

**Constructing Global Citizenship Identity through Accumulating Cultural Capital:
Chinese Female International Students' Experiences at a British University**

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Abstract

Purpose: This article explores Chinese female international students' construction of global citizenship identity by examining their accumulation of cultural capital in different forms from transnational higher education in the UK.

Methodology: Participant observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese female international students at a British university to explore their experiences with transnational higher education, cultural identities, the construction of global citizenship, and perceived future job opportunities.

Findings: In this research, participants revealed that accessing a global elite university helps them accumulate institutionalised cultural capital. Embodied cultural cultivation acquired from transnational higher education is justified by students' experiences in the context of transnational higher education. Rising confidence is shown by the participants' narration and global-oriented awareness, which is their

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ability to understand and respect people from diverse cultural backgrounds, which was developed during their studies in the UK. However, they still realise the potentially difficult conversion of cultural capital to real job competitiveness. Recognition of global citizenship identity may be complicated if students plan to return home after studying.

Originality: The originality of the article lies in expanding the global citizenship framework with the specific application of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to show Chinese female international students' study experiences in UK transnational higher education, rather than addressing the Chinese international student experience in general.

Research implications: This study provides further insight into the single-child generation of globally mobile Chinese female international students. Participants were aware of the positive accumulation of cultural capital in its embodied and institutionalised forms obtained from the UK higher education system and its contribution to the construction of global citizenship identity. However, the newly constructed global citizenship identity remains complex. Participants question the extent to which the new identity fits into the Chinese social context if they decide to return home.

Keywords: *global citizenship, cultural capital, gender, Chinese female international students*

Introduction

With the rapid rise of international education, more students are seeking higher education in foreign countries. For most students, studying abroad is largely regarded as a 'new episode of life', which involves opportunities for personal development and to explore another country's culture and learn its language (King and Gelices, 2003, p. 234). In 2020, approximately 139,130 Chinese students were pursuing higher education in British universities (Universities UK, 2021). A considerable number of female Chinese students participate in study abroad activities (Zhang and Xu, 2020). Their involvement in pursuing higher education abroad is the symbol of current transnational mobility, consisting of a new kind of diaspora: a 'knowledge diaspora', which is defined as being motivated by educational and career-advancement opportunities (Kim, 2010).

There is rich literature on the transnational mobilities of international students in higher education (e.g., Brooks and Waters, 2011). Waters (2010, 2009), Sin (2009), and Kim (2011) extended Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital to the field of transnational higher education and suggested that the acquisition of foreign cultural capital, especially overseas, enhances students' opportunities to secure their middle-class privileged status and superior employment in their home country in general. Chinese international students 'could become social and cultural citizens of the developed world by attaining globally recognised credentials and choosing careers

that would enable them to earn incomes comparable to those earned by professionals in developed countries' (Fong, 2011, p. 210). Pursuing degrees in overseas higher institutions enables students to return to their home countries with new cultural perspectives and an understanding of themselves and their homes in a globalised society (Martinez *et al.*, 2009).

Different forms of citizenship have been discussed in the current literature on citizenship and international student studies. Global citizenship is defined as the ability to see the world, respect cultural diversity, commit to social justice, and support environmental sustainability (Noddings, 2005; Nussbaum, 1997; Pallas, 2012). This form of citizenship can be seen as self-awareness and awareness of others. Self-awareness enables students to identify the universality of their human experiences. Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013, p. 860) position global citizenship as, 'awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act'. These studies show that higher education has increasingly begun to realise the significance of engaging students in opportunities for global citizenship by ensuring they are globally informed and competent (Tarrant *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, the existing literature has also explored the construction of Chinese international students' flexible citizenship, which was developed by Ong (1999) and conceptualised as 'cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond swiftly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions in the era of globalisation (Ong, 1999, p. 6) to understand the identities of Chinese students (e.g., Fong, 2011; Wu and Tarc, 2021). By exploring the diverse identities and imagined future mobilities of students attending international schools in China, Ma and Wright's (2022) research challenged the normal use of a flexible citizenship framework in the studies of Chinese international students.

The current literature has generally neglected two important issues. First, most studies that adopted a global citizenship framework or flexible citizenship lens tend to treat citizenship as a formal status associated with politics and the economy. However,

as Ong (1999) noted, the concept of 'cultural capital', proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in his exploration of social class structure in French, has found new salience in showing the practices of overseas Chinese migrants. In particular, Chinese international student citizenship has rarely been examined from a cultural capital accumulation perspective. Second, as Ong (1999, p. 10) further suggested that 'women are frequently absent in the studies of transnationalism', the Chinese international studentship lacks a gendered perspective. Female international students' sense of citizenship is closely connected to the educational and employment opportunities available to them; it interacts with their societal views (Nakanno, 2015, p.123). It is important to consider the experiences of Chinese women when discussing their global citizenship identities during transnational educational mobility. Thus, this article mainly focuses on the experiences of Chinese female international students instead of exploring the experiences of all Chinese students.

Therefore, the research questions for this study are: How do Chinese female international students perceive the accumulation of institutionalised and embodied cultural capital? How does the accumulation of cultural capital contribute to the construction of global citizenship identity? How do students who plan to return home perceive their newly constructed global citizenship identity? This study explores how cultural capital accumulated by female international students facilitates their global awareness and knowledge, their identification as global citizens, and the potential recognition of their global citizenship identity with their rising accumulation of cultural capital. It argues that students' distinctive global citizenship identity is constructed by accumulating diverse cultural capital, which is positively recognised by its global symbolic worth in the UK. It discusses how students' global citizenship identity is formed through the accumulation of embodied cultural capital and global awareness. Finally, the article shows that the function and recognition of global citizenship identity are not always positive but are complex, as perceived by students who plan to return to their home countries. The perceived complicated recognition of

global citizenship identity and the potentially difficult conversion of cultural capital to job competency in students' home countries will be presented.

The Global Citizenship Identity and Chinese International Students

Given the impact of globalisation, the definition of citizenship has been discussed from a global perspective. Davies (2006) indicated that global citizenship is based on its visible form of rights, responsibilities, and actions. Ong's (1999) research on flexible citizenship further placed notable emphasis on capital accumulation in her investigation of affluent Chinese diasporas in North America. Ong (1999, p.18) indicated that her participants acquired a range of symbolic capital that facilitated their positioning and cultural acceptance in different places. In the exploration of flexible citizenship of Chinese migrants, she defines 'flexible citizenship' as 'the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation' (Ong 1999, p.112).

However, studies on global citizenship in higher education in the UK are insufficient, and there are few studies on the formation of students' global citizenship during the process of studying abroad (Chen, 2011). The existing literature attempts to explore Chinese international students' citizenship based on their adaptation to academic and social life. Concerning academic life, pursuing higher education abroad for Chinese international students is increasingly being recognised as an effective way to foster cross-cultural exchanges. Higher education abroad facilitates the development of global awareness among students who participate in the flow of educational mobility (May, 2017; Reade *et al.*, 2013). Matsunaga *et al.* (2021) have shown international students' great agency, including providing actionable strategies for dealing with the normative practices of group work through group projects. Participation in higher education abroad can significantly strengthen students' affiliation with global citizenship and motivate them to engage in global-citizenship activities (Sherman *et al.*, 2020). Several studies have suggested that designing a

curriculum helps engage students in global citizenship by linking the acquisition of classroom-based knowledge with community-based involvement (Stoner *et al.*, 2014; Epprecht and Tiessen, 2012). More specifically, using classroom-acquired knowledge to address real social/political problems at both the national and global levels helps students become motivated to engage in proactive initiatives to consider ways to change the situation (Lorenzini, 2013).

Researchers have examined Chinese international students' social adaptation from diverse perspectives. Some studies have explored the negotiation of social identities and the use of social networks for social support and identity formation (Gomes 2017; Machart 2017; Oikonomidou and Williams 2013). These studies have examined a relatively visible range of activities in which international students engage in meaningful citizenship in the face of restrictions linked to their non-citizen status in their host countries (Fu and Li, 2022). This research will further explore Chinese female international students' perception of the social views they developed academically and socially on campus and off campus in the UK, including relatively invisible changes such as their inner thoughts, which are classified, in this paper, as an embodied form of cultural capital. This will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

Veugelers (2011) and Oxley and Morris (2013) distinguish between different forms of global citizenship based on cosmopolitan and advocacy approaches. They divide cosmopolitan global citizenship into different categories: political global citizenship, economic global citizenship, and cultural global citizenship, which stress symbols and cultural structures that 'divide or unite members of different societies and consider the globalisation of different cultural forms' (Veugelers, 2011, P. 47). Based on Veugelers' (2011) classification of global citizenship, this study focuses on the category of cultural global citizenship rather than political and economic forms.

The concept of citizenship has been closely linked to formal rights but has relatively little to do with its cultural dimensions (Putnam, 1999; Delanty, 2002). Delanty (2002) defines the sociological idea of cultural citizenship as 'cosmopolitan citizenship', which shifts the emphasis of citizenship onto experiences, learning

processes as well as discourses of empowerment. From this perspective, citizenship is concerned with identity and actions. According to Stevenson (2010), the cultural dimension of citizenship is not only linked to formal processes such as eligibility to vote but also to the inclusion of diverse cultural practices. The literature on cosmopolitan citizenship also highlights the role of educational institutions in enhancing students' cosmopolitan attitudes – a disposition to tolerate and respect different cultures (Wang, 2020).

Meanwhile, the global citizen identity is posed as 'a state of mind' (Davies and Pike, 2009, p. 67) with 'dynamic forms of belonging and participation' (Schattle, 2008, p.3). In other words, the concept of global citizenship has no official identity but is recognised through the attitude and behaviour of each individual (Chen, 2011). Oxfam (2006) conceptualised global citizenship from a more comprehensive perspective that tends to relate global citizenship to the attitudes and values of social individuals. From Oxfam's perspective, a global citizen is a person who has a better sense of how to position their role as a world citizen, 'respects and values diversity; has an understanding of how the world works; is outraged by social injustice' (Oxfam, 2006, p.3). More specifically, Oxfam (2006) suggested that the main elements of global citizenship include knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and attitudes of social individuals. Oxfam's (2006) framework strongly focuses on the disposition of the mind, such as critical thinking, respecting differences, tolerance, awareness of the world and sense of identity, and understanding social justice, diversity, and equity. However, visible elements, such as specific human rights, are less emphasised in Oxfam's conceptualisation of global citizenship (Chen, 2011). Chen's (2011) research adopted Oxfam's framework and indicated that Chinese international students had developed critical thinking skills mainly through academic studies in British universities. Since the focus of global citizenship in this research includes the disposition of the mind and changes in values and attitudes, this study adopted Oxfam's (2006) framework of global citizens to explore the effect of studying abroad on the development of Chinese female students' global citizenship.

Accumulation of Cultural Capital in Transnational Higher Education

Since the concept of 'cultural capital' is key to the examination of Chinese female international students' global citizenship identity in this research, it is necessary to examine the literature related to the concept of cultural capital and its different forms, the application of this theory to the field of transnational higher education, and how specific forms of cultural capital are defined in this research.

'Cultural capital' refers to widely shared high-status cultural signals (e.g. attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p.156). According to Bourdieu's (1984) theory, cultural capital can be accumulated and exchanged. Different types of cultural capital function as status markers, conferring superior power to individuals to legitimise their values, tastes, and cultural practices at a certain site (Bourdieu, 1984). Individual and group distinctions are offered through exclusive access to superiorly valued cultural capital, and such distinctions differentiate them from others who do not possess the same amount of cultural capital or privilege (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu (1977) classified cultural capital into three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital 'consists of a set of acquired and socialised bodily and mental dispositions, such as knowledge, competence, preferences, and practical actions, which constitute core properties of the self' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.47-50). This form of cultural capital is obtained from one's family and social environment through the process of learning and adapting to specific cultural norms (Sin, 2014). Engagement with cultural activities, such as going to theatres, museums, galleries, concerts, and exhibitions is also regarded as 'embodied cultural capital'. The accumulation of embodied cultural capital enables an individual to consume cultural goods commensurate with their internalised dispositions, which is known as the second form of cultural capital — objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The third form of cultural capital, defined as

institutionalised cultural capital, refers to an institution's formal recognition of an individual's cultural capital, such as academic credentials, professional qualifications, or degrees. Institutionalised cultural capital plays a vital social role in finding a job in the labour market, and it can be converted into economic capital to jobs and income (Bourdieu, 1984).

Existing studies on international students' lives have focused more on how their educational mobility interacts with cultural capital. Waters (2010, 2009) has attempted to explore Asian middle-class students' strategies for accumulating cultural capital in a global context. Zhang and Tang's (2021) research showed that for Chinese female students who had accumulated high levels of cultural capital before their transnational mobility, their study destination enabled them to attend diverse cultural events, which further helped them accumulate diverse forms of cultural capital. Anyon (2005) argued that educational attainment is not only an indicator of social status but is also related to employment opportunities. Such an acquisition is provided by higher education abroad, as argued by Biraimah (1991), and can be regarded as an effective way to obtain upward social mobility.

According to Fong (2011), the Chinese one-child generation cannot access prestigious Chinese universities, and a degree from a prestigious university can help them qualify for decent jobs. Therefore, transnational educational mobility is regarded as the key to offering an alternative path toward upward social mobility. For international students, the formation of a global citizenship identity can be regarded as a distinction gained through the accumulation of different forms of cultural capital. Pursuing higher education abroad contributes new insights into 'global cultural capital' or 'foreign cultural capital' (Sin 2014; Huang 2002; King 2002). The common definition of foreign or global cultural capital in their research is a range of qualifications, working skills, and competencies, as well as embodied dispositions such as the expanded Westernised outlook, lifestyles, tastes, and manners (Ong, 1999). Global cultural capital, particularly qualifications and embodied dispositions, can be accumulated through global higher education systems, bringing different types of

development to international students.

Reade *et al.* (2013) suggested that a lack of global competencies may place a social individual at a disadvantage in competitive job markets. Lacking global competencies also 'minimises their capabilities to make sense of the world around them, negatively impacting on their potential for assuming positions of leadership or effectively contributing to societal change' (Sherman *et al.*, 2020, p.5). From this perspective, global competencies are important for students to become competitive in future job hunting. However, the strength of the global citizenship identity tends to be exaggerated in the current literature. Some research (e.g Sin, 2014; Xu, 2017) suggest that job competencies are not directly related to the accumulation of global cultural capital, especially considering the differing internal fields of the educational system. They have mapped out the complex conversion from institutionalised cultural capital to job competitiveness. Xu (2017) points out that cultural capital conversion is complicated and not always straightforward when a specific field changes. This distinction can be problematic because mobility may disrupt the strength normally assumed to be associated with cross-border student mobility (Xu, 2018a; Xu, 2018b).

Regarding the relationship between gender and Chinese international student mobility, several studies indicate that international mobility helps Chinese female international students construct a global identity, and Chinese female students tend to accumulate different forms of cultural capital for self-development and even go against gender norms in the home country (Bamber 2014; Zhang and Xu, 2020). During the transnational mobility process, female Chinese students enjoy the benefits of broadening their horizons which is regarded as the key to the acquisition of global competency. Thus, female students absorbed a new gendered disposition, which acted as a form of gendered distinction (Zhang and Xu, 2020). Furthermore, Chinese female students' competitiveness in the job market is greatly enhanced, but they are considered devalued in the Chinese marriage market (Kajanus, 2015). According to Zhang and Xu (2020), female Chinese students exert diverse agencies while negotiating Chinese gender norms. The complicated ways in which these students

showed femininity demonstrated their changed gender views during mobility. In the discussion of their transnational gendered distinction, Chinese female students' new gendered mental dispositions act as important transnational cultural resources which are distinctive assets for them to develop a global identity (Zhang and Xu, 2020). However, current studies in the field of global citizenship seldom discuss gender when exploring students' constructions of global citizenship.

In this study, cultural capital, especially institutionalised and embodied cultural capital, is considered in the analysis of students' construction of their global citizen identity. Specifically, institutionalised cultural capital in this study refers to the UK degree which Chinese female international students are obtaining; embodied cultural capital refers to the new disposition of mind, such as new ideas and behaviours which students acquire socially/academically during their study in the transnational higher education context. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill these gaps by examining how Chinese female international students construct their global citizenship identity by accumulating cultural capital with its embodied and institutionalised forms in the UK higher education system. This shows that gaining access to a global elite university facilitates the accumulation of institutionalised and embodied cultural capital. Nevertheless, the recognition of global citizenship identity may be complicated if Chinese female international students plan to return home after their studies.

Research Methods

To explore the research questions, a British university was selected as the investigation site. It is a typical UK university that attracts many Chinese international students. The university was anonymised to avoid exposing the participants' information. Some students were recruited from the University Student Union, especially the Chinese Student Association which organises various social and cultural activities for Chinese students enrolled at the university. Other students were recruited through advertisements and student dormitories. Participant observation and informal

chats were conducted in diverse social activities, such as private parties and reunion dinners in the student dormitory, between November 2015 and November 2016.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants during the fieldwork. Among the interview participants, five were undergraduates, 11 had master's degrees, and the other 9 were PhD students. All the respondents were Chinese female students, as one of the aims of this research is to consider Chinese female students, and the data in this paper were selected from my wider research on Chinese female students' experiences in the UK.

The respondents were all students from mainland China ranging from 18–35 years. Before data collection, respondents were informed that they could speak either English or Mandarin Chinese in conversations or interviews; nevertheless, all participants chose to use Mandarin Chinese, with the occasional insertion of an English phrase to better express what they wanted to explain. Each interview lasted around 1 hour. The interviews were recorded after obtaining the participants' informed consent. The respondents' names were pseudonymised. All data collected during the fieldwork were in Chinese to guarantee conversation coherence. All the respondents were interviewed during their studies at a British university. I repeatedly read the field notes, interview summaries written immediately after data collection, and full interview transcripts. The transcripts were completed by the author. At the beginning of the translation and transcription process, I attempted to transcribe and translate all data into formal or informal interviews simultaneously. However, due to time limitations, I transcribed the data into Chinese. Looking at the Chinese transcripts, different themes and codes were identified according to the respondents' narrations. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify the major themes that emerged from the data. The three themes were as follows: changes in female students' behaviors/lifestyles, study aspirations, and potential job aspirations. I presented myself to my informants as an insider: an unmarried Chinese woman and a Ph.D. student who had also been studying at the university. Sharing a similar experience of studying abroad with my informants, my cultural background enabled me to establish

a rapport with respondents. During my fieldwork and interviews, I immersed myself in the field and aimed to develop trust and rapport with participants. My relationships with the respondents can be understood as reciprocal, that is, more alive, natural, and equal rather than unilateral or unequal. However, being one of them also has its disadvantages when conducting research. As a female Chinese international student, I am aware that one limitation was that my identity, transnational study experience, and bias affected the presentation of the data and the perspective of how I judged the observations. After awarding the potential impact of my personal bias, I attempted to minimise it as much as possible.

Results

Getting Access to Global Elite University: Global Symbolic Worth of Institutionalised Cultural Capital

In general, respondents spoke highly of the U.K. higher education system. The transnational study journey and the process of obtaining overseas degrees in return helped them perceive themselves as global citizens. The respondents believed that 'critical thinking ability', 'global awareness', and 'self-reflection' were their greatest acquisitions in the U.K.'s higher education system. These will be discussed in the next section. The symbolic worth of a U.K. degree strongly enabled them to gain more respect and recognition from the local people and other international students when they were in Britain. Most respondents expressed their pride in possessing new forms of cultural capital and symbolic worth. For instance, Alina spoke highly of her experiences.

For me, this elite university (where I studied) has a very long history of renowned alumni, such as Nobel Prize winners and celebrities. If I enter this university, I may become one of them. Moreover, it ranks among the top 30 universities worldwide. Some companies in China only recruit employees who graduate from the top 100 universities in the world; therefore, studying here might also be helpful and more recognised when finding a job in China.

Her response was similar to those of many other participants. At the beginning of my interviews, most of the respondents replied that 'an elite university itself stands for fame and recognition' without any hesitation in response to why they choose to study in their university. However, attending an elite U.K. university is a direct concern. This finding differs from Sin's (2014) findings, as she claims that international students' choices of U.K. universities are impacted by a variety of factors such as the city, university fame, and subject ranking. In participant observations, I found that master's and PhD students cared more about the symbolic worth of an elite university. Some of the taught master's students came to this prestigious university for a second master's degree after completing their M.Sc. degrees from a less-reputed university. There are also quite a few PhD students who gave up their PhD scholarship offered by a less-reputed university and transferred their PhD studies to this prestigious university. From their perspective, scholarships or excellent supervisors in less reputed universities cannot compensate for the loss of the symbolic worth of elite universities.

For example, Rongyu, a Ph.D. student in science from a middle-class family, performed well in her undergraduate studies in China and attached greater importance to entering an elite university. She received an offer from a UK university which is less well-known (with a full scholarship) and the university where she was currently studying (without a scholarship). Local people and their peers from other universities usually ask questions such as 'Where do you come from?' or 'What university are you studying at?' Every time she responded to these questions, the reactions showed that her university was held in high esteem. As she described:

When my peers or relatives in China or local people asked me questions, their first question was, 'What universities are you studying at?' The name of the university is a direct symbol, strongly linked to my personal fame. I think that I need to recognise them.

Although she felt that the condition of her lab was not as good as she expected

before she came to her study destination, she could easily establish her academic networks when her peers working in similar fields in China heard that she was a Ph.D. student at a U.K. elite university. She is satisfied with the symbolic worth of an elite university.

In addition, such distinctions brought about by symbolic worth enable the students to expand their social circles with students from other elite universities. Sometimes, respondents held discriminatory attitudes towards those who were not studying at elite universities. This attitude was easily found in the postgraduate students' responses. Liuxiu, a master's student, revealed the following:

My friends are all on the same level as me. They should be educated at well-known universities, and I would prefer to make friends with talented and outstanding peers. As for me, students from other elite universities would also like to make friends with me because I am also a student from one of the elite universities.

The symbolic worth from an elite university not only provides a strong sense of recognition to the participants but also helps them to expand their social circles with their peers who are also from elite universities in the UK. In general, students consider that such symbolic worth brought about by accumulating institutionalised cultural capital is an important way for their distinctive global citizen identity to be recognised by UK locals and students in the UK and China.

The Construction of Global Citizenship Identity from an Embodied Cultural Capital Perspective

The respondents revealed that they acquired embodied cultural capital (such as critical thinking, self-expression, global awareness, and self-reflection) during their studies in the UK. Consequently, they believed that they were global citizens. According to Bourdieu's (1986) definition of embodied cultural capital, embodied cultural capital consists of a set of acquired mental dispositions such as knowledge and competence. My respondents attributed the acquisition of critical thinking skills, self-expression, global awareness, and self-reflection to their transnational study experience. In this

research, the rising abilities perceived by my respondents could be classified as embodied cultural capital because they are newly absorbed dispositions of mind and ways of thinking that make my respondents distinctive. Taking Cara as an example, when I asked her about her most important acquisition from the U.K. universities and why she considered herself a global citizen, she answered without hesitation:

This is critical thinking ability. My own way of thinking about various issues has developed over time. For instance, I could see the advantages and disadvantages of an issue instead of just one side of the issue.

Regarding gender issues, some respondents from business and social sciences revealed that transnational education enables them to critically think about how their gender restricts their career choices and what kinds of choices are gendered after studying gender-related courses. Meimei indicated that:

In fact, I did strongly notice the issue of gender inequality, but by reading and choosing optional courses in gender studies, I began to think critically about how my choices were influenced by gendered views and what kind of woman I should be in the future. I am no longer the one who should obey what others tell me to do; I should analyse my situation and why they push me to do it.

This finding is supported by Zhang (2013), who asserted that international Chinese students acquire critical thinking skills during their transnational studies. Respondents from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences also revealed that they had developed a better understanding of the logical connections between different ideas, which enhanced their ability to think independently and clearly.

According to Oxfam's (2006) concept of global citizenship, the ability to challenge inequalities is considered an important element of global citizenship. This point is evident in this study, and many participants revealed that they dared to challenge gender norms in their home countries. Under significant cultural, societal, familial, and peer influences, some participants considered that an ideal woman should have a feminine body, such as being thin and nice. However, after arriving in Britain, the

respondents challenged such fixed, stereotyped images. For instance, Vivi questioned this representation after studying abroad. According to her:

I do not think there is one fixed type of femininity. Women are not merely slim, soft, or obedient. I feel that the lives of the women in my country are more likely to be restricted to different sorts of others' expectations as if we are living in others' eyes...I am not as burdened with the cultural expectations of my home country since I have studied abroad.

Transnational mobility enables her to challenge the mainstream female style in her home country and even helps her question the cultural norms of performing femininity, such as being soft and cute, when she is physically away from her home country. Young Chinese women gained the greatest power in their roles as daughters in the process of studying abroad (Kajanus, 2015). Other participants regarded studying abroad as a way of pursuing gender equality. Consequently, they challenge Chinese gender norms when studying abroad (Zhang and Xu, 2020). Furthermore, some participants revealed that they actively identify the specific gender norms they choose to conform to, while consciously going against certain types of gender norms. One element of global citizenship is making a difference (Oxfam, 2006). The respondents' active interpretations of what they can act on and how they actively interpret gender norms highlight the differences. In this way, their construction of a global citizenship identity reveals the specific inclusion of pursuing gender equality and creating differences by exerting agency.

Julia revealed that her educational experiences in the UK expanded her vision, further giving her an open mind as a global citizen. She realised she had become more tolerant of diverse cultural norms. Similarly, Susan indicated the following:

I would say that...[studying] here developed my global awareness and self-awareness as well...My classmates were from different countries around the world. It is possible that some answers do not reflect our understanding. However, I understand that there are different ways of thinking about the same question. As long as they can express why

they have come up with different ideas, there is no right or wrong answer.

It is clear that respondents developed valuable global awareness and self-awareness to understand the relationships between the self, local and global communities, and the world (Tran, 2012; Paige et al., 2008). As can be seen, the ability of critical thinking, global awareness, and self-reflection can be regarded as embodied cultural capital which helps to construct their sense of being global citizens. With the positive accumulation of the cultural capital of critical thinking, global awareness, and self-reflection through transnational higher education, this sense of being a global citizen is perceived as making them distinctive.

Meanwhile, some of the respondents spoke highly of a new higher education field that allows for different cultural exchanges, which facilitates the cultivation of the ability to express ideas bravely in classes. In terms of classroom experience, most respondents mentioned that diverse academic activities made great changes to their participation in class as well as their interaction with culturally diverse classmates. Some participants further mentioned that discussions with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds made them speak confidently in seminars. Participating in seminars enables them to fully engage in their learning processes.

Luna is a participant who considers that learning in a culturally diverse environment enabled her to become a globalised citizen. She enjoyed the way she freely expressed herself. Tina believed that she was more confident in speaking out with the encouragement of her tutors and classmates from different cultural backgrounds. The new trait of 'being confident to talk' was considered a newly embodied cultural capital. All the informants believed that their overseas study experiences inspired them to be prepared to express themselves confidently in public.

Potential Complicated Recognition of the Global Citizenship Identity

Some scholars suggest that the global competency reflected in embodied and institutionalised cultural capital is helpful for students' job hunting (see, for example, Reade *et al.*, 2013). However, the rising number of Chinese student returnees had

forced students to confront the dilemma of degree inflation (Tu and Nehring, 2019) and the conversion from cultural capital to anticipated job competitiveness is not always direct and smooth (Sin, 2014; Xu, 2017). It is likely that students still face fierce competition even if they believe they are global citizens and hold degrees from well-recognised Western universities.

Final-year undergraduates and taught Master's students expressed great concern that a U.K. degree might no longer be highly recognised upon their return to their home country because of the recent 'western degree inflation' phenomenon in China (Tu and Nehring, 2020). Xuhui, a master's student who submitted her master's thesis, narrated:

During summer vacation, I returned to Shanghai for a fair job. Most employees graduate from elite universities worldwide. I felt that most people coming to this job fair were Master's degree graduates from elite universities. It is extremely competitive to find a good job in a metropolitan city such as Shanghai, because the competitors around me all obtain overseas master's degrees.

A few students were worried that a one-year U.K. postgraduate degree might be greatly devalued for job hunting in the Chinese job market. For instance, Jiaoyang, a Master's student, said:

My friend Xiaoqing, who obtained a master's degree from the University of Oxford last year, told me that she got interviews from some famous companies, but the employers' focus was what she actually learned from merely a one-year taught master's program rather than a degree from a top university in the world...this employer said to my friend if she was a PhD graduate from Oxford [university], who would certainly be employed because it is harder [to obtain this degree].

As for one-year master's students, it seems that employers' concerns are more related to the United Kingdom's short program duration than to the symbolic worth of an elite university. Even if Jiaoyang's friend obtained a degree from an elite U.K. university, the employers still question whether the skills that she obtained from her degree fit the job she applied for, because she only held a one-year postgraduate

degree. According to Jiaoyang, respondents can only make the most of being a global citizen and the symbolic worth of an elite Western university when they obtain the highest degree: a Ph.D. degree from a well-known university. Thus, the value of possessing such cultural capital (a degree) is not only directly shown by its symbolic worth but also by the program level in China's job market. A U.K. degree might not be effective in finding a job if the degree type is a bachelor's or master's degree. Some middle-class master's students even revealed that they would establish a realistic strategy of relying on their parents' social networks to help them find decent jobs in China.

Would it be valid to say that Ph.D. degree holders from elite U.K. universities tend to be more recognised and enjoy their global citizen identity when they enter China's job market? There was still some hesitation in respondents' responses. In fact, not only did students like Jiaoyang express their worries, but a few final-year Ph.D. students also expressed anxiety about finding good jobs, especially good academic jobs. For example, Zhuxun, a Ph.D. student who had just sent her C.V. to a top university in China, revealed the following:

Some of my friends in my field work as engineers in a foreign or national company, and it might be very easy for them to get a job in these companies. However, most of the Ph.D.'s around me still want to continue their academic career in well-known universities in China....one of my friends who is a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Stirling got an academic position from a top Chinese university because he had published many papers during his study. Now, obtaining a U.K. Ph.D. degree from an elite university is not enough.

As can be seen, in general, compared with master's students, the symbolic worth of a U.K. Ph.D. degree might be more recognised when a Ph.D. degree holder attempts to find a job in companies in related fields. However, it may still be quite competitive for students to find an ideal Chinese academic position if they only obtain an overseas Ph.D. without publishing any papers.

In addition, some Ph.D. students expressed concerns about the recognition of their global citizenship. They felt that although learning from culturally diverse peers

helped them embrace a new disposition of mind, pursuing an overseas Ph.D. degree for four or five years meant the loss of Chinese local social capital and social resources in China if they planned to return to China after graduation. For example, Yuxi, who completed her M.A. and Ph.D. in the subject of the humanities, described:

I am proud to pursue an overseas PhD degree. My friend Xixi completed her Ph.D. in China...Her supervisor is a leading Chinese professor in her field, and her supervisor helped her find a job by contacting the dean of the related department in that university directly. I should rely only on myself to find a job when I return.

From Yuxi's perspective, studying in the UK cut off her social networks in China, including possible academic social networks. Not possessing enough Chinese local social resources and social capital is considered by her to be one of the important difficulties in finding an ideal job in Chinese academic job market.

Therefore, participants still questioned the extent to which obtaining a UK degree would help them become competitive in China's job market. They were clear on the fact that obtaining a decent job depends on certain complicated, such as the accumulation of Chinese local social capital in a specific job field, their exact academic achievements, and the different programs in which they were enrolled.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the construction of the global citizenship identity of Chinese female students from a cultural capital perspective and shows that Chinese international students believe that their global citizenship identity was developed through the accumulation of cultural capital in both embodied and institutionalised forms in the UK higher education system. This study contributes to the literature by linking the concept of cultural capital with global citizenship identity to explore the lived experiences of students in higher education abroad. This research argues that students' distinctive global citizenship identity is constructed by first accumulating cultural capital which is positively recognised by its global symbolic worth in the UK, and then acquiring embodied cultural capital (such as self-expressing ability, critical

thinking, and global awareness) from international tertiary education in the U.K. This new disposition of mind and capability is more likely to enable Chinese students to develop a global citizenship identity (Stoner *et al.*, 2014). This is in line with the findings of Fong (2011), which suggests that transnational migration acts as a powerful strategy for students' pursuit of developed world citizenship. During the course of studying abroad, the translation of cultural capital into a global citizenship distinction is straightforward and guaranteed because the symbolic worth of a U.K. degree enables them to gain more respect and recognition from the local people in the host country and other Chinese international students. Meanwhile, this article also shows students' worries and concerns, particularly in relation to the complications that may arise from their global citizenship identity and the potential difficulty of conversion of cultural capital in their home country based on their own experiences in job hunting and those of their peers who have already returned to the home country.

This study also contributes to the literature on global citizenship and international student mobility. The discussion of the exact formation of the relatively 'invisible' global citizenship identity in the field of international student mobility is still lacking. This study explored the formation of Chinese female international students' global citizenship identity from the perspective of its symbolic worth and embodied cultivation. It focuses on the cultural dimension of global citizenship by linking it to the concept of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu (1984), which expands the cultural dimension of global citizenship identity (Veugelers, 2011). Several studies in the field of Chinese diasporas emphasise only the value of symbolic capital in the discussion of global or flexible citizenship (e.g., Fong, 2011; Wu and Tarc, 2019). However, embodied cultural capital cultivation for Chinese women, especially critical, open-minded, global awareness, and self-awareness, should be included in the discussion of being a global citizen. Meanwhile, the adoption of an embodied cultural capital perspective, which builds on and expands from previous literature emphasising institutionalised cultural and social capital (Brooks, Waters, and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012) in student mobility, facilitates this research's investigation

of how a newly acquired disposition of the mind contributes to the construction of global citizenship identity.

In conclusion, this study offers an enriched understanding of the single-child generation of globally mobile Chinese female international students. Participants were aware of the positive accumulation of cultural capital with both its embodied and institutionalised forms obtained from the UK higher education system and its contribution to the construction of global citizenship identity. However, the newly constructed global citizenship identity is still complex. Participants questioned the extent to which the new identity fits into the Chinese social context if they plan to return home. Chinese women's aspirations to become global citizens are strongly reflected in their hopes of having worldviews and accumulating cultural capital in developed countries, which could help them win decent and high-paying jobs in the future (Fong, 2011). Studying abroad gave the students more freedom and capabilities than they considered they would have had if they had stayed in their home country, and obviously, they enjoyed recognition and distinction during their stay in the UK. Nevertheless, it also disappointed and frustrated them when they found that the global citizenship identity and the global elite distinction might not offer them as many benefits as they imagined. Even as they become more globally mobile and received a higher education degree from prestigious universities, the actual recognition of the distinction of being a global citizen is likely to be constrained. Therefore, although transnational higher education in the UK gives these students a strong and positive sense of being global citizens, which can be regarded as a distinction from different aspects, considering the potential dilemma and difficulties expressed by most students, the actual recognition of such a global citizenship identity and the function of the cultural capital they have accumulated may remain complicated and could be questioned, especially once the field changes when they return to the job market in their home country.

Finally, this study addresses two limitations and proposes future research directions. First, the findings indicate that Chinese female international students'

transnational degrees may not smoothly convert into job competitiveness upon their return to the Chinese job market. However, Chinese graduates' actual job competencies and recognition of their global citizenship identity in their home country are still unknown. It would be interesting to focus on the job competitiveness of Chinese international graduates after returning to their home country. Sin (2014) argues that Malaysian graduates who obtained a U.K. higher education degree still faced difficulties in job hunting in their home countries. It is still unknown whether Chinese graduates who obtain higher education degrees will also face a similar dilemma. To gain a better understanding, more Chinese graduates and student returnees could be added to the sample for future research. Moreover, the inclusion of some male international students' experiences will be practical in making useful comparisons between the sample of female international students and male international students, which will be helpful for researchers to analyse the gender differences in these students' global citizenship identity during the international migration process.

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