UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



Students' Choice of Postgraduate Education at G University in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China: An in depth case-study

by

Dan Liu, BA, MA

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2015

ABSTRACT

Previous studies of students' higher education choices have been mainly examined in the US, European and Australian context, with few related empirical research studies in the context of China (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). Although there is no lack of various online surveys about the reasons driving students towards postgraduate education in China, little is known about how far their decisions were shaped by their specific circumstances which is the purpose of this study, which investigates the main factors influencing students' decision-making about postgraduate education at G University in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. To achieve this aim, three main research questions were asked: what motivated students to undertake PG education, why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies, and why did they choose G University as their place of study?

This study employs an-in depth case study approach. The research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, questionnaires were distributed among the first-year postgraduate students at G University to get a general idea of what motivated them to undertake PG education and why they chose their particular subjects and place of study. In the second stage, 30 students who indicated their willingness in the questionnaires to participate in follow-up interviews were interviewed to explore the responses to the questionnaires in greater depth.

The findings of this research were analysed from the theoretical aspects of human, cultural and social capital, as well as the related Chinese concept of *guanxi*. The findings indicated that students' decisions to undertake PG education was mainly to enhance their employment competitiveness and to gain jobs with higher salaries and better advancement opportunities. In addition, the findings indicated that personal

interest influenced either by their family's education or school teacher's instruction constituted the main reason for choosing their specific fields of study. The findings also showed that family social capital and the social capital formed in the school context exerted great influence on students' choices of postgraduate education. Further, students chose G University as their place of study mainly for its academic reputation, the quality of its faculties and resources, and its convenient location.

The data indicated that students' choices of postgraduate education were influenced by their individual economic, social and cultural backgrounds, or the interplay between human, cultural and social capital from the theoretical aspect. Enquiring into the students' choices of postgraduate education in the specific Chinese social and cultural context contributes to the literature on students' choices of higher education. It is hoped that the findings will provide some informed knowledge for students who plan to invest in their future employability through postgraduate education in China, as well as for the Chinese further and higher education system, which may gain a better understanding of its students and so be able to provide a better service to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks go to Professor W. John Morgan and Dr. Zhen Li. Over the past three years, they have led me step by step throughout this long journey. Without their continued guidance, suggestions, encouragement and patience, this thesis would not have been achieved. My deepest gratitude to them is beyond words.

I would also like to thank Jackie Stevenson and Jodie Smith in the School of Education. They facilitated the whole process of my study here. I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues at Nottingham for their support and advice, especially John and Xiangpu, at University College London. They provided me with valuable suggestions and generous help towards the completion of my PhD journey.

I really appreciate the assistance and support from the staff of the targeted university of my research, especially Professor Wenzhong Zhu, Mr. ZhongpeiZhi and Peng Zhou. I was also grateful to all my participants both in the survey and interview, for their valuable time, opinions and suggestions.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Overseas Study Programme of Guangzhou Elite Projects sponsored by the Guangzhou Government as well as the Vice-Chancellor Scholarship for Research Excellence granted by the University of Nottingham, which provided me with the great opportunity to pursue my PhD studies here.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their endless love and care, as well as my younger brother and my boyfriend Dr. Yong Yan for their encouragement and support.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... **I**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **III**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **IX**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **X**

LIST OF APPENDICES ..... **XII**

KEY ACRONYMS ..... **XIII**

KEY CHINESE TERMS ..... **XIV**

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION **1**

Introduction **1**

Research Background **1**

The Research Problem **3**

Research Questions **5**

Research Design **6**

Research Purpose and Significance **7**

Organisation of the Thesis **7**

Summary **9**

CHAPTER TWO - THE CHINESE CONTEXT **10**

Introduction **10**

Geography and Demographics **10**

Administrative System **11**

The Culture of Confucianism **13**

Filial piety 14

Confucianism and learning 15

Confucianism and educational choices 16

Higher Education in China **16**

Chinese higher education reforms since 1949 17

From 1949 to 1978 17

From 1978 to present 18

Marketization of higher education 23
Contemporary Chinese higher education system 28
Structure 28
Classification of higher education institutions 30
Admission regulations and procedures 34
Access to higher education 35
Financing and tuition fees 38
Development of regular HE since 1978 40
Regular HEIs 40
Students' enrolment 41

Guangdong Province 44
Geographical location 44
Demographics and population distribution 46
Economic development 46
Higher education 48
Postgraduate education 49
Geographical distribution of universities 51
Development trends 54

Summary 55

CHAPTER THREE - THE LITERATURE REVIEW 57

Introduction 57

Empirical Studies on Student Choice of Higher Education 57
Choice factors 58
Social-economic factors 59
Institutional factors 60
Geographical factors 61
Personal factors 61
Societal factors 63
Information sources used 63

Empirical Studies of Chinese Students' Choices of Higher Education 64
For overseas higher education 69
For domestic higher education 72

Theoretical Perspectives on Student Choice of Higher Education 75
Rational choice theory 77
Theory of reasoned action (TRA) 79
Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) 81

Theoretical Framework of This Thesis 84
Explaining 'capital' 85
Human capital theory 86
Defining human capital 86
Human capital and individual investment 87

Costs and benefits 87
Rates of return 88
Sorting: 'signalling' and 'screening' 89
Human capital and educational decision-making 90
Critiques of human capital theory 91
Cultural capital theory 92
Defining cultural capital 92
Habitus 93
Forms of cultural capital 94
Cultural capital investment 95
Cultural capital and educational decision-making 97
Critiques of cultural capital theory 99
Social capital theory 99
Defining social capital 100
Forms of social capital 102
Types of social capital 102
Social capital investment 103
Social capital and educational decision-making 104
Critiques of social capital theory 105
The overlap of these capital theories 105
Guanxi 106
Defining guanxi 107
Connotations of guanxi in the Chinese culture 108
Guanxi categories 109
The transferability of guanxi 110
Theoretical perspective of guanxi and social networking 111
Empirical research on guanxi 112

Summary 117

CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY AND METHODS 119

Introduction 119

Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives 119

Research Design: An in-depth case study 121
Justifications for the case study 122
Advantages and disadvantages of the case study as a research method 123
Case selection 126

Specific Research Methods 128
Documentation 128
Questionnaire 130
Semi-structured interview 132

Piloting 135
Questionnaire 135
Semi-structured interview 137

Sampling and Access **139**
Student sample for the questionnaire 139
Student sample for the semi-structured interview 141
Access 141

Data Management and Analysis Methods **145**
Quantitative data 146
Qualitative data 147

Ethical Issues **149**

Summary **152**

CHAPTER FIVE - PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA **153**

Introduction **153**

Demographic Data **153**
Questionnaires 154
Interviews 158

Quantitative Data **158**
Students' main reasons for pursuing postgraduate education 158
Students' main reasons for choosing their subject of study 159
Students' main reasons for choosing G University 160
Students' main sources of information before making their choices 161

Qualitative Data **164**
What motivated the students to undertake PG education? 165
Employment Prospects 165
More job opportunities 166
Higher salaries 167
Access to elite universities 169
Door opener for certain jobs 171
Family attitudes 175
Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies? 182
Interest 182
Family learning 183
Teachers' influence 187
Follow up UG major 190
Easier to find a job 191
Easier to gain admission to a course 191
Why did they choose G University as their place of study? 195
Easier to gain admission 196
Stay close to families 197
Reputation of the university 198
Having studied there before 199
Environment 200
Quality of the facilities and staff 201

Location of the university 201

Summary of the Major Findings 203

What motivated students to undertake PG education? 203

Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies? 205

Why did they choose G University as their place of study? 208

Summary 211

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION 213

Introduction 213

The Research Questions and Main Findings 213

What Are the Theoretical Implications of the Findings? 218

What Contribution to Knowledge Has the Research Made? 223

What Are the Limitations of the Research? 225

What Further Research Might Be Undertaken? 226

What Are the Implications for Policy And Practice? 227

A Personal Reflection on the Research 229

Rationale for research methods 229

Research process 230

What I have learnt as a PhD researcher 233

Summary 235

BIBLIOGRAPHY 236

APPENDICES 255

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The Administrative Divisions of China 12

Table 2. Key Elements in China's Higher Education Reform and Their Effects 22

Table 3. Enrolment Change in Higher Education Institutions in China 25

Table 4. Distribution of HEIs in 2013 32

Table 5. The Classification of Tiers in HE Admissions 35

Table 6. Students by Level and Type of Education (2013) 42

Table 7. Number of Postgraduate Students by Field of Study (2013) 43

Table 8. List of Top Five Chinese Provinces by GDP in 2014 46

Table 9. Composition of Gross Domestic Product in 2013 47

Table 10. Total Enrolment by Level and Type of Schooling in Guangdong 48

Table 11. Statistics on Institutions of Higher Education in Guangdong (2013) 49

Table 12. Statistics for Postgraduate Education in Guangdong 51

Table 13. Factors Influencing Chinese Students Studying Abroad 66

Table 14. Factors Influencing Chinese Students Studying Abroad 67

Table 15. A Summary of the Theoretical Framework 115

Table 16. Main Themes of the Questionnaire 130

Table 17. The Matrix of Research Questions and Research Methods 134

Table 18. Student Sample for Piloting Questionnaire 136

Table 19. Student Sample for the Questionnaire 140

Table 20. Questionnaires Distributed and Returned in Each School/Faculty 155

Table 21. Demographic Data of the Participants in the Questionnaire 157

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Organization of the Thesis 8

Figure 2. The Map of China 11

Figure 3. The Location of Each Administrative Division in China 13

Figure 4. The Educational Market Place: Recent educational restructuring 24

Figure 5. The Overall Structure of the Contemporary Chinese HE System 29

Figure 6. Classifications of HEIs 33

Figure 7. The Number of HEIs from 1978 to 2013 41

Figure 8. The Enrolment Figures for Regular HEIs from 1978 to 2013 42

Figure 9. Map of China (Showing Guangdong Province) 45

Figure 10. Map of Guangdong Province 45

Figure 11. Distribution of Cities in Guangdong 52

Figure 12. Distribution of HE in Guangdong 53

Figure 13. Major Theories Used to Explain Students' Choice of HE 76

Figure 14. Theory of Reasoned Action 80

Figure 15. Theory of Planned Behaviour 82

Figure 16. The *Guanxi* Categories 110

Figure 17. The Transferability of *Guanxi* 111

Figure 18. Data Collection Procedure 145

Figure 19. An Example of the Analysis Procedure of Question 18 147

Figure 20. Students' Main Reasons for Undertaking PG Education 159

Figure 21. Students' Main Reasons for Choosing Their Subject of Study 160

Figure 22. Students' Main Reasons for Choosing G University 161

Figure 23. Students' Main Sources of Information for Making Their Choices 162

Figure 24. Major Factors Influencing Students' Choice of PE at G University 163

Figure 25. A Summary of Major Factors Influencing Students' Choice of PE 211

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: A List of '985' Universities 255

Appendix B: A List of '211' Universities.....257

Appendix C: The English Version of the Questionnaire 261

Appendix D: The Chinese Version of the Questionnaire 264

Appendix E: The English Version of the Semi-structured Interview Schedule.....266

Appendix F: The Chinese Version of the Semi-structured Interview Schedule 267

Appendix G: Student Sample for the Semi-structured Interview (Anonymized)....268

Appendix H: An English Version of Yan's (female) Transcription 270

Appendix I: An English Version of Fei's (female) Transcription 276

Appendix J: An English Version of Fan's (male) Transcription 283

Appendix K: An English Version of Yong's (male) Transcription 288

Appendix L: The Information Sheet for Participants.....292

Appendix M: The Participant Consent Form 293

Appendix N: General Information of the Participants for the Semi-structured Interview (Anonymized) 294

KEY ACRONYMS

AHE	Adult Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
RHEIs	Regular Higher Education Institutions
MOE	Ministry of Education
NPC	National People's Congress
PE	Postgraduate Education
PRC	People's Republic of China

KEY CHINESE TERMS

Benke 本科	the academic track in undergraduate education
Chengren Gaokao 成人高考	National Examinations for Admission to Adult Higher Education Institutions
Duli Xueyuan 独立学院	Independent college
Gaokao 高考	National College Entrance Examination
Gaige Kaifang 改革开放	'Open-up' policy
Guanxi 关系	Relationships or social connections
Kongzi Xueshuo 孔子学说	Confucianism
Minban Gaoxiao 民办高校	People-run Institutions of higher education
Putonghua 普通话	Mandarin
Sheng 省	Province
TongZhao 统招	National Unified Admission Process
Wenhua Dageming 文化大革命	Cultural Revolution
Wenping Kaoshi 文凭考试	Diploma Tests
Xiao 孝	Filial piety
Yuan 元（£1= Y 9.2）	Chinese monetary unit
Zhuanke 专科	the vocational track in undergraduate education
Zhixiashi 直辖市	Direct-controlled municipalities
Zixue Kaoshi 自学考试	National Self-Study Examinations for Higher Education
Zizhiqu 自治区	Autonomous regions
Zizhu Zhaosheng 自主招生	Independent Enrolment Project

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis explores why students decided to enrol in postgraduate education at the case study university, G University in the southern part of China. Specifically, it aims to understand how their decisions concerning what and where to study were shaped by their particular circumstances. The factors shaping this phenomenon are investigated from the theoretical aspects of human, cultural and social capital (*guanxi*, which is a Chinese variant of social capital and will be considered in more detail in the literature review). This chapter introduces the research background, the main research problem and research questions, the research design as well as the research purpose and its significance. The structure of the thesis is explained at the end of the chapter.

Research Background

Since the reform and 'opening-up' of China by the former leader, *Deng Xiaoping,* in 1978, there has been a rapid expansion in higher education in China (Hayhoe, 1999). Over the past twenty years or so, the number of higher educational institutions (HEIs) has doubled from 1,045 in 1995 to 2,491 in 2013 (NBSC, 2014). Correspondingly, the undergraduate enrolment in regular HEIs rose from just over 2.9 million in 1995 to 24.6 million in 2013 (NBSC, 2014). The rapid expansion of undergraduate enrolment has also stimulated students' enthusiasm for postgraduate studies. The

number of enrolled students for master degrees has increased over tenfold from 145,443 in 1995 to 1,793,953 in 2013 (NBSC, 2014).

To meet people's fast growing demands for higher education (HE), students have increasingly been required to pay a greater share of the cost of their education (Wu and Zheng, 2008). The average tuition fee in regular higher education institutions (HEIs) for each undergraduate rose from 500 Yuan[1] in 1995 to 5,000 in 2000, equivalent to the average annual urban income and twice the annual rural income (ibid.). The total costs of higher education – fees, living expenses, books and so forth – were consequently much higher than the above figure for tuition fees alone. The cost of living and other expenses associated with studying (apart from tuition fees) probably increased after 2000 (ibid.). It is estimated that the tuition fees contributed to around 34% of the income of all HEIs in recent years[2] (Altbach and Yu, 2012). This means that HEIs in China also face the need to position themselves positively in an increasingly competitive market to ensure enough funding from fees for their services and activities. In order to optimize their services, they need to understand on what bases students make their choices about where and what to study in mainland China as well as where they get information and advice from to help them.

Above all, it is time that the HEIs in China understood how postgraduate students make choices about postgraduate education (PE). In the autumn of 2014, China's Ministry of Education (MoE) announced a major reform. It began to charge tuition fees for all its postgraduate programmes, which it hadn't done before[3]. Under the

[1] Yuan, Chinese monetary unit, 1 pound equals 9.58 Yuan on July 8, 2015 (Bank of China, 2015).

[2] The rest comes from government grants (around 44%) and donations from industry or private individuals, or earnings from college-run enterprises (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

[3] From 1981-1985, the government was responsible for all the fees for postgraduate education. In 1993, the full-time postgraduates were classified as: postgraduates admitted by the enrolment plan, postgraduate students enrolled by contract (with enterprises and entrusted training institutions), and

new policy, yearly tuition fees for master's degrees and doctorates in academic disciplines were capped at 8,000 Yuan and 10,000 Yuan respectively (Anon., 2013a). This new tuition-fee scheme marked the end of a system allowing some government-funded postgraduate programmes to enjoy tuition fee waivers in China. Therefore, it was expected that the total number of students going for postgraduate education would decrease in the near future (Anon., 2013b).

Simultaneously, the options for students have broadened as the European higher education market, with intensified competition between universities, is now available to Chinese students. The total number of Chinese students studying overseas has soared from 20,381 in 1995, to 459,800 in 2014 (NBSC, 2014), making China the world's number one source of overseas students (Wang, 2012). In 2013, students going abroad for master's degree accounted for 52.7% of the total number of Chinese studying overseas (Anon., 2014a).

As the number of new enrolments for postgraduate education in mainland China is expected to decline and universities are competing not only nationally but internationally, having a clear grasp of the basis of students' choices of postgraduate education has become urgent for domestic HEIs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the recruitment market. This is central to developing institutional positioning in an increasingly competitive higher education environment (ibid.).

The Research Problem

Despite the importance of students' choices of higher education, most related literature has mainly examined the US, European and Australian context, with few

---

self-funded postgraduate students. The first two types of student did not need to pay tuition fees (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

related empirical research studies carried out in China. Research into students' choices of higher education has been conducted at three empirical levels to discover: first, the global level explanation why students choose to study abroad; second, the national level reasons, mainly focusing on students' choices of universities as well as their choice of specific courses of study, which is less frequently investigated (Maringe, 2006).

In the context of China, issues related to these choices remain under-researched. Classified by the educational providers in each region, most research studies have focused on Chinese students' choice of higher education overseas (for example, Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott and Lai, 2012; Fang and Wang, 2014; Lee and Morrish, 2012; Liu, 2010; Liu et al., 2013; Lowe, 2007; Rudd, Djafarova, & Waring, 2012). There have been few research studies into undergraduate Chinese students' choices of domestic higher education in mainland China, with the exception of Willis and Kennedy (2004), Lai, Gibson and Muthaly (2014), and Sheng (2015) and fewer still of Chinese students' choices of domestic postgraduate education.

Theoretically, explanations for factors influencing students' choices of higher education can be divided into conceptual frameworks focusing on economic, rational choice or on social (or socio-cultural) reproduction (Obermeit, 2012). From a rational choice perspective, post-school choices are based on an assessment of the relative costs and benefits attached to different options, with costs and benefits differing by social class (DesJardins and Toutkoushian, 2005; Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). However, the central argument here is that whether the students' choices of higher education are based only upon the rational calculation of costs and benefits (Smyth and Banks, 2012). Social reproduction theorists focus, by contrast, on what

and how the different economic, cultural and social capital possessed by different social classes influence students' ultimate educational choices (McDonough, 1998; Perna, 2006). Each approach has its critics and there is a tendency to combine approaches, for example, Kim and Gasman (2011) and Perna (2006), as both approaches complement each other (Obermeit, 2012).

However, using the combined approach to examine Chinese students' choice of postgraduate education is rarely found. Thus, my research aims to fill this gap by using a combined theoretical framework using human, cultural and social capital theory. It aims to explore the main factors influencing students' choices of postgraduate education at a case study university, G University, in the south of China. Based on the research problem, the main research questions are explained in the next section.

Research Questions

The thesis aims to explore the main factors influencing students' choices of postgraduate education at G University in China. The research questions are derived from the knowledge gap identified by the literature review. Specifically, it aims to investigate how students' decisions were made in their specific circumstances. The research attempts to answer the main research question: Why did students enrol for postgraduate education at G University? The sub-questions developed from the main research question are:

1. What motivated students to undertake PG education?
    a. What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?

   b. What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?

2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?

3. Why did they choose G University as their place of study?

Research Design

In order to answer the above research questions, the thesis uses an in-depth case-study of G University in the Southeast part of China.[4]

The field research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, I distributed 616 questionnaires to the first-year postgraduate students of all the fifteen schools and faculties at G University; 381 were returned. First-year postgraduate students were chosen because they were thought to still have the decision-making process they underwent fresh in their minds. It aimed to discover the general reasons why they had decided to enrol for PG education at this university. At the end of the questionnaire, they were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. The second stage involved selecting from those who indicated their willingness to participate in the follow-up interview, thirty whom I interviewed using the semi-structured interview format, face to face. This was to clarify and expand their answers to the questionnaire survey and obtain new information, thus to explore the topic in greater depth.

[4] The reasons for choosing this specific university are explained in the Methodology Chapter: Case selection, page 126.

Research Purpose and Significance

By enquiring into the students' choices of postgraduate education within the specific Chinese social and cultural context, this thesis aims to reflect people's changing attitudes to higher education through the in-depth case study of G University in China. The significance of this research is: first, it contributes to the literature on Chinese students' choices of higher education; second, the findings will also provide informed knowledge for students planning to invest in their future employability through postgraduate education in China. Further, Chinese further and higher education institutions can gain a better understanding of its potential students in order to attract them and provide better services.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter One introduces the research background, the research problem, as well as the research purpose and research significance.

Chapter Two locates the research in the broader Chinese context. It outlines the Chinese educational reforms and the characteristics of the contemporary Chinese higher education system. It also highlights the particular economic and educational development in Guangdong Province, where the case university is located.

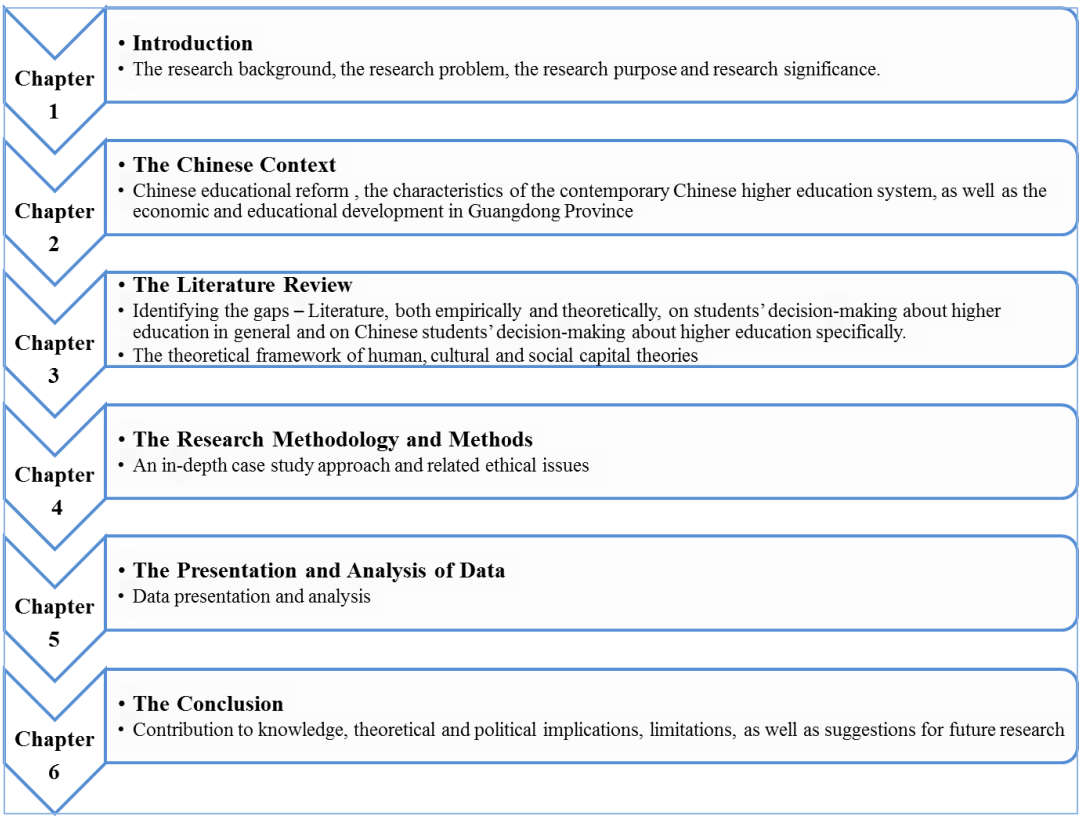
Chapter Three examines the literature on students' decision-making about higher education, both empirically and theoretically. Special attention is focused on the literature concerning Chinese students' choices of higher education choices in China. In doing this, I identified the gap that the research aims to fill. At the end of the

chapter, a combined theoretical framework of human, cultural and social capital theory of this thesis is presented.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology and the methods used to answer the research questions. The research design of this in-depth case study and the related ethical issues concerning the project are discussed in detail.

Chapter Five presents the results and analyses of the data. Chapter Six concludes the research by outlining its contribution to knowledge, theoretical and policy implications, limitations, suggestions for future research, as well as personal reflections on what I have learned as a researcher. The thesis ends with the bibliography and appendices.

Figure 1. Organization of the Thesis



Source: Developed by the researcher.

Summary

This chapter presented the background to the research from which the main research issue arose. Subsequently, the research questions which then developed were introduced, followed by a brief description of the resulting research design. In addition, it presented the organization of the thesis. The next chapter, Chapter Two, clarifies the research by locating it in the broader Chinese context.

Chapter Two

The Chinese Context

Introduction

This chapter introduces the Chinese context for the research. It begins with a brief introduction to its geography and demographics, the administrative systems and its culture of Confucianism, still important for understanding Chinese cultural and social attitudes. Next, it introduces Chinese higher education reforms from 1949 to the present day before outlining the major characteristics of the contemporary Chinese higher education system. Lastly, it presents the geographic location, economic situation and the development of higher education in Guangdong province, where the case study university of this research is located.

Geography and Demographics

China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), with a total area of 9.6 million square kilometres (3.7 million square miles), is the world's fourth largest country in area after Russia, Canada and the Unites States. The territories under China are composed of the mainland, as well as the two self-governing special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau (see Figure 2, following). As each of these regions has its own independent higher education system, the terms 'China' and 'Chinese' thereafter refers to mainland China (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

Figure 2. The Map of China



Source: (Google map, 2014).

China has a population of over 1.3 billion. There are 56 ethnic groups in mainland China, the largest ethnic group being the Han Chinese (90.56% in 2005). Although different ethnic groups have their own dialects, mandarin (*Putonghua*) is the official language spoken by over 70% of the population (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

Administrative System

The administration of the Chinese political system is achieved through multiple layers of governance, which, in decreasing order of authority, includes the national, provincial, prefecture, county, and township level governments. The National People's Congress (NPC), as China's representative legislative body, is the most

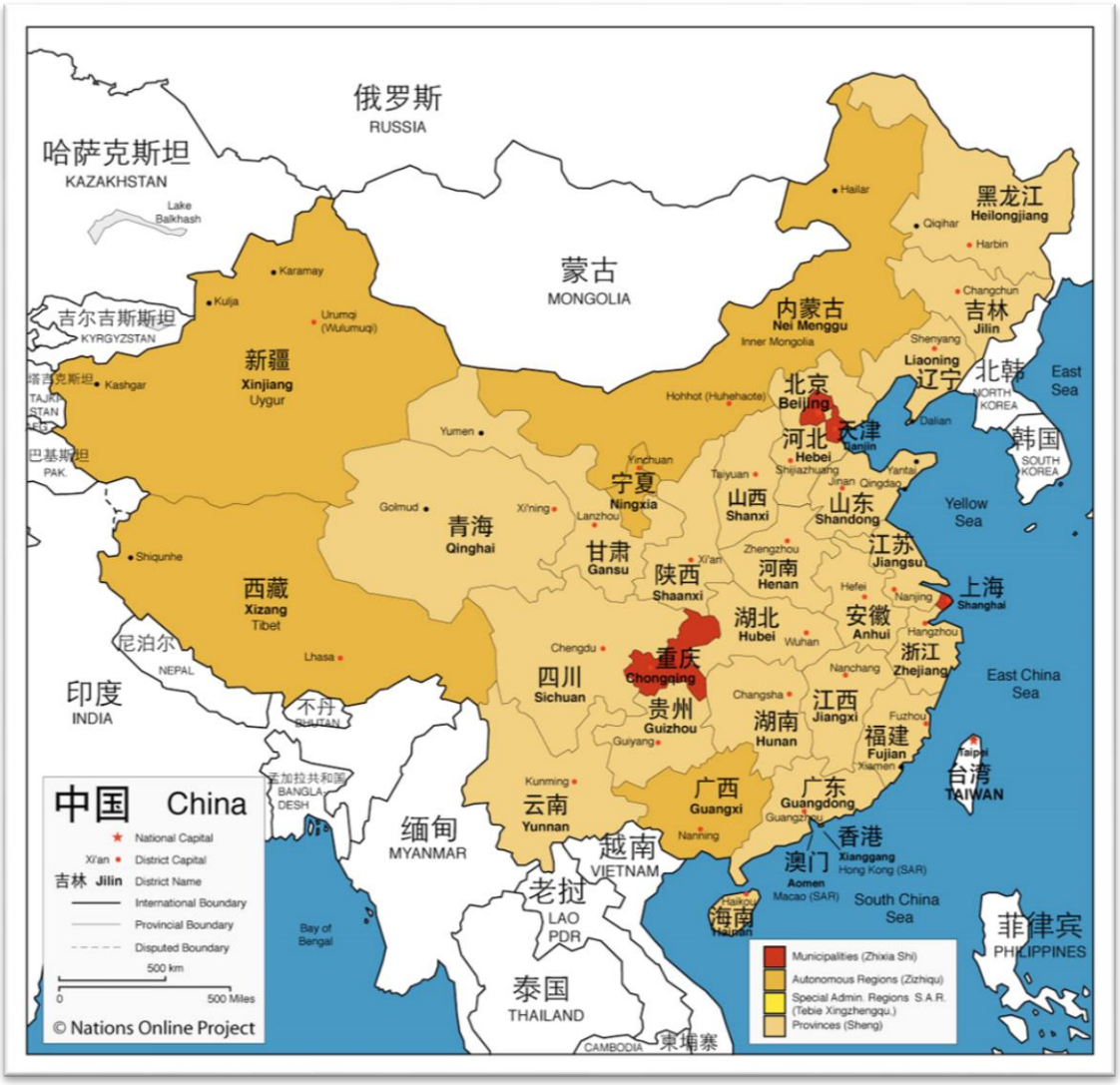
powerful organ. The State Council is the chief administrative body of China, which oversees the subordinate governments at provincial level. Based on their geographical location, economic status, or both, the provincial-level governments are classified into 22 provinces (*sheng*), 5 autonomous regions (*zizhiqu*), and 4 directly-controlled municipalities (*zhixiashi*): Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing (see Table 1, following). The provinces in eastern China are usually among the most developed in the country, while those in the western region are much poorer and thus less populated (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Figure 3 below provides the locations of each province, autonomous region, municipality, and special administrative region.

Table 1. The Administrative Divisions of China

Provinces	Anhui, Fujian, Gansu, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hainan, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Jilin, Liaoning, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Zhejiang, Taiwan
Autonomous regions	Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Tibet
Municipalities	Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, Tianjin
Special administrative regions	Hong Kong, Macau

Source: Altbach and Yu (2012)

Figure 3. The Location of Each Administrative Division in China



Source**:** (Google map, 2015a).

The Culture of Confucianism

Contemporary Chinese culture is generated from its own profound traditions of Confucianism (Liu, 2012). Confucianism is China's oldest and most revered philosophy (Goldin, 2010). Confucius (551 B.C. – 479 B.C.), was one of the top thinkers and educators in China and developed a new system of ethics and political

philosophy which provided a solid foundation for national life for the 25 centuries that followed (Chang, 2013). His wisdom is shown in the *Analects (Lun-yu,* meaning dialogues*)*, a collection of his sayings and ideas, recorded by his disciples (Chang, 2013), one of the most widely read and studied books in China for the last 2,000 years, and which still has a substantial influence on Chinese thought and values today (Goldin, 2010).

The core of Confucianism is humanism (Chang, 2013). It focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. Some of the basic Confucian ethical concepts and practices include *ren, yi, li* and *zhi* (Wikipedia, 2014a). *Ren* suggests an obligation of altruism and humanity towards others, which is the basis of all human relationships. It is the foundation for the formation of character and the highest standard of human behaviour (Chang, 2013). *Yi* is regarded as righteousness and the moral disposition to do good (Wikipedia, 2014a). *Li* refers to a system of ritual norms and propriety that a person should observe in everyday life. It is useful in preventing crime and building up orderly habits (ibid.). *Zhi* stands for the wisdom or ability to distinguish right from wrong or fair from unfair (ibid.).

Filial piety

Confucianism acknowledges the key place of the family in the child's process of moral development. This is highlighted by the virtue of 'filial piety' (*xiao* in Chinese) (Goldin, 2010). It is interpreted as the appropriate behaviour towards parents, the basis for self-cultivation and moral training (ibid.). "Filial piety is the root of virtue and the origin of instruction… The beginning of filial piety is serving one's parents; the middle is serving one's ruler; the end is establishing oneself" (ibid., p.35). Therefore, filial piety first requires children to respect and obey their parents,

and love and take care of them in later life (Bodycott and Lai, 2012). More importantly, filial piety requires children to be successful in their academic work as a way of establishing their character and personality. It could also bring fame and immortality to parents and family, and make them proud (Chang, 2013; Salili et al., 2001).

Confucianism and learning

Confucianism also attaches great importance to education (Salili et al., 2001). According to Confucius, the aim of education is to equip man with morality, a balanced intellect, self-cultivation, and spiritual fulfilment (Chang, 2013). Under the influence of Confucianism, education is considered crucial for self-improvement, ethical pursuits and the highest goals of humanity (Tu, 1993). Altbach and Yu (2012) further explain that learning is highly valued and respected as it promotes learning as a virtuous undertaking to develop people's moral concepts. Thus, the poem 'Urge to Study' in ancient China was created, with the famous sentence "Golden mansions and maidens as beautiful as jade are to be found in books" (*Shuzhong ziyou yanruyu, shuzhong ziyou huangjinwu*) was recounted to generations of children (ibid., p.7). It infused their passion for learning and the pursuit of knowledge, which was considered crucial to achieve social and economic mobility (Liu, 1998). Based on the central ideals of Confucianism, the civil service examination in ancient China was created. Those who passed could become a government official and thus attain prosperity (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Even in modern Chinese society, the ideal is still "All pursuits are of low value; only learning is high" (*wanban jiexiapin, weiyou dushugao*) accepted by many (ibid., p.8). As a result, many families regard making

huge investment in their children's education as their top priority (Yu and Suen, 2005).

Confucianism and educational choices

Given the importance of education, students' educational choices in China are highly influenced by their parents (Yu and Suen, 2005). The choice is not just that of the individual, but also, or more importantly, a choice that might bring honour to the whole family (ibid.). Therefore, the choice of higher education often reflects a range of different family members' expectations and motivations. Parents are often involved indirectly in the choices available to their children. Children may conform to the views of their parents in their choice of higher educational pathways in order to please them, even though the choice they make is not in accordance with their own wishes (Bodycott, 2009). Parents, in particular, not only serve as information providers, but also offer advice on their children's choice of career development and higher educational institution destination (Lee, Wong, & Brown, 1996). In addition, socio-cultural-economic capital plays an important role in students' choices of higher education. Families' educational level, their professions and income levels influence students' choice of higher education (Tunç, 2011).

Higher Education in China

This section first introduces higher education reforms since 1949, then illustrates the contemporary Chinese higher education system. Lastly, it presents the development of regular higher education in China since 1978.

Chinese higher education reforms since 1949

This section highlights the reforms in Chinese higher education post 1949. The history of Chinese higher education is long, dating back to the late Shang and early Zhou dynasties [5] (Altbach and Yu, 2012). This thesis only focuses on higher education from 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established.

From 1949 to 1978

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) marked a new development of the higher education in China. In 1949, there were only 205 universities with a total of 116, 504 students, mostly located on the east coast and in Beijing, the capital city of China, and a few other large cities (Hayhoe, 1999). The first higher education conference, held in 1950, set the basis for future higher education development, which was to 'serve the economic construction' (Hayhoe, 1999, p.75). To achieve this, there was also a call for careful curricular development to ensure both a strong theoretical basis and a curriculum to meet national needs (Hayhoe, 1999). It also called for "greater integration and uniformity among all institutions in the higher education system, with the central Ministry of Education (MoE) exercising overall central leadership, and other ministries taking control over institutions in their particular areas" (Hayhoe, 1999, p.75-76).

In the 1950s, following the Russian model of concentrating research and advanced scholarship in the Academy of Sciences, the First Five-year Plan (1953-1957) was carried out with the theme of 'the reordering of colleges and departments' (*yuanxitiaozheng* in Chinese) (Hayhoe, 1999, p.77). This involved both a

[5] From 1523 to1027 B.C, according to Parkins (2001), the foundations of Chinese culture were laid in art, literature, music, astronomy, medicine, and history.

geographical rationalization of higher education provision and a complete rethinking of curricular patterns and institutional identities. On the other hand, under the influence of the Soviet model of the fragmentation of tertiary institutions, many universities were split into 'smaller, specialized, and vocational-oriented institutions' (ibid., p.77). Under each narrowly defined specialization, "there was a carefully constructed combination of common courses (politics, foreign languages, and physical education), basic theory courses, specialist theory courses, and specialist courses" (Hayhoe, 1999, p.78). The number of distinct specializations rose from 249 in 1953, to 627 in 1962, and ultimately to a high point of over 1,000 in the 1980s (ibid.). In 1951, China began to recruit master's degree candidates. The State Council and Degree and Academic Rank Committee were responsible for conferring the academic degrees of bachelor, master and doctor.

The Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, paralyzed formal higher education. During that period, under the requirement that "real understanding must be acquired gradually through experience at work", the entire higher education system was closed down; many professors and students were sent to rural areas to work, and consequently, a generation of academics was destroyed (Hartnett, 1998, p.264). It also ended China's connections with other nations in the world and the teaching of foreign language was suspended.

From 1978 to present

China's higher education system was restored with the advent of the economic reforms and 'opening-up' policy of *Deng Xiaoping*[6], who decided to switch to a market economy domestically, the so-called 'market economy with socialist

[6] He is the form leader of China, from 1978 until 1992.

characteristics', and open China up to the outside world (Hartnett, 1998, p.353). This strengthened Chinese economic relations with other countries in the world. The reform in the economy triggered fundamental changes in higher education as well. *Deng Xiao Ping* pointed out that "Chinese education should be the engine for building China into a powerful and modern nation" (ibid.). In this context, the principal task of education was to produce the appropriate manpower or talent (*rencai* in Chinese) for society to meet the goals of modernization (Hartnett, 1998).

From 1978 to now, some major steps were taken by the central government to reform the Chinese higher education system (as illustrated in Table 2 below). In 1978, the National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao* in Chinese) was restored. Those who passed the exams received free higher education and would be assigned jobs within specific industries upon graduation (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

In order to motivate local educational institutions, the Chinese Communist Party decided to "devolve the decision-making power from the central government to individual higher education institutions" (Mok, 2001, p.130). Then, the central government took several steps to promote '3Ds' (decentralization, depoliticization, and diversities) and '3Cs' (commercialization, competition, and cooperation) (Wu, 2010). In 1993, the 'Mission Outline of the Reform and Development of China's Education' (*Zhongguo Jiaoyu Gaige he Fazhan Gangyao* in Chinese) stated its policy of actively encouraging and fully supporting social institutions and citizens to establish schools. It also required the government to changes its function, from direct control over schools to management through legislation, funding, planning, advice on policies and other necessary means (Mok, 2001). Therefore, the local government and educationalists were given more autonomy and flexibility in directing the

development of education in their area (ibid.). Individual institutions were allowed to be involved in issues such as student enrolment, adjustment of specialities, as well as the recruitment and evaluation of staff (ibid.).

In 1998, the establishment of the Higher Education Law confirmed the decentralization policy and allowed local and provincial governments more flexibility in running higher education (Mok, 2001). It called for joint efforts from society to create more educational opportunities and the people-run or private (*minban* in Chinese) institutions of higher education began to emerge (ibid.).

Under the diversification measures, private institutions began to appear. Since the reform in the mid-1980s, educational institutions have become both public and private, and educational services have transformed into a mixed approach of 'multi-channel' (*duoqudao* in Chinese) and 'multi-method' (*duofangfa* in Chinese) (Mok et al., 2009, p.507). In addition, the financing of the HEIs became diversified. Rather than the state's sole responsibility, communities, enterprises and individuals (self-sponsorship) were also responsible for financing HE[7].

Since the mid-1990s, local governments have taken over the administration of universities, and there were many 'mergers and acquisitions' among universities (Suttmeier and Cao, 2004). Universities reformed their curricula to make them more flexible, interdisciplinary and relevant. During that period of time, The '211 project'[8]

[7] Before the enactment of the 1985 reform plan designed to make the higher education system more responsive to economic development and improve its overall effectiveness and efficiency, the government provided full support for a student's university education, including tuition, fees, and lodging. The reforms pertained mainly to the structure of the expanded higher education system; funding arrangements; enrolment changes, student support, and study abroad; faculty income and conditions of work; and curriculum and instruction developments (Hartnett, 1998, p.361).

[8] The '211'programme is a project of the National Key Universities and colleges initiated in 1995 by China's Ministry of Education. It aimed at raising the research standards of high-level universities and cultivating strategies for socio-economic development. The 211 Project schools took on the

and the '985 project'[9] were introduced to increase the importance of research in higher education and turn China's top universities into world-class research universities (Suttmeier and Cao, 2004, p.1081).

responsibility of training four-fifths of doctoral students, two-thirds of graduate students, half the students from abroad, and one-third of undergraduates. They offer 85% of the state's key subjects, hold 96% of the state's key laboratories, and utilize 70% of scientific research funding (Wikipedia, 2014b).

[9] The '985'project was established on May 4, 1998 to promote the development and reputation of the Chinese higher education system The project involves both national and local governments allocating large amounts of funding to certain universities in order to build new research centres, improve facilities, hold international conferences, attract world-renowned faculty and visiting scholars, and help Chinese faculty attend conferences abroad (Wikipedia, 2014c).

Table 2. Key Elements in China's Higher Education Reform and Their Effects

Period	Key policy and legal changes	Content	Effects on HE	Effects on academic R&D
1978-1984 ***Reinstatement***	1978: National Education Working Meeting	Reinstatement of education system	RHEIs rose from 598 in 1978 to 902 in 1984; students rose from 856,000 to 1.4 million.	
1985-1992 ***Explorative reforms***	1985: Resolution on Education Reform 1987: Second adjustment of HE majors	Decentralization Depoliticization Diversification Commercialization Competition Cooperation	RHEIs increased by 59 and students by 34,000; private HEIs emerged.	Universities were first given mandate to include research as main mission
1993-1997 ***Deepening reforms***	1993: Guidelines of Chinese Education Reform and Development 1996: National Education Act	Decentralized administration and financing of universities (implemented in 1998)	RHEIs increased to 1,020 in 1997; students rose from 2.18 to 3.17 million (1997).	1995: The '211'programme to improve overall capacity and develop key disciplines
1998-present ***Rapid development***	1998: Education Revitalization Action Plan 1999: Strategy of revitalizing China through science and education	Sharp increase in enrolment. 'Mergers and acquisitions' among universities	Fivefold increase in annual admissions and annual growth of 23 percent; total RHEIs student enrolment reached 2.39 million in 2012.	1998: '985' Programme to turn top universities into world-class research universities

Notes: RHEIs= Regular Higher Education Institutions

Source: Adapted and extended from Wu (2010, p.5).

Marketization of higher education

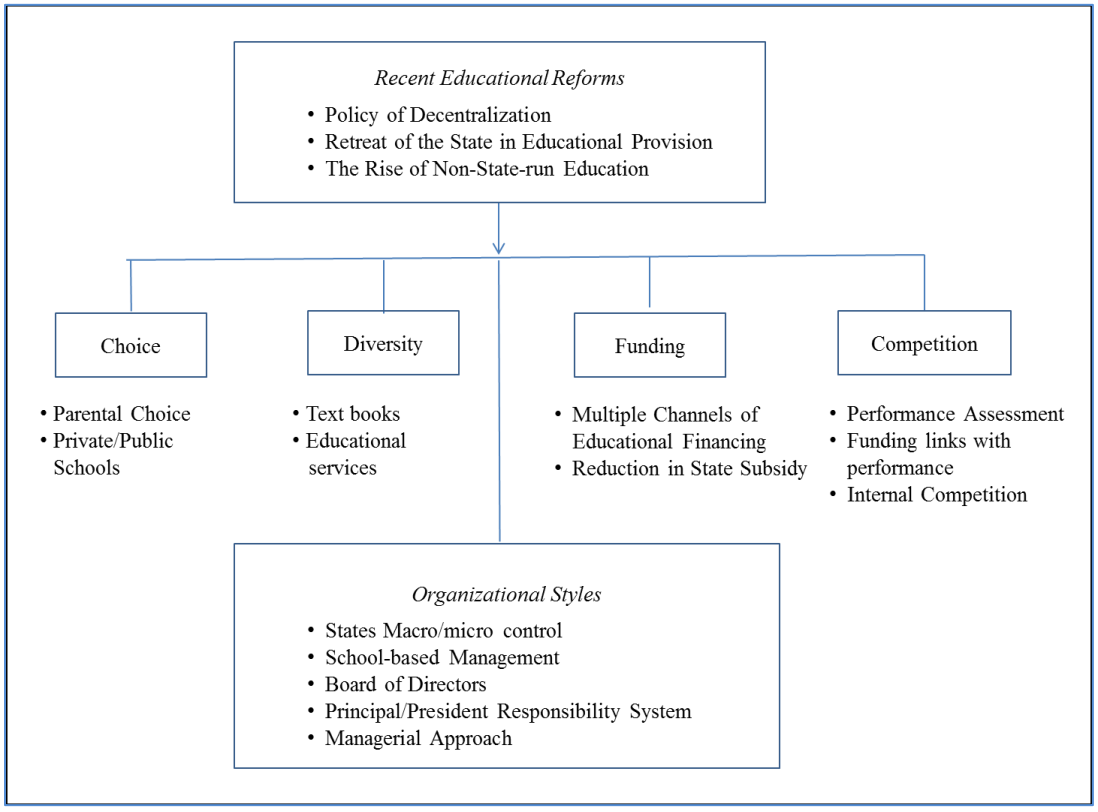
The reforming practice of decentralizing, devolving systems of schooling with more emphasis attached to parental choice and internal competition between different types of school, suggested that education had been going through the processes of 'marketization' and 'privatization' (Mok, 2001, p.112).

The 'marketization of education' according to Mok (2000, p.112) refers to "a process whereby education becomes a commodity provided by competitive suppliers, educational services are priced and access to them depends on consumer calculations and ability to pay". Central to the 'marketization' is the evolution of 'quasi-markets' whereby internal competition is introduced with the aim of enhancing 'consumer choice' (ibid.). The underlying assumption behind this approach is that "the empowerment of parents and students through resources-related choices in education has the potential to produce greater responsiveness and academic effectiveness" (ibid., p.111).

Ball (1990, p. 61, quoted in Mok, 2000, p.113) identified five key elements of marketized education: *choice*, *competition*, *diversity*, *funding* and *organization* (as shown in Figure 4, below). *Choice* means parents and students as consumers should be provided with a choice of different types of educational services, such as, curriculum and education provision. *Competition* was regarded as one of the key elements of marketized education because it is believed that competition between schools is not only the best way to serve their consumers (parents and students) but also the whole nation as it ensures continuous adaptation. Also, internal competition could ensure good quality education when funding is positively linked to school performance. *Diversity* means providing a range of products to customers. The

funding of the school of is positively correlated with its performance. The choices made by consumers have a direct impact on the funding of institution: those that performed well are rewarded with more funding, whereas those who fail are penalized with fewer resources. *Organization* means to improve school management and initiate reforms.

Figure 4. The Educational Market Place: Recent educational restructuring



Source: Reproduced from Mok (2000)

The features of 'marketized' education are embodied in the following aspects. First, is the changing structure of financing public educational institutions toward user charges (Mok, 2000). This policy stipulated the 'pay-to-learn' policy with the rationale that "those who benefit from it should pay for it" (Gao, 2011, p.48). Thus,

higher education was seen as a good personal investment which brings potential benefits to students in their later lives. Before the 1990s, the number of fee-paying students was only a small group. The 'fee-paying' principle introduced in the early 1990s has expanded since 1993 (as illustrated in Table 3 below). It is claimed that the 'self-paying' principle at university has strongly motivated students to study because "they have to pay for the courses and they are eager to learn a wider range of subjects to broaden their knowledge base" (Mok, 2000, p.116). The 'fee-paying' principle is generally supported by the people "because they believe that higher education is an investment" (ibid.). The annual tuition fees in higher education increased from an average of 200 Yuan per student in 1986, to about 6,000 Yuan in 2006, which accounted for one-third of the household consumption in urban China (Mok and Lo, 2007). The annual tuition fees probably increased after 2006. However, different institutions and majors charge different tuition fees. Prestigious universities charge more than other universities and colleges. Even within the same university, popular majors, such as Engineering and Medicine, charge higher tuition fees than other subjects (Gao, 2011).

Table 3. Enrolment Change in Higher Education Institutions in China

Year	Total No. of Students	No. of self-supported students	Percentage
1988	669,700	42,200	6.3
1989	579,100	25,800	4.5
1990	608,600	17,300	2.8
1991	616,000	11,800	1.9
1992	628,400	11,300	1.8
1993	924,000	336,000	39.0
1994	899,800	364,000	40.5

Source: Reproduced from Mok (2000)

Secondly, the emergence of private education (*minban* in Chinese) as a response to the pressing demand for higher education in China in the 1990s is also an important embodiment of 'marketized' education. As dependence on state financing and provision alone could not satisfy the growing demands for higher education, China began to seek market/ private sector and other non-state sectors as investors in higher education provision (Mok and Lo, 2007). In order to compete with those public governmental counterparts, they differentiate themselves by specializing in courses targeted at emerging market needs. Therefore, the private-run (*minban)* colleges can create more learning opportunities for students, to meet the increased demands for higher education.

Thirdly, the introduction of internal competition between educational institutions is also an manifestation of 'marketized' education in China (Mok, 2000). In order to enhance the quality of education among higher educational institutions, 'Project 211'[10] was introduced to select the top 100 higher educational institutions to become world class universities in the early 21st century (ibid.). The universities were selected based upon criteria such as "staffing, buildings, libraries, laboratories, research and funding" (Mok, 2000, p.119). Central to this plan is the notion of 'competition'. Under such policy guidance, mergers between universities in some cities, for example, in Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province, began to appear, to enhance their common strengths (ibid.).

In addition, 'marketized' education is characterized by stressing consumer choice in education as "students' choice is a very important factor affecting course design" (Mok, 2000, p.120). Therefore, teaching materials were adapted and disciplines and

[10] See footnote 8, page 20.

specializations were reshuffled to meet the newly emerging market needs (Mok, 2000). Also, courses were re-packaged to the 'applied' side, such as applied mathematics, applied physics and so on to make them more attractive to students (Mok, 2000, p.119).

Lastly, revenue generation activities by administrators, principals and presidents of schools and universities were encouraged to alleviate financing pressure on the central government (Mok, 2000). This income-generating activity (*Chuangshou* in Chinese) was officially established in 1987 (ibid.). Under this policy, university administrators began to be engaged in business and commercial fields to get additional funds (ibid.). The business firms and enterprises (*xiaobanqiye* in Chinese) were established to offer such services as adult education and evening courses (ibid.). In addition, other activities such as holding international conferences and charging registration fees to foreign participants, conducting training courses for local industry workers, and the like were organized (ibid.). Income generated from such activities is used to create more educational funds and improve teaching conditions (ibid.).

To summarize: since the economic reforms practiced in 1978, the Chinese higher educational system has been reoriented to adapt to the demands of the market-oriented economy. The policy of decentralization, commercialization, targeted funding and competition drove the marketization of higher education, which in turn has contributed to the greater expansion of higher education in China. In addition, the process of marketization has produced diversity of services and consumer choices; in this context, the continuous exploration of students' choices in higher education has become a necessity.

After introducing the reforms and the subsequent development of higher education in China from 1949 to the present, the next section illustrates the major characteristics of the contemporary higher education system.

Contemporary Chinese higher education system

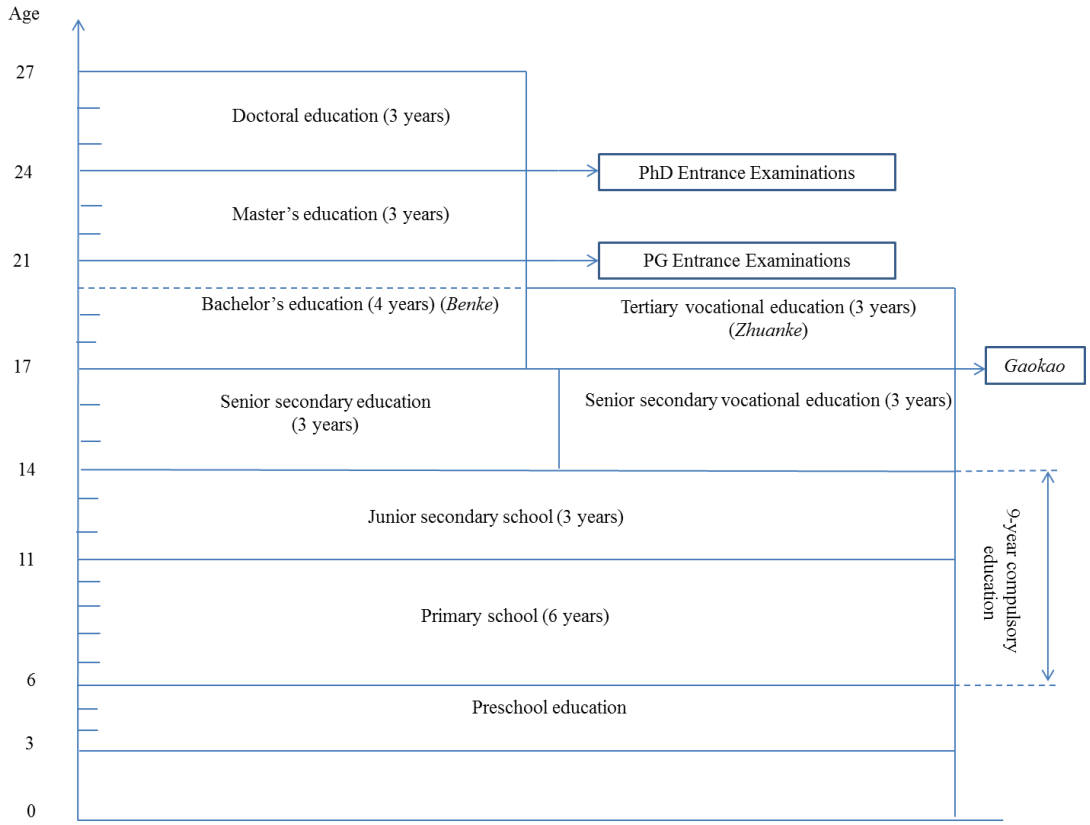
This section presents the major characteristics of the contemporary Chinese higher education systems. These include its structure, institutions, admission procedures, financing, and access to higher education.

Structure

The contemporary Chinese education is characterised by a '6-3-3-4-3-3' structure, that is, six years of primary school education, three years of both junior and senior secondary education, four years of undergraduate education, three years of master's education, and three years of doctoral education (see Figure 5 below). Primary education and junior secondary education are free and compulsory for all. The students who finish junior secondary education can choose to become part of the work force or continue to senior secondary education or senior secondary vocational education. Upon graduation, the senior secondary school graduates can choose to attend a regular or vocational higher education institution. By comparison, the graduates from senior secondary vocational school can only choose to attend a vocational college or university (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Senior secondary school graduates who want to receive higher education have to take part in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (known as *Gaokao* in Chinese). Those who with higher scores than required by the national minimum pass mark for admission can go to regular higher education institutions, whereas those with lower scores will normally go to vocational colleges or universities. After graduation from universities

or colleges, students can become part of the work force or pursue a master's degree for three years and then go on to work or continue to study for a doctoral degree and then go on to work.

Figure 5. The Overall Structure of the Contemporary Chinese HE System



Source: Adapted from Altbach and Yu (2012, Figure 1)

According to the Regulations for Academic Degrees by the Academic Degree Committee of the State Council (ADCSC), the bachelor, master and doctoral degrees are the three officially recognized higher education degrees (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Higher education consists of *zhuanke* education [11], *benke* education [12] and

[11] According to Article 16 of the Higher Education Law of 1998, *Zhuanke* education is to equip students with the essential principles and specialized knowledge of the subject area and the basic

postgraduate education[13]. As can be seen from Figure 5, above, both *zhuanke* and *benke* education are offered at undergraduate level, but they are different. First, *zhuanke* programmes are mainly offered at vocational colleges while *benke* programmes are mostly offered at academic colleges and universities. Second, they differ in the length of programme offered. It usually takes three years to finish *zhuanke* education while it requires four years for *benke* education. In addition, they are different in 'level of specialization'. *Zhuanke* is vocationally oriented, with the focus on teaching 'specialized knowledge of the subject area', while *benke* is more academically oriented, focusing on teaching 'general knowledge of the discipline and subject area in a relatively systematic way' (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.20). However, as the competition among graduates in the employment market has intensified in the last decade, many higher education institutions in China have tilted their *benke* programmes toward the applied side and employment (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

Classification of higher education institutions

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in China can be classified either by their governance structure or the level of qualification (see Figure 6 below). According to

---

skills and elementary ability to conduct practical work within the subject area (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.20).

[12] According to the same law (above), *benke* education shall equip students with the essential principles and general knowledge of the discipline and subject area in a relatively systematic way, and the essential basic skills and methods and relevant knowledge of the subject area, and the elementary ability to conduct practical work and research work within the subject area (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.20).

[13] According to the Article 16 (above), master's education is to equip the students with a strong theoretical foundation, systematic subject knowledge, relevant skills, methods, and knowledge, and abilities to conduct practical work and scientific research; while doctoral level education is to equip students with a solid and broad theoretical foundation, systematic and intensive subject knowledge, the relevant skills and methods of the discipline, and abilities to independently conduct creative scientific research and practical work (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.20).

the administrative organization, the higher education institutions in China can be classified into institutions that are governed under central ministries and agencies or under local authorities or non-state private agencies. Institutions that are administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other central ministries are labelled as central higher education institutions, while those administered by provincial or municipal authorities are known as provincial higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education administers the national higher education institution admission process. The admission office in each province is responsible for such issues as maintaining candidate records and sending enrolled student profiles to the appropriate institutions (see below) (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

At present, there are three kinds of institutions in the higher education system in China: graduate institutions, regular HEIs, and institutions for adult education. Under each branch, they are either governed by central ministries and agencies or are under local authorities or non-state private agencies. As can be seen in Table 4, in 2013, there were 2,491 regular HEIs, among which, 1,661 institutions were under the control of the local authorities, whereas only 113 institutions were under central ministry or agency control.

Table 4. Distribution of HEIs in 2013

Unit: institutions

	Overall Total	HEIs under Central Ministries & Agencies			HEIs under Local Auth.			Non-gov.
		Total	MOE	Other agencies	Total	DoE	Non-ed. Dept.	
Graduate Ins.	830	348	73	275	477	412	62	5
Regular HEIs	2,491	113	73	40	1,661	1,015	598	717
Adult Edu.	297	13	1	12	283	96	146	1

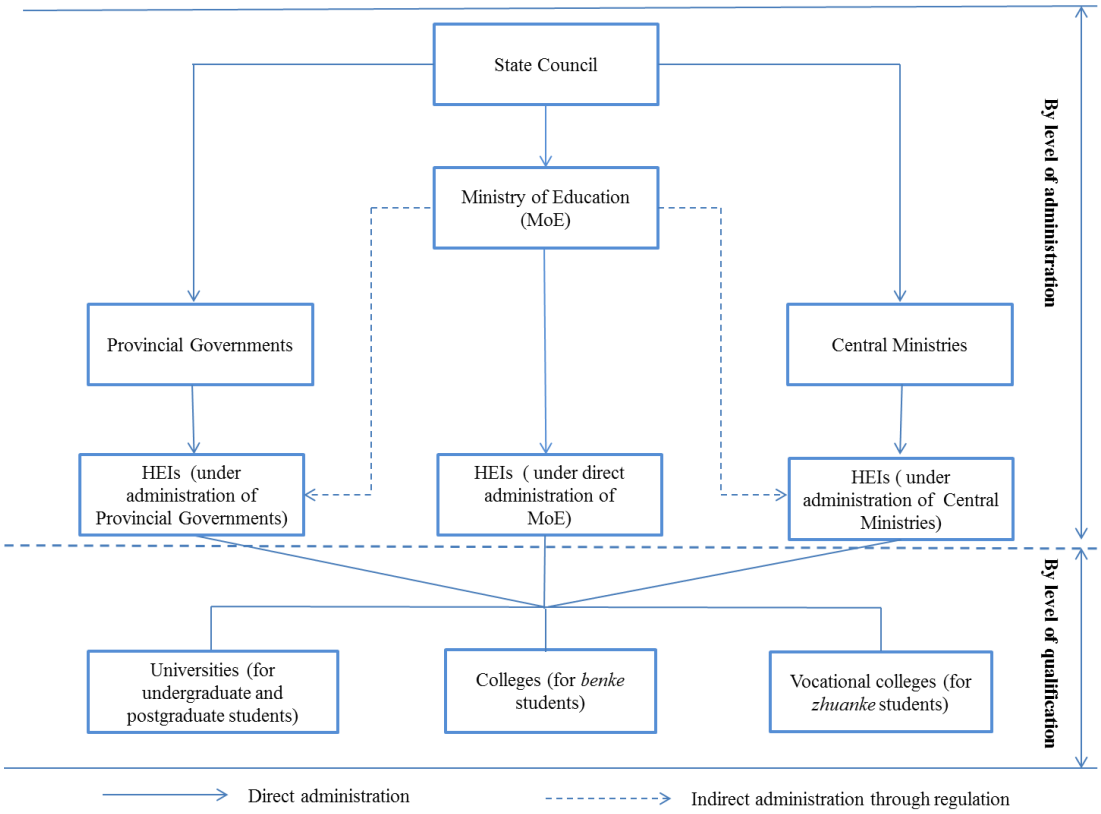
Notes: Graduate Ins. = Institutions providing postgraduate programmes; MOE = Ministry of Education; DoE: Department of Education; Ins. = Institutions; Edu. = Education.

Source: (NBSC, 2014)

As also indicated in the figure 6, following, by level of qualification, higher education institutions in China can be classified as 'universities' that are open to undergraduate students through the National Unified Admission Process [14] (*TongZhao* in Chinese) and post-graduate (both master's and doctoral degrees) students; 'colleges', institutions that accept *benke* students through the *tongzhao* process; and 'vocational colleges', institutions that offer education to *zhuanke* students admitted through the *tongzhao process* (Altbach and Yu, 2012) .

[14] This process is realized through the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (*Gaokao* in Chinese).

Figure 6. Classifications of HEIs



Source: Adapted and extended from Altbach & Yu (2012, Figure 2)

As a result of the government funding policy to raise the research capacity of public universities, higher education institutions are classified into '985' and '211' universities[15] as well as non - '985' or non - '211' universities. Generally, '985' and '211' universities are considered to be the most prestigious universities in China (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Full lists of '985' and '211' universities are given as appendices (see Appendices A and B).

[15] The details of these two projects can be seen in footnotes 8 and 9, page 20-21.

Admission regulations and procedures

The Ministry of Education administers the national higher education institution admission process. The admission office in each province is responsible for issues such as maintaining candidate records and sending enrolled student profiles to the institutions which have undergraduate intakes. There are 'admission tiers' for undergraduate students (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.27). The 'priority tier', includes institutions recruiting students ahead of other institutions, such as military and armed police academies; the 'first tier', includes institutions such as '985' and '211' universities; the 'second tier' together with the 'third tier' is for other *benke* institutions; and the later tiers are for *zhuanke* institutions (ibid.). Students with higher scores normally go to the priority tier and the first tier, while those with lower scores go to the second, third and later tiers. The priority tier recruit ahead of the National Unified Admission Process (*TongZhao* in Chinese), they got the exam results in advance of others.

Determined by the provincial educational departments, the higher education institutions are classified into the above tiers. Students are allowed to identify several institutions in each tier by descending or equal priority, for example, $A_1 \geq A_2 \geq A_3 \geq A_4 \geq A_5$ (as presented in the following Table 5). Within a single tier, for example in the 'first tier', a students' profile is first sent to the top-choice institution, namely B_1, if rejected, it goes to the second institution, namely B_2, and so on. If rejected by all the institutions of the 'first tier', the students' profile will be sent to the top-choice in the next tier, namely C_1.

Sometimes, institutions prefer students who have chosen them as their first choice in a single tier, to those with even higher scores in the College Entrance Exams

(*Gaokao* in Chinese) (Altbach and Yu, 2012). For example, the student H chose B_1 as his first choice and scored 580 points, however was rejected by B_1 in the 'Second tier'; his profile first goes to the B_2 in the same tier. B_2 might reject him/her and accept student M with a score of 575 if student M indicated B_2 as his/her first choice in the 'first tier'.

Table 5. The Classification of Tiers in HE Admissions

Tiers	**Universities/Departments**				
Priority Tier	A_1	A_2	A_3	A_4	A_5
First Tier	B_1	B_2	B_3	B_4	B_5
Second Tier	C_1	C_2	C_3	C_4	C_5
Third Tier	D_1	D_2	D_3	D_4	D_5
Zhuanke	E_1	E_2	E_3	E_4	E_5

Source: Compiled by the researcher

As for the number of students each institution should accept, including both undergraduate and post-graduate students, the government determines the quota whereas the institutions are required to meet the enrolment quotas, which is called the Enrolment Plan (*ZhaoshengJihua* in Chinese). If the institution fails to meet the enrolment quotas, the quota for that institution will be reduced accordingly the following year (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

Access to higher education

Access to higher education is through taking the National Unified Examination for Admission to Regular Higher Education Institutions or the College Entrance Examinations (*Gaokao*). It was established in the 1950s, but was destroyed during

the Cultural Revolution[16]. The College Entrance Examination was then reopened in 1977/78, to provide an equal opportunity for all people to receive higher education (Parkins, 2001). It is a set of joint examinations for high school students who want to go to university, which includes five exams in the selected subjects, with mathematics, Chinese and English being compulsory. The remaining two subjects could be physics and chemistry on the science track or politics and history on the liberal arts track[17] (Wang, L., 2011). The College Entrance Exams is intended only for those who are finishing secondary school immediately. For those adults who have already left school and wish to attend higher education, the National Examinations for Admission to Adult Higher Education Institutions (*ChengrenGaokao*), National Self-Study Examinations for Higher Education (*ZixueKaoshi*), or Diploma Tests (*WenpingKaoshi*) can be taken (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

After three decades of reform of the College Entrance Examination, a college entry system for a unified national college entrance examination, independent college recruitment and admission by recommendation have been established. Government agencies, universities and community enrolment organizations are responsible for enrolment policies (Wang, H., 2011). From 1949 to 1977, the central government had absolute power over deciding the enrolment quota of students and compiling college enrolment and examination rules (ibid.). Since 1978, this power has been transferred to local government. For example, the recommendation for admission practice in the mid-1980s empowered secondary schools to recommend students to

[16] This is explained in Chapter Two, Chinese higher education reform: From 1949 to 1978, p. 17.

[17] In most provinces, students are required to choose between Science and Liberal Arts as their tracks of study in senior secondary school. Students with different tracks attend different classes in the final year of secondary school and thus take different *Gaokao* exams (Altbach and Yu, 2012, p.30).

higher education (ibid.). In the 1990s, China reformed its entrance examination subjects, which gave certain rights to the schools and candidates to choose examination topics (ibid.).

At the beginning of 21st century, the policy of independent college entrance examinations was established (Wang, H., 2011). As a result, some provinces and cities had the right to determine the topics of college entrance examination. In 2005, fourteen institutions across thirty-one provinces used their own examination papers (Wang, H., 2011). In addition, some 'Project 985' and 'Project 211' universities' schools of study were given certain rights to practice independent enrolment. Further, local government was empowered to control the enrolment schemes of universities under total national enrolment quotas (Wang, H., 2011).

However, the College Entrance Examination has long been criticised for its 'life-determining' nature (Altbach and Yu, 2012). "In China, the National College Entrance Examination (CEE, *Gaokao* in Chinese) largely determines an individual's access to higher education, in turn impacting on his or her future career choices and attainment of wealth, income, and social status" (Wang, H., 2011, p.228), and, "the social class is strongly related to differences in access opportunity" (ibid., 229). In order to change its 'life-determining' nature, the independent enrolment (*Zizhuzhaosheng* in Chinese) project was initiated in 2004. Under this project, some of the top universities were allowed to enrol a small proportion of students – around 5% of their total annual enrolment – based on school recommendations, interviews or alternative examinations instead of *Gaokao* scores (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Recently, it was reported that the Ministry of Education is initiating a major reform of the National College Entrance Examination (Morgan and Wu, 2015). The new

reform proposes that the admission of new students will also take into account students' performance in other subjects, as well as their personal and social characters, instead of being purely based on performance in the three major subjects, namely mathematics, Chinese and English. This new proposal is being piloted in Shanghai municipality and Zhejiang Province, as it will impact on individual Chinese students as well as on the country's education system (ibid.).

By comparison, access to postgraduate education is less unified and should be within a certain age range. Students who want to follow postgraduate education have to first meet the age requirement, which is less than 40 years old for a master's programme and less than 45 years old for a doctoral programme (Altbach and Yu, 2012). However, the exception is for Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Public Administration (MPA) graduate programmes, which have no age restrictions (ibid.). Eligible potential graduate students are required to take a three-day entrance examination, with Politics and a foreign language (most often English) examinations – which are compulsory for all candidates – and the contents of which are decided by the Ministry of Education (ibid.). Additional examinations whose contents are determined by the each institution themselves are required to test the candidate's relevant knowledge of the proposed field of study (ibid.).

Financing and tuition fees

In the 1980s, the financing of higher education institutions was entirely dependent on government-funded enterprises. During this period, university and college students were exempt from paying tuition fees. In the late 1990s, higher education institutions in China began to charge the tuition fees of a small number of students. Since 1997, all students who want to pursue higher education have to pay tuition fees. In recent

years, the government has contributed to around 44% of the income of all higher education institutions while the tuition fees charged by institutions themselves together count for 34% (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

The tuition fees vary between regions, schools, and fields of studies as they are set either by the provincial or central government. Higher education institutions in western provinces usually charge less than those in eastern provinces. As for field of study, tuition fees are generally higher in popular areas such as engineering and medicine, while comparatively low in areas such as agriculture and history. As for types of institution, generally, private and independent colleges charge higher fees than public universities. The fees for private and independent colleges range from 5,600 to16,000 Yuan per annum and 8,000 to 20,000 Yuan respectively, depending on the subject and institution, while public institution fees generally range from 4,500 to 6,000 Yuan per annum, depending on the subject and institution (Altbach and Yu, 2012).

Postgraduate education, as stated in the 'Chinese Education Reform and Development Outline' is not compulsory education; thus students should pay fees (Altbach and Yu, 2012). From 1981-1985, postgraduate education was sponsored by the national fiscal account. The government was responsible for all the fees for postgraduate education. In 1993, the full-time postgraduates were classified as: postgraduates admitted by the enrolment plan, postgraduate students enrolled by contract (with enterprises and entrusted training institutions), and self-funded postgraduate students. The first two types of student did not need to pay tuition fees.

From the autumn of 2014, postgraduate higher education in China has undergone a fundamental change. For the first time, postgraduate education is to be funded via a

system of student grants and loans, by the students themselves, but not by the state. All the universities began to charge postgraduate fees. Under the new policy, yearly tuition fees for master's degrees and doctorates in academic disciplines were set at 8,000 Yuan and 10,000 Yuan respectively (Anon., 2013a). The new system makes postgraduate education more expensive and there has been speculation that applicant numbers would fall. However, nobody really knew what the new world of students as fee-paying customers would look like. In this context, an investigation of how students decide about postgraduate education in China has become a necessity.

After introducing the structure of contemporary Chinese education system, the next section presents the development of regular higher education since 1978.

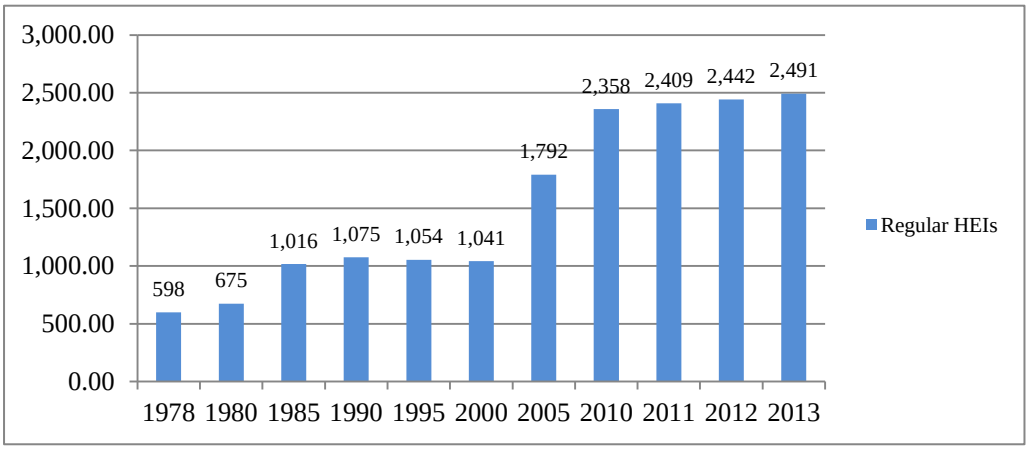
Development of regular HE since 1978

Over the past three decades, regular higher education has enjoyed fast development. This can be illustrated in the growing number of regular HEIs and student enrolment distribution by institution type and field of study.

Regular HEIs

In 1978, there were 598 regular higher education institutions. In 2013, the number of regular higher education institutions reached 2,491 (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The Number of HEIs from 1978 to 2013

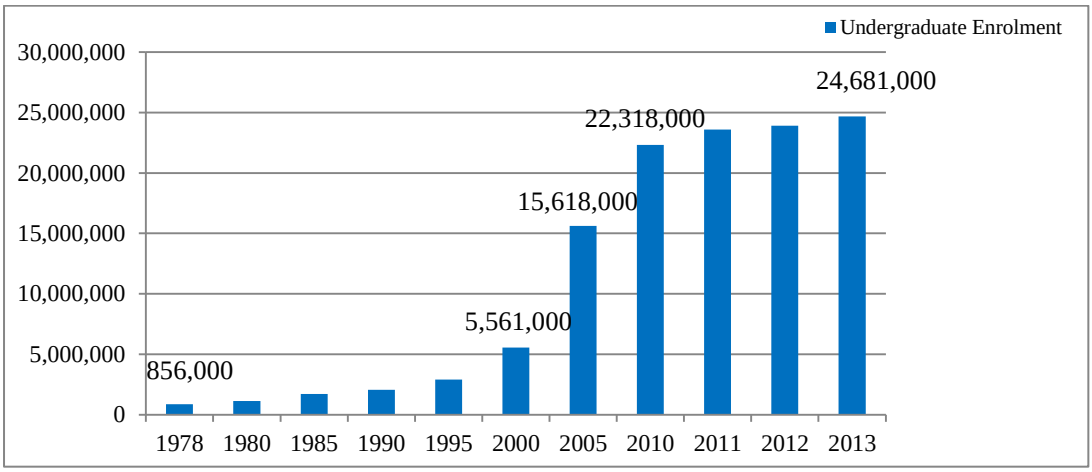


Source: (NBSC, 2014)

Students' enrolment

From 1978 to 2013, there was an annual increase in the number of students enrolling for undergraduate studies in regular HEIs, reaching over 24 million in 2013, up from 856,000 in 1978 (see Figure 8). The rapid expansion of enrolment in HEIs was not without reason. The extremely close connection between higher degrees and income since the reforms in HE in 1992 fuelled the Chinese people's passion for higher education (Bai, 2012). As a result, Chinese higher education has developed rapidly.

Figure 8. The Enrolment Figures for Regular HEIs from 1978 to 2013



Source: (NBSC, 2014)

In 2013, the number of postgraduates enrolled reached more than 1.7 million. Classified by institution type, 97.5% of the students (596,368) went to regular HEIs while the remainder went to research institutions (NBSC, 2014) (See Table 6):

Table 6. Students by Level and Type of Education (2013)

Item	Entrants	Enrolment	Graduates
Postgraduates	611,381	1,793,953	513,626
Doctor's Degree	70,462	298,283	53,129
Master's Degree	540,919	1,495,670	460,487
Regular HEs	596,368	1,749,864	502,426
Research Institutions	15,013	44,089	11,200

Notes: Entrants = students newly enrolled; Enrolment = the total number enrolled; Graduates = the number of students graduating in 2013.

Source: (NBSC, 2014)

As for specific fields of study, the total enrolment for master's degrees reached 768,408 in 2013. Among the most popular majors was engineering with 190,750

students, followed by Administrators and Medicine with 76,612 and 57,435 students respectively. By comparison, the total enrolment for doctorates was 110,076 in 2013. Similarly, the most popular major was engineering, with a total enrolment of 26,588. This was followed by the field of Science and Medicine with 14,158 and 9,090 students in each field (see Table 7).

Table 7. Number of Postgraduate Students by Field of Study (2013)

Item	Total Enrolment		New Enrolment		Graduates	
	Doctorate	***Masters***	***Doctorate***	***Masters***	***Doctorate***	***Masters***
Total	110,076	768,408	878,484	110,076	19,980	237,334
Philosophy	894	3,508	3,790	10,879	708	3,815
Economics	2,919	25,088	12,612	64,936	2,328	20,898
Law	3,604	38,119	15,416	105,998	2,828	37,547
Education	1,353	31,241	5,455	79,791	938	23,952
Literature	2,415	29,208	10,258	83,224	1,952	29,629
History	957	4,685	4,100	13,705	822	4,451
Science	14,158	46,044	52,683	131,314	10,396	39,596
Engineering	26,588	190,750	122,475	525,743	18,331	158,105
Agriculture	3,092	20,296	12,570	51,208	2,435	15,029
Medicine	9,090	57,435	32,422	164,199	8,228	50,322
Military Science	34	212	178	710	16	210
Administrators	4,701	76,612	23,982	214,852	3,698	62,093
Art	657	17,721	2,342	49,111	459	14,840

Source: (NBSC, 2014)

To summarize: this section has provided the broad context of higher education in China, including the Chinese higher education reforms since 1949, the major characteristics of the contemporary system of the Chinese higher education structure, and the development of regular HE since 1978. As the case study university in this

research is located in Guangdong province, the next section narrows the context down to Guangdong Province, introducing its geography, demography, economy and higher education.

Guangdong Province

Guangdong province is one of the most important of the 26 provinces in China. This is mainly due to its geographical location, political and economic context. This section introduces its geographical location, demography, economic context and the development of its higher education.

Geographical location

Located in the southeast of China, adjacent to Hong Kong and Macau, Guangdong Province occupies a land area of 178,000 square kilometres. As the 'window' of China in respect of trade and international exchanges, "Guangdong is one of the most economically prosperous regions in mainland China" (Mok, 2000, p.128). The provincial capital, Guangzhou, and economic hub, Shenzhen, are amongst the most important cities in China (see the following Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9. Map of China (Showing Guangdong Province)



Source: (Google map, 2015b).

Figure 10. Map of Guangdong Province



Source: (Google map, 2015c).

Demographics and population distribution

From 1995 to 2010, the permanent population increased from 73.87 million to 104.40 million. In 2014, the permanent resident population in Guangdong reached 106.44 million.

Economic development

Guangdong province is the largest economy in China and has been a key driver of the national economy over the past 30 years. Since 1989, Guangdong has topped the total Gross Domestic Production (GDP) rankings of all 26 provinces in China, followed by Jiangsu and Shandong province. According to state statistics, Guangdong's GDP in 2014 reached more than 6,779 billion, CNY (China Yuan) , which was 10.65% of the total GDP of Mainland China (See Table 8).

Table 8. List of Top Five Chinese Provinces by GDP in 2014

Unit: in millions of GDP

Provinces	Rank	GDP (CN¥)	Nominal GDP (US$)	PPP GDP (intl.$)	Real Growth (%)	Share of total GDP (%)
Mainland China		63,646,270	10,361,117	17,411,575	7.4	100
Guangdong	1	6,779,224	1,103,605	1,854,578	7.8	10.65
Jiangsu	2	6,508,832	1,059,587	1,780,607	8.7	10.23
Shandong	3	5,942,659	967,419	1,625,721	8.7	9.34
Zhejiang	4	4,015,350	653,668	1,098,471	7.6	6.31
Henan	5	3,493,938	568,786	955,829	8.9	5.49

Source: (Wikipedia, 2015)

Guangdong's rapid economic growth is inseparable from China's opening-up policy of 1979. Since then, several important measures have been taken by the central government by: decentralizing decision-making regarding exports and imports to local governments or regional foreign trade corporations; opening a series of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and coastal cities to stimulate exports and attracting foreign investment; replacing the administrative restrictions on exports and imports by tariffs, quotas, and licensing; and loosening control on foreign exchange, particularly on foreign-invested/managed firms (Wei, 1995). SEZs, a key element of the 'open-door policy' and export-led industrialization, have contributed significantly to attracting foreign investment and the rapid growth of the national economy (Wuttke, 2011).

As for GDP components, tertiary and secondary industries are the main contributors[18]. In 2013, the tertiary industry contributed the largest part, with 47.8%, closely followed by the secondary industry with 47.3% (see Table 9).

Table 9. Composition of Gross Domestic Product in 2013

	GDP (in billions of ¥)	**Percentage (%)**
Total	6216.40	
Primary industry	304.75	4.9
Secondary industry	2942.75	47.3
Tertiary industry	2968.90	47.8

Source: (SBGP, 2014)

[18] Secondary industry refers to Industry (Manufacture) and Construction, and tertiary industry refers to Transport, Storage, and Post; Wholesale and Retail Trades; Financial Intermediation; and Real Estate (SBGP, 2014).

Higher education

In recent years, Guangdong's higher education has developed very fast and the enrolment of students in regular universities and colleges has been expanded. From 1978 to 2013, the number enrolled in HEIs increased from 30,700 to over 1.7 million (See Table 10).

Table 10. Total Enrolment by Level and Type of Schooling in Guangdong

Unit: (10,000 persons)

Year	HEIs	Secondary Schools			Primary Schools
		Vocational Secondary Schools	***Technical Schools***	***Regular Secondary Schools***	
1978	3.07	3.64		313.32	743.02
1983	4.56	9.96	0.92	199.59	705.34
1988	9.72	37.63	3.40	244.23	688.72
1993	11.70	50.24	7.68	277.19	832.14
1998	18.50	70.50	14.50	423.61	918.02
2003	58.78	63.08	23.90	545.91	1025.37
2008	121.64	100.08	53.54	679.65	956.47
2011	152.73	152.05	85.13	699.47	822.06
2012	161.68	149.57	88.52	668.40	808.24
2013	170.99	140.89	87.62	625.24	807.94

Source: (SBGP, 2014)

In 2013, the number of institutions reached 138, of which 67 were universities. The number of new enrolments and graduates in all HEIs reached 526,162 and 412,315 respectively. Among these, new enrolment and graduates in universities amounted to 257,801 and 195,722 respectively. Until 2013, four universities were regulated by the central government with 134 others regulated by the local government. 20,767 and 391,548 students graduated in each type of universities respectively in 2013 (see Table 11).

Table 11. Statistics on Institutions of Higher Education in Guangdong (2013)

Item	Schools (unit)	Graduates (person)	New Enrolments (person)	Total Enrolments (person)	Teachers and Staff (person)	Full-time Teachers
Total	**138**	**412,315**	**526,162**	**1,709,881**	**128,161**	**91,099**
Female		209,077	276,722	888,119	60,347	42,199
by Govt. control	**138**	**412,315**	**526,162**	**1,709,881**	**128,161**	**91,099**
Central Government	*4*	*20,767*	*22,940*	*87,696*	*13,476*	*8,577*
Local Government	*134*	*391,548*	*503,222*	*1,622,185*	*114,685*	*82,522*
by Institution Type	**138**	**412,315**	**526,162**	**1,709,881**	**128,161**	**91,099**
University	*67*	*195,722*	*257,801*	*814,445*	*59,546*	*41,744*
College						
Science and Engineering	29	94,202	125,653	389,239	27,302	19,906
Agriculture	3	18,536	21,549	82,541	5,840	4,143
Medicine	7	21,139	23,153	91,693	10,277	7,654
Teacher Education	5	23,963	29,525	101,706	7,930	5,630
Language and Literature	2	7,232	7,209	28,668	2,760	1,764
Economics and Finance	14	42,431	49,978	163,066	10,369	7,679
Politics and Law	2	2,239	2,626	11,082	760	458
Physical Culture	3	2,656	3,115	10,449	1,303	712
Art	6	4,195	5,553	16,992	2,074	1,409
Vocational Technological	77	171,137	235,428	658,730	43,350	30,960

Source: (SBGP, 2014)

Postgraduate education

Postgraduate education has enjoyed fast development in recent years in Guangdong.

The number of institutions of postgraduate education increased from 23 in 1995 to 32 in 2013. Of these, the number of institutions of higher education increased from 15 in 1995 to 24 in 2013. The number of new enrolments has increased more than fourteen fold, from 1,922 in 1995 to 29,255 in 2013. This increase was mainly attributed to students on Master's Degree, which increased from 1,515 to 25,689 in the same period. The number of enrolled students for both Doctor and Master degrees reached 85,180 in 2013, up from only 5,404 in 1995 (see Table 12).

Table 12. Statistics for Postgraduate Education in Guangdong

Item	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of Institutions of Postgraduate Education(unit)	**23**	**26**	**29**	**31**	**31**	**32**	**32**
Institutions of Higher Education	15	18	21	23	23	24	24
Research Institutions	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Number of New Enrolments	**1,922**	**5,672**	**17,054**	**25,798**	**26,919**	**28,073**	**29,255**
For Doctor Degrees	407	1,053	2,802	3,307	3,379	3,459	3,566
Institutions of Higher Education	387	1,001	2,599	3,117	3,184	3,261	3,368
Research Institutions	20	52	203	190	195	198	198
For Masters Degrees	1,515	4,619	14,252	22,491	23,540	24,614	25,689
Institutes of Higher Education	1,442	4,510	13,953	22,135	23,209	24,274	25,342
Research Institutions	73	109	299	356	331	340	347
Number of Enrolled Students	**5,405**	**13,023**	**43,942**	**72,455**	**77,579**	**81,459**	**85,180**
For Doctor Degrees	935	2,558	9,049	12,341	12,991	13,438	14,351
Institutions of Higher Education	894	2,445	8,406	11,706	12,327	12,756	13,659
Research Institutions	41	113	643	635	664	682	692
For Master Degree	4,470	10,405	34,893	60,114	64,588	68,021	70,829
Institutions of Higher Education	4,308	10,161	34,066	59,159	63,650	67,069	69,863
Research Institutions	162	244	827	955	938	952	966
Number of Graduates	**1,265**	**2,182**	**9,489**	**17,862**	**20,538**	**23,220**	**24,353**
For Doctors Degrees	154	417	1,342	2,436	2,589	2,803	2,907
Institutes of Higher Education	147	387	1,241	2,288	2,413	2,620	2,732
Research Institutions	7	30	101	148	176	183	175
For Masters Degrees	1,111	1,765	8,147	15,426	17,949	20,417	21,446
Institutes of Higher Education	1,074	1,692	7,941	15,158	17,696	20,156	21,170
Research Institutions	37	73	206	268	253	261	276

Source: (SBGP, 2014)

Geographical distribution of universities

The spatial distribution of universities in Guangdong is highly concentrated in urban regions with large GDP. At the city scale, the HE institutions are mostly located within the capital city, Guangzhou (Zhao and Du, 2011). Institutes of higher learning are over-centralized in Guangzhou. 60% of Guangdong's institutions of higher

learning are based in Guangzhou. Figure 11 below presents the city distribution of Guangdong province. Higher education in other areas, especially the mountainous and backward areas of the northern, western and eastern parts of Guangdong, has a very weak basis. At present, university towns newly-built or under construction are also centred in large and medium cities in the Pearl River Delta area such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Foshan, Zhuhai and Dongguan, while backward areas have none. This will surely lead to even greater disparities in access to higher education and educational development between the vast mountainous areas and the Pearl River Delta area.

Figure 11. Distribution of Cities in Guangdong



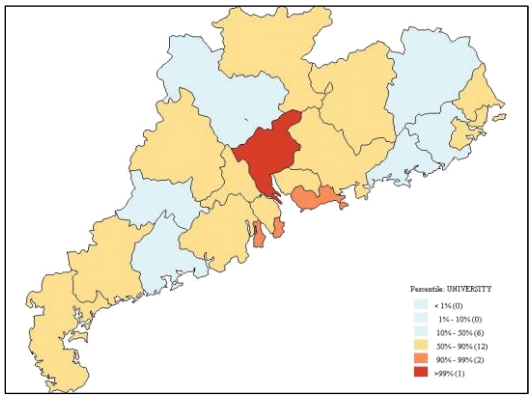
Source: (Google map, 2013).

Zhao & Du (2011) identified three features of the distribution of HE in Guangdong. First, the distribution of higher education institutions and students in Guangdong

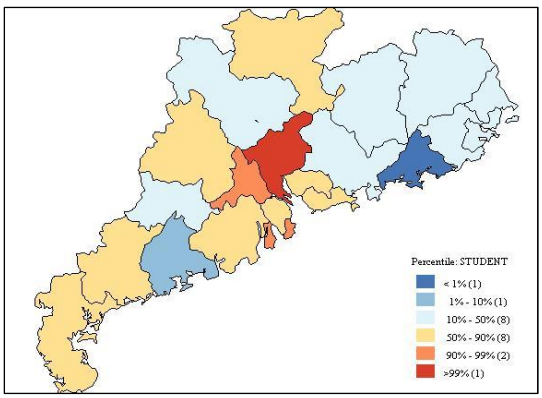
reveals a core-periphery pattern (see Figures 12(1) and 12(2)). The core of HE is Guangzhou, centre of the economy, politics and population. Second, the cities in Figure 12(3) and 12(4) (lighter in colour than the centre) with a large number of higher education institutions distributed in urban areas are characterized by their dense population, large GDP and higher socioeconomic status in the province. The sub-core cities of Guangdong are wealthy cities, Shenzhen and Zhuhai (indicated by orange in Figure 12(1)), Foshan and Zhuhai (indicated by orange in Figure 12(2)), ranked second and ninth, third and ninth by GDP respectively in 2009. Lastly, the spread of the distribution of HE is limited to Guangzhou (as indicated in Figures 12(3) and 12 (4)).

Figure 12. Distribution of HE in Guangdong

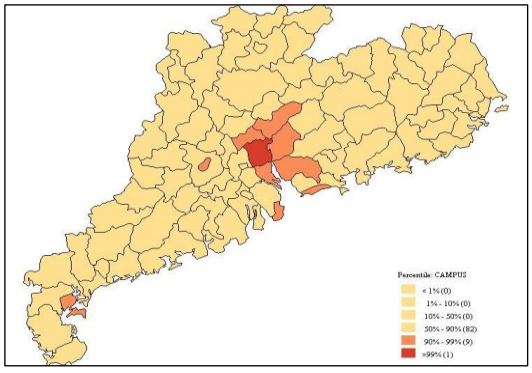
(1) Distribution of HE in Guangdong Cities (University)



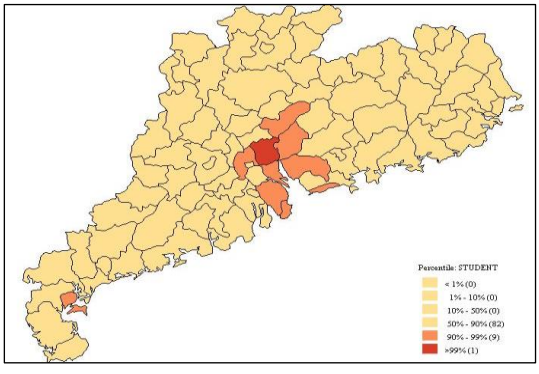
(2) Distribution of HE in Guangdong Cities (Enrolment)



(3) Distribution of HE in Guangdong Sub-city (University)



(4) Distribution of HE in Guangdong Sub-city (Enrolment)



Source: (Zhao and Du, 2011)

Development trends

Relating to the policy of decentralization, a major transformation has been made in the financing system of China's higher education as a way of alleviating the pressure of merely relying on the government for financial support because the limited financial resources of the central government cannot meet the increasingly stronger demands of the public for education. Diversified sources of financing, such as tuition fees, the profits from school-run enterprises and tax allowable contributions from businesses and individuals have formed. In addition, the provincial government has been given more flexibility to exercise their financial resources. In Guangdong, additional financial resources have been allocated to the development of higher education in terms of raising teachers' wages and improving the learning environment of higher education institutions (Mok, 2001).

This process marks a fundamental structural change in financing higher education, the introduction of the 'fee-paying' principle. In 1992, 25% of students in higher education institutions were charged fees by higher education institutions in the form of 'commissioned training' or 'fee-paying' students. In 1993, 30 higher education institutions were allowed to charge fees to students whose scores are lower than what was required. In 1994, the fee-charging policy was officially legitimized, and from 1997, all higher education institutions in Mainland China began to charge all their students tuition fees (Mok, 2001).

In addition, five higher educational institutions in Guangdong have established their own open colleges (schools of continuing education). These universities are more flexible in their management and curriculum design compared with formal

universities. At the same time, they assume responsibility for generating more revenue for the universities concerned (Mok, 2001).

Another development is the merging of universities and the establishment of a 'university city'[19] (Mok, 2001) in 1997, with the purpose of "sharing resources and facilities among universities; merging universities to enhance research and teaching quality; consolidating and strengthening the existing good work, and establishing new universities in collaboration with local governments" (ibid., p.137). Under this policy, different universities in Guangzhou attempted to merge to enhance their common strengths. Also, the 'university city' was established to draw resources and strengths together and to compensate for the limitations of Guangzhou city-run higher education institutions, in such aspects as small student population size, limited space for school buildings, and inadequate resources and faculty members (ibid., p. 139).

Summary

In summary, this chapter introduced the Chinese context, with special focus on Chinese higher education and its reform. It also highlighted the specific economic and educational development in Guangdong province, where the case study

[19] Guangzhou University city is an area designated to incorporate several higher education institutions. It is located on Xiaoguwei Island in Panyu District, Guangzhou, China. Ten local higher education institutions set up new campuses in this areas: Sun Yat-sen University, South China University of Technology, South China Normal University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong University of Technology, Guangzhou University, Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Guangdong Pharmaceutical University, Xinghai Conservatory of Music, and Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts.

university is located. The next chapter presents a detailed review of the literature concerning students' choices of higher education.

Chapter Three

The Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to consider what others have done to investigate the research problem, the methodology and methods they have used and their findings in order to identify the gap in knowledge that this research aims to fill and subsequently to develop specific research questions. This chapter first reviews the major topics in students' choice of higher education – the factors influencing their choices and information sources they use. Next, it focuses on the empirical research studies on Chinese students' choices of higher education, both for overseas studies and domestic studies. Later, it reviews the theoretical perspectives of student choice of higher education, followed by the theoretical framework of this thesis. Finally, the chapter summarizes the empirical and theoretical gaps in the research and presents the main research questions of this thesis.

Empirical Studies on Student Choice of Higher Education

I conducted extensive searches of relevant data bases, such as Scopus and Google internet searches. The search was mainly limited to publications between 2000 and 2014, and several newly published articles in 2015 were also included. The rationale for choosing this period is that it coincides with greater numbers of students choosing to study outside their own countries. This, being one of the important factors driving universities to explore reasons for students' choices in order to

compete with other universities for students (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). This review covers publications from a wide range of countries and regions, such as UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, Africa, Asia, mainland Europe and the Middle East.

Broadly, research into students' choice of and decision-making about higher education can be classified into two levels: the first is the global level explanation of why students choose to study abroad; the second is the national level of students' choice of universities and course of study, which has had little attention (Maringe, 2006). At both levels, choice factors and the information sources used by students are the two main topics (Obermeit, 2012). The next section reviews the two topics in detail.

Choice factors

Choice factors refer to the criteria used by students to rate the available options (Galotti and Mark, 1994; Kim and Gasman, 2011). Universities need to know which factors influence student's decisions to enrol at an institution in order to optimize their recruitment strategy (Obermeit, 2012).

The literature on factors influencing students' educational choices and pathways are classified into the following categories: 1) demographics, including socio-economic status, parents' occupation and education, gender/sex, and ethnicity (Brown, Varley, & Pal, 2009; Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008; Jung, 2013; Tunç, 2011; Wu, 2012); 2) characteristics of institutions, such as admission standards, accessibility and programme contents, schools' reputation, facilities, as well as the physical appearance and safety of the campus (Callender and Jackson, 2008; Imenda, Kongolo, & Grewal, 2004; Oliver and Kettley, 2010; Smyth and Banks, 2012); 3)

geographical factors, such as the location of the institution and its proximity to home (Bonnema and van der Weldt, 2008; Briggs, 2006; Kim and Gasman, 2011; Maringe, 2006; Pampaloni, 2010); 4) personal characteristics, including student aptitudes, abilities, school performance, expectation, and motivation (Cho et al., 2008; Grytnes, 2011; Hung, Chung, & Ho, 2000; Shaw, 2012; Steinberg, 2011); and 5) societal factors, such as labour market influence and government polices (Hung et al., 2000; Reay, 2010; Reimer, 2011). The next section takes one or two examples to illustrate the above categories.

Social-economic factors

Wu (2011) examined Chinese middle class parents' cultural capital and its influence on their children's accumulation of cultural capital. It found that parents arrange after-school activities, such as extracurricular tutorials, to help their children to accumulate cultural capital and thus enhance their advantage in the competitive school admission process. This study extended Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory, from focusing on the influence of parents' economic and cultural capital on children's acquisition of cultural capital within the family, to their influence on children's acquisition of cultural capital outside the family.

Tunç (2011) used responses to 427 questionnaires to investigate students' choice of technical education with reference to their socio-economic features in Tarsus Technical Education Faculty in Turkey. He found that students in this faculty were mostly from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their parents' educational levels were also low. The findings indicated that there was a strong positive relationship between social class and educational choices.

Institutional factors

Smyth & Banks (2012) used in-depth qualitative interviews from two schools in the context of Irish educational system to examine the key factors influencing students' choices of higher education. The findings revealed three types of processes: individual habitus[20]; the institutional habitus of the school in the form of the amount and type of guidance the school provided, and young people's own agency in consciously seeking out information and evaluating different choices. This research went beyond focusing on factors of individual and familial habitus that influence student choice by highlighting the effect of institutional habitus, namely the nature of guidance within the school, on the student decision-making process. Their findings pointed out the need to integrate the rational choice and social reproduction perspectives. Smyth and Bank's paper argued that people's rational decisions about higher education are bounded by their individual, familiar and institutional habitus and a student's access to information is never impartial.

Oliver & Kettley (2010) interviewed teachers and students in six institutions in the UK to investigate the influence of teacher habitus on student choice of elite universities. Their findings showed that teacher habitus, such as their political and ethical dispositions as well as their social capital, influenced student decision-making about higher education. They found two types of teachers. One type acted as facilitators for pupils to attend elite universities, as they were driven by the pressure of increasing the enrolment rates of their students at elite universities. The second group acted more as gatekeepers, and tried to save students from potentially uncomfortable experiences which might disrupt their learning. Based on these findings, the authors suggested that in order to address the problem of low

[20] For a definition of habitus, please see p. 93.

application rates of state students to elite universities, the university should be sensitive to the different views held by teachers shaping their students' attitudes towards higher education selection. It was concluded that a better rapport between the elite universities and students as well as their teachers should be built.

Geographical factors

Briggs (2006) explored the factors influencing student choice of two fields of study – accountancy and engineering – at six universities in Scotland. She investigated the top ten factors influencing Scottish undergraduates' choice of course by surveying 651 students in two disciplines (accountancy and engineering). The top three factors identified in both disciplines were: academic reputation, distance from home, and the location of the institution. Other factors varied across universities. The research highlighted the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how students make their choices. It also highlighted the importance of developing a conceptual model of consumer choice which provides a representation of the relationships between factors. Briggs raised the need for developing better marketing strategies, as all higher education institutions now have to sell their products, and marketing in higher education is "moving from a focus on brochure-ware towards relationship management with purchasers" (Briggs, 2006, p.17).

Personal factors

Shaw (2012) used a case study to investigate students' expectations of higher education and what they believed to be their parents' expectation of it. She combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. Initial questionnaires completed by 52 undergraduates starting their higher education and a group of in-depth interview with six former students three years after graduation were conducted in England. Shaw's

research revealed that expectations of better jobs, higher salaries and enhanced career prospects were the main reasons for their choices of higher education. However, the economic benefits and job prospects identified as their rationale for their earlier choice of higher education were not identified on their later reflection. Instead, more importance was attached to personal growth and fulfilment. The research suggested that the students whose parents had no experience of higher education were more encouraged to go to university with the expectation of achieving economic benefits. This research suggested that the emphasis on the economic benefits of higher education can pose a challenge for higher education in England with the policy of tuition fees and student loans. The children would be less encouraged to attend higher education courses if the potential economic gain did not become a reality, as expected. Consequently, arguing that education was a way of improving social mobility and achieving social justice would be difficult.

Grytnes (2011) examined the factors influencing Danish ninth grade students' educational trajectories. It showed that social background and personal experiences were the main factors influencing the student decision-making process. Grytnes noted that choice of post-compulsory education was a process of negotiation between the habitual understanding of opportunities, past experiences and reflections about the role of education. The author interviewed 37 pupils in different school classes with different economic capital, represented by parents' income, and parents' educational capital represented by their educational status. Six types of reasoning were found: 1) unconcerned choice, 2) obvious choice, 3) keeping choices open, 4) ambitious choice, 5) safe choice, and 6) restricted choice. It was found that people's biographical constructs and their relationship to necessity influenced their paths of reasoning. Therefore, educational choice is not only a rational assessment of

possibilities and limitations, but also a way to manage the need for a predictable and planned future. This research contributes to the understanding of young people's unequal access to educational opportunities.

Societal factors

Reay (2010) pointed out that educational policy coupled with parental involvement are influential in perpetuating educational inequalities through cultural capital. In the 'marketized field of education', parents are not only consumers within in education but also "active partners in the production of educated children" (Reay, 2010, p.76). Thus, institutions and schools are more targeted at parents to help them understand the services they offer their children. She also showed that choice policies are re-privileging the middle classes. Families in possession of economic, cultural and social capital can provide their offspring with exclusive choices compared with their working-class counterparts. Policy focusing on parents as educational consumers encourages the deployment of middle-class cultural capital, and has led to increasing social segregation between schools and pupils. Reay concluded that the new educational marketplace and policies serve to re-establish or corroborate the historical educational advantages of the upper classes or the more recently achieved status of the middle classes.

Information sources used

Choosing a college requires the student to search various resources and information. "For universities, it is essential to know what messages they should spread through which media at what time to which target group, to increase the chance of being noticed by the students and convince them to apply and enrol" (Obermeit, 2012, p.218). An overview of the information sources used by students in their decision-

making process is classified as follows: 1) internet (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009; Brown, Varley, & Pal, 2009; Kim and Gasman, 2011); 2) publications from and about universities (Briggs, 2006); 3) students' social networks (Bell et al., 2009; Pampaloni, 2010), where the important role of parents has been identified (Cho et al., 2008; Kim and Gasman, 2011); 4) rankings of universities (Brown et al., 2009; Kim and Gasman, 2011; Pampaloni, 2010); and 5) media such as television, newspapers and magazines (Kim and Gasman, 2011).

However, students' access to the above sources of information is influenced by their socioeconomic background and academic abilities (Veloutsou et al., 2005). In addition, how a student interprets information is also affected by his or her social and cultural background, which in turn leads to different choices (Brooks, 2002; McDonough, 1998; Obermeit, 2012).

To summarize: empirical studies on students' choices of HE revealed that these are influenced by a variety of factors and information sources. This evidence informs this research concerning the related perspectives involved in students' choice of higher education, particularly informative for the design of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for this research. The next section focuses on empirical studies on Chinese students' choice of higher education, which helps to identify the gap in the research that this thesis aims to fill.

Empirical Studies of Chinese Students' Choices of Higher Education

There are few related empirical research studies on Chinese students' decision-making about higher education in China. This is also evidenced in Hemsley-Brown

and Oplatka's (2015) review of higher education choices, in which only one quantitative research by Hung et al. (2000) was included. To my best knowledge, at the end of August, 2015, there were twenty-six research studies about Chinese students' choices of higher education. Classified by the educational providers who receive the students in regions, twenty-two of them were about Chinese students' choice of higher education for overseas studies, the majority of which explicitly used the push-pull theory. These research studies can be further divided into those conducted overseas, which number seven (See Table 13, following) (for example, Liu, 2010; Rudd et al., 2012) and in China, number fifteen (for example, Bodycott, 2009; Fang and Wang, 2014; Lee and Morrish, 2012; Liu, Hung, & Chung, 2013) (see Table 14[21] below). As for Chinese students' choice of domestic higher education, only two studies were found in mainland China (Sheng, 2015; To, La, Lung, & Lai, 2014) and two in Hong Kong (Lai et al., 2014; Willis and Kennedy, 2004).

[21] The references in italics both in Table 13 and 14 were added by the researcher.

Table 13. Factors Influencing Chinese Students Studying Abroad (Based on research conducted overseas)

Reference	Method	Research participants	Push Factors	Pull Factors
1.Gong & Huybers (2015)	Focus group interviews	Chinese students enrolled at two Australian Universities		• University ranking • Destination safety
2.Rudd et al.,(2012)	Interview	Chinese students enrolled in a Business school in UK		• Academic reputation • Western culture • Facilities • School reputation • Location of the institution
3.Lawson (2011)	Survey	Prospective students, parents, alumni		• Quality education • Tuition costs • Living costs • Safety • Prospects for PR • Opportunities to work
4.Liu (2010)	survey	Postgraduate marketing students at four British universities	• Intrinsic goals • Career-related aspiration	
5.Bodycott (2009)	Survey & Interview	Chinese students and parents	• Perceived higher quality of education in developed country • International/intercultural experiences	• Onsite accommodation • Range of programmes available • English-speaking environment • Language and academic support services • General facilities-buildings and grounds • International education experience during courses • Relatives or friends studying in the area • Social and emotional support services
6.Chen (2007)	Survey and Interview	Students who come from China and other countries enrolled in two Ontario universities	• Political environment • Educational system • Social capital • Future career • Programme offering	• Visa/immigration possibility from third countries • Academic quality • Environment (safety/climate) • Culture/Language • Geographical proximity • Location • Financial aid • Alumni/Friends
7.Mazzarol & Soutar (2002)	Survey	Students from China, Indonesia, Taiwan and India	• Perception that study abroad is better than local study • Students' ability to enter local university • Desire to understand 'West' • Intention to migrate	• Quality and reputation of the university • Quality of the academic staff • Alumni base • Geographical proximity

Source: Based on Liu, Elston, & Zhou (2014) and the researcher's own compilation

Table 14 provides a summary of the research studies conducted in China on factors influencing Chinese students studying abroad.

Table 14. Factors Influencing Chinese Students Studying Abroad (Based on research conducted in China)

Reference	Research approach	Push factors	Pull factors
1. Fang & Wang (2014)	Case study Questionnaires	• Factors related to domestic higher education and overseas higher education	• Economic condition • Academic aptitude • Future plans
2. Liu, Hung, & Chung (2013)	Survey		• Expected economic returns • Employment prospects
3. Bodycott & Lai (2012)	Survey & Interview	• Interest • Influence of the alumni • Parents' influence	• Freedom, prosperity and openness of the city • relatives there
4. Lee & Morrish (2012)	Interview	• Confucianism • Parents' influence	
5. Liu, Kong, & Zhong (2012)	Survey	• China's international cultural exchange programme • The education methods in China • Lack of enrolment opportunities	• The different foreign cultural experience • New knowledge and skills • Different education method • Employment prospects
6. Dong (2012)	Literature method	• The rapid development of Chinese national economy • Family funding to support their children's education fees • The Chinese government's more lenient study abroad policy • Diversified educational choices in China	
7. Hong (2010)	Econometric analysis	• Appearance of the study abroad agency • Personal environment	
8. Wu, Palinkas, & He (2010)	Literature method	• Perceived national power gap between China and developed countries • Foreign degree recognized in China • Higher wages for returnees than local graduates	• Provide scholarship • Lower entrance requirements • Issue working visa for students after they graduate • The degree of social welfare • Respected degree higher that the home country • Wage levels in host country

Continued from the above table			
Reference	**Research approach**	**Push factors**	**Pull factors**
9. Yan (2010)	Survey		• Supervisors' research area and academic level • Reputation of the university • Research funding
10. Lu, Mavondo, & Qiu (2009)	Self-completed questionnaire	• Motivation to live and work overseas • Availability of sponsorship • Well-designed information website in local language	• University ranking • Range and quality of services offered by host university • Well-designed university website
11. Lowe (2007)	Survey & Interview	• Greater opportunity • To learn more • Becomes a better person	• better job opportunities • potentially higher salaries
12. Li & Bray (2007)	Survey & Interview		• Job prospects • Ethnic identity • Merger of Chinese and Western cultures
13.Yang (2007)	Survey & In-depth interview	• Gain Western experience • Have international exposure • Learn western culture • Improve English • Difficult to gain entrance to Chinese universities • Become better prepared for their career in the future • Conceptions that overseas education is better • Family's financial background • Have broader perspective on life • Travel	• Future immigration opportunities • High quality of education • Lower costs of study and living • Wide range of programmes
14. Zheng & Dai (2006)	Survey	• The possibility of study abroad	• The teaching quality of the foreign university • The reputation of the university • The opportunity to improve English • Broaden social networks • Experience Western culture • The possibility of immigration
15. He (2005)	Literature method comparative analysis	• Lower quality of educational research • Resources distributed unevenly	

Source: Based on Liu, Elston, & Zhou (2014) and the researcher's own compilation

The following two sections outline several representative research studies on Chinese students' decision-making about overseas and domestic education. The review of these research studies are presented in reverse chronological order.

For overseas higher education

Fang & Wang (2014) used the push and pull theory to explore factors influencing Chinese students' choices of transnational higher education in W University, a public provincial university in the east part of China. It showed that Chinese students were affected by both push and pull factors in their choice. The pull factors were the economic condition, academic aptitude, and future plans, while the push factors were the disadvantages of domestic higher education. In addition, students' choices were largely influenced by the information channels they accessed and study programme characteristics. It also revealed that students use transnational education as a way to gain access to high-quality domestic and overseas higher education institutions.

Liu, Hung, & Chung (2013) used a quantitative approach to analyse Mainland Chinese Students choices of major subject of study in making decisions about overseas education. 12,961 senior secondary students were sampled. The data was analysed using human capital theory. It was concluded that expected economic returns and employment had a significant impact on students' choice of major, when factors such as family background and individual characteristics were controlled for. The conclusion suggested that higher education services should focus on developing more programmes in majors which have potential higher economic returns or good employment prospects.

Rudd, Djafarova, & Waring (2012) used a qualitative approach to explore factors which influence students' decision making about overseas education. 51 interviews

were conducted with Chinese students at a business school in the UK. It was found that Chinese students valued academic reputation, Western culture, facilities, the reputation of the school, and the city where the institution was located.

Lee & Morrish (2012) applied a qualitative approach to explore how in-grained cultural values influenced Chinese students' decisions to study abroad. Eleven students and nine parents who were in the process of making a decision about higher education abroad were interviewed. The results showed that Chinese traditional values, such as 'filial piety' rooted in Confucianism and child-centeredness exerted a huge impact on students and parents' decision-making. In addition, parents played a significant role in their children's decision to study abroad and children tend to be respectful and receptive to their parents' wishes in their choice of education. The conclusion was that Chinese parents should be targeted to make marketing strategies for educational provision effective.

Similarly, Bodycott & Lai (2012) also examined the influence of Chinese culture in students' choosing cross border higher education. Both questionnaires and interviews were used in this research. The questionnaires were used to discover a list of factors and information sources gathered to aid students' decision-making. Subsequently, twenty-four students were interviewed concerning their perceptions of both their parents' and their own roles in decision making. Significant differences were found between the role and focus of the students and their parents in the process of decision making, which was consistent with values such as filial piety advocated by Confucianism.

Liu (2010) used primary data collected from postgraduate marketing students at four British universities to assess their motives, expectations and preparedness for

postgraduate marketing education. Factor analysis was adopted and it was found that students were primarily motivated by intrinsic goals, such as the intention to further develop their intellectual abilities and to broaden their horizons, followed by career-related aspirations. In addition, it was also found that students have a relatively low perception of their preparedness for the course but high expectations of the various support and practical experience they hoped would be provided by the course. It was suggested that the differences between international students and their British counterparts should be taken into consideration in order to set up effective support mechanisms for overseas students. In addition, business schools should provide more marketing experience for students to enhance students' career opportunities.

Bodycott (2009) applied the push-pull theory to examine the factors that influence mainland Chinese students' choices of university abroad. By applying mixed methods, 251 parents and 100 students were first asked to fill in questionnaires and later, focus group interviews were conducted with volunteer participants who had previously completed the questionnaires. It was found that mainland Chinese students relied heavily on exhibitions/fairs, friends, and relatives for information sources, while their reasons for studying abroad were higher quality education providing international/intercultural experience, improved employment opportunities as well as the possibility of immigration. All these factors were valued by both students and parents. The results highlighted the major differences and similarities between the perspectives of parents and students. Parents were more focused on the long term benefits, such as migration and employment, while students were keener on the qualities of the experience of studying abroad. It was suggested that Chinese culture influenced by Confucianism should be taken into consideration to achieve effective marketing.

Lowe (2007) used a mixed method of research to investigate the factors valued by Chinese first-year undergraduates in their choice of higher education in UK universities as well as in Chinese universities. The targeted student cohorts were in universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an. Lowe used a questionnaire to obtain a list of factors influencing students' decisions to go to university. It was found that the notions of 'greater opportunity', 'to learn more' and 'becomes a better person' were greatly valued by the students. In addition, better job opportunities and potentially higher salaries were among the top ten priorities. Interviews conducted with students chosen from the three cohort cities supported the questionnaire's findings. They also revealed that Chinese students generally value education highly and see it as the gateway to a wider range of social and cultural opportunities.

For domestic higher education

Only four research studies concerning Chinese students' decision-making about domestic higher education, two in Hong Kong (Lai et al., 2014; Willis and Kennedy, 2004) and two in mainland China (Sheng, 2015; To et al., 2014) were found. They are reviewed below.

Sheng (2015) employed the mixed method to examine the gender differences in parents' and students' choices of undergraduate subjects in Beijing, the capital city of China. 2,200 students were chosen from 10 schools in this city. 47 students and 50 parents were subsequently interviewed. The study revealed that students' choices of undergraduate subjects are strongly gender-differentiated. It also showed that family habitus, the social-classed views of parents, impacts students' choices: students from working-class made less gender-stereotypical choices than that from the middle class.

To, La, Lung, & Lai (2014) used the theory of planned behaviour to examine the students' motivation for further studies in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao. 1,000 final-year students at higher education institutions in the above locations were invited to take part in an online survey, with 321 completed. Interviews were conducted with a small group of students in Macao. It revealed that family and friends significantly influenced students' intention to pursue further studies. Suggestions were that higher education administrators should use social media and alumni to create positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Lai, Gibson, & Muthaly (2014) explored students' decision making about higher education in Hong Kong. 314 questionnaires were analysed. The results suggested that parental influence was less than that of academics and/or friends. One possible explanation was that parents were less knowledgeable than the school counsellors. Previous and current students were heavily relied on by the potential students as in the Chinese collectivistic culture; information is more often acquired through interpersonal communication and word of mouth. In addition, school open days provided parents with important access to gaining direct experience of the college and the chance to make contact with college personnel. It was suggested that educational services should focus on post-purchase satisfaction for students, as they could help to generate new business.

Willis & Kennedy (2004) identified the major factors motivating students in Hong Kong to study foreign programmes within the home country. Both questionnaires and interviews were used. The results found that factors such as internet sites, exhibitions, and brochures and friends were important considerations for students.

They also revealed how students' expectations change over time with the accumulation of their own educational experience.

To summarize: the above section provided a detailed review of the empirical studies into students' higher education choices. Specific attention was placed on research into Chinese students' choices of higher education. Several gaps have been identified. First, research into Chinese students' choices of higher education mainly focused on students' choice of overseas studies, most of which used the push-pull theory (for example, Liu, 2010; Rudd et al., 2012). Related research into Chinese students' domestic higher education is quite limited (except for Lai et al., 2014; Sheng, 2015; To et al., 2014; Willis and Kennedy, 2004). Second, as far as sampling is concerned, the great majority of the studies tended to focus on high school student and undergraduate samples. There is a lack of research into the postgraduate students, whose higher educational experience is believed to be different from that of undergraduates (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015; Rounsaville, 2011). Third, most research studies explaining student choice of higher education only used survey methods for calculating the major influencing factors, which lacked any specific theoretical underpinning. There is a lack of any deep understanding of Chinese students' choices of domestic higher education with reference to their specific circumstances.

The next section summarizes the major theories used in the literature to explain factors influencing students' choice of higher education. These in turn inform the theoretical framework of this thesis, which is discussed at the end of the chapter.

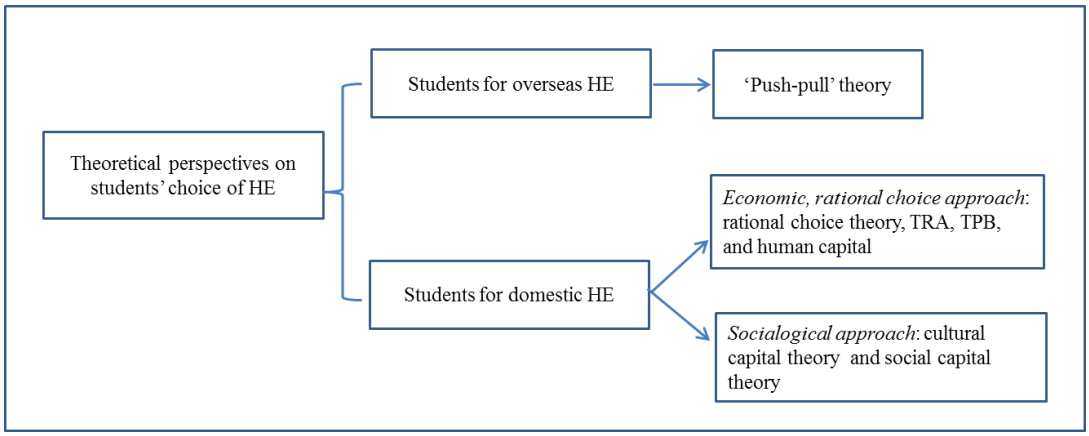
Theoretical Perspectives on Student Choice of Higher Education

The review of the major theories concerning students' choice of HE are classified according to students for overseas or domestic HE studies (see Figure 13 below). At the international level, the major theory used to explain the global flow of students from home countries to host countries is the 'push-pull' theory (Li and Bray, 2007; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). This theory tries to illustrate both the 'push' factors in the home country and the 'pull' factors of the destination country. The 'push' factors are the adverse conditions in the home country that push an individual to a new destination for higher education. The 'pull' factors are the favourable conditions of the host country which attract the students to select it as a place of study (Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). As evident in the empirical research above, this theory has been extensively used to explain students' choices of overseas higher education (for example, Bodycott, 2009; Lawson, 2011; Liu, 2010; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Rudd et al., 2012). However, this thesis focuses on students' choice of postgraduate education in China, where the push-pull theory does not fit, consequently, a detailed of review of the theory is not presented here.

At the national level, explanations for factors influencing students' choice of domestic higher education can be mainly divided into frameworks that emphasise economic, rational choices and those emphasising social (or socio-cultural) reproduction (Smyth and Banks, 2012). From a rational choice perspective, students' choices are seen as processes of assessing the relative costs and potential benefits for each option (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). The rational choice theory (McCoy and Smyth, 2010), the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Law & Yuen, 2012; Zhang, 2007) and its extension, the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (To et al., 2014), as well as human capital theory (Hung et al., 2000; Jimenez and Salas-Velasco, 2000;

Menon et al., 2007) are the major theories used in the rational economic approach. In contrast, the social reproduction theoretical frameworks focus on how individuals' possession of different economic, cultural, and social capital ultimately influences their individual choice of higher education (Cho et al., 2008; Davies, Qiu, & Davies, 2014; Gao, 2011; Obermeit, 2012; Reay, 2010; Rounsaville, 2011; Sheng 2012; Smyth and Banks, 2012; Tunç, 2011; Wu, 2008).

Figure 13. Major Theories Used to Explain Students' Choice of HE



Source: compiled by the researcher

The next section reviews the major theories in the rational economic approach, namely the rational choice theory, the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour. As human capital theory forms the theoretical framework of this thesis, to avoid repetition, it is discussed in detail in the theoretical framework at the end of this chapter.

Rational choice theory

Rational choice theory assumes that consumers are rational and evaluate all the information available to them so that they can make rational choices according to their preferences when making decisions. It is based on the following axioms regarding consumer preferences (Green, 2002, p.5).

(1) The consumer faces a known set of alternative choices.
(2) For any pair of alternatives (A and B, say), the consumer either prefers A to B, prefers B to A, or is indifferent between A and B. This is the Axiom of Completeness.
(3) These preferences are transitive. That is, if a consumer prefers A to B and B to C, then she necessarily prefers A to C. If she is indifferent between A and B, and indifferent between B and C, then she is necessarily indifferent between A and C.
(4) The consumer will choose the most preferred alternatives. If the consumer is indifferent between two or more alternatives that are preferred to all others, he or she will choose one of those alternatives – with the specific choice from among them remaining indeterminate.

Thus, rational behaviour means behaviour that is in accordance with the above axioms. The alternative preferences are presented with a utility function, which assigns a numerical value to each possible alternative facing the decision-maker (Green, 2002). It is assumed that agents are maximizing utility as decision-makers, but with certain constraints (Green, 2002). In summary, the generally accepted assumptions of rational choice theory are: first, rational action involves utility maximization; second, it is possible for the agent to rank their available options and an arithmetical calculation can be made based on the agent's preferences; third, the agent's preference order is transitive and each individual maximizes the expected value of his own payoff by measuring the utility of each choice; fourth, it applies to agents as individuals, and finally, agents make choices within constraints (Green and Shapiro, 1994). According to the above assumptions, choice is 'rational' only when an individual makes a feasible choice based on all the information available that

results in the highest possible value and which is not prohibited by constraints. It assumes also full information is available on which to base the choice (Green, 2002).

One major argument around rational choice theory is whether individuals have complete information about the choice alternatives available and/or are able to make the extensive computations called for by conventional rational choice assumptions (Green, 2002). This problem exists in applying the traditional rational choice theory to examine students' decision-making processes about higher education as well. This is because firstly, it is difficult to calculate the exact expected utility of each student choice as some of student preferences cannot be assigned an exact numerical value. Secondly, even if a student can assign each preference with an exact numerical value, it cannot be ensured that her/his choice is a rational calculation of economic benefits and costs and nothing more. "People may act impulsively, emotionally, or merely by force of habit" (Hechter, 1997, p.192). Similarly, Mowjee's concluded that students were driven by 'rational' motives as well as 'non-rational' motives when making their educational choices (Mowjee, 2013). Lastly, the complete information required for rational choice alternatives may be hard for every student to obtain, as it is constrained by their varied social class and networks of social relationships (Bosetti, 2007; Coleman, 1988; Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). In a recently published article by Fredman (2015), using the rational choice theory to explain student motivation for higher education has been challenged.

In response to the limitations of the traditional rational choice theory in explaining educational decision making, new sociological rational choice (SRC) was developed. SRC is a hybrid between sociological and economic theory. It not only adopts the basic axiom from economic theory that individuals are rational decision makers, but

also adopts the idea that educational decisions are always embedded in social contexts to serve both economic and social goals (Jæger, 2007). Therefore, contrary to conventional economic theory, which typically conceptualizes returns to education as economic ones, new sociological rational choice theory expands the utility of educational decisions to a broader social dimension (Jæger, 2007). Apart from economic returns, "the utility of educational decisions also includes social returns such as preserving existing social networks, maintaining family status, and obtaining social recognition from peers" (Jæger, 2007, p.452). Thus, the total utility of educational decisions includes both economic and social returns to education.

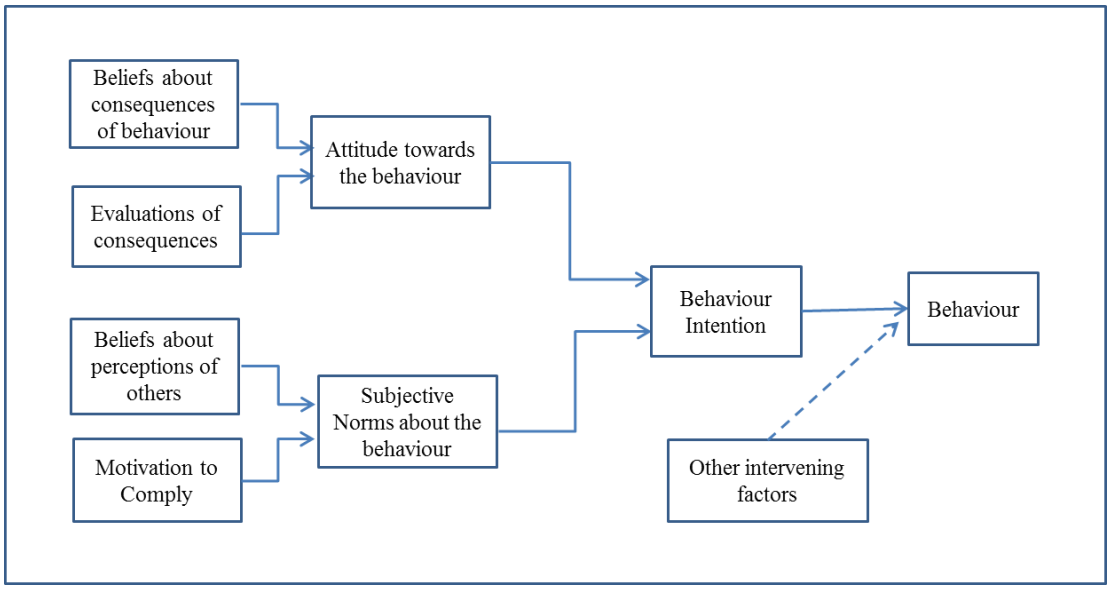
Three basic assumptions are behind the new SRC model: firstly, individuals are utility-seeking from education; secondly, students are reasonably rational in the sense that they are capable of making informed educational choices based on the expected returns to their choices; and thirdly, based on the available information and subject to constraints and uncertainty, students choose education to maximize total expected utility (Jæger, 2007). Therefore, students are seen as rational decision makers aiming to maximize the expected returns (the greatest benefit) in their educational choices. However, "while this new SRC represents an important theoretical advance over traditional sociological and economic models of educational attainment, empirical tests of its key assumptions are few" (Jæger, 2007, p.452).

Theory of reasoned action (TRA)

The TRA developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) is used to explain behavioural intentions (see Kumar, 2013). It is a well-known social-psychological attitude-behaviour model on behavioural intention (Kumar, 2013). According to this theory, an individual's behaviour is determined by the individual's intention. The intention is

determined by the individual's attitude and subjective norms towards the behaviour. The attitude towards the behaviour refers to the individual's evaluation of the potential outcomes of performing that behaviour. The subjective norm refers to influence from social pressure the individual feels when deciding to perform an action or not. The attitude towards the behaviour and the subjective norms are, in turn, influenced by behavioural beliefs and normative beliefs (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Theory of Reasoned Action



Source: Reproduced from Fishbein and Ajzen(1975)

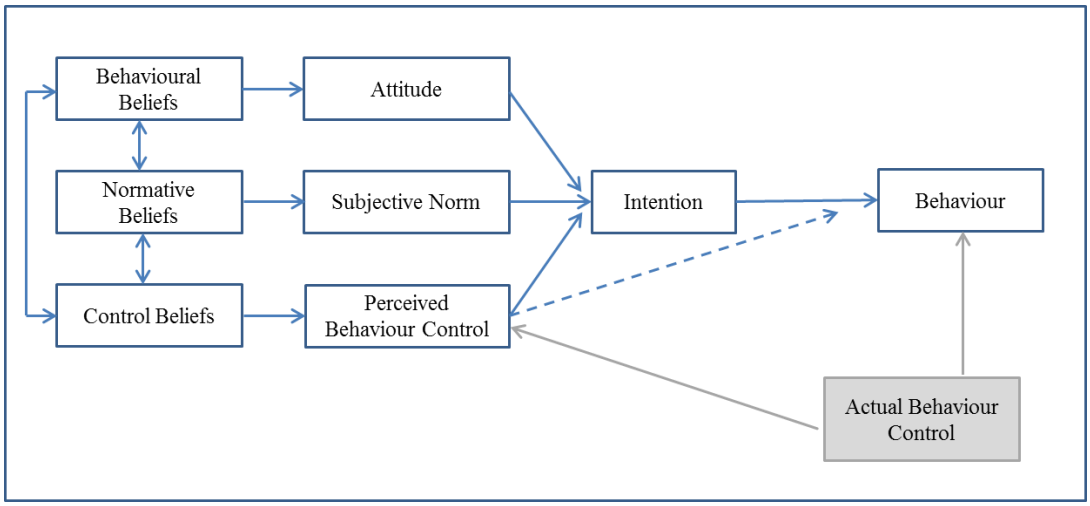
The TRA model has been extensively used to explain behavioural intentions in marketing, information technology, health education, and other fields (Kumar, 2013). In recent years, it has been used to explain students' choice of specific fields of study. For example, Law & Yuen (2012) used this model to examine the factors influencing students' choice of accountancy as a major subject of study in Hong Kong. Also, Zhang (2007) applied this model to examine students' intentions to

choose an information systems major for undergraduate study. However, the TRA has been criticized as behaviour is not solely subject to the control of the actor; additional variables, which mediates between intention and behaviour, are necessary (Warshaw, 1980). In response to this criticism, Ajzen (1985) put forward the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) with an additional variable, which was updated in 2006 (see Kumar, 2013). This is discussed in the following section.

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

According to Ajzen (2006), behaviour beliefs (beliefs about the potential consequences of behaviour), normative beliefs (beliefs about the normative expectations of others), and control beliefs (beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede the behaviour) guide human behaviour. Behavioural beliefs produce an attitude toward the behaviour, both favourable and unfavourable; normative beliefs result in perceived social pressure or subjective norms; and control beliefs bring about perceived behaviour control (ibid.). The attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perception of behaviour control determine the behaviour intention (ibid.). Given a sufficient degree of actual control over the behaviour, the individual will carry out his or her intentions when the opportunity arises (ibid.). In this model, intention is regarded as the immediate antecedent of behaviour (ibid.) (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Reproduced from Ajzen (2006)

Although this theory has been extensively applied to a wide range of research topics and recently to the study of students' choice of higher education (for example, To et al., 2014), there are some limitations. The first limitation is that both the TRA and TPB rely on the researcher to accurately identify the consumers' attributes that inform their attitude, whereas many situations are very complex and involve varied conscious and sub-conscious factors, which in turn influence consumer attitudes (Bray, 2008). In addition, The model is based on the assumption that consumers cognitively process comprehensive alternatives prior to performing actions, while some behaviour in certain circumstances might not go through attitude evaluation, for example, in the context of clothes shopping, where some customer's overall affective evaluation and hedonistic impulses influence their consumer decisions (ibid.). Further, although TRA and TPB have been extensively used in Western cultures, it is not clear whether the assumptions underpinning them could be applied to other cultures (ibid.).

To summarize: the above rational economic theories assume that decision-makers are rational, based on the principle of utility maximizing. However, the central argument here is that whether the students' choices of higher education are only made on the basis of the rational calculation of costs and benefits (Smyth and Banks, 2012). In contrast, social reproduction theorists focus on what and how an individual's economic, cultural and social capital influences his or her ultimate educational choice. Each approach has been criticised for its inability to fully account for students' decision-making about higher education (Davies et al., 2014; Smyth and Banks, 2012). Therefore, there is a tendency to consider them together as "both attempts complement each other" (Obermeit, 2012, p.211). For example, Rounsaville (2011) combined these two approaches together with a combined theoretical framework of human, cultural and social capital in her doctoral thesis to explain international students' decision-making about overseas higher education study.

I was not able to find any research combining these two approaches to investigate Chinese student choice of domestic higher education, although the empirical review above did show that their choices of higher education were not merely based on the rational calculation of costs and benefits, but were also heavily influenced by significant others, such as parents and friends (Tunç, 2011; Lee and Morrish, 2012; Rudd et al., 2012). Based on my experience, I also believed that a single approach is not enough to explain students' choice of higher education sufficiently. Thus, this research intends to fill the two gaps identified in the previous section[22] and this section, by using a combined theoretical framework of human, cultural, and social

[22] See p.74.

capital to explore students' decision-making about postgraduate education and how their decisions were made within their specific circumstances.

The next section presents the combined theoretical framework of human, cultural, and social capital theory.

Theoretical Framework of This Thesis

This section introduces the theoretical framework of this research. The human, cultural and social capital theories as well as *guanxi*, a Chinese variant of social capital, were combined to form the theoretical framework of this thesis. As these theories originated from different disciplines within social science and have different emphasis, it is important to explain how they are compatible in understanding students' decision-making about higher education.

First, although the three capital theories originate from different disciplines, Economics and Sociology, both are revelvant to and have been applied to understanding the problems and practices in the field of education, albeit from different angles. Therefore, intergrating the capital theories of both fields aims to produce a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding students' choice of postgraduate education than each would do on its own. As Bourdieu claims (2003, p.46): "It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory. "

Second, although the three forms of capital are different, they are interconnected as the accumulation and growth of one could not be fully achieved without the

employment of the other two, which in turn, impacts on the the other two's production (Bourdieu, 2003; Coleman, 1988; Keeley, 2007; Schuller, 2001). Students' reasons for choosing what and where to study are too complex to be fully accounted by a single one of these theories (Davies et al., 2014; Obermeit, 2012; Smyth and Banks, 2012). In addition, it is impossible to achieve the main aim of this thesis, which is to arrive at a deep understanding of students' decision-making pertinent to their specific econmic, social and cultural circumanstances, with the usage of only one of the three theories.

The next sections focus on the development of each theory, and then its relevance to educational decision-making is discussed. A brief explanation of the concept of 'capital' is given before the discussion of each capital theory.

Explaining 'capital'

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), capital is accumulated labour, and its appropriation allows individuals to "appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (p.241). It takes time to accumulate and has the potential capacity to produce profits (Bourdieu, 2003).

Bourdieu (2003) claimed that the functioning of the social world could not be fully explained without the introduction of capital in all its forms, which he classified into three forms: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. These capitals, under certain conditions, can be converted into one another and into economic capital. The accumulation and conversions of each capital needs investment, such as investment in labour-time (Bourdieu, 2003).

Human capital theory

Human capital has its origins in classical economics, for example, Adam Smith. Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker are the two most important modern pioneers of human capital theory. Schultz (1961) pointed out that the useful skills and knowledge that people acquire are a form of capital, and the growth of which may be the most distinctive feature of the economic system in Western societies. Becker (1993) showed how the analysis of investments in human capital can also facilitate understanding a variety of behaviour in developing countries and countries with very different cultures, instead of only in the Western world. Both recognize that human capital investment constitutes one of the most important forms of capital investment, both for individuals and nations. According to Becker (1993, p.15-16), "all forms of capital, human capital included, share a common feature in the sense that they yield income and other useful outputs over long periods of time". Thus defined, schooling, a computer training course, expenditure on medical care etc. are capital too in the sense that they improve health, raise earnings, etc. Consequently, expenditure on education, training, medical care, etc., are investments in capital. He also pointed out that education and training are the most important human capital investments. Schools and firms are often where particular skills can be fostered. "The development of certain skills requires both specialization and experience and can be had partly from firms and partly from schools" (Becker, 1993, p.51).

Defining human capital

Human capital refers to "an individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies and traits which can be beneficial for their personal, social and economic well-being" (Schultz, 1971, p.8). Woodhall (1987) added that an individual's ability to be

adaptable and trainable is a crucial part of his/her human capital. The uniqueness of human capital is that it cannot be separated from a person. "...you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put" (Becker, 1993, p.16).

Human capital and individual investment

At an individual level, Schultz (1971) pointed out the prospects of larger future earnings play a strong motivation in the case of students who attend schools as an investment in particular skills. He also maintained that education can improve the capabilities of people and thus enhance their future earnings. Besides, educational diplomas are usually regarded as indicators of human capital by employers in the labour market (Healy and Côté, 2001). Therefore, returns to education provide an important incentive for human capital accumulation. Human capital accumulation is said to influence the human well-being both directly and indirectly (Healy and Côté, 2001). It directly increases the human qualities and skills necessary for economic production and reproduction, while it indirectly enlarges individual opportunity sets by giving people new possibilities to enrich their lives (Zhang, Zhao, Park, & Song, 2005).

Costs and benefits

It is difficult to measure exactly the total costs of an individual's investment in formal education because there are two forms of cost: public and private, which are not easy to separate from each other. In most countries, higher education is supported by public finance, but investment in it is generally considered as private investment. Individuals themselves mainly responsible for investing time and money,

but the benefits of this investment tend to be more direct and greater to the individual than to society in general (Schultz, 1971).

The costs of individuals' investment in higher education are both direct and indirect. Direct costs include tuition fees, living costs, and expenditure on books and equipment (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001), while indirect costs such as time, effort and the opportunity costs of forgone income or the loss of job opportunities while attending university are less obvious (Schultz, 1971).

Although the costs of individual investment in higher education are never small, especially in China, it is hoped that the future economic and social benefits brought by this investment can outpace its costs. Becker (1993, p.17) suggests that "the earnings of more educated people are almost always well above average, although the gains are generally larger in less-developed countries." Higher education thus adds to the economic potential of the individual concerned, reflected in his/her capacity to do more jobs which, without education, would otherwise be impossible, or in having an improved ability to do various jobs which might initially have been considered inappropriate. While maturity, intrinsic ability, and experience gained on the job are all recognised as making a contribution to human capital, human capital theorists assert that increments in education have an additional effect (Lindley, 1981).

Rates of return

Rates of return (ROR) refer to profitability by measuring the costs and benefits of human capital investment (Schultz, 1971). When applied to educational investment, they include both private rates of return and social rates of return (Li, Zhao, & Morgan, 2011). The Mincerian ROR of Jacob Mincer (1974) and internal ROR are the two methods used to calculate private ROR (Li, Zhao, & Morgan, 2011). The

former is "the percentage increase in earnings resulting from an additional year of schooling" (Li et al., 2011, p.46), while the later "calculates the discount rate that equalizes the real costs of education during the period of study to the real gains made as a consequence of this study" (ibid.).

To calculate the rates of return, the costs of acquiring the capital, tuition fees and opportunity costs are included, as well as the future financial benefits (Schultz, 1971). However, it is not easy to calculate the exact rates of return since the benefits and costs are not always certain (Healy and Côté, 2001). Although students invest in higher education with the expectation of receiving higher economic or social returns, the costs and benefits of such investment are not very tangible. For example, the benefits of education are not generated immediately, but manifested throughout the individual's whole life. Further, people's investment is not totally based on calculating rates of return; other people's opinions, such as families and friends, may influence their choice. The investment of human capital in education is often considered as an investment by the whole family (Healy and Côté, 2001).

It is empirically confirmed that the ROR to education in China has increased as educational provision has expanded. It rose from 13% in 2000 to 18.9% in 2004, which is higher than the world average level (Li et al., 2011). Some have attributed this phenomenon to the effects of cost compensation, as the government allocates increasingly higher subsidies to college students (ibid.).

Sorting: 'signalling' and 'screening'

Sorting is an extension of human capital theory, which includes both signalling and screening (Weiss, 1995). Both signalling and screening were used to 'sort' workers based on their educational qualifications. Employers need to 'screen' or 'filter' out

potential employees with certain educational credentials. Graduates from universities with higher reputations 'signal' their probable superior productivity to potential employers through their education diplomas (Weiss, 1995). The signalling hypothesis assumes that higher educational credentials help their holders to signify to employers that they possess the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities required by them (Weiss, 1995). The screening hypothesis assumes that the major economic function of education is to help employers screen out the right individuals with the required capacities (Li, Ding, & Morgan, 2009). Both signalling and screening imply a positive relationship between education and salary. The signalling effect is reported to be influential in the labour market for higher education graduates in China (Li et al., 2009).

Human capital and educational decision-making

Human capital theory has been used extensively to explain students' decision-making about higher education. When applied to education, it presumes that people invest in themselves through education in that education improves their capabilities and thereby increases their future earnings (Schultz, 1971). It is supposed that "schooling raises the potentiality of higher earnings and productivity arming people with knowledge, skills, and a way of analysing problems" (Becker, 1993, p.19).

According to human capital investment, "students evaluate possible choices by comparing the expected benefits with the expected costs associated with an investment in a college education" (Paulsen, 2001, p.56-57). Thus, students make a choice based on the principle of "the highest utility of net expected benefits" (DesJardins and Toutkoushian, 2005, p.193). The costs include both direct costs, such as costs of tuition, books, living expenses, and opportunity costs, such as

forgone earnings. The benefits might be particularly high salaries for university graduates compared to high school graduates, and non-monetary benefits such as a lower likelihood of being unemployed and better health. In conclusion, this approach stresses the rationality of the choice and requires a calculation of measureable costs and benefits (Vrontis et al., 2007).

This model has also been recently applied to explaining Chinese students' decision-making about higher education (Hung, Chung, & Ho, 2000). Hung et al (2000) measured the effects of students' expected rates of return from higher education to their intention to pursue higher education or to enter the labour market. They used survey data in 1997 of 1,513 senior secondary students in Shenzhen, a Special Economic Zone in China, which dominated by a market-oriented economy. They found that 90% of students in the study preferred to have higher education as they expected a much higher rate of return to higher education than opting to go to work. They also found that students' expected rates of return to higher education had a positive and significant effect on their intention to pursue higher education, after factors such as the effect of gender, family background and ability were controlled for. This research is important as the findings confirm the positive relationship between human capital theory and the choice of higher education.

Critiques of human capital theory

Although a number of researchers supported this model, it nevertheless has its critics. Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) point out that the utilitarian reasons for making choices were usually filtered out by preconceptions derived from family background, cultural and life history. Factors like expectations and socio-economic background influence the choice of college as well (Obermeit, 2012). The concept of

rationality was also criticised by psychologists. Consumer psychologists regard individual behaviour as highly complex and influenced by several factors, hence "economic considerations were only one of these factors, while psychological and sociological influences account for most of the remaining variables" (Menon, 2004, p.269). In summary, human capital theory cannot fully explain students' decision-making process as students' choice of higher education is not only based on the rational calculation of benefits and costs.

Cultural capital theory

The development of the concept of cultural capital is mainly attributed to the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. It was extended from his conceptualisation of social capital, which includes social networks and connections as well as sociability (Bourdieu, 1986).

Defining cultural capital

Bourdieu (1977) defined cultural capital as part of social capital, specifically, "the sum of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (as cited in Portes, 1998, p.3). Cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to the cultural advantages an individual enjoys which are acquired through education, family, and other sources that confer social power and status upon that person (Bourdieu, 2003). It is an indicator and generator of social status (DiMaggio, 1982). Hence "the badges of cultural distinction denote group acceptance and membership" (Morgan, 2008, p.37).

Habitus

The conceptualization of cultural capital theory is closely rated to the concept of 'habitus'. Literally, habitus refers to "a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body" (Jenkins, 2002, p.74). Habitus is often defined as "dispositions, which includes both cognitive and affective factors: thinking and feeling" (Jenkins, 2002, p.76). It encompasses three distinct meanings: (a) 'the result of an organising action', a set of outcomes which Bourdieu describes as approximating to 'structure'; (b) a 'way of being' or a 'habitual state'; and (c) a 'tendency', 'propensity' or 'inclination'. Two characteristics of dispositions are first, they are acquired through social experience and, second, they are durable (Jenkins, 2002, p.79). Bourdieu relates habitus to practice that "dispositions which make up the habitus are the 'generative basis' of practices", "the habitus disposes actors to do certain things; it provides a basis for the generation of practices" (Jenkins, 2002, p.78).

Further, Bourdieu distinguishes between the habitus embodied in individuals, and habitus as a collective, homogenous phenomenon (Jenkins, 2002). First, habitus is acquired by individuals through experience and explicit socialisation in early life. Life and subsequent experience is then a process of adjustment between subjectivity (habitus) and objective reality (Jenkins, 2002). Second, habitus as a shared body of dispositions is the outcome of collective history. He argues that "the objective world in which groups exist, and the objective environment – other people and things – as experienced from the point of view of individual members of the group, is the product of the past practice of this generation and previous generations" (Jenkins, 2002, p.80). Habitus is the source of 'objective' practices, "but is itself a set of

'subjective' generative principles produced by the 'objective' patterns of social life" (Jenkins, 2002, p.82).

Bourdieu responds to the accusation of the determinism of habitus in three ways. First, he argues that habitus only operates in relation to a social field. The same habitus can produce very different practices[23] depending upon what is going on in that *field*[24]. Secondly, habitus can be transformed by changed circumstances, and expectations or aspirations will change with it. Lastly, habitus can be controlled as a result of the 'awakening of consciousness and socio-analysis' (Jenkins, 2002, p.82-83).

Forms of cultural capital

According to Bourdieu (2003), cultural capital has three forms: the *embodied state*, such as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the *objectified state*, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, instruments, etc.); and the *institutionalized state*, such as educational qualifications.

Embodied cultural capital comprises "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.47). He further suggested that "most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment". "The accumulation of cultural capital in the

[23] There are three distinctive features of practice. First, practice is located in space and, more significantly, in time. Second, practice is not consciously or not wholly consciously organised. While practice is the 'necessity imminent in the social world', it is also characterised by fluidity and indeterminacy. Third, although practice is accomplished without conscious deliberation for the most part, it is not without purpose (Jenkins, 2002, p.69-72).

[24] "Fields, can be defined such as cultural goods (life style), intellectual distinctions (education), power, social class, prestige etc., and is both the product of and produced by the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field. Therefore, a field is a structured system of social positions, occupied either by individuals or institutions" (Jenkins, 2002, p.85).

embodied state, …presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labour of inculcation and assimilation, costs time which must be invested personally by the investor" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244).

The objectified state, such as writings, paintings, instruments, etc., "has a number of properties which are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form". It is transmissible, "but what is transmissible is legal ownership, and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means…" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244).

The institutionalised state can refer to academic qualifications. It is the institutional acknowledgement of an individual's cultural capital through, for example, the recognition of academic qualifications and credentials (Rounsaville, 2011). The investment in it requires an individual's time, money and effort. "Unlike embodied cultural capital, it cannot in and of itself be transmitted to the next generation" (Rounsaville, 2011, p.94). However, educational qualifications, as institutionalised cultural capital, as a legally recognised form, has some sense of being separate from the individual and can be converted into human and economic capital in the labour market (Bourdieu, 1986; Rounsaville, 2011). The attainment of certain credentials symbolise certain embodied cultural capital traits which can be benefit for access to high status and powerful positions (Bourdieu, 1986; Rounsaville, 2011).

Cultural capital investment

Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital, the root of all other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the benefits brought by investment in cultural capital are not necessarily in the form of economic capital (Rounsaville, 2011). Reay (2010) pointed out that a close relationship between economic capital and cultural

capital is not necessarily always there since cultural capital can exist without the support of economic capital, and operate independently of it.

Bourdieu further points out that socialisation within the family and education are the two main channels through which social reproduction functions (Bourdieu, 1986). Both help children to develop the proper habitus[25], which can be further converted to cultural capital. Socialization within the family as well as its associated groups, reinforced by formal schooling produces the appropriate and: "…accepted manners and behaviours, good taste and discrimination, use of language, special skills and knowledge" (Morgan, 2008, p.37).

Bourdieu further argues that when children inherit cultural capital through the process of family socialisation, it is closely related to the level of their parents' socio-economic status, their social networks, educational experiences, and familiarity with the dominant culture as well as the education system (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Reay, 2010; Shaw, 2012). Most of the transmission of cultural capital is hidden, through efforts to enhance, maintain and reproduce cultural advantage and other benefits (Bourdieu, 1986). The family with more human and cultural capital would provide children with more educational resources and help to facilitate the cultural capital development of the children (Gao, 2011). In addition, the development of cultural capital is closely associated with participation in various kinds of cultural activities, such as reading books or attending the cinema, concerts, theatre and visiting museums. Time devoted by parents in helping their children's to accumulate cultural capital is also very important (Bourdieu, 1977; Sullivan, 2001).

[25] Habitus refers to an individual's durable dispositions gained from cultural conditions of life (e.g. family) which guide their social practice (Bourdieu, 1977, p.70). A detailed discussion is presented in the earlier section titled 'Habitus', p.93.

The returns to cultural capital investment can be in the form of personal qualities, such as manners, appearance, and the attire associated with the dominant habitus; and educational credentials. The returns to cultural capital investment differ by social class and usually require large sums of economic capital (Rounsaville, 2011).

Cultural capital and educational decision-making

The acquisition of higher education qualifications can also be considered as a new way to maintain social barriers. The saturated graduate job market following the massification of higher education increased competition for higher levels of university qualifications, top ranked universities and programmes (Zimdars et al., 2009). Many students choose to pursue masters or doctoral degrees with the aim of further reinforcing their 'positional advantage' (Waters and Brooks, 2010). Those with access to high levels of cultural capital and economic capital can maintain their positional advantage (Rounsaville, 2011). In other words, those with less cultural and economic capital are generally excluded from obtaining higher level qualifications, considered as the stepping stone to greater economic rewards (Rounsaville, 2011).

At the same time, the amount of cultural capital within the family influences students' attitudes and access to education (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2010; Gao, 2011; Shaw, 2012). An individuals' cultural and social capital as well as their personal and organizational habitus influences their college choice process (Kim and Gasman, 2011; McDonough, 1998). Several other studies support this claim (e.g. Brooks, 2002; Núñez and Bowers, 2011; Reay, 1998).

In recent decades, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory has been increasingly applied to contemporary Chinese society. For example, Wu (2008) found that cultural capital,

measured by family cultural resources and cultural environment, plays a very important role in students' educational attainment. He concluded that Bourdieu's cultural reproduction model can be applied to address the social reproduction of inequality of educational opportunities in the Chinese context (Wu, 2008). Sheng (2012) explored cultural capital and gender differences in parental involvement in their children's schooling and higher education choice and found that mothers have a more direct link to the generation of cultural capital than fathers.

Despite the increasing growth in applying cultural capital theory to the Chinese context, concerns have been raised regarding the applicability of the concept to the very different social context in China compared to that of Europe (Connel, 2007). Sheng (2012) justified the application of cultural capital theory in the Chinese context because firstly, although Bourdieu's concepts were generated in France, a highly stratified society, this does not mean that slight amendments to his concepts cannot be made and allow it to be applied to a different context. The development of any theory is unlikely to take place in a context completely consistent with its origins, but more likely to be applied to a similar context for verification or theory amendment and rebuilding (Sheng, 2012). As Bourdieu (1993, p.271) stated "concepts should not be treated as immutable, rather they are to be reworked… for putting into practice". Second, Chinese society is not so dissimilar to that of France in its characteristic of high stratification as China has become a more and more stratified society since the market-oriented reforms of recent decades (Wu, 2008; Sheng, 2012). The economic reforms brought about a process of class transformation and a new social stratification (Gao, 2011). The social and cultural differences between different social classes might be similar to those visible in the French context (Sheng, 2012). Third, a growing number of research studies have used

cultural capital theory in China in recent decades (for example, Li, 2005; Sheng, 2012; Wu, 2008; Zhou, 2005). Lastly, applying the theory in a non-Western context can potentially further strengthen its cross-cultural validity and applicability (Sheng, 2012).

Critiques of cultural capital theory

Although cultural capital theory has been found useful to explain students' choice of higher education in different social contexts, criticism has been made of Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus. First, the concept of cultural capital has been criticized for its vague operationalisation (Sullivan, 2001). Second, cultural capital is criticised for viewing habitus as durable and largely unconscious, which results in an overly-deterministic explanation (Jenkins, 2002)[26]. Thus, it was recommended that the individual's own reflexivity should be incorporated into this process to give due attention to both objectivity and the agents' subjectivity (Archer, 2007). Archer stresses that "subjects reflect upon themselves in relation to their circumstances and vice versa" (2007, p.42). This is because "even though we may share objective social positions, we may also seek very different ends from within them" (Archer, 2007, p.22). Therefore, 'reflexivity' is seen as a bridge which connects the objectivity and the subjectivity of the agent.

Social capital theory

Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Putnam are the main contributors to the theoretical development of the theory. The review of the social capital theory is informed by all the work of these three theorists. In addition, the similar concept of

[26] Bourdieu responded to this criticism, which can be seen in the section on habitus, p.93.

guanxi[27] in China is also discussed, which can enhance the explanatory and analytical power of the social capital theory (Qi, 2013).

Defining social capital

Bourdieu initially defined social capital in his book 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction' in 1977 (cited in Field, 2008, p.17) as:

> Capital of social relationships which will provide, if necessary, useful 'supports': a capital of honourability and respectability which is often indispensable if one desires to attract clients in socially important positions, and which may serve as currency, for instance, in a political career.

Later, Bourdieu (1986, p.249) defined social capital as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network". The volume of the social capital of a given agent depends on the number of connections they can mobilise and the volumes of different capitals (cultural and economic) possessed by each connection (Field, 2008). Thus, social capital is closely related to other forms of capital.

Further, Bourdieu refined social capital as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (quoted in Field, 2008, p.17). Here, network and relationships are stressed as the people inside resources need to be mobilized to seek benefits. Social capital is treated as a dimension of cultural capital. His main concern regarding social capital was and is the understanding of social hierarchy (Field, 2008). Thus, Bourdieu sees social capital as inclusive of the dominant class to achieve social reproduction (Dika and Singh, 2002; Lin, 1999).

[27] See section Guanxi, p.106.

Bourdieu (1986) further pointed out that the volume of social capital positively correlates with the size of the network of connections that an individual can mobilize as well as the volume of economic, cultural and symbolic capital possessed by him/her (Bourdieu, 2003; Dika and Singh, 2002). Thus, Bourdieu's social capital includes the social relationships that allow an individual to access resources and the quantity and quality of those resources (Dika and Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998).

By comparison, both Coleman and Putman have highlighted the value of social networks to all social classes, namely the broader community, from which all individuals can benefit (Field, 2008). According to Coleman (1988), social capital is "a variety of entities, including some aspects of social structure, which facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure" (Qi, 2013, p.316). Similarly, Putnam (1993) (cited in Qi, 2013, p.316) defined social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action". Thus, both Coleman and Putnam treat social capital as a collective asset and a public good (Qi, 2013).

In addition, Coleman (1988) highlighted how access to social capital influences the accumulation of human capital. According to Coleman (1994) (cited in Field, 2008, p.27), social capital refers to:

> The set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ from different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital.

No matter how it is defined, the focus is the resources embedded in one's social network from which one could benefit for certain activities. In this sense, social capital could be seen as similar to human capital in that it assumes that investment in

building and maintaining networks could yield benefits to the individual (Lin, 1999). Therefore, social capital could be defined as "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (Lin, 2001, p.12).

Forms of social capital

Coleman (1988) identified three forms of resources constituting social capital: 1) obligations, expectations, and the trustworthiness of structures; 2) information channels, and 3) norms and effective sanctions. The first form of social capital focuses on the trustworthiness of the social environment, where obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of obligations held (Coleman, 1988). Trust and trustworthiness are integral elements of reciprocity. In such networks, mutual obligations and expectations exist as a system to facilitate each individual's actions to achieve their goals (Schuller and Bamford, 2000). The second form of social capital is the information inherent in social relations, which provides an important basis for individual actions. Acquiring such information requires costly investment, such as attention, time and financial resources (Coleman, 1988). The third form of social capital highlights how effective norms can facilitate certain actions and, at the same time, constrain others. Communal values and norms within society make it possible to resolve collective problems (Healy and Côté, 2001). The first two forms of social capital – trustworthiness and information channels – are relevant to my research.

Types of social capital

There are three types of social capital: Bonds, bridges and links. Bonds refer to the strong deep ties shared by people who closely identify with each other, for example,

family members, relatives, friends, and people with a collective common purpose (Putnam, 2000; Healy and Côté, 2001). Children could benefit from intellectual and human capital development through the strong relationship between parents and children (Coleman, 1988). Bridges refers to weak ties across diverse social groups, for example, the relationships between distant friends, colleagues and acquaintances (Healy and Côté, 2001). According to Granovetter (1973), such weak ties could be especially important when there is a need to achieve access to a wider and more heterogeneous group (see Schuller, 2001). Links refer to the relationships formed by people of different social levels or social groups (Morgan, 2008). Links are created by individuals to people with exclusive access to power, resources and information to facilitate certain actions (Healy and Côté, 2001).

Social capital investment

Social capital is similar to human capital in the sense that investment in it could yield returns of benefits or profits (Lin, 1999). The focus here is how individuals invest in social relations and how individuals capture the embedded resources in the relations to generate a return (Lin, 1999). Social capital gain is based on intentional investment in both economic and cultural resources (Bahar and Kian, 2014).

Coleman (1988) claimed that social capital both in and outside the family influences the accumulation of human capital. Social capital, the relationship between children and their parents, the time and effort spent by parents on their children's learning, plays a positive role in children's educational achievement (Coleman, 1988). In addition, the network of the parents, number of friends known by parents as well as parents' involvement in the school positively correlate with children's educational achievement (Dika and Singh, 2002). Social capital was found to be positively

related to educational aspirations as well as parental expectations (Muller and Ellison, 2001). Social capital outside the family, for example, the social networks formed in educational institutions, can help students obtain employment and achieve social mobility (Putnam, 2000).

Social capital and educational decision-making

Coleman (1988) discussed the influence of a family's social capital on their children's development. He argues that social capital can be found in the parents' social relationships with community institutions (Coleman, 1988). Later, the concept of social capital was also used to explain students' educational aspirations (Byun et al., 2012; Khattab, 2003; Wohn et al., 2013) or students' educational experiences. For example, Papaconstantinou (2010) found that students' choice of higher education was shaped by social class and the forms of capital available as well as their socially shaped educational experiences. Students coming from higher socio-cultural family backgrounds would be able to make more informed decisions. Heath, Fuller, & Johnston (2010) concluded that the educational experiences of younger generations play an important role in shaping the perceptions of other network members about participating in formal education.

In recent decades, the concepts of social capital and *guanxi*[28] (a Chinese variant of social capital) have been increasingly examined in the Chinese educational context, albeit still limited. For example, Wu (2013) examined the role of social capital in school choices in a Chinese city and found that parents would mobilize their social capital (*guanxi*) to facilitate their children's access to their preferred school. Similarly, Tsang (2013) found that parents use privileged social capital (*guanxi*) to

[28] A detailed discussion of *guanxi* is in the following section: *Guanxi*, p.106.

help their children go to private universities and then study abroad, through which generational reproduction of their class status and mobility are achieved. Ma (2014) also concluded that social networks, which, by level of importance, include social networks formed among friends and classmates, family and relatives, as well as senior students and alumni, are important in providing information and advice about educational choice for students.

Critiques of social capital theory

However, criticism has been made of the concept of social capital theory. The first criticism is centred on the ambiguity of the concept. Schuller (2001) claimed that there is no agreed definition of social capital and its measurement is problematic, as it is highly context-dependent. Durlauf (1999) stated that social capital is ill-defined, with different authors attributing different meanings to the concept. Durlauf also put forward an alternative definition of social capital as "the influence which the characteristics and behaviours of one's reference groups has on one's assessments of alternative courses of behaviour" (Durlauf, 1999, p.2). Ponthieux (2004) further pointed out that the main problem about social capital is the lack of a precise conceptualization of the definition, which further leads to its measurement, which is always based on the definition. It is not clear what is and what is not social capital as "it could only be observed by its consequences when the actors use it and then its consequences are its proof" (p. 5).

The overlap of these capital theories

Although the three forms of capital are different, they are related to one another in complex ways with one often employed in the development of the other two (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Keeley, 2007). For example, Colman (1988)

analyses social capital as an essential component of human capital accumulation, both in the family and in the community. The social capital of the family, namely the relations between children and parents, as well as the time and effort spent by the parents with their children are important for the Children's intellectual development. Coleman (1988) concluded that even if human capital exists in the parents, the child does not profit from it if the social capital is missing. In Coleman's understanding, human capital is realised in the acquired abilities and knowledge of the individual, while social capital is materialized in interpersonal relations, and it is generated when the relation between individuals changes. Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that it is impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms. They are interconnected as the accumulation and growth of one could not be fully achieved without the employment of the other two, which in turn, impacts on the the other two's production (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Keeley, 2007; Schuller, 2001).

Guanxi

Guanxi literally means 'relation' or 'relationship' (Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002). It is a Chinese variant of social capital and provides one with exclusive access to limited resources and controlled information (Wu, 2013). In this sense, *guanxi* is similar to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'social capital', which means resources available to the members of the network (Gold et al., 2002). In addition, *guanxi* as social capital can also be converted into other forms of capital, such as economic capital (Gold et al., 2002). The concept of *guanxi* in Chinese culture has general relevance for understanding social capital theory originating from western society. It could be seen as a form of social capital and has been considered as fundamental to

understanding Chinese social structure (Qi, 2013). It is a culturally rich concept which includes trustworthiness (*xinyong* in Chinese), face (*mianzi* in Chinese), norms of interpersonal behaviour (*renqing* in Chinese), reciprocity and obligation (Qi, 2013). This is similar to the definition of social capital provided by Putnam (2000, p.19) as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". Besides, the anti-individualistic form of *guanxi*, namely all the members of the *guanxi* network benefit from the relationship make it possible for the general application of this term outside unique Chinese culture (Qi, 2013). Concerns have long been voiced about the applicability of theories originating from the West to non-Western regions, however, as Qi (2013) has argued, more is needed to explore "the possibility of the general applicability of concepts of non-Western origin to the further development of Western-sourced theory in a global context" (p.321), in order to enhance the explanatory and analytical power of the existing theories.

Defining guanxi

The Chinese term of *guanxi* can be defined as the state of being related or as relational entities and their relationships (Bian, 1997; Chen, Chen, & Shengsheng, 2013; Tsui and Farh, 1997).

From the Chinese indigenous perspective, *guanxi* can be defined in three different ways. Firstly, as interpersonal ethics, it refers to a static social structure of interpersonal relationships, for example, the relationship between father and son, classmates, colleagues and so on. Secondly, it can be seen as resources, such as controlled information. Thirdly, it can be interpreted as a favour or a privilege. In this sense, *guanxi* is seen as a special channel for accessing privilege (Huang, 2003).

Seeing *guanxi* as resources and a channel for obtaining favour is similar to the definition of social capital, seen as resources embedded in one's social network from which one could benefit for certain activities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1994; Lin, 1999). In this thesis, *guanxi* is mainly seen as resources or a special channel for accessing favour and privilege, thus it is interchangeably used as social capital. However, this does not neglect the fact that *guanxi* has its own cultural connotations, discussed in the following section.

Connotations of guanxi in the Chinese culture

Although *guanxi* can be generally regarded as similar to social capital in some sense, it does have its own cultural connotations. First, it is "based implicitly on mutual interest and benefit" (Gold et al., 2002, p.7). It refers to 'a dyadic, particular and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favour exchanges between the parties connected by the tie' (Bian, 2006, p.312). A person who receives a favour from another has a sense of indebtedness to that person (Bian, 2006; Qi, 2013). In this sense, *guanxi* implies the exchange of favour (*renqing* in Chinese) and the obligatory reciprocity (*huibao* in Chinese) (Qi, 2013). Reciprocal obligation, indebtedness and affect or sentiment (*ganqing* in Chinese) are central to the *guanxi* system in China (Gold et al., 2002). In *guanxi* relations, *renqing* and *huibao* are operating mechanism which not only regulate exchanges but also function as emotional and instrumental resources in the sense of debt (Qi, 2013). Thus, each member of the *guanxi* network could "ask a favour of the other with the expectation that the debt will be repaid sometime in the future" (Gold et al., 2002, p.7). *Renqing* has both a qualitative and quantitative meaning. The qualitative aspect of *renqing* is related to an individual's personality. It requires an individual to act according to

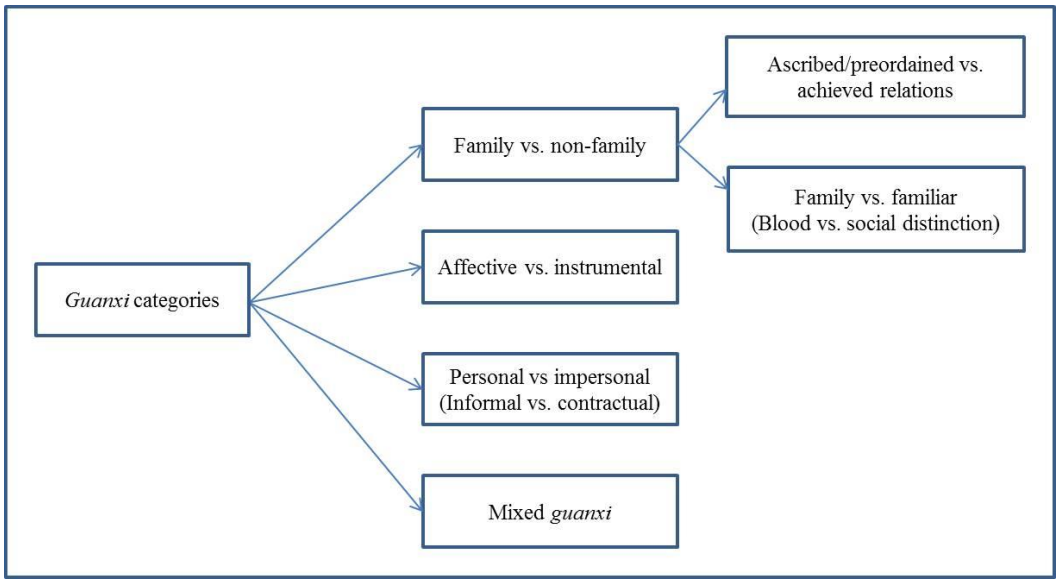
social norms befitting the social interactions (Qi, 2013). The quantitative aspect of *renqing* is related to the frequency and level of exchange obligations governed by reciprocity (Qi, 2013). The development of *renqing* could initiate a *guanxi* relation, which further promotes the *renqing* exchange. Thus, *renqing* acts both as input and outcome for future *guanxi* development (Qi, 2013). The strength of *guanxi* relations is positively related to the number and degree of *renqing* exchange and the degree of reciprocity (*huibao*) (Qi, 2013). Frequent interaction and reciprocal exchanges, high intimacy and mutual trust signifies 'strong ties', recognized as *guanxi,* what Chinese people frequently refer to (Bian and Ang, 1997).

Guanxi categories

The Chinese term of *guanxi* can be classified into the following four categories: Family vs. non-family *guanxi*, affective vs. instrumental *guanxi*, personal/informal vs. impersonal/contractual *guanxi*, and mixed *guanxi* (Chen et al., 2013) (see Figure 16 below). Family ties are usually strong and close as they are driven by affective motives which involve more frequent *renqing* exchange, whereas non-family ties are weak and distant as they are driven by instrumental motives which involves less frequent *renqing* exchange (Chen et al., 2013). There are two variants of family vs. non-family distinction. The first is the ascribed/preordained vs. achieved relations: the former refers to family, kinship, and birthplace and the latter to associations between colleagues, schoolmates, and friendships. The second variant is the family vs. familiar or blood vs. social distinction: the familiar or social relations refer to non-family but well-acquainted members. The family vs. non-family *guanxi* can alternatively be described as affective vs. instrumental *guanxi* (Tsang, 1998). Personal/informal *guanxi* refers to interpersonal relations characterized with affect,

obligation, and informality, whereas contractual *guanxi* refers to interpersonal or inter-firm relations that are characterized by impersonality, legality, and formality. The mixed *guanxi* type is between the above *guanxi* types. No matter how it is classified, there is a consensus that family, personal and informal *guanxi* tend to be more affective whereas non-family, impersonal, and contractual *guanxi* tend to be more instrumental (Chen et al, 2013).

Figure 16. The *Guanxi* Categories



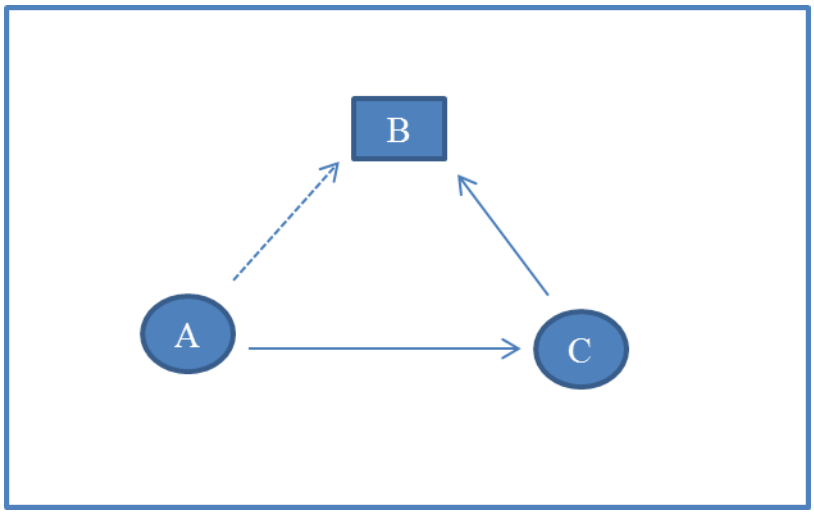
Source: Developed from Chen et al.(2013)

The transferability of guanxi

Guanxi has the characteristic of being transferrable. To illustrate this, Qi (2013) gave this example: if a person A needs the help of person B with whom there is no prior acquaintance, then A could ask for person C who knows B well and with whom A has a *guanxi,* to introduce him to B. Thus, C's *guanxi* with B is transferred to A. Thus, a new *guanxi* relationship is created between A and B, which further leads to

the creation of mutually reciprocal relations between A, B, and C (see Figure 17 below). This new joint venture serves as the substantive bases for future *guanxi* building (Chen et al., 2013). In this sense, the concept of *guanxi* accords with the idea of social capital defined by Putnam (2000), which sees social capital as 'connections among individuals – social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Qi, 2013).

Figure 17. The Transferability of *Guanxi*



Source: compiled by the researcher

Theoretical perspective of guanxi and social networking

Guanxi is crucial to understand Chinese behaviour in social, political and organizational contexts (Huang, 2003). It has been applied to a diverse range of disciplines, such as economics, sociology, and psychology as well as business management. As a result, different theoretical frameworks have emerged. The literature on *guanxi* could be broadly classified as: ego-pragmatic, community-ethical, and Confucian-relational. The ego-pragmatic perspective of *guanxi*

dominates the sociology literatures. *Guanxi* in this sense is seen as networks and social resources, through which one could attain benefits and favours (Bian, 1997). This echoes the concept of social capital theory, which also considers the social ties and networks possessed by individuals and which can be used to gain favours and benefits. In contrast, the community-ethical perspective focuses on the corrosive aspects of *guanxi* networks and practices within society. This perspective usually draws on the normative theories of morality and ethics in international business, theories of social dilemmas and multiple stakeholders. The Confucian-relational perspective can be understood through 'relationalism' (Chen et al., 2013). This refers to a social, organizational and moral system where personal and small group relationships take precedence over the needs and interests of the individual and general and impersonal relationships in organizations and communities (ibid.). According to Confucian relationalism, Chinese society is relation-based as opposed to individual or group based. In addition, the commitment to personal relationships, for example, to the family or family-like relationships, regardless of extrinsic costs and benefits, signifies the humaneness of society (ibid.). Furthermore, personal relationships differ according to the closeness or distance between the individuals or parties involved (ibid.). Therefore *guanxi* categories appear as family (*jiaren* in Chinese), familiar (*shuren* in Chinese), and stranger (*shengren* in Chinese) (Chen et al., 2013).

Empirical research on guanxi

The empirical research on *guanxi* can be classified into four categories: 1) the micro level of individuals and interpersonal relationships; 2) the macro levels of firm, industrial and societal relationships, with the majority at the firm level; 3) *guanxi*

practices and ethics; and 4) cross-cultural comparisons (Chen et al., 2013). At the level of individuals and interpersonal relationships, many empirical research studies have focused on the importance of *guanxi* in the realm of employment practices. For example, pioneering research by Bian (1997) found that the majority of job seekers used *guanxi* to gain employment and there was a significant positive effect of the strength of *guanxi* ties on job seeking in China between 1992 to 1997. Strong *guanxi* ties were used more frequently than weak *guanxi* ties to ensure success in finding a job. At the macro-level, research has focused on how *guanxi* ties affect a firm's performance, market entry and international expansion (Ellis, 2000; Luo, Huang, & Wang, 2012; Tung and Worm, 2001). From the moral and ethical perspective, certain *guanxi* practices could hurt the interests of others and thus cause injustice and unfairness (Dunfee and Warren, 2001). At the cross-cultural comparative level, research studies on *guanxi* have focused on: 1) the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in the importance of personal relationships in business and management decision-making (Sheer and Chen, 2003; Chua et al., 2009); 2) the effects of strong and weak ties in obtaining employment and advancing careers (Bian, 1997; Bian and Ang, 1997); and 3) the changing role of *guanxi* in Chinese culture (Khatri, Tsang, & Begley, 2006; Sheer and Chen, 2003; Yi and Ellis, 2000).

This thesis applies the *guanxi* model at the micro level of individuals and interpersonal relationships. At this level, most of the literature has focused on the benefits of *guanxi* in facilitating employment, for example Huang (2008) found that parents with particular backgrounds or *guanxi* could help their children gain advantages in the labour market. Little research has explored the role of *guanxi* ties in facilitating students' access to higher education, especially on the type of friendship networks among pupils and students, and fewer still of contacts among

alumni (Field, 2008; Wu et al., 2010). This thesis focuses on how *guanxi* ties, both family and non-family types, influenced students' choices of postgraduate studies, where there is still limited research in the literature. In this thesis, *guanxi* is treated as a form of social capital. The amount of social capital one possesses depends on the size of a person's network, namely *guanxi*.

To summarize: the above section provided a detailed review of the theoretical framework of this thesis. Table 15 summarizes the divergence and convergence of the theoretical perspectives used in this thesis.

Table 15. A Summary of the Theoretical Framework

Items	Human capital	Cultural capital	Social capital	*Guanxi*
Originating discipline	Economics	Sociology	Sociology	Sociology
Definition	An individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies and traits which can be beneficial for their personal, social and economic well-being (Schultz, 1971).	Cultural advantages an individual enjoys which are acquired through education, family, and other sources that confer social power and status upon that person (Bourdieu, 2003).	Resources embedded in one's social network from which one could benefit for certain activities (Coleman, 1988)	literally means 'relation' or 'relationship' (Gold et al., 2002). Indigenous meaning (Huang, 2003): 1) Interpersonal ethics 2) Resources 3) A favour or a privilege
Basic tenets	• Human capital affects human capabilities for productive work and output. • Education and training (on-the-job) are important investments. • Investment entails direct and indirect costs, such as time money and forgone income. • An investment is expected to bring economic or social returns.	• The conceptualization of cultural capital theory is closely rated to the concept of 'habitus'. • Cultural has three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state. • Socialisation within the family and education are the two main channels through which social reproduction functions. • Returns to cultural capital investment can be in the form of personal qualities associated with the dominant habitus and educational credentials.	• Social capital consists in and arises from the relations between & among people. • There are three types of social capital: Bonds, bridges and links. • Investment in it could yield returns of benefits or profits. • Social capital both in and outside the family influences the accumulation of human capital.	• It is based implicitly on mutual interest and benefit. • It implies the exchange of favours (*renqing*) and the obligatory reciprocity. • The strength of *guanxi* relations is positively related to the number and degree of *renqing* exchange and the degree of previous reciprocity. • *Guanxi* categories: Family vs. non-family, affective vs. instrumental, personal/informal vs. impersonal/contractual, and mixed *guanxi* • It can be transferred

Continued from the above table				
Items	**Human capital**	**Cultural capital**	**Social capital**	***Guanxi***
Application in education (rationale)	Education is an investment that raises individual potential for higher earnings and productivity by arming them with knowledge, skills, and other capabilities.	Education helps to enhance, maintain, and reproduce cultural advantage and other benefits. Acquisition of higher education qualifications can be considered as a way to maintain social barriers.	Participating in education helps to maintain and create social networks, including citizenship (Morgan, 2008). The amount of social capital possessed by individuals and their families influences his/her educational pathways.	Participating in education helps to maintain and create social networks (*guanxi*). *Guanxi* possessed by individuals and their families influences his/her educational pathways.
Application in education (gist)	It stresses the rationality of choice based on the calculation of measureable costs and benefits.	It stresses the social reproduction of inequality of educational opportunities.	It stresses the role of social capital in producing unequal educational opportunities.	It stresses the role of *guanxi* in producing unequal educational and employment opportunities.
Application in education (main critique)	• Students' educational choices are not only based on the rational calculation of benefits and costs, factors like expectations and socio-economic backgrounds influence the choice (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Obermeit, 2012).	• The applicability of the concept outside the French context (Connel, 2007). • Habitus was viewed as durable and largely unconscious, which results in an overly-deterministic explanation (Archer, 2007).	• There is no agreed definition of social capital and its measurement is problematic, as it is highly context-dependent (Schuller, 2001; Ponthieux, 2004).	• From the moral and ethical perspective, certain *guanxi* practices could hurt the interests of others and thus cause injustice and unfairness (Dunfee and Warren, 2001).
Convergence	• They are different forms of capital, which take time to accumulate and have the potential to produce benefits. • Under certain conditions, they can be converted into economic capital. • They are inseparable in accounting for the functioning of the social world.			

Source: compiled by the researcher

Summary

This chapter reviewed the related empirical research and the major theories used to explain students' choice of higher education. In addition, the combined theoretical framework of human, cultural and social capital (and the related Chinese concept of *guanxi*) as well as the relevance of the application of each theoretical stance to students' decision-making about education were discussed and the appropriateness of applying these capital theories to the Chinese context was highlighted.

The literature review identified several gaps. First, although the literature on factors influencing student choice of higher education is growing, related research into Chinese students' choice of domestic higher education, especially postgraduate education, is quite limited. There is a lack of research into the factors influencing Chinese students' choices of what and where to study. In addition, most related research studies have focused on calculating the major influencing factors, lacking a specific theoretical underpinning. This thesis aims to fill this gap by exploring the factors influencing students' choices of postgraduate education in a case study university, G University, in mainland China[29]. The factors are explained from the theoretical aspects of human, cultural and social (*guanxi*) capital. The specific research questions are:

1. What motivated students to undertake PG education?
    a) What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?
    b) What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?

[29] The rationale for conducting a case study and selecting G University as the case is discussed in Chapter Four: Methodology and research methods.

2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?
3. Why did they choose G University as the place of study?

Based on the above research aims and specific research questions, the next chapter presents the methodology and research methods used in this thesis.

Chapter Four

Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methodology and methods used to answer the research questions raised in the literature review. It begins with a general account of the ontological and epistemological issues of the research, which inform the research paradigm. The research design of an in-depth case study is then discussed in detail. Further, specific research methods, piloting, sampling and access, as well as data management and methods of analysis are presented. Finally, the related ethical issues are discussed.

Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

Ontology and *epistemology* frame the theoretical perspective, as each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology) (Crotty, 2012). "Every researcher brings some set of ontological and epistemological assumptions into the research process, which influences how one understands and interprets qualitative data" (Travers, 2001, p.9). It is therefore essential to become conscious of these issues.

Ontology is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such (Crotty, 2012, p.10-11). Put another way, it concerns the very

nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated. In this thesis, as a result of my research background in the field of English (Bachelor and Master's degrees), my understanding of the nature of being and of reality positions towards social constructionism, which emphasizes reality is subjective and individually constructed (Bryman, 2008). This means that each individual has their own understanding of reality. The study of the social world should thus be made through exploring and interpreting the individual's experience and interpretation of reality (Crotty, 2012).

Epistemology deals with "the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis" (Hamlyn, 1995, p.242). "How one aligns oneself in this particular debate profoundly affects how one will go about uncovering knowledge of social behaviour" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.6). There are two main competing epistemological views: positivism and anti-positivism or interpretivism. The former holds that "all genuine knowledge is based on sense experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment, while the latter looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 2012, p.67). My ontological assumptions, which tend more towards social constructionism, as described above, led me to an interpretivist epistemological orientation, which focuses on the individual's understanding and interpretation of the world based on the shared signs and symbols around them. Thus, multiple realities are produced. I wanted to find common themes from such multiple understanding of realities to get a deeper understanding of a certain issue. In this study, I intended to explore individual perceptions concerning their decision-making about PG education in China, why they made a particular decision and how that decision was produced

by their specific circumstances. I hoped common themes would emerge based on their answers.

A qualitative approach is usually based on constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2008). The constructionist ontological and interpretivist epistemological assumptions discussed above led to a qualitative approach to investigate the research questions. Another important criterion for the use of the qualitative approach is based on the nature of the research problem (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of the research problem in this study was to illuminate the students' decisions about postgraduate education through a case study in China; why they were taken, and how they were shaped by their specific circumstances. I did not aim to generalise the findings of this research to the situation of all postgraduate students in China but to have a deeper understanding of why the students in this case study decided to pursue postgraduate education and how they decided where to go and what to choose as their field of study. Therefore, an in-depth case study was appropriate and the next section justifies the research design of my in-depth case study.

Research Design: An in-depth case study

The case study has been a common research method in many fields, such as psychology, sociology, political science, education, nursing and other human and behavioural sciences because: "The distinctive need for case study arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (Yin, 2013, p.14).

Yin (2013, p.16) defines the case study as an empirical inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case' in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident". In other words, a case study is appropriate when you want to understand a real-world situation which involves important contextual conditions pertinent to that case.

Justifications for the case study

There are four justifications for using a case study in the research. First, the type of research question asked differentiates between various research methods (Yin, 2013) to suggest the most suitable. The case study method is often used when the study addresses either a descriptive or an explanatory question, such as questions beginning with 'how' and 'why', because it is more likely to provide rich descriptions or insightful explanations (Yin, 2013). The key research questions asked here is why students decide to follow postgraduate education in China and how their decisions were shaped by their specific circumstances. It is descriptive and explanatory in essence, and using the case study method should provide insightful explanations for why and how students made their decisions in their specific circumstances.

Second, the case study is preferred when the study of a phenomenon is emphasized within its real-world context (Yin, 2013). As for this research, the understanding of students' decision-making encompasses important contextual conditions, namely the economic, social and cultural contexts of China, the circumstances of the case study university, the economic, as well as the social and cultural circumstances of the students; such circumstantial and contextual conditions are pertinent to students'

decisions. The study is explanatory and context associated, and insightful explanations are not obtainable until the phenomenon is understood in its specific, real context. Compared with *derived* data – data which are not obtained from the original field work – the original field work as part of a case study can better help the understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2013).

Further, an in-depth case study can maximize the potential thorough and thoughtful responses to the questions because the case study allows the use of multiple strategies for the in-depth analysis of a single phenomenon, for instance, observation, interviews, documentation, questionnaires and so on (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). In this research, documentation, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were adopted (a detailed description of each method is discussed in Specific Research Methods, page 128). These help to provide a comprehensive picture of students' decision-making as to why and how their decisions were made in their specific circumstances.

Lastly, the in-depth case study approach was adopted based on the criterion of *efficiency* in judging the qualitative research, which means "the data to be collected should be at the least cost in terms of time, access, and cost to participants" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.42). Practically speaking, for a lone doctoral researcher, time and costs are important concerns. The in-depth case study was more practical for me to understand the phenomenon in depth under time and money pressures.

Advantages and disadvantages of the case study as a research method

The advantages of the case study are: first, it can be illuminating and insightful; second, it can be of great value in teaching and learning; third, it can lead to

subsequent quantitative research by pointing to issues worthy of investigation over a wider range; and lastly, "it can follow on from a broader survey or quantitative approach by exploring a phenomenon in greater depth, in a more exploratory, explanation-seeking fashion" (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007, p.93). This research used a survey to first obtain a general understanding of the factors influencing students' choices concerning PG education in a case study university in the southern part of China, after which there were follow-up interviews to gain more detailed explanations.

The case study method also has its disadvantages. Two common concerns which are relevant to the research are discussed here. The first is "the lack of rigor of case study research" (Yin, 2009, p.14). The case study investigator may not follow systematic procedures or may allow biased views to influence the findings and conclusions, which is less likely to happen with using other methods. Hoaglin etc. (1982 cited in Yin, 2009, p.16) argued:

> The problem is that we have little way of screening for an investigator's ability to do good case studies. Most people feel that they can prepare a case study, and nearly all of us believe we can understand one. Since neither view is well founded, the case study receives a good deal of approbation it does not deserve.

The second problem is that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2009). However, "case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions though not to populations or universes… The goal of the research is to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)" (Yin, 2009, p.15). Hopefully, the theories used to explain students' educational choice can be expanded and generalized through this study. Moreover, the real business of case study research is

particularization, not generalization (ibid). "We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does…and the primary emphasis is on understanding the case itself" (Stake, 1995, p.8). As for this research, the primary aim was not to generalize the findings to the situation of all postgraduate students in China but to have a deeper understanding of why the students in this case university decided to pursue postgraduate education and how their decisions were shaped by their specific circumstances. Through this, other students can "relate to the case and learn from it, this is perhaps more important than being able to generalize from it" (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007, p.95). Further, I thought scientific generalization in a broad sense, is best attained through the cumulative process of human research as a whole, whereby each single piece of research can contribute its own part. Case study research in the context of contemporary China could contribute to the overall research into the understanding of students' decision-making about higher education.

Lastly, whether it is possible to draw any general inferences from a single case depends on "the case one is speaking of and how it is chosen" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.225). "Generalizability of case studies can be increased by the strategic selection of cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.229). G University[30] (the case) was chosen in this research as representative of numerous universities in the Southern part of China. It has fifteen schools and faculties offering PG education with varied focus on different disciplines. The students come to this university for PG education from different parts of China; therefore, a variety of students could be sampled. I ensured that the students – both for the survey and the semi-structured interviews – had varied

[30] It is a not a member of the '985' or '211' university groups, however, it is a provincial elite university. It is well respected linguistic university, which ranks top three in China.

background and a wide range of disciplines. Studying the students' decisions about undertaking PG education at this university can offer a deeper understanding of how students arrived at their decision about their PG education and what specific circumstances affected these decisions. In addition, the research findings can be useful for students in China who are in the process of make decisions about postgraduate education as well as to Chinese further and higher education institutions, which can gain a better understanding of their students in order to provide them with a better service.

Case selection

Before selecting the case, it is important to know what a case is. A *case* is generally a bounded entity (a person, organization, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon), but the boundary between the case and its contextual conditions – in both spatial and temporal dimensions – may be blurred (Yin, 2013). In this research, the case was G University in a southern province of China.

Before making the selection of the site, I took the following four points into consideration. The ideal site was required to be where (1) entry is possible; (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programmes, interactions, and structures of interest are present; (3) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and (4) the data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.51).

According to the above rationale for selecting a case, G University in the Southern part of China was chosen for the case study as fulfilling all the conditions. The specific reasons are as follows:

(1) Entry was possible: My previous study experience as a postgraduate of this university made access straightforward since I had maintained a relatively good rapport with the teachers and graduates in this university[31].

(2) There was a high probability that a rich mix of people, interactions, and structures of interest would be present. First, G University was a popular university which attracted a large number of students each year. Second, this university had a variety of schools, for instance, a School of International Trade and Economics, School of English for International Business, School of Finance, School of Legal Studies, etc. All the participants in the research were carefully chosen from a variety of backgrounds and fields of study to ensure that a rich mix of opinions from the students.

(3) I was likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study as I graduated from this university as an excellent student and maintained a relatively good rapport with the teachers and students in this school. During the data collection, I found that students were quite cooperative and more open to me as they regarded me as their trustworthy senior schoolmate.

(4) The data quality and credibility of the study were reasonably assured. The relationship of trust facilitated my gaining true and objective replies from participants, which most of them would not have given in the face of a strange researcher. In addition, I tried my best to ensure the quality and credibility of the data by using participant information and consent forms. It turned out that all the participants really trusted me and confided in me about the real circumstances they faced when they made their decisions.

[31] The related ethical issues are discussed at the end of this chapter: Ethical Issues, p.149.

Specific Research Methods

In order to answer the three major questions presented in the research, the study employed three specific research methods for data collection: documentation, questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

Documentation

"Documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (Yin, 2013, p.106). Documentation has its own strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are: first, it is a stable source of information, so that it can be reviewed repeatedly; second, it is specific, with the exact names, references, and details of events; and third, it is broad covering a long span of time, many events, and many settings. The weaknesses are: first, it can be difficult to find; second, the selection may be biased if collection is incomplete; third, there is reporting bias reflected in any given documents; and last, access can be difficult if it is deliberately withheld (Yin, 2013, p.106).

In this thesis, the documentation of the related studies on students' choices of higher education was reviewed to confirm the research gap to be filled by this thesis. As the topic of this research was not a sensitive one, I did not have much difficulty in finding related research articles and documents. I tried my best to expand my search of documents in both Chinese and English to ensure that the selection of documents was comprehensive and not biased. I used *Scopus*, the largest abstract citation database of peer-reviewed literature, as a source of updated articles and research on students' choice of higher education. Most of the articles on this website concerning this topic were from the European countries and the US. Although research studies on this topic in Western countries were rich, only a few related research studies from

China about students' decision-making about higher education in China were found. I thought there might be a potential gap worth researching. In order to have a complete selection of relevant documents, I asked many friends in China to download related articles. I found that most Chinese studies on student decision-making focused on surveys of undergraduates. However, very few research studies used qualitative inquiry methods about how students chose their PG education and how they made decisions in their specific circumstances. Further, very limited research has been conducted concerning students' decision-making about postgraduate studies. Therefore, through the documentary search, the research gap of this thesis was confirmed.

Another important aim of the document review was to elicit the range of themes to be used in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. When reading documents with related topics, I paid special attention to the theoretical perspectives used to explain the educational choice process, questionnaire designs, as well as interview questions and relevant interview skills used. Thus, a list of the possible themes behind students' decision-making was generated, upon which the draft questionnaire and semi-structured interview themes were designed. Table 16 provides the main themes of the questionnaire based on the literature review.

Table 16. Main Themes of the Questionnaire

Part I: Students' demographic information

Gender, ethnic group, age group, field of study, undergraduate university, hometown, number of siblings, parents' educational background, parents' job, etc.

Part II: 1) Students' choices of PG education

- *Motivation for undertaking PG education:* personal interest, to continue academic research, to change major, to go to better universities, to enhance employment competitiveness, to build up my social network, etc.
- *Reasons for choosing their specific field of study:* personal interest, Entry requirements and school admission rate, easier to find a job, cost of package and variety of scholarship and grants available, the reputation of this subject in society, advice from senior students, teacher's advice, guidance from parents, etc.
- *Reasons for choosing G University:* location of this college, entry requirements, academic reputation of the institution, quality of faculty, excellent resources and amenities of the university, previously studied at the institution, subject to major transfer, etc.

2) Information sources: careers service of the university, the internet, college's recruitment brochure and presentation, broadcast, TV and newspaper, influence from teacher, peer and friends, tutorial class, parents' influence, relatives' influence, etc.

3) Students' career plan after PG education: to work or continue for PhD study

- If work, where to work
- If work, type of organization

Part III: Open-ended questions

- Anything want to add
- Contact information (for the follow-up interview)

Source: Compiled by the researcher

Questionnaire

The use of questionnaires can allay concerns about the representativeness of an in-depth case study (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). A prominent benefit of the

questionnaire is that it allows researchers to collect a large amount of data from a large number of people. The questionnaire here was used to get general background information about the students concerning their fields of study, family backgrounds, as well as their reasons for doing postgraduate studies and their plans after postgraduate education. The key purpose of the questionnaire was to refine the interview questions in the next stage of the research to decide what was really important for the researcher to find out in greater depth. In the questionnaires, closed questions were used to obtain general background information on the students and their reasons for doing postgraduate education. Open-ended questions were used to give students freedom to explain their particular opinions, which the questionnaire could not cover. Students were requested to leave their contact information at the end of the questionnaire if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Another important function of the questionnaire was to help the researcher make sure the students who participated in the semi-structured interview were balanced in terms of gender, school, etc.

The questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and the purpose of its design. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. It began with a general introduction of the purpose of the survey, participant information, participant consent form, and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The second section focused on gathering biographical and relevant background information, which consisted of ten, some closed and open-ended questions. The open-ended question in this section required them to fill in their current school, field of study and province they come from. The main aim of the section was to get a detailed profile of the PG students and to highlight characteristics such as gender, age, and field of study.

The third section consisted of sixteen questions exploring students' reasons for PG education, their reasons for their field of study, where they had received information on which to base their decisions, what they intended to do, where they intended to work, and the type of work they wanted to do after PG education. Finally, as one objective of the questionnaire was to identify potential interviewees, the last question asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview and, if so, to leave their contact information. The final version of the questionnaire is in Appendices C (English version) and D (Chinese version).

Semi-structured interview

Interviewing is one of the most commonly used methods in social research. In the interview, the process of finding out through conversation is inter-subjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.18). Interviews can provide information about people's attitudes, their values, and what they think they do (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006, p.449). Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A structured interview is also called a standardized interview. Questions in this type of interview are very specific and the interviewees are offered a fixed range of answers. "It is aimed for all interviewees to be given the exactly the same context of questioning so that their replies can be aggregated" (Bryman, 2008, p.193). In contrast, an unstructured interview has only a list of topics or issues, often called an interview guide. This allows the interviewer to adopt an informal style of questioning. The phrasing and sequencing of questions might vary from interview to interview. A semi-structured interview refers to "a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is

able to vary the sequence of questions" (Bryman, 2008, p.196). In this research, the semi-structured interview (one to one) was adopted because it allowed me greater flexibility to cover all the related issues arising from the students' responses. Thus I could ask follow-up questions in response to what were seen as significant replies.

The interview schedule was designed based on the review of the literature, the research questions, the questionnaire, and suggestions from my two supervisors. The purposes of the semi-structured interviews with a sub-set of students who indicated their willingness to participate were to clarify the data in their questionnaires, elicit more detailed information regarding their answers, and to yield possible new data beyond the questionnaire information.

The themes for the semi-structured interview were completed after a series of steps. First, I drafted a series of questions based on my research questions and those arising from the relevant literature review. Then I discussed the draft with my two supervisors and modified it accordingly. Finally, a range of topics concerning the potential factors which might influence students' educational choice were listed: 1) demographic information about the students themselves, which included their gender, age group, field of study, educational background, work experience, parents' educational background, and parents' jobs; 2) students' own motivations and the influence of their families, relatives and friends; and 3) students' career plans after graduation. Several sub-questions were produced around each topic. A final version of the range of semi-structured interview schedule for main data collection was then produced, and is in the Appendices E (English version) and F (Chinese version).

To summarize: the documents reviewed in the thesis were mainly to confirm the research gap existed and to elicit a range of possible topics for the design of the

questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was used to provide a wider picture of the topic being researched. The follow-up semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to probe the interviewee's thoughts, values, views and feelings in greater depth, to go beyond the data obtainable solely from the use of questionnaires. As Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014, p.41) stated: "During data analysis, they (qualitative data) can help by validating, interpreting, clarifying, and illustrating quantitative findings, as well as through strengthening and revising theory". The matrix of research questions and research methods is displayed in Table 17.

Table 17. The Matrix of Research Questions and Research Methods

Research questions	**Research methods: instruments**	**participants**
1. What motivated students to undertake PG education? a. What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?	• Questionnaire • Semi-structured Interviews (audio-recording) • Documents	Survey: 381 first-year PG Students enrolled in G University Interview: 30 first-year PG students who had completed the questionnaire
b. What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?	• Semi-structured Interviews (audio-recording) • Documents	Interview: 30 first-year PG students who had completed the questionnaire
2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?	• Questionnaire • Semi-structured Interviews (audio-recording) • Documents	Survey: 381 first-year PG Students enrolled in G University Interview: 30 first-year PG students who had completed the questionnaire
3. Why did they choose G University as the place of study?	• Questionnaire • Semi-structured Interviews (audio-recording) • Documents	Survey: 381 first-year PG Students enrolled in G University Interview: 30 first-year PG students who had completed the questionnaire

Source: Compiled by the researcher

Based on the document review of related topic on students' choice of higher education, lists of questions for the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were produced. Both were piloted before the real data collection. The next section discusses the piloting process in detail.

Piloting

Piloting a study is important in developing research instruments. The chief purpose of the pilot study for the questionnaires and interviews was to test whether the wording and meaning of questions were clear and unambiguous (Curwin and Slater, 2008). Therefore, the questionnaire and interview themes were piloted before the real data collection to ensure the procedures were easy for the students to understand, and to ensure the analysis was accurate. After that, minor changes were made to the questionnaires and questions based on feedback from the pilots tests.

Questionnaire

The first drafts of the questionnaire – both in English and Chinese – were extensively discussed with my two supervisors. Based on their suggestions, a final Chinese version of the questionnaire was drawn up and piloted in the middle of November of 2013. The sample for the pilot study was a convenience and snowball sample, by which eight students in their second year of postgraduate study at G University were sampled. The students were from different fields of study (see Table 18 below). Access to this group of students was facilitated by four acquaintances who had been postgraduate students at G University one year ahead of the participants. They identified students in the second year of their PG education and informed them about

the survey. After gaining their consent, I sent the questionnaire to them directly by Email.

Table 18. Student Sample for Piloting Questionnaire

Name	Gender	Hometown	Field of study
SR	Female	Medium-sized city	International Business
MJ	Male	Big city	International Business
LWQ	Female	Medium-sized city	Business English
YL	Female	town	Japanese
ZZY	Male	Big city	Law
SWK	Male	countryside	Comparative Literature and World Literature
LJ	Male	town	International Relations
LF	Female	Countryside	Translation

Source: Developed from the research

Upon completion of the questionnaire, each student was emailed to ask whether they thought the wording of the questionnaire was clear and easy to understand, and if they had any suggestions for improvements. SWK from Comparative Literature and World Literature suggested I explore in greater depth why students preferred to work in big cities and in certain types of organizations. This suggestion was taken into consideration in the semi-structured interviews. LF from the School of Translation suggested I simplify the answers to several questions by giving ticking options instead of filling in. This suggestion was taken into great consideration and changes were made accordingly. For example, the second question which had required

students to fill in their ethnicity was replaced by options between Han and Ethnic Minorities[32].

Semi-structured interview

Three of the eight participants indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview (SR from the International Business, ZZY from Law and SWK from Comparative Literature and World Literature). I then sent the participant information and consent form to the three students the day before the interview to allow them enough time to understand the purpose and aim of the interview. All the three interviews lasted for 30-45 minutes, which was in the limit imposed by their time schedules.

The semi-structured interview pilot indicated that the general themes of the questions asked were easy to understand. Two participants indicated that when preparing the PG entrance examination, they had peers in company with them in class. They shared information and encouraged each other when they felt discouraged. This inspired me with the questions "Did you encounter any difficulty in making up your mind to take and prepare for the PG entrance examination and if yes, what did you do and who did you turn to for help?" SWK suggested that I explore the relationship between family background and the students' education in greater depth. He mentioned that students from the countryside find it harder to enter key universities in China. He told me that he missed the opportunity to go to an elite university for UG study getting two points below the admission score for the Chinese College Entrance Examination. At that time, he still had a chance to go to the elite university

[32] China has 56 ethnic groups, Han and other 55 ethnic minorities with Han being the largest accounting for 92% of the mainland Chinese.

provided he could pay 4,000 Yuan, which was a large sum of money for a family in the central rural part of China. However, because of his disadvantaged countryside family background, he could not afford the fees and missed that opportunity. This was one of the key reasons why he wanted to undertake PG education, to make up for what he had missed as an undergraduate. He concluded that family background is an important external factor influencing how far you can go in the future. SR from the International Business also indicated this in the interview. She revealed that she had no idea why she wanted to pursue PG education. She just did it mainly because her parents wanted her to. Her parents were civil servants in public institutions and asked her to take the civil servants examination once her PG education was complete. Her parents told her that civil servant positions were relatively stable with high social status and enviable social welfare. Her parents even saved money for her to get a civil service position if necessary. Through this, I sensed that relationship (*guanxi* in Chinese) might be an interesting topic to explore further in the real data collection.

Piloting the questionnaires and interview schedule were all conducted through the Internet. Before piloting the interview schedule, I asked my fellow Chinese students at university of Nottingham to help me practice interviewing. QQ email was used to contact the participants at G University as QQ (like Facebook in the UK) is the most popular personal communications internet applications for young Chinese students. I was also aware of the shortcomings of piloting through the internet rather than through face to face interviews. The biggest shortcoming was the loss of students' physical reactions to the interview questions, their facial expressions and body language, all of which might have assisted the understanding and communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. I did not use Skype as it was not

popular in China. Some students did not have an account. QQ was more popular. QQ also has video talk function however strangers prefer not to use it.

I did not go back to China for the pilot study, for the following reasons. Primarily, through the Internet, I could achieve the main purpose of the pilot study, which was to test whether the wording and meaning of questions were clear and could be easily understood by the participants. Next, staying in the UK during the pilot study had benefits for revising the questionnaires and interview schedules efficiently, because as soon as I obtained the outcomes of pilot study here, I was able to discuss them with my two supervisors face to face, therefore subsequent modifications were made quickly. Lastly, for a lone researcher, it was less time and money consuming to do the pilot study here through QQ in the UK.

Sampling and Access

This section introduces the sampling procedures for both the questionnaire and interview. In addition, access to the targeted students is also illustrated.

Student sample for the questionnaire

The PG students from all fifteen faculties of the university were sampled to ensure a variety of students were involved. At the end of the questionnaire, they were asked whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview and if so, they were asked to leave their contact information. All the PG students from all fifteen schools of the university on both North and South campuses were sampled. I distributed 616 questionnaires to both campus, 436 to the North campus and 180 to the South campus. The questionnaires returned were 381 altogether, with 269 from the North

campus and 112 from the South campus. Most of the questionnaires were returned within a week, others from several classes within two weeks. The general distribution and the return of the questionnaires in each school is shown in Table 19.

Table 19. Student Sample for the Questionnaire

North Campus[33]				
Number	**School**	**Questionnaire distributed**	**Questionnaire returned**	**Date for return**
1.	School of Legal Studies	60	18	25/02/2014
2.	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	177	135	26/02/2014
3.	Faculty of Asian Languages and Cultures	41	27	25/02/2014
4.	Faculty of English Language and Culture	55	39	04/03/2014
5.	Faculty of Chinese Language and Culture	45	5	11/03/2014
6.	Centre for the Lexicographical studies	9	9	25/02/2014
7.	Centre for European Studies	8	5	04/03/2014
8.	The School of English for International Business	41	31	27/02/2014
Total		**436**	**269**	
South Campus				
Number	**School**	**Questionnaire distributed**	**Questionnaire returned**	**Date for return**
1.	School of Legal Studies	36	19	06/03/2014
2.	School of Politics and Public Administration	5	4	06/03/2014
3.	School of Finance	49	22	06/03/2014
4.	School of International Trade and Economics	47	43	02/03/2014
5.	School of Marxism	9	8	02/03/2014
6.	Cisco School of Informatics	9	9	02/03/2014
7.	School of Management	25	7	06/03/2014
Total		**180**	**112**	
North +South Campus		**616**	**381**	

Source: Compiled by the researcher

[33] The majors concerning English and minority languages are located on North campus, while other majors such as Finance, Management, International Trade, etc. are located on South campus.

Student sample for the semi-structured interview

The targets of the semi-structured interview consisted of an initial sample of twenty-five postgraduate students followed by five further cases to determine if any new themes emerged. The justification for choosing twenty-five to thirty cases was due to the following considerations. First, there was the concern about theoretical saturation, described as "a process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gathered from the data" (Bryman, 2008, p.700). Although I could not draw a line in advance as to whether twenty-five people would be the point when the saturation would be reached, based on the advice of my two supervisors as well as my assumptions and experience, the subsequent five cases were then used to further check if any new themes were to emerge.

The selection of PG students for interview was based on their answers in the questionnaire. First, I identified all the questionnaires with contacting information, then I selected students for the interview based on their answers in the questionnaire. I contacted them one by one to arrange an agreed time for the follow-up interview. In the end, I conducted thirty interviews and made sure that at least one student was from each of the fifteen schools or faculties. I ensured that the students selected had varied backgrounds and that the gender distribution was balanced. The characteristics of the PG students who participated in the semi-structured interview are in Appendix G.

Access

Gaining access to participants is often considered as challenging. It is therefore important to have a strong relationship with the relevant institutions to approach potential participants (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). I did not have much

difficulty in gaining access to the participants as I have a good relationship with the Research Office of G University. I contacted the PG Research Office first and introduced my research aim and purpose to them. They agreed to allow their students to participate in my research and gave me a signed and sealed document from the research office approving my research being conducted there. I then obtained the contact information of the class representatives from each school in each school from its research office. After that, I sent each class representative an email informing them about my research attaching the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form and asked for their help in distributing them and the questionnaires to their classmates. All of them replied cooperatively, giving the number of students in their classes and promised to help sending and collecting the paper questionnaires to their classmates in the following two weeks' time.

As it was easy for me to approach the representatives of each graduate school to ensure a valid response rate, I used paper-based questionnaires instead of electronic ones, as these might be ignored by the students, who were usually bombarded with lots of information from the internet. Compared with electronic questionnaires, the transcription of paper-based questionnaires was more of a burden and more expensive. However, as the site for the case study was just one university, it was not too costly and time consuming to administer the questionnaires directly. To increase the potential response rate, I distributed all the questionnaires at the very beginning of the spring semester following the Chinese New Year[34]. This time was chosen

[34] It is the biggest festival in China in the year, equivalent to Christmas in the UK.

because students were thought to be relaxed after the Chinese New Year and had more time available as they were not pressurised by schoolwork or exams[35].

I contacted the students who had indicated they were willing to participate in the interview one by one to confirm their willingness and explain explicitly the purpose of the interview. I presented them with the participant information sheet and participant consent form before the interview and made sure they were voluntarily participating. After gaining their consent, all the interviews were scheduled according their convenience. Before the interview, I prepared each interviewee with a warm-up topic to create a relaxed atmosphere, with most of the topic concerning the interviewee's hometown. This was because hometown is a common ice-breaking topic for two strangers, both away from home, in China. The interviews conducted mostly ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

At this stage, I found that it was difficult to strictly follow the original plan, which was to conduct one interview every day, because I had to follow the interviewees' schedule. Normally, I contacted the interviewee at least one day in advance for an agreed time for the interview. Sometimes I had to change the agreed time as the interviewee had some urgent matters to deal with. In that case, I needed to do two to three interviews in one day and the transcription the following day, to maintain my schedule. The other difficulty was that sometimes, when I had an ideal interviewee, he or she was not willing to participate in the follow-up interview. In that case, I had to find another interviewee. The third difficulty was that during the interview, at the very beginning, some of the interviewees were a little conservative about revealing their background information, especially when they came from poor areas of the

[35] Chinese postgraduates normally have end-of-term exams in a semester.

countryside. In order to make them feel more open during the interview, I went to their QQ web (Chinese' Facebook) to find out more about each interviewee, their general background information and their interests, the day before the interview, so that I had no difficulty finding a topic for the warm-up period. This made the interviewees more talkative during the interview. In addition, I organised a bottle of water and some biscuits for the interviewees during the interviews and some of them were surprised by my consideration. In this way, I found most of the interviewees were very cooperative and relaxed during the interview process.

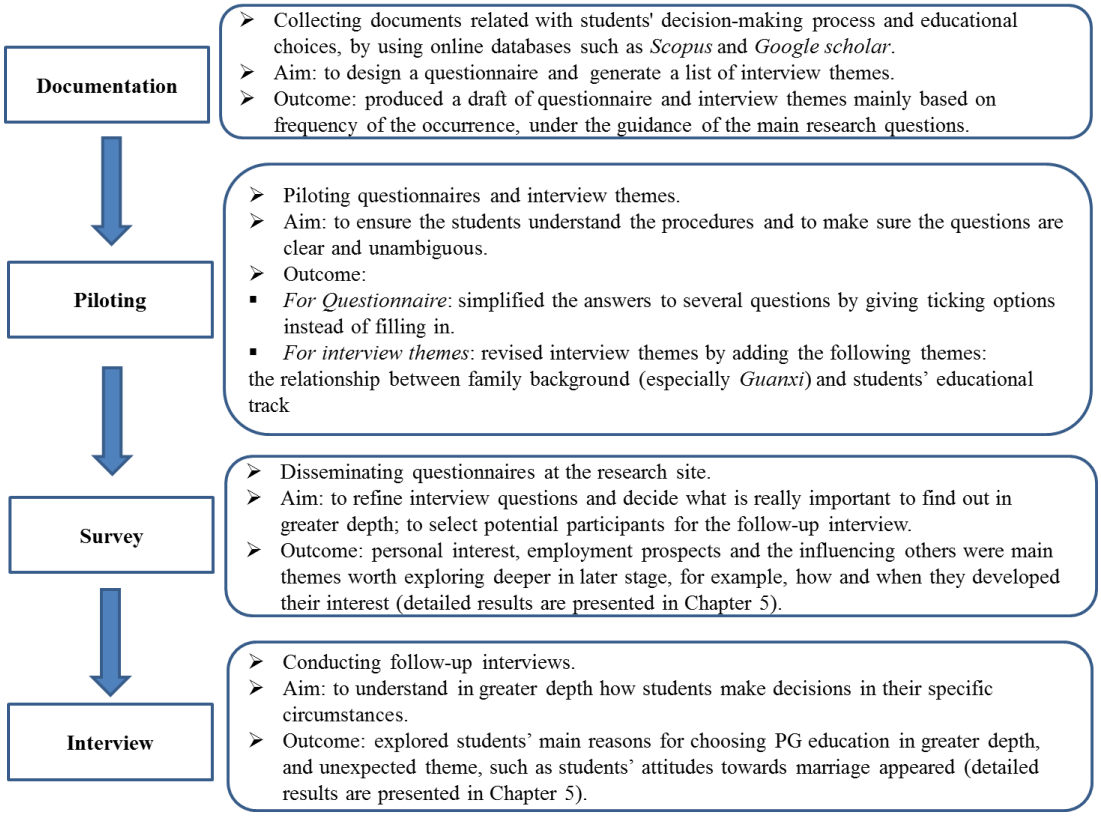
I conducted face to face interview instead of using the telephone because some students did not leave their mobile phone numbers on the questionnaires they answered – most left their QQ for contact, as this special chat software in China is as popular as Facebook in Western countries – therefore, it was hard to contact the potential interviewees by telephone or mobile phone. Besides, as the interview period was scheduled to be between 30 to 45 minutes, this was unlikely to be suitable as long telephone interviews are unlikely to work well (Bryman, 2008). Moreover, Further, telephone interviews do not allow for direct observation of interviewees' facial expressions and body language to discern discomfort or confusion during the interview (Bryman, 2008). By contrast, face to face interviewing allowed me to more easily establish a rapport with the interviewees, and assist my understanding of the interviewees, thus facilitated exploring the interviewees' opinions, motivations and experiences.

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese to ensure that the questions were easily understandable for Chinese students. All the interviews took place in or near the

libraries between February and March 2014. In addition, all the interviews were recorded upon obtaining the participants' informed consent.

A summary of the data collection procedure is presented in Figure 18, below.

Figure 18. Data Collection Procedure



Source: Developed by the researcher

Data Management and Analysis Methods

Bryman (2008) argued that the techniques for managing and analysing data should be appropriately matched to the types of variables, the size and nature of the sample. Thus, the management and choice of analytical methods were decided by the kinds of data and size of the sample involved. Suggestions and advice from one of my

friends, majoring in statistics at University College, London, were sought when the questionnaires were to be analysed.

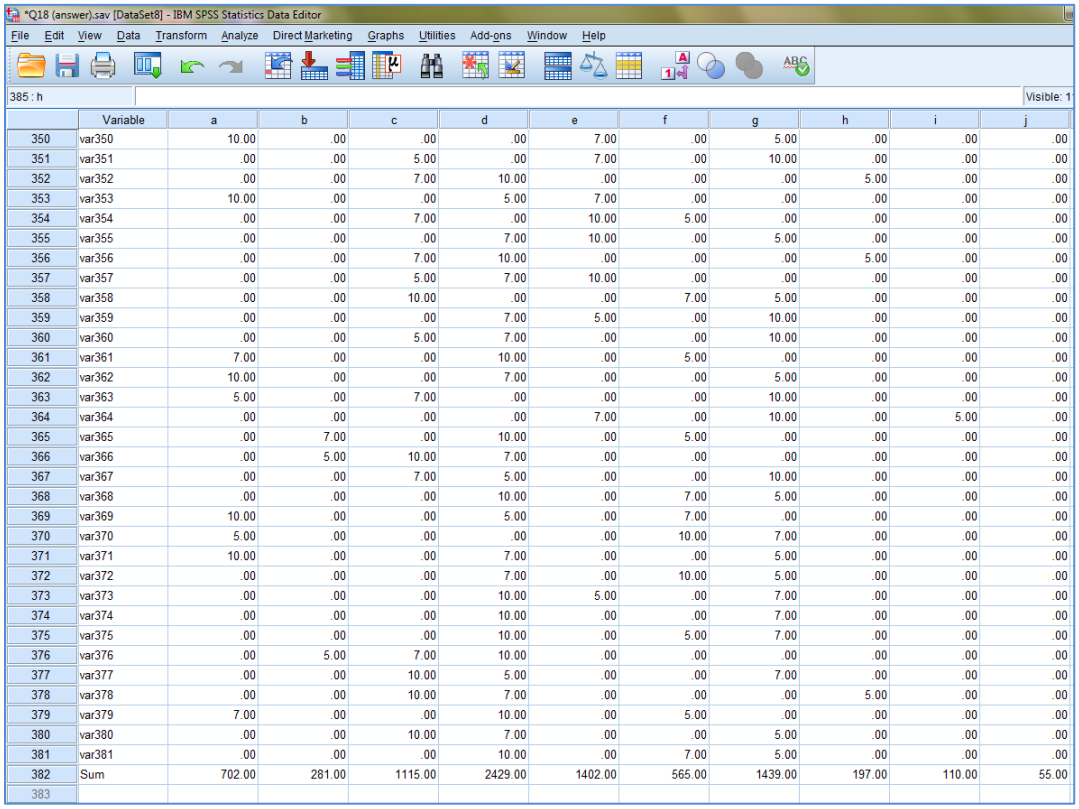
Quantitative data

As the main purpose was to gain a general picture of students' main reasons for undertaking postgraduate education, for choosing their specific major of study and G University as the place of study, as well as to discover what their main sources of information were. The results concerning these four questions (namely Question 18, 19, 20 and 21 in the questionnaire) were analysed with SPSS – a Windows based programme which is useful for large amounts of data entry and analysis and for creating tables and graphs. The common element in these three questions is that they all required students to choose the three most important reasons and rank them according to their importance. In addition, the answers to the remaining questions, for example, questions concerning the students' background information, were also put into SPSS, after which frequencies were obtained.

As for the analytical procedure, question 18 is used as an example for illustration. This question asked what the students' main reason for pursuing postgraduate education were and required students to choose three options and rank them according to their importance. Firstly, I put the answers of the 381 participants into the SPSS. The respondents' answers were then coded as 1, 2, 3 or 0. For example, if student A's answers were A, B and D according to their ranking, then numbers 1, 2, 3 were assigned to options A, B and D respectively. The remaining options not chosen by student A were coded as 0. Secondly, options A, B, D were then recoded with a new value according to their importance. For example, the options A, B and D were recoded with values of 10, 7, and 5 respectively. Next, the importance of each

option was calculated from the sum of the weight value, for example the sum of the weight value of the option A was 702 (see Figure 19 below). Thus, the three most important reasons for students to pursue postgraduate education could be obtained according to the sum of the weight value of each option. Finally, a graph was produced based on the sum of the weight values under each option.

Figure 19. An Example of the Analysis Procedure of Question 18



*Q18 (answer).sav [DataSet8] - IBM SPSS Statistics Data Editor

File Edit View Data Transform Analyze Direct Marketing Graphs Utilities Add-ons Window Help

385 : h

Visible: 1

	Variable	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
350	var350	10.00	.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
351	var351	.00	.00	5.00	.00	7.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00
352	var352	.00	.00	7.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00
353	var353	10.00	.00	.00	5.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
354	var354	.00	.00	7.00	.00	10.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
355	var355	.00	.00	.00	7.00	10.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
356	var356	.00	.00	7.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00
357	var357	.00	.00	5.00	7.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
358	var358	.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	7.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
359	var359	.00	.00	.00	7.00	5.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00
360	var360	.00	.00	5.00	7.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00
361	var361	7.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
362	var362	10.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
363	var363	5.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00
364	var364	.00	.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	10.00	.00	5.00	.00
365	var365	.00	7.00	.00	10.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
366	var366	.00	5.00	10.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
367	var367	.00	.00	7.00	5.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00
368	var368	.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	7.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
369	var369	10.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
370	var370	5.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	10.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
371	var371	10.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
372	var372	.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	10.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
373	var373	.00	.00	.00	10.00	5.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
374	var374	.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
375	var375	.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	5.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
376	var376	.00	5.00	7.00	10.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
377	var377	.00	.00	10.00	5.00	.00	.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
378	var378	.00	.00	10.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00
379	var379	7.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
380	var380	.00	.00	10.00	7.00	.00	.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
381	var381	.00	.00	.00	10.00	.00	7.00	5.00	.00	.00	.00
382	Sum	702.00	281.00	1115.00	2429.00	1402.00	565.00	1439.00	197.00	110.00	55.00
383											

Source: Developed from the survey

Qualitative data

The qualitative data in this research refers to the data derived from the thirty semi-structured interviews.

All the interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed into written word documents (Appendices H, I, J and K provide examples of the English versions of the transcripts). It was ensured that all the interviews were transcribed on the same day or the following day, so that the original live interview situation was still fresh. This also allowed me to reflect on the emerging themes that might need special attention in the later interviews.

The thirty transcripts were then thoroughly checked against the recordings for validation. This process also helped me to familiarize myself with the data. Later on, all the transcriptions were sent back to the interviewees for 'respondent validation' (Bryman, 2008, p.377) – i.e. for the respondents to check the data for accuracy.

During the process of data analysis, the original-language-transcripts were deliberately used to maintain the original meaning conveyed by the participants. The whole process of data analysis involves familiarisation, identifying the thematic framework and coding. In the familiarisation process, the transcripts were thoroughly read and re-read to develop a thematic framework based on the main research questions and the recurrent themes in the transcripts. Later, each unit of data was assigned a unique code. At the same time, I kept referring back to the earlier codes to ensure that as each set of interview data was analysed. I checked back to make sure the categories I assigned the data to were consistent with the themes developed from the earlier interview data.

Ethical Issues

The current research followed the requirements of the guidelines adopted by the School of Education from the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011. A detailed ethics protocol was discussed with my supervisors, based on which, the relevant statement of Research Ethics form was obtained from the Research Ethics committee of the School of Education.

Two potential ethical issues were access and the confidentiality of the information produced by the participants. Following the ethical guidelines, I requested a signed and sealed document approval from the Graduate Research Office of G University to obtain their agreement for the research to be conducted at their university, and to get their help in contacting potential participants. I felt this was the best way to access the students as I obtained a list of the class representatives of each school, through whom I reached a larger sample of students than possible by trying to contact students directly. As the participants were all adults there were no ethical issues in this respect.

One specific ethical issue relates to my previous experience of studying at G University. It might be questioned whether the objectivity of the research was influenced as the students might answer according to what they thought I wanted to know. Actually this was not a problem in this research as the research was exploratory in essence not an evaluation; students were asked why they made decisions based on their own experiences and the researcher was not interested in evaluating their decision-making process. Apart from that, I had ensured that all the questions in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were objective and

non-leading, so that the students were naturally providing information from their own experiences. On the contrary, the validity of the research was strengthened in a sense as I was told by some participants that because I had graduated from G University, they trusted me as a reliable person and thus were very comfortable about expressing their true feelings and opinions in the semi-structured interviews.

I took all possible measures to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants. I did not contact the students in each school directly, although I had the opportunity of doing so. I accessed the students through the class representatives of each school and asked them to distribute the questionnaires to their classmates. Students could decide whether to respond or not. The students responded totally voluntarily, and were well-informed about the research. Any transcripts excluded or modified not only names but any other potentially identifying information (e.g., mentions of specific individuals, events, or places). In the process of the data analysis and report writing, all the participants, including the target university, were identified only by first names or pseudonyms. After the data analysis, all the participants were given a draft report including the findings and results of the research, and their feedback was greatly valued and appreciated.

To guarantee confidentiality, all the participants were told that the data gathered would be used solely for the purpose of the research. In both phases of the research, the participants were told that while some of the results might be published, their identification in any published material would be impossible. In addition, all the information gathered would be stored safely by the researcher, and might be accessed by her two supervisors solely for the purpose of the thesis.

I explained the aims and general purposes of the research to the participants at the very beginning of each research phase. I also disclosed my identity and contact details to all participants so they could contact me if they had any questions and concerns about their participation. They were also informed that they could contact my supervisors or the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education if they required any further information. They were told that they could withdraw freely from the study whenever they wanted to without giving any reasons and would not be at any risk, and their dignity and interests would be respected at all times.

I ensured that all the participants were provided with a participant information form (see Appendix L) and the participant consent form (see Appendix M) both for the survey and semi-structured interviews. The first page of the questionnaire contains information about the aims and process of the research. The second page was a participant consent form. At the very beginning they were told that participation was voluntary. They were told at the end of the questionnaire they could leave their contact information if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

The research was conducted according to the students' free time from their schedules. In the questionnaire phase, students were allowed to return their questionnaire at any point within two weeks in late February, when they had returned from their winter vocation and were assumed not to be under time pressure because of heavy studying. As soon as I had collected the questionnaires, I made the arrangements for the follow-up semi-structured interviews to ensure that the students were still fresh with the research topic. In the semi-structured interview phase, all the interviews were scheduled according to the students' convenience. All of the interviews were

arranged at a time when they were not having classes and in a place they could easily access. I attempted to limit all the interviews to a maximum of 45 minutes. Throughout the whole process, I tried my best to act professionally and treated all the participants with dignity and respect.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology and methods used in this thesis, with special focus on the research design of an in-depth case study approach, specific research methods for data collection, and related ethical issues. The next chapter presents the research findings and data analysis.

Chapter Five

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data. Its purpose is to respond to the main research question presented earlier in the thesis: why did students pursue postgraduate education at G University? The chapter begins with the presentation of the demographic data of the participants for both the questionnaires and the interviews. Then, the chapter presents the main quantitative results, providing a general account of the factors influencing students' decisions about undertaking post-graduate education at G University, before focusing on the qualitative data of the participants for an in-depth understanding of their choices of post-graduate education. Finally, the chapter summarizes the major findings in relation to the additional research questions.

Demographic Data

This section describes the basic information about the participants in both the survey and the interviews. First, it shows the number of questionnaires distributed in each school/faculty and the corresponding return rate. Second, it presents the general background information of the participants in the survey, including their gender, age, number of siblings, hometown, educational background, as well as their parents' educational background and occupations. Finally, it presents the general background information of the participants in the interview.

Questionnaires

As discussed in the previous chapter, the student sample for the questionnaire came from the first year PG students from all the schools and faculties in both the North and South campuses of G University. Altogether, there were 616 questionnaires distributed, with 381 returned, a return rate of 61.9%[36]. 436 questionnaires were distributed in the North campus with 269 returned, a return rate of 61.7%. By comparison, 180 questionnaires were distributed in the South campus with 112 returned, a return rate of 62.2%. Table 20, below, shows the number of questionnaires distributed and returned in each school. The satisfactory response rate suggests that the time chosen for the survey, the beginning of the spring semester following the Chinese New Year[37], was appropriate. However, the relatively low return rate of the Faculty of Chinese Language and Culture was because, when the research was done, some students still hadn't returned from home following the Chinese New Year[38].

[36] The relatively high return rate was connected with the researchers' experience at G University for PG education, and the ethics, which is discussed in the methodology chapter.

[37] See footnote 34, page 142.

[38] The timetable for recommencing classes was slightly different among each school or faculty: it was a bit later in this school compared with the other at G University.

Table 20. Questionnaires Distributed and Returned in Each School/Faculty

North Campus[39]				
Number	**School**	**Questionnaire distributed**	**Questionnaire returned**	**Return rate**
1.	School of Legal Studies	60	18	30.0%
2.	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	177	135	76.2%
3.	Faculty of Asian Languages and Cultures	41	27	41.4%
4.	Faculty of English Language and Culture	55	39	71.0%
5.	Faculty of Chinese Language and Culture	45	5	11.1%
6.	Centre for the Lexicographical studies	9	9	100%
7.	Centre for European Studies	8	5	62.5%
8.	The School of English for International Business	41	31	76.0%
Total		**436**	**269**	**61.7%**
South Campus				
Number	**School**	**Questionnaire distributed**	**Questionnaire returned**	**Return rate**
1.	School of Legal Studies	36	19	52.8%
2.	School of Politics and Public Administration	5	4	80.0%
3.	School of Finance	49	22	44.9%
4.	School of International Trade and Economics	47	43	91.5%
5.	School of Marxism	9	8	88.9%
6.	Cisco School of Informatics	9	9	100%
7.	School of Management	25	7	28%
Total		**180**	**112**	**62.2%**
North +South Campus		**616**	**381**	**61.9%**

Source: Compiled by the researcher

[39] The English and minority languages majors are located in North campus, while other majors such as Finance, Management, International Trade, etc. are located in South campus.

Table 21, below, presents the general background information of the participants in the survey, including their gender, age, siblings, hometown, educational background, as well as their parents' educational background and occupations. Of the 381 participants, 88 were male (23%) and 293 female (77%)[40]. 280 (73%) were between 23 and 25 years old, with 78 (20%) aged from 18-22 and 16 aged over 25. Most of the participants, 367 (96%), were of Han ethnicity. Over two-thirds of the students undertook their undergraduate studies outside Guangdong province. Likewise, over two-thirds of the students' hometowns were outside Guangdong province. 166 of the 381 participants (44%) were only children. As regards the educational background of the parents of the participants, most had senior and junior middle school educational qualifications. 301 participants had had no previous work experience prior to their postgraduate studies[41]. Lastly, 326 of the participants took the postgraduate entrance examinations in order to pursue their studies. The remaining 55 students were recommended by their undergraduate universities for having achieved outstanding results in their undergraduate studies.

[40] G is a linguistics-based University, and the gender distribution of the participants reflects the female preference in China for this area of studies.

[41] This was mainly due to not being able to get jobs with an UG degree because of the massification of HE in China in the last decade.

Table 21. Demographic Data of the Participants in the Questionnaire[42]

Items		*Number*		*Items*		*Number*	
Gender	Male	88		**Age**	18-22	78	
					23-25	280	
	Female	293			26-28	14	
					28 and over	2	
Ethnicity	Han	367		**UG University**	GD Province	101	
	Minority	14			Outside GD	277	
Hometown (Province)	GD	76		**Hometown**	Countryside	109	
					County	49	
	Outside GD	304			Small city	119	
					Medium and big city	98	
Siblings	0	166		**Parents' Education (F: Left M: Right)**	Elementary school or below	31	59
					Junior middle school	104	96
	1	105			Senior middle school	179	165
	2	59			University and college	58	39
	3 and over	41			PG and PhD	7	0
Work Experience	Yes	80		**Ways of Entrance**	PG Entrance Examinations	326	
	No	301			Recommendation[43]	55	

Parents' job		**Father**	**Mother**
	General technical personnel	26	6
	Middle and senior level technical personnel	8	1
	Other professional (scientist, teacher, engineer, accountant, lawyer, doctor, performer, and others.)	53	54
	Staff of the Party, government, army, and others.	31	12
	Staff of enterprises and public institutions	45	44
	Staff of Business and service industry	24	31
	Family business or self employed	58	42
	Worker	51	33
	Farmer	57	58
	Unemployed	18	70
	Other occupations	7	23

Source: Compiled by the researcher

[42] Not every student answered all the questions: 7 students did not give their age; 3 did not give their UG university; 1 did not give their hometown (province); 6 did not give their hometowns; 10 did not give the number of siblings; 2 did not give their fathers' education, and 22 students did not give their mother's; 3 students did not give their father's job and 7 students did not give their mother's.

[43] On graduation, students can be recommended for higher degrees by their universities for having achieved outstanding results in their undergraduate studies. Such students do not need to participate in the PG entrance exams.

Interviews

In this section, I present the general background information of the interviewed participants. As also discussed in the methodology chapter, the participants in the interview had indicated their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews at the end of the questionnaire. Based on their willingness and their contact information they had left at the end of the questionnaires, I was able to contact them successfully and I scheduled thirty interviews altogether. Appendix N shows the background information of each participant in the interview[44].

Quantitative Data

The presentation of the quantitative results was in accordance with the main questions asked in the questionnaires. These include the students' main reasons for pursuing postgraduate education, for choosing their specific subject of study and G University as the place of study, as well as their main source of information for making their choices. As explained in the methodology chapter, students were asked to choose three most important reasons for each of the four main questions and rank them according to their importance.

Students' main reasons for pursuing postgraduate education

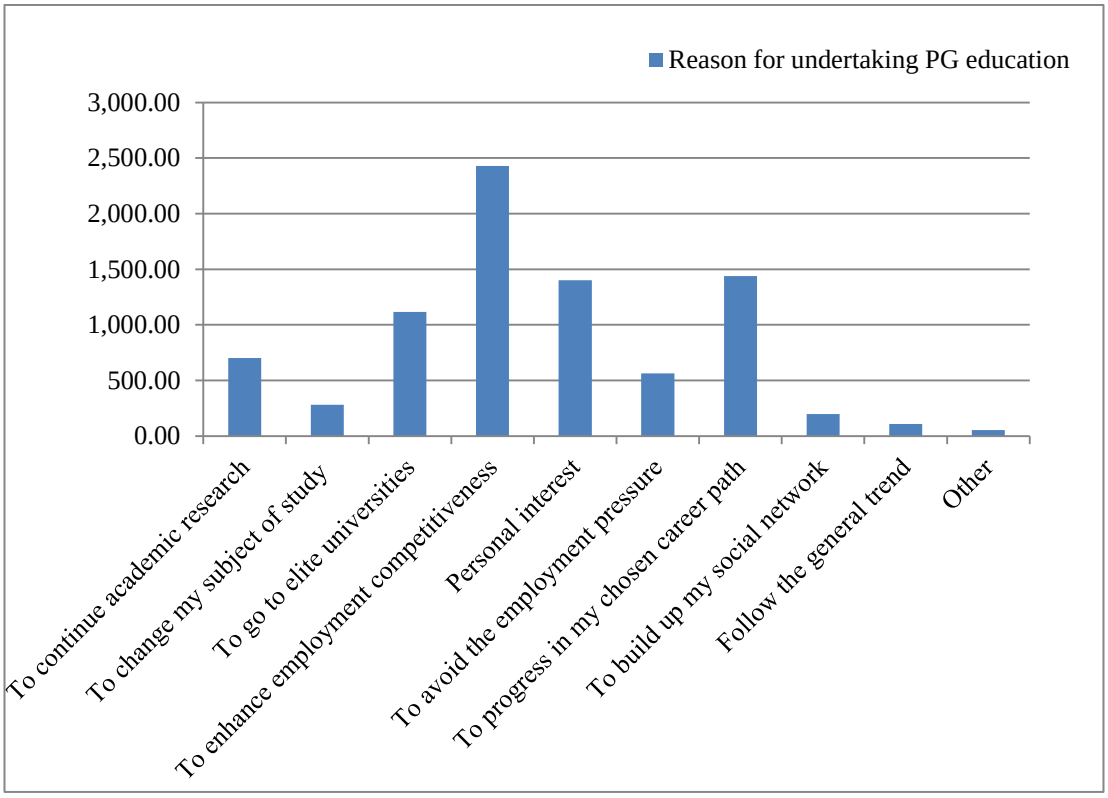
As shown Figure 20, below, according to the results of the importance of each option[45], students chose to undertake postgraduate education mainly to enhance their employment competitiveness. The second most importance reason was to progress in

[44] None of the participants were married; this is the true reflection of most of the Chinese PG students' situation.

[45] The specific calculation process is illustrated in Figure 19, in the methodology chapter, p.146-147.

their chosen career path. This was closely followed by personal interest and to go to elite universities for postgraduate studies.

Figure 20. Students' Main Reasons for Undertaking PG Education

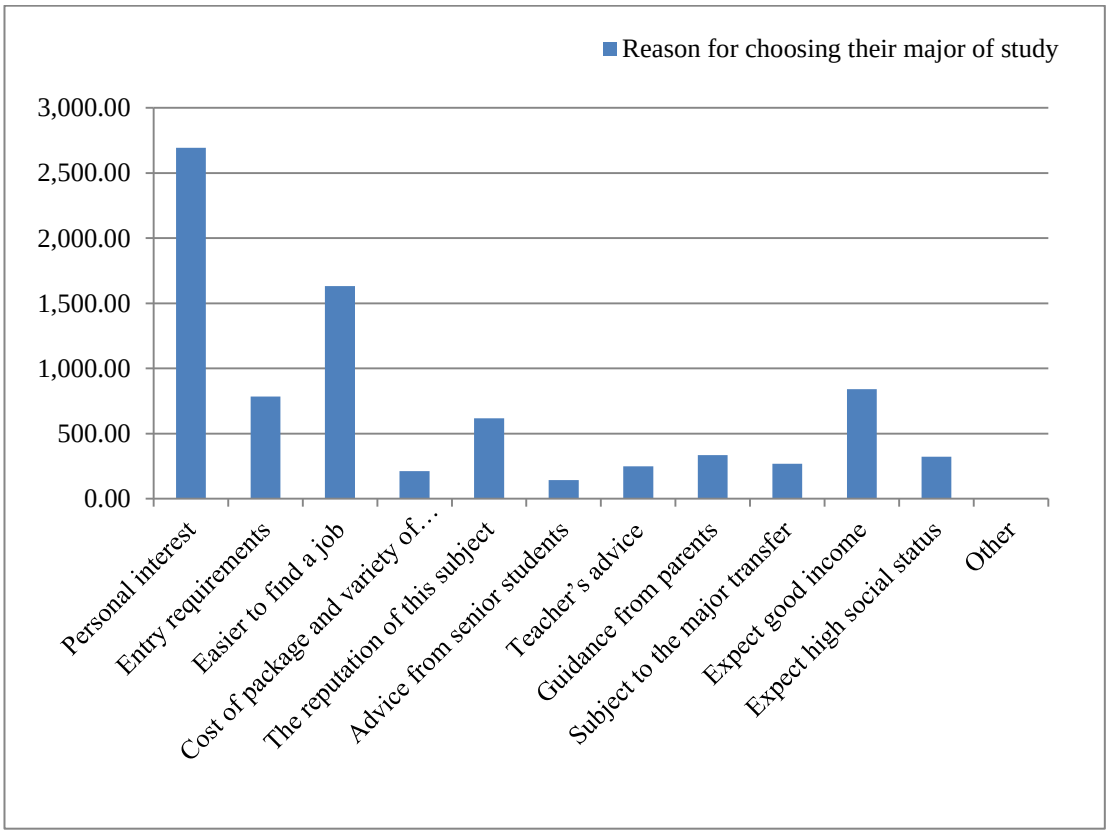


Source: Developed from the survey

Students' main reasons for choosing their subject of study

As shown in Figure 21, below, according to the ranking of the importance of each option, students choose their major of study mainly out of personal interest. Easier to find a job through studying this major was ranked second and good income prospects ranked third. In addition, entry requirements and the reputation of the subject were also important concerns in choosing their specific field of study.

Figure 21. Students' Main Reasons for Choosing Their Subject of Study

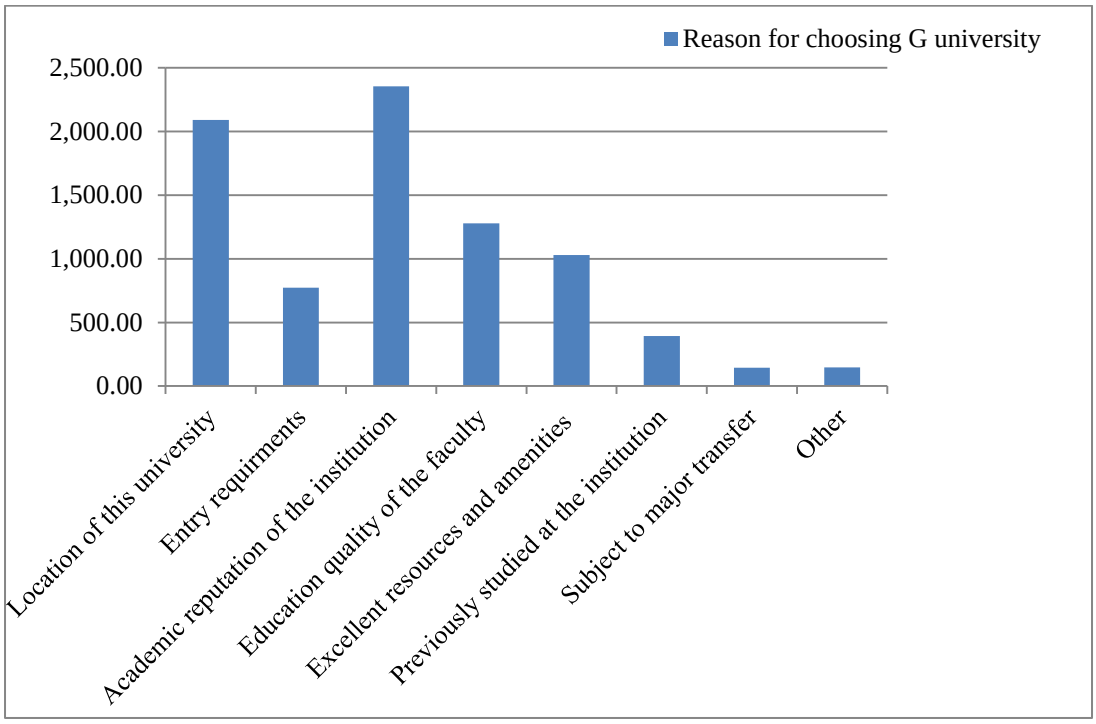


Source: Developed from the survey

Students' main reasons for choosing G University

In terms of the main reasons for choosing G University, as shown in Figure 22, below, according to the ranks allocated to the importance of each option, the three most important reasons were the academic reputation of the institution, location of this university and education quality of the faculty. Excellent resources and amenities of the university as well as entry requirements were also important reasons why students chose G University as the place to study.

Figure 22. Students' Main Reasons for Choosing G University

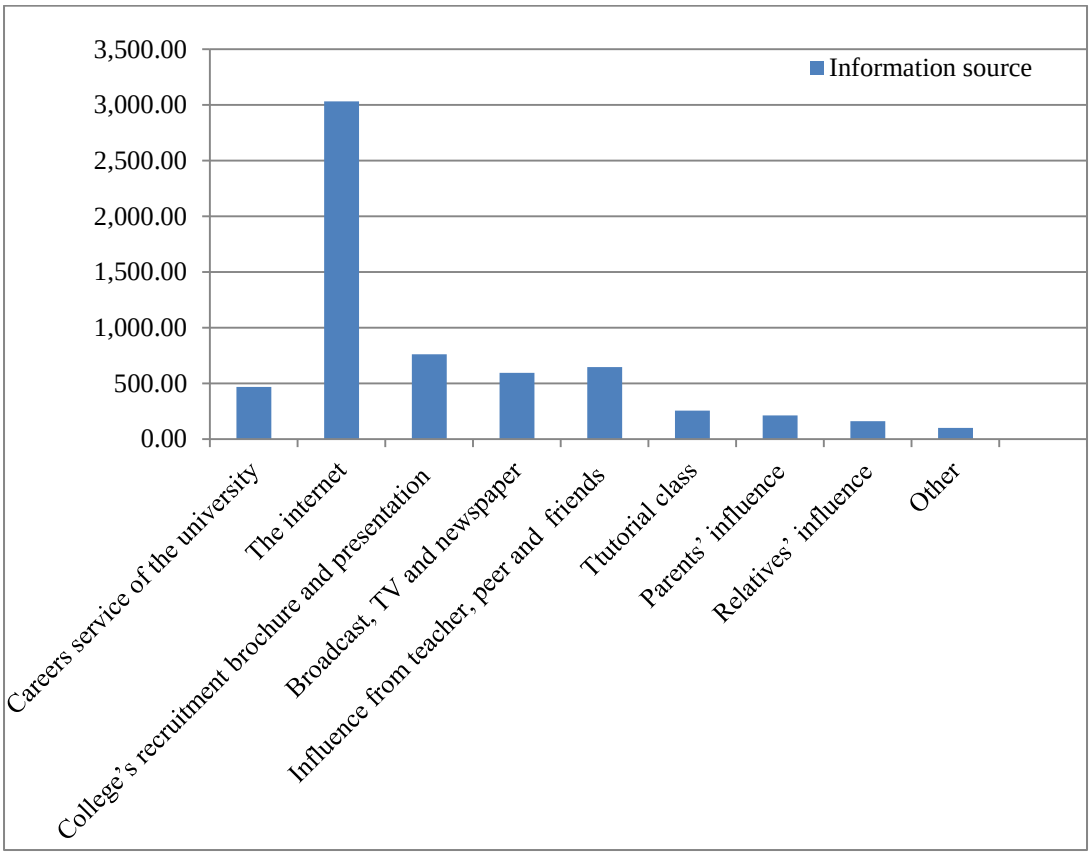


Source: Developed from the survey

Students' main sources of information before making their choices

As shown in Figure 23, the most important source of information was the Internet. The university recruitment brochure and presentation ranked second. The influence of teachers, peer and friends ranked third. In addition, information from broadcast, TV and newspapers as well as the careers service of the university were also important sources of information.

Figure 23. Students' Main Sources of Information for Making Their Choices



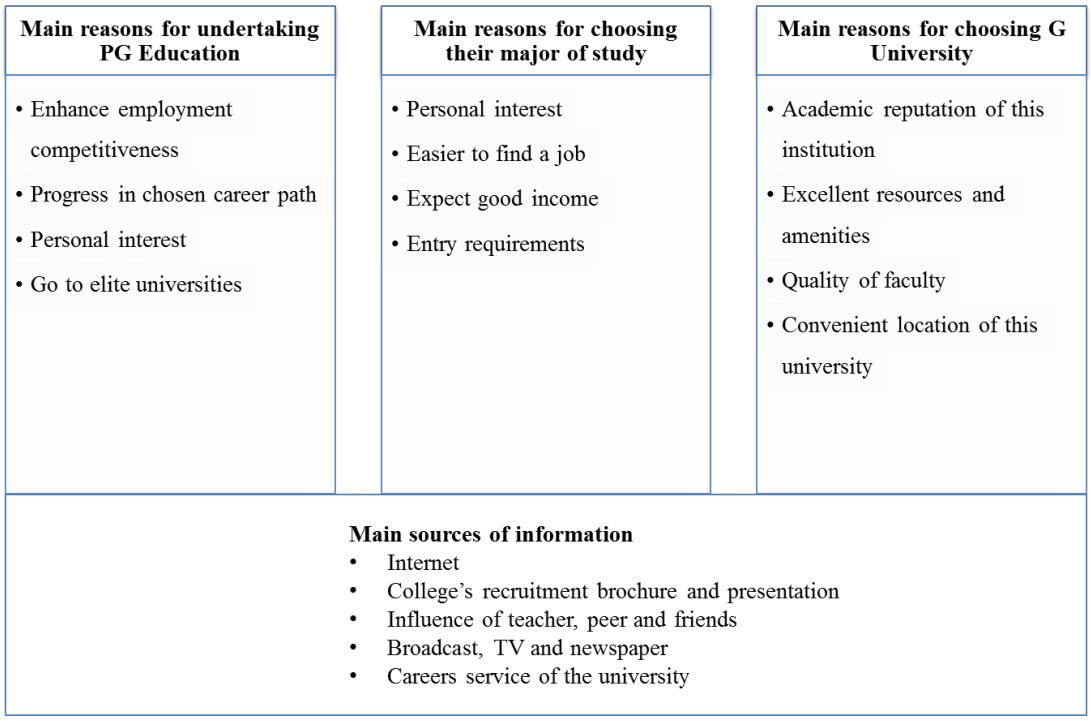
Source: Developed from the survey

To summarize: the quantitative data presented above provides a general picture of students' decisions about undertaking postgraduate education, namely their main reasons for undertaking PG education, and for choosing what and where to study, as well as their main information sources. Figure 24, below, summarizes the main results. Better employment prospects as well as personal interest constituted the main reasons for students pursuing postgraduate education as well as for their choice of major of study. 'Personal interest' as the reason for undertaking PG education and for choosing a specific major of study seemed to be recurring themes, and a detailed

discussion is shown in the section of interest below[46]. As for the reason for choosing G University as the place of study, the participants valued it academic reputation, location, as well as the faculty reputation and resources most.

Figure 24. Major Factors Influencing Students' Choice of PE at G University

(Based on quantitative results)



Source: Developed from the survey

The next section presents the qualitative data, which explores students' choices of postgraduate education in greater depth with reference to their specific circumstances from the theoretical aspects of human, cultural, and social capital.

[46] See page 182 for clarification.

Qualitative Data

The interview data, which is the most valuable source of data collected, supported the questionnaire findings and also provided a more in-depth understanding of the students' decision-making about postgraduate study at G University. As suggested by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), interviews help to interpret, clarify and illustrate quantitative findings. Before presenting the interview data, a reminder of the main research questions and sub-questions is helpful to focus the presentation of the qualitative results. The main research question is: Why did students choose to do postgraduate education at G University? The sub-questions developed from the main research question were:

1. What motivated students to undertake PG education?
    a. What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?
    b. What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?
2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?
3. Why did they choose G University as the place of study?

The presentation of the qualitative results follows the above sequence of sub-research questions. The main themes corresponding to each research question are presented and interpreted, with reference to the major findings of the quantitative data. Direct quotes from some of the participants are used to support the findings. The relevant literature is also referred to and discussed to support the interpretation of the qualitative data.

What motivated the students to undertake PG education?

In this section, I present the main themes motivating students to undertake postgraduate education. Consistent with the quantitative results above, students were mainly motivated to undertake postgraduate education by better 'employment prospects'. 'Families' attitudes about students' decision of undertaking postgraduate education were explored as an added theme. However, 'personal interest' did not appear as a main theme as only two participants out of thirty in the interview mentioned being motivated by 'personal interest' to pursue postgraduate education. This seemed a little incongruous compared to the quantitative results, where 'personal interest' ranked as the third most important reason for students to pursue postgraduate education. However, it makes sense on closer inspection of the students' accounts. For example, one student, *Song* said:

> I read a lot of books at university, for example, culture-related books. I was interested in it and thought it would be interesting to continue research in this aspect through PG education.

What *Song* meant by 'personal interest' was actually personal interest in his research area, or in his specific field of study. Later in this chapter, I show that 'personal interest' was the most important reason for students choosing their study major. Therefore, a more detailed discussion of 'personal interest' is given in the section 'why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies', page 182.

Employment Prospects

Consistent with the quantitative findings presented earlier in this chapter, twenty out of the thirty interviewees decided to undertake PG education mainly because they wanted to improve their employment prospects. This is also consistent with recent

research (Daymon and Durkin, 2013; Jepsen and Varhegyi, 2011; XinLangJiaoYu, 2008), which indicates that employment prospects constituted the most important motivating factor for students to pursue postgraduate education. PG education for better employment prospects was illustrated through the following four aspects: 'more job opportunities', 'higher salaries', 'access to elite universities', and 'door-opener for certain jobs'.

More job opportunities

'More job opportunities' was frequently mentioned by the participants. The students hoped that through a PG education they would stand on a higher platform and have more job opportunities and wider choices than a UG degree would provide. For instance, one of the interviewees *Shuai* said:

> … I really wanted to learn more as I felt that the things I learnt during my UG studies were not enough. Further, I thought there would be more job opportunities after PG education as I would be able to choose to be a teacher with a PG degree instead of simply going to a foreign trade company with an UG degree.

Likewise, *Qiang* wanted to improve his human capital accumulation through postgraduate education, which would enlarge his chances of being employed. For example, he said:

> … All I thought was to obtain a higher educational degree, and improve my English knowledge and skills… for better job opportunities.

Thus, Both *Shuai* and *Qiang* believed that the higher the educational level, the better the chances of finding satisfactory jobs. This was related to the 'credential inflation' (Collins, 2011) that has taken place following the massification of Chinese higher

education in recent years. The expansion of higher education posed a big challenge to the government to provide enough jobs for around 4 million new graduates annually (Wu and Zheng, 2008). Only 71% of the graduates found a job in 2007 (Wu and Zheng, 2008). There has been rising joblessness among new university graduates in China since then and the unemployment rate was around 30% in 2014 (Sharma, 2014). In China, students' probability of finding a job is positively related to their education level: the higher the education level, the greater the probability of success (Li et al., 2008). As a result, a PG education degree is increasingly considered as the key to the door of employment.

Higher salaries

At the same time, most of the interviewees considered or were aware that the decision to undertake PG education was an investment. This could be attributed to a human capital motive. They would evaluate the expected costs and benefits when making such a choice (Paulsen, 2001). Although no one mentioned 'human capital' specifically during the interview, they were aware of the initial costs, such as tuition fees and forgone earnings balanced against potential job opportunities. For example, *Fei* said:

> I was quite uneasy at that time because I knew there were risks. Firstly, I might fail the PG entrance examination after pouring all my energy into it. In addition, I might lose some potential work opportunities. Furthermore, even if I passed the PG entrance exam, what if I could not find my ideal job after PG education? You know the tuition for our subject was very high; it was 20,000 Yuan[47] a year…

[47] Normally, PG tuition fees are regulated to be less than 8,000 Yuan (around 800 pounds) a year.

Along with such investment, these students were expecting a high rate of return, such as higher salaries brought by a postgraduate education degree compared to an UG degree. For instance, *Hua* said:

> All I wanted was to obtain another education credential or more certificates from PG education so that I could find a satisfactory job with a higher salary.

Hua believed that higher education credentials bring higher salaries. This belief seemed to be justified as the findings by Li, Morgan, & Ding (2008) showed that students' educational level in China was positively to with their earnings. The starting salaries for post-graduate students were 1,400-1,700 Yuan RMB (around 140-170 pounds) higher than that of college students (Li et al., 2008). The rate of return to education influences individual choices of higher education in China, where the wage system is becoming increasingly responsive to key human capital components (Fan and Zhang, 2015). Students' hopes for a high rate of return to their investment, especially for monetary gain, to a large extent, explains the high private individual demand for higher education in China in recent decades (Li et al., 2008, 2011). According to Li, Zhao, & Morgan (2011), there has been a steady increase in the rate of return to investment in higher education in China, from 13% in 2000 to 18.9% in 2004. In subsequent years, these percentages might have changed given the slow but steady increase in fees.

The importance of obtaining satisfying salaries was also confirmed by eight of the interviewees with job experience, who went to work immediately after UG studies because they failed in their first attempt at the PG entrance examinations. Then they quit their jobs because of the low salary and long work hours. One student, *Fan* said:

> After I failed the PG entrance examinations the first time, I went to work in an IT company in Shanghai for eight months. My major responsibility was for programme development. However, I did not like it and began to prepare for the PG entrance examinations again. I really did not want to work there anymore. It was very tiring; I often had to work overtime while the salary was not very high...

Access to elite universities

'Going to an elite university' for postgraduate education was frequently mentioned by the interviewees. Most of the students stated that they intended to go to an elite university for postgraduate education. This was because graduates from elite universities have a greater chance of being employed than those from ordinary universities (Li et al., 2008). For instance, *Xiao* said:

> I graduated from a second-tier university [a non-elite university] in Shandong province; I thought if I went to find a job with a degree from this university, I wouldn't have been recognized as suitable by employers.

Education credentials from elite universities, especially from '985' or '211' universities[48] are essential to opening the door for certain jobs. This could be evidenced in *Yu*'s account:

> …I tried to find a job after UG studies; however, I encountered some companies who clearly stated that they preferred graduates from the '985' or '211' universities.

Thus, students were quite aware that an educational degree from a '985' or '211' university would greatly improve their chances of securing a good job with high pay, and so could realize a higher rate of return to their investment in their education (Wu,

[48] See footnote 9 and 8 for explanation, page 20-21.

2012). This confirmed the findings by Li, Ding, & Morgan (2009), which showed that the 'signalling' effect – the major economic function of education is to help employers to screen out individuals for tasks – is till influential in the Chinese labour market for higher education graduates.

Apart from understanding the value of the 'signalling' effect of the '985' or '211' universities, students also expected to benefit their human and cultural capital by studying at these universities. The '985' or '211' universities in China are leading research universities and provided with more government support than other universities (Ma, 2012). Thus, going to these universities usually means better access to good facilities, such as libraries with good selections of books and resources. Access to such objectified cultural capital – so-called by Bourdieu (1986) – was beyond the students' from non-elite universities. For instance, *Jing* said:

> I did not want to find a job as an undergraduate. I felt that I really lacked something that I had not gained from my UG University, although I had studied very hard during the previous four years. Our university lacked resources, and you know what, it even did not have a library…

Therefore, it was not surprising that students who graduated from a non-elite university would feel less confident about their employment. Some students attributed their lack of confidence to their non-elite undergraduate university learning experience with its lack of good quality facilities and resources. For instance, *Ran* said:

> …I also felt that my UG University was not good. The English major at that university was not well-reputed. The curriculum provided by that university was not well-designed. Therefore, I even began to doubt my learning ability. I thought even if I could be the number one at this university; I might be nothing at another university… Our university did not have a library. If the

> students wanted to study by themselves; they had to find an empty classroom instead.

More pessimistically, some felt that as non-elite university graduates, they could not find a position in society. For example, *Xiao Yu* said:

> I do not want to leave the campus; I felt that I could not find a position in the society if I went for a job then. I had no confidence at all, as I was not doing well in the College Entrance Examinations (*Gaokao*) and because of which I went to a non-elite university…

Door opener for certain jobs

Six of the participants wanted to do PG education because they realized that a PG education degree was a door opener for some jobs, especially for being a teacher or a civil servant. There had been a 15% year-on-year increase of applications to the civil service in China, with the number of people registered to take the civil entrance examinations reaching 1.5 million in 2013 (Jiang, 2013). The guarantee of job security constituted one of the main reasons for the eagerness to join the public civil service in China (ibid.). In addition, civil servants often receive exclusive welfare packages, such as cheap housing, paid holidays and other perks (ibid.). Therefore, being a teacher or a civil servant with a reasonably good salary became the priority for most girls. For instance, *Ran* said:

> The two good jobs for me were a civil servant and a university teacher, while the later requires a PG education degree.

Most female participants said they wanted to be a teacher or a civil servant after their PG education; as such jobs were stable and could allow them enough time to take care of their family. For example, *Qiao* said:

> … Being a teacher, I could afford much more time to take care of the family. As my father was a teacher, I knew it. It is quite stable, and the salary is satisfactory. Further, it is quite a decent and respected job.

However, good jobs in the girls' eyes were not seen in the same way by the boys. Among the male interviewees, almost none mentioned they wanted to be a civil servant in the future. They thought that as a boy, they should not be content with just a stable job. For example, *Fan* who went to be a village official (belongs to the national civil servant system) after he failed in his first attempt at the PG entrance examinations, said:

> My father told me, as a boy I should not be satisfied with just being a village official, as the salary was not very high, less than 2000 Yuan [200 Pounds] a month. What's more, I had little hope of getting promoted in that position as I did not have a strong family background. If I stayed there as a village official then, I would be there my whole life. So my father strongly advised me that I should leave… Seeing most of my classmates had very good development opportunities, I was depressed and I thought I should resign from that position as I was only 24.

From this we can see that both *Fan* and his father believed that a boy should shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the whole family, instead of being merely satisfied with a stable job. Thus, a stable job, as a priority for most girls, was not the same for boys. This was also evident in *Tao's* account:

> I had wide choices of jobs after UG studies as my father worked in the railway system and my major was electrical automization, so I could easily find a related job in the famous railway administration. However, I did not go to find a job immediately as one of my brother's friends also advised me not to find a job too soon but to continue studying. He said I should not find a job too soon; as a boy I should go to university to learn more and broaden my horizons.

Different attitudes towards jobs between the sexes were mainly because of the influence of the traditional view of men and women's roles in the family. As a result of the traditional division of labour in China, there is a well-accepted view that the role of men is outside the home, while the women's role is inside the home (Chen, 2004). This is also consistent with Sheng's (2012) findings, that women in China still play a major role in the division of household responsibilities. In addition, there is still a different mandatory retirement age for men and women in China: men can stay in employment five years longer than women. Consequently, men's role as the breadwinner of the family is reinforced (Zhou, 2006). Lastly, men are at a lower risk of being laid off and have a better chance of being reemployed, as a result of gender employment differences. Women over age 35 have fewer chances for employment than men of that age (ibid.).

The influence of the traditional view of different roles for men and women was also reflected in students' attitudes to marriage[49]. Some parents even believed the priority for a girl was to marry a good man rather than to have a good job. For example, *Fei* said:

> My mother thought that a woman should rely on her husband, which was also the common practice in our hometown. The priority for a woman was to have a good husband to rely on and a stable job.

This confirmed the finding by Stone & McKee (2000) from the survey responses of 1,181 college students in the US, and the finding of Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame (2005) from the survey responses of 190 young people aged from 14 to 16 in

[49] Although this might not be directly related to the theme of 'door opener for certain jobs', it is an interesting and unexpected topic which emerged from the data.

UK, that women would plan their future around the needs of their families due to gender differences.

In addition, women would also consider entering marriage and parenthood at an earlier age. It was thought that the higher the degree a woman has, the more difficult it is for her to find an ideal husband. For example, *Qiao* said:

> My father had concerns for my marriage as he faced a lot of pressure from society. In our community, it was much a concern that a girl with high degrees would have great difficulty in finding an ideal husband as she would no longer be young[50].

The increasing difficulty a highly educated woman might face to get married is mainly because Chinese men tend to 'marry down', both in terms of age and educational attainment. This is evidenced in the following BBC news report of February 21st, 2013 (Magistad, 2013):

> There is an opinion that A-quality guys will find B-quality women, B-quality guys will find C-quality women, and C-quality men will find D-quality women. The people left are A-quality women and D-quality men. So if you are a leftover woman, you are A-quality.

Also, highly educated women have higher requirements for their future husband, as explained by *Fei*:

> My uncle told me when a girl has a higher degree, it is natural that they would set their sights higher than before. As a result, it would be more difficult for her to find a husband suitable for her…

[50] According to statistics from the Sixth Nationwide Population Census of 2010, the average age of marriage for Chinese women is 23.89 while that for Chinese men is 25.86, slightly up from 23.17 and 25.11 for Chinese women and men in 2000 (NBSC, 2010).

Further, there is great pressure from society as unmarried women passed 27 are labelled as 'left-over' women. Thus, women will consider getting married at an early age, preferably before age 25 and no later than age 27. There was an interesting report about this in the BBC Magazine of February 21st, 2013 (Mcclintock, 2014):

> Pretty girls do not need a lot of education to marry into a rich and powerful family, but girls with an average or ugly appearance will find it difficult. These kinds of girls hope to further their education in order to increase their competitiveness. The tragedy is, they don't realize that as women age, they are worth less and less, so by the time they get their M.A. or Ph.D., they are already old, like yellowed pearls.

Family attitudes

Students were subsequently asked what their parents' attitudes were towards their decision about undertaking postgraduate education. This question was asked because it was assumed that the investment of human capital in education is often considered as an investment by the whole family (Healy and Côté, 2001). As an important investment requiring a relatively long time and a large sum of money, students would normally seek advice and help from parents and relatives about their decisions. In addition, Chinese parents normally become active role-players in their Children's education, as they attach a high value to education under the influence of Confucianism (Koo, 2012).

It was found that almost all the students confirmed their parents' support for their decision about undertaking postgraduate education. For instance, *Yan* said:

> My parents thought that if I had a PG education degree, I would have greater chances of finding a good job with a higher salary, which would bring more benefits to them too.

This was consistent with the finding by Lee & Morrish (2012), who conducted twenty interviews with Chinese parents and their children who were in the process of deciding on higher education abroad, and found that higher education was still believed to be of great importance to the future development of children and even the whole family.

Also, the idea of "the higher the educational degree, the better" was still popular among the parents. For example, *Qiao* said:

> My father went to university and was a high school teacher; he thought the higher education degree, the better…

This linked to the educational experience of parents. The restoration of the College Entrance Examinations (CEE) in 1977, which had been abolished during the Cultural Revolution[51], was a turning point for most parents. Those who passed it would normally enjoy great success in their later lives and careers (Wu, 2011). A student with a college degree in the 1970s or 1980s would be guaranteed a permanent position (Ma, 2012). Thus, a university degree was seen as a safe box, ensuring them a better life than those who did not have a university degree, as university graduates are found jobs. For example, *Ya* explained:

> My father encouraged me to do PG education. He was sort of worshiping the higher educational degrees. I thought it might have a connection with his age- when you entered university then, you were in a safe box. You would be arranged a job and live a better life than those who did not go to university. Besides, I thought it was connected with my uncle who was the only one who lived a good life as he had gone to university…

[51] This is explained in Chapter Two, Chinese higher education reform: From 1949 to 1978, p.17, see also footnote 16, p.17.

Further, higher education degrees were thought to bring higher status to a family within the community. For instance, *Tao* said:

> My father was very proud that I was the only one in my family who had gone to university for PG education. He liked to brag about this in front of his colleagues as he felt very proud of that.

This is consistent with the findings by Li et al., (2008), which stated that higher education is seen by the individual as well as parents in China as a means to not only to secure a higher income but also a higher status in society. In the same vein, Morgan & White (2014) said that, as a result of the rising costs of higher education and reduced graduate job prospects, the value of university education is becoming increasingly manifested in private gains or rates of return of higher education to individuals.

However, some parents' (those parents with a low education background) attitude towards going to university was changing. This was because the rapid expansion of higher education in the past decade has caused the value of undergraduate degrees to be inflated in China (Li et al., 2011). Students were no longer allocated jobs as they had been in the old socialist system, but had to find jobs in a competitive job market. It is reported that unemployment among new Chinese graduates in 2014 was officially around 15%, while the unofficial figure is around 30% (Sharma, 2014). Although going to the university might help you in other aspects, a university degree does not necessarily mean a better salary that those who do not have one. For example, *Ya* said:

> … Recently, my father's attitude [toward going to university] has sort of changed as now in society there is a saying 'it is useless to go to the university'. Even if you did not go to the university, you could still earn 4 to

> 5 thousand Yuan [around 4-5 hundred pounds] a month as a worker, equivalent to or even more than one month's salary of a fresh undergraduate.

Therefore, a few parents, especially low-income parents, might be unwilling to make this investment in their children[52] because they had to forsake benefits such as the salary their child would have earned by working, and at the same time, had to pay their children's tuition and living costs. For example, one student, *Wei* said:

> Most of the parents in my hometown were unwilling to support their children in higher education. They thought university education wouldn't bring them immediate benefits, therefore it would be better to work outside which can earn three to four thousand Yuan a month. If their children went to university, they had to support their tuition and living costs every month. On the other hand, they were unable to support their children going university by relying solely on farming…

This echoes the finding by Steelman & Powell (1991), who analysed the responses of a large survey of 3,600 parents of high school seniors and 3,600 parents of sophomores in the US, and found that low-income parents with less economic resources would be less willing to invest in education for their children. Several reasons might account for low-income parents' reluctance to invest in their children's higher education. One possible explanation could be that constrained by their disadvantaged family circumstances, they were not able to support their children for such a costly investment. In addition, as these parents have not received higher education themselves, they could not understand the long-term benefits of higher education. Because of this, they tended to be more short-sighted and only focused on immediate monetary benefits. Thus, they would be unwilling to make such an investment for their children's postgraduate education. According to the

[52] This conclusion was based on a student's account of the mind-sets of some of the parents in their hometown.

statistics, the average salary for the fresh graduates was 3,560 Yuan (equivalent to 350 pounds) a month in 2013 (Anon., 2014b). This is equivalent to what a worker could earn for a month, as evidenced in *Wei's* account above.

Furthermore, those parents with a low educational background, only with or below high school, had no real understanding of the choice process and thus could not provide any specific suggestions for their children's choice of PG education. For example, *Qiang* said:

> As my parents are peasant farmers with low educational backgrounds, they did not provide any guidance for me concerning my educational choices; I had to entirely rely on myself…

Similarly, *Fang* said:

> My parents did not make any suggestions about my choice as they had no knowledge about that.

Despite the possible changing attitude towards going to university in a few parents' minds, most parents, according to the participants' accounts, especially rural parents, were eager to encourage their children to receive postgraduate education. They considered going to university as the only way for their children to escape poverty. For example, *Yan* said:

> In our countryside, it was considered quite honourable to go to university, as it was the only way for us who had no special social background, to go out and earn a bright future.

This is consistent with Koo (2012) and Ma's (2012) research, which found that education was still seen by most Chinese rural parents as the only route out of poverty and to a better life for their children. This is especially true in China where

guanxi is greatly valued. *Guanxi* here means 'a dyadic, particular and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favourable exchanges between the parties connected by the tie' (Bian, 2006, p.312). In China, students with no special background, or *guanxi* are disadvantaged in the labour market (Huang, 2008). Without such *guanxi*, students had to rely on the only route to a better life, which was going to university. For example, *Xiao* said:

> My parents are peasant farmers. They told me with no special family background, the only way for me to go out and change this situation was by studying hard. Thus, they attached great importance to my education and hoped I could study hard and go to university so that I won't do laborious farm work like they had been doing their whole lives.

Although parents/grandparents with low education backgrounds could not provide any constructive suggestions for their children/grandchildren due to their limited educational experience, some did provide a source of inspiration and spiritual support for them to undertake PG education. This is consistent with the finding by Sjaastad (2011), who conducted a survey of 5,007 Norwegian students in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in tertiary education, and concluded that conversations with parents were important sources of inspiration for PG education. Apparently, the parents/grandparents of my respondents understood the benefits of going to university and thought it would provide their (grand) children with the ability to obtain monetary advantage. For instance, *Yan* added:

> Since I was young, I have lived together with my grandpa[53] [on her father's side]. He attached great importance to my studies and encouraged me to

[53] He joined the People's Liberation Army when young and had rich experience of life. He was versatile as he could play the Chinese violin, did well at Chinese brush writing, and was a good story-teller. He was well respected by the local villagers as he was of good character and conduct. He was also considered the most influential person in *Yan's* life.

> study hard and go to university... When I was young, I complained there was no meat in the meal; he would reply that when you go to university you will have meat to eat. When I complained that I did not have beautiful new clothes to wear, he would reply when you go to university you will have. Every time I wanted to have something, he would reply when you go to university, you will have whatever you want.

Yan's grandfather would also draw on examples of those who lived a comfortable life in the community after having gone to university to inspire her to work hard. For example, *Yan* added:

> My grandpa paid special attention to those who had gone to university in our village. Once he had that kind of information, he would tell me. For example, A went to university and become a policeman after his graduation, and thereafter he was well-off. B went to university and later had a good job through the university… He had a lot of this kind of stories to tell.

To summarize: students' decisions about postgraduate education were mainly motivated by human capital concerns, which confirmed the quantitative results in the previous section. These findings were also consistent with the online report by *XinLangJiaoYu* (2008), a professional educational service network platform in China, which stated that 61% of the students listed 'employment consideration' as the key motivating factor for postgraduate education. Students hoped that through their investment in postgraduate education, they would gain better employment prospects with more job opportunities and potentially higher salaries. What is more, most students wanted to go to elite universities. They understood the value of the 'signalling' effect of the elite universities in China, and expected to benefit from human and cultural capital increments by studying at these universities. In addition, students were aware that a postgraduate education certificate has become a door-opener for certain positions, especially for being a teacher or a civil servant.

However, attitudes towards good jobs as well as marriage were divided by gender. Parents' enthusiasm and support for their children's decision for postgraduate education reflected the influence of the concept of achieving social and economic prosperity through learning, which may be a legacy of Confucianism.

Parents' attitudes towards the benefits of higher education are their embodied cultural capital according to Bourdieu (1986), referring to the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. Parents' views and attitudes towards the benefits of higher education are transmitted to their children through family socialisation and inculcation, an embodiment of the existence of social capital within the family according to Coleman (1988). These attitudes and views later shaped their children's motivation for undertaking higher education. This illustrates how cultural and social capital within the family impacts on children's cultural and human capital formation, and further their choice of higher education.

The next section presents and analyses the main factors influencing students' choice of subject for postgraduate studies.

Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?

'Interest', 'follow up from the UG major', 'easier to find a job' and 'easier to gain admission to a course' constituted the main reasons for students' choice of particular subjects for postgraduate study. This confirmed the findings of the quantitative results. These main themes are presented and interpreted in sequence.

Interest

Twenty-seven of the interviewees made it clear that 'interest' constituted one of the main reasons for their choices of subject for PG education. This was consistent with

the research by Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby (2005), who surveyed 788 undergraduate students at a US business college and concluded that interest was the most important factor in college students' choice of major. For example, one student, *Xiao* said:

> Choosing Japanese as my subject of study was taken for granted as I was very interested in it.

Similarly *Jing* said:

> I felt that I was really very interested in Languages and made up my mind to study English.

Also, they were quite aware of the importance of choosing a subject they were interested in. For instance, *Shuai* said:

> I think you should choose a subject in which you are interested. There is no point in torturing yourself with a subject you don't like.

It is not surprising that they attached importance to their interest as they were mature enough to understand that the subject of their PG studies would largely determine their future type of work. Those who indicated 'interest' as an important reason for their choice of major were asked how and when they had developed their interest. Family learning and teachers' influence were the two main sources, discussed below.

Family learning

Seven of the participants developed certain interests or the habit of reading at an early age, influenced by their cultural capital accumulated from their family's learning. Parents who regularly read books at home formed a stimulating learning environment and acted as role models for their children. As a result, children picked up the learning habit. For instance, *Yang* said:

> I was thankful to my parents as they have helped me develop a reading habit since I was young. Whenever they came back home from work, they would read books together with me, unlike many other parents who would watch TV or play cards. Immersed in this environment, I also liked reading and learning and have continued this habit since then… I was very interested in English and I could always achieve high marks in English. Naturally, I chose English Interpretation for UG study, and later for PG study…

This confirmed the finding by DiMaggio (1982) that family lifestyles and cultural consumption patterns have an important impact on children's cultural formation. This is also consistent with Gao's (2011) findings, which concluded that valuable educational resources available at home, such as books can motivate children to learn and shape their orientation to schooling in China. In the same vein, Shaw (2012) showed that family background plays an important role in shaping students' perceptions of higher education in the UK.

Participation in cultural activities, aided by objectified cultural capital at home, could acquaint children with cultural cues, and lead to the further development of related knowledge and skills. As a result, it would be much easier for such children to adapt to classroom learning and excel among their classmates. For example, *Fei* said:

> I was interested in English and I think this is connected to my family. My father was a teacher, he taught mathematics. He also did very well in English… My father bought me a lot of tapes, English reading materials, and a tape recorder for me when I was in primary school [English was first taught at secondary school]. I became quite interested in it. Thus, I had laid the foundation for it before middle school. Maybe because of this, I knew more than the other students, and I kept learning English all the time. I think language learning is closely connected with your surroundings.

Thus, the knowledge increment and confidence accumulated from family learning directed students' specific interest in certain areas, which further influenced their choice of major for UG and PG study. This was also evidenced in *Yu*'s account*:*

> My father went to university… He had diverse knowledge… As a result; I could absorb a lot of information from him. My mother majored in accounting at college. She was an accountant. Influenced by her, I majored in accounting for UG studies and wanted to continue it for my PG studies…

In addition, parents with higher education degrees would be more conscious of and attentive in cultivating academic skills in their children at an early age. For example *Jiao's* parents, who were teachers with university degrees, took advantage of the love letter their daughter received to teacher her Chinese characters:

> When I was in primary school, I received a love letter from one of my classmates. Most of the children would hide them from their parents. I would let my parents know and they would read it and help me to find out the mistakes. I got on very well with my parents. I felt that to a certain degree, it was my parents who had given me enough freedom to do what I liked…

The above examples confirmed Bourdieu's argument that children can inherit cultural capital from family socialization through participation in cultural activities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Reay, 2010). Family socialization helps children to develop the proper habitus – "a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body" (Jenkins, 2002, p.74) – which guides their future practice (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 1998; Morgan, 2008).

In line with the findings of Walmsley, Wilson, & Morgan (2010), which found that parents had a strong influence on college students' choices of major based on focus groups with students in a US college, this research found that parents who had

university or postgraduate education tended to give more concrete advice on their children's choice of subject of study. They were able to provide specific learning methods, or even push their children towards a certain area which they thought was best. For example, *Man*, whose father was a university teacher with a postgraduate degree, said:

> My father has planned the education route for me since my UG studies. He asked me to major in English for UG studies as I went to a non-elite university, in which case, it would be helpful for me in the PG entrance examinations as English was one of the major exams. As for PG education, in order to ensure more employment opportunities, my father chose Ideological and Political Science for my field of study for PG education… Since I was young he has passed on his knowledge of political science and ideology and the skills he used to reach his conclusions.

This tendency to push may be explained by the 'one-child' policy and by the materialistic nature of contemporary Chinese society. However, this phenomenon is not particular to China as it has been reported elsewhere, for example, Dustmann (2004) found that parental preferences play a key role in their children's secondary school choice in Germany. Although *Man* was pushed by her father's wishes most of the time, she was not going to 'rebel' against her father's wishes. For example, she said:

> My father was a teacher. He has been very strict with me. Since I was young, he has dragged me down the education route he had planned for me, from primary school to university. Sometimes, I [as the only child] did not agree in my heart, however I would not rebel against his expectations.

This could be explained by the 'filial piety' advocated by Confucianism in Chinese culture. The concept of 'filial piety' requires children to show unconditional support, both material and emotional, respect, courtesy and obedience to parents (Cheung and

Kwan, 2009). Under the influence of 'filial piety', Chinese children are thought to respect and care for their parents (Canda, 2014). It also requires children to bring prosperity to the family; one important way of achieving this was to pass the civil examination in ancient China (Chang, 2013; Salili et al., 2001). Thus the concept of 'filial piety' is closely tied to the encouragement of learning (Lee and Morrish, 2012). With the practice of the 'one-child' policy in recent decades in China, parents devote themselves wholeheartedly to their child, while at the same time, the only child feels more obliged to show 'filial piety' due to their singleton status (Deutsch, 2006) .

Teachers' influence

By comparison, those who were without family cultural capital endowment cited the important role played by teachers. Teachers' encouragement could be of great importance in motivating the students to follow PG education[54]. For instance, one student, *Ting* said:

> I attended a training class for Business English at Hu Nan University [an elite university]. Once, I had written some questions on my notebook to ask my teacher, whose cover had written on it *Hunan First Normal University* [a non-elite university], where I had studied for my UG education. When he saw this, he pointed to the words on my cover and said 'you should not be content with a university degree from this university'. His words made me think of undertaking PG education.

Teachers' impact on developing students' motivation for learning has long been established (for example, Williams and Burden, 1997; Lei, 2012). This was consistent with Mullen's findings (2009) based on the qualitative results of fifty Yale junior and senior students, which concluded that the teacher could play an important

[54] Teachers' influence on students was more on students' choice of major than on students' motivation for PG education; the discussion of teachers' influence is therefore placed here.

role in motivating students to go to university in the absence of parents' social background influence.

More importantly, teaching methods and style were found to be influential in shaping students' interest for certain areas. Influenced by teachers, some students developed their interest in a particular subject. For example, *Jie* said:

> Our Linguistics teacher's class was very attractive as what she taught was very easy to understand and interesting, which made me want to explore Linguistics in greater depth.

The importance of the teachers' instruction in shaping students' interest in certain subjects was also confirmed by *Ya*, who did not develop any interest in her UG major mainly because she did not like her teacher's teaching style:

> … I did not develop any interest in my major also because I did not like the teachers' teaching style: they were just repeating the books, their teaching lacked depth and was not captivating...

For some students, the interest developed through their teacher would often lead to success in certain subjects in their later studies. For example *Lan said*:

> I was best at English during high school because our high school English teacher's class was interesting. Apart from teaching us something in the text, she gave us some interesting extracurricular knowledge. My English was not good during middle school; however, after having her classes, I became interested in it and made good progress.

Further, following their interest, some even connected their choice of PG subject to their future job plans. For instance, *Qiang* said:

> One of the teachers who taught us written translation was very good. I used his method for doing written translation and enjoyed the process very much.

> Then I developed an interest in it and decided to find a job related to English translation later.

Thus, good teaching style and instruction directed students' interests and even influenced their future career plan. This is consistent with the findings by Sjaastad (2011) from a survey of 5,007 Norwegian students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in tertiary education, which showed that teachers' support could influence students' interest in a particular subject, bring out students' abilities, and further influence their educational choices and future plans. Similarly, Lichtenstein, Tombari, Sheppard, & Storm (2014), based on a survey of 215 in-service teachers and high school seniors from around the US who planned to attend college, and 13 follow-up interviews with teachers, showed that high school and middle school instruction has a significant influence on students' choosing to major in engineering, which is more influential than other factors, such as peers, parents, students' own perceptions, interest and beliefs about the subject. Oliver & Kettley (2010) conducted interviews with teachers and students in six institutions in UK, and also found that teacher's beliefs, dispositions and their social capital are potential influencing factors shaping students' choice of higher education, especially students' choice of elite universities. In China, there is little related research specifying teachers' influence on students' choice of programme. The great positive impact of teachers on their students might be partly explained by the special teacher-student relationship combined with Chinese traditional culture. In the Chinese tradition, students revere teachers and teachers are treated with open and, presumably, complete respect. Such sayings as "a teacher is a parent" or "my teacher for a day is a parent for a lifetime" are widely accepted among Chinese students (Anon., 2009). Coughlan (2013) also reported that teachers in China were given the highest level of

public respect based on an international study and attributed this phenomenon mainly to its strong cultural emphasis placed on the importance of education[55].

Follow up UG major

Eight participants followed their UG major in their PG education as they had already laid the foundation for further study during the four years of UG study. For example, *Xiao* said:

> I chose Japanese for UG studies as advised by my aunt. Therefore I took it for granted I would continue with the same subject at PG level as I was also interested in it.

Some of the participants mentioned they were concerned about changing to a new subject, as it would require more investment in both money and time. For instance, *Qiao* said:

> I did not think of changing to another major as I have already learnt Japanese for four years. In addition, I have already got the things I wanted to explore further through PG education...

Others followed up their UG major because they were really interested in it, and this kind of interest was developed at an early age under the influence of their family background (see *Yang*'s account, p.184 and *Fei's* account p.184). One followed up her UG major because she had no choice as she was recommended for special academic excellence[56]. For example, *Lan* said:

> I chose Japanese for UG studies. I went to G University by special academic recommendation; I could not switch to another subject.

[55] Public or overt criticism is rare and I was privileged as the interviewer to access some critical comments, but overall, teachers are respected in China.
[56] Students who continued to PG education by special academic recommendation could only continue with their UG major.

One followed up her UG major because it was the only subject she was good at, as *Hua Jiao* said:

> I wanted to learn English because this was the only subject in which I did well… Then I continued this subject at PG level.

Easier to find a job

As discussed in the previous section, students were mainly motivated by employment prospects to undertake postgraduate education; it was not surprising that students would cite 'easier to find a job' as one of their main reasons for choosing their particular subject for postgraduate studies[57]. Six interviewees out of thirty mentioned that they chose the subject for PG education that would make it easier for them to find a job. For example, *Ru* said:

> I didn't continue English for PG education because it was not easy for me to find a good job… Then I changed to Master of Law...

Apart from taking the potential good job opportunities into consideration, some of them also incorporated their interest. For instance, *Fang Zi* said:

> …I was interested in Economics as I felt that it would be easy to find a job after graduation.

Easier to gain admission to a course

Four chose their PG subjects because it was easier for them to get a place. However, the reasons were a little bit different. Three of the interviewees mentioned they got inside information when preparing for the PG entrance examinations as they had a special relationship (*guanxi* in Chinese), which can be seen as a Chinese variant of

[57] As this is a recurring theme, the author here just lists a few examples. A detailed discussion can be seen in the section on Employment Prospects, p.165.

the concept of 'social capital' (Qi, 2013). Two types of *guanxi* existing in China were embodied here. The first is formed on the basis of kinship, familial *guanxi*, which includes immediate family members and distant relatives (Tsang, 1998). For example, *Fang Zi's* uncle provided a valuable source of information for her preparation for the PG entrance examinations as she said:

> I chose the subject at G University because my uncle on my mother's side was at this university. He was a professor at the Centre for European Studies. My uncle then introduced some of his students to me and asked me to consult them about what and how I should prepare for the examinations.

This was consistent with the findings of Coleman (1988), Wu (2013) and Tsang (2013), which concluded that family social capital plays an important role in transmitting parents' resources to their children to seek advantages to ensure their success at school. These parents would normally seek help from their relatives or good friends at the university targeted by their children. Some of them could benefit a lot from that kind of social capital or *guanxi* as they could access the so-called 'key points'[58] to help them prepare for the PG entrance examinations. For example, *Fan* said:

> I chose G University for PG education because my brother-in-law had a very good friend who was a teacher there. I talked with him about wanting to choose a major related to computers, and he recommended G University to me. It was much easier for me to get in… He taught computer science there and pointed out the key points for me to review…

Another type of *guanxi* is formed on a social basis, the non-familial *guanxi* type, arising from social interactions at different places (Tsang, 1998). Many interviewees mentioned that the *guanxi* accumulated during their UG studies contributed to their

[58] It means the specific information to be covered in the PG entrance exams.

success in the PG entrance examinations. For example, *Wei* made use of the human resources accumulated during his undergraduate studies, which ensured his success in the PG entrance examinations:

> I thought G University would be much easier for me as I had all the resources here, the most important of which was my supervisor. As long as I could pass the preliminary exam I wouldn't have any problem in the second round of examinations. He told me who was responsible for setting up the topics for the preliminary exam. Then I found that person and he told me the important topics for review (I can't specify any more). In the end, I got 140 marks out 150 and ranked second in the preliminary exam.

Another important finding was that social capital in the school context also played an important role in providing information sources concerning students' choices of subject and place of PG education, which tends to be less frequently studied (Wu, Palinkas, & He, 2010). This social capital mainly referred to the alumni (or senior schoolmates) in this research. Most of the interviewees said that apart from the internet, they got the information from their senior schoolmates who had previous experience in their chosen subject or at G University. For example, *Ran* said:

> One of my high school classmates introduced her senior schoolmate to me, who latter introduced her classmate to me, who was studying at G university. She was studying the subject I was learning... Then I chose it.

Frequently turning to senior schoolmates for help seems to be a unique aspect of Chinese culture as it has not been reported elsewhere in research concerning students' decision-making. Several reasons may account for this. First, the PG entrance exam is an extremely competitive exam with a low pass rate. In 2013, 3,838 students applied for the PG entrance exam at G University but only 908 were accepted, an acceptance ratio of about 1: 4.2 (Anon., 2013a). Therefore, students have to make

full use of the information resources available to excel in this exam. Second, there is no definite reference book for many subjects of study PG entrance examinations at G University. As a result, the only good resources, namely senior schoolmates with previous experience of such examinations, were frequently asked for help.

Those without such *guanxi* or social capital stated that the entrance examinations suited their personal capabilities. Two mentioned the absence of a second-foreign language examination for that major, at which they were not good. For example, *Rui Fang* said:

> There was no exam in a second foreign language… This was less demanding for me as I was not good at my second-foreign language.

One considered the degree of difficulty of the examinations. For instance, *Ran* said:

> I chose the major of Comparative Studies instead of English Interpreting because the latter required more comprehensive knowledge, which I lacked, and would be more difficult to gain admission.

One chose a less popular subject as it was supposed to be less competitive. For example, *Yao* said:

> … I had a talk with my previous supervisor and he advised me to choose Political Theory, which was a less popular subject.

To summarize: the main themes in this section not only confirm the main findings of the quantitative results, but also provide more informative explanations. 'Interest' constituted the main reason for students to choose their study subject. Family learning and teachers' influence played important roles in developing their interest, confirming the important influence of family habitus on students' accumulation of

cultural capital, which further influenced students' choice of postgraduate education. It was also found that teachers could play a very important role in students' choices of education. Although this has been confirmed elsewhere (for example, Sjaastad, 2011; Lichtenstein et al., 2014; Oliver and Kettley, 2010); there is little related research in China. 'Follow up the UG major', 'easier to find a job' and 'easier to gain admission to a course' were also important factors considered when choosing their PG subjects of study. This illustrates how students' existing human, cultural and social capital (especially *guanxi*) as well as potential capital gains were important references when making their decisions. Students who chose to follow up their UG majors could be seen as continuing the investment gained in human, cultural and social capital during their undergraduate studies.

The next section presents and analyses the main factors that students considered when choosing G University as their place of study[59].

Why did they choose G University as their place of study?

In this section, 'easier to gain admission', 'stay close to families', 'reputation of the university', and 'having studied there before' are the main factors influencing students' choice of university. In addition, 'environment', 'quality of the facilities and staff', as well as the 'location of the university' are considered by students when choosing G University as their place of study.

[59] For postgraduate study, students would normally decide their field of study before considering which university to go to. Thus, students' reasons for choosing G University are presented later in this chapter.

Easier to gain admission

Twelve of the interviewees stated that 'easier to gain admission' was one of the main reasons for students to target G University as their place of study. 'Easier to gain admission' seems to be a repeated theme as it appeared in the previous sections as well. However, what is different in this section is that it means easier to get into this University rather than to the field of study. Some of the students did not get enough time to prepare for exams[60] and thus wanted to choose a university with a better chance of success. For example, *Hua* said:

> Sun-Yat Sen University [a national elite university of the '985' programme] was not possible for me as I did not have enough time for preparation… I wanted to choose a provincial elite university in Guangzhou, and then I chose G University.

Some of them felt that it was easier to gain admission to G University because it is one of the less competitive of the top three language universities. For example, *Song* said:

> …While Linguistics at the Beijing Foreign Language University was also very good, I thought it was too difficult for me…

In the same vein, *Bin* said:

> I also thought of Beijing and Shanghai Foreign Language Universities; however, after going through their sample exams, I thought they were too difficult for me, and then I mainly targeted G University.

[60] This is because on the one hand, they were undecided about whether to pursue PG education or to find a job. On the other, they spent a lot of time trying to find jobs.

Similarly, some thought G University was less competitive than the elite comprehensive universities as it was not ranked as an elite national university. For example, *Shuai* said:

> I was very clear that I wanted to go to this university. I did not think of other comprehensive universities, such as Xiamen University [a national elite university], which would be too difficult for me to gain admission.

Others chose G University because they had studied there before and already had some resources to prepare for the PG entrance examinations. For example, *Wei* said:

> I thought G University would be much easier for me as I had all the resources here… As long as I could pass the preliminary exam I wouldn't have any problem in the re-examinations…

Stay close to families

Ten of the interviewees chose G University to stay close to their families. For example *Qiao* said:

> I chose G University mainly because it is quite near my hometown. I wanted to stay close to my family…

Some of the students' parents worked in Guangzhou or near Guangzhou; as a result, they preferred a university which was located in that city. For example *Ya* said:

> … My parents have been working in Shenzhen [close to Guangzhou]; it would be easier for me to visit them by studying at G University.

Others mentioned it was because they have relatives in Guangzhou. For example, *Ran* said:

> Considering my uncle from my mother's side was also in Shenzhen… I decided to choose G University in Guangzhou.

Also some students mentioned that they felt they should be available to help their families. For example, *Lan* said:

> Considering I should stay close to my families, I chose G University… I could go back to my home and care for my family if anything happened.

The common reason behind their preference for a nearby university, among those who wished to be close to their families, was that it allowed them easier maintenance of family ties (Kusumawati, 2013). It should be pointed out that the high frequency of 'staying close to families' did reflect the unique Asian cultural characteristic of close family bonds, which is considered to be the core feature of Chinese society . It is based on reciprocal responsibilities accepted through agreed ethical and moral guidelines, as reflected in *Ru's* words:

> My parents, like most parents in China, expect their children to stay close to them. They hope they will have someone to rely on when they are old…

Reputation of the university

Eight of the interviewees mentioned the 'reputation of the subject' as one of their main reasons for choosing G University for PG education. For example, *Hua* said:

> …G University has a good reputation in my ideal subject area. G University is a famous university especially for linguistics. I found this out when I was in Tianjin [a metropolis in northern China and is one of the four direct-controlled municipalities of China]. Although it was not a member of the '985' or '211'project, it has very good reputation in foreign language studies.

Four interviewees mentioned the 'reputation of the university' as one of the main reasons for targeting G University as their place of study for PG education. For example, *Ya* said:

> The University in Guangzhou had a good reputation. At first, I didn't know which university to choose then I went for my teacher for information. They all thought G University is a very good university and so I chose it.

This is consistent with the findings of Munisamy & Mohd Jaafar (2014) that the reputation of the university and its programmes together with employability prospects of its graduates were the most important factors influencing students' choice of institution in Malaysia. Students who attached importance to the 'reputation' of the institution or the programme reflected the 'screening effect' of higher education diplomas. Employers need to 'screen' or 'filter' out potential employees with certain educational credentials. Graduate diplomas from universities with higher reputations 'signal' a superior product to potential employers (Weiss, 1995). Students seemed to be well aware of this and believed that graduates from a well-reputed university would provide them with a higher platform for job-seeking after PG education[61]

Having studied there before

Seven of the interviewees stated that one of the main reasons for their choice of G University was because they studied there as UG students, so they were already familiar with the campus, facilities and the teaching style at this university and had accumulated certain human resources there. For example, *Jiao* said:

> As I have studied here for four years, I have already accumulated certain human resources. Also, I am used to the campus, facilities and the teaching style here.

[61] As this is a recurring theme, a more detailed discussion is in the section of 'Employment Prospects', p.165.

As a result, they could spend less time preparing for their PG entrance examinations than students without this advantage. For instance, *Yang* said:

> I only had one month for preparation and choosing G University where I carried out my UG studies made it much easier for me to gain admission.

Environment

Six of the participants mentioned the 'environment' as one of the reasons for their choice. To be specific, it could refer to the favourable environment for individual development provided by the open city of Guangzhou. For instance, *Yang* said:

> I wanted to stay in Guangzhou as I liked the free environment here… Guangzhou is a very open and inclusive city, this was very important to me.

Some liked the good language learning environment as expressed by *Li*:

> In order to have a good language environment, I chose G University…

or the good living environment, which was not too hot neither too cold in winter as *Fang Zi* said:

> … I liked the environment here, the air is very fresh. I felt that my skin looked better after I came here.

Others attached importance to the different living environment apart from the natural environment, such as the food and entertainment in the south compared to that of the north. For example, *Jing* said:

> In addition, I wanted to experience a new environment, such as the food and entertainment here [Guangzhou is hailed as the city of gastronomy].

Students attached importance to both the natural and cultural environment, which again, confirmed that the students valued the social and cultural capital brought by this environment.

Quality of the facilities and staff

Four interviewees mentioned the quality of the facilities or staff as one of the main reasons for their choice. They had this impression because they had studied here as UG students. For instance, one student *Fang Zi* said:

> I studied here before and was satisfied with the teaching quality and academic qualifications of the staff as well as the good facilities here.

Some got to know this through the Internet. For example *Jie* said:

> … Through the internet, I knew that some famous professors of Linguistics are at G University, and the Linguistics major was ranked 1 in China.

Several others got information through their UG teachers who had graduated from G University before. For example, *Ran* said:

> I knew from my previous teacher that there were high quality teachers at G University, such as *Liu Yan,* who specialised in cultural studies.

Location of the university

Another four interviewees also mentioned that the location of the university, in Guangzhou, constituted one of the main reasons for their choice. The importance of the location of the university was also found by Maringe (2006), who surveyed 387 students from schools and colleges in the Southampton University Partnership Scheme in the UK and found that location was among the top three important factors in determining students' choice of university for higher education. Guangzhou is a

developed city with booming economic development, which means more job opportunities are there. For instance, *Ya* said:

> Guangzhou is next to Shenzhen and Hunan province, it is a developed area and there are more job opportunities here.

Alternatively, it could be that Guangzhou is an open and inclusive city which gives people more freedom for self-development. For example, *Jiao* said:

> Besides, the city was open and inclusive…it allowed me the freedom to do what I like; I mean it has a wider choice of free time activities, such as going to the movies or shopping, and things like that.

To summarize: the main themes are consistent with the major findings of the quantitative data. 'Easier to gain admission', 'stay close to the family', and 'the reputation of the university' constituted the most important reasons for students to choose G University as the place for their study. The frequent mention of 'choosing a university which is close to my family' again reflected the deep Asian cultural characteristics of close family bonds. Students attach importance to the reputation of the university as well as of the programmes, which again confirmed the 'signalling' effect of education diplomas in the Chinese employment market.

After presenting a detailed discussion of the main themes corresponding to each research question, in the next section, I summarize the major findings corresponding to the three research questions.

Summary of the Major Findings

This section synthesizes the empirical findings in relation to the three research questions in sequence, namely:

1. What motivated students to undertake PG education?
2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?
3. Why did they choose G University as their place of study?

What motivated students to undertake PG education?

The data first shows that students' decisions for undertaking PG education was mainly motivated by human capital concerns, namely the potential employment prospects brought by a PG education degree. They thought a postgraduate degree could offer them wider choices of job opportunities as well as potentially higher salaries than the UG degree could (See *Shuai's* account, p.166; and *Hua's* account, p.168). The data also reveals that students were aware of or understood the investment nature of their decision, such as the tuition fees and forgone earnings, with the expectation or belief in getting potentially higher returns to their investments. The word 'capital' was not mentioned by any of the thirty interviewees; however, in the interviews, some students did use the word 'investment'. Several students indicated that they had made rough calculations of the costs and benefits of doing PG education (see *Fei's* account for example, p.167). Although they were not able to make an exact calculation of the monetary figures for the returns on their educational investment, they were aware that a PG degree usually leads to better career opportunities and higher salaries (Schultz, 1971; Becker, 1993; Li et al., 2011).

The data also shows that some of the interviewees were motivated by going to an elite university – which they perceived G University to be – for postgraduate education[62]. They understood the 'signalling' effect of credentials from elite universities, such as '985' and '211' universities for employers (See *Yu's* account, p.169). Credentials from these universities would improve their chances of finding a good job with high salaries in order to realize the best value for money (Bourdieu, 2003; Wu, 2012). In addition, the students also knew that an elite university usually allows access to good facilities and good quality resources, which also facilitates human and cultural capital gains. As a result, students could not only increase their knowledge and skills more comprehensively but would also feel more confident in the job market than those who graduated from a regular university (See *Ran and Xiao Yu's* account, p.171).

Further, the data shows that students were motivated to undertake PG education because they understood that a PG degree has become a 'door-opener' for certain jobs, especially teaching or certain civil service in positions (See *Ran*'s account, p.171). These two professions have long been sought after in China, especially by females as both ensure stable incomes, impressive welfare benefits and plenty of free time compared with most other jobs (See *Qiao's* account, p.172). However, the attitudes towards these jobs were gendered. The data shows that males were not as enthusiastic as females about these kinds of jobs. They understood that as men they should be the ones to earn the bread, while women should play a major role in housework. Therefore, they were not merely content with a stable job, as most of the females were (See *Tao*'s account, p.172). Thus, the influence of Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism, as well as the traditional division of labour, are still visible.

[62] Although G University is not a national elite university, it is a provincial elite university, and it has a very good reputation in Linguistics, Business English, and related fields of study.

This influence was also reflected in the students' attitudes towards marriage. Women normally plan their future around the needs of their families. They would like to marry at an early age. In addition, they were concerned about not being able to find an ideal husband due to their high educational degrees reducing the number of available husbands (See *Qiao's* account, p.174; and *Fei's* account, p.174).

Lastly, the data shows family attitudes to students' decisions about postgraduate education. Parents normally see university education as insurance for a brighter future (See *Yan's* account for example, p.175). This has certain connections with their own educational experience at a time when university graduates were ensured jobs (see *Ya's* account, p.176). It also reflects the heavy influence of Confucianism, which stresses the importance of attaining prosperity through learning. In addition, parents with limited economic and social capital were keen to encourage their children to pursue higher education as they had been the victims of poor education. Due to their lack of proper education, such parents had to earn their livings from manual labour, with very low incomes (See *Xiao's* account, p.180). Thus, higher education in China where *guanxi* is greatly valued, was seen as the only route out of poverty for their children (Koo, 2012; Ma, 2012). However, the data also shows that as a result of the inflation of university graduates in recent years, the blind worship of higher education degrees has begun to wobble in a few parents' minds (see *Wei's* account, p.178).

Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?

The data shows 'interest' was the most important factor influencing students' choice of subject for PG studies. This is consistent with the study on factors influencing students' choice of major by Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby (2005), which stated the

major role 'interest' played in students' choice of higher education. Family learning and teachers' influence played important roles in the development of students' interest. Parental education and cultural capital were found to be influential in students' formation of habitus, which further influenced their choice of higher education (see *Yang's* account, p.184). Those parents with higher education degrees could and tended to provide more concrete and constructive advice or help concerning their children's education (Walmsley et al., 2010) (See *Man*'s account, for example, p.186). Some students could benefit from knowledge or the development of good learning habits in childhood from their family's cultural consumption patterns in their daily lives, which further influenced their postgraduate educational choices (see *Fei's* account, p.184; and *Jiao's* account, p.185). This concurred with Bourdieu's theory of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Findings by Davies, Qiu, & Davies (2014) equally stressed the positive relationship between students' educational choices and parents' educational and cultural capital.

In the absence of such family cultural endowments, a teacher's influence became an important alternative source for developing students' interest in certain areas. The data shows that this is connected to the teacher's teaching style and methods as well as their knowledge capacity and personality. An interesting and stimulating class atmosphere, together with the transfer of clear and easy-to-understand knowledge, was welcomed by the students interviewed. These shaped students' willingness to carry on with later PG studies (See *Jie's* account, p.188; and *Ya's* account, p.188). Although teachers' influence on students' choice of programme has been reported elsewhere (Lichtenstein et al., 2014, Sjaastad, 2011), in China, there has not been much research in this area.

The data also shows that nearly one-third of the students continued with their UG major for their PG studies. They were reluctant to pick a new area after four years investment of money and time in a subject. Coupled with huge competitive pressure from peers and limited time to prepare for the PG entrance examinations, continuing with their UG major became the more rational and natural choice (See *Qiao's* account, p.190, for example).

The data further shows that for those students who picked a new subject for PG studies, the employment prospects following this major were also an important consideration in their choice of PG study. This is not surprising as the data showed earlier that most students continued their education to PG level out of consideration of their potential employment after graduation. 'Easier to find a job' was the most frequent phrase mentioned by the interviewees and this was a crucial reference point in their choice of subject (See *Ru's* account, p.191, for example). This confirmed the claim by Liu, Hung, & Chung (2013) that students' choice of major could be seen as a type of human capital investment.

Lastly, the data shows that the admission procedure for the subject would also be a reference for deciding which one to choose. In order to excel in the postgraduate entrance examinations, students made full use of their cultural and social capital (*guanxi*) to gain inside information, the so-called 'key points' for postgraduate entrance examinations. The most common one was family social capital, which helped them get the so-called 'key points' for review in their preparation and thus ensured their success in the school admission procedures (See *Fan's* account, p.192; and *Fang Zi's* account, p.192). Some also benefited from another type of *guanxi* built on social interactions during their undergraduate studies. The contacts and

networks built up with their previous supervisors as well as senior schoolmates became very important sources of information on how to excel in the PG entrance examinations (See *Wei's* account, p.193; and *Ran's* account, p.193). This is consistent with the finding by Lai, Gibson, & Muthaly (2014) that previous students were influential in potential students' choices of education in Hong Kong. This is natural, as both China and Hong Kong are influenced by the culture of Confucianism. Consulting alumni for information is an embodiment of the unique Chinese social capital with its characteristic of exclusiveness, which is found less outside China (Lai et al., 2014).

Why did they choose G University as their place of study?

The main factors influencing students' choice of institution as their place of the study were because it was 'easier to gain admission', they could 'stay close to families', the 'reputation of the university', and 'having studied there before'.

The data shows that around half of the students chose G University because it was relatively easy to gain admission. Students preferred to choose a University which suited their personal capabilities. G University, although one of the top three language universities in China, is relatively less competitive for places compared with the top two language universities. Thus, many students chose it to increase their chances of being passing the PG entrance examinations (See *Bin's* account, p.196; *Shuai's* account, p.197; and *Song's* account, p.196). In addition, as mentioned earlier, some students were able to get inside information to prepare for the PG entrance examinations as they had accumulated certain human resources from their UG studies at G university, which – to a great extent – ensured their success in the PG entrance examinations (See *Wei's* account, p.193; and *Fan's* account, p.192).

Next, the data shows that one-third of the interviewees chose G University as their place of study because they wanted to stay close to their families or relatives who were in the city where G University is located (See *Qiao's* account, p.197; and *Ya's* account, p.197). This reflected the core feature of Chinese society characterised by close family bonds where people have great attachment to their families.

At the same time, the reputation of the university was also referred to by the students (See *Hua's* account, p.198; and *Ya's* account, p.198). The 'reputation of the university' is a repeated theme, the detailed discussion of which can be seen in the section 'access to elite universities' (p.169). This again, confirmed the importance students attach to the 'signalling' value of diplomas.

In addition, the data shows that seven of the interviewees considered their UG experience as an important reason for continuing PG education at G University. This experience meant they were not only familiar with campus life, facilities and the teaching styles, but also had accumulated cultural and social capital to benefit their PG entrance examination preparation and future development (see *Wei's* account, p.193, for example).

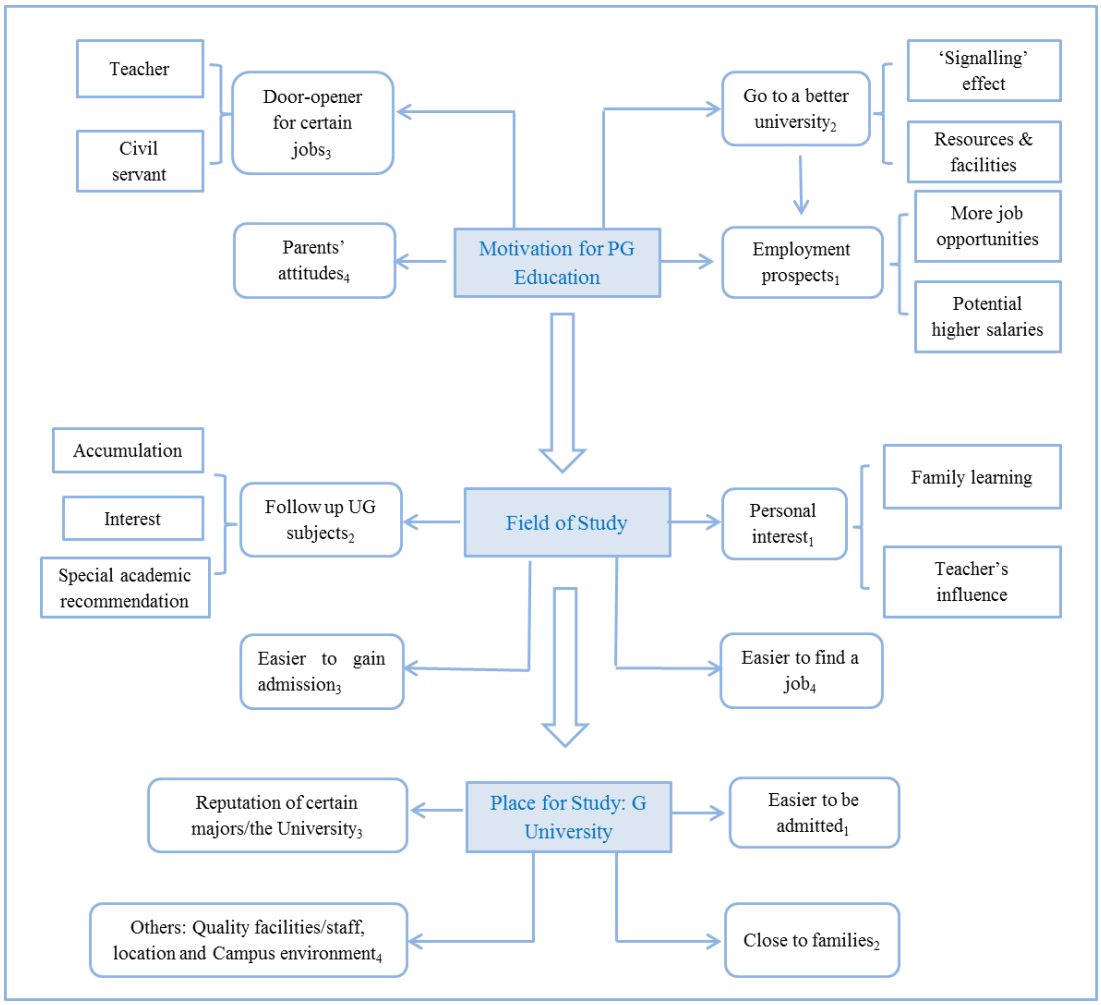
Further, the data shows that some students valued the natural and cultural environment as well as the location of the university. As G University is located in Guangzhou, one of the first cities to be opened-up and where reforms took place, it allows more freedom for individual development (See *Yang's* account, p.200). Also, it means there are more job opportunities there (See *Ya's* account, p.202, for example). Lastly, as a subtropical costal city, Guangzhou is generally very comfortable all year round, which also made it attractive to students (See *Fang Zi's*

account, p.200). All this confirmed that potential cultural and social capital is an important consideration for students in making decisions about where to study.

To summarize: the major findings of the interview supported and corroborated the major findings of the quantitative data. The qualitative data, along with the quantitative results, provide a more detailed and comprehensive explanation of students' choice of postgraduate education. The major factors influencing students' choice of postgraduate education are conceptualized in the following framework (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. A Summary of Major Factors Influencing Students' Choice of PE[63]

(Based on qualitative results)



Source: developed from the research

Summary

This chapter presented both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the research relating to the main research questions. The results were subsequently analysed and discussed with reference to capital theory and related topics in the literature. The major findings were summarized in response to the three research questions at the

[63] The number on the right down of each theme indicates the level of importance, e.g. 1>2>3>4>5

end of this Chapter. The next chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings, the original contributions to knowledge of this thesis, its limitations, implications and suggestions for future research, as well as my own reflections on the whole research process.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis. It summarises the research aim, specific research questions, and the main findings. The theoretical implications as well as the main contributions to knowledge of this thesis are then reviewed in relation to the previous literature. The limitations of this thesis are discussed and the implications for future research as well as for policy and practice. Finally, it concludes with a personal reflection on the research process.

The Research Questions and Main Findings

This thesis set out to explore the major factors influencing students' choices of postgraduate education in a case study of G University in Guangdong Province, China in an era of the rapid expansion and marketization of higher education. Three main research questions were developed following the literature review to focus the research.

Research questions:

1. What motivated students to undertake PG education?
    a) What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?
    b) What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?
2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?

3. Why did they choose G University as their place of study?

An in-depth case study approach was applied to answer the research questions. The field research was conducted in two phases, involving questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In the first phase, questionnaires were distributed to 616 first-year postgraduate students across the fifteen faculties and schools at G University, with 381 returned. The questionnaires were used to obtain general background information about the students, such as their field of study and family background, their main reason for undertaking postgraduate education. A further purpose of the questionnaire was to identify potential participants for the follow-up interviews. In the second stage, the thirty students indicating their willingness to participate in the follow-up interview at the end of the questionnaire were interviewed. The data was analysed using the theoretical concepts of human, cultural and social capital (*guanxi*). The main findings corresponding to the specific research questions are presented below.

Main findings:

1. a) What were the students' main reasons for undertaking PG education?

- Both the quantitative and qualitative results showed that students' main reasons for undertaking PG education were to have better employment prospects, such as more job opportunities and potentially higher salaries, to gain access to elite universities, to improve their professional knowledge and skills, and to obtain PG qualifications as stepping stones to satisfactory jobs.

- The results of the study produced evidence supporting human capital theory. Students viewed their decision to undertake PG education as an investment with

the expectation of a potentially higher rate of return than that brought by an UG qualification. In addition, students expected to accumulate human capital, such as knowledge and skills in their field of study through PG studies and thus to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market.

- Students' enthusiasm for going to elite universities for PG education supported the signalling/screening theory, which is consistent with the findings of Li, Ding, & Morgan (2009) that the signalling effect of higher education degrees still plays a major role in the labour market in China. For graduates, a PG qualification from an elite university signals their superior knowledge and potentially higher productivity to employers, helping them to identify the potentially more capable candidates for jobs.

- Students' enthusiasm for PG qualifications revealed that in certain professions, especially in academia, a postgraduate, or even a PhD education qualification has become a prerequisite for entrance.

- Participants' attitudes towards satisfactory jobs varied with gender. The female participants preferred stable jobs with good social welfare benefits and sufficient time to take care of their family; male participants attached importance to jobs that were well paid as they normally assumed the responsibility for being the bread-winner supporting the whole family.

- Finally, an interesting finding, which may not be directly related to students' main reasons for undertaking PG education, was revealed by the data. The female participants expressed concern about missing the right time for marriage while pursuing their postgraduate education qualifications and being 'left on the

shelf'. The preferred time to get married is, before 25 and no later than 27.

b) What was their parents' attitude towards their decision to undertake PG education?

- Students in the interview all responded that their parents supported their decision to undertake PG education.

- Parents of the participants generally believed that 'the higher the educational degree, the better'. Their views of the benefits of higher education or postgraduate education tended to be pragmatic, utilitarian, and more related to material benefits (See *Yan's* account, p.175).

- Those parents with a low educational background who had no experience of higher education thus could not provide any specific suggestions for their children's choice of PG education (see *Qiang*'s account, p.179; and *Fang's* account, p.179).

- Those parents with low educational levels generally saw going to university as the only way to escape poverty (See *Yan's* account, p.175), which confirmed the findings of Koo (2012) and Ma (2012).

- The inflation and devaluation of university graduate degrees following the massification of higher education in China has caused a few parents to reconsider the value of higher education (see *Ya's* account for example, p.176). This is especially the case with those parents who did not have higher educational experience themselves.

2. Why did they choose their particular subjects for PG studies?

- The main reasons for students to choose their specific area of study were personal interest, employment prospects, and entry requirements.

- Students developed their interest mainly through family learning and teachers' instruction at school.

- Family cultural consumption patterns, educational resources, as well as parents' attitudes, personal beliefs and educational experience all influenced their child's habits and interests, which in turn influenced their choice of subject of study (see *Yang's* account, p.184; and *Fei's* account, p.184). This confirmed Bourdieu's theory of habitus as well as similar findings elsewhere (for example, DiMaggio, 1982; Gao, 2011; Shaw, 2012) .

- Teachers' teaching styles and methods were influential in directing students' interest to their specific subject of study (See *Jie's* account, p.188; and *Ya's* account, p.188), which corroborated similar findings by Lichtenstein, Tombari, Sheppard, & Storm (2014) and Sjaastad (2011).

- Students attached importance to the employment prospects attached to a specific area when choosing their subject of study, echoing the findings of the main reasons why students pursue PG education.

- The types of *guanxi* (a Chinese variant of social capital) which students could mobilize influenced some students' choice of particular subject and institution to study at (See *Fan's* account, p.192; and *Fang Zi's account*, p.192).

- The major *guanxi* types that students normally turned to for help were families

and relatives (See *Fan's* account, p.192; and *Fang Zi's account*, p.192).

- The alumni and supervisors/teachers also played important roles in providing an information source for students' decisions about their choice of subject and place for PG education (See *Wei's* account, p.193; and *Ran's account*, p.193).

3. Why did they choose G University as the place of study?

- Students chose G University as their place of study mainly out of consideration for its academic reputation, the quality of faculty staff and resources, and the convenient location of the university.

- Students attached importance to the reputation of the institution, again confirming the signalling effect of higher education diplomas. Graduates from universities with higher reputations signal their potential superior productivity to employers.

- Students preferred to choose a university close to their families.

- Student preference for staying close to their families allowed them to maintain their *guanxi* relationship.

What Are the Theoretical Implications of the Findings?

The results of this research reveal that students' decisions to undertake postgraduate education was mainly motivated by human capital concerns. To be specific, most participants pursued PG education with the aim of acquiring human capital, such as the knowledge, skills and abilities to enhance their employment competitiveness. In

addition, they considered this as an investment, with their awareness of the potential costs, both direct and indirect, such as tuition fees and time, the forgone benefits, such as income during the time of their PG education, as well as in anticipation of potential benefits such as the higher salaries and better job opportunities brought by this investment. Further, students' enthusiasm for accessing elite universities for PG education confirmed the signalling/screening theory, considered an extension of human capital theory (Weiss, 1995). Thus, the application of human capital theory from a qualitative perspective to explain their reasons for undertaking PG education was appropriate.

However, human capital alone was insufficient as an explanation here as students' specific choices of what and where to study were also influenced by their available cultural capital resources. The data did show that students' choice of field for postgraduate study was closely related to their families' cultural consumption patterns and life styles as well as their later school education. This confirmed the findings elsewhere (for example, Liu et al., 2013; Fang and Wang, 2014; Sheng, 2012) that Chinese students' choice of higher education is closely associated with their family's socio-economic background. It also provided evidence for Bourdieu's assertion that family socialisation and education are two major channels for the transmission of cultural capital to bring about social reproduction (Bourdieu, 2003). Students who received family learning at an early age would normally develop habits, interests and confidence in certain areas, which further influenced their choice of education in their later schooling. In contrast, students without this endowment could feel inferior and less confident in their later school education. This supported the assertion by Brown, Power, Tholen, &Allouch (2014) and Davies, Qiu, & Davies (2014) that the related concept of 'habitus' remains useful in theorising students'

pathways to education. Thus, including cultural capital theory to explain the findings of this research was also appropriate.

Nevertheless, the understanding of the concept of cultural capital here must be clarified as it has been criticized for its vague operationalization by Sullivan (2001). First, cultural capital here does not only refer to 'highbrow' culture – an indicator and generator of social status – as suggested elsewhere (for example, DiMaggio, 1982), which is a narrow understanding and was not essential to Bourdieu's own conceptualization (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). A variety of participation in the arts, such as museum visits, reading habits, classical music appreciation and so on are all good indicators of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), but I take the view of Purhonen, Gronow, & Pahkonen (2011) that these may not necessarily be exclusively available to people of higher social status in contemporary society. Therefore, cultural capital might be seen as a resource or an advantage which individuals can use to enjoy special benefits, and which can be transmitted from generation to generation under certain circumstance (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). However, this does not detract from the fact that cultural capital is unequally embedded in different social hierarchies and associated social positions. Second, the credentials seen as the primary representative of 'institutionalised' cultural capital might need to be reconsidered (Brown et al., 2014). According to Bourdieu's explanation, the "credentials of the holder 'certify simultaneously two forms of competence', namely the technical capacity and the 'social competence', known as social dignity, and they couldn't be disentangled" (see Lareau and Weininger, 2003, p.581). This thesis has revealed that with the expansion and massification of higher education in China, 'credential inflation' has also taken place. Thus, the value of an undergraduate degree or even a master's degree has been devalued in a few parents'

views, as they do not necessarily ensure higher salaries or good job opportunities (See *Ya's* account, p.177; and *Wei'* account, p.178). In this sense, the inflation of credentials in China has meant a slight decline in their value in terms of social competence. However, this does not deny the dominant signalling/screening role of higher education degrees in the labour market in China.

Due to the interactive nature of economic, cultural and social capital, as stated by Bourdieu (1986), the factors influencing students' decisions about PG education cannot be fully accounted for without the application of social capital theory, especially in the Chinese context, where *guanxi* is considered very important in one's daily business (Qi, 2013). The data did show that both family social capital and the social capital formed in other places exerted a lot of influence on students' choices of PG education. As the data showed, some students were able to benefit from their family social capital (or familial *guanxi*) (See *Fan's* account, p.192; and *Fang Zi's account*, p.192) or social networks (non-familiar *guanxi)* they built during their educational experience (See *Wei's* account, p.193), which ensured their success in the postgraduate entrance exams. Consistent with the findings of Lai, Gibson, & Muthaly (2014) that previous students, as sources of information, had a strong influence on students' choice of college, the data showed that students frequently referred to senior schoolmates or alumni as important sources of information to help them make their choices. This should be understood within Chinese culture's strong sense of collectivism, where word of mouth through interpersonal communication is valued as an important source of information (Lai et al., 2014). Further, students' wish to stay close to families or relatives when choosing the location of their destination university was also an indication of their expectation of maintaining or strengthening their family social networks, or familial *guanxi*. Therefore, the

application of the concept of *guanxi* – regarded as both a private good for its exclusivity, and as a public good for all the insider members of the networks who can benefit from the relationship – enhanced the explanatory and analytical power of social capital theory (Qi, 2013). It responded to Qi's (2013) call of applying a non-Western concept to the further development of a Western-sourced theory in a global context (Qi, 2013).

In addition, the understanding of the findings, especially that of the profound influence of teachers and parents on student choice and decision-making, should be related to the Chinese culture of Confucianism. Confucianism attaches great importance to education (Salili et al., 2001). Based on the central ideals of Confucianism, the civil service examination in ancient China was created. Those who passed could become a government official and thus attain prosperity (Altbach and Yu, 2012). Even in modern Chinese society, the ideal that "He who excels in learning can be an official" is still accepted by many (ibid., p.8). As a result, many families regard making huge investment in their children's education as their top priority (Yu and Suen, 2005). Given the great importance attached to education, Chinese students are required to revere their teachers. Such sayings as "a teacher is a parent" or "my teacher for a day is a parent for a lifetime" are widely accepted among Chinese students (Anon., 2009). Coughlan (2013) also reported that teachers in China were given the highest level of public respect based on an international study and attributed this phenomenon mainly to its strong cultural emphasis placed on the importance of education.

In summary, the integration of the three capital theories provided a more comprehensive account of students' choices of PG education than each could do on

its own. It confirmed the assertion of Davies et al. (2014) and Glaesser & Cooper (2014) that it is more appropriate to combine economic and sociological theories to reveal the whole picture of students' decisions about higher education. In addition, applying these theories to the Chinese cultural context contributed to a better understanding of these theories and thus their further development. Finally, connecting social capital theory to the similar Chinese concept of *guanxi* produced a better understanding of each.

What Contribution to Knowledge Has the Research Made?

I have argued in the literature review chapter that there is an information gap concerning mainland Chinese students' choices of domestic higher education since research in the area is limited. Most related studies have been conducted in relation to Chinese students' choice of higher education for overseas studies, as China has become one of the largest sources of international students on overseas courses of study (Bodycott, 2009). The universities in China are facing increasingly intensified competition not only nationally but also internationally (Lai et al., 2012), so there is a great need for Chinese universities to have a clear understanding of the bases for students' choices of HE in China. In addition, the research targeted the postgraduate student cohort as I believe that they have different needs and wishes from undergraduates. These students are not only older but also thought to be more mature when making their decisions. Also, the admission procedures and requirements are different from those for undergraduate studies. It is therefore necessary to separate them from other student cohorts when discussing Chinese students' decision-making about higher education. Motivated by the need to fill this gap, the research adds to

the knowledge about students' choice of domestic postgraduate education through a case study of G University in Guangdong province, China. Specifically, it provides knowledge about students' main reasons for undertaking postgraduate education, for choosing their particular subject of study and for choosing their place of study, as well as how their decisions were shaped by their specific circumstances. In addition, it provides knowledge about the important role of teachers' teaching approaches and methods in developing students' interest in certain areas, which is still little reported in the literature. Further, it provides knowledge about the important roles of different types of *guanxi* or social capital in assisting students' access to postgraduate education in China, which is under researched.

In line with the related theoretical approaches discussed earlier in this thesis, the thesis makes a contribution to knowledge in the theoretical approaches used to address students' choice of postgraduate education in China. As discussed in the literature review, research into factors influencing students' choice of higher education usually adopted a single theoretical approach of either human or cultural capital (social capital) theory. However, as discussed in the literature review, each approach on its own has been criticized for its inability to fully account for students' choices of higher education (Smyth and Banks, 2012; Davies et al., 2014). Thus, I felt there was useful to combine these theoretical approaches. I was not the first to have this idea as Rounsaville (2011) also combined these theories in her doctoral thesis about international students' decision-making concerning higher education overseas. However, my research was different as I focused on Chinese students' choices of for domestic postgraduate education. Rounsaville (2011) also pointed out the necessity for examining the new theoretical framework in a wider variety of contexts and host countries. I also felt it necessary to see whether western capital

theories would be applicable to students' choice of higher education in a Chinese context, a country with unique social and cultural characteristics. Finally, the integration and application of these theories in the Chinese context with a unique culture influenced by Confucianism has produced further understanding of these theories, as discussed in the theoretical implications above.

What Are the Limitations of the Research?

Although the findings of this research answered the research questions, there are nevertheless some limitations. First, there were limitations in terms of the access and time available, so the research was not extended beyond the case study to larger groups of students at other universities. If larger samples had been used, all things being equal, the findings of the research would be more reliable and representative.

Another limitation of the research also constrained by access and time is the design of the second-sub question of the first research question, namely 'what were their parents' attitudes towards their decision for undertaking PG education'. This question was asked directly of students, not put to parents. Constrained by time, it was very difficult to access to the students' parents who were scattered in different provinces of China. Although it seemed that all the participants were able to represent their parents' attitudes in the interview, I recognized that the responses might have had more validity if the interviewees 'parents had been asked this question.

In addition, as all the questionnaires and interviews were conducted in Chinese to make them easy for the students to understand as they are native speakers. However,

this poses a question. As a non-native English speaker confident of her English capabilities, I nevertheless recognize that problems of inaccuracy might exist as could occur in any translation from one language to another.

Lastly, as the nature of the study was retrospective, it required students in their first year of postgraduate study at the beginning of their second semester, to recall past events affecting their PG education choices for the questionnaire survey, and when interviewed, they might not have been able to recall the exact situation at the time they were making their decisions. In addition, their responses might have been influenced by their early PG learning experience at G University. However, despite these limitations, the findings of this research are useful for indicating future related research.

What Further Research Might Be Undertaken?

As suggested in the limitation section, explorative in essence, this research only covered one case university in Guangdong Province; it is therefore impossible to generalise from one case study to gain a more general picture of what influences Chinese students' choice of postgraduate education in China. Consequently, the first suggestion is that future research should be conducted in various geographical areas across more universities in other provinces to present a more comprehensive picture of students' choice of postgraduate education in China.

Second, further comparative research into students' choices of postgraduate education in China is recommended. It is necessary to examine the choices of

postgraduate students from similar or different geographical and economic areas in China to see how homogenous they are or if significant differences emerge and why.

In addition, further research could also look at gender differences in students' choices of postgraduate education. Given that Chinese PG students can only apply to one university at a time in China, research into Chinese students who have chosen to attend overseas universities for postgraduate education would also be an interesting direction to reveal a comparative perspective between the motivations and reasoning of these two cohorts of students (home and overseas) and to see whether the subjects studied overseas are similar to those studied in China.

Moreover, it might be interesting to apply the framework adopted in this thesis to other Asian countries, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, which are also greatly influenced by Confucianism to see if any differences emerge. Application of the theoretical framework in non-Asian countries would also be an important direction to increase the understanding of and the differences between Chinese students and those from other cultures.

Finally, if possible, a longitudinal study comparing the students' later evaluation of their experience of postgraduate education with their initial reasons and motivations for undertaking postgraduate education should be conducted.

What Are the Implications for Policy And Practice?

As discussed in Chapter One, Chinese higher education institutions are facing increasingly intensified competition – both nationally and internationally – so it is vital to understand the reasons for students' choice of university.

At the international level, in order to positively face the increasingly intensified competition, Chinese higher education institutions need to know of any gaps between the educational services they provide and those provided by international higher education institutions to enable any appropriate and subsequent changes to be made. This is especially important as China has been facing a continual student exodus since the opening-up of the economy in 1978. Indeed, while China sent 3,518,400 students for overseas study from 1978 to 2014, only 1,809,600 (51%) students chose to return home during this period (MoE, 2014), resulting in a brain drain. Given this situation, improving the quality of Chinese higher education and thus reducing the number of students going for study overseas as well as improving the employment environment for the returnee overseas graduates has become an urgent affair for the government.

At the national level, in order to be competitive in recruitment and provide better services for students, Chinese higher education institutions should regularly survey students' motivations and expectations about the experience of higher education in the increasingly competitive educational environment. In addition, as the findings indicate that teacher's instruction and teaching methods can play an important role in directing students' choice of subject, it is suggested that the universities should aimed at enhancing teachers' skills and capabilities and their teaching standards. Further, as the findings show that Chinese students rely very much on their alumni as a source of information, this suggests that universities need to focus on creating a lasting alumni association for positive word of mouth recommendations to potential applicants and improve their self-promotion. Lastly, as *guanxi* has been frequently used to assist students in gaining access to PG education, this poses a challenge to

the government to ensure equal access to postgraduate education for all students, especially disadvantaged students.

A Personal Reflection on the Research

At the end of the thesis, I would like to reflect on my research methods, the research process and what I learned as a PhD researcher.

Rationale for research methods

I chose G University mainly because I studied there for my master's degree and believed that would give me access to the participants and a good response rate (60%) for the survey questionnaire. Students normally do not show much interest in surveys conducted by strangers especially when there is no direct benefit to them. However, most students showed enthusiasm for my survey and were willing to participate in it. This was not because they could gain direct benefits from my research, but because I was an alumna to them. This identity (*guanxi*) drew me close to the participants and ensured easy access to them.

Although potential ethical issues relating to my previous experience of studying at this university might have arisen, such as the objectivity of the research might be challenged if the student gave answers they thought I wanted to hear. It turned out that this was not the case during my data collection. Explorative in essence, I ensured that all the questions were asked in an objective and non-leading way to make sure that they were naturally reflecting on their own experiences. In fact, my identity as an alumna enabled me to gain useful information as they trusted me as a reliable person to express their true feelings and opinions to during the interviews. For

example, *Wei*, *Fang Zi* and *Fan* revealed that they have been given important inside information – as they had *guanxi* at this university – to help them prepare for the PG entrance exams. This information might not have been forthcoming if I had been a stranger to them. In fact, as a researcher in this area, I myself experienced and benefited from *guanxi*. This added valuable information to the deeper understanding and greater expansion of social capital theory within the uniqueness of Chinese society.

Research process

My research interest originated from my personal experience. I had dreamed of attending a 'renowned university' ever since I was young. One of my cousins went to one of the top universities in China, Tsing Hua University, for postgraduate study in the 1990s and I was expected and inspired to learn from her since I was young then. My family always took my cousin as an example to encourage me to learn from her. I did very well from primary school to high school. However, I did not do well at the College Entrance Examinations (*Gaokao*), consequently, I did not go to an elite university for my undergraduate studies but, I made up my mind to undertake postgraduate education at an elite university to realise my 'elite university dream'. I was especially interested in the different stories behind others' decisions to do postgraduate studies. Would they have similar or different stories to tell in their progress to postgraduate education? What were their reasons for undertaking PG education? These questions lingered in my mind and impelled me to explore as my research for the PhD degree.

With these questions in mind, I went online to find whether there was a potential gap in the related literature. I found that there was no lack of research on students'

choices of universities or decision-making about higher education in the world. Then I began to scale down my search with the key words 'China' or 'Chinese students' in order to find any potential gap. I did find a gap, as even though there were a lot of studies on Chinese students' choices of overseas studies, I could not find much on Chinese students' choices of domestic postgraduate education. Thus, I decided on my research topic and began to consider the relevant theoretical framework for this topic. Thinking of my own reasons for PG education and life experience, I believed that students' choices of higher education would be closely related to their individual economic, social and cultural circumstances. With the guidance of my supervisors, I began to consider capital theories. I then found that each individual capital theory was criticized for its inefficiency in exploring reasons for students' choices. Thus, I had the idea of using an integrated framework of human, cultural and social capital theory.

I was aware of the concerns associated with applying western theories, especially cultural capital theory, in the Chinese cultural context. However, as evidenced in the literature review, there is a growth in research using cultural capital theory in China (for example, Li, 2005; Zhou, 2005; Wu, 2008; Sheng, 2012). In addition, Sheng (2012) extensively justified the application of cultural capital theory in the Chinese context (see p.98). Finally, applying the theory in a non-Western context potentially helps further strengthen its cross-cultural validity and applicability. Although I cannot claim that the western capital theories I used are universally applicable based on my own research, I do believe that they can provide a basic foundation for further research on related topics in non-western cultures.

In terms of the data collection process, I did not use terminology such as *human*, *social* and *cultural capital* in the surveys or the interviews. Instead, I asked the participants general questions such as "Why did you decide to do PG education" and "Why did you choose G University for place of study?" This was to allow them to provide natural and honest accounts and avoid any possible research bias. Almost all the interviewees were very cooperative; however, a few were not very talkative because of their introverted personalities. In that case, I tried to 'break the ice' by taking about something they were interested in. Before doing the interview, I prepared by going to their QQ website (similar to Facebook) to get to know them. Their hometown, favourite music, and the food culture of their hometown all proved to be useful to 'break the ice'.

In the process of data analysis, I found that the capital theories were useful in explaining students' choices of postgraduate education. However, a full and comprehensive picture of the students' choices could not be gained without locating the capital theories in the broader Chinese cultural context where Confucianism is still found to be influential. For example, the data showed that being a civil servant or a teacher would be welcomed by the female interviewees, while these occupations were not seen in the same way by the male interviewees. This was partly because of the influence of the traditional view of man and women's role in the family, namely the role of men is outside the home, while the women's role is inside the home (Chen, 2004). This might not be the same in a western cultural setting where men and women are seen as equally responsible for earning a living. In addition, in a country characterized by collectivism rather than individualism and which attaches importance to the 'filial piety' valued in the Confucianism, students are thought to respect and obey their family members' opinions and repay them for care in their

early lives after they have grown up (Bodycott, 2009). Thus, it is easier to understand why some accounts, for example *Man's* refers to this concept: "I did PG education to realise my father's dream". Further, parents attach great importance to their children's education and this was seen as not only benefitting the children themselves but also the whole family. For example *Yan* mentioned: "My parents thought a higher educational degree would bring face to them and bring more benefit for them in the future." All these responses could not be fully explained through capital theory alone as they signal something more pertinent to the influence of Chinese culture.

What I have learnt as a PhD researcher

Before my PhD studies, I had no real idea about what it would be like and what I would possibly learn from it. The only thing I had was a general idea of what I was going to investigate. Luckily, with the assistance of school induction as well as related courses and skills workshops provided by the university, I understood the nature of doing PhD research and what a PhD journey would possibly involve. With the conversations with my fellow students as well as my supervisors, I was able to navigate my way along the tough PhD journey. As a PhD researcher, I have gained a lot from the research journey, not only about knowledge increments but also about the right attitudes towards doing research.

I have learned that to do PhD research, one needs to be devoted and to persevere. I had to take responsibility for managing my learning, which is the nature of doing a PhD. This involves a strong desire for exploring the truth. The process of finding the truth is long, lonely, depressing and unbearable much of the time. I felt like a failure for the first couple of years. I realized that most of what I had done did not work. I

had to revise my writing again and again. Through the process of constant reading, thinking, writing and reflection, I began to think independently, which I realized that it is the attraction of being an independent researcher. I consider myself very lucky and am very thankful to the great supervisors I had, who led me through the dark tunnel. It's their invaluable suggestions, patience and encouragement that have given me the confidence to stick to the task. Therefore, as I carried on and pushed through, my doubts and worries faded away.

I have learnt that doing PhD research means being humble and cautious. With numerous experts ahead of me, I have to be humble as what a PhD student is doing will only add a little drop to the sea of literature. With such a wealth of literature, I have to be very cautious about finding the right gap to fill. Being cautious is also needed when writing the thesis. I should be careful to make proper arguments and cite others' work. I should write my thesis clearly, concisely and succinctly as I am always told by my supervisors.

I have learnt that doing PhD research required maintaining good mental and physical health. When I encountered difficulties or failures, I always talked to my friends and families. Their sincere support and encouragement helped me complete my PhD journey. As PhD research involves repetitive and tedious work, I needed to maintain a good balance between physical health and working. I went to the gym to exercise regularly, which not only helped refresh my body but also my mind.

Because of the PhD research, I am more willing to ask myself 'why' when facing common phenomena, which has made me more critical and reflective about life in general. I am looking forward to applying what I have learnt both academically and non-academically to my future research journey.

Summary

This chapter concludes the thesis with reference to the research aim, research questions and main findings. The theoretical implications, contributions to knowledge, limitations, recommendations for future research and implications for policy and practice as well as my own reflection over the research process were also discussed.

Bibliography

Ajzen, I. (2006) Constructing a theory of planned behaviour questionnaire [online]. Available at: http://people.umass.edu/aizen/pdf/tpb.measurement.pdf [Accessed 6 March 2015].

Altbach, P. G. & Yu, K. (2012) *Tertiary education at a glance: China*. Rotterdam, NLD: Sense Publishers.[Online]. Availabe at: http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uon/detail.action?docID=10546374 [Accessed 8 April 2015].

Anon. (2009) Teaching international students. *Teaching International Students' staff blog on Community @ Brighton: University of Brighton* [Online]. Available at: http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/international/7eTeacherStudent.html [Accessed 8 August 2014].

Anon. (2013a) *China ends free postgraduate education* [Online]. Available at: http://www.scienceguide.nl/201302/china-ends-free-postgraduate-education.aspx [Accessed 19 September 2013].

Anon. (2013b) *The enrolment rate of the students for master degree at the G University from 2003-2013 (G 大学 2003-2013 年硕士研究生招生报考录取人数统计).* [Online]. Available at: http://www.chinakaoyan.com/info/article/id/33899.shtml [Accessed 2 October 2014].

Anon. (2014a) *Analysis on the Chinese students who going for overseas studies in 2013 (2013 年中国留学市场现状分析)* [Online]. Available at: http://www.xinquanedu.com/zt/2014/zh/0206shuj/ [Accessed 2 October 2014].

Anon. (2014b) *The average payment for the undergraduates tripped according to the report(报告称大学生毕业三年平均薪酬翻番)* Beijing Business Today [Online]. Available at: http://news.hexun.com/2014-06-16/165713693.html [Accessed 2 October 2014].

Archer, S. M. (2007) *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bahar, M. M. & Kian, F. S. (2014) A review on Pierre Bourdieu's theory about social capital. *Life Science Journal* 11(1s): pp. 58-60.

Bai, L. (2012) Graduate unemployment: Dilemmas and challenges in China's move to mass higher education. *The China Quaterly* 185: pp.128-144.

Bank of China (2015) Foreign exchange rate [Online]. Available at: http://www.boc.cn/sourcedb/whpj/ [Accessed on 8 July 2015].

Becker, G. S. (1993) *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education (third edition).* U.S.: The National Bureau of Economic Research.

Bell, A. D., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T. & Perna, L. W. (2009) College knowledge of 9th and 11th grade students: Variation by school and state context. *The Journal of Higher Education* 80(6): pp.663-685.

Bian, Y. (1997) Bringing strong ties back in: Indirect ties, network bridges, and job searches in China. *American Sociological Review* 62(3): pp.366-385.

Bian, Y. & Ang, S. (1997) Guanxi networks and job mobility in China and Singapore. *Social Forces* 75(3): pp.981-1005.

Bian, Y. J. (2006) Guanxi. In: Zafirovski, B. a. M. (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of economic sociology, pp.312-124.* New York: Greenword Press.

Bodycott, P. (2009) Choosing a higher education study abroad destination: What mainland Chinese parents and students rate as important. *Journal of Research in International Education* 8(3): pp.349-373.

Bodycott, P. & Lai, A. (2012) The influence and implications of Chinese culture in the decision to undertake cross-border higher education. *Journal of studies in international education* 16(3): pp.252-270.

Bonnema, J. & van der Weldt, D. L. R. (2008) Information and source preferences of a student market in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management* 22(4): pp.314-327.

Bosetti, L. (2007) Determinants of school choice: understanding how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta. *Journal of Educationl Policy* 19(4): pp.387-405.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Cultural reproduction and social reproduction.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In: Richardson, J. E. (Ed.) *Handbook of theory of research for the sociology of education, pp.241-258.* New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The field of cultural production.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2003) The forms of capital. In: Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P. & Wells, S. A. (Eds.) *Education: Culture, economy and society, pp.46-58.* Oxford: University Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C. (1990) *Reproduction in education, society and culture.* London: Sage Publishing Ltd.

Bray, J. (2008) *Consumer behaviour theory: Approaches and models* [Online]. Available at: http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/10107/1/Consumer_Behaviour_Theory_-_Approaches_%26_Models.pdf [Accessed 6 March 2015].

Briggs, S. (2006) An exploratory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice: The case of higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher Education* 31(6): pp.705-722.

Brooks, R. (2002) Edinburgh, Exter, Easter London - or employment? A Review of research on young people's highe education choices. *Educational Research* 44(2): pp.217-227.

Brown, C., Varley, P. & Pal, J. (2009) University course selection and services marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 27(3): pp.310-325.

Brown, P., Power, S., Tholen, G. & Allouch, A. (2014) Credentials, talent and cultural capital: a comparative study of educational elites in England and France. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* [Online] ahead-of-print (2014): pp.1-21. Availale at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2014.920247 [Accessed 29 September 2014].

Bryman, A. (2008) *Social research methods.* New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Byun, S.-y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J. & Hutchins, B. C. (2012) The role of social capital in educational aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology* 77(3): pp. 355-379.

Callender, C. & Jackson, J. (2008) Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education* 33(4): pp.405-429.

Canda, E. R. (2014) Filial piety and care for elders: A contested confucian virtue reexamined. *Journal of Ethinic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 22(3-4): pp.213-234.

Chang, C. Y. (2013) *Confucianism: A modern interpretation (2012 Edition).* Singapore, SGP: World Scientific & Imperial College Press.

Chen, C. C., Chen, X. & Shengsheng, H. (2013) Chinese guanxi: An integrative review and new directions for future research. *Management and Organization Review* 9(1): pp.167-207.

Chen, F. (2004) The division of labour between generations of women in rural China. *Social Science Research* 33(4): pp.557-580.

Chen, L.-H. (2007) East-Asian students' choice of Canadian graduate schools. *International Journal of Educational Advancement* 7: pp.271-306.

Cheung, C.-K. & Kwan, Y.-H. A. (2009) The erosion of filial piety by modernisation in Chinese cities. *Ageing and Society* 29(2): pp.179-198.

Cho, S., Hudley, C., Lee, S., Barry, L. & Kelly, M. (2008) Roles of gender, race, and SES in the college choice process among first-generation and non-first-

generation students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 1(2): pp.95-107.

Chua, R. Y. J., Morris, M. W. & Ingram, P. (2009) *Guanxi* vs. networking: Distinctive configurations of affect-and cognition-based trust in the networks of Chinese vs. American managers. *Journal of International Business Studies* 40(3): pp.490-508.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2011) *Research methods in education* (*seventh edition*). London: Routledge.

Coleman, J. (1988) Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology* 94 (Supplement): S95-S120. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243 [Accessed 12 October 2014].

Collins, R. (2011) Credential inflation and the future of universities. *Italian Journal of Sociology Education* 2: pp.228-251.

Connell, R. (2007) *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Coughlan, S. (2013) Teachers in China given highest level of public respect. *BBC NEWS*. 14 October 2013 [Online]. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24381946 [Accessed 14 December 2014].

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (2012) *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Curwin, J. & Slater, R. (2008) *Quantitative methods for business decisions.* London: Thomson Learning.

Davies, P., Qiu, T. & Davies, N. M. (2014) Cultural and human capital, information and higher education choices. *Journal of Education Policy* 29(6): pp.804-825.

Daymon, C. & Durkin, K. (2013) The impact of marketization on postgraduate career preparedness in a high skills economy. *Studies in Higher Education* 38(4): pp.595-612.

DesJardins, S. L. & Toutkoushian, R. K. (2005) Are students really rational? The development of rational thought and its application to student choice. In: Smart, J. (Ed.) *Higher education: Handbook of thoery and research, pp.191-240.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Deutsch, F. M. (2006) Filial piety, patrilineality, and China's one-child policy. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(3): pp.366-389.

Dika, S. L. & Singh, K. (2002) Application of social capital in educational literature: A critical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research* 72(1): pp.31-60.

DiMaggio, P. (1982) Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of U.S. high school students. *American Sociology Review* 47(2): pp.189-201.

Dong, W. (2012) Upon the construction of fuzzy evaluation system for studying abroad. *Journal of Ningbo University (Educational Science Edition)* 34(5): pp.72-75.

Dunfee, T. W. & Warren, D. E. (2001) Is Guanxi ethical? A normative analysis of doing business in China. *Journal of Business Ethics* 32(3): pp.191-204.

Durlauf, S. N. (1999) The case 'against' social capital. *Focus* 20(3): pp.1-5.

Dustmann, C. (2004) Parental background, secondary school track choice, and wages. *Oxford University Press* 56: pp.209-230.

Ellis, P. D. (2000) Social ties and foreign market entry. *Journal of International Business Studies* 31(3): pp.443-469.

Erikson, R. & Jonsson, J. O. (1996) Can education be equalized?: The Swedish case in comparative perspective. *European Sociological Review* 13(3): pp.326-329.

Fan, J.-b. & Zhang, C.-g. (2015) A study of the rate of return to higher engineering education in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, [online]42: pp.106-114. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.04.010 [Accessed 28 May 2015].

Fang, W. & Wang, S. (2014) Chinese students' choice of transnational higher education in a globalized higher education market: A case study of W university. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 18(5): pp.475-494.

Field, J. (2008) *Social capital (2rd Edition).* London: Routledge.

Fishbein, M. & Ajzen, I. (1975) *Belief, attitude, intention and behavior: An introduction to theory and research.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2): pp.219-245.

Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2006) *How to design and evaluate research in education (six edition).* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Fredman, N. (2015) Understanding motivation for study: Human capital or human capability? *International Journal of Training Research* 12(2): pp.93-105.

Galotti, K. M. & Mark, M. C. (1994) How do high school students structure an important life decision? A short-term longitudinal study of the college decision-making process. *Research in Higher Education* 35(5): pp.589-607.

Gao, L. (2011) *Impacts of Cultural Capital on Student College Choice in China*. UK: Lexington Books.

Glaesser, J., & Cooper, B. (2014) Using rational action theory and Bourdieu's habitus theory together to account for educational decision-making in England and Germany. *Sociology 48*(3): pp.463-481.

Gold, T., Guthrie, D. & Wank, D. (2002) An Introduction to the Study of *Guanxi In:* Gold, T., Guthrie, D. & Wank, D. (Eds.) *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi, pp.30-20.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldin, P. R. (2010) *Confucianism.* Durham, GBR: Acumen.

Gong, X., & Huybers, T. (2015) Chinese students and higher education destinations: Findings from a choice experiment. *Austrailan Journal of Education* 59(2): pp. 196-218.

Google map (2013) *City distribution of Guangdong*. Available at: http://atimes.com/atimes/Others/guangdong.html [Accessed on 20 June 2013].

Google map (2014) *Map of China.* Available at: http://www.operationworld.org/files/ow/maps/lgmap/chna-MMAP-md.png [Accessed on 7 October 2014].

Google map (2015a) *Location of each administrative division in China*. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_administrative_claimed_included.svg [Accessed 26 January 2015].

Google map (2015b) *Map of China (Showing Guangdong Province)*. Available at: http://mapsof.net/map/china-guangdong-location-map [Accessed on 10 April 2015].

Google map (2015c) *Map of Guangdong province.* Available at: http://ccbaaugusta.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GuangdongMap.gif [Accessed 10 April 2015].

Granovetter, M. (1973) The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6): pp.1360-1380.

Green, L. S. (2002) Rational choice theory: An overview. *A paper prepared for the Baylor University Faculty Development Seminar on Rational Choice Theory, 2002.* [Online]. Available at: http://business.baylor.edu/steve_green/green1.doc [Accessed 16 June 2013]

Green, P. D., & Shapiro, I. (1994) *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applicantion in political science*. US: Yale University.

Grytnes, R. (2011) Making the right choice! Inquiries into the reasoning behind young people's decisions about education. *Young* 19(3): pp.333-351.

Hamlyn, D. W. (1995) *Epistemology, history of the Oxford companion to philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartnett, R. A. (1998) *The saga of Chinese higher education from the Tongzhi restoration to Tianammen Square: Revolution and reform*. United Kingdom: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Hayhoe, R. (1999) *China's universities, 1895–1995: A century of cultural conflict.* University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre.

He, Y. (2005) Cause analysis and its treatment adverse balance of China's overseas education services. *Hunan Normal University*.

Healy, T. & Côté, S. (2001) *The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital.* Paris, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation: OECD [Online]. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/1870573.pdf [Accessed 6 October 2014].

Heath, S., Fuller, A. & Johnston, B. (2010) Young people, social capital and network-based educational decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31(4): pp.395-411.

Hechter, M. (1997) Sociological rational choice theory. *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: pp.191-214.

Hemsley-Brown, J. & Oplatka, I. (2006) Universities in a competitive global marketplace: A systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 19(4): pp.316-338.

Hemsley-Brown, J. & Oplatka, I. (2015) University choice: What do we know, what don't we know and what do we still need to find out? *International Journal of Educational Management* 29(3): pp.254-274.

Hong, S. (2010) Econometric analysis of the impact factors of Chinese students studying abroad. *Science and Technology Innovation Herald* 28: pp.212-213.

Huang, X. (2008) *Guanxi* networks and job searches in China's emerging labour market: a qualitative investigation. *Work, Employment & Society* 22(3): pp.467-484.

Huang, Y.-H. (2003) A Chinese perspective of intercultural organization-public relationship. *Intercultural Communication Studies* XII(4): pp.251-276.

Hung, F.-S., Chung, Y.-P. & Ho, S.-C. E. (2000) To work or to continue to higher education? The choice of senior secondary students in Shenzhen, China. *Higher Education* 39(4): pp.455-467.

Imenda, S. N., Kongolo, M. & Grewal, A. S. (2004) Factors underlying technikon and university enrolment trends in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 32(2): pp.195-215.

Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu (Revised edition).* London: Routledge.

Jepsen, D. & Varhegyi, M. (2011) Awareness, knowledge and intentions for postgraduate study. *Journal of higher education policy and management* 33(6): pp.605-617.

Jiang, C. (2013) *The iron rice bowl is back: Why young Chinese want to be civil servants* [Online]. Available at: http://world.time.com/2013/03/27/the-iron-rice-bowl-is-back-why-young-chinese-want-to-be-civil-servants/ [Accessed 5 November 2014].

Jimenez, J. & Salas-Velasco, M. (2000) Modeling educational choices. A binomial logit model applied to the demand for higher education. *Higher Education* 40(3): pp.293-311.

Jæger, M. M. (2007) Economic and social returns to educational choices: Extending the utility function. *Rationality and Society* 19(4): pp.451-483.

Jung, J. Y. (2013) Amotivation and Indecision in the decision-making processes associated with university entry. *Research in Higher Education* 54(1): pp.115-136.

Keeley, B. (2007) Human capital: *How what you know shapes your life (OECD Insights Series)* [Online]. Available at: http://www.oecdbookshop.org/get-it.php?REF=5L4W96X1PSWG&TYPE=browse [Accessed 5 November 2014].

Khatri, N., Tsang, E. W. K. & Begley, T. M. (2006) Cronyism: A cross-cultural analysis. *Journal of International Business Studies* 37(1): pp.61-75.

Khattab, N. (2003) Explaining educational aspirations of minority students: The role of social capital and students' perceptions. *Social Psychology of Education* 6: pp.283-302.

Kim, J. K. & Gasman, M. (2011) In search of a 'good college': Decisions and determinations behind Asia American students' college choice. *Journal of College Student Development* 52(6): pp.706-728.

Koo, A. (2012) Is there any chance to get ahead? Education aspirations and expectations of migrant families in China. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33(4): pp.547-564.

Kumar, P. (2013) An examination of factors influencing students selection of Business majors using TRA framework. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* 11(1): pp.77-105.

Kusumawati, A. (2013) A qualitative study of the factors influencing student choice: The case of public university in indonesia. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research* 3(1): pp.314-327.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009) *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (*Second Edition*). London: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Lai, A. P. C., Gibson, P. & Muthaly, S. (2014) Becoming an education provider of choice in Hong Kong: An inquiry into student decision making. *International Journal of Educational Management* 28(5): pp.590-609.

Lai, L. S. L., To, W. M., Lung, J. W. Y. & Lai, T. M. (2012) The perceived value of higher education: The voice of Chinese students. *Higher Education* 63 (3): pp.271-287.

Lareau, A. & Weininger, E. B. (2003) Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society* 32(5/6): pp.567-606.

Law, P. & Yuen, D. (2012) A multilevel study of students' motivations of studying accounting: Implications for employers. *Education + Training* 54(1): pp.50-64.

Lawson, C. (2011) *Studying in Australia: View from Six Key Countries*. Australian Education International [Online]. Available at: https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/Publications/Documents/Perceptions%20of%20studying%20in%20Australia.pdf [Accessed 12 November 2013].

Lee, C. K. C. & Morrish, C. S. (2012) Cultural values and higher education choices: Chinese families. *Australasian Marketing Journal* 20(1): pp.59-64.

Lee, C. K. C., Wong, M. Y., & Brown, R. (1996) *The impact of Confucian dynamism and family decision making*. Paper presented at the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Educators Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.

Lei, Z. (2012) Investigation into motivations types and influences on motivation: The case of Chinese no-English najors. *English Language Teaching* 5(3): pp.100-122.

Li, C. (2005) *Cleavage and fragment: An empirical analysis of the social stratification of the contemporary China.* Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.

Li, F., Ding, X. & Morgan, W. J. (2009) Higher education and the starting wages of graduates in China. *International Journal of Educational Development* 29(4): pp.374-381.

Li, F., Morgan, W. J. & Ding, X. (2008) The expansion of higher education, employment and over-education in China. *International journal of Educational Development* 28(6): pp.687-691.

Li, F., Zhao, Y. & Morgan, W. J. (2011) The rate of return to educational investment in China: A comparative commentary. *Education, Knowledge & Economy* 5(1-2): pp.45-52.

Li, M. & Bray, M. (2007) Cross-border flows of students for higher education: Push-pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. *Higher Education* 53(6): pp.791-818.

Lichtenstein, G., Tombari, M. L., Sheppard, S. D. & Storm, K. (2014) Does teaching matter? Factors that influence high school students' decisions whether to pursue college STEM majors. *121st ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition.* Indianapolis, IN: American Society for Engineering Education.

Lin, N. (1999) Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections* 22(1): 28-51.

Lin, N. (2001) *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lindley, R. (1981) *Higher education and the labour market.* England: Direct Printers.

Liu, J. (2010) The changing body of students: A study of the motives, expectations and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 28(7): pp.812-830.

Liu, J. (2012) Examining massification policies and their consequences for equality in Chinese higher education: A cultural perspective. *Higher Education* 64(5): pp.647-660.

Liu, X., Elston, F. & Zhou, P. (2014) Comparing research on Chinese students study abroad decision-making: China-based versus overseas-based perspectives. *World Review of Business Research* 4(3): pp.124-135.

Liu, Y. (1998) Educational utilitarianism: Where goes higher education. In: M. Agelasto & Adamson, B. (Eds.) *Higher Education in Post-Mao China, pp.121-140.* Hongkong: Hong Kong University Press.

Liu, Y., Hung, F. S. & Chung, Y. P. (2013) Chinese students' choice of major when considering higher education abroad: The case of mainland China. *China: An International Journal* 11(1): pp.94-112.

Liu, Y., Kong, F. & Zhong, Y. (2012) Our high school students to study abroad at their own expense willingness research: Seven city-based sample survey data. *Education Research* 10: pp.59-63.

Lowe, J. (2007) Decision making by Chinese students choosing UK and Chinese universities: Full research report. *ESRC End of Award Report.* Swindon: ESRC.

Lu, Y., Mavondo, F. T. & Qiu, L. L. (2009) Factors influencing the choice of overseas study by undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese students. *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference.* Melbourne.

Luo, Y., Huang, Y. & Wang, S. L. (2012) *Guanxi* and organizational performance: A meta-analysis. *Management and Organization Review* 8(1): pp.139-172.

Ma, S. A.-h. (2014) Social networks, cultural capital and attachment to the host city: Comparing overseas Chinese students and foreign students in Taipei. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 55(2): pp.226-241.

Ma, W. (2012) Why the rural poor get fewer opportunities to leading research universities. *Asia Pacific Education Review*13(2): pp.263-271.

Magistad, K. M. (2013) China's 'left-over' women, unmarried at 27. *BBC News Magazine.* 21 February [Online]. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21320560 [Accessed July 31 2014].

Malgwi, C. A., Howe, M. A. & Burnaby, P. A. (2005) Influences on students' choice of college major. *Journal of Education for Business* 80(5): pp.275-282.

Maringe, F. (2006) University and course choice - Implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management* 20(6): pp.466-479.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1995) *Designing qualtative research* (*second edition*). UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Miles, M. B., Huberman A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd edition).* London: SAGE Publications.

Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G. (2001) *The global market for higher education: Sustainable competitive strategies for the new millennium.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G. N. (2002) "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *The International Journal of Educational Management* 16(2): pp. 82-90.

Mcclintock, A. (2014) Concerns over Sexist 'leftover' women campaign. *Late Night Live*. 21 July[Online]. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/one-child-policy-leads-to-leftover-women-campaign-in-china/5611496 [Accessed 31 July 2014].

McCoy, S. & Smyth, E. (2010) Higher education expansion and differentiation in the Republic of Ireland. *Higher Education* 61(3): pp.243-260.

McDonough, P. M. (1998) Structuring college opportunities: A cross-case analysis of organizational cultures, climates and habits. *In:* Mitchell, C. A. T. T. R. (Ed.) *Sociology of education: Emerging perspectives, pp.181-210.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Menon, M. E. (2004) Information search as an indication of rationality in student choice of higher education. *Education Economics* 12(3): pp.267-283.

Menon, M. E., Saiti, A. & Socratous, M. (2007) Rationality, information search and choice in higher education: Evidence from Greece. *Higher Education* 54(5): pp.705-721.

MoE (2014) The report on students for overseas study of 2014 (2014年度我国出国留学人员情况). March 5 [Online]. Available at:

http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s5987/201503/184499.html [Accessed 2 October 2014].

Mok, H. K. (2000) Marketizing higher education in post-Mao China. *International Journal of Edcuational Development* 20(2): pp.109-126.

Mok, H. K. & Lo, W. Y. (2007) The impacts of Neo-liberalism on China's higher education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5(1). Available at: http://www.jceps.com/archives/544 [Accessed 6 September 2014].

Mok, H. k., Wong, C. Y. & Zhang, X. (2009) When marketisation and privatisation clash with socialist ideals: Educational inequality in urban China. *International Journal of Educational Development* 29(5): pp.505-512.

Mok, K.-h. J. (2001) From state control to governance: Decentralization and higher education in Guangdong, China. *International Review of Education* 47(1): pp.123-149.

Morgan, W. J. (2008) Social capital, citizenship and continuing education: What are the connections? *International Journal of Continuing Education adn Lifelong Learning* 1(1): pp.35-45.

Morgan, W. J. & White, I. (2014) *The value of higher education: Public or private good?* Grundfragen und Trends. [Online]. Available at: http://www.unesco.org.uk/uploads/The%20Value%20of%20Higher%20Education%20Public%20or%20Private%20Good.pdf [Accessed 22 March 2015].

Morgan, W. J. & Wu, B. (2011) *Higher Education Reform in China: Beyond the expansion*. London: Routledge.

Morgan, W. J. & Wu, B. (2015) *Why reforms to China's college entrance exam are so revolutionary*. The Conversation. [Online]. Available at: http://theconversation.com/why-reforms-to-chinas-college-entrance-exam-are-so-revolutionary-36048 [Accessed 2 April 2015].

Mowjee, B. (2013) Are postgraduate students 'rational choosers'? An investigation of motivation for graduate study amongst international students in England. *Research in Comparative and International Education* 8(2): pp.193-213.

Mullen, A. L. (2009) Elite destinations: Pathways to attending an Ivy League University. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30(1): pp.15-27.

Muller, C. & Ellison, C. G. (2001) Religious involvement, social capital, and adolescents' academic progress: Evidence from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. *Sociological Focus* 34(2): pp.155-183.

Munisamy, S. & Mohd Jaafar, N. I. (2014) Does reputation matter? Case study of undergraduate choice at a premier university. *Asia-Pacific Edu Res* 23(3): pp.451-462.

NBSC (National Bureau of Statistics of China) (2010) *Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China*[Online]. Available at:

http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm [Accessed 12 June 2015].

NBSC (National Bureau of Statistics of China) (2014) *China statistical yearbook 2014*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2014/ [Accessed 6 March 2015].

Núñez, A.-M. & Bowers, A. J. (2011) Exploring what leads high school students to enroll in Hispanic-serving institutions: A multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal* 48(6): pp.1286-1313.

Obermeit, K. (2012) Students' choice of universities in Germany: Structure, factors and information sources used. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 22(2): pp.206-230.

Oliver, C. & Kettley, N. (2010) Gatekeepers or facilitators: The influence of teacher habitus on students' applications to elite universities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31(6): pp.737-753.

Pampaloni, A. M. (2010) The influence of organizational image on college selection: What students seek in institutions of higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 20(1): pp.19-48.

Papaconstantinou, M. V. (2010) LIS as a field of study: Socio-cultural influences on students' decision making. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives* 62(3): pp.321-344.

Parkins, G. K. (2001) *Chinese higher education: an A-Z of people, facts & developments.* Feltham, Middlesex, G.K: Parkins.

Paulsen, M. B. (2001) The economics of human capital and investment in higher education. In: Smart, M. B. P. a. J. C. (Ed.) *The finance of higher education. Theory, research, policy, and practice, pp.55-94.* New York: Agathon Press.

Perna, L. W. (2006) Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In: Smart, J. (Ed.) *Higher education, pp.99-157.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Ponthieux, S. (2004) The concept of social capital: a critical review. *10th ACN Conference.* Paris.

Portes, A. (1998) Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annuual Review of Sociology* 24: pp.1-24.

Purhonen, S., Gronow, J. & Pahkonen, K. (2011) Highbrow culture in Finland: Knowledge, taste and participation. *Acta Sociologica* 54(4): pp.385-402.

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Qi, X. (2013) Guanxi, social capital theory and beyond: Toward a globalized social science. *The British Journal of Sociology* 64(2): pp.308-324.

Reay, D. (1998) 'Always knowing' and 'never being sure': Familial and institutional habituses and higher education choice. *Journal of Education Policy* 13(4): pp.519-529.

Reay, D. (2010) Education and cultural capital: The implications of changing trends in education policies. *Cultural Trends* 13(2): pp.73-86.

Reimer, D. (2011) Labour market outcomes and their impact on tertiary decisions in Germany: class and gender differences. *Irish Educational Studies* 30(2): pp.199-213.

Rounsaville, A. C. (2011) *Where should I study? International students' perceptions of higher education in the UK, Ireland, and the U.S.* PhD Thesis. University of Nottingham.

Rudd, B., Djafarova, E. & Waring, T. (2012) Chinese students' decision-making process: A case of a Business School in the UK. *The International Journal of Management Education* 10(2): pp.129-138.

Salili, F., Fu, H., Tong, Y. & Tabatabai, D. (2001) Motivation and self-regulation: A crosscultural comparison of the effect of culture and context of learning on student motivation and self-regulation. In: C. Chiu, F. S., & amp; Y. Hong (Eds.) *Multiple competencies and selfregulatedlearning: Implications for multicultural education, pp.123-140.* Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

SBGP (Statistical Bureau of Guangdong Province) (2014) *Guangdong Statistical Yearbook* [Online]. Available at: http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjnj/2014/directory/content.html?03-01[Accessed 6 March 2015].

Schuller, T. (2001) The complementary roles of human and social capital. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2: pp.18-24.

Schuller, T. & Bamford, C. (2000) A social capital approach to the analysis of continuing education: Evidence from the UK learning society research programme. *Oxford Review of Education* 26(1): pp.5-19.

Schultz, T. W. (1971) *Investment in human capital: The role of education and of research.* New York: The Free Press.

Sharma, Y. (2014) What do you do with millions of extra graduates. *BBC News Business*. 1 July [Online]. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-28062071 [Accessed 10 November 2014].

Shaw, A. (2012) Family fortunes: Female students' perceptions and expectations of higher education and an examination of how they, and their parents, see the benefits of university. *Educational Studies* 39(2): pp.195-207.

Sheer, V. C., & Chen, L. (2003) Successful Sino-Western business negotiation: Participants' accounts of national and professional cultures. *Journal of Business Communication* 40(1): pp.50-85.

Sheng, X. (2012) Cultural capital and gender differences in parental involvement in children's schooling and higher education choice in China. *Gender and Education* 24(2): pp.131-146.

Sheng, X. (2015) Gender and habitus: Parental involvement in students' subject choices in China. *Journal of Gender Studies* 24(2): pp.227-238.

Sjaastad, J. (2011) Sources of inspiration: The role of significant persons in young people's choice of science in higher education. *International Journal of Science Education* 34(10): pp.1615-1636.

Smyth, E. & Banks, J. (2012) There was never really any question of anything else: Young people's agency, institutional habitus and the transition to higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33(2): pp.263-281.

Stake, R. E. (1995) *The art of case study research.* United States of America: SAGE Pbulications, Inc.

Steelman, L. C. & Powell, B. (1991) Sponsoring the next generation: Parental willingness to pay for higher education. *American Journal of Sociology* 96(6): pp.1505-1529.

Steinberg, P. M. (2011) Educational choice and student participation: The case of the supplemental educational services provision in Chicago public schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 33(2): pp.159-182.

Stone, L. & McKee, N. P. (2000) Studying universities – Gendered futures: Student visions of career and family on a college campus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 31(1): pp.67-89.

Sullivan, A. (2001) Cultural capital and educational achievement. *Sociology* 35(4): pp.893-912.

Suttmeier, R. P. & Cao, c. (2004) China's technical community: Market reforms and the changing policy cultures of science. In: Goldman, E. G. a. M. (Ed.) *Chinese intellectuals between state and market, pp.138-157.* New York: Routledge Curzon.

Tinklin, T., Croxford, L., Ducklin, A. & Frame, B. (2005) Gender and attitudes to work and family roles: The views of young people at the millennium. *Gender and Education* 17(2): pp.129-142.

To, W. M., La, L. S. L., Lung, J. W. Y. & Lai, T. M. (2014) Intent to pursue further studies among Chinese Students. *Educational Studies* 40(3): pp.292-309.

Travers, M. (2001) *Qualitative research through case studies.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Tsang, E. Y.-h. (2013) The quest for higher education by the Chinese middle class: Retrenching social mobility? *Higher Education* 66(6): pp.653-668.

Tsang, W. K. (1998) Can guanxi be a source of sustained competitive advantage for doing business in China? *Academy of Management Executive* 12(2): pp.64-73.

Tsui, A. S. & Farh, J.-L. (1997) Where guanxi matters: Relational demography and guanxi in the Chinese context. *Work and Occupations* 24(1): pp.56-79.

Tu, W. (1993) *Way, learning, and politics: Essays on the confucian intellectual.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Tung, R. L. & Worm, V. (2001) Network capitalism: The role of human resources in penetrating the China market. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 12(4): pp.517-534.

Tunç, B. (2011) An analysis of the socio-economic root of the technical programme choice in higher education: A sample from Tarsus Technical Education Faculty. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri • Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 11(4): pp.1943-1948.

Veloutsou, C., Paton, R. A. & Lewis (2005) Consultation and reliability of information sources pertaining to university selection: Some questions answered? *International Journal of Educational Management* 19(4): pp.279-291.

Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A. & Melanthiou, Y. (2007) A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries. *Journal of Business Research* 60(9): pp.979-989.

Walmsley, A., Wilson, T. & Morgan, C. (2010) Influences on a college students' major: A developmental perspective. *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* 14(2): pp.25-46.

Wang, H. (2011) Access to higher education in China: Differences in opportunity. *Frontiers of Education in China* 6(2): pp.227-247.

Wang, H. (2012) *A summary of China's development of students studying overseas in 2010 (Zhongguo Liuxue Fazhan Baogao 2012)* [Online]. Available at: http://wenku.baidu.com/view/fbb8b49f6bec0975f565e200.html [Accessed 12 March 2013].

Wang, L. (2011) Social exclusion and inequality in higher education in China: A capability perspective. *International Journal of Educational Development* 31(3): pp.227-286.

Warshaw, P. R. (1980) Predicting purchase and other behaviors from generally and contextually specific intentions. *Journal of Marketing* 17(1): pp.26-33.

Waters, J. & Brooks, R. (2010) Accidental achievers? International higher education, class reproduction and privilege in the experiences of UK students overseas. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31(2): pp.217-228.

Wei, S. J. (1995) *The open door policy and China's rapid growth : Evidence from city-level data*.University of Chicago Press. [Online]. Available at: http://www.nber.org/papers/w4602 [Accessed 6 August 2014]

Weiss, A. (1995) Human capital vs. signalling: Explanation of wages. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9(4): pp.133-154.

Wellington, J. & Szczerbinski, M. (2007) *Research methods for the social sciences.* London: Continuum Internationl Publishing Group.

Wikipedia. (2014a) *Confucianism* [Online]. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism [Accessed 8 October 2014].

Wikipedia. (2014b) *Project 211* [Online]. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_211 [Accessed 11 October 2014].

Wikipedia. (2014c) *Project 985* [Online]. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_985 [Accessed Oct. 8 2014].

Wikipedia. (2015) *List of Chinese provinces by 2014 GDP* [Online]. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Chinese_administrative_divisions_by_GDP [Accessed 8 April 2015].

Wilkins, S. & Huisman, J. (2011) International student destination choice: The influence of home campus experience on the decision to consider branch campuses. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 21(1): pp.61-83.

Williams, M. & Burden, R. L. (1997) *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, M. & Kennedy, R. (2004) An evaluation of how student expectations are formed in a higher education context: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 14(1): pp.1-21.

Wohn, D. Y., Ellison, N. B., Khan, M. L., Fewins-Bliss, R. & Gray, R. (2013) The role of social media in shaping first-generation high school students' college aspirations: A social capital lens. *Computer & Education* 63: pp.424-436.

Woodhall, M. (1987) Human capital concepts. In: Psacharopoulos, G. (Ed.) *Economics of education: Research and studies, pp.21-23.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Wu, B. & Zheng, Y. (2008) Expansion of higher education in China: Challenges and implications. *Briefing Series*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/documents/briefings/briefing-36-china-higher-education-expansion.pdf [Accessed 2 March 2015].

Wu, Q., Palinkas, L. A. & He, X. (2010) An ecological examination of social capital effects on the academic achievement of Chinese migrant children. *British Journal of Social Work* 40(8): pp.2578-2597.

Wu, W. (2010) Higher Education Innovation in China [Online]. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEASTASIAPACIFIC/Resources/China-HigherEducationInnovation.pdf [Accessed 5 June 2014].

Wu, X. (2011) The dynamic role of cultural capital in the competitive school admission process: A Chinese experience. *Australian Educational Researcher* 39(3): pp.275-293.

Wu, X. (2012) The school choice market in China: a case study. *Educational Research* 55(2): pp.195-218.

Wu, X. (2013) School choice with Chinese characteristics. *Comparative Education* 48(3): pp.347-366.

Wu, Y. (2008) Cultural capital, the state and educational inequality in China, 1949-1996. *Sociological Perspectives* 51(1): pp.201-227.

Wuttke, C. (2011) From industrial enclaves to prototypes of the modern Chinese city: Development zones in Guangdong. *Local Economy* 26(5): pp.363-372.

XinLangJiaoYu. (2008) *The main factors influencing Chinese UG students for doing a PG education (中国应届大学毕业生选择读研的最主要原因)* [Online]. Available at: http://www.sina.com.cn [Accessed 6 August 2014].

Yan, Y. (2010) Factors influencing the students' decision-making to study abroad in Selecting host universities: A state sponsored program. *Wuhan: Management and Service Science (MASS),* 24-26 August 2010.

Yang, M. (2007) What attracts mainland Chinese students to Australian higher education. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation Innovation and Development* 4(2): pp.1-12.

Yi, L. M. & Ellis, P. D. (2000) Insider-outsider perspectives of Guanxi. *Business Horizons* 43(Jan. - Feb.): pp.25-30.

Yin, R. K. (2009) *Case study research: Design and methods (Fourth edition).* London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Yin, R. K. (2013) *Case study research: Design and methods (5th Edition).* London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Yu, L. & Suen, H. K. (2005) Historical and contemporary exam-driven education fever in China. *KEDI Journal of Education Policy* 2(1): pp.17-33.

Zhang, J., Zhao, Y., Park, A., & Song, X. (2005) Economic returns to schooling in urban China, 1988 to 2001. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 33(4): pp.730-752.

Zhang, W. (2007) Why IS: Understanding undergraduate students' intentions to choose an information systems major. *Journal of Information Systems Education* 18(4): pp.447-458.

Zhao, Y. & Du, D. (2011) A comparison of higher education location patterns in Guangdong China and California USA. *19th International Conference on Geoinformatics.* Shanghai: Geoinformatics.

Zheng, M. & Dai, R. (2006) Motivated investigation report of our students to study abroad. *World Education Information* 6: pp.30-32.

Zhou, L. (2006) American and Chinese college students' anticipations of their postgraduate education, Career, and future family foles. *Sex Roles* 55(1-2): pp.95-110.

Zhou, X. (2005) *Survey of the Chinese middle Classes.* Beijing: Social Science Academic Press.

Zimdars, A., Sullivan, A. & Heath, A. (2009) Elite higher education admissions in the Arts and Sciences: Is cultural capital the key? *Sociology* 43(4): pp.648-666.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: A List of '985' Universities

Province	University Name	Year Joining the Project	Administrative Body
Beijing	Peking University (北京大学)	1999	MoE
	Tsinghua University (清华大学)	1999	MoE
	Beijing Institute of Technology (北京理工大学)	2000	MIIT
	Beihang University (北京航空航天大学)	2001	MIIT
	Beijing Normal University (北京师范大学)	2002	MoE
	Renmin University of China (中国人民大学)	2003	MoE
	China Agricultural University (中国农业大学)	2004	MoE
	Minzu University of China (中央民族大学)	2004	SEAC
Tianjin	Nankai University (南开大学)	2000	MoE
	Tianjin University (天津大学)	2000	MoE
Shanghai	Fudan University (复旦大学)	1999	MoE
	Shanghai Jiaotong University (上海交通大学)	1999	MoE
	Tongji University (同济大学)	2002	MoE
	East China Normal University (华东师范大学)	2007	MoE
Liaoning	Dalian University of Technology (大连理工大学)	2001	MoE
	Northeastern University (东北大学)	2002	MoE
Jiangsu	Nanjing University (南京大学)	1999	MoE
	Southeast University (东南大学)	2001	MoE
Zhejiang	Zhejiang University (浙江大学)	1999	MoE
Fujian	Xiamen University (厦门大学)	2001	MoE
Shandong	Shandong University (山东大学)	2001	MoE
	Ocean University of China (中国海洋大学)	2001	MoE
Guangdong	Sun Yat-Sen University (中山大学)	2001	MoE
	South China University of Technology (华南理工大学)	2001	MoE
Jilin	Jilin University (吉林大学)	2001	MoE

Heilongjiang	Harbin Institute of Technology (哈尔滨工业大学)	1999	MIIT
Province	**University Name**	**Year Joining the Project**	**Administrative Body**
Anhui	University of Science and Technology of China (中国科学技术大学)	1999	CAS
Hubei	Wuhan University (武汉大学)	2001	MoE
Hubei	Huazhong University of Science (华中科技大学)	2001	MoE and Technology
Hunan	Hunan University (湖南大学)	2001	MoE
	Central South University (中南大学)	2001	MoE
	National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学)	2004	CMC
Chongqing	Chongqing University (重庆大学)	2001	MoE
Sichuan	Sichuan University (四川大学)	2001	MoE
	University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (电子科技大学)	2001	MoE
Shanxi	Xi'an Jiaotong University (西安交通大学)	1999	MoE
	Northwestern Polytechnical University (西北工业大学)	2002	MIIT
	Northwest A&F University (西北农林科技大学)	2004	MoE
Gansu	Lanzhou University (兰州大学)	2001	MoE

Notes: MoE: Ministry of Education

WIT: Ministry of Industry and Information Technology

CAS: Chinese Academy of Sciences

CMC: Central Military Commission

SEAC: State Ethnic Affairs Commission

Source: Altbach & Yu (2012)

Appendix B: A List of '211' Universities

Province	University Name	
Beijing	Tsinghua University	清华大学
	Peking University	北京大学
	Renmin University of China	中国人民大学
	Beijing Jiaotong University	北京交通大学
	Beijing University of Technology	北京工业大学
	Beihang University	北京航空航天大学
	Beijing Institute of Technology	北京理工大学
	University of Science and Technology Beijing	北京科技大学
	Beijing University of Chemical Technology	北京化工大学
	Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications	北京邮电大学
	China Agricultural University	中国农业大学
	Beijing Forestry University	北京林业大学
	Communication University of China	中国传媒大学
	Minzu University of China	中央民族大学
	Beijing Normal University	北京师范大学
	Central Conservatory of Music	中央音乐学院
	University of International Business and Economics	对外经济贸易大学
	Beijing University of Chinese Medicine	北京中医药大学
	Beijing Foreign Studies University	北京外国语大学
	China University of Petroleum, Beijing	中国石油大学 （北京）
	China University of Political Science and Law	中国政法大学
	Central University of Finance and Economics	中央财经大学
	North China Electric Power University	华北电力大学
	Beijing Sports University	北京体育大学
	China University of Geosciences	中国地质大学（北京）
Tianjin	Nankai University	南开大学
	Tianjin University	天津大学
	Tianjin Medical University	天津医科大学

Province	University Name	
Shanghai	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	上海交通大学
	East China Normal University	华东师范大学
	Shanghai International Studies University	上海外国语大学
	Donghua University	东华大学
	Shanghai University of Finance and Economics	上海财经大学
	Tongji University	同济大学
	East China University of Science and Technology	华东理工大学
	Shanghai University	上海大学
	The Second Military Medical University	第二军医大学
Hebei	Hebei University of Technology	河北工业大学
Liaoning	Dalian University of Technology	大连理工大学
	North-eastern university	东北大学
	Liaoning University	辽宁大学
	Dalian Maritime University	大连海事大学
Jiangsu	Nanjing University	南京大学
	Southeast University	东南大学
	Soochow University	苏州大学
	Nanjing Normal University	南京师范大学
	China University of Mining and Technology	中国矿业大学
	China Pharmaceutical University	中国药科大学
	Hohai University	河海大学
	Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics	南京航空航天大学
	Jiangnan University	江南大学
	Nanjing Agricultural University	南京农业大学
	Nanjing University of Science & Technology	南京理工大学
Zhejiang	Zhejiang University	浙江大学
Fujian	Xiamen University	厦门大学
	Fuzhou University	福州大学
Shandong	Shandong University	山东大学
	Ocean University of China	中国海洋大学
	China University of Petroleum	中国石油大学 （华东）

Province	University Name	
Guangdong	Sun Yat-sen University	中山大学
	Jinan University	暨南大学
	South China University of Technology	华南理工大学
	South China Normal University	华南师范大学
Shanxi	Taiyuan University of Technology	太原理工大学
Jilin	Jilin University	吉林大学
	Northeast Normal University	东北师范大学
	Yanbian University	延边大学
Heilongjiang	Harbin Institute of Technology	哈尔滨工业大学
	Harbin Engineering University	哈尔滨工程大学
	Northeast Agricultural University	东北农业大学
	Northeast Forestry University	东北林业大学
Anhui	University of Science and Technology of China	中国科学技术大学
	Anhui University	安徽大学
	Hefei University of Technology	合肥工业大学
Jiangxi	Nanchang University	南昌大学
	Zhengzhou University	郑州大学
	Wuhan University	武汉大学
	Huazhong University of Science and Technology	华中科技大学
	China University of Geosciences, Wuhan	中国地质大学（武汉）
	Wuhan University of Technology	武汉理工大学
	Central China Normal University	华中师范大学
	Huazhong Agricultural University	华中农业大学
	Zhongnan University of Economics and Law	中南财经政法大学
	National University of Defense Technology	国防科技大学
Hunan	Hunan University	湖南大学
	Central South University	中南大学
	Hunan Normal University	湖南师范大学
Sichuan	Sichuan University	四川大学
	Southwest Jiaotong University	西南交通大学
	University of Electronic Science and Technology of China	电子科技大学

Province	Province	Province
Sichuan	Sichuan Agricultural University	四川农业大学
	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	西南财经大学
Guizhou	Guizhou University	贵州大学
Yunnan	Yunnan University	云南大学
Shaanxi	Northwest University	西北大学
	Xi'an Jiaotong University	西安交通大学
	Northwestern Polytechnical University	西北工业大学
Shaanxi	Xidian University	西安电子科技大学
	Chang'an University	长安大学
	Northwest A & F University	西北农林科技大学
	Shaanxi Normal University	陕西师范大学
	The Forth Military Medical University	第四军医大学
Gansu	Lanzhou University	兰州大学
Xinjiang	Xinjiang University	新疆大学
Inner Mongolia	Inner Mongolia University	内蒙古大学
Guangxi	Guangxi University	广西大学

Source: Altbach & Yu (2012)

Appendix C: The English Version of the Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Note:

Please respond to the following questions by either ticking or filling-in the blank.

Background information

1. What is your gender? a) Male b) Female
2. What is your ethnicity: a) Han Chinese b) Ethnic minority
3. How old are you?
   a) 18-22 b) 23-25 c) 26-28 d) over 28
4. Which school are you in now: _____ current major: _____
5. Did you get your Bachelor Degree in Guangdong? a) Yes b) No
6. Is your hometown in Guangdong Province? a) Yes b) No, _____Province
7. Where is your hometown?
   a) Countryside b) town c) county-level city d) large and medium-sized cities
8. How many siblings are there in your family?
   a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 and over
9. What is the highest educational level of your parents? **(please choose from the following options and then fill in the blanks)**
   Father:_____ Mother: _____
   a) Elementary school and below
   b) Junior middle school
   c) Senior middle school (including equivalency)
   d) University and college
   e) Post-graduate and PhD
10. What are your parents' professions? **(please choose from the following options and then fill in the blanks)**
    Father: _____ Mother: _____
    a) General technical personnel
    b) Middle and senior level technical personnel
    c) Other professional (scientist, teacher, engineer, accountant, lawyer, doctor, performer, and others.)
    d) Staff of the Party, government, army, and others.
    e) Staff of enterprises and public institutions
    f) Staff of Business and service industry
    g) Family business or self employed
    h) Worker
    i) Farmer
    j) Unemployed
    k) Other occupations, please specify _____

About your view on postgraduate education

11. Did you work before starting your PG education?

a) Yes, (please go to question 12)
b) No, (please go to question 13)

12. Did your work relevant to your major for Undergraduate study?
    a) Yes b) No

13. Did you continue education from UG? a) Yes b) No

14. How did you enter the PG education?
    a) PG entrance exams b) by special academic recommendation

15. Was the major you study now the same as the major for your bachelor degree?
    a) Yes (please go to question 17) b) no (please go to question 16)

16. Why did you change your major for PG study?
    a) personal interest
    b) The major I am studying now is more conducive to employment
    c) Following other people's suggestions or expectations
    d) Other_____

17. What is the main source of your tuition?
    a) family support b) scholarship and grants c) student loans d) part-time jobs

18. What is your motivation for pursuing postgraduate education? **(please choose the three most appropriate and then rank them in sequence according to importance on the line)** _____
    a) To continue academic research
    b) To change my major
    c) To go to better universities
    d) To enhance employment competitiveness
    e) Personal interest
    f) To avoid the employment pressure
    g) To progress in my chosen career path
    h) To build up my social network
    i) Follow the general trend
    j) Other: _____

19. Why did you choose this particular subject for PG education? **(please choose the three most appropriate and then rank them in sequence according to importance on the line)**
    _____
    a) Personal interest
    b) Entry requirements and school admission rate
    c) Easier to find a job
    d) Cost of package and variety of scholarship and grants available
    e) The reputation of this subject in society
    f) Advice from senior students
    g) Teacher's advice
    h) Guidance from parents
    i) Subject to the major transfer
    j) I expect good income with this specialization
    k) I expect high social status with this specialization
    l) Other: _____

20. Why did you choose this college for PG education? **(please choose the three most appropriate and then rank them in sequence according to importance on the line)** _____
    a) Location of this college

b) Entry requirements
c) Academic reputation of the institution
d) Quality of faculty
e) Excellent resources and amenities of the university
f) Previously studied at the institution
g) Subject to major transfer
h) Other: _____

21. Where did you get relevant information which helped you to make your decision? **(please choose the three most appropriate and then rank them in sequence according to importance on the line)** _____
    a) Careers service of the university
    b) The internet
    c) College's recruitment brochure and presentation
    d) Broadcast, TV and newspaper
    e) Influence from teacher, peer and friends
    f) Tutorial class
    g) Parents' influence
    h) Relatives' influence
    i) Other_____
22. What would you hope to do after PG graduation?
    a) find a job (please go to question 23 to 24) b) further study in China
    c) Study abroad d) preparing for the civil service exam e) other:_____
23. Where do you want to work after PG graduation?
    a) Guangzhou, Shenzhen b) other big and medium-sized cities
    c) Towns d) countryside
24. In which type of organization would you like to work after PG graduation?
    a) Government agency b) public institution c) state enterprise
    d) private enterprise e) foreign-invested enterprises f) other：_____
25. Is there anything you would like to add about why and how you choose to do postgraduate education?
    _____
26. Will you recommend the major of your PG study to other people? Why or why not?
    _____
27. Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview on your decision making? If yes, please leave your contact details here:

    Email or QQ: _____ Mobile phone number:_____

This is the end of the questionnaire, thank you very much for your cooperation! If you have any question, please contact me at 524392732@qq.com.

Appendix D: The Chinese Version of the Questionnaire

研究生高等教育及专业选择情况调查问卷

亲爱的同学：

您好！我是英国诺丁汉大学教育学院的博士生（广外商英学院 2010 级研究生）。本调查旨在了解个人在研究生教育以及专业选择方面的原因及影响因素。调查采用不记名方式，收集到的资料仅供研究之用，给予保密，请放心按照真实情况填写。非常感谢您对本研究的支持和帮助！

提示： 1. 若题干后无特殊说明，为单选。请您在选项(a, b, c…)处打 √，在___处填写相关资料；

2. 若题干后有特殊说明，请按具体要求答题。

一、背景资料

1. 性别： a) 男 b) 女
2. 民族： a) 汉族 b) 少数民族
3. 请问您的年龄是： a) 18-22 岁 b) 23-25 岁 c) 26-28 岁 d) 28 岁以上
4. 请问您目前所在学院：_____ 专业: _____
5. 请问您之前本科就读的学校是在广东吗？ a) 是 b) 不是
6. 请问您家乡在广东省吗？ a) 是 b) 否, _____省
7. 请问您的家乡在? a) 农村 b) 乡镇 c) 县级城市 d) 大中城市
8. 请问您有几个兄弟姐妹？ a) 0 个 b) 1 个 c) 2 个 d) 3 个及以上
9. 请问您父母的最高学历**分别**是? (**请将字母填在横线上**) 父亲：___ 母亲：___
   a) 小学及以下 b) 初中 c) 高中或中职中专
   d) 大学本科 e) 研究生及以上
10. 请问您父母亲的工作类型**分别**是？（**以现在的情况为准，若已退休，则填写退休前的情况。请将字母选填在横线上**） 父亲：_____ 母亲：_____
    a) 一般技术人员
    b) 中高级技术人员
    c) 科学家，教师，工程师，会计师，律师，医生，演员等
    d) 党政机关工作人员
    e) 企事业单位工作人员
    f) 商业和服务行业工作人员
    g) 私营企业业主
    h) 工人
    i) 农民
    j) 无固定职业者
    k) 其他：_____

二、关于对研究生教育及专业选择的看法

11. 请问您研究生入学前是否有工作过？
    a) 是 （请回答 12 题）
    b) 否 （请回答 13 题）
12. 请问您当时的工作是否与大学所学的专业相关？
    a) 是 b) 否
13. 请问您考广外时是否是应届考研？
    a) 是 b) 否
14. 请问您是以何种方式进入现在就读的专业的？

a) 研究生入学考试录取　　b) 保送

15. 请问您目前研究生所学的专业与大学所学的专业与是否一致？
    a) 是（请回答问题 17）　　b) 否（请回答问题 16）
16. 请问您选择跨专业读研的主要原因是？
    a) 对研究生所学专业感兴趣　　b) 研究生所学专业更利于将来就业
    c) 他人的建议或期望　　d) 其他_____
17. 请问您的学费的最主要来源是？
    a) 家庭资助　　b) 奖助学金　　c) 助学贷款　　d) 自己兼职
18. 请问您读研究生的主要动机是什么？（**请选择三个并在括号内按重要性排序**）
    第一位【 】　　第二位【 】　　第三位【 】
    a) 继续学术研究　　b) 改变所学专业　　c) 去更好的大学
    d) 增强就业竞争力　　e) 个人兴趣驱使　　f) 规避就业压力
    g) 职业发展的需要　　h) 拓展人际关系　　i) 随大流
    J) 其他：_____
19. 请问您为什么选择您所学的专业?（**请选择三个并在括号内按重要性排序**）
    第一位【 】　　第二位【 】　　第三位【 】
    a) 个人兴趣　　b) 入学要求以及该专业的录取比例　　c) 该专业的就业前景
    d) 学费、奖助学金情况　　e) 该专业在社会上的声誉　　f) 师兄/姐的建议
    g) 老师的建议　　h) 我家人的意见　　i) 服从调剂，不想放弃学习机会
    j) 希望通过该专业的学习获得较高的收入
    k) 希望通过该专业的学习获得较高的社会地位
    l) 其他：_____
20. 请问您为什么选择在广外读研？（**请选择三个并在括号内按重要性排序**）
    第一位【 】　　第二位【 】　　第三位【 】
    a) 学校地理位置　　b) 录取要求和程序　　c) 学校的专业优势
    d) 优秀的师资　　e) 丰富的资源和便利的设施　　f) 之前在广外学习过
    g) 服从调剂　　h) 其他：_____
21. 请问您选择专业时，从哪里获取了相关信息？(**请选择三个并在括号内按重要性排序**） 第一位【 】　　第二位【 】　　第三位【 】
    a) 所在大学的就业指导部门　　b) 互联网　　c) 大学的招生会议或者宣传资料
    d) 广播、电视、报纸　　e) 老师、同学、朋友的介绍　　f) 考研辅导班
    g) 父母的经验　　h) 亲戚的介绍　　i) 其他：_____
22. 请问您研究生毕业后想？
    a) 就业(请回答 23-24 题)　　b) 在国内继续深造　　c) 出国留学
    d) 考公务员　　e)其他_____
23. 请问您倾向于去哪里就业？
    a) 广州深圳　　b) 其他大中城市　　c) 城镇　　d) 农村
24. 请问您就业单位意向是？
    a) 政府机关　　b) 高校科研院所等事业单位　　c) 国有企业
    d) 民营企业　　e) 外企　　f) 其他_____
25. 关于研究生教育及专业选择方面，请问您还有什么想补充的吗？
    _____
26. 如果有人向您咨询专业选择的意见，请问您是否会向他（她）推荐您现在所学的专业？为什么？
    _____
27. 我们也许需要与您进一步联络，若您同意，请留下相关联系方式：
    常用的 email 邮箱或 QQ：_____ 手机或其它: _____

问卷到此结束，再次感谢你对本次问卷调查的支持！若您有任何问题或疑问，请联系我 524392732@qq.com.

Appendix E: The English Version of the Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Opening questions: general information about the students (field of study, family background, hometown, etc.)

1. When did you start thinking about PG education?
2. Why did you decide to pursue postgraduate education? (E.g. Improve relevant knowledge and skills, get a good job with high salary, improve English communication skills, gain prestige in community or among friends, build up social networks, etc.)
    - What information sources did you use to make you decision? From where did you get that information? How did it influence your choice?
3. Why did you choose your particular subject for PG education?
4. What were your parents' attitudes about your decision? Did they support it or not, why and in what ways?
    - What are their educational levels?
    - What are their professions?
5. Apart from your parents, were there any significant others who influenced your choice of field of study?
    - If yes, who has had significant influence on your choice? (Friend, relative, teacher, neighbours, or other?)
        - What are their educational levels?
        - What are their professions?
    - How did they influence you and in what specific ways?
6. What were you doing before starting your PG education?
    - If working, why did you give up your job and salary to go to university?
    - If not working but continuing you education post UG, have you thought about finding a job after UG?
7. Did you think about the job opportunities after graduation before you made your choice?
    - What kind of job do you want to do after graduation?
    - What kind of salary do you hope to gain after graduation?
    - Where do you want to work?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your reasons for doing PG study?

Appendix F: The Chinese Version of the Semi-structured Interview Schedule

访谈提纲

1. Ice-breaking questions: 学生的基本情况：家乡，家庭背景，兄弟姐妹，现在所学专业等
2. 什么时候开始有了读研的想法？
3. 为什么选择读研究生？当时是怎样想的？什么事情或人让你有了这样的想法？
4. 有了这个想法后，是怎样确定专业（学校）的？在选择专业是，有哪些方面是你比较看重的？为什么在研究生阶段读这个专业？除了这个专业（学校），还有没有考虑过其他专业（学校）？最后又是怎样确定最终所选的专业（学校）的？（用了哪些衡量因素：如自身知识水平，学校设施，校园环境，教学科研水平，专业设置，奖助学金，距离家乡远近，学校所在城市影响等）
5. 你的父母是否支持你的决定？（读研以及专业选择上）为什么？具体表现在哪些方面？
6. 父母与子女关于专业选择意见是否一致？如果不一致是由于什么原因造成的？父母的意见是基于哪些原因提出的？（父母的职业，受教育程度，工资水平以及父母人际关系，以及对子女的期待和对子女教育情况的关注等）
7. 除了父母外，还有没有向谁咨询意见？如果有，他们是谁，教育背景怎样？给你提供了哪些意见或信息？这些意见或信息对你有什么影响？怎样影响的？自己有没有做相关实践调查？
8. 你是大学毕业后就直接读研还是工作后读研的？
9. 如果是直接读研——本科是什么专业？学习成绩怎样？为什么大学毕业后没有直接参加工作？有没有去实习过？
10. 如果是工作一段时间再读研——之前的工作经历对你读研有什么影响？（谈谈工作经历，为什么放弃原来的工作和薪水来读研？）
11. 研究生毕业后想从事什么类型的工作？是否有明确的职业生涯规划？对未来的工作薪酬期望是多少？择业时，您主要考虑哪些因素？（工作地点，薪酬福利，个人发展机会，专业对口，工作环境，自己的性格和兴趣，父母的医院，工作的稳定性等）是否会选与专业相关的，为什么？如果择业时，工作不对口，你会选择怎么办？准备去哪就业？为什么?
12. 关于你为什么要读研以及为什么选择所学专业，你还有什么要补充的吗？

Appendix G: Student Sample for the Semi-structured Interview (Anonymized)

No.	Interviewee	Gender	School	Hometown	Duration	Work experience
1.	Zou T.	Male	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Hunan province	45 min.	Yes
2.	Ye F.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Hunan province	30 min.	No
3.	Wang L. Y.	Female	Faculty of Asian Languages and Cultures	Guangxi Province	45 min.	No
4.	Hu. J. J.	Female	Centre for the Lexicographical studies	Hunan Province	35 min.	No
5.	Li F. Q.	Female	School of Legal Studies	Shanxi Province	50 min.	No
6.	Zhao X. R.	Male	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Henan Province	30 min.	No
7.	Jiang P. J.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Anhui Province	55 min.	No
8.	Chen H. L.	Male	School of Legal Studies	Heilongjiang Province	50 min.	Yes
9.	Lei B.	Male	School of Legal Studies	Hunan Province	34 min.	Yes
10	Liu S.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Hunan Province	35 min.	Yes
11.	Nie Q. S.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Henan Province	40 min.	No
12.	Cao X.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Yunnan Province	38 min.	No
13.	Cheng S. Y.	Male	Centre for European Studies	Hunan Province	30 min.	Yes
14.	Wang Y. L.	Male	Faculty of English Language and Culture	Anhui Province	45 min.	No
15.	Wen Y.	Female	School of Marxism	Hubei Province	33 min.	No
16.	Xu Y. Y.	Male	Cisco School of Informatics	Hunan Province	32 min.	Yes
17.	Chen Q.Q.	Female	School of International Trade and Economics	Hunan Province	29 min.	Yes
18.	Zhu X. Y.	Female	School of International Trade and Economics	Hunan Province	28 min.	Yes
19.	Deng Q.	Female	Faculty of English Language and Culture	Anhui Province	44 min.	No
20.	Guolin F. Z.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Shandong Province	29 min.	No
21.	Wang W.	Female	School of Interpreting & Translation Studies	Hunan Province	40 min.	No
22.	Xiao M.	Female	Faculty of Asian Languages and Cultures	Hainan Province	36 min.	No
23.	Li Y. Y.	Male	School of Management	Hunan Province	37 min.	Yes

No.	Interviewee	Gender	School	Hometown	Duration	Work experience
24.	Yang F. Y.	Male	School of Politics and Public Administration	Guangdong Province	32 min.	No
25.	Jiang Y. Y.	Female	School of Finance	Guangdong Province	30 min.	No
26.	Huang W. H.	Male	Cisco School of Informatics	Guangdong Province	45 min.	No
27.	Jiang X.	Female	Faculty of Chinese Language and Culture	Guangdong Province	33 min.	No
28.	Liang X. Y.	Female	School of Marxism	Guangdong Province	31 min.	No
29.	Wang J. L. J.	Female	School of English for International Business	Hunan Province	35 min.	Yes
30.	Zhang H. H.	Female	School of English for International Business	Henan Province	50 min.	Yes

Appendix H: An English Version of Yan's (female) Transcription

Transcription

A: Can you tell me about your hometown?
B: I came from Anhui Province.

A: Which part of Anhui?
B: *Fuyang*.

A: In the countryside?
B: Yes.

A: You have a brother according to your questionnaire?
B: Yes. I have a brother; he quit school when he was in middle school. At that time, most of his friends didn't go to school and my brother hanged out with them. On the other hand, he was classified into an average class because of the entrance examination, because of that, he was not happy as he thought he was not taken seriously by the teachers. He was quite self-respected and then he decided to quit without noticing anyone. Even my parents didn't know. Later, he noticed my parents through telephone. My parents tried to pull him back to school but in vain.

A: He quitted the school mainly because he was not classified to a good class?
B: Yes, we got to know this latter.

A: What's your parents' reaction then?
B: They were emotionally not prepared at all. They did not think he would quit school at all. At that time, my parents were working outside to afford us to go to school. My parents called my brother and wanted to change his mind. My grandpa also tried his best to persuade him to resume study, but all in vain.

A: Do you and your brother live together with your grandpa at that time?
B: Yes, we lived together since we were very young as my parents were working outside. My parents came back once a year.

A: Does your brothers' dropping out of school have any connection with your family economic situation?
B: I think yes. If my brother continued to go to school, it is very difficult for my parents to support us both to go to university. However, I got to know latter that the major reason for his quit was because he was not classified into a key class and he thought he was not taken seriously… Actually, my parents were very eager to encourage us to go to university. They would be very proud if we could go to university. I still remember when I was in grade two of my primary school; my parents told my head teacher that they would support us to go to school by all means.

A: So your parents support you and your brother to go to school?
B: Yes, very much. In our countryside, it is generally believed that it is quite honourable to go to university. Born in the countryside, we have no relationship [*Guanxi* in Chinese] and going to the college is the only route for us to go out and get rid of poverty.

A: Your brother quitted school but you continued to PG education, does it mean you always do well in your subjects?

B: I was quite average when I was in middle and high school. Then I went to a non-elite provincial university for undergraduate studies. The people around me were not interested in studying at the university. I was different, I was interested in reading. I could feel that I made progress bit by bit.

A: What's your major for your undergraduate degree?
B: English, Business English to be specific. That was the only major orientation of English in our university**.** Our university attached importance to employment instead of encouraging us to prepare for the PG entrance examination.

A: Then why did you make up your mind to take part in the PG entrance examination then?
B: I thought it was mainly because of family influence. I was brought up by my grandpa. He had very high hopes for me. I made up my mind to go as far as I could in learning when I was a freshman. Naturally, I decided to do postgraduate study then.

A: How about your parents' attitude towards your decision to do postgraduate study?
B: They really supported and even wished me to go for a PhD degree.

A: They support you just for a higher degree?
B: Of course not. They wanted me to be a credit to them, and then they will have 'face'. They thought when I had higher educational degrees; I would have better chances of having good jobs and then make more money. Thus I could bring more benefits to them**.**

A: How did you think of that?
B: I did postgraduate study mainly out of my personal interest. I did not do it to comply with my parents' wishes. It was just that my personal interest corresponded to their wishes. I could do what I like and let them to be proud of me at the same time. Therefore, I had no pressure.

A: Did you have any special reason that you loved English?
B: I don't know. I think my interest in English began when I was in the middle school. I was good at English and I could always achieve good grades in it. I could feel a sense of achievement in learning English**.**

A: Then, you choose English as a major of study for BA and postgraduate study?
B: Yes.

A: Did anybody give your any suggestion on choosing the major for PG education?
B: No, nobody gave me any suggestions on how to choose the major. I chose it simply because I really liked it. I was not sociable, therefore I didn't have many friends, and the only one I could consult was my senior schoolmate.

A: How did you choose your place for study?
B: I wanted to make progress through PG education. I graduated from a non-provincial key university; I wanted to go to an elite university for postgraduate study. I firstly thought of Xiamen University [a national elite university] because I had a senior schoolmate at that university. It was a comprehensive university and was excellent in every aspect. The campus was also very beautiful. However, I found that the second foreign language, Japanese, for me was too difficult for me after I tried their sample exam paper. I thought as I have spent a lot time and spirits on preparation, I need an outcome. Then I had the ideal of choosing G University.
I also took Beijing Foreign Language University and Shanghai Foreign Language University into consideration. However, they were too hard for me. I thought G University suited my personal abilities then I chose it.

A: Did your senior schoolmate give any other help through your preparation?
B: Her help was mainly about the past exam papers. She told me where I could buy those past exam papers. She also recommended some books for me, such as books on how to improve my translation and writing skills, which were very valued in the PG entrance exams of G University.

A: Did you have any working experience before your PG education?
B: Yes. When I got to know that I was accepted by G University, I went to work as a teacher for several months when it is a couple of months before the autumn term. I was an English teacher in an English training school. I liked being together with children; however, I did not like that job. The students I taught were at the end of their primary school and were ready to prepare for their middle school entrance examinations. I did not like it because I couldn't improve myself in knowledge through that job. I wanted to improve myself through my jobs. I still think I am a learner, I have not been prepared for diffusing knowledge, and I want to obtain more knowledge instead.

A: Could you specify more on why you chose English Language and Culture for PG study as your previous major was Business English for BA?
B： Actually, I wanted to choose English translation for PG education first.

A: Was it because you really are interested in it?
B: Well, how to say, I thought it is the highest level of English learning, especially those doing simultaneous interpretation. I thought they are the best. However, I was not sure whether I could enter this area as the admission score for that school at G University was quite high. The admission score in the school of English Language and Culture was lower by comparison**.**

A: Did you also like Literature as your specific major is now English language and Culture?
B: Yes. From the inner heart, I loved it. However, as I have said the major I wanted to choose most was English translation and interpretation. I believed the major of Translation and Interpretation could more reflect a person's capacity and abilities, because it requires higher admission scores. If you could enter into that major, people will say you are really great.

A: Is it correct that you really cared about other's opinions?
B: Yes. I think this has a great connection with my family. I wanted to get others' recognition and I was instilled with this notion when I was very young: when you are excellent, you will receive others' praise and recognition. Then, you will gain the 'face' and be respected by them.

A: Were you one of the few university students in your village?
B: Yes, I was the only university graduate as well as the first PG student in our village. As a result, I would always be regarded as a good example to the children in our village. My grandpa always praised me in front of other villagers. Although I liked being accepted and respected by others and I enjoyed this feeling, I did not want to be given too much focuses.

A: Could you specify how you developed your interest in Literature?
B: I loved reading related books when I was young. I had a relative who was a teacher. She bought many fairy books for her granddaughter when her granddaughter was very young. Every time I went to her house, I would read those books. I had good memories. I also loved watching TV programmes. I was interested in a lot of things. I wanted to know the different cultures and characteristics of each country.

A: Anyone else who helped you develop your interest in Literature?

B: Yes. I think this was connected to one of my college friends. She was my soul mate. She did not do well in her professional courses; however, she did love reading all kinds of books. She also liked travelling. I enjoyed being together with her. She would share what she had read and what she experienced in her life to me. Then I would read the book she recommended.

A: You mentioned in your questionnaire the major motive for doing PG education was to go to an elite university, could you expand on that?
B: I wanted to improve myself and receive other's recognition. I thought there would be richer resources in elite universities. Besides, I was interested in it and I thought it would improve my employment competitiveness through undertaking PG education at an elite university.

A: And the second reason was personal interest, which you have mentioned earlier. While the third reason was to improve employability, could you please expand on that?
B: I have told you the importance of interpretation in my heart. Thus, I wanted to find a relevant job accordingly. As for jobs concerning foreign trades, I thought working is for the sake of making money and according to my knowledge the salary for foreign trades was satisfying. This job was also connected to what I have learnt for my BA, which was business English. I also wanted to be a teacher if possible; this was what my grandpa wanted me to do as well. He thought for a girl being a teacher, she will live a stable life and will also have good social status.

A: Your parents supported you for PG education, then how about your grandpa?
B: You know my parents were in the working class, and they were under-educated: my father's highest degree was middle school, and mother's was primary school. I was mostly influenced by my grandpa because I was brought up by him. He was well-respected by the villagers and he had a strong story-telling ability. He knew a lot and his hand-writing was very good. He was good at Chinese Violin. He was good at study at his time but his study life was interrupted as he went to be a member of the People's Liberation Army because of the Cultural Revolution. I respected him very much. He was the people who influenced me most.

A: So your grandpa encouraged you to study hard in order to go to university?
B: Yes. Let me tell you an interesting story, when I was young, when I complained there was no meat in the meal, he would reply that when you go to university you will have meat to eat. When I complained that I did not have beautiful new clothes to wear, he would reply when you go to university you will have. Every time I wanted to have something, he would reply me when you've gained admission to the university, you will have whatever you want. Gradually I found it is not true as I found that I still do not have beautiful clothes to wear even now I am in the university. However, I am really thankful for what he has done to inspire me to study hard. I owned all the progress I have made in every stage of my life to him.

A: What else did he do to encourage you to go to university?
B: He paid special attention to those who had been admitted to the university in our village. Once he had that kind of information, he would tell me. For example, A went to the university and became a policeman after his graduation, and thereafter he became very rich. B went to university and gained a lot of scholarship. Because of his excellence, he was arranged a good job by the university… He had a lot of this kind of stories to tell. He hoped that I could learn from those good examples. At that time I was quite encouraged by those good examples.

A: When you decided to do PG education, did you talk with him about it?

B: No, my grandpa didn't know this; he didn't give me any suggestion on how to choose the major for graduate study as he didn't know it at all. He thought I would live a better life after I became a university graduate. Now, for the first term, I felt a lot of pressure and I felt that I couldn't move any further. My grandpa would comfort me like this: "it's ok, even if you didn't finish your postgraduate study; you are still a college student". On the other hand, he knew some of the companies which would use PG degree as a threshold for recruitment, so he hoped me could stick to it. At the same time, he worried that I would face too much pressure from study.

A: You chose this major also because it does not need tuition fee in your questionnaire?
B: Yes, if it needed, I wouldn't have chosen it.

A: From where else did you get those sources for PG education?
B: The internet. I searched it on the internet. The teacher did not give me any suggestion. The counsellor in our school encouraged us to find a job instead of taking part in the PG entrance examination. However, I have made up my mind to do PG education. I remembered once when I was doing the Japanese exams of G University, I came across a problem and I went to ask our Japanese teacher. She told me like this: "never set your goals too high". I thought she gave me a blow. Maybe because our university was not good and she thought G University was beyond my ability.

A: What's your reaction then?
B: The more the people around me didn't think I could, the more I wanted to prove myself to them that I could. Yes, I did.

A: How about your brother?
B: He went to work after dropping out of the school. He gave me the living costs every month.

A: Did he ever regret for having quitted school?
B: I think so. Once I heard him saying that he was too impulsive to quit school.

A: Would he tell you his working experience to you?
B: No. He always told me some happy things when we were together. When I was doing a part-time job during the summer vacation, he was also there to learn. He would ask me if he had pronounced that English word correctly. I felt that my brother had good memories too and I wanted to help him to resume study in the future.

A: He supports your living costs, how is your feeling towards your brother?
B: I love him very much. He is very handsome. Actually, from the inner heart, I feel a sense of guilty for him. He quitted school and went to work to support me for my PG education. He had a difficult time when he was young. I was told by my mother that he fell sick for a long time and didn't get better until he was 4 or 5 years old. In contrast, I had a strong body. I would always think that it was my brother who shouldered all the sufferings for me.

A: You and your brother were emotionally attached to each other?
B: Yes, we had a happy family, although my parents were not with us most of the time, we were very happy. My mother would call me every week.

A: Did you encounter any difficulty throughout your preparation for PG education?
B: Yes, I think it is the mental disorder. I have been targeting at Xia Men University for a long time; I mean having been preparing for the professional exams for a long time. But I have made a big mistake; I ignored the second language exam and did not prepare for it at all. When the exam date was approaching, I was picking up the second language (Japanese). Then I realised that it was too difficult for me. As I have been preparing for the PG entrance

examination for a long time, I wanted an outcome. Then I decided to choose G University as I knew it had a very basis requirement in the knowledge of the second language.

A: Do you have any special reason for choosing Xia Men University as your priority?
B: I have watched a programme which was filmed in that University. I really liked the beautiful campus there. Besides, Xia Men was also a very good city. This university was also a famous comprehensive university. The major I aimed at also ranked top 5 in China. That's why I wanted to go to Xia Men University very much.

A: Did you ever regret for having coming to G University?
B: A little maybe. I always have the feeling that I haven't adapted to this university. There is a big gap between my previous university and G University. The students in my previous university were not as academically strong in learning as those in this university. When I came across the theoretical knowledge concerning literature now, I could not understand it. I felt much pressure. I am thinking of making it up in a half years' time, if I still could not catch it up, I may quit.

A: According to your questionnaire you might continue for the PhD degree in the future?
B: Yes, I am still thinking about it in Beijing or Shanghai Foreign Language University, or Xiamen University. I wanted to stay close to my hometown. I thought Guangzhou is too far away from my hometown. I wanted to be far away from home when I was young, but not now. I don't think I have adapted to the life of Guangzhou. It doesn't belong to me, either the language, or the food.

A: Do you have anything else you want to add for today's interview?
B: No, almost there.

A: Ok, thank you very much.

Appendix I: An English Version of Fei's (female) Transcription

Transcription

A: Your hometown is in Anhui province?

B: Yes, in Wuhu, Anhui.

A: A good place, how did you think of coming to Guangzhou for PG education?

B: I graduated from Anhui Normal University, a key university in Anhui Province. My major was English Education. At that time, most of my classmates became a teacher in middle schools after their graduation. Also, a lot of students were preparing for the PG entrance examination. The school in our university also encouraged us to do that. At that time, some schools in our university distributed milk to students in order to encourage students to take part in the PG entrance examination. Our school distributed blankets to us because it was very cold in the winter.

A: Distributing blankets to you was also to encourage you to take part in the PG entrance examination?

B: Yes. It was much encouraged. At that time, the school counsellor even jokingly told us, as long as you were taking part in the PG entrance exam, no matter what the result would be, we would not take the blankets back from you. Encouraged by the school and influenced by most of my classmates who were also preparing for the PG entrance examination, I decided to take part in it too. Actually, I was not motivated to study. I was a little timid most of the time; as a result, I would like to follow others in what they do. Apart from that, I was influenced by one of my teachers, who taught us English and Language Culture. I loved watching American TV series so I knew a lot about that aspect. Each time in her class, I would sit in the very front and have interaction with her. I also prepared carefully for the presentation in her class. In that case, I left deep impression on her. In the last class of that term, she asked whether we had any question to ask. Nobody replied except me. Therefore, she talked with me for a whole class. I just remember she said, 'being a girl, you couldn't feel truly happy until you become truly independent'. She also encouraged me to take part in the PG entrance examination. However, my parents were not supportive enough for my PG education.

A: Was it popular that encouraging students to take part in the PG entrance examination in your whole university?

B: Yes. I think it is the difference between the costal and the mainland China[64]. When I came to Guangzhou, through one of my roommates who came from Hunan province, I knew that taking part in the PG entrance examination is also very popular there.

A: Was there a lot of competition in your hometown?

B: Yes. Since primary school, there was always intense competition. It was very common to bribe teachers in our hometown. Some of the parents sent gift cards or money to the teacher in order to let their child have a better seat in the classroom. Some of the students could be very shy in the class and were afraid of answering questions in the class. Then those students' parents would give money to the teacher to let the teacher call their child's name in the class.

A: How did you get to know this?

B: I got to know this because my father works in the educational system. I have two cousins who are teachers now. Actually the salary for a teacher was not very high, but the extra

[64] The students in coastal areas were not as enthusiastic as those students from inland China to PG education. This was also mentioned in another interviewee who came from the Hainan Province.

benefits were far beyond that. The common practice was that parents would treat the teacher a luxurious dinner and then bribe them money. In our hometown, some of the bosses of the local town would bribe a headmaster a large amount of money in order to let their children to go to that school.

A: It seems that the practice you described mainly happened in primary, middle or high school? Was it common in your university?
B: In universities, it was not as common as it was in high schools. However, you can also feel that the school counsellor would care the students from his or her hometown more. The sense of regionalism is very strong. They thought they might have a chance to meet each other in the future.

A: Apart from distributing blankets to students, did your school take any other steps to encourage students to take part in the PG entrance examination?
B: Yes. On the one hand, the school would invite the senior schoolmate who was accepted to a good university for exchange of experience. On the other hand, the school counsellor would arrange meetings from time to time to encourage us to take part in the PG entrance examination. The third was that they would put the entire successful senior schoolmates in the PG entrance examination on the school website for publicity. I thought the reason why the university attached great importance to this was that the students who got admission to PG education were also counted in the employment rate of the university.

A: You mentioned your parents were not so supportive to your PG education, how was that?
B: My father actually was no against to that. What he meant was that we were from the middle class; I should win the position in PG education by myself, I mean by my own capacity, not by bribing others, for which they could not afford. If I could not pass the entrance examination, he would not help me to *make connections and bribe.* As for my mum, she said it would be better for a girl to be stable, she did not think it is good for a girl to fight for her future (打拼). She said after finishing PG education, a girl would lose the golden age for marriage. As a result, it is difficult for her to find an ideal husband. She also worried that if I did my PG education in Guangzhou, I would consider finding a job here. In that case, I would be far away from home. Oh, yes. This ideal was shared by my uncle (from my mother' side) too. He was especially against me for doing PG education. He told me a story. One of his friends' daughters went to Japan for PG education. Of course she found a good job after graduation. The only problem was that she set her sights too high and could not find an ideal husband. My uncle told me when a girl has a higher educational degree; it is natural that she would set her sights higher than before. As a result, it would be much difficult for her to find a husband suitable for her. Chinese parents attach great importance to marriage, even greater than employment. When you spend two to three years on PG education, those who didn't would have earned equivalent working experience or have got married and even given birth to babies. Therefore those excellent potential people for marriage would have been picked up by others.

A: What do you think then?
B: I admitted that what they said is partly true, but I wouldn't become a girl who could not find an ideal husband. As long as I've made up my mind, I believe I could handle what I face appropriately, even if it is not what I want, I could also afford it. In terms of the ideal husband, I don't attach importance to a person's appearance; I don't care whether he is handsome or very tall or not. What I do value is whether this person has the connection of hearts and minds with me. My rule for finding a husband is different from most of the other girls (who think to find a tall, handsome, and rich guy), so I won't be worried that the excellent ideal husband would have been picked up by others. Actually, I found there are a lot of excellent people around who are struggling for their careers or are receiving higher education like me. Therefore I think it is not necessary good to get married at an early age.

Now, for my age, it is the beginning of life. I am not attracted to the life which you begin to settle down and to be burdened with family chores instead of fighting for your career.

A: As an administrative person working in the educational system, did your father give you any suggestion on choosing what and where to study ?

B：He didn't give me any suggestion about that. After I had decided to take part in the PG entrance examination, my father spurred me to stick to my decision. Sometimes, he would call me and told me once you've made up your decision, you should stick to it. Sometimes, he would call me to check my progress in preparation for PG entrance exams. However, when I got admitted by G University, I didn't know why I chose this university as I had no knowledge about it at all.

A: Why was that?

B: When I have made up my mind to take part in the PG entrance examination, I noticed that everybody around me was talking about where to study. However, I myself had no idea as to where to study. Accidently, I heard through my sister that one of her classmates chose Xiamen University for PG education. She told me that university was very beautiful. Then I had the ideal of choosing Xiamen University too. I also learnt from one of my classmates, who was excellent in her school performance and also decided to target at Xiamen University. She chose the major of Linguistics for PG education in that university. I was thinking about choosing English Translation as a major for PG education. Through her I got to know that the School of Translation in Xiamen University wouldn't accept a person without any working experience. As I didn't have any formal working experience before, I gave up. Later, once in the library, when I was reading a journal, I came across an article written by a student from G University. The article was mainly about her experience of abroad study tour. This attracted me very much. I also heard that G University was a good university, so I changed my mind to target at G University.

A: How did you come up to choose legal translation as your major for PG study?

B: I didn't know the specification of the major of Translation in this University. I just knew the translation was classified into interpretation and written translation. I chose the latter. I didn't know the written translation would be classified into legal translation, business translation and media translation until I came to this university. This was to be decided after I come to this university. When I came to this university, I knew very little about those three majors. At that time, most of my classmates wanted to choose Business Translation. As I have said earlier, *I don't like follow the bandwagon***.** I wouldn't do the things when most of others were doing; I thought it would be meaningless in that case. I chose this because I found one of the students, who were excellent in her school performance, also chose legal translation. He got his BA degree in G University. I knew there must be some reasons and sensed that the major of legal translation might be worthy of doing. It turned out that I was true, he got familiar with all these specifications in this university, and the major of legal translation in this university is the top one or two in China.

A: Don't you think doing PG education is following the bandwagon?

B: Although I followed others to take part in the PG entrance examination at the very beginning, I have avoided following a more common route, which was to find a job. I have been living in an environment surrounded by teachers. I didn't want to be a teacher in the future. I thought if I found a job as a teacher after graduation, my thoughts and field of vision would be restricted. Actually, I have had an internship of being a teacher for a few months. The salary was very good. I got that position out of dozens of applicants. However, when I really took that job, I found that I would not reconcile to be a teacher like that. I realised that one of my colleagues even couldn't understand the text book. I then decided that I could not stay in such an environment. I believed I was capable of doing jobs which required higher abilities.

A: How did you feel for that internship?
B: Being a teacher, I got along with my students; however, I didn't enjoy it, I mean I didn't feel happy of being a teacher.

A: Then what do you think the happiness of being a teacher should be?
B: I thought the happiness of being a teacher was that you could teach your students and let them become knowledgeable. However, I didn't have such a feeling. When I was doing the internship, only those students sat in the front of the classroom would take it seriously, I mean listen to me very carefully, the students in the backwards wouldn't. There were around 60 students in my class. It was beyond my capacity to control the whole class even I tried my best to make the class interesting. You can't choose your students, when you treat your students wholeheartedly, you couldn't expect your students would do the same to you. Sometimes you have to deal with very troublesome students.

A: You mentioned you don't like to be a teacher in the future, why you choose Anhui Norman University for your BA degree before?
B: Actually I wanted to choose Zhejiang University. However, I got very sick before the College Entrance Examination; as a result, I didn't do well in it. At that time, based on my scores of the College Entrance Examination, I could only choose a good major in Anhui Norman University, that's English.

A: Do you like English then?
B: Yes. I had an innate interest in it. I was more sensitive to language than others since I was young.

A: Why was that?
B: I think this has connection with my family. My father was a teacher, he taught mathematics before. He also did very well in English. In our town, the students begin to learn English in the middle school, and most of the students didn't like it at the very beginning. My father bought me a lot of tapes, English reading materials, and the player for me when I was in primary school. I became quite interested in it. Thus, I have laid a foundation for it before middle school. Maybe because of this, I knew more than other students, and I kept learning English all the way. I think language learning is closely connected with your surroundings.

A: Did you father do anything else to help your learn English?
B: No. My father believed that one should depend on oneself. When I was in grade two in the middle school, I suddenly became resistant to schooling and did not want to learn anymore.

A: Why was that?
B: As an excellent student, I needed to resist certain psychological pressure. In our class, many students were not concentrated on study; they considered me as a bookworm. I didn't want to be called like that. Then I chose to play with them. Therefore, I fell behind. The head teacher, who was my father's colleague, reported this to my father. She said if I continued like this, I wouldn't be able to go to a high school. My father replied it totally depends on herself. At that time, one of my cousins passed the high school entrance examination, all the families were very happy and held a special feast for her. A lot of elders gave red package to her, which contains 500 Yuan (around 50 pounds) generally. 500 Yuan for me at that time was a huge amount of money. I thought, if I failed in the high school entrance examination, I wouldn't be able to get such huge amount of money. Then I decided to study hard again. My father was very supportive, whenever I wanted to buy reference books; he would give me the money unconditionally.

A: How about your mother?

B: My mother wasn't very strict with me. If just my mother and I were at home, I would play around, if my father was also there, I would study hard.

A: Why was there such a difference?
B: My mother didn't care so much about my study, what she would do was telling me that if I didn't study hard, she would let my father know when he come back.

A: Have your parents given any suggestions on how to choose the major for PG education?
B: No, I knew as my background was English, I did not have many choices concerning majors for PG education. I could only choose Literature, Linguistics or Translation. I didn't choose Literature because I really didn't like it. Once in the literature class, I said openly to the teacher that I don't like it, and I don't like poems or heavy book on literature either. My teacher said literature is arts of words. I replied nonsense directly. I didn't choose Linguistics because I didn't like it either. Our linguistics teacher herself even could not pronounce some English words clearly. I also considered finding a job after MA graduation; however, I didn't know what I could do as a college graduate except being a teacher, which I didn't like. Considering translation would be more practical and my translations skills were very good, then I chose the major of English Translation.

A: Did you have any career plan when you chose the major of Translation for PG education?
B: No. Actually I was quite uneasy. There was a lot of risk in it. The first risk was that you might fail in this examination even after you have put a lot of strength in it. The other risk was that you might lose a lot of good working opportunities. I was worried that after my PG education, I still couldn't find an ideal job. However, I was being overconfident. I thought PG education would give me a chance to study further. I was not going to play around for PG education; but I was to really learn something useful. I thought I would have much more good opportunities after PG education. I only need to grab one from those opportunities then I would be better than before. On the other hand, I felt like doing a gambling, and believed that I did the right choice in this gambling.
.
A: Could you expand more on why you think there would be more opportunities?
B: I think I could meet better teachers in this university. They would be more experienced and resourceful. Most of them had the background of studying abroad. They were incomparable and quite beyond the reach of the teachers in my previous university. I felt like they could teach me more. In that case, my capabilities would be improved and then I would have much more opportunities after PG education.

A: According to your questionnaire, the major motive for PG education was out of the consideration of employment?
B: Yes. When I graduated with my bachelor degree, the students were much depreciated. Companies were being overly choosy as there were a lot of graduates available. At that time, one of my classmates, although he did very well in the past three interviews, he still failed in the three-month internship. I didn't like to be treated like that; I hoped I could be valued, not being depreciated by others.

A: Was there any successful example of employment at that time?
B: Yes. One of my classmates got very beautiful appearance. I thought she could enter that bank was mainly because of her appearance. I got to know later I was wrong. She told me she only prepared for one week and got admitted to that bank. However, the reason was that her father was working for that bank too, who gave her a lot of inside information and chances. In China, this is very normal. Parents would try their best to establish a *relationship* (*guanxi*) for their children. Let me tell you another story. My uncle worked for a World Top 500 company in Shenzhen as a senior executive, my brother-in-law wanted to go to that company. However, they could not recruit my brother-in-law directly. What the company did was to set a vacant position to the public. Of course a lot of applicants applied for it.

When my brother-in-law was interviewed, the interviewer asked what the relationship between my uncle and him is. My brother-in-law was a bit hesitated at first, and replied no special relationship. The interviewer was confused and asked firmly "wasn't this position was set to recruit you"? Then my brother-in-law told the interviewer the truth. In the end, he was recruited. You know relationship is really very important, if your family doesn't have powerful connections, you will find it is difficult to find a good job. This is especially true for those impoverished students. It used to be true that the impoverished students might stand out among others by their own capabilities, but this is not the case in nowadays.

A: As you father was in the educational system, have you ever thought you father could establish a relationship for you to find a good job ?
B: Yes, my father could do it for me in our hometown. However, my father didn't want me to be a teacher. He has been in that circle for more than ten years; there were a lot of shady deal in it. For example, one excellent student could have the chance for being transmitted to a better school in the city from the countryside; however, the leader in the educational system could transmit him or her to a school in the remote countryside instead. This was simply because he or she didn't bribe the leader.

A: Was there any other reason why you choose G University?
B: I think it was because of the rank of the majors of this university. It was known that according to the rank of foreign language universities, Beijing Foreign Language Studies, Shang Foreign Language Studies and G University were the top three linguistic universities. However people in different regions would think differently. The people in the north would thought Beijing Foreign Language Studies as the best, while the people in my hometown would thought Shanghai Foreign Language Studies as the best, and the people in the south would thought G University as the best. I thought G University would be less difficult to get admitted by comparison as there were very few students could go to G University according to previous records.

A: What's your plan after PG education then?
B: I wanted to find a job. I didn't want to be a civil servant. Although a lot of people said there would be much extra incomes. Being a civil servant, you will have a lot of social engagement and dinner parties. You have to learn to drink as most of the businesses were done on the table. My uncle works in a building company; he had a lot of social engagement. I didn't like to be a man of his kind. He said, when his project wanted to be approved, he had to be making connections with the leader in charge of it. He could not bribe directly. When he played cards with the leader, he would lose money intentionally.

A: What kinds of jobs did you have in mind then?
B: Not very clear, but I wanted to work for the company dealing with international contract as it was related with my major.

A: You wanted to work in Guangzhou or Shenzhen according to your questionnaire, why?
B: My major is concerned with Legal English translation. It is used in many companies which have contracts with foreign companies. There would be much more opportunities here than in my hometown. Besides, the graduates from G University were much appreciated in Guangzhou, in which case, it would be easier for me to find a job.

A: Have you ever thought of work in your hometown?
B: No. I did not choose to work in my hometown because if I came back to there, my parents would arrange it for me, which would disturb my original career plan. Although I am away from home now, emotionally suffered, I could bear it. I could decide what I want to do in the future. If this job doesn't suit me, I could change to another one. I don't like to be my cousin, who is a teacher now, although she is living a stable life. She said she could see what she will be doing after ten years-that's still being a teacher. I don't like that.

A: Do you have anything else to add concerning today's interview?
B: No.

A: Ok, thank you.

Appendix J: An English Version of Fan's (male) Transcription

A: You are now in the school of Cisco School of Informatics?
B: Yes.

A: What is it about?
B: It has majors of computer science, Network Engineering, Software Engineering for undergraduate study; Management Science and Engineering and Statistics for PG study.

A: You studied here for undergraduate study?
B: Yes.

A: And your hometown is also in Guangdong?
B: Yes, in *Chao-Shan area* [65](nick name for Chaozhou, Jieyang and Shantou), Jieyang to be specific.

A: You have over three brothers and sisters?
B: Yes, my hometown is in the Chao-Shan area, where most family has a lot of children. I have an elder brother, two elder sisters and a younger brother, who and I are twins.

A: Is your little brother also receiving PG education now?
B: Not yet. We took the exam in the same year, he failed but I succeeded. He plans to re-take it this year.

A: Did he also choose G University?
B: No, Hunan University.

A: Why did he choose that university?
B: Because my brother-in-law is from there. He has some social networks there and it would be much easier for him to be admitted.

A: Your parents' highest degree were middle school right?
B: Yes.

A: Your father is now self-employed, could you please expand on that?
B: My father went out for work in his early age. He did small business and now he is running a small factory which refines copper and iron scraps. Then he uses these refined products to make articles, like containers and then sells them in the local area.

A: Your mother has no job; do you mean she is also looking after your father's business?
B: Yes. My mother was primary Chinese teacher before we five were born. After that, she quit her job as she had to take care of us five children and became a housewife since then.

A: What's your parents' attitude towards your education since your early age?
B: My father would teach by examples, while my mother would like to expound something mechanically. For example, now I smoke and drink, which were not preferred by my parents. My father wouldn't say it directly to me that I shouldn't drink or smoke, instead, my father

[65] There is strong commercial atmosphere as this area traditionally has been an important goods distribution center of Eastern Guangdong, South-eastern Jiangxi and South-western Fujian Province. The people in ChaoShan area forms the most powerful and widespread merchant groups in the contemporary Chinese and has been titled has 'Oriental Jews'.

would bring out the drink in front of me and observe whether I will touch the drink or not. If I drank a lot, he would make a conclusion that I have done it very often outside. He would ask with a threatening voice: Did you drink out of my sight? In this way, he let me to keep away from drinking.

A: Did he drink himself?
B: He didn't, but he smokes.

A: As your parents have to attend five children, do they care your study?
B: As my father's degree was not high, he didn't care it very much. It was my mother who always expounded something mechanically. Since we were young, my mother would ask us not to watch TV but to read textbooks and do homework. Looking back now, I feel that my mother's way of teaching was not good as we didn't have time to read a variety of books. As a result, we lack extra-curricular knowledge.

A: Do you mean your mother just focus on text books?
B: Yes. Now when I am chatting with my friends I could feel that I lack knowledge from extra-curricular books. My mother's way of teaching is more like *feeding the duck*.

A: How about your two sisters' educational background?
B: Both my big brother and my big sister quit school during middle school. My second elder sister is now doing her PG education in *Guangxi Norman University*.

A: Does it mean you are much closer to your second sister?
B: Yes. As my second elder sister was just one year ahead of me and my twin brother. During primary school, my mother would let us three in the same class from grade one to grade three. Therefore, my second sister could help us in study. She taught us a lot of things. Actually, we are grateful for her help so that we could go to a good university like G University.

A: Can I say you second sister was shouldering your mother's responsibility to take care of you two?
B: Yes, even now we are very afraid of her. She is very strong in personality although she respects my parents very much. For example, we were much influenced by her for taking PG education. I had the thought of doing PG education when I was a freshman but I didn't make up my mind.

A: Why did you come up to this?
B: Because the major for my undergraduate study, which was Network Engineering, was not what I was really interested. I chose urban planning in South China University of Technology. However, I failed because my scores were not up to the minimum passing line and as a result I was transferred to G University. I was transferred to the network engineering because I thought it would be suitable for males. However, when I was in my third year of undergraduate study, I felt tired of it. I have to stay up till very late to programme very often, which requires a lot of strength. It would be very tired if I find a related job after undergraduate study. Therefore, I had the thought of changing my major through doing PG education. When I was in my third year, I went to Hunan province for travelling during the summer vacation as my brother-in-law's hometown was there. The parents of my brother-in-law both had very high degrees. They both encouraged me to do PG education and then PhD study. I was quite inspired as I found that educational degree was much valued there. Then, my second sister came back and asked me to do PG education instead of finding a job immediately after undergraduate studies.

A: What are the educational backgrounds of the parents of your brother-in-law?

B: They both had a PhD degree and the mother of my brother-in-law is a university professor whiles the father of my brother -in-law works in a state-owned enterprise.

A: They encouraged you to do PhD study?
B: Yes. I had few direct contacts with them. My second elder sister encouraged us to do that. Whenever my second sister asks us to do something, she likes giving an order. Although we are families, I am afraid of my second sister, I think it is respect exactly. Whatever she told us to do; we would do it immediately most of the time.

A: Did you choose the major for PG education based on your own willingness?
B: Yes. Actually, I didn't have many choices. There were only Engineering Management and Statistics in this school. The former is more connected with computer science while the latter is more connected with mathematics.

A: How did you become interested in computer science?
B: I think it is because of programming. It made me have a sense of accomplishment, which encouraged me to stick to it. I wasn't that much interested in it at the very beginning.

A: Could you expand on your sense of accomplishment over programming?
B: I could programme while most of my classmates couldn't, which made me feel very excited and proud. I came from the countryside and didn't have much opportunity to use computer very often. When I came here, I found that I could do some complex work by programming very efficiently.

A: Then until now, which programme you did was the most satisfying one?
B: It is my diploma project. It is about aiding people to make decisions on choosing the right person for president. The programme focused on the progress of the person during a period of time, through which it can be decided whether the person is really suitable for the position or not. I got more than 90 marks out of 100.

A: Apart from your second-sister's advice, is there any other reason for you to do PG education?
B: Social networks (*guanxi*). My brother-in-law in Hunan province has good social networks (*guanxi*). He also advised my brother and me to do PG education as he can recommend us to good jobs, provided that we had a PG education certificate. This also drove us to do PG education.

A: Then what's your own thought about doing PG education?
B: Personally, I don't plan very far. I would like to stay for a while when I was walking (边走边看). This leaves me enough time to think about which route to take in the next stage. For example, as I am now doing PG education, after half a year, I feel that my previous plan to work in the state-owned enterprise after PG education was not feasible now as President *Xi Jinping* is in power now. Now I have a new plan, I want to do jobs concerning *Rural Informatization*, which is also connected with my major and the state attaches importance to it now. I want to start my own career instead of working for others. Therefore, my plan for the three-year-PG education is to establish my own team. If this is not practical, I will consider working for the state-owned enterprises.

A: I found that the people in Guangdong prefer to work for themselves instead of working for other people?
B: Yes. Maybe it is because the housing prices here is much higher and you could see a glimmer of hope by starting your own career.

A: You didn't have any working experience before your PG education?

B: I worked in a foreign trade company for one month after I finished the PG education exams. I did some work concerning programming.

A: What did you gain from it?
B: I met the manager of that company and he gave me a very useful advice. It was to accumulate human resources. He told me, ahead of the month you are going to graduate; you should re-acquaint each of your classmates. Every student has their own advantages and some resources which you may need in your following three years. I took his advice and I would care each of my classmates and chat with those who were close to me. Now, as I have said I want to establish my own team for *Rural Informatization*, I obtained a lot of resources from my classmates.

A: Did you ever think of changing to another university for PG education?
B: Yes. The process is like this. As I studied here before, we have a privilege for recommendation without exams compared with students from outside. The students who had the possibility for recommendation were those ranked in the front based on their university grade points. According to the previous years, top three to four students would be recommended without examination to the PG education. However, I lose this opportunity because of my grade points. Then my teacher and senior schoolmate suggested me to take part in the PG exams. Then I was thinking if I have to take the exam by myself then I can chose a better university other than G University. I thought of Sun-yat Sen University however this ideal was given up as I thought it would be much difficult for me based on my university grade points. Then I thought G University would be much easier for me as I had all the resources here, most important of which was my supervisor. As long as I could pass the preliminary exam I wouldn't have any problem in the re-exams. However, I still worried about the preliminary exams and then I found the president of the school. He told me who was responsible for setting up the topics for the preliminary exam. Then I found the person and he told me the important topics for review (I can't specify any more). In the end, I got 140 marks out 150 and ranked the second in the preliminary exam. My senior schoolmate called *Lin* helped me a lot in the second round of the examination. According to the number of applicants in that year, just one would be enrolled. As I was in the second and I was worried. Then, *Lin* told me to find the president of the school again. In the end, the president of the school made every effort and I was enrolled together with the person who ranked first in the preliminary exam.

A: How about your parents' attitude towards your decision of PG education?
B: My parents supported me very much, unlike most of the parents in my hometown who didn't attach much importance to university education. In our hometown, most of the children quit school during middle school.

A: What are the differences between your parents and those in your hometown?
B: My mother had been a primary school teacher, that's the reason why she would be more open. My father was also different from most parents as most of them were just farmers who are very conservative and near-sighted. They thought university education wouldn't bring them immediate benefits, therefore it would be better to work outside which can earn 3 to 4 thousand Yuan a month. If their children go to universities, they had to support tuition fees and living costs every month. Besides, they couldn't support their children to university solely relying on farming. My father has his own business, although it is small, he could afford it. The other reason is that he went to Zhuhai for business in his early age and he experienced that the life for a worker is much difficult. He hoped that we will not live a life like his but to find a good job through university education.

A: You mentioned your big brother and big sister quitted school during middle school, why was that?

B: I think it is because they were much influenced by their friends. My big brother was doing well during primary school. After he went to the middle school, he changed and learned to smoke, drink and fighting with others. Because of this, my father always hit him and has to say sorry to others. Then my brother didn't want to go to school anymore and he went to work with his friends. At that time, my father suggested transferring him to another school, but he didn't want to. My sister's situation was similar to that.

A: Your second sister is also in the PG education now?
B: Yes. She went to a Vocational Academy of Art after finishing her middle school. She didn't go to high school. She studied by herself and then went to a university. After finishing her undergraduate study, she went to an English training school as a teacher. Then she met my brother-in-law. The parents of my brother-in-law value educational degrees very much and encouraged my sister to take PG education. Then she quitted her job and went to do PG education in Guangxi Normal University. She is still doing it and planning to do PhD education after that so she can be a teacher in the University.

A: What's your plan after PG education?
B: I want to start my own career instead of looking for a job.

A: Have you also considered doing PhD education?
B: My sister-in-law advised me to do that however, my parents wouldn't because they are very old now. My little brother and I are relying on my father's small factory for economic support. My father is now very old and it wouldn't be possible for him to earn a lot of money. My big brother got married and had a baby now; so he couldn't support me either if I do PhD education. I don't want to ask my families for money anymore after PG education. Therefore, I didn't consider doing PhD education directly after my PG education. If it is not constrained by economic situation, I would like to do a PhD education in computer science as I realised that if you want to have a good or key position in the big IT companies, you should have a PhD degree.

A: Ok, thank you then.

Appendix K: An English Version of Yong's (male) Transcription

A: Your hometown is in Heilongjiang Province?
B: Yes.

A: How did you think of coming from the north to the southeast part of China for PG education?
B: It might be destiny. Now there are 30 students in our class, most of whom targeted Fudan University and Shanghai Jiaotong University as their first choice, with only a few consider G University as their first choice. I also targeted Fudan University for my first choice; however, I missed it by 7 points below. I was transferred to this University.

My hometown is in a small county near the Sino-Russian border. I went to Ha'erbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang for university. After staying there for four years, I didn't want to go back to my hometown again. This is just like the old saying goes: *Man struggles upwards; water flows downwards (人往高处走，水往低处流).* Then I considered Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen for my next stop. This is connected with my middle school's experience. My mother took me to Beijing, Dalian, Yantai, Qingdao and so on for travelling when I was in middle school. The first impression was that the buildings in those cities were more modern than that in Ha'erbin. It was the first time that I had seen subways, and airplanes. I truly felt that the living conditions in these big cities were really very different from that in my hometown. Then I had the feeling of going out to have a look in the outside world.

Beijing is a combination of classicism and modern. Personally, I don't like Beijing. The first reason was that the climate there was not good. I went to there in the summer, when it was very hot. The second reason was that the transportation there was very crowded. Every time we headed to a tourist spot, we had to set off two hours in advance because of the heavy traffic. The third reason why I didn't choose Beijing was that there were a lot of elite universities with a wealth of talents, among whom I couldn't stand out. There was a famous saying in China, which was: *Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion （宁愿做鸡头，不愿做凤尾）*. Therefore I didn't choose Beijing.

There was a reason why I chose Fudan University for priority. In 2010, my mother took me to see the Shanghai EXPO. We also went to look around many famous tourists' spots, such as the *Oriental Pearl Tower, the Bund, the Bell Tower and so on.* When I saw the Pudong new area, I felt that it is a place worthy of working hard here. Although there were crowded with people, the house price was also very high; however, there were also a lot of opportunities. As an economics major, I knew that the benefits and risks coexist, and the greater the risk, the more the benefits. I also took the chance to have a look in Shanghai Jiaotong University and Fudan University. I prefer the more open atmosphere in Fudan University there, and then I chose it. I chose the Economics in Fudan university because I majored Financial Management for undergraduate study.

A: sorry to interrupt, where did you go for your undergraduate study?
B: Ha'erbin College. It is a non-elite university. I didn't do well in the College Entrance Examination. However, I wanted to go to an elite university. On one hand, I wanted to prove my capability to others, and on the other, I wanted to fulfil my dream. I didn't choose Economics for further study because the minimum required scores for it was very high, for which I thought I couldn't make. Then I considered the major of legal study for my PG education.

I chose it also because my family background. My father was a criminal policeman. There were a lot of books and journals on his desk, such as Public Security Administration Regulation and China Criminal Policeman. I would often read them. Because of this, I considered the major of legal studies in Fudan University. I also talked with my parents. I was a little bit worried as I didn't go to Fudan University for undergraduate study, as a result, I wouldn't be able to get much materials for preparation. Besides, there was no senior school mate in my previous university who got admitted by *Fudan*. However, considering this major was a national college entrance exam which doesn't require background knowledge in legal studies, I chose it.

A: Apart from the influence of your family, is there any other reason for transferring from Financial Management to Legal Studies for PG education?
B: This was because of my personal interest. I have been interested in the Wall Street investment banks. It gathered most of the wealth of the world. I also watched a lot of related movies, such as Money Never Sleeps. I am very interested in Finances and Economics. I often read related newspaper and journals. I learnt that most of the staff in the Wall Street has a complex background, say Mathematics, Chemistry or Physics. I learnt that if my goal was to enter the Wall Street Investment Banks, it is not enough just to have knowledge in Finance and Accounting. Besides, I thought that if I combined Law with Finance and Accounting, there would be more job opportunities after PG education.

A: Among so many universities, why did you choose G University as a second choice?
B: At that time, a lot of my senior schoolmates told me if you want to stay in a big city, it is very important to master a good foreign language. In order to have a good language environment, I thought of Beijing Foreign Language University, Shanghai Foreign Language University and G University. There first two universities didn't enrol students concerning Legal Studies, except G University. The Legal Studies in G University was set up with an aim to combine law and English. Besides, this was a new major in this University, few people would choose it. Third, I came here can combine my financial knowledge with law. Further, this university is in Guangzhou, which is very close to Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Studying here could help to achieve my dream of working in big cities. These are also the reasons for choosing this city, this university and major.

A: What was your parents' attitude towards your PG education?
B: My parents were different from most others. My father went to college before. He graduated from Shijiazhuang Police Officer Academy. He had been a soldier before. He didn't like to interfere my choice. During my primary school when computer games were very popular, I was also very obsessed with it. Sometimes I would skip class to play games. One Saturday's afternoon, my father took me to the internet bar with a bag of snacks. He sat beside me and watched me how to play games. I played for the whole afternoon. The next day, my father asked whether I wanted to go again. I said yes, and he took me to there again. My mother was also the same. She took me to the local internet bar. She bought me a lot of snacks and played with me together. We went there every weekend and after two weeks, I felt bored and didn't like to play it any more. Then I wouldn't play skip class because of games again.

A: Yes, your parents' educational method is quite different from others, any other examples?
B: My mother likes newspaper-cutting. She has now collected 10 books of newspaper-cuttings. When I played computed games, she wouldn't interrupt me; instead, she would place them on my computer games and asked me to read them after the games. When I felt tired of playing games, I would pick them up and have a look.

A: You mentioned that the second reason for PG education was to go to an elite university, why was that?

B: Yes. G University is a university, not a college. As you know, I went to a college for undergraduate study. The first time I took a taxi to go to that college, I told the driver my destination. He asked which college in Ha'erbin? I felt very depressed at that time. Because my college's name was Ha'erbin College and He didn't understand it until I showed my paper offer to him. It might be Ha'erbin College was merged in 2008, that's why a lot of people didn't know it.

A: It seemed that you had an elite school dream?
B: Yes, It began when I was young. I always achieved good grades. I came in ninth in the High School Entrance Examination in the whole city; therefore I could choose a good high school. I then had the dream of going to *Tsinghua* and *Peking University*. My mother was very pleased and she took me to visit the campuses of these two universities. I still remembered the campuses were very large. It took us one hour by tourist bus to go around the whole campus. I also met three graduates of Peking University and from their words; I could feel that they really had a special deep feeling to their university. I thought if I can't go to an elite university I would feel very regretful as university life for a student is very short.

A: What's your parents' attitude towards your elite school dream?
B: They hoped me to go to an elite school very much. However, they would think whichever university I choose; it is the best in their eyes. When I was in high school, I wanted to go to Qing Hua and Peking University, and then my mother gave me a video of 100 anniversaries to watch. When I was in college, I wanted to go to Xiamen University for PG education. At that time, there was a TV programme called The Same Song: going to the Xiamen University- a place for flying your dreams. My mother sent me a text message and told me this is also the place where I will fly my dream. Later, when I chose the place for PG education, I thought of Shanghai. My mother would think it is also a good choice. My thoughts were changing with my experience and environment. As now I am in G University, they would think G University is the best. They visited me last year. My mother was very happy with the campus. There were a lot of flowers and trees.

A: From where did you get that source of information for the major you are studying now?
B: My senior schoolmates who are now in G University. I also went to the library for book reference on how to choose the major.

A: Was there any other person who influenced your choice?
B: Yes, mainly over the choice of major. Most of people encouraged me to choose Accounting instead of *legal studies*. I got third in the accounting competition held by a website in the Heilongjiang province. Therefore, most of my teachers thought I would choose accounting for PG education naturally. When I told them that I chose legal studies, they were surprised. They thought it would be easier for me to get accepted if I chose accounting. However, they didn't know that my biggest weakness was my Mathematics, which accounted a major part in the accounting.

A: Therefore, you chose your major partly out of the consideration of my personal strength and the employment opportunities?
B: Yes. Another reason was that I got to know that some of the theories in learning materials of PG education for accounting would not be very helpful for my future development as I thought accounting should be quite a practical subject. For example, if you are going to learn cooking, you wouldn't be taught how to cook but the materials of the knife. Of course, the materials of the knife should match the materials of the food; however, personally, it is more important to learn practical skills of how to cook delicious food.

A: Did you have any knowledge about G University before you were transferred to here?
B: No, nothing. The time for making the decision was only a few hours. I was so nervous. I consider the location first, and then the university itself and last the major as well as the

future development of the career. As a major transfer, you are not expecting to be transferred to a very good university. I got to know that G University is the best one except the '985' and '211' universities. I also got to know that G University enjoys a high reputation in Guangdong. Then I chose it.

A: Did you take any other university into consideration except G University?
B: Yes. We have two choices. One is G University; the other is *Dongbei University of Finance and Economics*. I thought G University would be better for my future employment, although *Dongbei University of Finance and Economics* is also a good university in the northeast of China. I took the second round of the entrance examination of G University on April 7th, while the date for *Dongbei University of Finance and Economics* was on April 12th. On April 7th, I got the result that I was among the 40 students out of the 80 candidates who got accepted by G University. I was excited when my name was renounced. I thought that my hard work paid off eventually and I could face my parents too. The affirmation process was half an hour; if I give it up I will miss it. I talked with my parents and affirmed it. As soon as I affirmed, I couldn't go to *Dongbei University of Finance and Economics* for re-examination. I got to know later that I was the only one from the Northeast provinces who was accepted by G University. They thought I have a wide background of knowledge and was quite logical according to my answers to the questions.

A: As a single child, did your parents ever thought of keep you close to them?
B: My mother might have this kind of feeling. It is nature as all of my relatives and friends were in my hometown. Our hometown was a small place, my parents knew all the people around. For example, when I go to the hospital, I don't need to queue. I just need to pay for the registration fee. Last time, when I went to a hospital in Guangzhou, I queued for two hours. There were advantages and disadvantages in each place. I remember when I went to the train; just the moment when the train pulled out, my mother shed tears. I couldn't see my mother very often as Guangdong is too far away from my hometown.

A: What's your feeling after staying here for half a year?
B: I feel that Guangzhou is an open and inclusive city. When I come here for the first time, I went shopping and the cashier said Cantonese. As soon as she got to know that I couldn't understand, she repeated with mandarin. I felt that people are very open and inclusive. Besides, the teachers in our school are very responsible, they would suggest direction for our future career as well as our senior schoolmates. However, I couldn't get used to the food here. In our hometown, we eat different kinds of porridge and buns. When I come here, the buns are sweet, which is quite different. One good thing is now I am getting along with my classmates very well and we often dining out together and I feel that I am adapting to the lifestyle here and think of Guangzhou as my third hometown now.

A: Then you want find a job here after PG education?
B: Yes. As I have gone so far away from my hometown, I want to stay here. It would be more beneficial to expand my horizons here. If I come back to my hometown after PG education, I may not be able to get used to it. I don't want to live a life like my parents did, as ordinary people with a safe life.

A: Ok, thank you then.

Appendix L: The Information Sheet for Participants

Information for Prospective Participants:

My name is Dan Liu and I am a PhD student at the School of Education, University of Nottingham (U.K.) under the supervision of Professor W. J. Morgan and Dr. Zhen Li. I am conducting research which examines students' decision-making process about postgraduate education in China. The main question is: why do prospective Chinese students pursue postgraduate education in China and how do they make choices about where and what to study? The first year postgraduate students across different disciplines at G University are selected for case studies. In order to collect the data needed for answering my research questions, I am going to disseminate questionnaires and conduct semi-structured interviews with the informed consent of participants.

What you will need to do:

- Provide details of your name (optional), age, gender, family background, what opportunity you have had for postgraduate education and relevant university experience you have.
- Participate in a recorded interview to inform me about your reasons for choosing BE/ Linguistics as a field of study.
- Perhaps join a focus group discussion.

Ethical details:

- You can withdraw from the research at any time.
- Information gained during the study may be published, but you will not be named or identified and your personal details will remain strictly confidential.
- The data will be stored with the researcher, and at any time you can request to see data relating to you.
- You may contact me if you require further information about the research, and you may contact my supervisors, or the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if you wish to make a complaint relating to your involvement in the research.

I am willing to provide further information about myself and the research. Please feel free to contact me at ttxdl12@nottingham.ac.uk or my supervisors, Professor W. J. Morgan at John.Morgan@nottingham.ac.uk or Dr. Li at Zhen.Li2@nottingham.ac.uk, or the Research Ethics office at EDUCATIONRESEARCHETHICS@NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Liu

Contact address in the UK
Dan LIU
School of Education
Jubilee Campus
University of Nottingham
Wollaton Road
Nottinghamshire,
NG8 1BB
E-mail: ttxdl12@nottingham.ac.uk
Mobile: 0776 7558436

Contact address in China
Dan LIU
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies,
Guangzhou, 510420,
China

Appendix M: The Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Dear Student,

My name is Dan Liu and I am a PhD student at the School of Education, University of Nottingham (U.K.) under the supervision of Professor W. J. Morgan and Dr. Zhen Li. I am conducting a research to examine students' decision-making process about postgraduate education in China. The main question is: why do prospective Chinese students pursue postgraduate education in China and how do they make choices about where and what to study? In order to collect the data needed for answering my research questions, I am going to disseminate questionnaires and conduct semi-structured interviews.

My study involves students in the first year of their Master studies. Participant students will be asked to take part in an oral interview of about 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped, and the audio recording will be erased at the completion of the study. Anonymity and of all students and confidentiality of all the information will be kept strictly throughout the study. You have the right to choose to withdraw from or not to participate in the study at any time without giving any reason. All data to be collected will be used for research purposes only.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, the results of the study may assist in developing a better understanding of the issues and concerns about postgraduate education in Guangdong.

I would appreciate your agreement to participate actively in this research study by filling in 'participant's acknowledgement' below. If you have any questions about this research study or your potential participation in this study, please feel free to contact me at ttxdl12@nottingham.ac.uk or my supervisors, Professor W. J. Morgan at John.Morgan@nottingham.ac.uk or Dr. Zhen Li at Zhen.Li2@nottingham.ac.uk or the Research Ethics office at EDUCATIONRESEARCHETHICS@NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Liu

Doctoral Student

University of Nottingham

Participant's Acknowledgment

I do consent to participate in this study. I understand that the interview will be audio taped. I give permission to be quoted directly in the final research report.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature & Name in print Date

Appendix N: General Information of the Participants for the Semi-structured Interview (Anonymized)

N	Name	G	Cur. Major	M. f. UG	Home -town	Parents' Edu.	Parents' Jobs	Bro. & Sis.	UG Uni.	W. Ex.	Ways Enter	Tuition fees
1	Cao Xiao.	F	Japanese	Japanese	Countryside, Shandong Province	**F:** High school . **M:**Primary school	**F**: farmer **M**: farmer	1	Liao Cheng Uni.	No	Special Academic recommendation	NO
2	Chen Hui Lan	F	Japanese	Japanese	Small county, Guangxi Province	**F:** Middle school **M:** Mid. school	**F**: farmer **M**: farmer (died)	4	Liao Ning Normal Uni.	No	Special Academic recommendation	yes
3	Chen Q. Q.	F	Japanese	Japanese	Small city, Hai Nan province	**F:** Uni. **M:** High school	**F:** high school teacher **M:** Account.	0	Xi'an Foreign Language Uni.	No	Special Academic recommendation	NO
4	Cheng Si Yang	F	English	English Interpreting	Big city, He Nan Province	**F:** Uni. **M**: Uni.	**F**: Uni. teacher **M:** High school teacher	0	G Un.	No	Exams	yes
5	Deng Qi Yao	M	Management	Political theories	Bit city, Guangdong Province	**F:** middle school **M:** high school	**M:** small restaurant owner	0	G University	No	Exams	NO
6	Guolin Fangzi	F	European Studies	English	County, Hubei	**F:** College **M:** College	**F:** PE teacher **M:** English Teacher	0	G University	yes	Exams	NO
7	Huang Wen Hua	F	Finance & Eco.	Finance & Eco.	County, Hunan	**F:** middle school **M:** middle school	**F:** Self-employed **M:** Worker	1	Hunan Normal Uni.	yes	Exams (2)	NO
8	Jiang Pei Jie	F	Applied Linguistics	English Teacher Edu.	Countryside Hunan Province	**F:** middle school **M:** high school	**Parents:** Small shop owner	2	Hunan First Normal Uni.	No	Exams	NO
9	Jiang Xiao Jing	F	Business English	Business English	Small town, He Nan Province	**F:** middle school **M:** high school	**F**: steel shop owner **M:** housewife	1	Normal Uni.	No	Exams	NO
10	Jiang Yun Yu	F	Accounting	Accounting	Big city, Guangdong Province	**F:** university **M:** College	**F:** Personal investor **M:** Accountant	0	G Uni.	No	Special Academic recommendation	
11	Lei Bin	M	English Trans.	Medicine	Big city, Hunan Province	**F:** high school **M:** University	**F:** auto mechanic **M:** middle school English teacher	0	Not Known	yes	Exams 4 times	NO
12	Li Fu Qiang	M	English written translation	International Business and Trade	Countryside, He Nan Province	**F:** high school **M:** primary school	**Parents**: farmers	2	Xi'an Foreign Language Studies	No	Exams	yes
13	Liu Shuai.	M	English comparative studies	English	Countryside, Anhui Province	**F:** middle S. **M:** Primary S.	**Parents:** farmers	2	China Uni. Of Mining and Tech.	yes	Exams 2	NO

N	Name	G	Cur. Major	M. f. UG	Home -town	Parents' Edu.	Parents' Jobs	Bro. & Sis.	UG Uni.	W. Ex.	Ways Enter	Tuition fees
14	Nie Qi Song	M	Europeans Studies		Small city, Hunan Province	**F:** university **M:** high s.	**Parents:** doctors	0	Tianjin Normal Uni.	No	Exams 2	NO
15	Wang Wei	M	Management Science	Computer science	Countryside, Guangdong	**Parents**: primary S.	**F:** small factory owner **M:** housewife	4	G Uni.	No	Exams	NO
16	Wang Ya Jiao	F	International trade	English Translation	Medium city, Yunnan Province	**F:** University **M:** high school	**Parents:** primary school teachers	0	G Uni.	No	Exams	yes
17	Wang Ye Ting	F	English	English Language and culture	Big city, Hunan Province	**F:** primary S. **M:** high S.	**Parents:** small factory owner	0	Hunan First Normal Un.	No	Exams	
18	Wang Yi Le (married)	F	English	English Translation	Small city, Hunan Province	**F:** high school **M:** College	**F:** enterprise staff **M**: teacher	Not known	Not known	yes	Exams 3	NO
19	Wen Ya	F	International Trade	Human Resource Management	Countryside, Hunan Province	**Parents:** middle school	Parents: workers in Shenzhen	1	Hunan City College	Yes	Exams 2	
20	Xiao Man	F	Ideological and Political Education	English	Small city, Hubei Province	**F:** PG education **M:** High S.	**F:** business owner of psychology Education **M:** Housewife	0	G University	No	Exams	NO
21	Xu Yan Yan	F	English Language & Culture	Business English	Countryside, An Hui Province	**F:** middle S. **M:** Primary S.	**Parents:** Workers	1	Non-elite Uni. In Anhui	No	Exams	NO
22	Yang Fan	M	Management Science and Engineering	Maths	Small town, Hunan Province	**F:** Primary S. **M:** Middle S.	**F:** worker **M:** no job	0	East China University of Science and Technology	yes	Exam 2	NO
23	Ye Fei	F	Legal Translation	English	Town, Anhui Province	**F:** university **M:** Primary S.	**F:** teacher **M:** housewife	0	Anhui Normal Uni.	No	Exams	NO
24	Zhang Ren Ran	F	Cultural Comparative Studies	English	Small city, Anhui Province	**Parents:** University degree	**F:** Uni teacher **M:** high school English teacher	0	Non-elite Uni.	No	Exams	NO
25	Zhang Rui Fang	F	English	English	Small city, Shandong Province	**F:** high S. **M:** middle S.	**F:** Taxi driver **M:** housewife	1	Shang dong Institute of Business and Technology	No	Exams	yes

N	Name	G	Cur. Major	M. f. UG	Home -town	Parents' Edu.	Parents' Jobs	Bro. & Sis.	UG Uni.	W. Ex.	Ways Enter	Tuition
26	Zhao Xiao Ru	F	Master of Law		Countryside, Shanxi Province	**Parents:** high school	**Parents:** both farmers	1	Shandong Jianzhu Uni.	No	Exams	yes
27	Zhou Hua Jiao	F	English Cultural Analysis	English Cultural Transmission	Countryside, Hunan Province	**F:** middle S. **M:** Primary S.	**Parents:** farmers	1	G Uni.	No	Exams	NO
28	Zhu Xiao Yu	F	English Interpreting	Business English	Big city, Hunan Province	**F:** high S. **M:** College	**F:** small business owner **M:** government personnel	0	Ji Shou Uni.	No	Exams	yes
29	Zou Tao	M	Master of Law	Electrical automation	Medium city, Hunan Province	**F:** Technical Secondary School. **M:** High S.	**F:** Technical personnel **M:** Housewife	1	Zhu Zhou Uni. Of Tech.	yes	Exams 3	yes
30	Wang Yong Li	M	Legal Studies	Finance	Small town, Heilong Jing Province	**Parents:** university	**F:** criminal policeman **M:** Enterprise staff	0	Ha'erbin College	No	Exams	yes