The trajectories, experiences and post-graduation intentions of African students at universities in China

By

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Statement of Originality

I, Benjamin Joseph Mulvey, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that the material presented in this thesis is my original work, except that which is indicated in the Acknowledgements. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on academic honesty, copyright and plagiarism in writing the thesis, and that no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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Abstract

This thesis examines an emergent pattern of international student mobility within the Global South: that of international students from across the African continent who migrate to China to undertake degrees. Despite the fact that ~6% of African tertiary students study abroad, a higher proportion than in any other region, and that China is now the second most popular destination country among African international students, there remains a paucity of research into this emergent student flow. What empirical research does exist is limited in terms of theory-building and is poorly integrated into the existing literature on international student mobility. By employing a number of concepts from postcolonial theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice, this thesis accordingly examines both the discourse surrounding this nascent migration pattern, and the nature of the mobility itself in terms of students' migration decision-making (both pre- and post- study) and experiences.

The research draws on semi-structured interviews carried out remotely with African students in several cities across China between December 2019 and April 2020. The interviews focused on students' pre-mobility lives, including their social and economic background, their experiences in China, and their life plans for after their graduation. The research also utilises a number of policy texts related to international student mobility produced by the Chinese government.

The findings from the research were written up in five substantive articles which are at various stages of publication in international peer-reviewed journals. Taken together, the articles offer a novel means of theorising and comprehending migration within the Global South. I explore how China's shifting structural position within the global political economy is mirrored in the discourse surrounding student mobility in Chinese policy texts, and how this position also shapes the decision-making and capital accumulation strategies of students

from across the African continent. I argue that the specific modalities of integration into the global economy of the sending region and host country lead to particular discursive formations, and also shape the decision-making, capital accumulation strategies and trajectories of students. In addition, the thesis highlights how incipient flows of international student migrants, such as those between various African countries and China, are bringing into question a number of the axioms in the study of international study mobility that were developed with reference to more established migration patterns, which tend to flow from other regions to the West. These include, for example, the idea that international students are generally privileged members of the global middle class who seek an education abroad as part of a strategy to accumulate cultural capital and reproduce social privilege. In outlining the complex and multidimensional decision-making processes, experiences and future plans of these students, I highlight that many of the assumptions within existing literature related to international student mobility, particularly around the pre-mobility lives, decision-making processes and post-study plans of international students, are challenged by the evidence from this study.

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'能做事的做事，能發聲的發聲。有一分熱，發一分光，就令螢火一般，也可以在黑暗裡發一點光，不必等候炬火。此後如竟沒有炬火：我便是唯一的光。倘若有了炬火，出了太陽，我們自然心悅誠服的消失。不但毫無不平，而且還要隨喜讚美這炬火或太陽；因為他照了人類，連我都在內' – 魯迅

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Chapter One: Introduction

Global context

Patterns of international migration are changing, in line with the 'rebalancing' of the global political economy that has unfolded over the last several decades. Countries in the Global South, such as China, have achieved consistently high economic growth rates (Raghuram et al., 2014), and in parallel with this rapid economic growth are emerging as migration destinations, where previously they have been perceived primarily as source countries of international migrants (Zhu and Qian, 2020). Global patterns of international student mobility are no exception to this trend. The geography of international education does remain highly unequal, in that the majority of the 5.3 million students enrolled in tertiary education outside their home country in 2017 were moving from Global South to destinations in the Global North (UNESCO, 2021). As an example, over six hundred thousand mainland Chinese students went abroad for tertiary study in 2017, predominantly to Anglophone Western countries (Choudaha, 2017). However, China has rapidly become one of the largest destination countries for international students as well as one of the largest source countries, having hosted nearly 258,122 students for undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in 2018 (MOE, 2019). The government also provides a large number of scholarships for these students – 63,041 in 2018 (MOE, 2019).

The focus of this thesis is on one particular flow of students which is representative of this broader trend – that of African students to China. Demand for higher education across Africa has risen due to a number of factors. Africa's population is relatively young and is also growing rapidly when compared to any other region – as a result, it is estimated that half of the world's young people will be African by the year 2100 (MasterCard Foundation, 2019). At the same time, educational attainment and household income levels have risen gradually

across the continent, driving demand for higher education (Schullman, 2017). For a number of reasons which we will explore in this thesis, related for example to the desirability of overseas education and the potential of overseas credentials to produce advantages in the labour market (e.g. Waters, 2008), and to the lack of capacity in African higher education systems (Kritz, 2015), many Africans move overseas for higher education. In fact, a higher proportion of African tertiary students are globally mobile than in any other region, with ~6 percent undertaking higher education outside their home country (Kritz, 2015). This means that African students comprise ~10 percent of all internationally mobile students, despite a lower overall rate of tertiary enrolment in comparison to other regions (Schulmann, 2017).

While around 50 percent of these students move regionally within Africa, many move further afield. The most popular destinations historically have been former colonial metropoles in Europe, such as the UK and France. However, other emergent destinations are becoming popular: these include India, Russia, and Malaysia, as well as China, for example (UNESCO, 2021). China is now host to the second largest number of African international higher education students, after France, which hosts a large number of students from former North and West African colonies (UNESCO, 2021). In China, students from African countries constitute the second largest regional grouping after students from Asian countries (MOE, 2019). 81,562 students from across Africa studied in China in 2018 - around 17 percent of the total number of international students in the country (MOE, 2019). These students hail from across the continent, with the largest number coming from Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe (see Table 1). Of these students, 59,249 were seeking a full degree and the rest were on non-degree programmes.

Table 1. Total numbers of degree, non-degree and scholarship holding students from African countries registered in Chinese universities in 2018 (MOE, 2019)

| | **Number of students** | | | **Number of scholarships** |
Country	Total	Degree	Non-degree	received
Nigeria	6845	5467	1378	512
Ghana	6475	5349	1126	689
Tanzania	5673	4633	1040	691
Ethiopia	5532	4086	1446	581
Zimbabwe	5225	4388	837	279
Zambia	4342	3717	625	356
South Africa	2981	1565	1416	186
Sudan	2883	1795	1088	754
Rwanda	2660	2310	350	489
Morocco	2612	1139	1473	170
Kenya	2553	1742	811	509
Cameroon	2535	1686	849	314
Egypt	2247	1448	799	724
Dem. Rep. of Congo	2264	1429	835	283
Rep. of Congo	2173	1504	669	281
Uganda	1570	942	628	269
Somalia	1564	1320	244	289
Burundi	1227	967	260	209
Equatorial Guinea	1075	798	277	264

South Sudan	1051	705	346	95
Algeria	1036	668	368	297
Sierra Leone	983	600	383	192
Côte D'Ivoire	946	554	392	144
Guinea	861	418	443	136
Liberia	802	637	165	148
Madagascar	797	537	260	206
Senegal	797	450	347	177
Mali	788	434	354	292
Djibouti	725	486	239	101
Mauritius	714	477	237	92
Malawi	708	551	157	216
Botswana	688	546	142	166
Angola	684	577	107	168
Namibia	675	626	49	89
Mozambique	659	444	215	226
Benin	634	496	138	227
Niger	538	350	188	179
Tunisia	532	180	352	85
Gabon	518	339	179	118
Togo	483	295	188	141
Guinea-Bissau	373	288	85	118
Chad	372	291	81	164
Lesotho	358	292	66	73
Comoros	330	199	131	57

Gambia	317	187	130	61
Cape Verde	276	254	22	158
Mauritania	266	141	125	86
Eritrea	265	221	44	90
Burkina Faso	205	130	75	68
Central African Republic	188	121	67	72
Libya	180	136	44	11
Sao Tome and Principe	171	151	20	129
Swaziland	132	121	11	2
Seychelles	91	62	29	49
Total	**81,562**	**59,249**	**22,313**	**12,508**

Africa appears to have a particular geopolitical significance for the Chinese government (e.g. Bodomo, 2018), which underpins China's focus on recruiting students from African countries. This explains the large number of scholarships provided to African countries by China: a pledge was made at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018 to provide 50,000 government scholarships for higher education to African countries over a three year period (2019-2021) (FOCAC, 2018). To put this into perspective, the Commonwealth Scholarship funded 26,000 students globally for study in the United Kingdom between its conception in 1959 and 2016 (CSC, 2017).

According to China's Ministry of Education, 12,508 African students were awarded scholarships by the Chinese government in 2018. This means the majority of African students are self-financing. Scholarship holders are fairly evenly distributed across levels of study – 3687 were studying for doctoral qualifications, 5026 for master's level, and 3621 for

undergraduate (MOE, 2019). All African nations are included amongst awardees, and Sudan, Egypt, Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia received the largest number of scholarships respectively (MOE, 2019).

Rationale

This thesis is primarily concerned with developing theoretical insights into processes of international migration, given that the mobility of Africans to China represents an emergent shift in migration patterns from global peripheries towards countries associated with this 'rebalancing' (Raghuram, 2013) of the global political economy. The study of 'South-South' student migration has the potential to contribute to migration theory-building, and this has been noted in recent scholarship on the topic. For example, Lipura and Collins (2020, p. 353) note that the 'presumed geographical directionality of ISM has been pivotal in establishing many of the key theoretical insights that now dominate the field and assembling some of the key blind-spots' in research on international student mobility. In other words, the movement of students 'westwards', from the largest 'source countries' of international students, such as China and India, has informed much of the theory around the migration of international students. This has led to a number of theoretical assumptions becoming almost axiomatic in the field. However, these assumptions may not be straightforwardly applicable to educational migration within the Global South. For example, student mobility is often assumed to be a strategy amongst privileged members of the 'global middle-class' to transmit social privilege across generations (e.g. Waters, 2008), but it is increasingly recognised that international study is not always associated with privilege (e.g. Yang, 2018a). In various ways, and particularly in the case of mobility between locations in the Global South, students' decision-making, experiences and post-graduation mobility plans may be more appropriately couched

in terms of disadvantage and disparity of experience among students, as the empirical chapters of this thesis will explore.

Moreover, at the level of national discourse around international student mobility, there is a level of understanding that the discourse of internationalisation processes in general and international student mobility specifically are formed by an amalgamation of neoliberalism and humanitarianism (Bamberger et al., 2019), and that, in turn, these discourses mirror global inequalities that are vestiges of colonialism (Stein and De Andreotti, 2016). However, outside the West these theoretical axioms are not necessarily applicable, and yet there have been few attempts to understand the discourses surrounding student mobility in the Global South.

Thus, a premise of this thesis is that focusing on Africa-China student mobility offers an opportunity to contribute to, adapt and expand upon current theorisations of both the discourse within policies surrounding student mobility and the mobility itself. As Yang (2018b) notes, existing empirical studies of international students in China are quite fragmented and not well integrated with other work on international student mobility. Yang's observation is accurate, as research on international students in China as a whole thus far has tended to focus on the experiences of students, in particular through the lenses of interculturality (e.g. Dervin, Du, & Härkönen, 2018; Tian, Dervin, & Lu, 2020). There has been relatively little interaction with the other literature on the processes of international migration.

In addition, with regard to the body of work on Africa-China student mobility specifically, Yang's observation also holds true. The majority of the research on this topic has focused specifically on students' decision-making and opinions as they relate to China's 'soft power' and political influence across Africa (Haugen, 2013; King, 2013; Mulvey, 2020). In terms of

geopolitics, African international students are deemed by the Chinese government as an important part of a 'grand strategy'. Securing access to natural resources in Africa, as well as 'tapping' emerging markets and shaping global governance norms through interactions with African countries are all important parts of this (e.g. Cáceres & Ear, 2013). Therefore, understanding Africa-China student mobility from the perspective of soft power is clearly of importance given the public diplomacy rationale underpinning China's recruitment of African international students (explored in Chapters Three and Four).

However, focusing on how the opinions and actions of students contribute to soft power and public diplomacy also leads to a neglect of the agency of the students, and of the processes of migration in this unique case, a potentially rich vein of empirical study. A focus on these aspects of Africa-China migration is timely and worthwhile in that doing so serves to contribute to a better of understanding of 'who' internationally mobile students within the Global South are, and why they migrate. These are both issues that may become increasingly prescient in the future, as the shift in the global political and economic centre of gravity towards Asia and away from the West is already evident and likely to continue in the long term. The results of this shift in terms of flows of international student migrants are increasingly clear. In 2000, approximately 63 percent of international students were enrolled in North American or Western European universities, compared to 14 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, but by 2017 East Asia and the Pacific hosted around half the number of international students that North America and Western Europe did (Lipura & Collins, 2020). In this time period, the latter region also lost around 11 percent of the share of globally mobile students. The importance of developing research on educational migration between Africa and China has also been noted within scholarly literature, yet there are still relatively few empirical studies on the topic. King (2013, p. 209) for example highlights 'a need for many more in-depth studies of the China-Africa tapestry unfolding across the continent'.

Theoretical framework

This section provides a brief outline of the theoretical framework that is employed throughout each of the articles. Due to the fact that this is a thesis by publication, consisting of several separate published or re-submitted journal articles, the frameworks in each article are slightly different, drawing upon a wide range of auxiliary concepts. However, various concepts from postcolonial and world-systems theory, as well as Bourdieu's *theory of practice* are employed in all of the chapters other than the first. The first article offers a broad overview of the policy context in order to situate the study, employing a policy-as-discourse approach to understanding how international students are constructed in Chinese policy. It thus differs from the other four.

The frameworks in each of the articles draw on a number of concepts from the migration studies literature, providing a lens to understand how both the discourse and actual processes of migration are shaped by structural forces and global inequalities. Overall, the theoretical approaches taken in the articles respond to calls within the field of migration studies for a better understanding of how structural power shapes trajectories. The following section provides a general introduction to theory drawn upon in various ways across the latter four articles.

Postcolonial Theory

> A global perspective of one kind or another has always been central to the
>
> postcolonial project, responding as it must to the conditions that brought it into being
>
> such as transnational imperialisms, geopolitical relations, analytical and everyday
>
> comparativisms and, of course, globalization. In recent years the social sciences
>
> (including human geography) tended to approach the worldwide through reference to
>
> globalization (Sidaway et al., 2014, p. 5)

An aim of this thesis is to understand firstly, how China's long-term structural and ideological position within the contemporary global political economy is mirrored in the discourse of student mobility and secondly, how the processes of migration and the agency of students are shaped by the nature of China's embeddedness in this global system. The concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality is employed to express China's position as it relates to the discourse produced in national policy and to students' migration plans. The concept is useful in expressing the multifaceted position of China in relation to 'peripheral' countries in Africa and elsewhere. The concept draws on elements of postcolonial theory (e.g Gandhi, 2019) and of world-systems theory (e.g. Wallerstein, 2004). In the following section I will outline each of these approaches, and the way they are combined in this thesis.

The term 'postcolonial theory' refers to a broad set of theoretical perspectives that are applied across a wide range of fields, and are informed by a swathe of theories, such as Marxism, post-structuralism, and feminism (Nash, 2014). This is why Leela Gandhi (2019) describes the field of postcolonial theory as a 'meeting point and a battleground' for different academic disciplines and theories - it remains a diffuse term, lacking a coherent methodology. The 'post' in postcolonialism is generally understood to have two meanings. Firstly, it refers to the end of direct colonialism, although this is one criticism of the term, as in reality, most would agree that the world order is still characterised by the political, economic and cultural domination of former colonial powers (e.g. Grosfugel, 2002). Secondly, it refers to the use of poststructuralist and postmodernist theory in postcolonial academic literature (Tikly, 2004). A common criticism of this usage is that these approaches to postcolonialism may actually serve to reinforce inequalities, through using 'Western' frameworks to understand 'non-Western' realities (e.g. Tikly, 1999).

Despite its wide-ranging nature, at its core, this approach is concerned with a critical engagement with colonialism, and with the enduring legacies of colonialism in the present day. To put it another way, it is centred around the aim of revisiting and cross-examining the colonial past, as well as how this past shapes systems, structures and lived experiences in the contemporary world. Hall (1996, p. 250) describes postcolonialism as a 're-narrativisation' which acknowledges the centrality of colonialism in the global peripheries in the formation of capitalist modernity, reconceptualising colonialism not as one part of the narrative of European history, but as an event central to globalisation and the development of a global capitalist system (Crossley and Tikly, 2004). Therefore, at the broadest level, postcolonial approaches to research consider how colonialism continues to shape contemporary globalisation. By extension, I seek to explore how global migration is embedded within the global matrix of power that developed as a result of colonialism and globalisation.

However, postcolonial theoretical approaches to migration are less well developed with reference to both educational migration and migration between locations within the Global South. The postcolonial lens is applied here to understand how international student mobility, even *within* the Global South, is embedded within a 'global regime' of coloniality. There are a number works which explore student mobility through a postcolonial lens. Stein and De Andreotti (2016) summarise this understanding of student mobility by describing a 'global imaginary' in which Western knowledge is presumed to be both superior and universal. In a similar vein, Madge et al. (2015) describe how contemporary relations of international education are inextricable from past injustices. Both of these points essentially describe how the hegemony which defines the field of global higher education has its roots in colonialism. Overall, the approach has been developed in only a very limited way with reference both to international student mobility as a whole, and to migration within the Global South (Koh, 2015).

The weakness of postcolonial theory and its 'West' vs. 'Rest' gaze, in particular for understanding the complex and sometimes ambiguous structural positions of non-Western countries, is clear. In this vein, Raghuram et al.'s (2014) article highlights the challenges for postcolonial theory raised by 'rising Asia', which in some instances could lead to a reversal of 'centre' and 'periphery', as formerly colonised countries in Asia wield power over others. With regard to migration studies specfically, Koh (2015) calls for studies of migration drawing on postcolonial theory to move beyond the increasingly inadequate dichotomous framing of global 'centre/periphery':

> Another method is to highlight power inequalities across different scalar temporalities. While in the past, this has been explored between the "centre" and the "periphery" (i.e. empire and colony, "West" and "East") in a more-or-less linear fashion, recent works have highlighted that postcolonial approaches are useful in highlighting how power imbalances exist within the periphery… and/or "other" places in fluid and nonlinear ways (Koh, 2015, p. 435).

Following this suggestion, in order to theorise around China's place as a higher education destination for students from 'peripheral' nations, this thesis explores China's changing position in the world through a postcolonial lens (in particular in Chapters Four, Five and Seven. I combine postcolonial theory with world-systems theory, which will be outlined in more detail in the next section, to express more precisely China's position within the global political-economic hierarchy.

World-systems theory

Neo-Marxist 'world-systems theory', essentially a conceptualisation of how nation-states and regional blocs interact in a global and hierarchical political-economic structure, is also employed to understand the macro-level context in which processes of migration unfold.

Wallerstein (2004) presents a metanarrative which describes the development of a single global capitalist economy with a core-peripheral axial division of labour, over time. The hierarchical structure has a core, semi-peripheries and peripheries.

The hierarchy is not completely rigid, however, and states within the semi-periphery may attempt to improve their position in the system by putting pressure on peripheral states in various ways (Wallerstein, 2004). Through a process of unequal exchange, accumulated capital is moved away from peripheral regions to hegemonic core regions. At the same time, semi-peripheral states such as China strive to develop trade with peripheral postcolonial states such as those in Africa, in order to decrease dependency on core states, thus reproducing core-periphery relations between semi-periphery and periphery. From a world-systems perspective, this is what drives China's push for political and economic influence in Africa, of which international student mobility is one part.

Semi-peripheral (post)coloniality

The two perspectives outlined above are combined in the concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality, which expresses China's dual position within the global political economy. This concept is drawn upon in three of the five articles to understand how China's structural position shapes first, the discourse surrounding relations with other regions, and second, the actual processes of migration. The nature of China's embeddedness in the global political economy, and its resulting relations with students' home countries, shapes in turn students' decision-making and their post-graduation plans, as Chapters Five and Seven explore. The concept has thus far not been widely employed. Ginelli (2018) developed the concept, applying it to an analysis of the discourse of Soviet Hungarian aid and development support in postcolonial Ghana, arguing that the closely intertwined structural and discursive aspects of semi-peripheral bilateral relations shaped the activities of the experts sent by Hungary to

Ghana, and the discourse they produced, both of which mirrored colonial relations and came about as a result of the nature of Socialist Hungary's integration into the system. Although these experts transferred valuable know-how between semi-periphery and periphery, they did so in a way which looked less like 'South-South' co-operation and exchange (which it was framed as by the Hungarian government), and more like the reinforcement and entrenchment of an existing Eurocentric vision of the world. This, argues Ginelli, compromised the supposed decolonial commitment of the Hungarian government. In a similar vein, Pugach (2019) explores how European semi-peripheries exercised power over postcolonial countries by controlling the process of knowledge transfer in educational exchanges.

The concept has a clear utility in dealing with the topic at hand, South-South migration. With regard to the 'rise' of Asian countries such as China and India, and their relations with peripheral states, Mawdsley notes that 'South-South' development co-operation sometimes manifests in a reversal of centre and periphery, and a reinforcement of existing hierarchies characteristic of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality, as countries such as India and China become regional hegemons:

> While many welcome the adjustment that Western powers will have to make in response to the emergence of a more multilateral world, smaller nations may be less enthused about the rise of regional hegemons. Nepal, which has received aid from India since the early 1950s, has often experienced it as an overbearing and interfering neighbour. Development cooperation personnel are quite as capable as any Westerner of assuming and constructing Nepalese inferiority (Mawdsley, 2012, p. 60)

Mawdsley's observation highlights the suitability of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality as a means of conceptualising the nature of relations between rising Asian countries and their peripheries, and explaining power relations within the Global South. I expand upon this

concept, applying it to the study of contemporary flows of international students, which are generally representative of broader inequalities within the political economy which manifest in the example above. In doing so the aim is to nuance postcolonial understandings of international student mobility by recognising how China's multifaceted position within the global political economy shapes the discourse it produces with reference to incoming international students from Africa. I also explore how the initial decision to study abroad is shaped by the reproduction of asymmetrical relations. Likewise, I explore how in various ways, the reproduction of global inequalities restricts the agency of African students as they plan for their post-study lives.

Bourdieu's theory of practice

> It is important, therefore, not just to assess the valuation of various forms of capital, but also to explore how such valuations are being arrived at, by whom, and in whose interests. Therein lies the possibility of retaining a sense of the structural power involved. (Kelly and Lusis, 2006, p. 837)

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven I also draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's *theory of practice* in combination with the concepts above in order to understand how migration decision-making is sometimes related to processes of *capital* accumulation among students, and sometimes leads to a process of *habitus* transformation. I also consider how the power to classify and evaluate forms of capital is predicated upon global structures of capitalism and racialisation. As the theory is employed in slightly different ways in each article, I provide a brief outline of the theory here, and more detail around the specific concepts from Bourdieu's theory and the way they are used as part of the theoretical framework for each chapter is provided in the chapters themselves.

The articles draw mainly on the concepts of habitus*, field* and capitals (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984), along with a number of others such as 'the field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984) and *hysteresis* (Bourdieu, 2000). The term habitus refers to an individual's disposition – in Bourdieu's words, it is the 'permanent manners of being, seeing, acting, and thinking' (2002, p. 27). The habitus is assumed to be durable and long-lasting, and develops as a result of the social environment one is socialised in as a child. Therefore, individuals from similar social backgrounds develop a similar habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), as these individuals would have a similar 'archive of personal experiences' which is rooted in the socialisation process (Costa et al., 2019, p. 20).

The habitus in turn provides the context within which various forms of capital are held and valued. Capital is categorised by Bourdieu into the economic, social, and cultural, and defined formally as follows:

> accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241)

Economic capital refers simply to financial resources. Social capital refers to the 'aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). To put it another way, social capital refers to social ties and group membership, which can be viewed as a credential which entitles the owner to credit, and can be converted into other forms of capital.

Cultural capital can be further broken down into three states: the embodied, the institutionalised, and the objectified. This thesis will focus primarily on the former two.

Embodied capital refers to the 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). In other words, these are traits and attitudes that may be gained, in this case, from higher education which are symbolic and garner advantages in the global labour market. The institutionalised form refers to the academic qualifications themselves. Crucially, Bourdieu points out that it is convertibility that determines the value of these forms of capital: Social and cultural capital mean little if they are not convertible into economic capital. Likewise, economic capital is only of significant value when it is successfully converted into social and cultural capital – economic inequality translates to unequal social relations and differentiated cultural representations (Xiang and Shen, 2009).

Taken together, the aim of combining Bourdieu's theory of practice and the concept of semi-peripheral post-coloniality is to understand how strategies for the accumulation of capitals are shaped by students' negotiations of the global structures expressed in the macro-level concept. The relationship between China and Africa produces various incentives and opportunities, but also disincentives and barriers to capital accumulation, and the combination of these two theories enables an exploration of how these factors shape the trajectories of student migrants. Moreover, the theory of practice has utility in explaining how different forms of capital are evaluated, but not necessarily why. Throughout the final three empirical chapters, I explore how capital is valued and revalued as students move across the globe, and how underlying power structures, expressed in the concept of semi-peripheral postcoloniality, mediate this valuation of capital.

Thesis structure

The thesis is framed and submitted under the 'thesis by folio' route, in accordance with the requirements set by the Graduate School at the Education University of Hong Kong. Under this route, at least three papers of a publishable standard must be submitted to peer-reviewed

journals that have an 'impact factor' equal to or higher than the averaged median impact factor over the previous three years (according to the InCites Journal Citation Reports), at the time the paper is submitted. The papers must also represent connected parts of a coherent research project. In addition, the articles must be accompanied by a relatively brief introduction which outlines the theoretical and practical context of the research as well as the relationships between the publications in the folio, and a conclusion. As such, the first sections of the thesis are abbreviated relative to a 'traditional' thesis. I have, nevertheless, provided some further detail on methodology beyond what is included in the articles. Chapter Two provides accordingly an account of the research design. I introduce the policy-as-discourse approach that is taken in the articles focused on the discourse of mobility and the policy context. I also introduce the qualitative case study approach and the main research instruments employed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, as well as discussing the challenges and ethical considerations associated with this project. However, it should be noted that because of the limits on the length of the thesis mandated by the university, and because of the fact that more detail on the research design is provided in the papers themselves, this chapter is also relatively brief.

The five chapters following that represent the papers that were submitted to peer-reviewed journals to be published, which are at various stages in the publication process. Chapter Three, which has been published in *Globalisation, Societies and Education,* effectively provides policy context for the following chapters, taking a discursive approach outlining the ways in which international students are constructed as social subjects in Chinese higher education policy. Understanding the various ways in which international students are constructed is useful in the later chapters, as these constructions are intertwined with the structural forces which shape the pre- and post-mobility decision-making of students. This paper was co-authored with William Yat Wai Lo. For the purpose of transparency it is

necessary to outline both authors' respective roles in this co-authored article. As the first author I undertook the majority of the work. I collated the policy texts and conducted the analysis, as well as writing up the paper. The co-author, in his role as a thesis supervisor, offered several rounds of detailed feedback and helped to respond to the reviewers' comments on the article after it was submitted to a journal.

In Chapter Four, published in *Higher Education*, the focus turns to the discourse circulating on the Chinese side surrounding the mobility of African students specifically. This chapter draws on and develops the concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality which expresses the global structural position of China, as well the way in which students' decision-making is embedded within global structures. Overall the chapter argues that the relative structural positions of China and of the majority of African countries are reflected in the discourse of student mobility between the two regions, which contains examples of civilizational paternalism and the use of students as 'tools' for the achievement of foreign policy goals.

Chapter Five, which was published in *Population, Place and Space,* moves on to an examination of the pre-mobility decision-making of a group of forty African students in China. I provide a typology of the students I encountered during the fieldwork in order to delineate how educational mobility between Africa and China differs from other migration routes in terms of 'who' these globally mobile students are, the purpose of their mobility, and the ways in which global structures mediate student agency.

Chapter Six, published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration and Studies,* focuses more specifically on the experiences of African international students in China, and the process of transformation that students undergo as a result of their overseas sojourn. Building on Chapter Five, which emphasized the varied social backgrounds of students, this chapter examines how social background mediates the extent and nature of changes to students'

socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions over the course of the overseas sojourn. In doing so, the chapter examines migration holistically, linking students' pre-mobility background with their experiences in China. This paper was co-authored with my thesis supervisor Mark Mason. Similarly to the other co-authored paper, I undertook the majority of the work, having collected the data and analysed it myself. I then wrote up the draft paper and Mason, in his role as supervisor, offered several rounds of feedback to help me to revise the article and respond to the comments of the reviewers.

In Chapter Seven, revised and resubmitted to *Sociology*, I return to examining the migration trajectories of students. This chapter explores the ways in which global inequalities shape the post-study plans of students. It examines how the nature of students' embeddedness within the global matrix of power shapes the ways they navigate *global regimes of mobility*, encountering and overcoming barriers to mobility and to the accumulation of various forms of capital.

It is also important to note that the content of each of the five papers is included as it was published, or as it was revised and resubmitted for review. This leads to some inconsistency in formatting and style, as it includes the referencing and writing style required by each journal. I did, however, make some changes to the formatting in order to increase consistency across the thesis. This includes adopting consistent font and line spacing across the thesis, removing heading and page numbers, matching the formatting of headings, and removing the author biographies.

A note on the COVID-19 pandemic

In January 2020, as I was about to begin the fieldwork stage of this thesis, the coronavirus pandemic began. This had a significant effect on my fieldwork, which I discuss in the chapter on research design. In addition, the global landscape of higher education and of international

student mobility has been profoundly affected by the pandemic. With regard to China, foreign students have been unable to enter the country since March, and it is as yet unclear when they will be unable to return (ICEF Monitor, 2020). The effects of the pandemic on international student mobility are likely to continue for a number of years (Tran, 2020), but given the unprecedented effects of COVID-19 in terms of international travel restrictions and the relations between China and other countries, it is difficult to predict what the scale and nature of long-term changes will be. The maltreatment of international students across the country, who were subjected to forced evictions and quarantine, refused access to public facilities such as hospitals, as well as private businesses such as restaurants and shops, was widely covered in international media reports in April and May 2020 (e.g. Ruwoko, 2020; Vincent, 2020). This may influence African perceptions of China for years to come, but the extent to which this might shape student mobility is difficult to predict, and beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, it is important to state here that in the five articles that constitute this thesis, I do not consider the possible effects of COVID-19 on student mobility. However, in the final chapter, I do reflect on the future of Africa-China student mobility in light of the changes wrought by COVID-19, when discussing the future implications of the project.

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Chapter Two: Research Design

The research aims outlined in the previous two sections reveal the main objective of this planned study: an exploration of the mobility of African students to China which also recognises the embeddedness of international student mobility within global power relations, at the levels both of the mobility itself and the discourse surrounding this mobility. With these aims in mind, this chapter outlines how the research was carried out. In addition, because the original fieldwork plan was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the following sections I seek to make clear how the original research was altered as a result of being unable to travel to China to conduct fieldwork. The thesis can be split into two main parts: the first part - Chapters Three and Four - explores the discourse surrounding international student mobility to China. The second part - Chapters Five, Six and Seven - explores the actual pre- and post-mobility decision-making and experiences of African international students in China, with reference to the broader structural forces (mirrored in discursive constructions explored in the first part). As such, this chapter is also divided along these lines. The first section outlines the research questions. The second section goes into further detail around the design of the first stage of the research, an analysis of texts relating to international students as a whole, and to African students in particular, aiming to answer research question 1. The second section outlines the design of the second stage, designed to answer questions 2, 3 and 4, detailing the original plan for data collection and how this plan was altered in light of the pandemic. I also detail the data analysis and interpretation methods, as well as discussing some of the limitations of the study and going into further detail about the challenges faced during data collection and analysis.

Research questions

On the basis of the literature reviews provided in the Introduction and in each chapter, this thesis seeks to answer the following 4 research questions:

RQ1: How are international students, and African students in particular, constructed in Chinese higher education policy texts?

RQ2: What are the logics that underpin the decisions of African students to study abroad?

RQ 2.1: How might these logics be shaped by structural forces?

RQ 3: In what ways are the processes of migration experienced differentially by students positioned in different and unequal ways in terms of socioeconomic background in their home society?

RQ 4: What plans do African students in China have for post-study mobility?

RQ 4.1: In what ways are these plans shaped by global structures (regimes of mobility)?

Research design

Stage one: a discourse analysis

In the first section, the aim was to outline the policy context and to understand why China seeks to recruit international students. I also sought to understand how global structural relations were mirrored in discourses produced in Chinese policy texts. The overall aim was to conduct a critical analysis of publicly available texts related to the recruitment of international students in China. I understood policy as discourse, drawing on the important work of Lomer (2017) who applied a similar approach to the discourse of international student mobility in policy texts in the United Kingdom. Lomer draws on Bacchi's 'what is the problem represented to be' framework (e.g. 2000). This approach is premised on the

assumption, that policy 'problems' are also socially constructed, rather than purely being concrete problems in the real world. That is to say, problems are constructed within the very policy texts that are offered as responses to particular problems, rather than being solutions to existing problems (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2018). As Watts (1994) elaborates, there is a deep-seated assumption in modern states that there is a process of discovery which uncovers real social problems before the policy intervention takes place. However, this assumption 'deploys categories in such a way as to ignore the possibility that the 'discovery' of problems requires the discursive constitution and abstraction of categories of social practice' (Watts, 1994, p. 117). Hence the focus in an analysis taking a policy-as-discourse approach is not what the 'problems' are but how these problems are constructed, or how they become 'an object of concern' (Lomer, 2017). Using this approach, the representations of students can be viewed as 'solution' from which the problem can be inferred.

This approach was deemed useful in understanding the broad context in which African international students were recruited, the reasons underpinning the recruitment, and ways in which these students are constructed as social subjects. Moreover, the construction of international students as social subjects is likely to *shape* students' decision-making pre- and post- mobility. As examples, I draw on findings from the discourse analysis in Chapters Five and Seven to understand how the ways in which students are constructed in policy discourses also serve to contribute to the initial mobility to China and create barriers to 'educationally channelled labour migration', effectively deterring students from remaining in China after the initial mobility has taken place and 'pushing' students to other countries, where they are constructed as social subjects in policy differently (in a way which enables settlement and integration). This is because student recruitment is viewed in policy as a solution to the 'problem' of China's lack of 'international influence' rather than to any economic or social problem within China's borders.

Document selection and data analysis. For the first two articles, the documents were selected on the basis of their relevance to the recruitment of international students. I also selected a range of documents from different levels of the policy dissemination hierarchy in China. In this hierarchy, broad national planning documents, which offer a sometimes vague general direction, are developed into more specific and detailed 'notices' and 'measures'. In turn, more detail around the nature and implementation of these documents is sometimes provided in press releases and statements by government officials. As an example, important documents such as the 'China Study Abroad Plan' and 'Quality Standards for International Students in Higher Education Institutions', which outline the overarching policies and aims with regard to student recruitment and management respectively, were prioritised amongst national planning documents. In addition, the measures and notices available on Chinese government websites (websites ending in 'gov.cn') in both Chinese and English which were recent and informed current policy were selected from those available. In addition a number of speeches, press releases and interviews with officials released on government websites were also included. Given the focus on discourse, including these documents was important because they add further depth to government planning documents, notices and measures, which are often quite limited and technical in nature. The criteria for inclusion were that the policy texts provided some kind of justification for policy decisions or provided accounts of the policies themselves (Ball, 1993).

The documents were uploaded to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software, before being inductively coded and thematically analysed. The analysis followed the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). To summarise briefly, the data were reviewed carefully, before codes were derived through an iterative process based on the stated research aims and on review of literature. Documents were inductively coded according to the two-stage process

outlined by Saldaña (2013). Codes were then grouped into larger themes, and these themes were reviewed. In this final stage of analysis, it was decided which themes 'worked' in relation to the data (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 65). This process is outlined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Limitations. The main challenge encountered doing this kind of critical policy research was related to the availability and content of documents. It is widely understood that the process of policymaking in China is intentionally opaque (Beeson and Li, 2016). Therefore, the kind of detailed, publicly available industrial strategy reports or parliamentary debates that have been used in analyses of this kind in Western contexts are not widely available. As such, it was not possible to include a wide range of policy actors in the analysis (Han and Ye, 2017), given the opacity of the process.

Stage two: a qualitative case-study

The originally planned research had a single-case study design. Two key features define a case study. First, a case study 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident' (Yin, 2016, p. 1). In other words, there is a recognition that the phenomenon in question is inextricably linked to the context in which it occurs. A second defining feature of case-study research is related to design and data collection methods. Case studies generally rely on multiple sources of evidence, in order to cope with the situation whereby there are many more variables of interest than data points. These different data sources must be triangulated. Typically more than one of the several possible tools (e.g. interviews, questionnaire survey, focus group, observation) are employed in case studies, based on their suitability for answering the research questions. In this case, findings and

connections with participants from the first site comprise the basis for the second part of the study.

Data were to be collected from two fieldwork sites in Wuhan and Guangzhou, from African students attending universities in these cities. After having conducted a number of pilot interviews, I planned to travel to Wuhan in January 2020 for around six weeks of fieldwork. However, my planned trip coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the city. On the good advice of my supervisor, amongst others, I made the decision to postpone my trip. In hindsight this was a very good decision. In the end, I collected all of the data remotely, and because I was not restricted to the fieldwork sites, I interviewed students studying in various cities across the country.

The scope of the study. At this stage it is important to outline and justify the scope of the case study. I chose to adopt a broader scale of analysis by including the voices of students from the entire continent of Africa, rather than focusing on one specific country, region, or group. I would like to note the issues associated with the 'Africa' label, and outline why I felt it was appropriate to have a broader scope in this study. Mazrui (2005) outlines the historical development of external conceptualisations of Africa, explaining how, from the beginning of the European colonial period, Africa has been generalised and essentialised with the aim of justifying imperialism and colonialism. In a similar vein, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks of the risks of perpetuating a 'single story of catastrophe' about Africa (John, 2013). While I acknowledge these issues and sought to mitigate them in a number of ways, overall, a whole of Africa focus was deemed appropriate for this project for a number of reasons. The main justification for the focus is that this project is framed by an 'Africa-China' discourse which has become pre-eminent, and is the dominant way that the relationship is expressed by the Chinese state, most notably through the Forum on China-Africa

Cooperation. A specific aim of the project is to explore migration in relation to this discourse and the broader political and economic structures it describes. Moreover, it was crucial to consider how students negotiated their identity as 'Africans' in China, given that they are often seen or essentialised in this way (e.g. Ho, 2017). Overall, there are a number of disadvantages and risks associated with this approach, but I felt it was vital to reflect the diversity of 'Africa-China' international student mobility.

I reflected on the problem of essentialising or generalising the continent of Africa throughout the research process, and took a number of measures to avoid falling into this trap. Where possible, I tried to provide context of the students' home country in the three articles based on the interviews, and to emphasize students' agency in the process of migration. I also employed member checking (Candela, 2019) as a means of validating the findings and ensuring they were presented in an accurate way that was acceptable to and matched with the actual experiences and thought processes of the interviewees. Member checking involves sending the written report to several of the interviewees and eliciting feedback on the extent to which the report is accurate and resonates with their experiences. I did this for each paper, and the feedback was positive for each one.

In addition, the study focuses on full-degree students: it does not include non-degree students (for example those studying short-term language and culture courses) but does include undergraduates, taught master's degrees and postgraduate research degrees. This is because the focus of the thesis is processes of decision-making around and transformation as a result of migration, and how these challenge existing understandings developed with reference to migration to Western countries. I decided that a focus on all degree holding students would be preferable, because it would allow me to capture a broad spectrum of rationales, experiences, and post-study choices.

Data collection. The research objectives outlined in the first section naturally lent themselves to being answered through qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. A qualitative study is well-aligned to the stated goals. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) provide a generic definition of qualitative research which outlines how qualitative research can be used: 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. Yin (2016, p. 10) suggests that qualitative research 'is driven by a desire to explain social behaviour and thinking, through existing or emerging concepts'. These characterizations emphasize the utility of qualitative research for this piece of research which seeks to explain the behaviour and perceptions of globally mobile students. The research aims and objectives imply that a deep and nuanced understanding of individual motivations and perceptions is required: the study seeks to understand what motivates students to study in China, their experiences in China, and post-study plans, as they related to global structures and flows which restrict or extend agency. Given the objectives of this study, qualitative methods, which provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the meaning people attach to phenomena, are deemed appropriate.

A key means through which to increase the construct validity of a single-case study is to collect data from multiple sources (Yin, 2009). This study used semi-structured interviews as the main instrument, and a short questionnaire as a supplementary means of data collection. Data from questionnaires were used as a means of triangulation and corroboration: any finding is likely to be more convincing if it is based on more than one source of data (for example from both questionnaires and interviews), rather than just one.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection instrument for Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher

has more control over topics and themes discussed than in an unstructured interview, but unlike a structured interview, there is no fixed range of responses to any given question (Given, 2008). Kvale (1996, p. 2) describes such interviews as a 'construction site of knowledge'. Unstructured interviews are generally useful when there is little guiding theory or previous literature, for example when the researcher is exploring domains where there is relatively little existing research (Given, 2008). In this case, the research design adheres broadly to Yin's (2009) case study format, in which theory development is a necessary first step and forms the basis to interpret findings. The previously outlined conceptual framework and research questions act as a guide in determining what data to collect, or a 'hypothetical story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur' (Sutton and Staw, 1995, p. 378). In other words, they inform the themes and topics in the interview. Thus, an unstructured interview approach is inappropriate as it does not allow for the use of theory as a guide during data collection.

At the same time, the goal of the interviews in this study is to achieve depth of understanding, rather than confining the interviewee to a predetermined range of answers. The semi-structured interview creates space for the in-depth discussion of students' motivations for study in China, their perceptions of the Chinese higher education system, and how participants have fared since graduation. Based on these considerations, a primarily qualitative approach, with semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument, was considered the most suitable for this study.

Interviews were collected from both sites until the point of data saturation. As Fusch and Ness (2015) note, data saturation is not about numbers, but rather about the depth of said data. This is in order to capture a wide range of students from various backgrounds and studying a

range of subjects at various levels. In total, 40 interviews were conducted with current students and five with recent graduates.

After the outbreak of COVID-19, my fieldwork plans were altered, as the border was closed and I could not go to China to conduct fieldwork. Thus, I decided to conduct all interviews over video call. Given the sampling strategy employed, this was actually quite effective. Starting with the contacts I had made in Chinese universities, I employed a purposive approach to data collection with the goal of sampling for maximum variability (Cresswell, 2007). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p. 713), describe purposive sampling as 'the selection of individual participants, units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly'. In this study, the aims of purposive sampling are twofold. First, the researcher sought to achieve representativeness through the selection of participants for maximum variation. Cresswell (2007, p. 126) describes this kind of sampling as 'determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the… participants, and then selecting… participants that are quite different on the criteria'. The aim, therefore, was to select individuals who together create a body of participants that is typical and representative of the case as a whole. By selecting cases that represent the diversity of these characteristics, the likelihood is increased that the findings will reflect the range of perspectives and viewpoints.

I employed a number of different methods to find participants for my study. I started with a few contacts that I already had from my time in Wuhan, including lecturers and students in universities there. I also gained access to a number of student groups on social media, and I was then able to conduct pilot interviews. Students were, generally speaking, willing to be interviewed. Those who indicated willingness to take part in the interview were sent the background questionnaire to fill out (see Appendix (F)). Based on the answers provided on the questionnaire, I would contact them either to confirm the interview or to inform them that

I would not be interviewing them. I did not interview some potential interviewees because I decided they were too similar to others in terms of demographic criteria. As Creswell (2007) suggests determining criteria that differentiate participants in advance when sampling for maximum variability, the criteria that differentiate individuals within this case study are as follows:

1) University attended: The sample includes participants from several universities. Originally I planned for the first stage of fieldwork to take place in two cities with a number of 'first class' and 'first class disciplines' universities (Wuhan and Guangzhou). However, after I had to conduct the fieldwork remotely, I decided that I would select students from any city. Thus students from a wide range of institutions can be recruited.

2) Level of study: it is important that students studying at bachelors, masters, and doctoral level are included in a somewhat proportionate way in the sample.

3) Field of study: Participants studying a broad range of disciplines were sought. A breakdown of international student numbers in China by field of study is not available, therefore the researcher aims for maximum variability.

4) Funding source: As outlined in the background section, many international students receive scholarships to study in China, but the majority are now self-funded. Country-level data on funding sources for African students is not available. Thus a combination of scholarship holders and self-funded students was sought.

5) Gender: Variation in terms of gender will be sought within the sample.

I provide the actual demographic information about the participants in Table 2 which was included as part of Chapter Seven. In order to avoid repetition, please see the table for

detailed socio-demographic information about participants. It should also be noted that I conducted five more interviews with recent graduates for Chapter Seven, and these five participants are not included in the previous two chapters. This is because I wanted to get some idea of what recent graduates had actually done since graduating. However, I found the pool of students who had graduated in the previous few months was much more difficult to trace through existing contacts and online tracing, and in the end I only managed to conduct a few interviews with recent graduates. I did however think that it was important to include the perspectives of these five recent graduates in the final paper.

The second aim of the purposive sampling technique employed in this study was to use participants as a means to identify additional cases who can be included in the study - this is one variety of purposive sampling known as snowball or chain sampling (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This technique allows the researcher to identify 'cases of interest from people who know what cases are information-rich' (Creswell, 2007, p. 127).

Conducting interviews online was an advantage in this regard because I was able to select amongst potential participants in terms of institutions and cities without being geographically bound to the fieldwork site. Interviewees were from 14 African countries, around two-thirds male and a third female (see Table 2). This represents one of the limitations of the thesis as a whole, and I acknowledge it in the three articles based on this data. The participants studied a wide range of subjects, distributed fairly evenly across a range of fields of study. As is shown in Table 2, participants were drawn from a number of universities, some amongst the most prestigious in China, and some more provincial universities with less prestige. The interviews last between 45 and 90 minutes, and were predominantly conducted in English. It was made clear that interviews could also be conducted in Chinese, but this represents a further limitation of the study—most participants were from Anglophone countries, potentially

because students who did not speak either English or Chinese fluently (for example many students from Francophone regions of Africa) were less willing to take part.

Analytical memoranda. Immediately after the interviews had taken place, I wrote up analytical memoranda, and this continued throughout the data analysis process (as data were transcribed and as coding and theme formulation were undertaken). As Maxwell (2013) notes, memoranda are a useful addition to the tools of data analysis in that they facilitate thinking about relationships in the data and make the researchers' 'ideas and analysis visible and retrievable' (Maxwell, 2013, p. 239). Thus, I planned to write memoranda frequently during the concurrent data collection and analysis stages, in order to induce and record new ideas about relationships between data. Analytical memos also aided in the cross-verification of information between the questionnaire and the interview for Chapter Seven. Reflecting on and looking closely at both data sources directly after the interview is important as verification of discrepancies or inconsistencies between data sources may be required. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that the longer the time between the original interview and the follow-up, the more problematic following-up is likely to be, given that informants may be harder to contact or locate. Therefore analytical memos were an important part of the data collection and analysis process in this study.

Interview themes. This section outlines the broad themes that were addressed in semi-structured interviews and links these themes explicitly the guiding theory outlined in the literature review section. These themes served as the basis for the semi-structured interviews. The themes were as follows:

1) Educational background: Tell me about your educational journey to-date, and the influence of family members and peers on this journey.

This theme explores the participants' educational background in relation to motivations to study internationally. It examines for example whether students were motivated by previous educational mobility experiences. Understanding the background of internationally mobile students in China is crucial for understanding the childhood socialisation process of students, and their motivations for study in China and the path of capital accumulation post-degree.

2) Family background: Tell me about your family members and their life stories to-date. This theme was derived with the aim of shedding light on student motivations for studying in China, and whether mobility was a deliberate means of capital accumulation supported by family members. It also acts as a proxy for socio-economic status. The theme also sheds light on the proposition made in the literature review that the availability of scholarships for study in China mean that previous literature associating international credentials with social inequality reproduction may not be easily applicable to this case.

3) Motivations: What does the participant see as the key motivating factors for their mobility? Did the participant see study in China in terms of possible future benefits? Or were there other motivating factors?

Numerous possible motivating factors are outlined in the literature. For example, educational mobility is seen by some students as a gateway to other forms of mobility (e.g. labour or trade mobility), and students may be motivated by low fees and the availability of scholarships. Motivating factors also help to explain the extent to which structural forces are shaping migration decisions. For example, are scholarships and other incentives put in place as part of the government's internationalisation strategy important factors in motivating students to come to China?

4) Academic experiences: How do participants view their academic experience in China? Do students feel their learning has been valuable? Do graduates feel their learning has been useful since graduation?

This theme aids in the researchers' understanding of how students see Chinese higher education, and aids in understanding the transformations that and changes within the habitus that took place as a result of overseas study.

5) Language and culture: Did students become proficient in Chinese before or during their studies? Do those participants who have learned Chinese perceive that it has benefited them? Do students feel that they have a good understanding of Chinese culture? Do they feel that this will (or already has) benefit them in some way?

The literature review suggested that for East Asian students, English language proficiency and an understanding of 'Western' culture are sources of embodied cultural capital. Whether students are able to leverage understanding of Chinese language and culture is important in answering research questions concerned with cultural capital accumulation.

6) Adaption and cross-cultural communication: Did participants integrate into international student groups? Did students integrate successfully with the local community? What social activities did they participate in?

This theme is also related to habitus transformation and the accumulation of cultural capital. It explores the extent to which participants perceive their international experience to have been 'embodied' in them. It also explores the extent to which policies that make up the international student recruitment strategies of Chinese universities serve to enhance or diminish student experiences.

7) Social networks: Did study in China strengthen participants' social networks? Do students and graduates have friends from other countries, or local Chinese friends? Have students use nodes of their social networks to help with business or employment related issues? Have students made use of national student or alumni groups/unions?

The research questions are partly concerned with social capital, in other words, how students are able to expand their social networks through international study, and use new connections

in order to accumulate other forms of capital. Social capital is one potential benefit of international mobility and contributes to an explanation of how study in China is leveraged by students upon graduation.

8) Post-graduation plans: What jobs do students plan to do? What is the career trajectory of graduates? How do students perceive their study in relation to career plans? How do graduates perceive that study in China influenced their career trajectory? Do students wish to stay, return, or migrate elsewhere?

This is important in understanding how study in China is used as a capital accumulation strategy, how students view the valuation of their capitals transnationally, and how the degree is viewed by employers. The full interview protocol, which provides more detail about the specific questions I asked, is provided in Appendix (D).

Questionnaires. Interviewees were also given a short questionnaire in order to collect additional information on motivations for study and demographic information relevant to the study (see Appendix F). The data gleaned from the questionnaire is presented in one of the articles for publication, in Table 2. The questionnaire took no longer than 10 minutes to complete for most interviewees. Parental occupation and educational level was included in the questionnaire, as this information can be used as a rough indicator of social class. The information could be gathered through closed questions during the semi-structured interviews. However, questions about parental income and socioeconomic status are often sensitive and participants may feel uncomfortable discussing them with the interviewer. The questionnaire, completed online using Google Survey, provides a relatively private and impersonal space for participants to answer these questions. In other words, it allowed the researcher to collect data on participants' backgrounds, which if asked in person for some participants might have caused embarrassment or lead to more vague or evasive answers.

In addition, the questionnaire provided another means to create converging lines of enquiry and increases the robustness of any findings. The questionnaire provided another source of information about family background and social class. This approach also allows for the verification of interview content - where there is significant inconsistency between the questionnaire and the interview, I could contact the interviewee for further clarification. This reduces the likelihood of inaccurately reporting participants' perspectives and demographic information.

Data analysis. Data from interviews was thematically analysed, with themes being derived through an iterative process based on the original research questions, the concepts outlined in the theoretical framework, and the literature review. Thematic analysis, employing an inductive approach, is considered an appropriate approach to data analysis as it allows for the construction of a complex case analysis grounded in theory and concepts, which is consistent with the overall research design. Such an approach to data analysis allows for flexibility in the exact procedures of the analysis, which is important given the emergent and flexible nature of data collection stage.

The data were uploaded, after being transcribed, to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. The transcribing, initial coding, and theme searching stages of the analysis was undertaken concurrently with data collection within each stage of the research. Thematic analysis is a way of systematically identifying, organizing, and providing insight into meaning within a data set (Braun, Clark, Hayfield & Terry, 2019). Thematic analysis is often used merely to summarise or describe key patterns emerging from data, but that was not the purpose here. Rather, as Braun and Clarke (2006) write, good thematic analysis is interpretive, constructing a story about the data in relation to the research question. The goal is to 'fracture' the data in order to facilitate comparison within and between the created

categories (Maxwell, 2013, p. 237), identifying the data which are relevant to answering the research questions.

The themes were derived and interpreted through an iterative process based on the original research aims, and the concepts outlined in the conceptual framework. The thematic analysis followed six phases delineated by Braun et al. (2019):

1) Familiarizing yourself with the data and identifying items of potential interest

2) Generating initial codes

3) Searching for themes

4) Reviewing potential themes

5) Defining and naming themes

6) Producing the report

The remainder of this section goes into further detail about this process. The first stage of the data analysis involves becoming familiar with the data and identifying items of potential interest. This stage involves 'immersing yourself in the data by reading and re-reading textual data and listening to audio recordings' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this case interviews were transcribed by the researcher, which aided this process. The transcripts were then read and re-read, with reference to the analytical memos written during the data collection process, and on the basis of this, potential themes and emergent points of interest in the data were added to the memos.

Phase two of the data analysis consists of generating initial codes. Codes identify and label potentially relevant pieces of data, sometimes providing an interpretation of the data (Braun

and Clarke, 2006). The coding procedure can be described as breaking apart the data and rearranging it into categories (Maxwell, 2013). The coding process consisted of two cycles, and different coding methods were used in each cycle. In the first cycle I used 'attribute coding', also known as 'socio-demographic coding' (Kuckartz, 2014), which involves coding for basic descriptive information, in order to understand the socio-demographic patterns in the data. This also helped with triangulating data from the questionnaire. I also used 'In Vivo coding' (Miles et al., 2014). Stringer (2014, p. 140) suggests that the main purpose of this method is to adhere to the 'verbatim principle, using terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants themselves. By doing so [researchers] are more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people's experience' (Stringer, 2014, p. 140). In this stage I also drew on initial and affective coding methods to a lesser extent (Saldaña, 2013).

Phase three involved shifting from codes to themes. A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83). In this phase, the aim is to reorganise the codes to develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories or themes. I employed pattern coding (Miles et al., 2014) to group the In Vivo, initial and affective codes into broader themes. Pattern codes essentially pull together the material from the first cycle codes into more meaningful and organised units. Miles et al. (2014, p. 86) describe them as a 'meta code'.

Researchers towards the interpretivist end of the paradigmatic spectrum may claim that the process of coding and creating themes fractures the contextuality and reduces the coherence of findings (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). In order to address this critique, data were coded inclusively, that is, with some of the surrounded text retained. This reduces the loss of contextuality and contributes to the yielding of findings that are more contextually grounded. In phase three, the same extract was sometimes included in more than one theme. At the end

of this phase the themes and sub-themes were organised into a thematic table and all relevant data extracts will be organised into categories in preparation for the next stage, reviewing themes.

The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes, and deciding which themes 'work' or do not work, in relation to the data (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 65). In this stage some themes and sub-themes were discarded, and the boundaries of the themes were redrawn with the aim of having themes more closely capture the data. The fifth phase involved labelling and then selecting extracts to present and analyse which reflected the essence of the themes well. In this phase, quotes and extracts chosen to present should provide a clear and vivid example of the analytical point the researcher is making. There is some overlap between stage five and stage six, as the analysis of the quotes and extracts necessarily involves beginning the writing up of the findings and discussion sections of the dissertation. The final phase involved the writing up of the three articles, although the process of writing up, as previously outlined, was interwoven with the other stages of research and takes place concurrently with the data analysis. During this stage, the findings from the short questionnaire are integrated with the findings from the interviews in order to triangulate the results, thereby increasing construct validity.

Positionality

In qualitative research of this kind, there is an ethical concern that power relations may be unequal (Dowling, 2010). This may also have an impact on the reliability and validity of the data collected. In order to mitigate these concerns, it is important for qualitative researchers to consider their own positionality and reflexivity throughout the process of data collection and analysis (Merriam et al., 2010). Throughout the research project I aimed to understand and acknowledge my positionalities and also how social characteristics, such as race, gender,

nationality and socio-economic status, language and others, shape the research process (Dowling, 2010). This could be in terms of both substantive and practical facets of the process, for example, the type of questions the researcher asks during the interviews, the way the data is collected and analysed, as well as the way in which the findings are presented and received by others. This allows researchers to have an enhanced awareness of the possible risks of (re)creating unequal power relations in the research process (Bilgen et al., 2021). Understanding my own position on a grid of power relations, which in turn influences the way my findings were collected and presented, was of particular importance in a project concerned with power inequalities and shifting global structures.

A common way of considering positionality is the dichotomy of the researcher as an 'insider' or 'outsider' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Insiders are similar to their research participants in terms of the various social characteristics that constitute their positionality, whereas outsiders are less similar. There are assumed advantages to both positions: insiders may have a greater level of understanding of the phenomenon being studied, but outsiders may have a greater interest in learning about and focusing on what may be unfamiliar to them, and may be more objective, in the opinion of the interviewees (Merriam et al., 2010). Clearly, given the complex milieu of social characteristics that researchers and participants possess, a researcher cannot be exclusively an insider and outsider, and is usually both, to varying extents (Dowling, 2010). The researcher's position also determines the level of trust place in them by the participants, and the power relations that develop between the two parties (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, understanding my position in relation to the students I was interviewing was important in establishing rigour.

At this point I would like to reflect on my own motivations for undertaking this project, and on my positionality as a researcher, including how this affected the project. Before I began

my PhD, I had finished my undergraduate and master's degree in the UK, and had also spent several years working and studying in China in the years in between. After I completed my undergraduate degree I moved to Wuhan, China to work at a university. It is through my time in Wuhan that I became aware of the mobility of students from African countries to China, as there were many African students in the city that I met during my year there. After several years of working and also studying in China, I decided to take up a master's degree in Education and International Development, and my previous experience in Wuhan motivated me to focus on the Africa-China development nexus, which I felt was a blind spot that few others on my course had knowledge of. My interest in the topic eventually developed and I decided to undertake my PhD on it.

Overall, I was very much towards the outsider end of the spectrum in relation to the interviewees. I understood little about the backgrounds of many of the people that I interviewed, and my life experiences, growing up in the UK, were of course vastly different to all of the interviewees. I feel that, generally speaking, this had a marked effect on the way that the interviewees communicated with me, and the on the nature of the information they provided. They tended to assume that I had little prior knowledge of their backgrounds, which was advantageous sometimes, as this seemed to encourage the interviewees to provide a lot of contextual detail about previous life experiences. However, on other occasions it seemed that interviewees omitted information, as they may have thought that I was simply unable to understand certain things about, for example, the nature of their lives before they came to China, and that it would have perhaps required too much explanation for me to grasp what they might have wanted to express. At the same time, as an international student in the same area of the world, many of the students were keen to speak to me, and it was easy to approach them as peers, which I felt often helped in terms of developing a rapport with students.

As a white, male, and European researcher, I was also highly cognisant of the possible power imbalances inherent in this kind of research in the Global South, and I tried to mitigate this in the interviews through a number of measures, to some success. I emphasized my position as a peer, usually of a similar age and also an international student, and also tried to outline my background and give the interviewees time to ask questions about me before the interviews, which Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest as a method to reduce the sense of power imbalance in the interviews. Most interviewees seemed very open and were just as keen to ask me questions about my experiences in Hong Kong as I was to ask them about theirs in mainland China.

However, in a few cases, it was clear that interviewees' perception of me as an outsider meant that they thought I could not understand the problems faced by African international students, or adequately present an accurate account of their narratives. One student, when asking me questions about the research before the interview took place, told me that he hoped that 'an African would be doing this kind of research'. His comment made me consider how I could more accurately portray the accounts given by the students in a way that would be satisfactory to them. As previously mentioned, I employed member checking (e.g. Candela, 2019) in order to do this. I sent the draft versions of the articles that constitute this thesis to a number of the students, and ask for their feedback with reference especially to how I had portrayed the accounts they had given. The feedback they provided was positive and they felt that I had portrayed their narratives in an accurate and sensitive way. In terms of power, I felt that doing this went some way to redressing any imbalance between the participants and I, in that they had a level of control over how they were represented in the research (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). However, I feel that my identity, in that I am not African and I am male contributed to one of the most significant limitations of my final research reports - the difficulties that I had in finding suitable participants who were not male. Throughout the

research I found that female students who I spoke to were less keen to speak to me and much less comfortable with being interviewed. This was disappointing as it left me unable to explore fully the gendered aspects of mobility.

Throughout the fieldwork process, I attempted to reflect on relations of power and positionality in the analytical memos, before and after the interviews took place. This enabled me to exercise critical reflexivity in relation to the research. I became increasingly conscious of my position as an insider in some ways but primarily as an outsider over the course of the fieldwork, and of how this would influence the direction and the content of the interviews. I also took measures to consider power imbalances and redress them to the extent that it was possible.

Ethical Issues

There were several potential ethical issues to consider. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, approval was sought and successfully acquired from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Education University of Hong Kong (see Appendix A). The first potential issue was the safeguarding of the interests of participants. Participants may not want to have their details made available, and this had to be considered. The study strived to protect the social and psychological wellbeing of the participants, and this means that participants who divulge information that could be deemed sensitive needed to be given anonymity: pseudonyms are used throughout, and all data have been stored on a password protected computer hard drive. The data will be deleted 12 months after completion of the project. The informed consent of participants was also gained before the interviews began. This meant the researcher 'explain[ed] in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being

undertaken, and how it is to be distributed and used.' (BSA, 2017, p. 5). The participants

were given an information sheet before the interview (See Appendix B), which emphasizes

the voluntary nature of the research and the participants' right to withdraw. After participants

had read the information sheet they were asked to sign a consent form.

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Chapter Three: Learning to 'tell China's story well': the constructions of international students in Chinese higher education policy

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Abstract

This article takes a policy-as-discourse approach to understanding how Chinese policy texts construct international students. This is important given the growth of China as a study destination, and the fact that the majority of the studies on Chinese internationalisation policy are descriptive, and poorly integrated with literature focused on other contexts. Drawing upon a thematic analysis of 19 policy texts, the China article reveals that economic rationales are absent in the policy texts; it also reveals five somewhat contradictory ways in which international students are constructed in policies: As 'para-diplomats' and 'future elites', but also as sources of 'mutual exchange', of 'insufficient quality' and finally, as requiring 'guidance' to understand Chinese laws. The article also discusses these constructions and problems with the assumptions within them, and how such problems could be thought about differently, with reference to the 'critical internationalisation studies' literature developed largely with a focus on the Global North.

Introduction

International student mobility is on the rise globally, and at the same time, patterns of mobility are gradually shifting. Perhaps the largest shift to have taken place in the past several years is China establishing itself as a major destination country in its own right. During 2018, 492,185 international students studied in China, meaning that it is now the third largest destination country in terms of total international enrolment (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2019d). This also suggests that the target set by the MOE (2010a) in the China Study Abroad Plan, of hosting 500,000 international students by the year 2020, is likely to be met. The Chinese state also provides a large number of scholarships for international students – 63,041 were provided in 2018 (MOE 2019d). Amongst all international students, 52.44% are enrolled on full degree courses, with the rest enrolled on non-degree programmes (usually in Chinese language). Overall, almost 60% are from elsewhere in Asia – with the South Korea, Thailand, and Pakistan sending the most students respectively – and around 17% are from Africa, and 15% from Europe (MOE 2019d).

In light of this rapid expansion, the aim of this study is to draw out the nuances and possible internal contradictions of policy texts and the various ways students' roles are represented within them, by taking a discursive approach which is rarely used in studies on international student mobility policy, with a few exceptions (see Riaño, Mol, and Raghuram 2018b). Taking this approach in the Chinese context constitutes a significant contribution to the literature on the policies surrounding international student mobility. A critical discussion of the ethical dimensions of Chinese higher education internationalisation is not present in the existing literature (e.g. Pan 2013; Zhu and Zhang 2017; Ma and Zhou 2018; Liu and Wang 2020), despite the rapid rise of China as a destination for international students. As such, we outline the discursive constructions of the roles of international students in national policy

texts, and discuss these constructions in relation to a body of critical approaches to internationalisation that has developed with reference to Western internationalisation (e.g. George Mwangi et al. 2018). A critical approach to policy is important in part because it highlights the ways in which global inequalities are reproduced and entrenched as a result of higher education internationalisation (e.g. Bilecen and Van Mol 2017). Applying this kind of approach to Chinese internationalisation is relevant given the country's augmentation of its position within the global political and economic landscape, and the 'reversal of centre and periphery' which has been documented in its relations with other countries in the Global South (Raghuram, Noxolo, and Madge 2014, 127).

By means of analysis of discursive constructions in recent policy texts relating to the recruitment, education, and administration of international students in Chinese universities, we explore the specific ways in which international students are presented within policy, as well as seeking to understand the previously under-recognised contradictions and implications of these representations. Overall we argue that whilst the interaction between sending and host countries within the Global South offers an opportunity for a fundamental reconsideration of the exploitative relationships which manifest in ISM discourse in the Global North, in this case, policy texts appear to (re)produce problematic soft power and deficiency constructions of students, whilst at the same time contradictorily calling for 'mutual civilisational exchange'. In the following sections we seek to address two main research questions: firstly, what are the main constructions of students contained within Chinese policy documents addressing international students? Secondly, what are the logics behind these constructions, and by extension, what internal contradictions exist between these logics?

Literature review and theoretical framework

Critical approaches to internationalisation

This section outlines field of 'critical internationalisation studies' (e.g. Stein 2019), a body of work which is fundamentally concerned with emphasising that internationalisation is never a benign process, tending towards the view that if internationalisation takes places without a redistribution of power and a rethinking of existing unequal relationships, then existing global patterns of inequality will simply be reproduced in the process of internationalisation, rather than being challenged. George Mwangi et al. (2018) survey the field of higher education internationalisation, noting that only a minority of studies expressly articulate issues of inequality and power differences in leading higher education journals. We seek to apply this critical lens to our discourse analysis in order to question the constructions of problems within Chinese international student mobility (ISM) policy.

Within this body of literature, we are particularly concerned with work which recognises the problems associated with instrumental approaches to internationalisation. Stein (2017) suggests that the critical internationalisation literature can broadly be categorised into three forms. The first, 'soft' form of critique is exemplified by Knight (2014) who argues that internationalisation is moving away from values of cooperation and towards competition and status-building. The second 'radical' form of critique is more concerned with recognising how internationalisation actively contributes to reproduction of global inequality – an example is Waters (2018, 1463) who highlights how discourses around international students can be dehumanising, as they frame international students as 'inert' rather than as political and social actors. The third 'liminal' critique outlined by Stein draws on anti- or post-colonial as well feminist and critical race theory. It expresses how internationalisation initiatives uncritically expand colonial and capitalist modes of knowledge production.

However, these critical approaches to internationalisation have been developed largely with reference to the West, and as Bamberger, Morris, and Yemini (2019, 210) note:

> discourses around internationalisation formed by a fusion of neoliberalism and humanitarianism hold little explanatory power in China, and instead reflects more the normative Western progressive views of the literature rather than the reality.

In other words, the 'nodal' (Fairclough 2006) discourse underpinning Chinese ISM policy is not similar to the nodal 'neoliberal' discourse which increasingly underpins higher education internationalisation within the Global North (e.g. Lomer 2017a). As such, the critiques of these discourses are also limited in their applicability to the Chinese context. This study recognises said gap in the context of ISM policy and around Chinese internationalisation in particular, integrating the critical approach to internationalisation into a study of the Chinese context. The following two sections outline what this approach entails.

Research on ISM policy discourses

This section reviews studies which take a discursive approach to the policies surrounding ISM. This kind of analysis highlights how policy actors use discourse to shape policy debates and legitimise certain policy choices (Riaño, Mol, and Raghuram 2018b). In turn this means some uses of internationalisation, for example as a means of furthering national self-interest and as part of a neoliberal reductionist narrative in which the economic competitiveness is the predominant orientation of internationalisation, which are highlighted as problematic by Stein (2019) and others (e.g. De Wit 2015; Stein and de Andreotti 2016) are constructed as legitimate.

According to this body of literature, several framings appear commonly in policy texts related to international students. Firstly, a common narrative in the Global North positions students as sources of income within a broader neo-liberal restructuring of the higher education sector (e.g. Geddie 2015). In the narrative which positions students as sources of income, hosting students leads directly to revenue accumulation for both the host institution and nation (Brooks and Waters 2011; Stein and de Andreotti 2016). The recruitment of international students therefore leads directly to economic growth (Knight 2004). The development of higher education as an 'export economy' and the narrative of students as 'cash cows' is particularly strong in Australia (e.g. Robertson 2011; Song and McCarthy 2018), but is also present in many other contexts such as the UK, the Republic of Ireland, and the US (e.g. Lomer 2017b; O'Connor 2018; Cantwell 2019).

Other discourses include those which construct students as a means of global economic competition. For example, in an examination of national policy discourses in the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia, Karram (2013) found that a narrative of economic competition between nations was dominant, and that within it, international students themselves were consistently not positioned as stakeholders – rather, nations and institutions were positioned as the key stakeholders in international recruitment, and students were instead constructed as markets. In the contexts of Australia and Canada other studies corroborate Karram's findings (e.g. Robertson 2011; Scott et al. 2015). Levantino et al. (2018) also find that in France, Spain, and the UK, there is a narrative present in policy texts which frames international students as containers of knowledge who can drive economic growth. There is a trend towards the pre-eminence of this narrative as higher education institutions are increasingly incorporated into the broader neoliberal discourse of 'global competitiveness' (Robertson and Keeling 2008). This discourse is present across anglophone Western countries, e.g. Australia, the USA and the UK, although it should be noted that in all of these contexts it is one of

several concurrent rationales (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011). The discourse of students as consumers is problematic when viewed through a critical lens partly because it implies that international students are only valuable in terms of their benefit to the nation-state, thus preventing other forms of internationalisation which might, for example, be aimed at reducing global inequalities (Knight 2014).

It is important to note that policies are sometimes internally inconsistent, and contain contradictions (Brooks 2018). For example, these neoliberal discourses which imply that international students should be welcomed as long as they serve the instrumentalist purposes of the nation-state, often coexist alongside the narrative that international students are undesirable or 'backdoor' migrants (e.g. Robertson 2011; Lomer 2017b; Levantino et al. 2018). For example, Robertson (2011) describes how Australian politicians denigrate international students as problematic and opportunistic threats to the state who are seeking a shortcut to permanent residency. Likewise, Lomer (2017b) describes how international students in the UK are categorised as migrants and therefore become subject to the same negative discourse as other migrants, which focuses on the need to 'control' and 'manage' migration. This has increasingly been in the case in the past decade, demonstrating how shifting public attitudes appear to constrain public policy with regard to international student mobility (Levantino et al. 2018).

Another common discourse is that of higher education as an instrument of diplomacy (e.g. Bolsmann and Miller 2008; Stetar et al. 2010; Lomer 2017a). In this narrative governments use international students as diplomatic tools with the aim of expanding global influence, expecting that international students will play a 'para-diplomatic' role and act as ambassadors for their host nation in their home country (Wilson 2014). This role has most notably been integral to US higher education internationalisation since the beginning of the Cold-War

(Stetar et al. 2010), with programmes such as the Fulbright Scholarship, part of the US's attempt at establishing 'a democratic empire' (Sidhu 2006). The role of educational aid was to persuade elites abroad that the US was a 'friendly authority with whom they shared common interests as members of the 'free world'' (Sidhu 2006, 6). Soft power and public diplomacy continue to be perceived as key justifications for the recruitment of international students in the US, and its ambassadorial role until recently was frequently cited by political commentators (Robertson and Keeling 2008). Similar logic underpins Australia's Colombo Plan (Tran and Vu 2018) and the Commonwealth Scholarship in the UK (Lomer 2017a).

The soft power discourse is also closely intertwined with the narrative of higher education for international development. Whilst seemingly rooted in social justice and benevolence (e.g. Trilokekar 2015), the stated aim of aiding the development of the Global South also implies that the benefactor will benefit politically. Stein (2019) suggests that this dual rationale actually reproduces colonial relations because it is implicit within the rationale that the flow of knowledge is oneway, that international students have little to offer their hosts, and consequently that recipients would be grateful for what is essentially a charitable donation, implying the superiority of the donor country. However, Trilokekar (2015) argues that challenging the legitimacy of national self-interest in international education as Stein (2019), Knight (2014) and others do is paradoxical, given that national governments are concerned primarily with upholding national interests and progress.

In terms of Chinese discourse around international students, Wu (2019) suggests that China's higher education system engages in outward oriented internationalisation including international student recruitment at the behest of the government, as a means of enhancing the national soft power and international status, and assertion is also made in a number of other studies (e.g. Pan 2013; Kuroda 2014). Moreover, there are a number of articles in

Chinese which have examined policies relating to international student recruitment (e.g. Zhu and Zhang 2017; Ma and Zhou 2018; Liu and Wang 2020), however, they tend to merely outline challenges with regards to policy implementation.

As this review has shown, there are a wide range of discursive constructions of international students that have been covered in the literature focusing on the Global North. However, there is little understanding of the Chinese context, beyond the consensus that international student recruitment is related to soft power accumulation. We can expect that representations of international students in the Chinese context will differ in some ways from those outlined here, given the vastly different ideological, cultural, and historical context.

Method

The approach taken to analysing the data draws on the important work of Lomer (2017a) who takes a policy-as-discourse approach to national ISM policies in the UK. This approach can be described as broadly Foucauldian, in that discourses are seen as socially produced forms of knowledge which limit and shape what it is possible to think or express about social practices (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). The policy-as-discourse approach is premised on the assumption that 'problems' are actually constructed in the policies that are offered as 'responses' to said problems, rather than being solutions to existing problems (Bacchi 2000). This approach thus rejects the notion that there is a process of uncovering actual social problems before the policy intervention takes place. It is also assumed that the process of analysing problem construction within policy discourse reveals ideological positions (Ball 1993). As the literature review demonstrated, in practice ISM policy discourse variously represents international students as sources of income, as unwanted migrants, or as soft power tools and recipients of charity. Using this approach, each of these representations can be viewed as a 'solution', from which the constructed 'problem' can be inferred. Lomer

(2017a) gives the example of income generation, which implies a lack of income for the HE sector as a constructed problem. Our aim, then, is to understand the problematisations present in Chinese policy texts and in turn, disrupt these representations and suggest how these problems could be thought about differently (Bacchi 2000) through the lens of the critical internationalisation studies literature.

The documents were selected on the basis of their relevance and significance to the recruitment, teaching, and administration of international students. In other words the documents selected are the most significant to international students in China. For example, key documents, such as the China Study Abroad Plan (MOE 2010a), which outline the overarching policies and aims of international student recruitment in China, were prioritised amongst national planning documents. Measures and notices which inform current policy were selected from those available. Given the sometimes limited and technical nature of these documents in the Chinese context, we decided to also include a number of other documents released by government departments, which include press releases, speeches, and interviews with officials. In China, policies are structured in a clear hierarchy, from broad national plans, down to more specific implementation 'notices' and 'measures'. National plans are rather vague whereas notices and measures provide more detail about how national plans should be implemented. Because our focus is on the discourse within policies, these genres of documents were considered important in that they add further depth to government measures and notices. 19 texts related to China's policy on incoming international students were selected. The criteria for inclusion is that the texts were policy documents, provided justifications for policy decisions, or accounts of the policies themselves, such as reports, press releases and speeches by government representatives (Ball 1993). The documents were uploaded to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software before being inductively coded and

thematically analysed. The analysis broadly followed the stages delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The main limitation with this kind of research in the Chinese context is that policymaking process in China is notoriously and intentionally opaque (Beeson 2018), and as such, many documents detailing rationales for policies were presumably not publicly available. As such, the resources we were able to draw on were more limited than other studies with a similar focus. For example, there are no detailed industrial strategy reports as exist in most Western contexts, and it was difficult to include the perspectives of the range of policy actors (Han and Ye 2017) given the opacity of the process and the top down nature of policy transmission. That is to say, documents appear to adhere closely to the directions outlined in the texts at the top of the hierarchy, and much of the debate that is part of the policymaking process and the factors that lead to decisions are obscured.

Findings

In this section we outline and discuss in relation to the existing literature the major themes which emerged from the analysis. The first part discusses the notable absence of (neoliberal) economic discourses which are almost ubiquitous in the Global North. The second and third parts describe the major themes found in the data, which briefly comprise; (i) students as para-diplomats, (ii) students as a point of mutual exchange, (iii) students as future elites, (iv) students as of insufficient quality, (v) students as a potential public security threat.

Absence of economic rationales

In contrast with other major destination countries, policy texts do not construct international students as a source of income for China's higher education system. In the case of China, universities receive subsidies from the government to incentivise recruitment (Wen, Hu, and

Hao 2018), and this analysis of policy texts highlights that the creation of a higher education export industry does not appear to be a current goal of the Chinese government as it is in many countries of the Global North, which stands to reason given the differing ideological underpinnings (state-interventionist as opposed to neoliberal) of the policy contexts. This is corroborated by Zha, Wu, and Hayhoe (2019) who note that 'hosting international students may not bring in tuition revenue, yet it helps enhance the university's status with respect to attracting revenue from government' (p. 17). Therefore, whilst universities are financially incentivised to recruit international students through subsidies from the government, income for the higher education system is not a rationale contained within national policies related to international student recruitment. The current policy document outlining how international student fees should be calculated is the Notice on Adjusting Fees for Foreign Students to Come to China at Their Own Expense. This document makes clear that fees should be calculated on the basis of 'normal expenses of teaching and management', and tuition fees should only be set within a specific range mandated by the government (Center for China and Globalization 2016).

Thus, the narrative of students as a source of income or as future skilled workers present in many other national contexts (e.g. Karram 2013; Lomer 2017; Levantino et al. 2018) is not present in Chinese policy texts. This narrative has been critiqued because it is fundamentally exploitative of students from outside the Global North, who are viewed as valuable only to the extent that they are economically useful (e.g. Tikly 2004). Further, internationalisation framed as marketisation reduces the potential for international higher education to be viewed as a public good (e.g. Knight 2014), as well as contributing to the reproduction of global inequalities (e.g. Brooks and Waters 2011). However, the existing discursive constructions outlined in the next section reveal that many of these problems remain even when students are not constructed as neoliberal subjects.

Students as 'para-diplomats' and 'future elites'

The dominant representation of students uncovered through the thematic analysis conceives of students as tools for the realisation of China's foreign policy goals. This construction of students' roles is common in other contexts such as the UK, the USA, and Canada (e.g. Wilson 2014; Trilokekar 2015; Lomer 2017a). For example, Wilson highlights how scholarship programmes in the West, such as the Fulbright and Colombo programmes (Sidhu 2006; Tran and Vu 2018) often portray international students as playing the role of a 'para-diplomat'. However, in these contexts, the para-diplomat construction appears to have become less dominant over time, with neoliberal constructions of students becoming more common as a result of the 'aid to trade' (Stein and de Andreotti 2016) shift in higher education. This is in contrast to Chinese policy texts, where the construction of students as para-diplomats is primary and the recruitment of students is not undergirded by economic considerations.

Students are positioned as a means of accumulating global influence, and it is made clear that they are expected to leave China with a better 'understanding' of China's historical, cultural, social and political conditions (MOE 2018b). Developing students' understanding of China, in a deliberate way through course content and planned social interaction, is foregrounded. For example, the China Study Abroad Plan (MOE 2010b) emphasises that students should be educated about China's 'excellent traditional cultural and national conditions' and that universities should 'help students to understand the development of Chinese society objectively'. In a similar vein, the Quality Standards for International Students in Higher Education Institutions (MOE 2018b) notes:

> International students in China should be familiar with China's history, geography, society, economy and other basic Chinese conditions and cultural knowledge, understand China's political system and foreign policy.

Furthermore, organised interactions with local students are highlighted as another mechanism through which the overall diplomatic objectives of international student recruitment can be met. One policy text stipulates that higher education institutions should 'actively cooperate with group organisations and communities to promote positive and beneficial interaction between Chinese students and the society' (MOE 2018b). Alongside these stipulations are suggestions that universities are responsible for improving communications with alumni, in the name of improving China's national image abroad. Another document suggests that universities should 'tap' the resources of alumni, and that the key role of alumni is to 'tell China's story and spread China's voice' (MOE 2015b). Universities are also directly responsible for supporting alumni to 'contribute to the promotion of inter-civilisation exchange, the enhancement of friendship between peoples and the deepening of international cooperation' (MOE 2018b). This suggests further that China primarily positions students as tools for furthering diplomatic relations with foreign countries over the long-term.

Policy texts also appear to suggest that to achieve the desired outcome of improved international relations from the recruitment of students, said students recruited by Chinese universities should not be ordinary members of their home societies. For example, the 13th five-year plan for the development of national education calls for the 'strengthening the cultivation of elites' through international education (MOE 2017d), and a press release on the Belt and Road Initiative includes a quote from Xu Tao, Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange in the MOE, who emphasises that a goal of China's international student recruitment is to 'cultivate high-level talented individuals' and to 'train

young elites and future leaders in developing countries' (MOE 2017a). This construction is common in other contexts, as highlighted in the literature review. For example, the US state department has historically sought to attract 'potential opinion leaders' through exchange programmes, who would serve as 'interpreters' of the USA, respected and trusted by their local community (Scott-Smith 2008). From these documents, it can be inferred that the 'problem' as constructed by Chinese policymakers is China's lack of global influence, caused by a lack of 'understanding' of China by those living outside the country.

The narrative of students as para-diplomats appears to change subtly over time, as international student recruitment is referenced in relation to China's grand strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (e.g. MOE, 2017c; MOFCOM, 2018). The BRI is a global trade and infrastructure project which, since its announcement in 2013, has rapidly grown to become the dominant representation of China's foreign policy practices and international relations since. This 'outward' shift is reflected in policy documents released since the inception of the BRI which increasingly employ a discourse of 'mutual understanding' between China and BRI countries through ISM (MOE 2019a). Indeed, a stated goal of the BRI is to 'strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations' (BRI 2020). Documents focusing on the BRI also highlight how scholarship provision has shifted towards BRI countries in recent years (MOE 2015a, 2017a, 2017d, 2018a, 2019b, 2019c), suggesting that the Chinese government sees the recruitment of students from these countries as relevant to broader geopolitical aims. Thus, the problematisation is slightly different here, in that a lack of 'mutual understanding' is inferred to be a barrier to the success of the BRI.

The idea that international education should be a cultural dialogue, and international students a source of knowledge (implied by the term mutual exchange) echoes some of the critiques of instrumentalist narratives in the Global North. This for example is at the core of Knight's

(2014) call for a re-thinking of internationalisation in the West. Knight juxtaposes a view of internationalisation in the past rooted in 'values of cooperation, partnership, exchange, mutual benefits and capacity building' (p. 76). At the same time this discourse is difficult to reconcile with the construction of students as 'para-diplomats' and 'future elites'. The latter construction from a critical internationalisation perspective is problematic because it essentially reproduces instrumentalist narratives common in the West (Stein 2019), viewing students as tools for the achievement of foreign policy goals. The agency of students is denied, and they are rendered politically malleable and docile in relation to global geopolitical competition (Tikly 2004). Such narratives also imply a one-way flow of knowledge, and by extension the superiority of the host country, as well as reproducing global inequalities by essentially aiming to create a cadre of graduates who are willing to acquiesce the political influence of more powerful countries in their home country (e.g. Lomer 2017a). Thus, students' roles are reduced to contributing to the host's nation-building and hegemony (Johnstone and Lee 2014), thereby reproducing exploitative discourses found elsewhere. In other words, this construction of students' roles contradicts the mutual exchange narrative within the same texts, by suggesting that knowledge of Chinese culture, language and history is disseminated from the Chinese side, and not tending to strongly position students a source of knowledge to the same extent that it emphasises the importance of international students' own learning about China (e.g. MOE 2015b, 2016a).

In addition, whether these constructions of students are actually realistic is also questionable. The 'opinion leader' model presented in the policy texts is based on reductionist logic (Wilson 2014), and in the case of China there are several reasons why the assumptions of the model may not apply. The success or failure of policies underpinned by this rationale is evaluated in terms of whether graduates occupy positions of influence in their home countries, which institutionalises and spreads the positive attitude and understanding held by the

graduate (Scott-Smith 2008; Wilson 2014). The documents make clear the para-diplomatic role to be filled by alumni in that maintenance of links with alumni is expected to lead to the 'telling of China's story' in a positive way. As Lomer (2017b) highlights, the assumption that international students would choose to work in the interests of the host country is flawed. In the case of China, several studies have attempted to assess students' attitudes towards China, and conclusions around students' opinions towards China are mixed (e.g. Haugen 2013; Ding 2016).

International students as deficient

The analysis also uncovered a theme which is present in documents from 2018 onwards: the suggestion that the 'quality' of international students should be improved, implying, contradictorily, that students are not future elites who are highly likely to go onto positions of influence. For example, it is suggested that 'University admissions departments… should guarantee and continuously improve the quality of international students' (MOE 2018b). This calls into question the idea that China is recruiting international students who will go on to become societal elites able to act as 'interpreters' of China in their home country (Scott-Smith 2008). Recent research, which reports that universities in China needed to lower entrance requirements in order to recruit more international students, echoes this finding (Song 2018; Liu and Wang 2020). This theme also highlights how the Chinese government aims in the longer term to limit access to those only students who are considered 'desirable' in relation to the overall rationale for international student recruitment, a goal common in other national contexts (e.g. O'Connor 2018). That students are simultaneously constructed as future elites and as of insufficient quality is of course a contradiction, and further calls into question the logic underpinning the primary rationale for student recruitment in China.

The final theme highlighted in this article is one in which international students are presented as requiring guidance in order to understand and obey Chinese laws. This theme echoes Ho's (2017, 26) finding that some international students perceived that administrators were concerned with the 'moral degradation' of domestic students through contact with international students. This theme also emerged after 2018, possibly in response to the perceived problem of international students' 'misbehaviour', several instances of which were reported in Chinese state-controlled media (Yan 2019). This led to an unnamed MOE official stating that universities 'should seriously punish foreign students if they violate those rules' in the state media outlet People's Daily (Yan 2019). It is likely that the emerging policy construction of students as potential security threats is related to these developments. In other words, this policy is framed a solution to the 'problem' of unruly international students constructed through policy discourse. The policy texts note that international students should 'form a good concept of the rule of law and moral awareness', and that universities must 'provide safety information to international students in China to prevent illegal activities and unlawful infringement' (MOE 2018a). Another report emphasises that international students should be 'dealt with seriously' if they violate local laws (MOE 2019c). In addition, universities are required to 'educate international students on Chinese laws and regulations… and help them to become familiar with and adapt to the learning and living environment as soon as possible' (MOE 2017b). Thus, Liu and Wang (2020) suggest that the government needs to strengthen its socialisation programmes for international students in order to avoid them becoming a 'threat to public security'.

This narrative, and the choice of focus on the potential of international students to undertake illegal activities, seemingly implies that these policies are a response to the 'problem' that international students in China are in deficit in terms of their ability to understand the law, which along with the narrative that international students in China 'lack quality' reproduces a

problematic discourse within the Global North, in this case of deficiency (both academic and cultural) or moral inferiority (e.g. Montgomery and McDowell 2009). This echoes Xu's (2019) findings around the ways in which students from Hong Kong in Mainland China are constructed as potentially politically dangerous 'others' who are subjected to surveillance on campus – it seems international students are seen in a broadly similar way. This narrative is also aligned in some respects with the policy discourse found in some European countries in which international students are represented as immigrants who are of questionable value to the host society. For example, Levantino et al. (2018) describe how in the contexts of Spain, France, and the UK, international students are positioned as foreigners whose entry must be controlled in order to protect citizens from their possible criminality. Lomer (2017b, 212) also describes how international students who do not fall into the 'elite' category are constructed in UK policy documents as 'undesirable migrants'. Similarly, these policy documents also imply the possible criminality of international students. In relation to the other constructions of students highlighted, this theme has the potential to undermine the dominant soft power construction of international students, as it is distinctly possible that students may also be aware of negative assumptions made in policy, which filter down to the university level and may shape interactions with university administration, resulting in resentment and a 'backfiring' of the policy.

Conclusion

This article has explored how international students are constructed as social subjects, and discussed the implications of these constructions. The main contribution to the existing literature is that this study is the first to adopt a critical approach to national ISM policy in the Chinese context. Understanding the ways in which students are constructed is important in that it helps nuance and rebalance the field of ISM as a whole, which focuses

overwhelmingly on the Global North. Given China's position as the third largest destination country, an understanding of the structural forces that shape this trend, as well as students' experiences in China, is valuable. Moreover, this close reading allows for a richer understanding of Chinese international student recruitment in a global context: although it is beyond the scope of this article, the findings outlined here enable comparison with the nascent body of research from Global North (e.g. Robertson 2011; Lomer 2017a; Levantino et al. 2018; Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018a), in order to locate points of intersection and explore the nuances of differences in policy constructions.

Finally, we would like to reflect on the policy constructions outlined in here in relation to critical perspectives on internationalisation. Interaction between sending and host countries within the Global South clearly offers opportunities for re-thinking the fundamentally exploitative and imbalanced relationships which inform discourses contained within ISM policy in the Global North. Discourse in the Chinese policy context appears to shift over time, and in particular since Xi Jinping came to power and the BRI was established in 2013. A discourse of mutual exchange has emerged, which seems to be fundamentally opposed to the constructions of students as valuable to the extent that they are economically or politically useful, which appear to reproduce those found in the Global North. The narrative associated with the BRI seems to hint at a move towards the kind of internationalisation conceived of in 'soft' critiques of internationalisation. For example, literature on global public goods often calls for a conceptualisation of internationalisation based around notions of 'win-win' (Marginson 2007, 331) and 'shared prosperity' (Stein 2017, 13) echoing the narrative of 'mutual exchange' in BRI related ISM policy discourse. However, policy discourses are often contradictory (e.g. O'Connor 2018), and in this case, Chinese ISM policy discourse also presents international education as a resource for securing national (geo)political advantage, and international students variously as politically docile tools for securing this national

advantage and as future elites, and at same time as academically and morally deficient, and as a public security risk, effectively undermining the narrative of mutual civilisational exchange.

The contradictory nature of discursive constructs surrounding the BRI more broadly is well documented. For example, Callahan (2016) notes how a discourse of mutual respect and equality sits alongside a discourse of a hierarchical Sino-centric regional order. In terms of higher education, these narratives are hard to reconcile. Attempting to re-imagine higher education as a point of mutual exchange and equality would mean for example a focus on respecting and integrating the indigenous knowledge traditions of other cultures, in particular those from other countries in Global South whose citizens make up the bulk of the international student body in China (MOE 2019d), rather than discursively establishing that knowledge flows should be one way, with an instrumental goal of augmenting China's geopolitical position, and that students themselves are public security risks or academically deficient.

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Chapter Four: Conceptualising the discourse of student mobility between "periphery" and "semi-periphery": the case of Africa and China

Abstract

China is now the second most popular destination country for African international students. This paper investigates the discourse surrounding this emergent flow of students. The main aim is to offer a new means to conceptualise mobility between non-Western nations. The article highlights weaknesses in current postcolonial conceptualisations of student mobility. A key contribution to the literature on international student mobility is that it extends and adapts existing work on the unequal and asymmetrical nature of international student mobility by drawing on the concept of *semi-peripheral (post)coloniality*, to examine how specific modes of integration into the "world-system" result in particular discursive formations around international student mobility. The main argument is that relative structural positions between the sending region and receiving country are mirrored in discourse around international student mobility, which contains examples of civilizational paternalism and pursuit of pragmatic foreign policy goals.

Introduction

Global patterns of international student mobility are changing. As of 2017 there were over 5.3 million students enrolled in tertiary education outside of their home country (UNESCO, 2019). Historically, the largest sending region for international students has been East Asia, and at the same time, the regions able to attract the most international students have been Europe and North America (Choudaha, 2017). This largely remains the case, for example, in 2017, 600,000 mainland Chinese students went abroad for tertiary study, and of these students, over half chose to study in the USA. However, as De Wit (2018) notes, developing nations which were previously the largest suppliers of international students, most clearly China, are now amongst the largest destination countries. China also hosted nearly half a million international students as of 2018 (MOE, 2019), making it the third largest destination country, after the UK and USA. A large proportion of these students are from what can be considered 'peripheral' postcolonial countries. For example African students constitute the second largest regional group - 81,562 studied in China in 2018.

The growth of China as a destination for international higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon, and as such, a large part of research on international student mobility examines the phenomenon of students moving from East Asia to Anglophone Western nations. Some of this literature has adopted a postcolonial lens to understand the nature of this form of migration. However, less attention has been paid to other student flows, including students moving from sub-Saharan Africa to East Asia, and as a result, the explanatory power of existing postcolonial approaches to international student mobility is limited, given that the literature tends to adopt a binary of 'Western' and 'non-Western'. As such, this article aims to develop a concept for understanding the discourse associated with higher education internationalisation globally, using mobility between Africa and China as an example.

The analysis begins from the premise that 'globalized higher education is highly unequal' (Altbach, 2007, p. 124). Altbach (2007) makes the distinction between powerful university systems in the global core and weaker institutions as peripheries. He argues that centre-periphery relations between university systems resemble neo-colonial domination. This article extends and adapts Altbach's arguments by drawing on the concept of *semi-peripheral (post)coloniality* (e.g. Ginelli, 2018) to analyse how structural forces shape the nature of educational mobility between the periphery and semi-periphery, and to refine current postcolonial theorising around student mobilities in the light of non-Western destination countries such as China. The argument is made that the concept, combining insights from world system theory with postcolonial theory, adds nuance to current postcolonial conceptualisations of student mobility, and allows for the expounding of China's position in 'the middle', that is, as defined by both subordination (by the global core) and superiority (over the periphery).

The analysis provides an overview of the global context within which the strategies of globally mobile African students are embedded, and argues that this structural context results in asymmetrical patterns of knowledge exchange, drawing on a core-periphery model of university systems. China's semi-peripheral structural position is mirrored in the discourse and policies surrounding international students from peripheral nations. It is argued that China's stated position with regard to international students from developing countries in Africa is somewhat contradictory, due to its status as a semi-peripheral nation seeking to 'catch-up' with and 'overtake' the global core. On the one hand discourse around African international students emphasises political solidarity, and associated with this, a stated ethical aid policy, of which higher education scholarships are one part, is positioned as an alternative to Western models. At the same time, this discourse is juxtaposed against some examples of

'civilizational paternalism', pragmatic foreign policy manoeuvring, as well as the possibility of the racialised reception of African international students.

The article consists of three sections. The first section briefly reviews relevant literature and outlines the analytical framework that will be applied in the following sections. The second section explains how more established global student flows developed, how this development is related to the structure of the 'world-system', and how this structure is mirrored in discursive formations around international student mobility. The third section goes on to outline the factors which have contributed to the emergence of a flow of students between sub-Saharan Africa and China, and discusses what the emergent flow of students between sub-Saharan Africa and China can reveal about the ways in which structural forces shape discursive formations around international student mobility, and consequently, the reception of students in the host country.

Literature review and analytical framework

Postcolonial approaches to international student mobility

This paper draws on postcolonial theory to examine international student mobility flows. In terms of international student mobility, it tends to focus on how the legacy of colonialism drives international student flows from other regions to the Anglophone West, and shapes international student experiences in Western host countries (Yang, 2019). As Madge et al. (2014) put it 'the painful politics associated with colonialism and its past spatial relations, inequities and injustices are essential to shaping contemporary neocolonial relations of education' (2014, p. 693). Bolsmann and Miller (2008) highlight how Western universities continue to benefit from imperial and colonial linkages in the contemporary higher education market, as students from postcolonial countries are seen as potential sources of income for Western institutions. In addition, a 'developmental' discourse with its origins in colonial

'civilising, controlling' missions is identified in Western discourses about international higher education provision to developing countries (Bolsmann and Miller, 2008, p. 80). Related to this, Stein and Andreotti (2016) outline a global imaginary, with its roots in the birth of the modern colonial world system, which is defined by the 'colonial myth of Western supremacy' (2016, p. 229). The reproduction of this myth leads to a presumption of the 'universal worth' of Western higher education, and drives international student mobility from other regions to the West (2016, p. 231). One issue with this literature, however, is that it tends to reproduce a framework which juxtaposes the West with the rest of the world. A result of this is that existing frameworks utilised in the international student mobility literature cannot fully express the position of nations within the system, outside the West.

The weaknesses of this 'West' vs 'the Rest' gaze within postcolonial theory beyond the field of higher education, and its limited utility in explaining the multifaceted and ambivalent position of many non-Western nations have long been recognised. For example, McClintock (1992, p. 86) posits that postcolonialism 'continues to privilege Europe as a central subject of history', thereby undermining its own objectives. With this in mind, Koh (2015) suggests that the postcolonial literature on migration must move beyond the dichotomy of centre and periphery, and beyond pointing to migration flows between former colonies and the imperial core. Similarly, Raghuram (2013) highlights a lack of theorisation of the role played by those positioned in-between core and peripheral countries. As an example of how this can be problematic, Raghuram et al. (2014, p. 119) highlight that improved position of Asia within the global political economy, framed as a 'global rebalancing' – in other words a shift away from a system represents a significant empirical challenge to postcolonial theory. This rebalancing sometimes results in 'reversal of centre and periphery', as formerly colonised countries appear to subjugate those below them within the global symbolic hierarchy (Raghuram et al., 2014, p. 127). This in turn raises questions around the suitability the West

and 'non-West' binary to explain contemporary relations between states outside of the 'core' of Western, industrialised nations.

The role of such nations in the global South raises questions about dominant binary imaginaries such as North-South, developed-developing etc., overturning the spatial imaginaries of 'development' and of postcolonial theory (Raghuram, 2012). The North-South relations that underlay much postcolonial thinking in Geography have been supplemented by a much more complex and variegated spatial matrix of power relations.

World-systems Analysis

This article also draws on neo-Marxist approaches to analysis of the global political economy. The theory is essentially a metanarrative of the historical development of a single global capitalist economy over time. The narrative highlights how nations and regional blocs interact in a global hierarchical political-economic structure, which has a core, or centre, and a periphery (Wallerstein, 1993). The hierarchy is flexible and changeable, and as Wallerstein (2004) explains, states currently in the semi-periphery, such as China, often attempt to augment their position, and higher education is part of this process. Semi-peripheral states, in competing to move closer to the 'core' of industrialised nations, are under pressure from the core and also 'putting pressure on peripheral states' (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 29). World-systems analysis thus provides a framework for understanding the relative position of nation-states within the hierarchical world political economy.

Following this theory, the global higher educational field can also be conceptualised in the same way, as Altbach (2007, p. 124) notes, 'concentrating on developing countries and on smaller academic systems immediately reveals the spectre of inequality'. Powerful academic systems have always dominated the production and dissemination of knowledge (Marginson, 2008). Indicators of this include 'research concentration and knowledge flows, the global role

of English, and American universities as people attractors and as exemplars of ideal practice'
(Marginson, 2008, p. 308). In this way, the core pressurises and influences the semi-
periphery. These interactions manifest themselves in global student flows, as the following
sections will explore. As Wu (2018, p. 82) argues, China's 'outward-oriented'
internationalization, of which international student recruitment is one facet, is one of the
'instruments' which the Chinese state wields with the aim of movement towards the core.

Importantly when considering the case of China, a crucial part of the world-systems analysis
argument is that the structure of the system is supported by a set of cultural beliefs that
developed in the enlightenment and later the French Revolution, and became integral to
Western society (Griffiths and Arnove, 2015). A key belief shared by all polities, argues
Wallerstein (2004) is in developmentalism and the associated faith in the possibility of
endless economic development - this belief is 'a universal faith, shared alike by conservatives,
liberals, and Marxists' (Wallerstein, 1995, p. 163). This shared belief in linear progress is
important in that it partly explains the phenomenon outlined in the next section.

Semi-Peripheral (Post)coloniality

Six (2009, p. 1110) notes that China holds a 'dual position' within the global political
economy, resulting in 'a certain ambiguity' in its relationship with peripheral nations, or in
other words, China sits in the 'middle' of the world-system (Raghuram, 2012), resulting in an
ambivalent relationship with those in the periphery. Postcolonial theory is thus somewhat
limited in terms of its ability to explain China's position, in that, as mentioned in the first
section of this review, it tends to reproduce a dichotomy of centre and periphery, or of West
and non-West. As such, the concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality is put forward as a
means of explaining how this ambivalence manifests in student mobility discourse. A 2018
article by Zoltan Ginelli introduces the concept, which, as the name suggests, connects

insights from the two approaches outlined above. The aim of combining these two approaches in this case is to show how discursive and structural processes of relationships between semi-periphery and periphery are closely intertwined.

Ginelli (2018) outlines that the concept expresses how the long-term ideological and structural positions (positions within the world-system) can serve to (re)produce colonial relations and colonial discourse. Countries within the semi-periphery are relatively well connected to the global centre but in some ways remain subjugated to it. They normally do not have colonies, but are perceived to have civilizational superiority over the global periphery. These countries have a strong urge to 'develop', 'catch-up' with and imitate the global core, and share the same sense of responsibility for the modernisation of the periphery (Ginelli, 2018). Hungary provides a case of the contradictory nature of semi-peripheral postcoloniality. Ginelli (2018) argues, drawing on the case of Hungary's development support to Ghana, that Hungary's anti-imperialist political solidarity with Ghana and other postcolonial, peripheral countries, was 'mixed with a civilisational paternalism and pragmatic manoeuvring in foreign policy'.

Historical examples from interactions between Soviet Eastern Europe and the postcolonial world are highlighted by Ivancheva (2019) to demonstrate how semi-peripheral (post)colonialism operates in terms of higher education internationalisation. For instance Pugach (2018) reveals how European socialist nations exercised power over postcolonial nations by controlling which subjects students would be trained in, and how many would be trained. This meant the receiving countries had far greater power over the process of knowledge transfer than the sending countries. These examples highlight how structural relations influenced the nature of educational exchanges between semi-periphery and periphery. In a similar vein, Mawdsley highlights that 'South-South' development

cooperation, in some cases, 'reinforces the social hierarchies that it purports to reject' (2011, p. 267). This highlights the challenge to postcolonial theory generally as well as in relation to international student mobility, in explaining power relations beyond the dominant binary of centre and periphery. As such, one outcome of this article is a theoretical contribution – the concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality is expanded upon, adapted, and introduced to the study of contemporary international student mobility. It has utility in understanding international student flows to non-Western destinations, as postcolonial approaches to understanding international student mobility to date are somewhat limited, in that the arguments associated with them are made within a dichotomous 'centre-periphery', or 'West' and 'Rest' framework. This actually serves to reproduce West-centric imaginaries and cannot adequately explain the complex and ambivalent position of semi-peripheral nations (Ginelli, 2018). Therefore, this theoretical approach provides nuance to postcolonial understandings of student mobility, by recognising how China's structural position in the world-system shapes the discourse of relations with other states.

Manifestations of (post)coloniality in mobility between the West and 'the Rest'

The aim of this section is to outline briefly how the phenomenon of mass international student mobility has emerged over the past several decades. One of the most notable features of the process of internationalisation outlined in the previous section is the growth in the number of international students globally. International student mobility generally reflects the structure of the 'world-system' outlined above, and is also defined by its (post)colonial nature (e.g. Madge et al., 2009; Stein and Andreotti, 2016). That is to say, historically, students from the semi-periphery and periphery have chosen to study in the hegemonic global core countries. As such, the flow of students from the semi-periphery (for example East Asia) to the core is one manifestation of the hegemony of the likes of the USA and UK. Over 5.3

million individuals undertook higher education studies outside of their home country in 2017, a large increase from a figure of 2 million in 2000 (UNESCO, 2019). The majority of these students are in full-time degree bearing programmes, whilst a smaller number are in other forms of study such as language programmes or vocational education courses (Ziguras and McBurnie, 2011).

In the past two decades, mobility for full degree programmes, predominantly from developing countries in Asia to industrialised countries in the West, has fuelled the growth of a global market for higher education, and the concurrent growth of higher education as an important export industry, especially for Anglophone Western countries (e.g. Marginson, 2011). The number of Chinese students overseas, for example, continues to grow year-on-year. In 2017, 608,400 Chinese students studied abroad, an 11 percent increase on the number from the previous year (MOE, 2019). The reasons for the growth in numbers of students from China and from other East Asian nations are related to the structure of the global political economy. First, rapid social and economic growth led to more disposable income for families in East Asia. The size of the global middle-class has risen from 1.8 billion in 2009, to 3.2 billion in 2020. The majority of this growth is coming from Asia: by the year 2030 Asia is projected to account for 66% of the global middle class population, compared to 28% in 2009 (Pezzini, 2012). Families with disposable income are willing to invest significantly in Western educational credentials, as qualifications from Western countries are associated in East Asia with the highest level of symbolic capital, and thus the highest level of convertibility into advantages in the labour market (e.g. Waters, 2006). This symbolic capital is in turn related to a global imaginary, with its roots in colonialism, which is defined by the myth of Western supremacy (Stein and Andreotti, 2016).

In addition, foreign direct investment from countries within the global core, along with the development of export economies, has driven demand within East Asian labour markets for the skills and knowledge associated with relocated manufacturing processes and business services (Ziguras and McBurnie, 2011). Thus the rise of international student mobility from Asia to the West can be attributed partly to a response to the demand for highly skilled workers in East Asia as a result of economic globalisation and the economic domination of the global core over other regions. Related to this, within East Asia there is a demand for English-language skills, and this is reflected in the fact that a large share of globally mobile students choose English-speaking destination countries: 42% of globally mobile students were studying in the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as of 2014 (OECD, 2014). The global demand for English education can also be seen as a manifestation of the hegemony of Anglophone Western countries over other regions (Song, 2019), and more specifically of the hegemony of the higher education systems within the global core over those outside it (Marginson, 2008).

Furthermore, changes on the supply-side also contributed to the flow of Asian students to the West. Perhaps most important were policy changes, coinciding with increasing demand for international higher education, which massively increased supply in what are now the largest host countries. As a result of policy changes in the late 1980s, the vast majority of international students in Anglophone are enrolled on a user-pay basis. For example, in the UK, overseas recruitment as a major source of income emerged in the Thatcher era as a means to fund higher education systems without deregulating home fees (Lomer, 2017b). Likewise, within a few years of each-other, Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland all deregulated international student fees (Ziguras and McBurnie, 2011). As a result of these changes, the number of places for students in what are now the largest destination countries was uncapped.

Thus the nature of the Anglophone West's integration into the world system led to mobility from other regions to the West. At the same time, the discursive formations around student mobility in the West tend to reflect this position within the structure. Recent literature has documented several manifestations of this. The construction of students as a source of income for universities in the global north further demonstrates how discourse international student mobility has been shaped by the unequal structure of the global political economy. The superiority of Western knowledge and education is presumed, international students are willing to purchase access to Western education in order to pursue social mobility (Stein and Andreotti, 2016). By extension, international students are often perceived to be 'in deficit' in academic terms, due to their national origin (Lomer, 2017a). In addition, Bolsmann and Miller (2008) argue that a 'developmental' discourse, with roots in colonialism, still exists with reference to higher education scholarships to non-Western countries.

This section has outlined the factors that led to the growth of the Anglophone West as the primary destination for internationally mobile students from East Asia over the past three decades. The flow of students from East Asia to the Anglophone West is emblematic of Western hegemony within the 'world-system' and of the dominance of the higher education systems of these countries within the global higher educational field. The discourse of international student recruitment in the West is also closely related to its position within the global political economy.

International student mobility between Africa and China

This section aims to outline how, more recently, a global higher educational field with a clear centre, semi-periphery, and periphery has emerged, with larger middle income countries such as China becoming destinations of choice for students from Africa and other relatively low-income regions. This hierarchy broadly mirrors the structure of the global political economy

as a whole. The argument is made that the factors which have led to recent Africa-China educational migration patterns in many ways mirror those which led to flows of students across the world to the Anglophone West, resulting in the reproduction of structural inequalities, which is reflected in policy discourse. There is a hegemonic centre which attracts the bulk of students and research power from the semi-periphery and periphery (Connell, 2017). However, as semi-peripheral nations such as China improve their position within the global political economy relative to peripheral nations, their relationship with those countries increasingly becomes asymmetrical. This is reflected in discourse and policy around international student mobility. As a result discourse within Chinese policy texts with regards to international students from Africa is somewhat contradictory – political solidarity and an ethical aid policy which is positioned as an alternative to Western models, is juxtaposed against some examples of 'civilizational paternalism' and pragmatic foreign policy manoeuvring.

China's relative position within the global political economy acts as a pull factor for African students, just as the West's relative position to East Asia has. As of 2016, China became 'Africa's largest trading partner, foreign job creator, and source of foreign direct investment' (Brigety, 2018). China has become, according to Adams Bodomo 'the most important bilateral trading partner for the African continent' (2018, p. 128). China also created the largest number of jobs - 137,041 in total - through FDI in Africa in the same time period (Ernst and Young, 2018). Such investment creates a demand for credentials in business, information technology, as well as competency in the respective language of the investor. The flow of students from one country to another then, can be seen as a means of transferring 'know-how' or skills and intercultural competencies from more to less developed economies (Guruz, 2008). As the volume of Chinese investment in Africa has increased, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of African students seeking international study in

China, possibly due to the fact that knowledge and skills associated with study in China appear to be in demand in African nations (Mulvey, 2019). The extent to which skills such as Chinese language are in demand across the continent is not completely clear, but given the level of Chinese investment generally, it is likely that the demand for higher education in China is related to increased demand for highly-skilled, Chinese speaking graduates across Africa. Therefore, the flow of students from Africa to China is partly a corollary of economic globalisation, which in recent years has engendered Chinese economic activity in Africa in the form of investment and the operation of a number of Chinese multinational corporations.

It appears then, that just as Western foreign direct investment between the 1970's and 1990's led to demand for students with Western credentials, and contributing to a rise in the number of Asians studying for degrees in the Anglophone West (Ziguras and McBurnie, 2011), the recent explosion in Chinese investment in Africa has contributed to the flow of Africans to China for study. In other words, the relative economic and political power of China in most African nations is likely to be a key motivating factor for African students to choose China as a destination. This power differential may manifest itself in numerous ways which influence the reception and education of African students in China.

The factors outlined in this section appear to point towards the development of a multiple-tiered structure of international student flows. In the past, international students primarily moved from the semi-periphery and periphery to the hegemonic higher education systems of the global core. There is a consensus within academic literature that these movements are related to the unequal structure of the global political economy. For example, on the demand-side students are keen to learn English and other skills associated with the relocation of manufacturing processes and business services to the semi-periphery and periphery (Chan, 2012). On the supply-side, changes in policy meant that students from these countries were

increasingly viewed as 'cash-cows' - as Stein and Andreotti (2016) argue, this positioning highlights the assumed superiority and universal worth of Western education. As a result of this perception, within the hierarchical global higher educational field, Western institutions are assumed to provide individuals with the greatest amount of symbolic capital.

China has succeeded in becoming a destination of choice in regions that are of particular geo-political significance and in doing so has effectively reproduced the 'structural conditions of global inequality' (Ivancheva and Syndicus, 2019, p. 4) of the world-systems model. Students from peripheral regions, due to limited cultural, social and economic capital (partly a result of peripheral location within the global hierarchy), normally would not have access to the international study destinations which are associated with the greatest level of symbolic capital, that is, those at the global core. However, lower entry standards (both academic and financial) mean that the semi-peripheral Chinese higher education system represents a viable option for students from the global periphery. The following section outlines how the structural inequalities that drive student mobility between Africa and China are mirrored in policy and discourse. There are two main examples of this: Firstly, discourse around educational mobility between Africa and China which positions students from African nations as recipients of charity and as lagging behind on a linear path of human progress, and secondly, the positioning of African students as diplomatic tools for the achievement of foreign policy goals.

Discourse of China's higher education scholarships to African countries

The intention of the Chinese state to utilise higher education as a means of achieving foreign policy goals means that a relatively large number of full and partial scholarships are available for study in China, especially for African students. China provides massive support for foreign students through a number of scholarship programmes such as the Chinese

Government Scholarship and the Great Wall Scholarship. 63,041 international students in total received scholarships for study in China in 2018, and a pledge was made at the FOCAC conference in 2018 to provide 50,000 government scholarships for higher education to African students over a three year period (2019-2021) (FOCAC, 2018). To put this into perspective, the United Kingdom's largest scholarship programme for international students, the Commonwealth Scholarship, funded 26,000 students globally for study in the United Kingdom between its conception in 1959, and 2016. The scholarships are provided to a broad range of students: Of 12,508 African scholarship awardees in 2018, 174 were studying for non-degree qualifications, 3621 for undergraduate degrees, 5026 for master's, and 3687 for doctoral (Ministry of Education, 2019). All 54 African nations are represented amongst awardees, with Sudan, Egypt, Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia receiving the most (Ministry of Education, 2019). Scholarships are awarded across all disciplines, but are particularly concentrated in Engineering, Management, and Economics related disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2019). A total of 81,562 African students studied in China in 2018, meaning that most do not receive scholarships.

Before discussing the discourses circulating on the Chinese side, it is important to note that the students themselves exercise agency. China is increasingly seen across Africa as a source of useful resources for personal, familial, and business progression (Mohan and Lampert, 2013). African students often come to China with the aim of running family businesses (Ho, 2017), and in some cases assume that they will benefit from having studied in China by taking up employment in Chinese companies upon their return home (Mulvey, 2019). The success of Chinese enterprises in Africa often depends on African actors, including graduates of Chinese universities, who aid in understanding the local market (Mohan and Lampert, 2013).

The ambivalent position of China in relation to Africa, of solidarity and also of civilizational superiority, is expressed in recent discourse around higher education scholarships. The presentation of international students as recipients of 'charity' in the form of scholarships also mirrors the historical relationship between the core and periphery, rather than challenging it. Non-western students are at times framed as recipients of development aid, which is benevolently granted by Western countries, so that peripheral countries can 'catch-up' on the linear and universal path of 'progress' (Stein and Andreotti, 2016). Although this logic is less common now in the West than in the past, having been displaced to some extent by neo-liberal marketisation, and the associated positioning of students as sources of income for the higher education sector, it is still applied to some students, especially those from low-income countries.

The discourse around African international students in China sometimes appears to reproduce this logic. Within state-media and FOCAC reports on higher education scholarships to African countries, two contradictory narratives emerge. Firstly, a rhetoric of two-way exchange and 'win-win' cooperation is employed. This construction implies that African students are part of an equal exchange. Secondly, African students are constructed as recipients of 'help' from the Chinese government.

The documents referring to African students specifically present higher education scholarships given to African students as one form of China's foreign aid. The rhetoric employed within China's aid policy is well documented in academic literature. As King (2014, p. 153) summarises 'China claims to present what is essentially an ethical aid policy, based on principles of mutuality, complementarity, political equality and common development'. China's Africa Policy (MOFA, 2006) outlines the logic under which cooperation between China-Africa should take place, including educational exchange. Four

key principles are outlined: (i) sincerity, friendship and equality (ii) mutual benefit, reciprocity, and common prosperity, (iii) mutual support and close coordination, and (iv) learning from each other and seeking common development. In other words, China positions its aid, of which scholarships are one part, in contrast to the 'Western' notions of aid, which reproduce developmentalist narratives that imply the superiority of the West over the aid recipient. Chinese policy documents present China's aid policy as ethical and an alternative to Western aid and its associated logics. Documents referring to Africa in particular highlight 'exchange' and 'mutual cooperation'. For example the Johannesberg Action Plan (MOFA, 2015) outlines that scholarships are a part of a broader plan to achieve 'win-win results, exchanges and mutual learning'.

Interestingly, whilst a discourse of 'win-win' relations and 'mutual cooperation' is found in both English-language sources (which can be assumed to be for international consumption) and Chinese, another discourse, framing scholarships as a form of assistance, is more commonly found in English language sources, but appears less prominent within Chinese language media for a domestic audience, perhaps suggesting that this discourse is intended primarily for an international audience. Wang (2013) notes that some discourse in China reproduces a 'Western' donor-recipient narrative, thereby deviating from the aforementioned 'win-win' narrative. For example, FOCAC (2019b) highlights how 'African students have become government officials, started their own businesses or worked with international companies, which is a great boost to development in Africa', and in doing so clearly positions the provision of scholarships as a means of 'helping' Africa to develop. In a similar vein, another recent state media report on China's higher education scholarships, describes how scholarships offer a 'ray of hope' for African international students (FOCAC, 2019a). China's Foreign Ministry also argues in a recent report that African students are 'grateful for the trade and business opportunities that Chinese education offers them' (MOFA, 2017).

Africa and by association, African students, are depicted as lagging behind, requiring assistance from 'world leader' China:

> Africa still lags behind the rest of the world in the generation of new scientific knowledge. On the other hand, China has grown to become a world leader in scientific knowledge. China's increasing support and commitment to educational cooperation with African countries will play a crucial role in establishing a knowledge-based Africa in the future. (FOCAC, 2019b)

In other words, these documents appear to present Africa and African students in a way which effectively 'others' them and reproduces the colonial logic of Western higher educational aid (Stein and Andreotti, 2016).

China's higher education scholarships to African students, presented as 'win-win' and on equal terms actually further the asymmetric internationalization of higher education which Ivancheva (2019) argues is an example of semi-peripheral (post)colonialism (Ginelli, 2018). Ginelli explains the ambiguous position of the semi-peripheral world in relation to the postcolonial periphery, arguing that instead of challenging eurocentrism, Eastern European countries, through unequal exchanges, actually embraced this eurocentrism and undermined their own anti-imperialist position.

China's position in relation to African countries can be viewed in a similar way. Whilst Chinese aid and by extension its higher education provision is presented as an alternative to the West and an equal partner for 'win-win' exchange with African countries. However, the positioning of African students as 'lagging behind' and China as 'more technologically advanced' (e.g. FOCAC, 2019a; b) implies a hierarchical worldview in which China itself is moving towards the 'core'. The premise is that Chinese knowledge is superior to that of its partners in Africa, and is thus not decolonial in nature.

The soft power rationale

Unlike in the West, the positioning of international students as sources of income is not dominant in China. However, through the soft power rationale, African international students are still positioned as tools, with which the Chinese government can improve its cultural soft power, and in turn augment its semi-peripheral position, thereby 'catching-up with' and ultimately overtaking the West. Implicit in the soft power rationale for international student recruitment broadly speaking is a sense of superiority over the periphery. For example, international students are expected to learn Chinese, and graduation is conditional on students passing classes on China's 'excellent traditional culture' (MOE, 2018). Policy documents also highlight that universities should 'tap' the resources of alumni, and that the key role of alumni is to '*tell China's story and spread China's voice*' (MOE, 2015). Universities are also directly responsible for supporting alumni to 'contribute to the promotion of inter-civilisation exchange, the enhancement of friendship between peoples and the deepening of international cooperation' (MOE, 2018a). African students recruited by Chinese universities should also be 'future leaders' and 'elites' (FOCAC, 2019; MOE, 2017a; 2017b).

The soft power rationale reproduces inequalities and colonial relations in a number of ways. Implicit within it is the notion that knowledge flows should be largely in one direction. That is to say, the student should learn about the host's culture, and take this knowledge back to their respective home country. In the case of China, as with student mobility between the West and other regions, discourse implies that the flow of knowledge is one-way: the implication is that international students have nothing to offer their hosts. Moreover, soft power as a rationale for international student recruitment has its roots in colonialism – as Lomer (2017b, p. 590) notes, students from Britain's colonies were given scholarships with the assumption that higher education was a means to 'guide the thoughts' of colonial subjects.

This logic appears to be mirrored in the assertion that African students in China should be future leaders. In addition to this, implicit in the rationale is an assumption that students will naturally develop positive attitudes towards their host country and its social and political conditions (Lomer, 2017b). This appears to be true of China's rationale for recruiting international students: That students would return home and choose to 'spread China's voice' is taken for granted – implying that exposure to China through study abroad would be enough to cause students to firstly develop positive opinions towards China and secondly, choose to act on this positive disposition after graduation. As Tian and Lowe (2016) state with regard assumptions contained within China's public diplomacy efforts 'it would be cultural arrogance to assume that 'success' is assured simply as a consequence of exposure to Chinese society and culture' (2016, pp. 242-243).

This rationale also fails to account for the agency of African students in China. Students may hold nuanced and multi-faceted views towards their host, and are political and social actors in their own right. Whilst some may choose to continue to engage with China after graduation, this may be related to the potential economic benefits of doing so, rather than a positive disposition towards China (Mulvey, 2019). Further, some students seek to contest Chinese economic presence in their home country, and see scholarships underpinned by a soft power rationale as one part of a larger trend of Chinese involvement which is perceived to be against the interests of their country as a whole (Mulvey, 2019). Thus, students' agency is inadequately accounted for in this discourse. The discourse of 'soft power' through higher education provides one example of how structural inequalities between the periphery and semi-periphery are mirrored in policy discourse. Implicit in the soft power rationale is a sense of civilizational superiority, and that the flow of knowledge should be primarily in one direction. African students are seen as diplomatic 'tools' for the achievement of the goal of augmenting China's position in the global political economy, or as recipients of charity, but

there is little sense that anything can be learned from the students themselves. In these ways international student mobility between Africa and China reproduces the inequalities that structure international student mobility between the West and other regions.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been argued that the discourse around international student mobility from countries in Africa to China mirrors the relative positions of the two nations within the global political economy. Through introducing the concept of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality to the literature on international student mobility, this article has sought to shift the focus away from a Eurocentric discourse around higher education mobilities, and theorise China's complex position 'in the middle' (Raghuram, 2013). That is to say, the nature of this student flow and the associated discourse is framed as a semi-peripheral nation reproducing its own self-peripheralisation through international student recruitment, and engaging in uneven knowledge exchanges with countries in lower positions on the 'symbolic ladder' (Ivancheva, 2019, p. 745). The rationale which underpins the recruitment of students from peripheral regions such as Africa which have strategic geo-political importance to China, as well as the discourse in policy documents relating to higher educational aid to Africa were put forward as the two main sources of evidence demonstrating China's complex and sometimes contradictory position in relation to student mobility from peripheral nations. The analysis, drawing on the concepts of semi-peripheral (post)coloniality (Ginelli, 2018) improves our understanding of how global structural forces and factors are potentially connected to the mobility experiences of individual students.

The theorisation outlined here strengthens our understanding of the ways in which the (post)colonial global political economy shapes student mobility between the periphery and semi-periphery, and associated discursive formations. It does so by offering a means of

applying postcolonial approaches to international student mobility to such countries, through a recognition of 'middle' positionality within the world-system. Recent literature on international student mobility to the West has strengthened our understanding of how the current structure of the global political economy influences narratives around international students, and resultantly, influences the reception of international students in the West (e.g. Stein and Andreotti, 2016). This work has important implications in that it emphasizes the need to pay more attention to the ethics of higher education internationalisation, and the reception and education of international students in universities. However, these approaches also reproduce a West-centric framework which cannot be applied easily to emergent trends of international student mobility to non-Western destination countries. This article provides a means to understand how global structures also shape internationalisation in non-Western destination countries.

This theorisation also highlights important areas for further study. Most obviously, postcolonial analyses of Western higher education have highlighted how structural factors are closely related to the racialised reception of international students. In these analyses, a global hierarchy makes Western education desirable to international students, and at the same time, results in the presumption that international students are in 'deficit', in other words, are presumed to be academically weak due to their national origin. As Lomer (2017b) suggests, discourses ultimately filter down to staff and students via institutions, and this could have implications for the reception of international students. Yet, thus far, what research exists on international students in China has largely not explored their experiences in these terms. The discourses surrounding student mobility between Africa and China, of mutual exchange, and contradictorily, soft power and charity, may have important implications for how students are received in China, and this link should be further explored in future research.

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Chapter Five: "Decentring" international student mobility: The case of African student migrants in China

Abstract

Despite the growth in numbers and geopolitical relevance of African students in China, research focusing on this body of student migrants remains scarce. This article presents an empirical investigation and postcolonial theorisation of student migration between Africa and China. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with 40 African students, I provide an account of the decision-making processes that lead African student migrants to study in Chinese universities. The article explores how this process is mediated by global power asymmetries, specifically China's position within the (post)colonial world system relative to African nations. Four examples of student decision-making processes, which are shaped by structural inequalities, are given and challenge existing understandings of who moves overseas to study for a degree and to what ends. These are as follows: underprivileged students benefiting from China's political manoeuvring, students who are coerced into moving overseas, students who are middle class but not affluent by global standards, and and elites who take advantage of social networks to secure diplomatic scholarships.

Introduction

Global patterns of international student mobility (ISM) are shifting. In 2017, there were around 5.3 million individuals studying in tertiary education institutions outside of their home country (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019). These flows of student migrants generally tend to favour Western nations such as the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia (Brooks & Waters, 2011). However, China has in recent years become an important destination country, having hosted almost half a million international students in 2018 (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2019). It now hosts more international students than any other nation besides the United Kingdom and United States.

At the same time, a higher proportion of African tertiary students are globally mobile than in any other region, with ~6% undertaking higher education outside their home country (Kritz, 2015). China hosts the second greatest number of African international students of any country, and African students are the second largest regional grouping of international students in China—there were 81,562 students from all 54 African countries studying in China in 2018 (MOE, 2019).

The development of China as a major destination country for African students and the growth of outbound ISM among African students are both emergent phenomena. This partly explains the lack of empirical research on this student flow and why the bulk of research on ISM focuses on major sending (e.g., China and India) and destination countries (e.g., the United Kingdom and United States; Lipura & Collins, 2020). However, less attention is paid to other student flows, and a result is that existing theory around students' mobility decisions, largely developed with reference to 'rest' to 'West' student flows, is insufficient to explain the mobility decisions of students not moving to the West to study (Prazeres, 2017). In this article, on the basis of empirical research consisting of 40 interviews conducted with African

students in Chinese universities, I analyse the decision-making processes of this group of student migrants and explore how this new knowledge challenges existing conceptual understandings of the nature of ISM.

An outcome of the article is that it draws attention to under-acknowledged unequal dynamics within the Global South. I seek to situate Africa–China educational migration within the broader context of the globalisation and the global regime of coloniality, incorporating structural power relations into an analysis of student migrants' decision making. The main theoretical contribution is to contribute to the development of postcolonial approaches to migration by drawing on the concept of *semiperipheral (post)coloniality* (e.g., Ginelli, 2018) to explore how changing global spatial matrices of power are shaping the migration decision-making processes of African students who migrate to China. I highlight four examples of how students' agency is mediated by global structural positions of sending and destination countries. The research aims are as follows: firstly, to understand the logics underpinning African students' decisions to study abroad in China and, secondly, to explore how these logics may be shaped by structural forces. The first and second sections of this article outline the theoretical framework and the approach taken to carrying out the research. The third section outlines and conceptualises the decision-making processes of this diverse group of student migrants.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

African students in China: What we know

Yang (2018b, p. 252) notes that 'studies about international students in China tend to be piecemeal works that do not amount to a programmatic effort of general theory building.' This is correct in that research on international students in China in general often focuses on students' experiences, particularly through the lens of interculturality (e.g., Dervin, Du, &

Härkönen, 2018; Tian, Dervin, & Lu, 2020). It is also accurate with regard to the small body of literature, which addresses African international students specifically. This section outlines what has been established within this literature and which questions remain to be answered with regard to this body of mobile students.

Research on Africa–China student mobility (Ferdjani, 2012; Haugen, 2013; King, 2013; Mulvey, 2019) tends to focus on students' attitudes towards and experiences in China in most cases as they relate to China's 'soft power.' These studies and others on international students in general tend to note that the affordability of studying in China is an important motivating factor for choice of destination (Haugen, 2013; Ho, 2017; Yang, 2018a). A notable exception is Ho (2017) who conceptualises Africa–China mobility as a 'global householding strategy' where students leverage on the geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions of Sino-African relations to reproduce social status through running family businesses.

Current theoretical understandings of this emergent migration pattern are, however, quite limited. King (2013, p. 209), for example, emphasises 'a need for many more in-depth studies of the China–Africa tapestry unfolding across the continent.' Likewise, Naidoo (2011) suggests that '[a] more nuanced analysis of the multifaceted relationship between China and Africa is required that goes beyond blind endorsement or prejudice' (p. 53) is needed. This type of analysis is emerging, but very little exists on the higher education aspect of Sino-African relations.

Therefore, I offer a more fine-grained analysis of international student migration between Africa and China, examining how the complexities and layered colonialities associated with Africa–China migration challenge us to rethink existing frameworks used to think about international education and migration. The next section outlines the theoretical framework that will be applied to meet this aim.

Theorising China's position as a destination country

Fundamentally, this article is concerned with how ISM is embedded within a global regime of coloniality (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2008; Mignolo, 2013). Although there are a number of articles (e.g., Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Ploner & Nada, 2019) that examine various facets of ISM through a postcolonial lens, the approach has been developed in a very limited way. I pay particular attention to how global structural inequalities shape student decision making, answering calls by Kelly and Lusis (2006) and others for an approach to migration studies, which incorporates global structures of inequality and power into analysis, applying an innovative approach to educational migration in the Global South specifically, thus making a theoretical contribution to the ISM literature.

Grosfoguel (2008) describes how peripheral nation states exist under a regime of global coloniality, as non-core zones continue to exist in conditions of coloniality despite the end of formal colonialism. This is fundamental because the exploitative global division of labour, which developed as a result of colonialism, is reproduced in the 'postcolonial' capitalist world system (Wallerstein, 2004). It is obvious that this global regime shapes South-to-North migration patterns, and as such, postcolonial approaches to analysing labour migration are well established. For example, San Juan (2011) and Eder (2016) describe how low-income countries such as the Philippines become reservoirs of cheap labour and Western countries its clients, reproducing colonial asymmetrical relationships. Less well developed in the literature however is the notion that, firstly, migrations within the Global South and, secondly, migration for educational purposes, entrenched within the same global system, can be viewed through this lens.

I seek to apply these approaches to Africa–China educational migration. Mains et al. (2013, p. 139) suggest that one way to develop postcolonial approaches to migration would be to

stretch 'the boundaries of the spaces of the postcolonial,' for example, by looking at how postcolonial theory can be applied in non-Western contexts. In this vein, the basic idea, which underpins this article, is that global higher education and ISM are shaped by the global colonial matrix power, regardless of the directionality of migration.

Although postcolonial theory could be applied to ISM to examine, for example, the racialisation of international students or to subjectivity and knowledge production (Madge et al., 2015), it is important to note that the application of the theory here is limited to understanding broadly how student decision making is shaped by the structure of the political economy and the reproduction of asymmetrical (post)colonial relations between Global North and South in contemporary 'South–South' power structures. Because much ISM theory is predicated broadly on 'North–South' framings, it is difficult to employ existing frameworks to understand China's place within the global higher education field. As Mohan (2020) rightly points out, the presence of China 'complicates … the accepted binaries and power relations of knowledge production where the critique has focused on the colonizer as Western imperialist' (pp. 4–5).

North–South relations, framed as structural forces that drive student migration (e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2011; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) and shape migrants' experiences (e.g., Ploner & Nada, 2019), are increasingly supplemented by a much more multifaceted and variegated 'spatial matrix of power-relations' (Raghuram, Noxolo, & Madge, 2014, p. 2). I explore how these power asymmetries between countries in the 'periphery' within Africa and semiperipheral China are a result of the nature of the embeddedness of both locations within the (post)colonial world system and in turn how this leads to structural forces shaping the decision-making processes of international students.

As this is a global system, all migration patterns are in some way entrenched within it, even when the migration flow is between locations outside of the West. As such, I do not necessarily imply any untoward motive by any of the actors involved in the process of migration but rather seek to explain how the actions of actors are shaped by the nature of their embeddedness in the increasingly complex matrices of power that characterise contemporary globalisation.

In order to explicate the structural forces that contribute to South–South migration, I draw upon, expand, and adapt the concept of semiperipheral (post)coloniality (Ginelli, 2018; Mulvey, 2020), which combines insights from both world-systems theory (e.g., Wallerstein, 2004) and postcolonial theory. World-systems theory focuses on how nations interact in a global, hierarchical, political-economic structure, which has a clear core and periphery. Higher education internationalisation is one of the means through which the Chinese state seeks to compete within the global political-economic hierarchy (Wu, 2019). These two theoretical models are combined in order to express the ambiguous position of semiperipheral states such as China, historically subordinate to the global core but also with a mission to catch up with and overtake the core nations, wielding its relative power over the periphery to achieve this end (Mulvey, 2020). This framework is used to examine how unequal power structures between nation states have implications for the nature of educational migration (Koh, 2015).

Ginelli (2018) describes how this concept manifested itself in semiperipheral Soviet Eastern European 'development guidance': various kinds of support, including educational exchanges, were employed with the contradictory logic of expressing anti-imperial solidarity but at the same time also expressing cultural superiority, aiming to achieve political recognition overseas and to legitimise the successes of the political regime. In other words, structural

position and the associated discourse from the host country constitute an important structural factor, which drives student mobility. China's drive to expand the recruitment of international students in Africa can be viewed in a similar light. As a result of China's position in the (post)colonial global political economy relative to African nation states, China acts to reproduce its own self-peripheralisation through international student recruitment. This mirroring of relative positions in the political economy manifests in two main ways. Firstly, scholarships are provided to African countries through various channels, including via the Chinese Government Scholarship Programme, as well as bilateral diplomatic scholarship programmes, Confucius Institutes, and others with the aim of bolstering relations between China and those countries (e.g., Wu, 2019). At the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation conference in 2018, China pledged to provide 50,000 scholarships to African students between 2018 and 2021 (Forum in China–Africa Cooperation, 2019). The scholarships are provided across disciplines and at all levels of higher education. Moreover, there are currently 54 Confucius Institutes operating across Africa with the goal of furthering China's 'soft power' in the region (Pan, 2013). China's 'semiperipheral (post)coloniality' has the potential to shape student flows in the region and also has implications in terms of the kinds of students who come to China; for example, Ferdjani (2012) suggests that some students receiving scholarships from the Chinese government are the children of politicians or diplomats.

Secondly, as well as the pragmatic foreign policy manoeuvring outlined above, power asymmetries within the global division of labour can also been viewed as a manifestation of semiperipheral (post)coloniality, which acts as a 'pull' factor for international students, in the same way that, for example, labour migration from Global South to North is structured by these asymmetries. As is the case with East Asian student mobility to the West, a key factor driving African student migration to China is the destination country's position with the

(post)colonial global division of labour relative to the home country. China is the largest

trading partner for the African continent as a whole (Bodomo, 2018). China also creates the

largest number of jobs of any trading partner through foreign direct investment in Africa

(Ernst & Young, 2019). Such investment creates demand for credentials and competency in

the language of the investor. As such, China-related knowledge and skills appear to be in

demand in Africa (Mulvey, 2020). Essentially, this article explores how China's changing

structural position, expressed in this concept, acts as a structural factor, which shapes student

migrants' trajectories.

West-centric understandings of ISM

One of the dominant framings of ISM in extant literature is that this form of migration is

heavily influenced by structural forces and Global North/South relations. International

student flows generally mirror the structure of the world system and are (post)colonial in

nature: that is to say, students from the semiperiphery and periphery generally move to the

global core countries to study, motivated by a belief in the universal value of a 'Western

education' (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). This belief comes about due to a 'global imaginary,'

which presumes the superiority of Western knowledge. Students are attracted to former

colonial metropoles to study (e.g., Ploner & Nada, 2019; Rizvi, 2011), because of the

'symbolic power' of credentials from these locations, which result from the global

political-economic structural position of the host nation—this position is of course a legacy

of colonialism.

Using the Bourdieusian lens, which is commonplace in the ISM literature, this symbolic

power means that students decide to migrate to the West to study because due to the

structural position and status as a former colonial metropole of Western nations, Western

credentials are viewed as a potent source of 'cultural capital,' a means to achieve 'distinction'

and (re)produce social status (e.g., Kim, 2011; Sin, 2013; Waters, 2006). This theoretical framework has been applied primarily in studies where the focus is on student mobility to the West. As such, much of the theory surrounding student mobility, such as the notion that ISM is a 'strategy' (Findlay et al., 2012; Kim, 2011; Waters, 2006) for the accumulation of cultural capital among the 'cosmopolitan elite' or 'global middle class' (Findlay, 2011), has been developed largely with reference to this directionality. In this way, ISM research reproduces the binary frameworks, which are increasingly challenged within postcolonial geography by the complex and unequal relationships between rising powers such as China and peripheries such as Africa (Raghuram et al., 2014).

There is an increasing recognition of the limitations of existing approaches to understanding ISM, and it is argued here that China's power asymmetry with many peripheral nations provides an example of how these existing assumptions, which often (but in some cases inadvertently) draw on binaries such as 'North/South' or 'West/East,' are somewhat limited in their explanatory power in relation to the changes in ISM patterns such as the rise of Asian countries as regional and sometimes international hubs. As patterns of mobility have shifted, there has been growing but still limited focus on non-Western higher educational student mobilities (e.g., Phan, 2018; Shields & Edwards, 2010). There is also increasingly a recognition that ISM is not always associated with privileged individuals moving from 'South' to 'North' (e.g., Lipura & Collins, 2020; Yang, 2018a). Lipura and Collins (2020) highlight that the strength of the association of ISM with the westward movement of members of an affluent global class may be overstated and that such an approach 'is blunt in understanding who moves, under what circumstances and to what ends' (p. 352). Yang (2018a) also argues that Indian medical students from the 'non-affluent middling class' end up in China as a result of the 'discrepant logics' of compromise and complicity. However,

there are still few examples of empirical research into student mobility to non-Western destination countries.

The Research

This article forms part of a larger project on student migration between Africa and China. The data come from semi-structured interviews conducted with 40 students from Africa, who were studying in China at the time of interview. Starting with existing contacts in Chinese universities, participants were identified using a purposive approach with the rationale of sampling for maximum variability (Creswell, 2007). Interviewees were from 14 African countries, around two-thirds male and a third female. This represents a minor limitation, as fewer female students were willing to be interviewed. The participants studied a wide range of subjects, distributed evenly throughout the arts and humanities, social sciences, and 'science, technology, engineering, and mathematics' fields. Students studied at a range of institutions, from elite to provincial, and in a range of cities, from the largest 'tier 1' cities to smaller provincial cities, across China.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, interviews were mostly conducted online using VoIP technology, lasting between 45 and 90 min. Interviewees were informed that interviews could be conducted in English or Chinese. However, this is a limitation of the study—most participants were from anglophone countries, potentially because students who did not speak either English or Chinese fluently were less willing to take part. Interviews were semi-structured but also reflexive, focusing on students' own understandings of the purpose of their overseas study and their pre-mobility perceptions around study in China. For the analysis, the researcher identified codes and themes within the data set, following the five-stage process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytic work focused on

identifying parts of the data where students explained the logic underpinning their choice to study in China.

Findings and Discussion

Underprivileged students benefiting from China's political manoeuvring

The ambiguous 'middle' position expressed by semiperipheral (post)coloniality means that China is not one of the countries that sits within the core of the (post)colonial world system, but it benefits from a sense of civilizational superiority and seeks to profit from practices that have their roots in colonialism in its interactions with the periphery. One manifestation of these practices is the provision of scholarships with a dual rationale of 'charity' and 'soft power'—both colonial in origin and indicating a sense of superiority over the periphery (Lomer, 2017; Mulvey, 2020). In this example, students from relatively marginalised backgrounds within their home countries are able to leverage China's political manoeuvring, highlighting how previously under-recognised spatial power matrices within the Global South shape student decision making.

This section focuses on a group of students lacking the familial economic, social, and cultural capital to be considered part of the nascent African 'middle class,' who made up a minority of the sample. I argue that for these students, studying abroad was not part of a strategy and was not within the perceived 'field of the possibles.' Bourdieu (1984) describes how, corresponding to an individual's level of inherited capital—which constitutes the habitus—there is a set of probable trajectories leading more or less equivalent positions within society—this is termed the *field of the possibles.* To put it another way, the access individuals have to capital, and the position within social fields they occupy, shapes expectations about various aspects of life, such as what constitutes realistic educational or career choices (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110). What a young person views as a 'possible' or realistic life

trajectory, and thus what they choose to pursue, is shaped by their position within the social hierarchy, making social mobility more difficult, as those from outside the middle class are less likely to see 'middle-class' activities (such as studying overseas) as realistic and therefore do not pursue these activities and glean the cultural capital, which results from them, as they view doing so as not 'for the likes of them' (Burke, 2017).

These students came from relatively marginalised backgrounds within their home country. An example is A.Y., who grew up in somewhat difficult circumstances in a rural area of northern Tanzania. His parents were unable to provide financial support for his studies. A.Y. describes how completing primary school sometimes required undertaking part-time work:

> I mean, starting from my family, in 2000, my father had a little bit of money, not much. But from 2000 to 2004 he was sick, for four years, and at that time my father lost everything, and also at the time I was still young. So at the time when I was supposed to be starting school, my father had no ability to give me money or anything. I am the second one with my sister, and so both of us, we had to pay our school fees by ourself, so I was working by myself.

Students such as A.Y. generally expressed that they understood the potential benefits of an overseas education but did not have the familial resources to understand that it was possible for them to study abroad or to know how to do so.

A.Y. achieved good exam results after primary and middle school, despite having to work while studying, meaning that he was sent to the capital city, Dar Es Salaam, to board during high school. Even after starting his undergraduate degree in Tanzania on a scholarship, he had no expectation that he would be able to study overseas. This was a common refrain among this group of students, as B.L., an undergraduate student from the Democratic Republic of Congo, explains:

> Sometimes it is difficult for us to think like that because of the family background, the political instability in my country, so it is always difficult for us to realistically think that we can go and study abroad. But it's just, when the opportunity comes, we try our luck. So my movement from Congo to Rwanda was nice, because I managed to take the language test, and then I ended up in China. And if I did not have the scholarship it cannot be possible for me study abroad.

International study for middle-class students has been framed as a natural extension of 'a household strategy that incorporates multiple family members' (Waters, 2006, p. 184), implying that international study is seen as an option for middle-class students long before mobility takes place. In other words, for middle-class students, higher education is seen as a natural step within a life plan or a 'non-choice.' However, as the above excerpt shows, international study was seen as 'not for the likes of us' (Burke, 2017) by some students interviewed for this study or, to put it another way, beyond the 'field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984).

In these cases, the decision to study abroad was generally a result of serendipity, in that students reacted to an opportunity that arose, rather than planning over the long term to study overseas. This is emphasised by B.L.'s framing of his overseas study as a response to an 'opportunity' rather than a plan. The decision to study abroad cannot ascribed completely to students' existing resources or to structural factors. Shifts in the global geopolitical landscape and the resulting emergence of China as a semiperipheral (post)colonial actor in Africa made overseas study a viable option for these students. One manifestation of this positionality is 'public diplomacy' initiatives: China reproduces the asymmetrical (post)colonial relationship between the Western core and itself through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes and bilateral scholarships, as a means of competing with the West by improving relations with the

global periphery (Mulvey, 2020). However, ultimately, the awareness of the opportunities afforded by this and the final decision to study abroad were explained in terms of 'chance' and 'luck.'

The Chinese government offers a scholarship for prospective Chinese language teachers to study for a degree in teaching Chinese as a second language in China (Hanban, 2020), and several students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds received scholarships through this route. For example, another student who received this kind of scholarship had a similar motivation for learning Chinese, emphasising that the presence of a Confucius Institute and the ability to study Chinese for free motivated him to learn the language:

> So then when I was in university, some people told me that there's a Confucius Institute, and you can learn Chinese as an elective course. So I realised, yes, this is the chance for me to go outside of the country... Well, because it was free, you know, I could afford it. There was also German, but this, we were supposed to pay money. And the opportunity to go and study abroad with German was a little bit less, so I think that with Chinese, when they tell us, oh if you pass this you will have the opportunity. I asked them three times, really? Only examinations? They said yes, only examinations and then you can go to China.

This excerpt reflects the interrelationship between individual agency, global structures, and serendipity, which leads to migration. Most students outside the middle class did not see studying overseas as feasible and reacted to chances that arose. If this student had not heard about the Confucius Institute and enrolled in the Chinese classes, it is unlikely that he would currently be studying overseas. This demonstrates that changing global structures and specifically the reproduction of core–periphery discourse, which characterises China's

provision of scholarships to African countries, contribute to decision-making processes among students that vary from those documented in existing ISM literature.

Non-agentic international student migrants

The interviews also uncovered that China's political manoeuvring also leads, in rare cases, to a form of migration not previously recognised within ISM literature. Theories of migration generally and ISM in particular rest on the assumption that students have a substantial degree of choice in the decision to move (Bakewell, 2010; Findlay, 2011). It is very rare that migrants are not framed as exercising a degree of agency, and cases where movement is not voluntary (e.g., the case of refugees fleeing war or natural disasters) are often considered beyond the scope of migration theory (Bakewell, 2010).

Therefore, it is difficult to draw on existing migration theory to explain the cases of students from Eritrea. Framing this form of migration in terms of 'decision making' or 'destination choice' is not possible, because these students exercised little agency in their migration to China. Both Eritrean students interviewed were working as administrators in the Eritrean government and had been doing so for several years. They undertook undergraduate education in their home country and then began working in the government, although they stressed that this was not voluntary. Both were effectively coerced into national service, which appeared to be indefinite: this is a common practice in Eritrea (see, e.g., Poole, 2013). I draw on the example of P.A., who was working in a government department and had a wife and child in his home country. He was selected for a bilateral scholarship provided by the Chinese government by the department, after working there for several years as part of his national service. Although P.A. did not necessarily have wholly negative attitudes towards overseas study, he expressed that this was not a 'choice.' Rather, as with his original

conscription, he did not feel he had the option to refuse. In other words, he was coerced into studying overseas:

> There wasn't much choice or anything like that, I was working in the government office, and suddenly, they told me you have this scholarship for China… we do not have any right to oppose, you have to obey only, you see? It was not my choice, it was just given by the government. I was working in the government department and I was nominated to go for the qualification.

P.A. expressed that he does not resent being sent to China, despite being separated from his family, because he believes that studying in China will lead to better opportunities than his previous indefinite national service allowed. During national service, P.A. felt his time was wasted:

> The support from the government is not much when you national service, you have to do part time work, in order to live as a human being. It's a good thing for me because I spent 10 years in vain, doing nothing.

Cases such as this one are obviously relatively rare but nonetheless trouble many of the assumptions around ISM and have a number of ethical implications. I now turn to unpacking this case, which, like Yang's (2018a) study of Indian medical students, lies at the margins of existing knowledge about ISM. Predominant understandings of ISM, focused on, for example, rational behaviour and often the accumulation or conversion of various forms of capital, have little explanatory power in relation to this 'deviant' case of ISM. Students such as P.A. do not desire to attain prestigious credentials through studying abroad, with the aim of building a career as a highly skilled graduate (e.g., Kim, 2011), nor do they see studying abroad as part of a family migration or householding strategy (e.g., Ho, 2017; Waters, 2006), an adventure

(e.g., Waters, Brooks, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011), or respond to social networks when making decisions about international higher education (Beech, 2015).

The regime of global coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2008), which defines Global North/South relations, is a structural force, which drives migration from South to North. This unusual example allows us to explore how global power inequalities within the regime of coloniality but outside South–North migration patterns continue to structure migrants' agency (Koh, 2015). It is clear that the Chinese state's 'catch-up mentality,' a product of its long-term ideological and structural position, acts as a structural force which shapes the trajectory of these students. The Chinese government provides a large number of scholarships to countries such as Eritrea in the hope that this will improve bilateral ties (King, 2013). An indirect result of this is that these students, who have little control over major life decisions such as career and education, are at the mercy of structural factors, which 'push' them abroad, and exercise almost no agency in the process. This is an extreme example of how shifting global structures shape mobility patterns, and the 'logic' underpinning student migration changes when the focus is shifted from a westward directionality. In other words, this is another example of how (post)colonial power asymmetries between Africa and China filter down to drive migration between periphery and semiperiphery.

Middle-class students leveraging Africa–China power asymmetries

The majority of students interviewed for this article were 'middle class' by the standards of their home country but not members of the 'global middle class' in the sense of an affluent, globally oriented middle class (Koo, 2016) or 'transnational capitalist class' (Findlay, 2011) that are widely perceived to be the main beneficiaries of international higher education. The most explicit manifestation of inequality in the 21st century is through capital (Piketty, 2017). Inequalities within the (post)colonial world system dictate global capital flows, and this in

turn shapes migration trajectories, which are responses to differential access to resources (Koh, 2015). In many ways, these students are similar to those who have been the focus of much ISM research, from East Asian semiperipheries such as China, who choose to go the West—they are middle-class students who employ educational migration as a strategy for social reproduction (e.g., King & Sondhi, 2018; Waters, 2006). However, these students are excluded from the most 'potent' (in terms of future exchange value in labour markets) migration patterns due to the unequal distribution of capital globally. For these students, the structural position of China within the global division of labour was ultimately a key factor in their decision to study abroad. That is to say, just as Western investment in Asia between 1970s and 1990s led to more students seeking the cultural capital of a Western degree (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011), China's trade with African nations appears to be a key motivating factor for student migrants to seek a Chinese degree.

The key difference between the middle-class African students interviewed for this study and the members of the 'global' middle class undertaking mobility to the West that have been the focus of other studies is the sense of precarity that pervades the accounts of decision making in this case. These students perceived that their middle-class position was 'precarious' and felt that downward social mobility was a possibility. They tended to perceive studying in China not as a ticket to a prestigious career but as a means of gaining skills (such as fluency in Chinese), which would enable them to merely avoid continued precarity. A.S., for example, comes from what he describes as 'not wealthy but middle-class' background in Nigeria. Although neither of his parents went to university (as tertiary enrolment rates in Nigeria in the 1970s were very low), they both completed high school, and his father had a successful career as a government official. Despite this, he felt that it would be difficult to maintain his family's middle-class status, largely due to economic instability in Nigeria. This was a common refrain among middle-class students from across Africa:

Even now the economy is a little bit shaky in Nigeria. But before even, I would say

that we probably could not really sponsor ourselves to study abroad. I would say

totally maybe like, if we had a partial scholarship then yes, maybe we would be able

to afford it. But anyway, full sponsoring someone, no I do not think it's possible …

Well if the economy is not stable, it's going to have an effect on the possibility of

being employed, because right now, a lot of my friends from school, some of them are

just trying to start up a business, be an entrepreneur. Nobody is going to bother going

to try and find a job in a company because the truth is there are too few of these jobs

now.

There are some nuanced differences in the nature of these middle-class students' mobility,

when viewed in a comparative perspective with the middle-class international students from

other parts of the world.

Students such as A.S. clearly cannot be placed within the upper levels of the global

social-economic hierarchy in the same way that students in many other studies of ISM can be

(e.g., Kim, 2011; Sin, 2013; Waters, 2006). In these studies, the focus is on how crossing

international borders to study acts as a strategy for occupational and social status

advancement for relatively privileged middle-class students. In contrast, the majority of

middle-class African students did not see studying in China as a ticket to success in the

labour market. These students are in fact more similar in terms of social background to the

'non-affluent' middle-class Indian medical students in Yang's (2018a) study. Students

travelling to the West to study often see mobility as a strategy for enhancing access to an

international career (e.g., King & Sondhi, 2018). In contrast, these interviewees also

perceived that the position of China relative to Africa did mean that it was an attractive

choice and envisaged being able to leverage knowledge about China in African labour

markets but did not necessarily expect that their overseas sojourn would lead to high-status careers in multinational corporations. Rather, they viewed studying in China as a means to gain skills valued for their rarity across Africa (e.g., Chinese language) that would enable them to weather instability.

Generally speaking, studying in China was also seen as a compromise or as a second choice. This is reflected by J.E.'s account. His parents were relatively wealthy—like A.S., they had completed secondary school education but had not been to university, but his father had a relatively prestigious career, which afforded middle-class social status, and had supported him to study overseas:

> Well I made a meeting with my parents, and I suggested that I wanted to continue with my studies abroad. By the way, I preferred to go and study in European countries, but it's difficult. As an African it's not that easy to go to Europe, they ask you for bank statements for fifty million [Rwandan Francs], for thirty million, but we are not rich, you know, we have five million, three million, it's not enough. But then here in China, the things I needed, the requirements I needed in order to come and study here, it's not too much, it's easy to get.

Many students, like J.E., felt that they were priced out of studying in places such as Western Europe or North America, generally seen as the most desirable destinations. In other words, African students perhaps more comparable with those members of the global middle class in other studies (e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2011) would be more likely to choose these destinations, with less affluent students limited to destinations such as China.

The agentic decision-making processes of these middle-class students are shaped by global structural inequalities. Postcolonial semiperipherality 'conceptualises how the intertwined

long-term ideological and structural positions as effects of global integration (re)produce both colonial relations and colonial discourse' (Ginelli, 2018). 'Traditional' student mobility patterns, for example, between China and the West, are colonial insofar as migration patterns mirror inequalities within the (post)colonial global division of labour. For example, the expansion of mobility between East Asia and the West resulted in part from the relocation of manufacturing processes and business services to the region (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). At the same time, the reproduction of global conditions of inequality between peripheral Africa and semiperipheral China also results in a mirroring of student migration patterns.

In other words, China's ideological and structural position (of subordination to the core but increasingly of domination over the periphery) effectively reproduce colonial relations and the structural conditions of global inequality (Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019), which can be seen in South–North mobility patterns. However, middle-class students from Africa, due to limited cultural, social, and economic capital, are denied access to study destinations associated with the greatest quantity of symbolic power (those within the global core). China's asymmetric power relationship with African nations—resulting in African students perceiving that they can leverage a credential from China in the labour markets—means that China's semiperipheral higher education system represents the best 'return on investment.' The finding that African international students largely define themselves in terms of precarity and their decisions in terms of a compromise adds further evidence to a somewhat limited body of literature, which argues that ISM is more diverse in terms of level of privilege of the migrants themselves, especially when the focus is shifted to non-Western destination countries (e.g., Lipura & Collins, 2020; Yang, 2018a).

Yet another example of decision making at variance with established narratives largely constructed with reference to westward mobility is middle-class students who also participate

in running family businesses, which involve trade with China. This is one of the rationales given for studying in China, which is well covered in the literature (Haugen, 2013; Ho, 2017). None of the interviewees in this study can be described as 'student traders'—possibly because other studies have focused on Guangzhou, a trading hub. However, it is important to note that student traders fall broadly into the category analysed here, in that they are members of the nascent African middle class (Ho, 2017) who leverage structural inequalities in order to profit from Sino-African linkages and further familial social reproduction efforts.

Societal elites taking advantage of Chinese public diplomacy efforts

A minority of students can be described as upper-middle-class or social 'elites.' In this final example, unequal power relations, in the form of public diplomacy scholarships targeted at 'future elite' students, act as a key factor in shaping the mobility decisions of a small group of elite students. It is not known how common this practice is, or whether it differs across Africa, although Ferdjani (2012) has also highlighted that there is perception among African students in China that many children of diplomats or politicians are able to study in China on government scholarships. S.C., an undergraduate student from Uganda provided a first-hand account of this practice:

> My dad was a great politician, so he had so many friends. So, one day, my dad paid a visit to the ambassador, and he had gone along with my sister. So the ambassador is like 'is this your daughter? Would you like to go to study in China?'. She was offered a scholarship just like that, and she went to school for an MBA.

Others, such as D.U., another undergraduate student from Uganda, who had gained a scholarship as a result of her acquaintance with a Ugandan politician, suggested that to be

recommended by a government minister would improve one's chances of receiving a scholarship:

> The bilateral relations, I really would not say that every minister who recommends a person, that person will get the scholarship, no. They will not get the scholarships. But, it depends if the person who is recommending you has worked on projects with the Chinese government. I would give an example, let us say like the minister of foreign affairs, if anyone approached him and asked him for a recommendation, I'm very sure the ambassador would not reject his request, because I mean, he's the direct middle-man between him and the government, so something like that. Like that's what I can say, especially if the person has had any meetings or projects with Chinese, not with the ambassador, but this person has worked on projects … It more or less cuts across all countries in Africa. Most of the students I interact with, they have come through the same way.

These students were similar to the middle-class students in the previous section, in that studying abroad was part of a strategy to reproduce social status. S.C., for example, also expressed that his family may not have been able to finance his study in one of the more desirable locations in the Western world such as the United States or United Kingdom. The opportunity for his sibling to receive a scholarship therefore represented a means for social reproduction through the use of familial social resources (e.g., Beech, 2015).

The supply of scholarships to the children of political figures highlights a means of elite social reproduction, which has not previously been covered in the ISM literature. Providing scholarships to the children of elites is an outcome of China's soft power rationale for the provision of said scholarships. Chinese international education policy texts suggest that international students in China should be 'elites' and 'future leaders' (e.g., MOE, 2017). This

rationale is essentially a reproduction of colonial logic in China's relations with its periphery. It is common in scholarship programmes with a public diplomacy rationale globally and has its roots in colonialism (Lomer, 2017), but usually, the selection criteria are focused on academic performance and leadership potential (Wilson, 2014), and to directly distribute scholarships to those with close social ties to political figures with the aim of improving political relations would be considered exploitative. This decision-making process again highlights how global structural inequalities and colonial relations are reproduced in ISM.

Conclusion

This article, which has focused on the decision-making processes that led to the migration of African students to China, allows for a reflection around how the associated complexities and layered colonialities challenge researchers to rethink existing critical frameworks of international education. The framework employed here represents a theoretical contribution to the literature in that it demonstrates how students migrants, employing varying degrees of agency, respond to structural conditions. It is a novel and useful approach in that it helps place migration patterns within the context of a global regime of coloniality. Doing so is important because it reveals how power inequalities outside South–North migration patterns continue to structure student migrants' agency (Koh, 2015).

On the basis of interviews with African student migrants in China, I outlined four examples of how structural factors shape student decision making and argued that these examples deepen understanding of the structural drivers of student migration and of the mechanisms through which ISM is related to inequality. African students have a wide variety of rationales for seeking overseas study, usually influenced in some way by China's structural position within the (post)colonial global political economy and by China's reproduction of core–periphery relations in its interactions with Africa. Empirically, the article makes a significant

contribution to the literature by outlining four cases of student mobility decision making, which differ from those outlined in existing literature. Some are from outside the middle class and are able to leverage China's soft power gambit to go beyond their 'field of the possibles.' Others are pawns in China's political manoeuvring and are essentially forced into studying overseas by their own government. Most, unsurprisingly, appear to be middle class. I note however that these students are not necessarily members of the affluent 'global' middle class (e.g., Koo, 2016) and are excluded from the 'best' educational migration opportunities in the West by the unequal distribution of capital afforded by the global (post)colonial political economy. A minority of students are social elites who are able to leverage social networks in order to take advantage of China's courting of the political class across Africa. This example again demonstrates how China's semi-peripheral position is reproduced in its relation with African nations (as peripheries) and in turn how this creates discrepant logics of migration. All of these examples demonstrate how China's ambiguous political and economic relationship with Africa, borne out of its position within the postcolonial world system, serves to create logics of migration, which cannot be easily explained using existing frameworks, and tend to be quite simplistic in their assumptions about who moves and to what ends.

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Chapter Six: 'It's kind of becoming a culture': How habitus influences the migration trajectories of African students in China

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Abstract

Global flows of international students have diversified in recent years. As a result, the common association of this form of mobility with affluent members of the global middle class increasingly does not hold. This study focuses on one emergent student migration pattern that has been the subject of relatively little empirical research: that of African international students in China. The main aim is to establish how international student migration is experienced differentially by students positioned in their home societies in unequal ways, thereby moving beyond the notion that international student migration is a middle-class activity. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with 40 students from 14 African countries, we apply Bourdieu's *theory of practice* to examine the extent and nature of *habitus* transformation of students from a variety of social backgrounds. We show that differences in social background in this particular case led to distinct trajectories during the sojourn and in terms of post-study plans. Our study makes a theoretical contribution to the international student migration literature, arguing that the nature of transformation that took place among student migrants as a result of study was shaped by the nature of mobility, both spatial and social.

Introduction

Flows of student migrants tend to favour Western and particularly Anglophone countries over others (e.g., Findlay *et al.*, 2017). Associated with this is an assumption in the existing literature that internationally mobile university students are middle-class and relatively privileged members of their home societies (Lipura and Collins, 2020). However, patterns of international student migration have shifted significantly in recent years. Notably, more students are choosing to study within the Global South, and particularly in East Asia (UNESCO, 2021): for example, China has become one of the largest destination countries in terms of international students enrolled, having hosted nearly half a million in 2018 (MOE, 2019).

This study contributes to the limited existing literature on international student migrants in the Chinese context by focusing specifically on students from Africa. Approximately six percent of African tertiary students undertake higher education outside their home country, a higher proportion than in any other region (Kritz, 2015). About half stay within Africa, but China is the second largest single host country after France, having hosted 81,562 African students in 2018 (MOE, 2019). At the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018, the Chinese government pledged to provide 50,000 scholarships over the following three-year period (FOCAC, 2018). Most students are self-financed, but the proportion of scholarship holders is higher than in other destination country. Scholarships are concentrated in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), but are awarded across all disciplines (MOE, 2019).

We build on existing migration theory by drawing on our case study to explore how socially classed differences in pre-mobility habitus lead to varied trajectories in the host country. We seek to add to the body of literature which employs Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* with

reference to migration, by focusing on the question of how intra-group differences in pre-mobility habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) influence migration trajectory. The question of the extent to which the habitus changes (or does not) as a result of migration has been the subject of surprisingly little academic attention (Noble, 2013; Soong *et al*., 2018; Xu, 2017). This is potentially a question of importance with regard to international student migration, because existing empirical research on this topic has generally focused on middle-class students, perhaps thus overstating the homogeneity of global flows of international students in terms of social background (Yang, 2018a; Lipura and Collins, 2020). Because of this, the question of how international student migration is experienced differentially by students positioned in society in unequal ways has scarcely been foregrounded. Thus, employing Bourdieu's framework enables an understanding of the experiences that individual students have, associated with moving between "fields" both transnationally and socially, and how these experiences are differentiated by social class.

One of our overall aims is to build on a nascent social class perspective on education migration which moves beyond framing mobility as the preserve of an affluent global middle class (e.g., Waters, 2006; Findlay, 2011; Yang, 2018a), comparing and contrasting the process of habitus change for students from different social backgrounds as they experience international education in China. Key outcomes of the paper, as a consequence of our exploration of the nature of habitus mutability in a transnational context, include new insights into the conditions under which habitus adjusts and how this process is mediated by the nature of pre-mobility habitus. To these ends, the article provides a detailed account of the pre-mobility social backgrounds, overseas experiences, and post-study plans of this group of students. This enables a focus on, first, socially-classed differences in pre-mobility habitus and, second, the mutability of habitus as a consequence of an overseas sojourn.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Changing patterns of international student mobility

In recent years there has been a significant shift in international student mobility patterns as a number of middle-income countries outside of the "West" have become hubs for this form of migration. These include, for example, China, India and Malaysia (UNESCO, 2021). As a result of this shift, there are several assumptions in the literature on international student mobility related to social class, privilege and the nature of decision-making, as examples, that are increasingly contested.

Most of the axioms in research on international student mobility were developed with reference to flows of students from the Global South to the Global North, or from the "East" to the "West" (Lipura and Collins, 2020). Work drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, which comprises a significant proportion of this body of literature, tends to frame overseas study as part of a strategy pursued primarily by privileged members of the global middle-class, formulated with the aim of accumulating forms of capital and reproducing social privileges (e.g., Xiang and Shen, 2009; Findlay *et al*., 2012; Kim, 2016; Sin, 2016; Waters, 2006, 2012). This assumption is made partly because the vast majority of studies on international student mobility focus on the West, and non-Western mobilities remain relatively marginalised (Collins *et al*., 2017).

While there is an association in the literature on international student mobility outside of the Global North or West of international students with the middle-class(es) (e.g., Collins *et al*., 2017), there is also an increasing recognition that international students in middle-income countries are not always socially privileged in the context of their home countries. Daniels (2014), for example, highlights the mobility of less privileged students from various regions to Malaysia, and Hodzi (2020) claims that education mobility from Africa to China may be a

means for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve social mobility – although this claim is not supported by empirical evidence. Mulvey (2020b) adds weight to Hodzi's argument by exploring the decision-making processes of African students from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds in China. Yang (2018a) suggests that the Indian students he interviewed in China would be best be described as "non-affluent middling class", again suggesting that the dominant framing of education mobility as a strategy pursued primarily by privileged individuals does not always apply in the Global South. Yang (2018a) also rightly highlights that existing accounts of international student mobility among less privileged students rarely look beyond the West, despite the likelihood that the rise of middle-income destinations would lead to more individuals from less affluent backgrounds seeking to move overseas for university study. In sum, while there are a few exceptions, much of the literature reproduces the assumption that international student mobility is a middle-class activity, thereby precluding analyses of socially-classed differences in experiences of the kind we undertake here.

African student migrants in China

Despite the relatively sharp increase in South-South education migration in recent years, the literature on international student migration has focused largely on students moving from Asia to Anglophone Western countries. There is a burgeoning literature focussed on other forms of migration from Africa to China (e.g., Carling and Haugen, 2020; Lan, 2016; Liang and Le Billon, 2020). While these studies are useful in understanding the context into which African students enter, the nature of students' mobility is significantly different to that of traders and businesspeople – which is the focus of most of this research – and, as such, they have limited explanatory power in understanding the experiences of students. Indeed, studies focusing on African student mobility in any direction are relatively scarce. The handful of

existing studies on international students in China from any region of origin are, furthermore, quite narrow in terms of theoretical lenses applied, tending in particular to focus on interculturality (e.g., Dervin, Du and Härkönen, 2018; Tian, Dervin and Lu, 2020), or on higher education as a form of public diplomacy (Haugen, 2013; Mulvey, 2020c). Haugen (2013), for example, focuses on soft power and argues that most African student migrants in China generally become dissatisfied with their academic experience, and that many also conduct trade during their time in China. Ho (2017, 2019) explores the experiences of "worlding" African students in Guangzhou and Wuhan. African students are, in similar vein, cast as taking part in "global house-holding" strategies, in which the main purpose of overseas study is to ensure familial social reproduction through the running of family businesses that involve China-Africa trade while in China (Ho, 2017). Other outputs from our research Mulvey (2020a; b) have moved towards theory-building in this context, but, overall, studies on mobile African students in China have been quite limited in terms of the theoretical lenses applied, and are not well integrated with the broader literature on education migration. As Yang (2018b) notes, little is known about how well the assumptions around international student mobility as a means of middle-class social reproduction contained within the Bourdieusian literature on this topic apply to this context.

Bourdieu's theory of practice

We draw on the concepts of *habitus* and *field* to work with the data. Bourdieu defines habitus as "a system of dispositions, that is, of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 27). The habitus is developed in the context of the social field within which an individual is socialised during childhood. Thus, those holding similar positions in a social field are socialised within similar

"conditions of existence" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60). In other words, an individual's disposition is an "archive of personal experiences" rooted in socialisation processes (Costa *et al.*, 2019, p. 20). These conditions structure the habitus and in turn create structuring dispositions that guide social practice. As such, the family plays a clear role in the reproduction of social class, because class differences of course manifest in the reality in which children are socialised (Lareau, 2011).

This description may give the impression that an individual's habitus is fairly rigid. Our research, however, is concerned with the notion that the habitus is not entirely deterministic in nature: Bourdieu recognised that the habitus could be subject to change due to adaptation to new social fields or through an intentional effort (Friedman, 2016). A social field is conceptualised by Bourdieu (1986) as a structured social space in which agents occupy positions within a hierarchy, dependent on the totality of resources – i.e., capital that is relevant to and valued in that field – possessed. Habitus change through adaptation to new social fields would accordingly be gradual and limited by childhood dispositions, other than in cases of profound shifts in circumstances (e.g., Bourdieu, 1979). In these latter cases a mismatch between the existing habitus and the new social field, known as *hysteresis,* occurs. Such an experience, argues Bourdieu, leads to a divided habitus, or *habitus clivé*. This implies a habitus that is destabilised and in tension, both internally and with the field, which allows for the agent to accept messages within the new field while maintaining key dispositions from the habitus of origin (Stahl, 2015).

In the field of migration studies, existing research drawing on the habitus tends to emphasize the "habitus-field disjuncture" that migrants face as a result of moving from one field to another. However, Noble's (2013) assertion that "much of the scholarship on migration that has taken up a Bourdieusian approach has not, however, gone much beyond this binarism"

remains true. Oliver and O'Reilly (2010), for example, explore the extent to which habitus change is possible in British migrants' interactions with the social field of lifestyle migration in Spain, finding that opportunities for reinvention in this context are limited. Several studies have developed the concept of the "transnational habitus" (Guarnizo, 1997) to explore how migrants adapt to their host country's social context, leading to a dynamic transformation of values and behaviours as a consequence of shifting across social fields, without losing ties to the society of origin (Kelly and Lusis, 2006; Erel, 2010; Nowicka, 2015; Soong *et al.*, 2018). For example, Soong *et al.* (2018) explore education mobility through the lens of transnational habitus and habitus clivé; and Darvin and Norton (2014) employ the concept of transnational habitus to explore how pre-mobility social class is "inscribed in the social and learning trajectories" (2014, p. 115) of student migrants, describing how social class appears to mediate both the linguistic capital students are able to accumulate in the host country and the social networks of which they become part. Xu (2017; 2018), focusing on how habitus is transformed by cross-border higher education, describes how mainland Chinese students experience hysteresis or, in other words, a "habitus-field disjuncture", when studying in Hong Kong. Importantly, Xu (2018) highlights the theoretical under-recognition of intra-group differences among migrants in studies which employ this concept, bolstering Soong *et al.*'s (2018, p. 246) suggestion that "the concept transnational habitus is under-researched specifically in migration studies".

Our study seeks to focus on differences in pre-mobility habitus, drawing out intra-group differences among African student migrants and exploring how these differences influence migration plans and experiences. For this purpose, we draw on studies based on Bourdieu's work which address cases in which students achieve education success despite lacking a "middle-class habitus" (e.g., Reay *et al.*, 2009; Stahl, 2013; Jin and Ball, 2020). The concepts from these studies aid in understanding the trajectories of a number of students in this study

who could also be seen as "exceptional" or at least atypical cases, in that they are not from privileged or middle-class backgrounds.

Generally, this body of research, addressing access to domestic higher education in various national contexts – rather than international student migration – tends to focus on students' development of internal resources that can be drawn on to achieve education success (e.g., Reay *et al*., 2009; Stahl, 2015; Jin and Ball, 2020). It provides accounts of how students from working-class backgrounds develop internal resources that become ingrained in the habitus and how they are thus able to draw on these to achieve success in education. One example is the concept of self-conscious reflexivity in which "self-awareness and a propensity for self-improvement become part of the habitus" (Reay *et al*., 2009, p. 1105). Students develop this reflexivity as a response to repeated habitus-field disjuncture, but this does not necessarily equate to a capacity to achieve social mobility. Just as studies of social mobility have employed the concept of habitus to understand how working-class students experience social mobility, we seek to apply the concept to develop an understanding of how international students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience simultaneous spatial and social mobility.

The Research

This article is based in a project focusing on student migration between Africa and China. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 students in Chinese universities, who held nationality of 14 different African countries. The research employed a purposeful snowball sampling approach (e.g., Cresswell and Poth, 2018). Beginning with existing contacts, potential participants were identified. The interviewees had studied across a range of fields and in a number of institutions across China, both elite and non-elite.

Students' social status in their home country was ascertained from information, provided in a questionnaire before the interview took place, pertaining to parental income levels, education level, and nature of employment, as well as qualitative information provided in the interview. While this approach obviously led to some simplification of complex socio-cultural milieu in different national contexts, it was nevertheless possible to determine whether students were members of the middle class, and whether they had faced significant disadvantage compared to others in the sample. About two-thirds of the students were categorised broadly as members of the nascent African middle classes (e.g., Ncube and Lufumpa, 2014; Melber, 2016), and one third as from what could be termed as "disadvantaged backgrounds". It is not possible to refer to these students in terms of a single coherent social class background (e.g., "working class") because such terms developed in reference to the industrialised West are not unproblematically applicable to the broad range of non-Western, non-industrialised national contexts of students' home countries (Melber, 2016).

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted mostly online using VoIP technology, and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviewees were informed that interviews could be conducted in English or Chinese. This is, however, a limitation of the study: most participants were accordingly from Anglophone countries, potentially because students who did not speak English or Chinese fluently were less willing to take part. Interviews were semi-structured and also reflexive, focusing on students' upbringing and earlier education experiences, as well as on their social experiences in China and post-graduation plans. For the analysis, the researchers identified codes and themes within the data set, following the five-stage process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Findings and Discussion

Pre-mobility habitus

In order to understand the relationship between study abroad and habitus adjustment, the pre-mobility habitus of students is a key starting point. A.Y. is from a rural and mountainous area of Northern Tanzania and grew up in a small village. He received a scholarship from the Chinese government, which enabled him to study in China. He suggested that among the students in his village's primary school, he was the poorest, as his father was ill and unable to work for much of his childhood. For students such as A.Y. – now studying for an undergraduate degree in Chinese-language teaching – poverty was a defining and habitus-shaping feature of early life:

> My twin sister, in the end, she don't go to school. So for me, I am the boy, I was trying to do some part-time jobs…. When I see photos of that time, I think, I was old, because the job I was doing at that time, it was inappropriate for my age […]. When I went to high school, I was bullied by my classmates. First, they told me I can't speak Swahili well. Because I'm from the village, so I have this kind of accent, it's not a standard accent. For me, I thought I spoke well, but for them, they thought 'this guy is speaking so badly'. This also made me, when I went to university, to change my accent…. So everyone in high school was mocking me, and when I went up to speak, they didn't want me to speak. Sometimes it made me angry, but it also made me say, 'Okay, one day I will show you'. This is what I always told myself, 'One day I will succeed'.

This is A.Y.'s account of his relationship with education in his childhood and adolescent years. From his account it is clear that, like several other students in our sample, he was from a disadvantaged background and unable to draw on the social, cultural or economic capital assumed to be a prerequisite for education 'success' broadly, and which is framed as a key factor on the demand-side driving international student mobility among a largely middle-

class international student population in the West (e.g., Findlay, 2011). His account is somewhat similar to that of V.Y., who also received a Chinese government scholarship. His parents were subsistence farmers, and he also described his upbringing as more difficult than that of his peers at school, owing to the death of his mother. Like A.Y., his father was unable to pay school fees, and he worked throughout his primary and secondary schooling:

> When I went to my aunt, at first, my father he couldn't afford to pay for private school.... So I couldn't afford registration for the private school, so I go around, I beg people, I cleaned their house, I cut grass. So that's how I managed to complete the first year […]. So, for two years, I was sleeping on the floor in my aunt's house, I would always think […] no matter how tough it is, I know one day it's going to be better. So I held on to that. But it was so tough, at times I would go a whole day until seven or eight p.m. not eating.[1]

Both of these accounts emphasize repeatedly learning to adapt to being outside of the context in which one's habitus developed, or, in other words, to being a "fish out of water" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is exemplified by A.Y.'s will to succeed, which he describes as resulting from his feelings of anger over being bullied for his accented Swahili. This frequent pressure, argue Reay *et al*. (2009), leads to some students from disadvantaged backgrounds developing a proclivity for adapting to out-of-habitus contexts. A.Y. and V.Y. found themselves in social contexts substantially different to those in which they were socialised – A.Y. after moving to Dar Es Salaam for secondary school, and V.Y. after moving to Monrovia after his mother's death. As a result, both learned to cope with being "fish out of water". It is also important to note that A.Y.'s account highlights how systems of inequality

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[1] "Private" in this case refers to schools which provide low-cost education to the urban poor in Monrovia.

are overlapping. In this example, familial social status clearly intersects with both gender and ethnicity, shaping A.Y.'s early experiences and shaping the habitus. While beyond the scope of this study, this highlights the importance of considering the contributions of both gender and ethnicity to social position and habitus formation.

Students from less advantaged backgrounds tended to reflect on having faced disadvantage and succeeding. Such students are clearly outliers in terms of their education success in comparison to initial social and cultural resources, given that tertiary enrolment rates in countries such as Liberia and Tanzania are low by global standards, and that individuals who are able to study overseas make up only a small proportion of those who are able to gain access to tertiary education (Kritz, 2015). We propose that a key reason for their education success lies partly in the incorporation of a propensity for self-improvement and a high level of self-awareness into the habitus, as a result of repeated habitus-field disjuncture. This self-conscious reflexivity also had profound effects on experiences abroad and post-study plans, as we explore in the following sections.

In the case of disadvantaged students, there was relatively little evidence of migration planning, because study abroad was seen as beyond the "field of the possible" (Bourdieu, 1984) or, in other words, as an unrealistic life trajectory. In terms of a spectrum ranging from the long-term strategic planning of middle-class students in other contexts and pure serendipity, in these cases the decision to study abroad generally tended towards the latter (e.g., Reay *et al.*, 2009; Atkins, 2017). These students framed their decision to study overseas as a response to an "opportunity" or as "taking a chance", rather than as a plan.

In contrast, in the group of middle-class students, one consistent theme was that studying abroad was perceived as always within the realms of the possible. Occasionally these students had family members living abroad or parents who had completed some post-

secondary education and were able to support them because of their cultural and social resources. For example, E.G. grew up in the capital city of his home country of Zimbabwe. His family helped to pay for his overseas study, in contrast to A.Y. and V.Y., who had both received full scholarships. E.G.'s mother was an economist:

> You know how mums act. Most of the time when she sees me lying down on the couch, maybe watching TV, she would start yelling at me, like 'Hey, who have you left your books with? You better work hard if you want to go outside. If you don't work hard, you'll just be stuck in the country, in Zimbabwe, and you're not going to taste a better education'. So she always pushed me all the time.

Others, such as I.J., usually at the relatively high-income end of the spectrum of students interviewed, already had kinship networks (Brooks and Waters, 2010) spanning their home country (in this case, Ghana) and China. I.J. did not receive any scholarship stipend, and her mother and father also operated a business which involved importing goods from China to Ghana for sale:

> Family was part of my decision. Like I said, I have two of my cousins here. We are all together here doing our Bachelor's. Well, one graduated last year and she is doing her Master's here now. So it's kind of becoming a culture. Once we've done with high school they want us to study outside of Ghana, acquire something different to the usual things back home. I have family members in other places too […], in France and in the United Kingdom.

I.J's account echoes the findings of numerous studies that suggest how family networks and established study-abroad patterns among peers are important factors in the mobility of international students (e.g., Waters, 2012; Carlson, 2013; Beech, 2019). Moreover, the suggestion that overseas study's "becoming a culture" among her family and friends is

important in the context of this study is reminiscent of Reay's (2016) description of how elite students frame their choices around studying at prestigious universities as "non-decisions" – it is simply what "people like us" do. The decision to study abroad is deeply engrained within the habitus of students like I.J., reflected in the claim that overseas study is a "culture" among I.J.'s peer group and family, which has similar connotations, in that overseas study is framed as always assumed.

These accounts emphasize the active role that family members play during the socialisation process in shaping attitudes towards education and overseas study. The first excerpt, in particular, makes clear that from an early age, study abroad was framed as a realistic option or, in other words, "for the likes of us" or within the "field of the possible" (Bourdieu, 1984) for many of the middle-class students in our study. The role of middle-class students' family members in shaping a habitus in which overseas study is perceived to be a realistic option reflects much of the international student migration literature focused on other contexts (e.g., Waters, 2006; Collins *et al*., 2014).

Experiences of transnational field shift

First, it is important to note an initial expectation: that students from the disadvantaged group may have been adversely affected relative to the middle-class group by a lack of financial resources in the host country, which would in turn affect academic performance. However, our findings suggest that this was not unanimously the case. All of the students from the former group received some form of financial support, whereas only a portion of the middle-class students did. Many of the middle-class students, while privileged in the context of their home country, were not societal elites or members of an affluent, globally oriented middle class (Koo, 2016). As such, differences in pre-mobility financial resources did not shape students' experiences in China differentially along the axes of social background as much as

might be expected. While the stipend provided as part of the scholarship was quite low, and some students had to work (illegally) in order to cover living costs, this was true of both disadvantaged and some middle-class students, including self-financed students.

We also anticipated that students from across the range of social backgrounds would experience hysteresis as they entered a new social field in the migration destination, and, in the case of non-typical international students, encountering two new social fields simultaneously – Chinese society and a social milieu consisting of relatively privileged international students. It was assumed that these students would struggle with being 'cultural outsiders' in the host country, as has been shown to be the case in other instances of transnational migration (e.g., Soong *et al.*, 2016; Xu, 2017) and within compatriot groups. However, a noticeable theme within the data was that the propensity for self-improvement that became a part of the habitus – documented in the previous section – also shaped students' processes of adjustment to being international students in China. In stark contrast to the relatively disadvantaged student profiled by Darvin and Norton (2014), whose pre-mobility habitus appeared to act as a barrier to success in the host country, pre-mobility habitus became, over the course of the sojourn period, a productive resource for the disadvantaged students described in the previous section. These students took the propensity for self-improvement into their experience abroad, recounting processes of conscious deliberation and a determination to develop social and cultural resources for personal development. One of the most obvious manifestations of this was a desire among this group to avoid compatriots:

> A lot of the students in [omitted] province were Nigerians actually. There were so
> many, because it's cheaper, lower cost of living – just get there and you can just study

in peace. It was a lot easier to be with your countrymates. But I always had this

feeling that I had to explore more, this is too ordinary (H.C., Undergraduate, Nigeria).

Students such as H.C., a scholarship holding student, tended to make conscious decisions

about the nature of the social ties they pursued, and this usually meant avoiding compatriots

as a means of achieving "distinction" and of "learning" to be different to compatriots, which

they perceived would lead to personal growth and improvement, in line with the self-

conscious reflexivity (Reay *et al*., 2009) engrained in the habitus. Students such as V.E.,

another student who had received a scholarship, and from a less affluent background, tended

to avoid wealthier international students:

> I don't spend time with them. I think they're more confident than us. They seem more
>
> likely to disobey the school rules and regulations because they're not afraid. They
>
> know they still have a chance. But for us from more humble backgrounds, everything
>
> is a risk.

 In other words, these students were generally more determined to make themselves stand out

from non-migrating peers by spending less time with others from their home country. This

echoes the "self-excluding tendency" (Jin and Ball, 2020) of students from outside dominant

social groups in higher education. Cases of self-exclusion in domestic higher education

contexts are often motivated by a sense of loyalty towards socially-classed values and

communities.

At the same time, a common refrain among these students was that, despite their wish to

build social and cultural resources by achieving some level of integration into Chinese

society, any level of integration or even interaction was perceived as very difficult, owing to

cultural differences and racial othering. This, in turn, shaped the process of habitus change as

a result of migration, in that students were unable to integrate, thus changing the nature of the

interaction with the new social field. M.R. is also a Tanzanian student who had grown up in a rural part of the country and had received a full scholarship to study for a PhD in a prestigious Chinese university:

> I have friends who are Chinese, but you know the Chinese have a different culture from Africa, Europe, everywhere else. Like, for them, they like a small circle. So they don't want to be attached to too many people. If you want to friendships with them you have to force them. At first they will be enthusiastic and add your WeChat, then after that they won't want to reply. We have to force them to be our friends. They are not willing.[2]

Students such as M.R., as a result, tended to have friendship groups consisting largely of other international students.

In comparison, students from middle-class backgrounds usually fell into one of two categories: first, students such as K.J., the daughter of two doctors from Nigeria, also studying for a self-financed undergraduate degree in medicine, who developed a mixture of social ties consisting of compatriots and other international students, having developed international friendships with ease due to existing cosmopolitan traits and tendencies resulting from earlier socialisation experiences:

> My closest friends are Nigerians, my acquaintances and other friends are all nationalities, but then I just have a few Chinese friends and we are not close, because of the cultural difference. It's hard to understand them, and them for me.

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[2] "WeChat" is a social media app commonly used in China.

Second, those who developed social networks primarily with compatriots: these students, such as S.H., were generally relatively wealthy and had friends who had already migrated to China:

> I feel at home in China. I have people from Nigeria who graduated from the same school as me. They are here. We are like family – we help each other out. It's a bit like a home away from home, so, yes, I feel at home here.

Like the majority of students interviewed, D.W., a self-financing student from a middle-class background in South Africa, did not wish to integrate or assimilate into Chinese society:

> I don't think you can ever feel at home in China…. I think in China – maybe they don't really mean to – there's a possibility that they don't really mean to do it – but they have a tendency of making you feel like you don't belong here. They have a tendency of making you feel like a step-kid.

First, these excerpts suggest that social class also plays a role in shaping the social experiences of students in China. Integration into the host society is relevant here because habitus mutability is often linked to the process of adjustment to a new social field: as migrants attempt to adjust to a new social field, they sometimes experience a "divided-habitus" or a "habitus-field disjuncture" which contributes to habitus change (Soong *et al.*, 2018; Xu, 2017). In some cases, such as those of I.J. and S.H., individual students already possessed social networks, which contributed not only to the initial decision to study overseas, but also to experiences *in-situ.* Because, to use I.J.'s words, studying abroad is "becoming a culture" among segments of the African middle-classes, these students are often able to find others from similar backgrounds, contributing to the de-incentivisation of integration. As Oliver and O'Reilly (2010, p. 61) note: "A habitus finds similar habitus… to avoid feeling like a fish out of water". Clearly, spending time with others of a similar background may

mean that these students, in particular, are less likely to experience the disjuncture which can lead to habitus shift. Despite the fact that some learned Chinese, none of these students sought to integrate in any meaningful way into Chinese society and, as such, there was little evidence of the disruption and discomfort resulting from attempts to assimilate into the host society that are often experienced by migrants in other contexts, where perhaps integration was seen as more necessary or desirable (e.g., Soong *et al.*, 2016; Xu, 2017; Erel and Ryan, 2019).

There are many possible explanations for this lack of desire to integrate. As well as the obvious cultural gap between these students and their Chinese counterparts, and in addition to existing social networks resulting from students' social backgrounds, racially inflected discrimination and racial othering encountered by Africans across China also featured strongly in accounts given by most students, as exemplified by the excerpt below, provided by D.C., who had come to China to study for a Chinese language degree, funded by the Chinese government. Students' experiences in this regard were broadly similar to what has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Lan, 2016; Liang and De Billon, 2018):

> The people here, even the Chinese at home […] – I could see the way they were treating the local people, and I took it to heart. I just see how they are treating people. When I meet such kind of things, I don't care. There are very many embarrassments, like when you come on the subway, and you see people start disappearing, moving away from you. The second semester I was not feeling myself. I was walking around the campus thinking everyone was looking at me, watching me. But, like, the second year, I decided not to think more about that. I just need to work on what I think will help me.

This experience, common among participants in this study, exemplifies how a combination of colonial racial hierarchies and China's own history of race hierarchisation (Cheng, 2019) come together to shape the transnational experiences and habitus transformation process of African students in China, leading to common experiences of exclusion and marginalisation among Africans in the country (Bodomo, 2020). While the initial encounter with Chinese society certainly caused practically all of the interviewees to become aware of a mismatch between the habitus acquired in the country of origin and the new social field, there was very little evidence of students attempting and either succeeding or failing to "master the game" of the host country's social field, as has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Erel, 2010; Noble, 2013; Soong *et al.*, 2018). Rather, most students experienced a profound sense of alienation from Chinese society, which, combined with the fact that study overseas was viewed as a temporary sojourn, led the vast majority simply to give up on navigating the host society. In this unusual case, it can scarcely be claimed that these international students underwent a process of habitus transformation as a result of adapting to the "rules of the game" in new social fields in China.

Post-study plans

In terms of post-graduation plans, a consistent theme among students from disadvantaged backgrounds was that career plans were usually framed in terms of "giving back" to their home communities. V.Y., a Chinese government scholarship holder studying for a Master's degree in a specialist, policy-oriented field of social sciences, wished to use his newly-gained skills to improve the education system in Liberia for children from backgrounds similar to his own:

> I definitely need to go back home. Absolutely, if I didn't, that would be bad, because
> my government and my country helped me a lot. Right now, those that have a higher

degree in my discipline, I think I would be the fourth person.… Because I know our system, I want to make our system better. I think the next generation should not go through what I did. The government has to subsidise private schools. We have to design this policy.

Despite having accumulated cultural and social capital through migration, V.Y. did not express his post-study plans in terms of social mobility or a high-profile career. This was quite common among the students from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose post-graduation plans often reflected a complex mix of continued loyalty to, but also separateness from, the communities they belonged to before their study abroad. Allegiance to class communities is also common in 'exceptional' cases of entry in domestic higher education, as working-class students tend to maintain a sense of loyalty to working-class communities (e.g., Friedman, 2016; Reay *et al*., 2009). The cases of V.Y. and several other students from disadvantaged backgrounds perhaps provide examples of how practices are the result of the relationship between the habitus and current and past circumstances (Stahl, 2015): in these cases, there is a tension between habitus and field. As such, the students' habitus appears to be somewhat destabilised, in that V.Y. and others clearly see themselves as separate from their home communities, having achieved long-range social mobility. The desire and perceived ability to help others reveals a recognition of a social, cultural and economic position of relative privilege, and of a new separation from the home community.

Among middle-class students, post-study plans were highly varied. The vast majority of students and graduates interviewed here planned to move away. Some preferred to return home, and some sought to migrate to third countries for work or further study. A common thread among middle-class students was anxiety around maintaining and reproducing middle-class status. A typical case is that of K.J., who had also originally planned to become a doctor,

and was undertaking a degree in medicine in China. She perceived that her degree might not guarantee her a career that would enable her to maintain a middle-class lifestyle:

Things changed about eight years ago: things became shaky in the economy, things changed, the government of my state changed, and then they weren't paying salaries regularly – there was one time when for two months they didn't pay salaries. There is no income coming in.

As a result of her perception that the economy of her home country was unstable, K.J. had started a business involving trade between China and Africa, and hoped that this business would enable her to weather economic instability and eventually be able to return to Africa (but not necessarily to her home country) and maintain her upper-middle-class social status. This account is similar to many others in several ways. First, K.J. worried about her ability to maintain her social status. Second, she had taken steps in an attempt to ensure that she would be able to: moving outside of career paths – such as medicine and law – associated with secure middle-class status. K.J. started a business, but others sought to develop Chinese language skills, hoping that this would allow them to find lucrative work as translators. Third, she eventually planned to return to Africa – but, importantly, not necessarily to her home country – because of her perception that integration into Chinese society would not be possible.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we draw on the case of African international students in Chinese universities to demonstrate how differences in pre-mobility socialisation within a flow of migrants exerts influence over the nature and extent of habitus mutability as a result of migration. In doing so we develop empirical understandings around how migration and international education are experienced differentially by students positioned in their home societies in unequal ways, specifically along the axis of social class. This is important in light of the increasing

diversification of flows of globally mobile students in recent years. In this regard, there are three key points to be made.

First, and perhaps unsurprisingly, pre-mobility habitus was an important factor shaping the trajectories of students' overseas sojourns. International students from disadvantaged backgrounds tended to be highly successful academically during their time abroad, as they were able to draw on internal resources developed as a response to achieving academic success while lacking cultural and social capital during childhood and adolescence (Reay *et al*., 2009). These students displayed a strong sense of connection to home communities, while shunning students from more privileged backgrounds and working towards post-study goals that evidenced a sense of loyalty to pre-study plans.

Second, we propose that the extent to which students from outside the middle-class self-excluded (e.g., Jin and Ball, 2020) from middle-class students, as a result of their self-conscious reflexivity and also because of their lack of identification with compatriots in China, partly explains the limited extent to which the research revealed evidence of habitus change among these students. This could be seen as somewhat counterintuitive, as it is generally accepted in social research drawing on Bourdieu that both social mobility and transnational spatial mobility are both potentially disruptive and possibly detrimental for the individual (e.g., Reay, 2001; Xu, 2017), sometimes causing a habitus clivé (e.g., Friedman, 2016; Soong *et al*., 2018). In this case, the specific nature of mobility meant that outcomes in terms of habitus change were quite unusual for a number of reasons. While there was some evidence of habitus destabilisation, we propose that important facets of participants' pre-migration habitus are largely left intact, despite the disruption of international migration. As such, it is clear that habitus mutability is heavily dependent on the nature of one's mobility – both spatially and socially.

Finally, most students, regardless of their original social background, did not perceive integration in China as possible. Several factors, including the large cultural gap and racialisation, appeared to contribute to this outcome. A profound sense of alienation when initially navigating new social fields in China appeared in most cases to lead to withdrawal from the host society, rather than to attempts to adapt, which often leads to habitus disjuncture (e.g., Xu, 2017). Our findings highlight that existing assumptions around the relationship between social class and international student migration are increasingly inadequate for the purpose of understanding migrants' experiences and decision-making. That is to say, the original social background of students and the nature of spatial mobility are important factors in shaping student experiences which have thus far not been adequately addressed in the literature on this topic. Examining this case of South-South mobility through the lens of Bourdieu has been valuable in allowing us to go beyond international student migration as a "middle-class" strategy, and to compare the mobility of students from across the social spectrum. This also highlights the need for more empirical research into international student migration 'at the margins'. Because our focus was on differential migration experiences of individuals "subject to similar experiences" (Wacquant, 1998, p. 221) in terms of social class background specifically, it has not been possible to unpack fully the relevance of other factors such as gender and ethnicity. However, it is not our intention to diminish their importance. Rather, we hope that this discussion of socially classed differences in the experiences of African students in China provides an impetus for further research on how experiences of education mobility are mediated along other axes of difference. Last, future studies on migration from Africa to China could focus on individual countries in order to better understand how specific national and local social, cultural and economic contexts, and differences among migrants along axes of religion, gender and ethnicity, as examples, influence mobility patterns.

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Chapter Seven: Global inequality, mobility regimes and transnational capital: the post-graduation plans of African student migrants

Abstract

Employing a theoretical framework which draws on the concept of *global regimes of mobility* and Bourdieu's *theory of practice*, this paper seeks to analyse how African student migrants in China navigate global structural inequalities in planning for post-graduation mobility, while strategising to overcome barriers to mobility and capital accumulation. It is argued that China's position within the contemporary global political economy is reflected in the ways that these student migrants navigate intersecting global mobility regimes. Moving beyond the 'stay/return' binary common in student mobility research, the article delineates three post-study trajectories: returnees, deterred by structural barriers to staying in the host country; those who stay in China, overcoming these barriers by opening businesses, with plans to return home later; and those who plan to accumulate capitals in China in order to meet the requirements of more stringent mobility regimes in the Global North.

Introduction

As of 2017, there were more than 5.3 million individuals studying for a tertiary qualification outside of their home country (UNESCO, 2019). In the context of an increasingly unequal world (Piketty, 2017), the post-graduation migration plans of these students are of importance in that their mobility is often framed as part of a 'global competition' for skilled workers who are able to contribute to innovation and economic growth (Wu and Wilkes, 2017). International student mobility tends to contribute to the concentration of skilled individuals in countries situated at the 'centre' of the contemporary global political economy, as international students are often seen as a solution to labour shortages in these destinations (Robertson, 2013). This leads to 'brain drain' from peripheral regions, hampering economic and social development and further entrenching global inequality. This problem is particularly acute for African countries. ~6% of Africans in tertiary education are enrolled in institutions outside of their home country, a higher proportion than any other region (Kritz, 2015). Partially as a result of outbound educational mobility, former South African President Thabo Mbeki estimates that Africa has lost as many as 20,000 academics and ten percent of its information technology and finance professionals in recent years (Firsing, 2016).

It is in this context that I seek to undertake a study of the post-study mobility plans of African international students in China. To meet this aim the article draws on data from interviews with 45 students and recent graduates. Whilst there is a substantial body of literature on the decision-making processes that take place before the initial international mobility (e.g. Waters, 2008; Brooks and Waters, 2011; Yang, 2018), the body of literature on students' post-graduation plans and trajectories is much less well developed. In relation to African international student mobilities, literature on both pre- and post- sojourn decision-making is scarce. This is despite the obvious importance of the post-graduation plans of globally mobile

students in the context of this global competition, especially for African countries that, generally speaking, appear to lose out as a result of students' post-sojourn decisions.

China represents a case of interest with regard to the international mobility of African students, in that it is a rapidly emerging destination for students from across the continent. Amongst the approximately half a million international students in China, Africans constitute the second-largest regional grouping: there were 81,562 registered in Chinese universities in 2018 (MOE, 2018). Chinese universities recruit these students for the purpose of public diplomacy. However, this is just one facet of an increasingly complex nexus of political, social, and economic engagement between Africa and China. China is the largest bilateral trading partner for the continent as a whole: in 2014, the total trade volume between African countries and China was greater than the total between Africa and the United States, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom combined (Tang, 2018). China also focuses heavily on trade relations rather than development assistance relative to other major partners, resulting in a relatively high ratio of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) and trade to ODA, when compared with Western countries for example (Bodomo, 2019).

Despite the obvious relevance of these students' future plans to their respective home countries' development, as well as in geopolitical terms, in the limited existing literature on African students in China, the focus tends to be on pre-migration decision-making and experiences *in-situ*, and post-study migration plans have not been addressed. For example, Ho (2017) explores how African students engage in 'global householding' strategies by running family businesses whilst studying, and in a similar vein Haugen (2013) suggests that some African students may become traders due to dissatisfaction with the educational

experiences. Mulvey (2020) also explores the pre-migration decision-making of African students, describing how global structural forces shape the initial decision to study overseas.

As such, I draw on a novel multi-level theoretical framework which employs Bourdieu's *theory of practice* (Bourdieu, 1984) to conceptualise the experiences, actions and intentions of student migrants as they plan for their post-study lives, making a contribution to the literature on international student mobility by recognising how strategies for capital accumulation through international education in the Global South are mediated by 'regimes of mobility' (e.g. Glick Schiller and Salazer, 2013). The analysis also draws on the concept of *semi-peripheral (post)coloniality* (Ginelli, 2018). Semi-peripheral (post)coloniality expresses China's long-term structural position within the contemporary global political economy, and in turn, this position manifests in the regulatory systems, migration infrastructures, and processes of racialisation which shape student migrants' plans. Employing this framework, I outline three migration pathways uncovered as a result of the research: returnees; those who stay in order to run businesses, with plans to later return home; and students who plan to use China as a 'stepping-stone' to destinations in the Global North.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Existing research on post-study migration

Whilst there is a wealth of literature which has assessed international student decision-making in terms of the initial decision to study abroad (e.g. Brooks and Waters, 2011) understandings around students' decision-making with regard to post-graduation onward migration are comparatively less well developed. Within the body of work on post-study decision-making, a significant proportion reproduces a 'stay-return binary' (Wu and Wilkes, 2017), in which staying in the host country or returning home are presented as the only two possible options resulting from study (e.g. Bijwaard and Wang, 2016; Van Mol and

Timmerman, 2014). An emphasis on 'staying' or 'leaving' tends to obscure the more nuanced and multifaceted goals and outcomes of mobility (Collins and Shubin, 2015).

However, there is an increasing recognition that post-study trajectories are often more complex than this dichotomy would suggest. For example, Wu and Wilkes (2017) examine international students' conceptions of 'home' linking them to a typology of post-study plans consisting of 'staying', 'returning' and 'open', thus challenging the stay/return binary, and similarly Tan and Hugo (2017) suggest that students may opt to migrate onwards, further challenging the stay/return paradigm. Findlay et al. (2017) also describe how familial and social institutions, at home and in the host country, complicate students' life planning pre- and post-study, sometimes shaping and changing life plans. These studies serve to challenge the notion that mobility is determined by a set of predetermined factors that can easily be ascertained. As this short review demonstrates, the logics underpinning and factors contributing to post-study plans of migrants are more complex and multifaceted than might be assumed. However, there is only a limited body of research that has sought to develop theory with regards to post-study mobility, especially in the context of the Global South. As such, the next section seeks to outline a novel, multi-level theoretical framework designed with the aim of understanding the factors and forces that contribute to international students' post-study mobility decision-making.

Mobility regimes and China's position with the contemporary global political economy

A criticism of existing frameworks for understanding the decision-making processes of migrants is that they too often neglect global structural power relations (e.g. Lipura and Collins, 2020). Therefore, the theoretical framework developed in this article is constructed with the aim not only to explore how students strategise to accumulate and exchange capital but also to gain a sense of the structural power involved in the valuations of capital, and by

extension in students' decision-making (Kelly and Lusis, 2006). The multi-level analytical framework developed here takes into account global structures of inequality, whilst at the same time seeking to examine the formation of migrants capitals through personal narratives, responding to the call for accounts of migration which are multi-levelled and which take into account structural factors and global inequalities and their impacts on student decision-making (e.g. Erel and Ryan, 2019).

The article employs the concept of semi-peripheral postcoloniality (Ginelli, 2018; Mulvey, 2020a) as part of the theoretical framework, in order to express China's position within the (post)colonial global political economy, and by extension, in order to account for the hegemonic power structures which are likely to shape the onward trajectories of migrants. This concept, coined by Ginelli (2018), is essentially a dialogue between world-systems analysis and postcolonial theory, two theoretical approaches to understanding the contemporary global political economy. World-systems analysis is a neo-Marxist metanarrative of the historical development of contemporary global capitalism, which highlights how nation-states interact within a hierarchical structure, with a clear centre, semi-periphery and periphery (Wallerstein, 2004). Semi-peripheral countries such as China compete to augment their position within the system, under pressure from the core, whilst also pressurising the periphery to do so (Wallerstein, 2004). The (post)colonial part of this concept emphasizes 'how the intertwined long-term ideological and structural positions as effects of global integration (re)produce both colonial relations and colonial discourse' (Ginelli, 2018). What this paper is primarily concerned with is not so much the actions or discourse produced by the Chinese state with reference to African countries, but how post-graduation plans of student migrants are embedded within this structure.

Robertson (2013) and others have explored how 'the education-migration nexus', or in other words, the relationship between student mobility and post-study mobility, shape the experiences of student migrants. In order to delineate the nature of students' embeddedness within global structures, this paper draws on the related but more wide-ranging concept of 'regimes of mobility' - one manifestation of global structural inequalities which may serve to mediate the agency of African student migrants (e.g. Glick Schiller and Salazer, 2013; Collins, 2020). Mobility regimes are intersecting systems that differentially allow and restrict migration across social groups. The term refers not merely to a nation-state's migration apparatus, but to a 'networked entity' that includes for example (supra-)state actors, international organisations, and non-institutionalised local practices (Schwarz, 2020, p. 219). It expresses the power-laden nature of mobility, pointing out how policies and practices tend to make mobility possible for some whilst hindering it for others, thus contributing to the entrenchment of inequalities (Massa, 2020). These regimes also actively generate othering processes and experiences of societal marginalisation for some groups (Schappendonk et al., 2020). The ability to cross borders legally and to gain access to labour markets, professions and employment is dependent on the structural factors, such as these regimes of mobility that lead to the stratification of movement along lines of national belonging and racialised markers (Erel and Ryan, 2019; Collins, 2020). In response to these factors, migrants may employ agential strategies, or draw on networks in which they are embedded in order to overcome barriers.

Bourdieu's theory of practice

Several concepts from the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1984) are employed in order to highlight the specific processes and dynamic interplay between global structures and individual agency that characterise migration decision-making. The central focus here is on

the ways in which global structures and regimes shape the differences in the valuation of capitals spatially, and how students negotiate these structures and overcome barriers in order to accumulate multiple forms of capital. Bourdieu's theorisation of capitals has been used widely in studies of migration, and studies utilising the theory also make up a significant proportion of the literature on international student migration (e.g. Waters, 2008; Sin, 2013; Yang, 2018). The following section outlines how these concepts will be employed and integrated with the macro-level framework outlined above.

I draw in particular on the concepts of *field* and *capital*. Forms of capital comprise the economic, cultural and social. Economic capital refers to financial resources, whilst social capital refers to resources which are linked to a network of relationships and group membership – Bourdieu (1986, p. 21) describes these resources as a kind of 'credential' which entitles the holder to credit: in other words, social ties that can be exchanged for other forms of capital. Cultural capital exists in three states: embodied, which refers to dispositions, traits, and skills; institutionalised, for example through educational credentials; and objectified, in the form of cultural goods. This article is primarily concerned with the first two. The social conditions in which the habitus and capitals are produced are termed 'fields' (Bourdieu, 1993): these are structured and hierarchical social spaces, in which each agent occupies a position of subordination or dominance, dependent on the amount of capital possessed. How capital is valued within a social field is dependent upon the 'common sense' of that particular field, and if an agent changes fields, their social position is likely to change, as the rules around the value of capital differ. Bourdieu (2000) outlines that what is considered 'common sense' is usually nationally bounded, and that when an agent crosses between fields transnationally, the valuations of capital based on this may change.

The concept of cultural capital in particular has been applied widely in studies of international student mobility (e.g. Findlay, 2011; Kim, 2011; Waters, 2008). In terms of post-study trajectories, this body of research usually emphasises how overseas higher education credentials are valuable sources of cultural capital that facilitate the reproduction of social status upon return to the home country. However, within there is also increasing recognition that the exchange of capital across transnational fields is far from straightforward. For example, Collins et al. (2017, p. 13) highlight that the cultural capital value of an international credential is 'situated in governmental, economic, and social connections', and that 'there is nothing automatic' about the exchanging of these forms of capital after-study. Additionally, Sin (2013) argues that demographic factors such as age and gender add complexity to the valuation and exchange of capital as, for example, it was perceived by participants in Sin's study that males would gain more immediate symbolic capital from overseas study than females.

The theory of practice outlined above is a heuristic which aids in explaining how different forms of capital are evaluated, but not *why* (Kelly and Lusis, 2006). In this article, I attempt to provide an account of students' post-graduation decision-making through the lens of capitals, arguing that students' post-study strategising in terms of post-study capital accumulation and exchange is closely related to this process of capital valuation and re-valuation across transnational spaces. As such the focus is not just on students' plans, but how these valuations of forms of capital across transnational spaces are arrived at, and how underlying power structures shape them.

The Research

The main research instrument was semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with 45 students and recent graduates of Chinese universities, who hailed from 14 different African

countries (See Table 2). While students from a wide range of countries are represented, a limitation is that potential interviewees were informed that the interview could be conducted in either English or Chinese, and this resulted in relatively few participants from outside anglophone Africa participating in the study, as students (for example those from francophone countries) that did not speak English or Chinese fluently were less willing to take part. As the focus is on planned trajectories rather than students' actual long-term post-graduation mobility, students and those who had graduated within the past six months were eligible to be interviewed. As Table 2 shows, most of the interviewees were male: this also represents a minor limitation of the study, as fewer female students or graduates indicated willingness to take part. The participants studied various courses, and were distributed throughout social sciences, arts and humanities and STEM fields. Students studied at a range of universities in China. The universities are categorised in Table 2 according to the 'Double First-Class University Plan', which is a tertiary education development initiative introduced by the Chinese government in 2015 (Peters and Besley, 2018). 'Class A' universities are the generally considered to be the most prestigious in China, whereas 'Class B' and 'double first-class disciplines' (DFCD) universities are less prestigious, but rank highly within China. Universities outside of the Double-First Class University Plan are termed 'provincial', and are generally considered less prestigious than those within it. In the table, students' post-study mobility plans are also indicated: a small number of students were unclear about their future plans. As the main aim of this article is to shed light on the relationship between students' decisions and structural inequalities, the focus is on those who have a clear trajectory in mind.

In addition, participants' social class background (see Table 2) was indicated in a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on parental education level, nature of employment, as well as students' perceptions of their familial income level relative to others. This

information formed the basis of the broad categorisation of students into two different social groups. In addition, further in-depth information on students' social-class background was elicited during the interviews. This approach clearly has limitations when applied to the broad context of the African continent, and inevitably led to some simplification. However, it was possible to ascertain whether individuals, broadly speaking, were members of the middle-class, or whether they had faced significant disadvantage in early-life compared to other participants.

The interviews were conducted between December 2020 and April 2021, and usually lasted for between 45 and 90 minutes. Most were conducted via video call (due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Interviews were reflexive and focused on participants' pre-mobility background and life in their home country, as well as their experiences in the host country, plans or trajectories after the completion of studies, and the factors that contributed to these decisions. The research employed a purposeful sampling approach (e.g. Cresswell and Poth, 2018). Beginning with a few existing contacts from the researchers' previous work, potential participants were identified. The aim was to achieve maximum variability along a number of axes, such as country of origin, level of study, and social background in the home country. In doing this, we hoped to uncover shared patterns amongst African student migrants that cut across unique cases, and to reduce homogeneity. For the analysis, the researchers identified codes and themes within the data set, following the five-stage process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 2. Participant characteristics

Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	University	Trajectory	Social background
DJ	Eritrea	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
TU	Ghana	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class

MR	Tanzania	Female	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
MW	Chad	Male	DFCD	Return	Disadvantaged
QP	Ethiopia	Male	DFCD	Return	Middle class
PA	Eritrea	Male	Class A	Onward	Disadvantaged
OU	Uganda	Female	Class A	Return	Middle class
DC	Uganda	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
IU	Uganda	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
NS	Kenya	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
BL	Dem. Rep. Congo	Male	Provincial	Return	Disadvantaged
DU	Uganda	Female	DFCD	Return	Middle class
DS	Uganda	Female	DFCD	Return	Middle class
TE	Ethiopia	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
WS	South Sudan	Female	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
DF	Nigeria	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
GW	Ghana	Female	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
IJ	Ghana	Female	Provincial	Return	Middle class
NJ	Malawi	Male	Provincial	Undecided	Middle class
FH	Ghana	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
EM	Tanzania	Female	DFCD	Undecided	Middle class
VE	Tanzania	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
AS	Nigeria	Male	Class B	Return	Middle class
SA	Rwanda	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
PF	Nigeria	Male	DFCD	Return	Middle class
HL	Ghana	Male	DFCD	Return	Middle class
JE	Rwanda	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
VY	Liberia	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
EB	Malawi	Male	Provincial	Return	Disadvantaged
BD	Ghana	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
WH	Malawi	Male	Provincial	Short-term stay	Middle class
AY	Tanzania	Male	Provincial	Return	Disadvantaged
YS	Ghana	Male	Provincial	Return	Middle class
KJ	Nigeria	Female	Provincial	Short-term stay	Middle class
DW	South Africa	Female	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
EG	Zimbabwe	Male	Provincial	Undecided	Middle class
UF	Nigeria	Male	Provincial	Return	Disadvantaged
SH	Nigeria	Female	Provincial	Return	Middle class

EH	Malawi	Female	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
SC	Uganda	Male	DFCD	Return	Middle class
HC	Nigeria	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
HD	Nigeria	Male	Class A	Return	Disadvantaged
SJ	Cameroon	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class
AG	Rwanda	Male	Provincial	Short-term stay	Middle class
WU	Cameroon	Male	Provincial	Onward	Middle class

Findings

Returnees

Educational mobility is often part of a broader plan which may involve other forms of migration over the longer-term. Robertson (2013) describes how international students, through various means, seek to work in the host country and eventually gain permanent residency after the completion of their studies. However, in this case, whilst some students were initially open to the prospect of staying in China to work post-graduation, most were deterred by two interrelated factors: visa policies and perceived discrimination based on race and national belonging. In total, 29 of the 45 students interviewed suggested that they planned to return home. Interestingly, all but one of the 14 students from the disadvantaged group preferred to return to their home countries. The one exception to this rule is also an unusual case in that he plans to seek asylum in the future, hence his plans for onward migration. This perhaps suggests that these students saw staying in China or moving to a third country as beyond the 'field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984), or in other words, beyond the scope of expectations. Bourdieu argues that the position within a social space that an individual occupies shapes not only his or her life chances, but also the level of their expectations. In this case, it appears that only a few of the most socially privileged students in the sample perceived onwards migration as an option.

As an example I.J., an undergraduate student in a Business Administration related course, sought to stay in China, but felt that structural barriers to doing so were too great:

> I wouldn't want to stay in China, I think it's very stressful, you need working visa, […] and some people they really struggle to support themselves, imagine the stress they go through, sometimes they are forced to work illegally, so it's not easy.

While some students were initially open to the possibility of working in China, they perceived that it would not be easy to obtain a work visa, and that staying in China might require working illegally. This perception appears to be accurate in that the Chinese government does not frame international students as a means of plugging skills gaps within the domestic workforce (Mulvey & Lo, 2020). In Chinese policy texts, international students are seem primarily as a public diplomacy tool, rather than as potential skilled labour migrants, as is the case in Australia (Robertson, 2013) and the UK (Lomer, 2017) for example.

Moreover, perceptions of alienation and othering also deterred students such as H.C., a master's student from Nigeria, from staying in China after their course had finished:

> I experienced a lot of discrimination in China, walking around and trying to make friends, it was a bit difficult, a lot of them, they would like to approach you or speak to you, but because of whatever it is they were taught about blacks, they kind of retreat, and in the subway you feel so isolated, nobody would want to come and sit next to you.

This was a common refrain amongst interviewees, who had been surprised by the level of discrimination and othering they experienced in China – experiences of this kind are well documented in the literature on international student mobility to Asia. Jon (2012) for example highlights how South Korean students tended to discriminate against those from countries

perceived to less wealthy or powerful than their own. As a result, interviewees generally believed that accessing the Chinese labour market by finding an employer to secure a visa would be difficult. At the same time, many of these students, particularly those from less wealthy social backgrounds, believed that migration to a third country was unrealistic, and assumed that they did not have sufficient resources to do so.

It is clear that the valuation of capital across transnational fields is mediated by a labour mobility regime which privileges some racial markers and nationalities over others, and this further motivates return migration. Interviewees believed that both their race and nationality would disadvantage them in the post-graduation labour market in China, and this is perhaps supported by evidence of a hierarchy of race and nationality in Chinese labour markets (Lan, 2017). For example, Liu and Dervin (2020) describe how 'whiteness' acts as a form of embodied cultural capital, and beyond this, citizens of Western countries are often presumed to embody certain desirable skills and competencies associated with their nationality (Farrer, 2014). Conversely, in these cases, students perceived that being a 'non-white other' and a national of an African country would lead to the *devaluing* of other forms of capital. This therefore highlights how global structural inequalities within the (post)colonial world-system are reproduced and mirrored in local practices which constitute one part of the mobility regime, shaping the 'field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984), or in other words the perceived range of possible future lifecourse trajectories, of some international students.

The desire to return home was redoubled by the perception that cultural capital was valued differentially across the home and host country labour-market fields. Whilst national belonging and racialisation appeared to lead to the devaluing of capitals in China, students generally perceived that the experience of having lived and studied in China would be highly valued within the home country field. B.L., a student from the Democratic Republic of

Congo who previously migrated to Rwanda and later Uganda, was confident about the exchange value of the cultural capital gained from study in China, resulting largely from the rarity of Chinese language skills in Africa:

> Now, I'm aiming to work in translation, because it is difficult to get other jobs in my country, but there are many Chinese companies in Rwanda and Uganda. It is difficult to find other jobs because for example government jobs are very few... So translation, it is automatic, how many people can speak Chinese? You find there aren't many, so the job is there for you.

This in some ways echoes Waters' (2008) finding that a Canadian university degree was more valuable when taken by Hong Kong students back to Hong Kong than it was for students opting to stay in Canada. This was because firstly, students in Canada perceived that racial discrimination was a barrier to finding employment in Canada, and secondly because a Canadian degree had 'rarity value' in Hong Kong. In a similar vein, whilst African students perceived that their capitals were devalued in the Chinese labour market, they also perceived that a Chinese credential and the embodied skills associated with overseas study such as proficiency in Chinese language would be valued for their rarity in students' respective home countries.

Overall, the findings presented here highlight an important point with regard to China's position within the global political economy – that the power to classify is embedded within structures of global capitalism. The migration plans of these students were clearly shaped by the differentiated value of credentials in China and across Africa, which in turn is influenced by the entrenched structures of global inequality which predicate the power to classify (Kelly and Lusis, 2006). However, a complexity is that students may not necessarily be correct in assuming that these forms of capital will be valorised in their home country (Waters, 2008).

Collins et al. (2017) highlight that the 'portability' of international credentials cannot necessarily be assumed to be straightforward. Similarly, Sin (2013) highlights that demographic factors such as gender and nationality add complexity to the conversion of cultural capital.

Short-term remaining, long-term returning entrepreneurs

A minority of students and graduates desired to stay in China. These three students were all from middle-class backgrounds, perhaps suggesting that existing financial and social resources played a role in enabling students to stay. This is because, given the lack of opportunity for careers within Chinese organisations, staying in China for these three students involved opening a small business. However, doing so was fraught with difficulty for those who chose this route. For example, A.G. had opened a consultancy while he was studying, recruiting students from his home country to study in China and receiving a commission for doing so. He stayed in China post-graduation in order to expand his business:

> Well basically when I was at school, in China, you know we students we can't work, and there was nothing that we could do really, so I actually started helping students, you know, someone who knows someone that wants to study in China, and I would charge them.

It should be noted, however, that A.G.'s plan was to eventually move back to his home country and operate his business from there, rather than to permanently remain in China. A similar case is that of K.J., an undergraduate medical student from Nigeria. K.J. described how she lost interest in her field of study, claiming that this career path did not represent a viable path towards reproducing a middle-class social status. Instead she chose to start a small business importing and exporting goods between her home country and China:

> At the moment I can't go back to my country. I'm so sorry but it's just the truth, because there is nothing for me to do back home. There is no job, so I'm going to go back home and then what? Nothing. Since I've been in China I've got an okay client base. So it's more comfortable to start here, and there's better opportunities here. And I don't want to go with the flow of going to Western countries, because everybody is going to Western countries, and I don't know if that's for me. So I don't want to take that risk, I want to just start here and see where it leads.

These are cases in which the plan is neither to simply 'stay' or 'return'. For both A.G. and K.J., the relative value of forms of cultural and social capital across transnational fields were of importance in post-study decision-making. For reasons similar to those who preferred to return home, both of these students felt that permanent immigration was both undesirable and infeasible. However, in the short-term, the value of social and cultural capital across transnational fields was judged by these individuals to be greater in China. Studies of migration often emphasise the importance of co-ethnic ties in finding employment in the host country (Erel and Ryan, 2019). In this case, ties with other students from across Africa, developed over the course of study, enabled A.G. to develop a source of income which he felt was more stable and lucrative than any of the employment options that might be available to him in Rwanda. Similarly, K.J. exported goods from her home country and built a client-base in China. Thus, for both, the social capital built up over the course of study in China meant that operating a business was possible, and that this was preferable to returning home where they felt opportunities were limited.

In addition, the nature of respective home countries' embeddedness within the contemporary global political economy relative to China means that these students-turned-entrepreneurs occupy a particular position amongst foreigners, which limits post-study options in China.

This appears to be broadly true of all Africans regardless of country of origin: as others have noted, the majority of Africans in China are individual businesspeople who look for niches in the import and export trading system (Haugen, 2012). Their presence in China is not supported by the national government under the 'foreign talents' scheme, or other initiatives aimed at attracting foreign skilled workers or foreign direct investment from corporations (Bork-Hüffer and Yuan-Ilhe, 2014). They are largely formally excluded on the basis of national origin, in contrast to other groups of foreigners in China, a large number of whom are expatriates from the Global North who are employed by large Chinese and transnational businesses (e.g. Liu and Dervin, 2020). As such, students from across Africa who wish to work in China post-graduation are often unable to obtain Z-visas, which are usually available only to those who are formally employed by larger companies. A Z-visa is generally longer in duration offers more stability for immigrants in China, unlike business (F) visas or tourist (L) visas, both of which are used by small business operators and exporters, and must be renewed more regularly (Haugen, 2013). Thus, the plans of these students are in effect limited by a mobility regime which privileges some migrants and hinders others. In this case, China's policies around labour migration mean that African students are largely unable to access opportunities that might allow for a longer-term stay in China. As such, they draw on various forms of capital in order to overcome obstacles to remaining in China.

Onward migration to the Global North

In total, 10 students saw China as a stepping-stone to other destinations. For all but one, whose case I discuss later in this section, this meant more desirable destination countries in Europe or North America that they presumed would afford a greater level of symbolic capital associated with more international recognition and prestige in transnational spaces (Brooks and Waters, 2011). These regions were also desirable because finding employment was

perceived to be easier. All but one were from the middle-class group, and were from relatively privileged backgrounds within the group, suggesting that these wealthier students perhaps had a broader 'field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984) due to previous life experiences, as well as presumably having greater quantities of the financial and cultural resources required for onward migration.

For example, S.A. is an undergraduate student from Rwanda whose middle-class parents had funded his overseas study in China. Although his parents were relatively wealthy in the context of the Rwandan middle-class, they could not afford to support S.A.'s study in Europe, which was his preferred destination:

> Right now, what I'm thinking is that the students in Rwanda, they are actually better than us, they have got real skills. Because the name is from abroad, it gives you respect, but in your head you have nothing… The things I'm planning, if it all goes well, are to study for a Master's in a European country. I am really focused on that. I want to achieve this dream, because I am twenty-two now, they can allow us to work, if you know what you want to do. I can go there, gain education and also make money and help my brothers. So that's a big advantage of Europe.

S.A.'s desire to study in Europe was echoed by D.W., a Master's degree student from South Africa. The reasoning underpinning D.W.'s onward migration however was somewhat different:

> I just don't want to stay in China any longer. But if I did a PhD in England I would plan to stay and find a job there, because, if you watch the news you might know the South African economy is not doing well, there aren't that many job opportunities, the unemployment rate is really high. I don't think it would be that easy to get a job. In

> South Africa it's always easier if you're someone who knows someone, but I'm not
>
> anyone who knows anyone.

There are a number of points to unpack in relation to these cases of planned post-study onward migration. Firstly, these two accounts reveal the role that China may be playing as a semi-peripheral 'middle place', acting as an intermediary in global migrations between peripheries and former colonial metropoles that constitute the core of the global political economy. Raghuram (2013, p. 145) notes the possible role of semi-peripheries in terms of brokering mobility 'along the chain' - the strength of the theme of planned onward migration in the data suggests that China may be playing such a role for some African students, particularly members of a nascent globally-oriented African middle-class. These students perceive that a credential from a Chinese university provides forms of institutional cultural capital unavailable in their home country, thus allowing them to meet the more stringent financial and academic requirements for study visas in Europe and North America.

In addition, the one student from outside of the middle-class group represents an unusual case. P.A., a Master's student from Eritrea, preferred onward migration as he planned to seek asylum in a third country. Mobility regimes also play a role here in driving P.A.'s mobility. The political manoeuvring which results from China's long-term structural and ideological position within the world-system means that China is particularly unlikely to accept Eritrean asylum seekers, as China seeks to foster political and economic ties with Eritrea. This example demonstrates how international students from the most underprivileged groups, such as P.A., are often the most restricted in terms of their future mobility.

To summarise, migration is stratified by migration policies which differentially assign status and rights to groups of migrants (Collins, 2020). In this case, the Chinese state restricts educationally-channelled labour migration (Robertson, 2013), shaping not only the

trajectories of students that return home, but also those who migrate onwards. In this case, wealthier students sought to use their experience in China to gain the greater quantities of capital required access to higher education in Europe, with an eye to working and eventually settling in the West, as opportunities to make the transition from study to work were perceived to be greater there.

Conclusion

This article has sought to present findings related to the decision-making around post-study mobility of African student migrants in China, while at the same time situating these findings in a discussion of the ways in which global inequalities determine the value of multiple forms of capital held by students from countries within the global 'periphery'. To summarise, the study analysed distinct post-study migration trajectories, highlighting that the tendency to reduce students' decisions around post-sojourn plans to a simple binary of 'stay' or 'go' (e.g. Van Mol and Timmerman, 2014) leads to the obscuring of the complexities of the decision-making around post-study migration. The three trajectories analysed here serve to highlight firstly, how the agency of African student migrants is restricted by regimes of mobility, and secondly, how these individuals strategise to overcome barriers to mobility and capital accumulation. The study demonstrated how regimes of mobility lead to the normalisation of movement for some international students, and its restriction for others (Glick Schiller and Salazer, 2013). Intersecting systems, including both national policies and less formal local practices effectively act as a structural barrier which restricts the options available to African students. Along with formal work-visa restrictions, well-documented labour market discrimination on the basis of race compounded a perception amongst students that gaining employment in China post-graduation was infeasible. At the same time, amongst African international students, intersecting mobility regimes both in China and elsewhere are most

easily navigated by the most socially privileged students, some of whom envisioned onward migration, or were able to stay in China post-graduation.

The example of students who planned to return home highlighted how national mobility regimes which serve to exclude those from the Global South led to the perception amongst most participants that returning home offered a better opportunity to move forward and achieve social mobility or maintain social status. The second trajectory highlighted how the same mobility regimes which disadvantaged African student migrants in the Chinese labour market drove some to open businesses, as this represented an opportunity to leverage China's structural position relative to Africa which allowed students to circumvent restrictive labour migration policies. The third highlighted the role China plays for some, usually more privileged, students in acting as a 'middle place' to accumulate the necessary capital to move on to study in the Global North where educational migration regimes are usually more stringent, and tend to exclude African students with international mobility plans.

Despite the obvious differences between students, both migration policies and labour market discrimination appeared to shape the trajectories of all the students here in a similar way. That said, social class plays a role in post-study decision-making. Those from less privileged backgrounds were more likely to perceive that returning home was the only option, suggesting that pre-mobility access to forms of capital played a role in mediating the expectations of students. Overall, the findings highlight how the nature of the sending country's embeddedness within the global political economy shapes the way that capital is valued or devalued across transnational fields. Each of the trajectories outlined here represents a strategy to accumulate capital. Students who planned to return home did so partly because they perceived that their capitals, devalued in China, would be more greatly valued in the home country field. The (de)valuation of students' cultural capital in China is

related to structural power relations, and a key point is that, in order to understand how international student migrants strategise to accumulate various forms of capital, it is necessary to retain a sense of the structural power which underpins the valuation of capital across transnational social fields.

Finally, I would like to reflect on the implications of these findings for Africa in the context of the global skills competition. It seems clear that the potential for brain drain resulting from this migration pattern appears to be low relative to Global South-to-North student mobility, due to the regulatory regime in China which makes long-term settlement for Africans in particular very difficult. Given that the number of African student migrants in China is likely to increase in the future, the challenge for African governments, however, is in ensuring these students are motivated return to their home countries, rather than seeking opportunities in a third country.

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Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to explore the processes of educational migration between Africa and China, and the ways in which these processes are shaped by global inequalities and structural power relations between China and African countries, in the context of a 'global rebalancing' of economic and political relations. In this final chapter I aim to draw the arguments of each of the empirical chapters together. By doing so, I underscore how this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the transformations taking place in international student mobility as a result of China's emergence as an international education 'hub' for the Global South.

Drawing upon, first, an analysis of policy texts related to international student mobility between Africa and China, and second, a case study of a group of African international students in China, I developed existing theory on the processes of international student mobility. Throughout the thesis, I draw upon a multi-level framework with the aim of understanding how students' decision-making and experiences are embedded within hierarchical global structures. In the Introduction, I highlighted that current theoretical approaches and assumptions are to too great an extent influenced by the idea that students move from Global South to North, or from other places to the West. At the same time, little is known about emergent patterns of international student mobility, regarding for example 'who' these globally mobile students are (in terms of pre-mobility socio-economic backgrounds), why they move abroad to study, their experiences abroad, and what they plan to do after their study sojourn abroad has ended. Overall, I argued that this focus on students from the Global North resulted in the obscuring of other patterns of student mobility, and sought to build theory with regard to international student mobility in the Global South.

Synthesis: China's reshaping of the global higher education landscape

The results of this inquiry into international student migration have been written up in five papers, with each of them focused on a different aspect of the educational migration between Africa and China. Taken together, they constitute an attempt at theory-building, integrating a number of approaches commonly used in studies of international migration in order to understand how Africa-China mobility challenges existing understandings of educational migration. The results of the analyses were detailed across the respective papers: *Learning to 'tell China's story well': the constructions of international students in Chinese higher education policy* (Chapter Three), *Conceptualizing the discourse of student mobility between "periphery" and "semi-periphery": the case of Africa and China* (Chapter Four), *"Decentring" international student mobility: The case of African student migrants in China* (Chapter Five), *'It's kind of becoming a culture': How habitus influences the migration trajectories of African students in China* (Chapter Six), and *Global inequality, mobility regimes and transnational capital: the post-graduation plans of African student migrants* (Chapter Seven). In this section I offer a synthesis of the papers, outlining the broader significance of the papers taken together, and how they contribute to achieving the overall research aim delineated in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

Structural factors in migration

The first two papers focus on the discourse of international student mobility. The findings serve to deepen understandings of the structural forces shaping the decision-making described in Chapters Five and Seven, and provide necessary context for understanding the experiences described by students across the latter three chapters. As Riaño et al. (2018) highlight, a comprehensive understanding of any case of international student mobility must factor in national policies and other macro-level factors, because students' motivations to

move across borders are shaped by horizons for action which are created by the policies put in place by national governments and other actors. The content of policies also has the potential to filter into everyday discourse (Bacchi, 2000), thus impacting on students who interact with them.

There is relatively little research on the discourse of migration policy generally (e.g. Boswell and Hampshire, 2017), and within studies on international student mobility this is also the case, with few exceptions (e.g. Lomer 2017; Riaño et al., 2018). These exceptions deal with the UK and other places in Europe, and reveal little about how students might be represented as social subjects in China, and how these representations contribute to creating structures which shape students' migration decision-making and experiences. Thus, the findings from the first two papers add valuable context which aids in understanding the latter three.

Chapter Three examined the discourse around international student mobility. The literature review revealed that some discourses common in Western countries were not present in Chinese policy texts. In particular there was an absence of economic discourse, which frames students as economic agents or as future workers and drivers of economic growth. Further, there was a presence of a particularly strong 'soft power' discourse in Chinese policy texts. In Chapter Four the focus was narrowed to the discourses surrounding African students in particular, and I also aimed to theorise how these discourses came about. In addition to a discourse of soft power, I found that with reference to African countries, there was also a discourse of what I termed 'civilizational paternalism'. Overall, while the national discourse surrounding international student mobility differs markedly in China when compared with that found in various other contexts (e.g. Lomer, 2017; O'Connor, 2018), Chapter Four theorises that China's changing structural position within the global political and economic order contributes to the production of discourse around international students – and this

applies to the findings of both Chapter Three and Chapter Four. That is to say, much of the discourse produced around international student mobility is related to relative power and structural inequality. As China becomes a 'superpower', moving towards the centre of the global order, it has begun to produce discourses in national policies implying superiority over other regions and effectively mirroring those found in the Global North. However, the Chinese party-state views international student recruitment as a part of its strategy for 'overtaking' countries currently at the top of the global order (resulting in a soft power discourse).

This theorisation, developed through the first two papers, represents a substantive contribution to the international student mobility literature for two reasons. First, because there is little understanding of the discourses surrounding international student mobility in the Global South, especially in a context like China, where internationalisation is not driven by neo-liberal, market-led ideology but by what Pan (2013) describes as 'developmental statism', or in other words, state-directed efforts to enhance foreign political, economic and academic relations. The papers thus contributed to an understanding of how China's re-shaping of the global higher education field is also challenging existing assumptions about why international students are recruited. Second, Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three by offering an explanation as to *why* the Chinese party-state produces these discourses: they are a product of the country's long-term historical and ideological position within global structures, and at the same time, a product of its movement towards the top of the global order.

I drew on the findings of Chapters Three and Four in the later chapters focusing on the mobility itself. In Chapter Four, I looked at students' decision-making with regard to overseas studies, paying particular attention to how structural inequalities contributed to constructing their scope for action. I found that the powerful discursive frameworks of soft

power and attracting 'future elites', outlined in Chapter Three, shaped the mobility of students in a number of ways. First, the framing of students as tools to achieve foreign policy goals resulted in policies such as the provision of a large number of scholarships. This in turn meant that there were some students who, contrary to the common notion that international education is a middle-class activity, came from impoverished backgrounds. These students would not have been able to study overseas without scholarships. Most did not study overseas as part of a long-term strategy, but instead reacted to unexpected opportunities that arose as a result of China's soft power gambit, and more broadly, as a result of China's semi-peripheral (post)coloniality (in other words unequal power relations resulting in a reversal of centre and periphery) in relation to Africa.

The discourse within the policy texts that students should be 'future elites' also appeared to have some impact on the way in which scholarships were distributed. There was a perception amongst students from some countries that a proportion of scholarship holders had received the scholarship as a result of their social connections (to political elites in their home country) rather than as a result of their academic ability or deservingness, although clearly this was not always the case. It is uncertain how common this practice is, or whether its prevalence varies across Africa. Nonetheless, the example demonstrates how discourse within policy texts has the potential to filter down and shape the migration trajectories of individuals.

Moreover, in the final chapter, I explored how constructions of students' roles in policy documents influenced the regulatory systems and migration infrastructures within China, thus shaping students' post-study plans. The most notable link between the discourses outlined in Chapter Three and Chapter Four and the findings of Chapter Seven is related to students' post-study work plans. The fact that, unlike most other major destination countries for international students, in China students are not discursively constructed as a potential means

of bolstering the workforce, meant that the scope of action created by government policy was quite narrow. Students generally felt that remaining in China was not possible due to the difficulty of obtaining a work visa. As a result they generally preferred either to return to their home country or to move on to a third country where it would be possible to get a work visa.

Overall, discursive constructs within policy contributed to students' decision-making by creating scope for action, enabling for example the mobility of students from underprivileged backgrounds (as a result of scholarships given as part of soft power initiatives), and encouraging the mobility of political elites from Africa to China for the same reason. Post-mobility, the dominant construction of students as tools to contribute to China's foreign policy goals meant that most were unable to secure work visas, as China had little interest in encouraging students to find work in China after graduation.

Challenging axioms within research on international student mobility

Another overall aim of the thesis was to understand how the case of African student migrants in China challenges assumptions within existing literature on international student mobility. These axioms include for example the idea that international students are invariably from privileged backgrounds, mostly moving abroad as part of a deliberate strategy to 'get ahead' and maintain the social privileges they already have (e.g. Waters, 2007; Lipura & Collins, 2020). Taken together, the latter three papers challenge both the idea that international education is invariably an activity undertaken by privileged individuals, and that it is part of a deliberate strategy for reproduction of social status. The papers accordingly highlight that the rise of China as a higher education destination (along with a number of other destinations in the Global South), is changing the dynamics of student mobility globally, opening up opportunities for overseas study to a wider range of students. At the same time, global

structural inequalities (expressed in the concepts of semi-peripheral postcoloniality and regimes of mobility), complicate the strategies and trajectories of these students. The findings in the papers also highlight that the demographic breadth and diversity of internationally mobile higher education students appears to be increasing, and is not well captured in existing literature.

In this section I highlight some of the ways in which the findings challenge existing understandings of mobility. The most obvious challenge to existing understandings of international student mobility is from the range of student accounts presented in the three papers. The prevailing view within the literature on international student mobility is that international students are usually privileged within their home country, often seeking an international education in order to opt out of the overly-competitive domestic education systems (Waters, 2007). From this perspective, international students and their families are effectively reduced to rational and competitive actors who make decisions strategically and with an eye to the accumulation of various forms of capital (Lipura & Collins, 2020). In Chapter Six, I focused on the backgrounds of students and the decision-making processes associated with their mobility. While the majority of students I interviewed were middle-class, focusing on these students alone would have belied the diversity of the group of students I interviewed. The first thing to note is that whilst these middle-class students are quite privileged within the context of their home countries, they are mostly not members of the 'global middle-class'. That is to say, these students are not members of a global class whose members have more in common with each other than they do with their fellow countrymen, and whose living standards are close to Western middle-classes (Koo, 2016). Whilst a minority of the middle-class students in this study might fit this category, most were middle-class only within the context of their home country, and have little in common with the students described in other studies of 'South-North' mobility (e.g. Waters, 2008; Holloway et

al., 2012; Findlay et al., 2017). At the same time, some of the international students interviewed were not socially privileged or middle-class, and their decision-making processes do not fit well into existing frameworks which emphasize rational and competitive economic decisions. Throughout the latter three chapters, I explored the cases of a number of socially disadvantaged students who reacted to unexpected opportunities for overseas study.

In sum, the emergence of 'middling' higher education destinations within the Global South means that existing assumptions about international student mobility need to be revisited. This is also true of the process of transformation which takes place during the overseas sojourn, as I explored in Chapter Six. Comparing the experiences of middle-class students who had long-term plans to study overseas, and those from less privileged backgrounds, it was clear that differences in pre-mobility experiences exert some influence on the experiences students have overseas, but this has been neglected in the existing literature. Students carried their pre-mobility habitus into their experiences abroad, and as a result, those from less-privileged backgrounds had different experiences in China resulting partly from what I described as a 'self-conscious reflexivity' and 'self-excluding tendency' among many of them.

Given the vast differences between the students outlined in Chapters Five and Six and those that have been the focus of existing literature, it is unsurprising that Chapter Seven sheds light on how existing understandings of post-study migration of international students do not capture well the planned trajectories of African student migrants. The theme of privilege was also not obvious in many of the accounts given in this chapter. Social class appeared to play a role here too – those from less privileged backgrounds also appeared to be more likely to plan to return home, rather than either staying in China or moving on to another country. In addition, the horizons for action were often limited as a result of global structural inequalities.

The post-study mobility of students was quite restricted, and for most, staying in China was not an option due to the difficulty of obtaining a work visa.

Finally, it is worth summarising the key contributions to theory resulting from this research. A central argument of this thesis is that understanding global structural power relations is a necessary part of understanding the processes of capital accumulation through international education. In this thesis I have drawn upon and developed the concept of semi-peripheral postcoloniality to express China's position in the global order. This concept has utility for both postcolonial theorists, as well as those examining facets of 'rising' Asia's interactions with the rest of the world, for example with regard to migration flows to and from China and other countries such as India. The concept offers a means of understanding postcolonial relations and migration flows in the context of the 'global rebalancing' of the global political economy, thereby representing a means to move beyond a 'West' vs. 'the Rest' gaze within postcolonial theory and migration studies. I introduced the concept in Chapter Four, delineating how China's changing position within the global political economy leads to the reproduction of discourse with origins in colonialism in policy texts related to Africa-China international student mobility. I then developed the concept in Chapters Five and Seven, examining how the nature of China's embeddedness within the global political economy structures the agency of African international students. In Chapter Five, I explored how global power inequalities and the mirroring of colonial discourse shape the decision-making of students even within the Global South. In Chapter Seven, I explored how the valuation of capital across transnational fields is underpinned by global structures of capitalism which predicate the power to value forms of capital. In addition, I drew on the concept of mobility regimes to demonstrate how China's structural position is mirrored in policies and practices which shape the scope of trajectories perceived to be possible for students.

Furthermore, I have applied several concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice to the study of educational mobilities in the Global South, looking at how students' strategies for capital accumulation and experiences of habitus shift are influenced by global structures. In terms of capital accumulation, Waters (2008) established that international mobility can be vital in affording access to forms of capital, arguing that transnational migration has enlarged the spatial scale of capital accumulation. I have sought to build on this work by examining how the shifts that have taken place over the past decade have led to the development of new transnational migration patterns. These patterns challenge some of the existing understandings of the relationship between overseas study and social reproduction.

Moreover, I have explored how students' pre-mobility social background, and by extension the pre-mobility habitus, shapes study abroad experiences, and the nature of the transformation that takes place as a result of it. This builds on previous work which tends to neglect differences in pre-mobility experiences of social class habitus as factors shaping experiences in the host country. Relatedly, I have applied a number of concepts from Bourdieu's work that have not been applied in research on international students previously. For example, in Chapters Five and Seven I draw upon the concept of 'the field of the possibles' to understand students' decision-making with regard to both the initial mobility and future mobility. The concept, which describes how an individual's level of inherited capital creates a scope of probable trajectories, was useful in explaining how students' decision-making and strategising with regard to overseas study was shaped by social class background. In addition, in Chapter Six, I explored a number of concepts related to Bourdieu's work that have not been applied widely in migration studies, such as 'self-conscious reflexivity' (Reay et al., 2009) and the 'self-excluding tendency' (Jin and Ball, 2020) in order to understand how students' pre-mobility backgrounds, particularly in terms of social class, mediated their experiences and plans. The use of these concepts in the thesis

represents a theoretical contribution to the literature and contributes to understandings of socially classed differences in migration experiences and decision-making.

The future direction of Chinese international education and student mobilities

Over the past year, during the writing of this thesis, the landscape of international student mobility between Africa and China has changed significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many African students left the country at the start of the outbreak in 2020, and have since been unable to return, as China closed its borders. These students face uncertainty about their futures: at the time of writing, the Chinese government has yet to give clear information as to when they will be allowed to re-enter the country. Many have joined an international campaign on social media platforms entitled '#TakeUsBackToChina' (*The Economist*, 2021). The campaign aims to pressure the Chinese government into allowing international students to re-enter the country, and accuses the government of ignoring students' requests to return, despite their indicating their willingness to undergo quarantine and testing. Students have alleged that universities are withholding scholarships, despite the fact that students are still enrolled and taking online classes, and demanded accommodation fees, despite the fact they are not allowed to enter the country (*The Economist*, 2021).

The discontent amongst African students has been exacerbated by a series of incidents, spurred by government propaganda (Burke et al., 2020) implying that African and other foreign residents were responsible for importing and spreading COVID-19 in China. African people were barred from restaurants, shopping malls, and hotels in Guangzhou, and were denied access to medical care at public hospitals. Many Africans in Guangzhou were evicted from their houses, including some students. Though the reported incidents mostly took place in Guangzhou, the negative effects of government propaganda appeared to be felt by Africans across the country: some of the students I interviewed followed up after the initial interview

to talk about the increasing anti-African sentiment across China. I would argue that xenophobia and anti-African racism in China is likely to continue and possibly increase in the future, as the Chinese government increasingly promotes ethnic nationalism and a social Darwinist worldview (Cheng, 2019). As Steve Tsang, the director of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) notes, '[i]f you are being indoctrinated by one Chinese identity, one Chinese civilization, one Chinese culture, then you are being directed in the direction (sic) which is essentially xenophobic' (DW, 2018).

While it seems clear that these incidents will live long in the memory of current and prospective students, the actual long term impact of the pandemic on student mobility is difficult to predict. The factors that attract African students to study in China, such as the relatively low cost of study, the availability of scholarships, and the economic and political relationships between China and many African countries, are unlikely to change. In addition, the demand across Africa for international education seems bound to increase in the future. By 2035, the number of Africans entering the working-age population every year is forecast to be greater than the rest of the world combined (Samman & Watkins, 2017). At the same time, domestic higher education systems seem unable to keep up with ever-increasing demand for quality higher education. For example, in Nigeria around two million secondary school students take the national university entrance exams each year, competing for approximately 750,000 seats (Parr, 2018). This means that 1.25 million students cannot access a university place each year in Nigeria alone. The situation is similar in many other African countries (Kritz, 2015). This suggests that the continuing growth in international student mobility between Africa and China will not be impacted in the long term by the pandemic, given that demand for affordable international higher education is only likely to increase in the next few decades. However, the full scale of the disruption to this student flow will become clear only in several years' time.

I would also like to suggest some potential directions for future research on Africa-China educational mobility, building on the foundation of this thesis, which of course has limitations, and merely 'scratched the surface' in terms of developing a full understanding of this nascent migration pattern. One limitation is the focus on Africa as a whole. While this was useful in providing a broad account of mobility to China, a greater level of detail could have been realized had I focused on fully understanding the complex political, social and cultural milieu of just one country, and how this pre-mobility context shaped students' experiences and trajectories. In a previous article on China's education soft power (Mulvey, 2020) I looked specifically at Uganda, which allowed me to provide a better account of the context of the home country.

Conversely, in this project, while I tried where possible to include context about students' home countries, the accounts provided inevitably lacked depth. As such, future projects on this topic could focus on specific countries within Africa to provide a more detailed account of the circumstances in countries of origin as they relate to students' pre-mobility experiences. As an example, it would be interesting to know more about how different groups within the same country differentially experience studying in China, along a number of different axes that were beyond the scope of this study. To draw again on the example of Nigeria, a country of 200 million with around 250 ethnic groups and two major religious groups, Christian and Muslim: would the experiences of students from two different ethnic groups, such as Hausa and Igbo, be comparable, or are there factors related to the presence of other members of their ethnic group in the country, for example, that have some impact on the overseas sojourn for some students? Moreover, would the restrictions on religious practices in China affect both Christians and Muslim students in a similar way? And is it possible that the persecution of Muslims in Western China by the Chinese state somehow shapes the experiences and impressions of Muslim African students in other parts of the country? These questions are

beyond the scope of this thesis but of importance in fully understanding the experiences of African students in China.

An additional, and significant, limitation of this thesis was that I interviewed fewer women than men. I aimed to interview the same number of male and female participants, but this was not possible for a number of reasons, which I outlined in the section on positionality in Chapter Two. Other studies of international student mobility (e.g. Holloway et al., 2012) highlight gender as a significant axis of social difference which shapes study abroad experiences. Future research on African students may also examine how students' experiences and post-graduation trajectories are shaped by differences along axes beyond social class, such as gender or religion.

Finally, China is one of many countries that have emerged as hubs of international student mobility over the past decade or so. In general, beyond Africa-China mobility, this thesis demonstrates the importance of understanding non-Western education mobilities in the long-term, as it seems likely that the proportion of international students studying outside the West will continue to increase. Future studies could examine other emergent contexts in order to understand how changing patterns of global migration are transforming what it means to be a migrant and an international student. As examples, countries such as Malaysia, Russia and India are also becoming regional higher education hubs and popular destinations for students from other regions (UNESCO, 2021). Very little empirical research exists on international student decision-making or experiences with regard to any of these destinations. Given the insight gleaned from this study of African students in China, it seems likely that a focus on these and other destinations presents an opportunity for the further expansion and adaptation of existing migration theory.

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Appendices

Appendix (A)

Ethical Approval from Human Research Ethics Committee

香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

25 October 2019

Mr Benjamin Joseph MULVEY
Research Postgraduate Programmes
Graduate School

Dear Mr Mulvey,

Application for Ethical Review <Ref. no. 2019-2020-0043>

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for your research project:

Project title: China's Restructuring of the Global Higher Educational Field: Sub-Saharan African Students in Chinese Universities

Ethical approval is granted for the project period from 1 January 2020 to 30 May 2020. If a project extension is applied for lasting more than 3 months, HREC should be contacted with information regarding the nature of and the reason for the extension. If any substantial changes have been made to the project, a new HREC application will be required.

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any proposed substantive changes to the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Patsy Chung (Ms)
Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Professor CHOU Kee Lee, Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix (B)

Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

China's restructuring of the global higher educational field: Sub-Saharan African students in Chinese universities

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. Mark Mason and conducted by Mr. Benjamin Mulvey, who are staff / students of the Department of International Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

Introduction

The planned research will seek to explore the motivations and experiences of a group of students from Africa in China, linking educational mobility in this case to China's rise as a higher education destination. The specific objectives of this study will firstly be to examine students' perceived motivations for study in China, as well as lived experiences.

There is little understanding of international student experiences in China, and as such the study aims to add to the body of research on international student mobility globally by shedding light on China's growing role as a destination.

The research will involve semi-structured interviews with approximately 50 international students studying in the cities of Wuhan and Guangzhou, China. The students involved will be undergraduate, master's and doctoral students, and from any country in Africa. Students will have been studying in China for at least 12 months. All participants will be above the age of 18. Students will be recruited to take part in one-to-one interviews, in person, with the PI for between 45 and 90 minutes. You will be asked about your academic and family background before coming to China, as well as your process of adjustment (educational, cultural, and social), and their development of new skills, for example Chinese language and subject related. In addition you will be asked about your plans after graduation.

The planned research has a single case study design. Data will be collected from two fieldwork sites, Wuhan and Guangzhou, from African students attending universities in these cities. The fieldwork will take place in Wuhan and Guangzhou at various universities in those cities in January and February 2020. Participants will be interviewed with their consent for between 45 and 90 minutes somewhere that is convenient to them (for example a library or cafe). Participation is voluntary and there is no compensation offered for participation. You may withdraw your consent at any time before, during, or after the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded.

There are no known risks to participating in this research project.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The findings from this project will be disseminated in the form of a thesis, academic journal articles, and conference presentations. By consenting to take part in this study you are also consenting to your data being used in these reports. If you would like to receive a copy of the thesis, journal articles, and conference papers, please contact the principal investigator.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Benjamin Mulvey at telephone number ███████████ or their supervisor Mark Mason at telephone number ███████████.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Mr. Benjamin Mulvey
Principal Investigator

Appendix (C)

Consent form

THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of International Education
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

China's restructuring of the global higher educational field: Sub-Saharan African students in Chinese universities

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Prof. Mark Mason and conducted by Mr. Benjamin Mulvey, who are staff / students of the Department of International Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Appendix (D)

Interview protocol

<u>The trajectories, experiences and post-graduation intentions of African students at universities in China</u>

Pre-interview ethics-related statements:
- **Read through information sheet and consent form**
- **Interview can be stopped at any time during**
- **Interviewee can skip any questions they do not want to answer**
- **Interviews with be anonymised and data will be stored securely in line with university's ethics and data protection rules**

Section 1: pre-mobility background

Family and educational background, childhood, and adolescence

"Tell me about your life before you made the decision to study overseas"

To get things started, please could you introduce yourself, and tell me where you are studying now and for how long you have been there?

Can you describe your upbringing, for example where did you grow up, and what kind of things did you do in your spare time when you were younger?

Could you describe your schooling from primary school up until now?

Could you describe your parents' attitudes towards education?

Could you give me some examples of what your school friends are doing now?

Could you go into some detail about your parents careers? What about your grandparents?

Have members of your family been abroad before to study or work?

How would you describe your upbringing in terms of your level of privilege compared to others in your country?

Motivations for overseas study

"Tell me about what motivated you to study in China"

Can you talk me through the process that led to you coming to China, from the moment you had the idea to study abroad?

Was the destination of your overseas study important to you?

Could you identify the main motivating factors for your wanting to study in China?

What attracted you to China over other countries?

Did you discuss studying abroad with your parents/siblings? If so, what was their attitude towards it?

Did your family provide any support for your study abroad? Either financially, or through social networks, or any other kind of support?

Section 2: Experiences in China

"Tell me about your experiences since you arrived in China"

What was the biggest challenge for you during your time in China?

Who is in your circle of friends in China? Are they all from the same place or from different countries?

What kind of social activities do you normally engage in, and with whom?

Did you learn some Chinese? How would you describe your current Chinese level?

If you have learned Chinese, has this been useful? If not, do you think it would be useful if you did?

Do you feel like you are 'at home' in China?

If not, do you think that it would be possible to feel this in the future?

Do you miss home often?

Was your intention to integrate into Chinese society? Why or why not?

Did you feel you were able to integrate and become part of Chinese society?

Have you developed better intercultural communication skills as a result of your time in China?

Section 4 - Post study

"Tell me about your plans for after you graduate from your degree"

What do you plan to do after you finish studying?

What kind of careers are you interested in?

Will you go back home or will you stay in China, or go somewhere else?

What are the factors that have influenced this decision, or what motivated you to make this choice?

Will it be easy for you to find a well-paying job with your credential from China?

Did you feel your social status changed as a result of your overseas study?

Do you think you will be able to fit back into the same groups as you were in before you left? For example, friends, family? Do you feel "different" as a result of your study abroad experience?

Appendix (E)

Excerpt of interview transcript

Participant 35	Yeah so kids on their own they're always well, they're always innocent and they don't have the kind of stigma or whatever the parents have towards especially black people. So in Sichuan I can say like there, everything was positive. My overall experience in Sichuan was positive from the students I taught to the people I hang out with, even people I work with, everything was positive. But when I came here the situation changed 'cause there are way too many other Africans.
Ben	In [name of city redacted]?
Participant 35	In [name of city redacted]. I usually go to [name of city redacted] as well and I meet a lot of black people there and - I don't know why is this problem because I never really met any black people in Sichuan, but here there are a lot and tend to do a lot of stupid stuff maybe because they're on scholarships and they don't get enough money so they usually steal things and they go into shops and they steal someone loaf of bread and they stack it in their jacket and they get caught on camera and then all Chinese people over generalize every black person: 'You black people are like this'.

This one time I went to buy fruits and I bought a (inaudible, 17:02) Like one thingy of watermelon the lady looked at me at first and it said on the thing it says 7 *kuai* and She says to me I have to pay 19 kuai. So I asked her this 7 here doesn't mean the whole price? the overall price is 7 so why you charging me extra? She started freaking out "you black people this and that". So yeah so she was just freaking out in Chinese for a while and then I said to her with my limited Chinese, I said to her "that's actually not right for you to say black people whatnot". You could of said whatever you want to said to justify how now you're charging me 19 kuai - This has nothing to do with race. |
| Ben | Yeah. |
| Participant 35 | And then she was shocked at me I understood everything she said. And then I said "you Chinese people don't like when people generalise. What you guys do, you say it's 'those' Chinese people, so whatever experience you have or with 'those' black people not every black person is like that, then she apologise she insisted I don't pay for the watermelon but I was actually pissed off, so I left everything there, I was just over her you know. So here in terms of racism like in Zhejiang province, it's really like a lot like really really. You go outside on the street, they point at you, they covered their nose they ran get under their mother skirts and be like scared, and okay so there's that and - |

Ben	So -
Participant 35	Yeah?
Ben	I was going to - how does that affect your… kind of the way you interact with people like because one of the questions I was going to ask was: Is your a social circle Chinese people or mostly other internationals or other South Africans?
Participant 35	Wait so -
Ben	Hello? Bad signal.
Participant 35	I think - you know like the way -
Ben	Sorry, I just missed what you said because I signal just dropped -
Participant 35	No no, my power just went out so I open the window to check if it was, my flat or if it was around the block because when I looked outside the whole block is like dark.
Ben	Ok oh, dear…
Participant 35	Yeah so in - I hang out with people that I click with, independent of where they come from. So like I have - I don't have many many Chinese - I mean South African friends although they are South African people that are here around but yeah I don't hang out by country, I don't do that. I have a South African that I hang out with, I have a few Chinese friends that I hang out with. So yeah.
Ben	Yeah okay you're - I think you were about to say something else in terms of other like challenges or like especially since you're - well not just especially since you started studying have you - what's the biggest challenge you've faced, apart from what you've already mentioned?
Participant 35	Wait so I was going to mention the racism part and I was going to mention education yeah so. Actually had this problem last year right I had complaints about this one professor that we had yeah, he's not Chinese he's Arabic the guys major His PhD thingy is in Sustainable whatnot
Ben	Yeah.
Participant 35	Yeah now he does public administration and all we ever do is talk about climate change. You know? climate change that has nothing to do with were studying, like we had two courses last semester one was Climate Justice, he said he just made it up.
Ben	Yeah so - is - yeah go on sorry.
Participant 35	The second one was policy analysis. So what's interesting is in climate justice class we learned or reviewing Paris Agreement for the entire semester 3 (inaudible, 22:18) and in the policy class, we were still reviewing

the same thing nothing he ever taught had anything to do with you know actually analysing policies, so I complain to the school in my college and I complain to the agent that actually helped me get into the school and they were going to talk to the school about it I'm not sure if I ever did that and now this year that guy is still teaching us this time he's teaching us (inaudible, 22:56) and we're still doing the same thing. I think Students were asking last year like we don't really understand all these concepts that we were studying, and he said think of this as climate change part 2. Yeah so like in terms of education quality for me I'm not satisfied because you know I cannot talk about people who on scholarship because they're not paying for anything. They get 3000 you know on Top Up - Like every month just free, but for us to have to like struggle to make ends meet. You know, just to pay tuition and I feel like we deserve more you know.

Ben	So why does he do that?
Participant 35	I actually think that when he (inaudible, 24:21). He actually said something about out this being good for us but not and - and that they let him do it it's actually really really funny to me 'cause like our supervisors - they assigned supervisors to us and (inaudible, 24:41). We have a guy who is a professor whose concentration is policy analysis, we have one political theory one, so the people there where were actually supposed to be teaching us but they are our supervisors, if they're supervising us they should know some English so right?
Ben	Yeah yeah, you would think so.
Participant 35	So why are they teaching us? and that's not the same actually because in this MPA we don't have any Chinese students, it's not the same for Chinese students. The Chinese students don't even get that guy, they don't have this guy. I feel like the foreigners get crappy education, they only care about… we're just here for promotion whatever.
Ben	So why do Chinese students and international students have separate courses?
Participant 35	On orientation day they said what we studying is actually very difficult, so Chinese students can't possibly learn this in English because they are going to be like working in China, so it doesn't make sense why - as to why they would have to learn this in English so learning it in Chinese, because they're going to work in China that's explanation we got.
Ben	Yeah but then ok, and has that affected - were you - did you have the expectation that like you would be mixing with Chinese students, and do you think it's an advantage or disadvantage to be like kind of split up like that?
Participant 35	I think it's a disadvantage when you are split up - when (inaudible, 26:47). Teacher they always you know go an extra mile a bit because they want to make sure the Chinese understand them you know? and although they will be reading directly from a PPT, and won't be able to explain some concepts

	but you get something. As opposed to right now, we are against this guy, and he just does whatever he wants, even when we like report him. They will just say we will investigate it all. But then they just say, just do whatever the teacher wants you do. So like nobody cares, because there's like no Chinese there, you know.
Ben	So why is it that you think they don't care as much?
Participant 35	So another thing is in my program we are 21. Out of 21 only 4 students are self-support and the rest are scholarship students so they never speak up because they're so afraid of losing their scholarships.
Ben	Okay yeah.
Participant 35	So whenever you have something to say, it's just it's always going to be you now standing up, you look like a bad, you know a bad student. To the teacher it's like "ah that person is a troublemaker" you know, because no one will back you. When it's just you guys alone and your talking and you complaining even the scholarship people will complain "Oh my god lets go forward - Let's go complaint let's go report them or whatnot" but when it's actually time to go do something they stand back you know, so yeah.
Ben	Does that actually happen where students will complain about something then get their scholarship taken away, or do they just have that fear without anything having happened before?
Participant 35	I guess they just have that fear 'cause in my class all the ones that are here on scholarship they just came to China and then most of them maybe they're from the rural places back from where they came from, so their families and themselves depend on this money that they get, so they really can't afford to lose the scholarship yeah.
Ben	So do you think that there is a divide in that sense as well, that's very clear, or is it all just mixed up?
Participant 35	It's very clear. It's very clear. Yeah it's very clear and I think you know whenever the school announce something they always say - Oh yeah sometimes the school they like to threaten students with the scholarship as well - "Do this or forget the scholarship if you don't" - like when just now when the semester began in February. We still were able to go to campus right so we had to - to send our location every night there was this other student also self-support, he's my classmate. He wasn't sharing his location he's like teacher - teacher the whole like the area is in lockdown where do you think I'm going to go, I'm at home, but I'm not going to share the location and then the teacher would like all the time say " oh you're going to lose your scholarship" but this guy said, I'm not on scholarship so I don't care, you know? so I guess with those things if you are on scholarships You kind of like pickup on oh it means if I don't comply I might lose my scholarship you know.

Appendix (F)

Background questionnaire

Background Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed in order to ascertain background information about international students in China all the data collected will be stored safely and the anonymity of the respondent is guaranteed.

* Required

1. Email address *

    _____

Section One - Current University and Field of Study

2. Name of university *

    _____

3. Field of study and level (e.g. Economics, BA) *

    _____

4. Did you receive a scholarship for your study in China? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

5. If yes, was the scholarship full (tuition fees and living costs) or partial (in total less than tuition fees and living costs)

Mark only one oval.

◯ Full

◯ Partial

◯ N/A

6. Date of Birth

_____

Example: January 7, 2019

7. Approximate date of first entry into China for study purposes

_____

Example: January 7, 2019

8. Age at the beginning of your studies in China

_____

9. Gender

Mark only one oval.

◯ Female

◯ Male

◯ Prefer not to say

◯ Other: _____

10. Nationality

_____

Section Two - Background Information

11. What is your mother's highest level of educational attainment? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Primary school or lower
- ◯ Lower secondary school
- ◯ Higher secondary school
- ◯ Higher diploma/ associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor/Undergraduate degree
- ◯ Graduate degree or higher
- ◯ prefer not to say

12. 15. How would you best describe your mother's occupation?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Managerial (e.g. business executive, finance manager, senior government official)
- ◯ Skilled blue-collar worker (e.g. carpenter, driver, electrician, mechanic)
- ◯ Professional or technician (e.g. doctor, teacher, engineer, scientist)
- ◯ Skilled agricultural worker (e.g. crop or animal production, forestry or fishery worker)
- ◯ Clerical, sales or service worker (e.g. office clerk, shop salesperson, police officer)
- ◯ Elementary occupations (e.g. cleaner, labourer, unskilled factory worker)
- ◯ Homemaker
- ◯ Armed forces
- ◯ prefer not to say
- ◯ Other: _____

15. Approximately where would you place your household's (combined mother's and father's) income level within your home country?

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Lowest 20% of households
- ⬭ Lowest 50% of households
- ⬭ Top 50% of households
- ⬭ Top 20% of households
- ⬭ Top 10% of households
- ⬭ prefer not to say