some changes. My supervisor is nice, however, we have less contact.)
- Interviewer: 就是说社交上, 以后工作上就没有帮助到? (Social contact. Any support for your future careers?)
- Interviewee: 目前没有吧, 毕业后回韩国找工作, 他也帮不到我吧。(So far no. I don't my supervisor will be able to help me as I will go back to Korea to look for jobs.)
- Interviewer: 在学习上有比较享受的事? (Any enjoyable things during your study?)

- Interviewee: 在学习中交到了好多朋友吧。如果在韩国学习的话就不会交到那么多外国朋友。这一点是不同的。(I have made many friends. If I study in Korea, I wouldn't be able to make so many friends. This is a big different.)
- Interviewer: 刚开始来的时候是怎么建立朋友圈的呢? (How did you start to build up your friend circle when you just arrived here?)
- Interviewer: 班里有不少外国人, 然后吃个饭打招呼。也有通过必修课认识新的朋友。通过课程认识, 这是比较好的机会。在外面认识会比较困难吧。(There are many international students in the classroom, we may meet up and have a meal together. I also make some friends in the optional classes, which is a good chance to meet new people. Outside the classroom, it would be hard (to make friends).)
- Interviewer: 你的朋友主要是中国人还是国际学生? (Are your friends mainly Chinese or international students?)
- Interviewee: 国际学生。(International students.)
- Interviewer: 与不同文化的人交流, 你会有什么收获吗? (Any benefits you could get from communicating with people from various cultural backgrounds?)
- Interviewee: 与不同国家的人交流, 可以让我了解不同的文化。不同外语。(I can know different cultures and languages through communicating with people from different countries.)
- Interviewer: 平时如何社交? (How do you socialise with them?)
- Interviewee: 出去吃饭, 喝个咖啡, 桌游, 旅行。(We go out to have a meal, have a coffee, play table games, travel, etc.)

- Interviewer: 有参加过其他课外的活动吗? (Any other activities outside the classroom you have attended?)

- Interviewee: 我参加过学外语的活动, 认识过各种各样的不同国家的人, 喜欢学习外语的。这是校外的, 我的朋友推荐的。(I have joined language exchange activities, from there I met people from different countries and enjoy learning language. My friends recommended them to me such activities outside the campus.)

- Interviewer: 有机会了解中国文化吗? (Any other opportunities to learn Chinese culture?)

- Interviewee: 我自己看了很多中国的书。还有在中国体验, 旅游。但是主要的知识来自于书籍。(I have read many books. I also travel around China. But mainly, I gain such knowledge from books.)

- Interviewer: 旅行当中有什么趣事吗? (Anything interesting during your travel in China?)

- Interviewee: 比如说我去一个地方, 住在旅社。然后和一个房间里刚刚认识的人一起去旅游, 他是中国人。因为我很喜欢这样。在韩国, 有年龄差异带来的问题。在中国没有。在韩国日本有。和长辈交流的时候, 非常小心, 礼貌。比我大一岁也要很尊重他, 说敬语。在中国没有这样的麻烦。我可以随便和陌生人交流, 交朋友。不用考虑到很多。所以和陌生人随便说话就很好。在韩国的话完全不能这么做, 但在中国可以。感觉人与人更亲切。(For instance, I went to a place, and stayed at a hotel. I travelled with a person just met in the room. He is Chinese. I quite like this. In Korea, we have to be aware of some issues due to the seniority; but, here in China,

this seems to be not a problem. In Korea and Japan, you have to be very cautious and polite when you communicate with seniors, even with those who are one-year older than me. This won't be a problem in China. So I find it is more free to communicate with strangers and make friends in China. In Korea, this is totally inappropriate, but in China, I can do this. I feel people are more close.)

- Interviewer: 还有别的趣事吗? (Any other interesting things?)
- Interviewee: 我在韩国认识的一个中国朋友。他在韩国留学的时候, 我帮助他很多; 我带他去各种地方玩过。后来他就回国了。他是东北人。然后, 有一天我去哈尔滨玩, 他是哈尔滨附近的人。他就来哈尔滨接我, 请客到底。他很大方, 和南方的人不一样。他就真的请客到底, 吃饭, 交通。我都不好意思。但是, 他说客人来了就一定要请客到底, 不让我花钱。(I met a Chinese friend in Korea. I helped him a lot when he was studying in Korea; I brought him to travel around. Later on, he returned back to China. He lives in the Northern part of China. One day, I travelled around there, where was near his home. He then came and treated me everything, food, transportation. He is so generous, which is different from Southerners. I feel it's not a small amount of money and hesitate to accept this, but he insisted to do so.)
- Interviewer: 你还有一个比较, 南方人相对来说小气? (Then you have a comparison. Southerners are relatively stingy?)
- Interviewee: 也不是小气。我觉得中国朋友大部分是大方的。我觉得东北人特别大方一点。我也有 [the city name]的朋友。我第一次来[the city name]的时候, 他请我吃饭, 自己的家。在韩国, 朋友来也不会这样, 就除非自己很有钱。还有那个时候, 不是我一个人去的, 我还带了一个人去。他

不认识我朋友，他还请了我的朋友。(I wouldn't say Southerners are stingy. I think most of my Chinese friends are generous. However, the Northerners even more. I also have friends in [the city name]. When I first came here, he treated me at his house. In Korea, we wouldn't do this unless the rich. And that time, I was not alone, I went there with my friend. He didn't know my friend, but he covered my friend's expense as well.)

- Interviewer: 如果回韩国，会有什么反文化的冲突吗？(If you return back to Korea, any cultural shock you would expect?)
- Interviewee: 回韩国，我的支付宝就没有用，我只能刷卡。手机支付很方便。还有中国吃，出行比较便宜。回到韩国，太贵了。同样的钱在中国会丰富一点。(Returning back to Korea, I would be able to use Ali-pay, I have to use my card. Using you phone to pay is very continent when going out. Also, the living cost in Korea is higher. Certainly, you would get more things in China by spending the same amount of money.)
- Interviewer: 你的社交生活还是蛮丰富的。(Your social life is good.)
- Interviewee: 但是我的中国朋友少了一点。我当时来中国觉得应该会有很多中国朋友。结果没有。有是有，比较少。(But I don't have many Chinese friends. I expected to make more before I came here. However, I don't as many as I want, just a few.)
- Interviewer: 比如说那种 close friends。(like a close friend?)
- Interviewee: 没有。本科的时候认识的有。硕士的时候真的没有。(No. I have when I was an exchange student here. This time, I haven't found any.)

- Interviewer: 你觉得你有交到比较好的国际学生? (How about other good friends who are international students?)
- Interviewee: 有的。(Yes.)
- Interviewer: 那为什么中国学生? (Why not Chinese?)
- Interviewee: 因为他们不和我们玩。研一的时候他们就实习什么的。没时间吧。(They don't interact with us. They intern since the first year starts. (maybe) they don't have free time.)
- Interviewer: 在社交这一块, 你想学校, 学院给与什么帮助吗? (Any support you want to get from your university for your social life?)
- Interviewee: 在来中国之前, 有些大学就学院帮留学生安排中国学生帮他们适应中国生活。但是我们学校没有。对中国学生比较好吧, 可以有认识外国学生的机会。有喜欢和外国学生交流的中国学生, 但比较少。可能中国学生怕沟通不了吧。哑巴英语; 还是怕我们不会说中文。在学校外面的人有喜欢韩国的各种元素, 但在学校的话, 很少。可能都是学霸吧。(Before arriving here, some universities would allocate some Chinese students to help international students' transition to the study in China. But, this university doesn't provide any support in this aspect. I think Chinese students have benefits too like taking a chance to make friends with foreign students. Are they afraid of speaking English? Do they worry about our Chinese language proficiency? People outside the campus, they like Korean elements, but inside the campus, just a few people would be interested in these things. Maybe they are all intellectuals.)

Part4 Relevant institutional supports for employability enhancement

- Interviewer: 你觉得留学的体验会帮助到你今后职业的选择和发展吗?
(Do you see your study here in China could benefit your future careers?)

- Interviewee: 看人吧。看自己嗯嘛过的吧，结果会不一样。第一年的课很多，就自己好好学习。第二年，没什么课了，就要自己做一些事情，不然太浪费了。第二年开始学习外国语，还有找一些兼职，实习。这样过了，感觉还不错，然后去各个地方旅游。我觉得这个是人生当中不错的机会，年轻的时候。不一定是为了什么找个工作。这个是一个好的过程。当然，就是名牌大学毕业之后，找工作也有一定的帮助。但是更重要的是怎么过这个时间。同样的时间，每个人过得都不一样。所以我觉得好好过这个时间是最重要的。(It depends on people, depends on how you decide to spend your time, then you will get different results. The first year, I studied hard as there were lots of courses. The second year, not so many courses, I chose to do some other stuff otherwise it would be a waste of time. I learned foreign languages and found some part-time jobs and travelled around. I think it would be good experience in my life, not necessarily for finding a job. It is a good process. Of course, because it is a good university, it would be good for my future career. But, more importantly, how you see your time abroad matters. The same time, but people choose to live differently. I think that matters the most.)

- Interviewer: 你有去学校找一些有用的 career service 吗? (Have you find some useful career service from university?)

- Interviewee: 学校没什么。中国学生在 [the selected university] 的话有很多机会。很多企业来[the selected university] 办招聘会，这样的很多。像外国学生的话，除非英美国家的人以外，不太受欢迎。有一些专门针对留学生

的招聘信息，学校会 email 通知。(I haven't found any. Chinese students can get plenty of such opportunities. Many companies would come to and set job fairs at [the selected university]. But for us as foreigners, unless you are from America or the UK, they are not welcomed in the job fairs. Some recruitment information, more specifically targeted at the international student group, would be emailed by university.)

- Interviewer: 你有参加过学校组织的招聘会吗？ (Have you joined any?)
- Interviewee: 去过一个。看过大概什么样子，但是没有什么合适的。在 [the city name]比较少，上海很多。(I have been to one. I got a general idea if what it looked like, but I couldn't find a job that fitted me. There are few (job opportunities) in [the city name], but more in China)
- Interviewer: 在就业方面学校可以提供什么帮助？ (Any other benefits for job-hunting?)
- Interviewee: 学校的话，就是 [the selected university] 的名声，平台。在中国找工作有很大的帮助。我也是在这里找兼职的时候，他们也是听到[the selected university] 的名字，就感觉，看着好一点。(The repudiation of this university. When I was looking for part-time work in China, when (employers) heard the name of the university, the name of university helped a lot,
- Interviewer: 在韩国呢？ (How about that in Korea?)
- Interviewee: 在韩国不知道 [the selected university] ，只知道北大，清华吧。但是拿到中国政府奖学金读研究生，所以应该还可以。回韩国发的话，有利于在中国有市场的公司就职。毕竟在中国 3 年，会说中文，比较了解中国。需要中文会有利。(In Korea, (they) don't know [the selected university],

they only know Peking University, or Tsinghua University. But I am receiving scholarship for doing this Master's, which would help me to get a position in a Chinese company in Korea. After all, I have stayed in China for three years; I can speak Chinese; I know Chinese culture quite well. The Chinese language really is an advantage.)

- Interviewer: 你觉得整个留学体验值得吗? Do you consider the whole degree study in China worthwhile?
- Interviewee: 值得。如果自费来的话, 因为我对整个课程不是很喜欢, 拿奖学金是值得的。收获很多的。就是学习, 拿到说是学位, 学习外国语, 还可以认识到很多国际朋友, 还有旅游。(Yes. As I am not satisfied with the courses, I think it's more worthwhile if you are funded. There are plenty of things you can get: study, degree, foreign language learning, international friends, and travel.)
- Interviewer: 如果你只是在韩国拿那样一个学历, 其它方面会缺失很多?
(If you simply get a degree in Korea, you may lose opportunities to learn other things.)
- Interviewee: 对, 肯定不一样。在韩国, 读研的话, 不会遇到很多外国朋友。也没有现在轻松, 自由。现在拿着奖学金, 经济就还好。而且, 因为是外国留学, 感觉不一样, 和国内读的。感觉留学是比较好的印象, 让人羡慕的那种。(Yes, definitely. If I do a Master's in Korea, I wouldn't be able to meet many foreign friends, and also to get such freedom. The scholarship solves my economic issue.) Compared with getting a domestic (Korean) degree, I feel like, studying abroad seems different: giving people a good impression, one kind that attracts an admiring look from others.)

Part5 Future plan.

- Interviewer: 今后的发展方向? (Your future plan?)
- Interviewee: 可能去日本, 留中国, 或者回韩国。但是 60%先回韩国工作。然后在考虑其他国家。不然学了外语就。我也不喜欢一直留在韩国。
(Maybe I would go to Japan, stay in China, or return back to Korea. I think, for 60 percent, I would return back to Korea. And then, I may consider going to other counties, considering my foreign language skills, and I don't want to stay in Korea forever.)

Second Interview:

Part 6 Post-graduation experience

- Interviewer: 你已经毕业? (Have you graduated?)
- Interviewee: 没毕业。因为病毒的原因, 延迟到 6 月份。烦死了。(Not graduated. Because of the Covid. It has been postponed until June. So annoying.)
- Interviewer: 就是推迟了。(It's delayed.)
- Interviewee: 就答辩也推迟了。本来 2 月答辩, 变成 5 月中旬了。(And the thesis defence as well. I was supposed to have it in February, now it is moved to the middle of May.)
- Interviewer: 那你的职业规划, 有在找工作吗? (Then how is your plan, are you looking for a job?)
- Interviewee: 现在不可以找啊, 还没毕业, 证书还没拿到, 不知道什么时候才能好。现在等通知。就 2 月 20 的答辩延迟到 5 月, 原来 3 月 30 的毕

业典礼延迟到 6 月。所以什么都没确定，不能找工作。（在韩国）找到工作了，回中国的话也很麻烦。但是，在准备各种资格证，语言证考试。我刚来韩国，已经考了两个考试了。（I haven't got the certificate yet and don't know when. If I find one (in Korea), it would be troublesome to come back to China. But now, I am preparing and working hard to get different types of qualifications like foreign language tests, etc. I just arrive in Korea; however, I had two exams already.)

- Interviewer: 就是各种资格考试。（A lot of exams for gaining qualifications.）
- Interviewee: 一个是语言的；还有工作相关的考试，比如说国际贸易有关的证书。（One is related to language, and others are for gaining qualifications in relation to my work in the E-commerce field.）
- Interviewer: 这是针对韩国就业市场需求的吗？（Are these for meeting the needs of labour market in Korea?）
- Interviewee: 对，是针对韩国的就业市场需求。（Yes. These are for Korea's labour market needs.）
- Interviewer: 能否讲一下你现在的职业规划？（What is your plan now?）
- Interviewee: 我现在要毕业，然后学业证书才可以申请。现在只能提高自己的一些水平。只能这样了。了解一些相关职业信息。（I need to get graduated and use it to apply for a job. Now the only thing I could do is to enhance my skills and know more job-related information. That's it.）
- 就是网上看一些求职信息。（To get some information for job opportunities?）

- 嗯。还有刚刚考了中文的汉语水平考试，下周结果会出来。结果出来之后，还准备英语考试。这个也需要。还有计算机软件操作，什么 Word, Excel 一些。(Yes. I am just finished the Chinese language proficiency test and will be able to get the result next week. I am also preparing tests for English language, Microsoft skills like Word, Excel.)
- Interviewer: 在韩国毕业生当中，这是普遍的现象吗？(Is this quite common among graduates in Korea?)
- Interviewee: 对。韩国都需要这样的，就业竞争很大。(Yes. It is a Must in Korea, so competitive.)
- Interviewer: 就像你这样海外经历，硕士学位？(People like you, having overseas degree study experiences at Master's level?)
- Interviewee: 对。因为除非是工大的毕业生好找工作，文科这类的没什么啊。主要工科的计算机专业，生物专业。(Yes. Unless you are doing majors in Engineering, Science, like Computer and Biotechnology, there are less opportunities for Majors in Arts.)
- Interviewer: 现在找工作信心程度高吗？(Are you confident in finding a job?)
- Interviewee: 还不知道哎，因为大家都想要大企业工作。但是我就怕，现在竞争大，我不太有信心。但是条件还可以。在韩国找大企业（工作）的话，申请是一个很漫长的事情。需要很长一个过程，我不想再耽误时间了。很矛盾，大企业的话要至少六个月才可以。那 6 月 30 号之后，又要 1 年耽误，也不一定百分之百合格。所以到时候再决定吧。原先呢，很多韩国企业去中国发展，做生意。所以需要有人会说中文。之前有了 SARS 之后，

就有下降。现在又有了这个病毒，他们意识到中国市场不稳定，慢慢搬到了越南。所以，现在中国市场需求下降。所以担心。(Not sure, everyone wants to work in big companies. I am worried about the fierce competition, and I am not confident. My conditions are okay. It is a long application process to work at a big company. And I don't want to waste time. This is tricky. I need to wait for at least six months if I apply for a big company. That means, I need to take another year off after I get my degree in the end of June, and it is not promised to get a job in that company. Then, I have to leave the decision at that time. Before, there are many companies choosing to expand their business in China. And these companies need to hire someone who can speak Chinese. And, the needs declined after the outbreak of SARS previously. Now various comes again, thus, companies may realize that China's market is not stable; they may move their sites to Vietnam. So if China's market needs decline, it is a worrying situation.)

- Interviewer: 会不是有什么负面影响? (Any negative impacts on you?)
- Interviewee: 情绪很差, 很累, 都是这种负面影响。但是没有办法这能这么做。因为我们90后开始, 91, 92, 93, 这一段是“baby boom”的时代, 那个时候, 生了很多孩子。我这年龄的人是很多的, 最惨的。可能再十年后生的就轻松一点。我这个年龄段最难找的。(I'm exhausted, upset, all these negative impacts. But it's just like this, I couldn't help, because we are the post 90's generation, in the years of 'baby boom.' At that time, (our parents' generation) gave birth to many kids; then, I have so many peers at my age, which is the worst. Maybe, it would be easier for me if I was born ten years later. It is hard for people at my age to look for jobs.)