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# Motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK: Perspectives of Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university

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## **Abstract**

Joining the global trend of internationalisation, higher education in the Chinese context has witnessed remarkable outbound flows of students and a thriving market of transnational education. With China and the UK forging formal arrangements for educational exchange, the UK has become one of the top destinations for Chinese international students and British higher education institutions have been proactively developing partnerships with Chinese institutions. Against this backdrop, this qualitative study examines the motivations of Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK and the impacts of their previous undergraduate experience on their decision-making. The research reveals novel insights into international students' study choices and the emerging relationship between student mobility to the UK and the growing availability of transnational education offered by British institutions. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten students who had spent their four undergraduate years in mainland China in a Sino-British university and then chose to enroll in master's programmes in the UK. The data analysis adopted the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). From the analysis, the research uncovers four common themes in the students' motivations for doing a master's degree abroad: academic motives, career development motives, self-formation motives, and the influence of peer norms. The research also discovers five themes in the students' choice of the UK as the overseas study destination: knowledge and awareness, academic considerations, career development, social environment, and financial cost. Additionally, it is found that the study experience at a Sino-British cooperative university had a defining influence on the formulation of these two aspects of their motivations. Not only did it inspire the students to pursue higher education abroad for the sake of personal development, but it also contributed to their overwhelming preference for undertaking postgraduate study in the UK.

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## **Chapter One Introduction**

The thriving trend towards globalisation has prompted twenty-first century higher education to engage in more international operations. As different parts of the world become more closely connected with each other, the higher education sector worldwide has adopted measures to adapt to the changing global environment through internationalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2008; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). This process of internationalisation can be defined as ‘integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels’ (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Since the 1990s, when the World Trade Organisation (WTO) initiated the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), higher education has become more of a commodity governed by neoliberal market principles and multilateral trade rules, providing a stimulus to international academic mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004, 2008; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Mobility covers the movement of students, faculty, programmes, and providers (OECD, 2004).

While the traditional mode of international students moving to overseas destinations has remained a major form of mobility, programme and provider mobility, referred to as transnational education (TNE), has been gaining momentum recently as a new way of higher education provision across countries (Knight, 2014, 2016). Under the influence of globalisation and market mechanisms, China has pursued initiatives to facilitate the internationalisation of higher education via the traditional approach of international student mobility as well as the novel approach of TNE, with the aim of enhancing its national knowledge production capacity in order to strengthen its competitive advantages in the global academic arena (Huang, 2007; Yang, 2008).

### **1.1 Chinese tertiary international student mobility**

Chinese tertiary students constitute a significant part of the worldwide international student flow in higher education. Since China’s economic reform and opening-up in 1978, altogether 5,194,900 Chinese students have acquired overseas study experience (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2018). In 2017, 869,387 mainland Chinese students travelled abroad for study, accounting for 1.97% of

China's total tertiary enrolment (UNESCO, 2018a, 2018b). The total number has risen continuously from 134,407 since 1998, and China has remained the largest source of internationally mobile tertiary students among 280 countries for the last two decades (UNESCO, 2018a). The latest statistics show that Chinese students make up 25% of all international students enrolled at the tertiary level in OECD countries, with an increase of 5% in the percentage shown in 2015 (OECD, 2017, 2018a). The United States, the United Kingdom and Australia are the top overseas study destinations. In 2016, nearly 60% of the Chinese students who pursued tertiary study in OECD and partner countries were in these three countries: the United States (36%), Australia (13%), and the United Kingdom (10%) (OECD, 2018a).

More specifically about sending students to particular countries, China serves as the largest source of mobile tertiary students studying in the UK. The most recent data show that among 458,490 international students enrolled in higher education in the UK during academic year 2017/18, 23.2% were mainland Chinese students (106,530), the largest proportion of the non-EU student body (HESA, 2019). Since the academic year 2012/13, the number of Chinese students in their first year of a course has each year outstripped the total number from all the other EU countries combined and has become the greatest among all non-UK domiciles (HESA, 2019). As for the different levels and modes of study within the British higher education sector, master's courses have consistently been the most popular among Chinese students (Iannelli & Huang, 2014). According to the data from 2014 to date, students taking full-time postgraduate taught courses account for the largest percentage of all Chinese international tertiary students studying in the UK each academic year, with the figure in 2017/18 reaching almost half of the total student population (HESA, 2019).

## **1.2 Transnational education in China**

TNE in general can be divided into the collaborative mode and the independent/stand-alone mode, depending on whether or not the foreign higher education institution forms partnerships with a local higher education institution or provider to design and/or deliver academic programmes (Knight, 2016). In the Chinese context, TNE refers to 'the joint operation of higher education institutions with foreign partners and collaborative delivery of education programs' (Huang, 2007,

p. 427). TNE in China dates back to the mid-1980s and has been evolving alongside the parallel development of state regulations (Huang, 2003). 《中外合作办学暂行规定》 ('The Interim Provisions for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running School') issued by the State Commission of Education in 1995 stipulated that TNE could only be carried out by collaborations between foreign higher education institutions and local institutions with restricted profit margins by foreign institutions (Ennew & Yang, 2009; Mok & Xu, 2008). With this clarification of the emergent model of TNE provision, international collaborations began to grow and more than 70 institutions were licensed to offer higher education together with overseas partners (Huang, 2003). Moving on to 2003, the State Council introduced 《中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例》 ('The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools') to align its regulations with the WTO regulations concerning TNE. These regulations overtly promoted partnerships between Chinese higher education institutions and renowned foreign institutions to launch academic programmes of high quality and relaxed the restrictions on overseas institutions earning profits in China (Mok & Xu, 2008; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Yang, 2008).

The educational institutions established through the cooperation between Chinese and foreign institutions are named as '中外合作办学机构' ('Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools'), which encompass Sino-foreign joint-venture higher education institutions and project to joint programmes as well (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2003; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2013). According to State regulations, Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools shall have legal person status, but those established to provide higher education service through cooperation between a foreign educational institution and a Chinese institution of higher learning which offers education for academic qualifications may not have legal person status (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2003). The schools with legal person status embodied Sino-foreign cooperation at university level, meaning that they stand as independent entities of a university with the capacity for civil right and civil conduct, whereas the schools without legal person status constitute institutes/colleges affiliated to Chinese higher education institutions (Dai, 2018; Lu, 2018; Studying Abroad Magazine, 2018). Altogether 22 Sino-British cooperative institutions with undergraduate education provision have been set in China up to date. Among them, only two have legal person status, namely the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2019). China has been among the

top ten countries hosting the most TNE students studying in institutions cooperatively run by British universities (Kumari, 2018).

### 1.3 Graduates of Sino-British cooperative institutions pursuing further study abroad

For undergraduates from Sino-foreign cooperative institutions, continuing with further study appears to be the most frequently chosen pathway after graduation. According to the 2018 data from World Education Services (WES), the graduate study ratio for Sino-foreign cooperative universities was 76% for the class of 2017, significantly surpassing the 10.8% ratio for graduates of China’s traditional universities (Lu, 2018). Graduates of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions have shown a considerably greater interest in studying abroad, making them a unique segment among China’s entire Chinese tertiary international student population.

#### 1.3.1 Pursuing postgraduate study abroad

Table 1 illustrates the data regarding graduates of Sino-British cooperative institutions who choose to continue with postgraduate study (Out of all 22 institutions approved by the China Ministry of Education, the figures for ten institutions are available from their respective official websites. As for the remaining twelve excluded institutions, one does not publish a graduate employability report, one does not provide Sino-British education at the undergraduate level, and the others have been established for less than four years with no graduates yet). It could be seen that the graduates of Sino-British cooperative institutions generally have a high probability of pursuing further education, with even the lowest proportion of total graduates exceeding 50%. The majority of these graduates are inclined to carry out their study in a foreign country rather than in China, as displayed below in Table 2. More than half of these cooperative institutions had more than 60% of their total graduates studying overseas.

**Table 1**

*Figures of Sino-British Institution Graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Study*

Sino-British cooperative institution	Year of graduation	Graduates pursuing postgraduate study	
		Number	Proportion of total graduates

	2018	1715	86.44%
	2017	1677	82.37%
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University	2016	1622	81.84%
	2015	1589	83.28%
	2014	1204	81.13%
The University of Nottingham Ningbo China	2018	959	83.39%
Glasgow College, UESTC	2018	—	84.50%
	2017	—	81.80%
Surrey International Institute, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics	2017	260	66.84%
	2016	270	64.44%
Sino-British College, University of Shanghai for Science & Technology	2018	110	54.46%
	2017	91	54.17%
HBU-UCLan School of Media, Communication and Creative Industries	2018	51	53.13%

*Note.* Own calculations based on each institution's official website data (Glasgow College, UESTC, 2018; HBU, 2018; Sino-British College, USST, 2017, 2018; Surrey International Institute, DUFE, 2017, 2018; UNNC, 2018; XJTTLU, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). Cells with a dash indicate that data were not available.

**Table 2**  
*Figures of Sino-British Institution Graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Study Abroad*

Sino-British cooperative institution	Year of graduation	Graduates pursuing postgraduate study abroad		
		Number	Proportion of total graduates	Proportion of graduates pursuing postgraduate study
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University	2018	1714	86.40%	99.94%
	2017	1674	82.20%	99.82%
	2016	1620	81.74%	99.88%
	2015	1585	83.07%	99.75%
	2014	1203	81.06%	99.92%
The University of Nottingham Ningbo China	2018	958	83.3%	99.90%
Glasgow College, UESTC	2018	—	67.6%	—
	2017	—	66.9%	—
Surrey International Institute, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics	2017	234	60.15%	90.00%
	2016	254	60.62%	94.07%

ZJU- UoE Institute, Zhejiang University	2018	11	94%	—
	2017	12	88%	—
Sun Wah International Business School Liaoning University	—	—	About 60% each year	—
Sino-British College, University of Shanghai for Science & Technology	2018	97	48.02%	88.18%
	2017	79	47.02%	86.81%
Bangor College, Central South University of Forestry and Technology	2018	—	43%	—
Sun Wah International College of Fashion and Innovation, Donghua University	2018	3	16.67%	—

*Note.* Own calculations based on each institution's official website data (Bangor College, CSUFT, 2018; Glasgow College, UESTC, 2018; SCF, Donghua University, 2018; Sino-British College, USST, 2017, 2018; Surrey International Institute, DUFE, 2017, 2018; SWIBS, 2014; UNNC, 2018; XJTLU, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; ZJU-UoE Institute, 2018). Cells with a dash indicate that data were not available.

The distinctiveness is more apparent when comparing the data in Table 1 and Table 2 with those in Table 3, which presents the figures concerning graduates of the Chinese universities as Sino-British cooperative institution partners as well as China's top two universities (Tsinghua University and Peking University).

**Table 3**

***Figures of Traditional Chinese University Graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Study and Postgraduate Study Abroad***

Traditional Chinese University	Year of graduation	Graduates pursuing postgraduate study (proportion of total graduates)	Graduates pursuing postgraduate study abroad (proportion of total graduates)
Peking University	2018	74.49%	30.34%
Tsinghua University	2018	78.30%	26.30%
Zhejiang University	2018	37.44%	22.86%
University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, UESTC	2018	66.93%	20.70%
Dongbei University of Finance and Economics	2018	36.45%	20.03%
Xi'an Jiaotong University	2018	62%	12.77%
	2017	64.26%	14.25%
Liaoning University	2018	32.53%	10.71%

Central South University of Forestry and Technology	2018	20.56%	6.22%
Hebei University	2018	27.03%	2.43%

*Note.* Own calculations based on each institution's official website data (CSUFT, 2018; DUFE, 2018; HBU, 2018; LNU, 2019; PKU, 2018; THU, 2018; UESTC, 2018; XJTU, 2017, 2018; ZJU, 2018).

As the data suggest, the proportion of graduates pursuing postgraduate study abroad appears to be much higher for Sino-British cooperative institutions than China's traditional universities. This finding resonates with the existing literature on student motivations for studying at transnational education institutions in China. Tsang (2013) pointed out that qualifications acquired from Sino-foreign cooperative universities are regarded as a stepping stone for further study overseas by many Chinese middle-class families. Students interviewed in Lee's (2016) research expressed similar views when asked about their motives for choosing higher education provided by an international branch campus in China. They perceived the undergraduate experience as preparing them better for postgraduate study abroad. Lu's (2018) report also revealed the perception of cooperative universities as an effective bridge leading to overseas postgraduate study. The participants in Dai's (2018) study on students' choices in Sino-foreign cooperative universities presented variances. Having already decided to undertake further education overseas before entering university, some students regarded the experience at undergraduate level as a 'transition period' or a 'springboard'. Others without such an intention upon entry were influenced by their peers and gradually formed their choice to go abroad during their undergraduate study.

Despite the differences within the group, it is discovered that the more international curriculum and education mode offered by Sino-foreign cooperative universities tend to influence a large proportion of the students to choose to go overseas for postgraduate study. As shown in these studies, the idea of pursuing a postgraduate degree in a foreign country upon graduation seems to be a common plan for the undergraduates enrolled in transnational higher education in mainland China.

### **1.3.2 Study destination choice**

With regard to the choice of overseas study destinations among Sino-British institution graduates pursuing postgraduate study abroad, the UK appears to be overwhelmingly favoured over other countries. The data in Table 4 show the proportion of students going to the UK out of all mobile

graduates with an undergraduate degree and the top destination country (Only six Sino-British cooperative institutions provided data regarding the distribution of mobile students in terms of their study abroad destinations).

**Table 4**

***Figures of Sino-British Institution Graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Study in the UK and the Top Destination Country Chosen***

Sino-British cooperative institution	Year of graduation	Graduates pursuing postgraduate study in the UK (proportion of total mobile students)	The top destination country
Sino-British College, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology	2018	74.23%	UK
	2017	75.30%	UK
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University	2018	74.34%	UK
	2017	62.31%	UK
	2016	61.36%	UK
	2015	64.92%	UK
The University of Nottingham Ningbo China	2018	65.60%	UK
	2017	67.52%	UK
	2016	60.24%	UK
	2014	83.20%	UK
Surrey International Institute, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics	2018	27.30%	US (followed by UK)
	2017	50%	UK and US
	2016	35.30%	US (followed by UK)
Sun Wah International Business School Liaoning University	2014	60.50%	UK

*Note.* Own calculations based on each institution's official website data (Sino-British College, USST, 2017, 2018; XJTU, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; UNNC, 2018; Surrey International Institute, DUFE, 2017, 2018; SWIBS, 2014; ZJU-UoE Institute, 2018).

The UK is the top choice for over 60% of the graduates seeking further study abroad in all but one institution. The exception with ZJU-UoE Institute, Zhejiang University is probably because this institution only offers a Biomedical Science curriculum, a field in which postgraduate education quality and research capacity is considered more advanced in the US. The high popularity of the UK as a preferred study destination could possibly be attributed to the

partnership of British universities in these cooperative institutions. As Kumari (2018) pointed out, students who have undertaken transnational education with a British institution are 30% more likely to go to the UK for university education, implying that transnational education involving institutions from the UK plays an important role in increasing the attractiveness of British higher education.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The popularity of undertaking postgraduate study in the UK among Chinese graduates of Sino-British cooperative institutions warrants special attention, for so far little is known about the rationale behind the choices made by this particular group of Chinese tertiary international students. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to relate their decision-making with the influence of their undergraduate education, which might shed light on the uniqueness of the education provided in such cooperative institutions. To explore this phenomenon, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Why do Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university choose to pursue postgraduate study in the UK?
2. How does the experience of studying at a Sino-British cooperative university influence these students' decision-making?

#### **1.5 Dissertation outline**

Following this chapter, the remaining part of this dissertation is divided as follows. Chapter Two reviews the existing relevant literature and identifies the research gaps. Chapter Three introduces the methodology adopted by this study, touching upon research design, trustworthiness of the research, ethical considerations, researcher's positionality, as well as limitations. The research findings are presented in Chapter Four, followed by Chapter Five which discusses the answers to the two research questions while referring to the results from previous studies. Finally, Chapter Six provides concluding remarks and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter Two Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the previous research relevant to the present study. The two main themes include Chinese international students' motivations for studying abroad and their motives for choosing a specific country as their overseas study destination. Under each theme, motives are categorised into several sub-themes, with section 2.1 covering four aspects and section 2.2 containing five. The research gaps in the existing studies, which the current study aims to fill, are then identified.

### **2.1 Chinese students' motivations for studying abroad**

Among the studies which explore the motivations of international students for studying abroad and selecting a particular country as their study destination, the framework of 'push-pull' factors is quite frequently adopted (Altbach, 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001; McMahon, 1992; Yang, 2007). This model divides factors influencing the students' choices into two categories, namely those factors at play inside the source country that 'push' the students to pursue studies abroad instead of domestic studies, and those factors operating in the host country that 'pull' students with the attractiveness of education and environment. Despite the pervasive use of this seemingly clear-cut model for analysing Chinese students' motivations for studying abroad, this model has noticeable limitations which have long been the subject of debate. For one thing, the factors included in this explanatory mechanism are primarily external to the students and fail to take into account how personal characteristics might impact their individual responses to these factors (Li & Bray, 2007). Similarly, Lu, Tian, and Lai (2014) pointed out that students' international study choices turn out to be the result of the interactions between external factors and personal traits. This means those 'push-pull' factors first have to be internalised by the students to shape their motivations. Besides, Martin (2017) proposed that understanding the students' decisions from a micro-level perspective would require a multi-dimensional examination that goes beyond the plainly instrumental considerations covered by the usually cited 'push-pull' factors. Consequently, it would prove to be more reasonable to sort the Chinese students' motivations for studying abroad into different themes that could accommodate both macro-micro

and external-internal factors.

### **2.1.1 Academic motives**

One common reason that Chinese students have provided for explaining their overseas study intentions is the perception that the quality of education in foreign universities surpasses that available in their home universities (Bodycott, 2009; Fang, 2010; Kajanus, 2015; Li, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006). More specifically, the students believe that they would have better long-term benefits from having access to more innovative and diverse teaching methods (Liu, Kong, & Zhong, 2012; Lu et al., 2014); learn more professional and practical knowledge and skills (Kajanus, 2015; Liu & Fang, 2011; Xie, 2013); experience better cognitive improvements with more emphasis on critical and creative thinking (Kajanus, 2015); enjoy more advanced educational resources, including supervisors, facilities, and further development opportunities (Liu & Fang, 2011; Lu et al., 2014; Pang, 2001); benefit from receiving an education that is more international at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level (Liu et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2014); and acquire internationally recognised qualifications and credentials (Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006).

Pursuing this line of inquiry further, Hansen and Thøgersen (2015a) attributed this preference for overseas higher education to a belief common in Chinese society that foreign education in developed countries is superior to that available at home due to that a global education hierarchy. This belief is rooted in the Chinese people's binary impression of home country versus abroad, meaning that anything associated with 'abroad' is always judged favourably (Fong, 2011). It is a stubborn feature of the cultural imaginary in China that geographical locations are implicitly related to moral judgements, so that developed countries are perceived to be superior to China in terms of development, including the quality of their higher education (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015a; Liu, 2000).

Apart from its relatively inferior position compared with foreign higher education, China's tertiary education also entails other unfavourable conditions that prompt students to seek study abroad. Given the rapid growth in demand for mass higher education and its limited domestic availability, students choose to search for educational resources abroad in order to avoid the fierce

competition within China (Chen, 2017; Li, 2007; Lu et al., 2014; Wu, 2014), especially when they are not sufficiently qualified to meet the high admissions criteria of their ideal institutions (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Fang, 2010; Liu et al., 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Wang, 2017; Yang, 2007). For some students, the courses in the disciplines in which they are most interested are simply unavailable in China (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Since the majority of China's outbound students choose to study in English-speaking countries, the motive of improving their English language skills, particularly English writing and speaking in academic settings, could be seen as another important factor influencing their academic motives (Chen, 2017; Kajanus, 2015; Li, 2007; Wang, 2017; Wu, 2014; Xie, 2013; Zheng & Dai, 2006). This factor is in turn related to a student's English language ability and academic performance. As Lu et al.'s (2014) study showed, China's college students who have better spoken English and a higher level of academic achievement are more likely to be motivated to apply for postgraduate study abroad.

### **2.1.2 Future development motives**

Acquiring a higher education overseas is but one stage along the life trajectory of China's international students. When weighing benefits against costs as they make the decision, these students tend to anticipate a promising future development as a favourable outcome. In alignment with Human Capital Theory, studying abroad is considered an important means of personal investment from which international students could gain more financial rewards through their enhanced competitiveness in the labour market (Fong, 2011; Qiu, 2017). Chinese tertiary international students are often driven by the wish to improve their employment opportunities (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Li, 2013; Wang, 2017; Wu, 2014; Xie, 2013; Zheng & Dai, 2006), which ideally leads to enhanced economic rewards (Kajanus, 2015; Martin, 2017) and social status (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). For those who expect to return home to pursue a career, overseas study experience is perceived as a positive contributing factor for improving employment opportunities back in China (Fang, 2010; Kajanus, 2015; Liu et al., 2012; Wu, 2014; Zwart, 2013). Some students believe it would enable them to become more compatible with the working environment in foreign enterprises based in China (Liu & Fang, 2011). Given the

prevalent gender bias against female workers in the domestic labour market, obtaining an overseas degree is regarded by some female students as an especially effective means for maximising their opportunities and hence for overcoming structural gender biases and disadvantages (Martin, 2017). For those looking to work abroad, studying overseas offers the possibility of avoiding the intense job hunting competition common in China (Li, 2013; Liu & Fang, 2011).

Although raising employment prospects appears to be the most significant motive concerning future development, some other aspects also emerge from the research findings available in previous studies. Studying abroad serves as an opportunity to build social networks, allowing students to accumulate social capital that might be of help later in their lives (Li, 2007). Moreover, some of the students pursuing higher education abroad intend to immigrate to the host country after graduation (Li, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006), often attracted by the congenial living environment, well-developed social welfare system, as well as freer and more relaxed lifestyle (Li, 2013; Liu & Fang, 2011).

### **2.1.3 Self-formation motives**

The motives associated with future development presented above fall into what Martin (2017) categorises as ‘wealth motivation’ and ‘risk motivation’, motivations which are generally considered instrumental in that international students are seeking financial benefits and evading unfavourable conditions. What deserves equal attention is the more intrinsic impact of overseas study on Chinese international students’ development of self. Students frequently mentioned the intention of gaining a better understanding of Western culture (Huang, 2013; Kajanus, 2015; Liu, Elston, & Zhou, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006) and searching for international/intercultural experience (Bodycott, 2009; Li, 2007; Liu et al., 2012; Sánchez et al., 2006; Wu, 2014; Xie, 2013), which are believed to have a beneficial effect on broadening their horizons and enriching their life experiences (Cebolla-Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2018; Chen, 2017; Huang & Turner, 2018; Kajanus, 2015; Liu & Fang, 2011; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006). Martin (2017) described these motives as types of ‘identity motivation’, which refers to the desire to fundamentally transform oneself—widening one’s horizons, assimilating knowledge of different cultures, as well as becoming more independent and more self-confident. All of these

could be summarised as striving for 'self-cosmopolitanisation' (Martin, 2017, p. 12) and 'self-development', echoing Vertovec and Cohen's (2002) idea of cosmopolitan orientation. In this sense, students with the intention of studying abroad often carry with them the desire for making life changes (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015b).

Additionally, the mobility to a foreign country somehow distances international students from the pressures imposed by social norms in their home country, meaning that they would be allowed more freedom to fashion a certain kind of self as they wish (Martin, 2017). This idea of identifying the self-determination elements of educational travel echoes Marginson's (2014) conception of international education as a process of self-formation during which students reflexively navigate the course of their lives through self-directed agency. In this sense, the students consciously and actively seek for the changes in their subjectivities rather than wrestling with the pressures of having to adjust to a foreign culture. Although what Marginson (2014) discussed is the transformation that happens during and after the international students' foreign sojourns, this idea is still felt even before these students set off from home. As Martin's (2017) study shows, the motive for self-fashioning already exists when the students are pondering the option of studying abroad. They are applying their agency to imagine the kind of self they long to become and the scope of this self-agency is expected to expand as a result of the projected overseas study experience.

#### **2.1.4 Family influence**

Despite the fact that students themselves have a major part to play in decision making about their future, the influence from others should not be ignored, particularly in the Chinese context. This is linked with the conception of 'self' entailed in the Confucian cultural heritage. Although in Confucianism reflective self-conscious capacity is considered a precondition for self-cultivation (Cheng, 2004), it is also believed that exercising the autonomy granted by this capacity requires the fulfilment of one's social roles (Shun, 2004). Hence, 'self' for the Chinese is simultaneously autonomous as well as relational; a significant part of one's identity is his or her social roles in relation to others (Jiang, 2006). As for the implications of this notion for education, a student's education is not merely his or her own business but also a matter of significance for his or her

family, community, and even home country (Jiang, 2006). Self-cultivation through education is a duty shared between parents and children (Marginson, 2015, 2018), which means that success in education is both a personal achievement while contributing to family glory (Jiang, 2006). This could explain why some Chinese students choose to study abroad with the wish of making their family members proud (Liu & Fang, 2011). Since the children's success is relevant to the whole family, parents in China are willing to give full financial support and even make sacrifices in order to secure their child's access to a high quality education, which often means overseas education (Jiang, 2006; Lee & Morrish, 2012). This devotion to some extent has become intensified by China's one-child policy, for parents would spare no effort to provide the best for their single child as the centre of the family's hopes and dreams (Bodycott, 2009; Fang, 2010). The value of overseas education is especially important for parents from China's growing middle class, who tend to attach great significance to the role of their children's education in maintaining their social status and possibly facilitating their upward social mobility (Fang, 2010; Qiu, 2017).

Meanwhile, 'filial piety', a social norm essential in Chinese culture, drives students to show respect and gratitude to their parents, which has noticeable impacts on students' decision-making regarding studying abroad. Some students choose to pursue study abroad to meet their parents' expectations, sometimes compromising their own desires (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Lee & Morrish, 2012). The family-based decision making constructs influenced by the traditional Confucian cultural heritage seem common among Chinese international students (Stewart, 2017). The reliance on parents as their source of funding for overseas study means that even in families with a more liberal parenting style, the children in most cases are not totally free to decide entirely on their own (Lee & Morrish, 2012; Li, 2013; Lu et al., 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006). Additionally, for many students, the promise of future development as a positive outcome from studying abroad enables them to better support their family, possibly including repaying their parents for their devotion (Li, 2013; Lu et al., 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006).

### **2.1.5 Research gap (1)**

A closer scrutiny into the characteristics of the students participating in the studies mentioned above reveals that researchers often include both undergraduates and postgraduates in the sample

for their individual studies without differentiating the motivations of students at different degree levels (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Huang & Turner, 2018; Kajanus, 2015; Lee & Morrish, 2012; Martin, 2017; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Rudd, Djafarova, & Waring, 2012; Xie, 2013; Yang, 2007). A fewer number of studies do focus, however, specifically on Chinese students who intend to pursue undergraduate degrees abroad (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Chen, 2017; Huang, 2013; Liu et al., 2012), whereas others investigated the students' particular reasons for longing to go overseas for postgraduate study (Li, 2013; Liu & Fang, 2011; Lu et al., 2014; Stewart, 2017; Wang, 2017; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006; Zwart, 2013). So far there has been no research on Chinese students' motives for doing postgraduate study abroad that has focused more narrowly on the motivations of graduates of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. This segment of graduates constitutes a unique student group within the broader Chinese tertiary international student body. Given the overwhelming popularity of continuing with further study abroad after graduation among Sino-foreign university undergraduates, it seems worthwhile to explore the special conditions of this gap in the research, which is one of the aims of the present study.

## **2.2 Chinese students' motivations for choosing overseas study destination**

As proposed by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), the first out of the three stages in international students' decision-making process is to decide on going abroad for higher education. The students' next step is to select a country as the study destination. Compared with the motives for pursuing overseas study, the motives for choosing a certain host country appear to be more context-specific, though some aspects of the rationale behind these two decisions do overlap.

### **2.2.1 Knowledge and awareness**

Going abroad for further study, students enter a whole new and unfamiliar milieu. Thus their level of familiarity with a particular country is of significance when they are making the choice. Previous research has shown that Chinese students favour those countries about which they can easily acquire relevant information, often from family members or friends, some of whom might be alumni of an institution in that particular country (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Lu et al., 2014;

Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Zwart, 2013). With such existing social links as relatives or friends studying or living abroad, students have greater access to the knowledge of studying in that host country and in turn might choose the country based on their enhanced awareness and familiarity with it (Bodycott, 2009; Dong, 2012; Lu et al., 2014; Mazzarol et al., 2001).

Regarding students who choose to study in the UK, Binsardi and Ekwulugo's (2003) study showed that advice from friends about Western university life experience has a more significant influence than that from family. Also, the participants' knowledge of the British higher education system tends to be drawn from the massive stock of existing Chinese international students, as could be seen in the study by Cebolla-Boado et al. (2018). Nonetheless, Wu (2014) reported a lower rate of impact among postgraduate students from recommendations by parents, friends, and significant others compared with other factors. Research conducted with Chinese students pursuing postgraduate study in Canada illustrated how information gained through friends about the programmes counted as a source of influence on the students' motives (Wang, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Academic considerations**

Referring back to the academic motives for Chinese students' international study choices, the perception of the more advanced quality of higher education available abroad figures prominently in most studies as a major stimuli. Accordingly, when comparing potential study destinations, Chinese students tend to take the reputation and recognition of a country's education into consideration, often laying great stress on it. The reason for going to a country could be that it provides a renowned educational opportunity of high quality that is widely recognised in China (Dong, 2012; Li & Lv, 2004; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Sun, 2017). Since the perception of the quality of higher education in a country is inclined to meld with specific institutions in that country, Chinese students often separate potential destinations into several tiers based on academic reputation (Marginson, 2006; OECD, 2004). Having an established population of international students also sends prospective students a signal that the host country's higher education is acknowledged worldwide (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). With the growing popularity of global university rankings, countries hosting more institutions with

outstanding rankings are more likely to be chosen by Chinese international students (Dong, 2012; Li & Lv, 2004; Zwart, 2013). This prestige mechanism works in the same way with disciplines, so that students in certain subjects tend to choose a foreign country with cutting-edge teaching and research capacity in their particular fields of interest.

Responding specifically to the renowned reputation of its institutions, advanced teaching modes, and credentials recognised worldwide, Chinese international students in the UK find the world-class quality and prestige of the British higher education system appealing (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Huang, 2013; Rudd et al., 2012; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006). The same is true for students selecting the US as their study destination, as they perceive that the education offered in American universities is superior to the rigid teaching available in China (Austin, 2015; Chao, Hegarty, Angelidis, & Lu, 2017; Stewart, 2017). Due to its proximity to the US, Canada also enjoys a good reputation among China's international students for the quality of its graduate education (Chen, 2017). Likewise, Chinese students consider Australian higher education attractive for its outstanding quality (Yang, 2007).

Regarding more practical issues, chances are that students look at those destinations which offer the most appealing courses, broadest selection of programmes, focused experience in international offerings, and well-developed support services (Bodycott, 2009). The ease of application is another important consideration. The students carefully weigh the chances of success in getting admitted, language requirements, and visa procedures (Dong, 2012; Lu et al., 2014). For those choosing the UK, the ease of university admissions is one of the factors that counts (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). When considering the application for a student visa, students tend to favour the UK (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Rudd et al., 2012) and Canada (Chen, 2007).

### **2.2.3 Environment**

Apart from the academic considerations associated with the higher education system at a study destination, Chinese international students give careful consideration to the natural, social, and cultural environment they will encounter when they get there. As one of the important factors structuring the global education hierarchy, the worldwide advantages of the English language has

a significant influence on the students' choices (Marginson, 2006). Given that the English language has become a *lingua franca* in multiple fields, countries with a native English-speaking social environment tend to be more attractive to students from China (Bodycott, 2009; Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015a; Liu et al., 2014). This factor has been specifically mentioned by students studying in the UK (Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006), the US, and Canada (Chen, 2017). Besides, students studying in the US often cite their interest in cultural diversity and foreign worldviews (Austin, 2015; Chao et al., 2017; Stewart, 2017). Under the influence of the rhetoric about the 'American Dream' or 'Canadian Dream', some Chinese students are drawn by the shared perception of a merit-based political system offering more and better opportunities in either the US (Austin, 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011) or Canada (Chen, 2017). Moreover, students are also concerned about the climate, geographic proximity to home country, study environment, living facilities, as well as level of safety and ethnic tolerance (Bodycott, 2009; Lu et al., 2014; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Wang, 2017; Zwart, 2013). Students with a preference for Canada over the US stress the comparatively safer and more welcoming environment (Chen, 2017; Wang, 2017).

#### **2.2.4 Future development opportunities**

As mentioned in future development motives in section 2.1.2, those who choose to study abroad yearn for promising prospects in their career trajectory and possibly immigration to the host country. Consequently, when selecting an overseas study destination, students who plan on working abroad after graduation normally take into account job opportunities and the prevailing salary levels offered in the host country (Dong, 2012). Students in the UK mentioned the benefit of job opportunities during and after their programme (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Students who wish to return to China upon graduation believe the widely-recognised qualifications and credentials they obtain in the UK and the US will give them a competitive advantage in the domestic labour market (Huang & Turner, 2018; Wu, 2014; Yan & Berliner, 2011). In addition, there exists the expectation of making use of such benefits of international studying experience in the UK as networks and development of work-related soft skills to boost future employability (Huang, 2013; Huang & Turner, 2018; Wu, 2014). The relatively shorter duration of master's programmes in the UK means enhanced employment competitiveness for degree holders (Wu,

2014). For those with the intention of immigration, countries with a nicer living environment and more welcoming immigration policies seem more desirable (Dong, 2012; Liu et al., 2014). Some students believe that pursuing study in the US, Canada, or Australia can be used as a stepping-stones for immigration, particularly in Canada and Australia where immigration policies are more favourable (Austin, 2015; Chen, 2017; Wang, 2017; Yang, 2007).

### **2.2.5 Financial considerations**

The issue of cost attracts serious consideration when students are selecting a study destination, particularly when those students are not from a wealthy family background. The cost of studying abroad normally includes tuition fees, living expenses, travel expenses and money spent on gaining such entry qualifications as language certificates, whereas the offsetting sources of funding could be support from parents, part-time job opportunities, and scholarships (Dong, 2012; Liu et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2014; Lu, Mavondo, & Qiu, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Zwart, 2013). Although China's Confucian cultural heritage drives parents to provide their children with as much financial support as possible, which relieves the burden from the students themselves, education cost is still a significant factor in the decision-making process, particularly for those pursuing undergraduate study abroad with little chance of getting a scholarship (Lu et al., 2009).

Taking cost into account, one notable reason for students pursuing a master's degree in the UK is the shorter duration of the programmes in the British system, imposing less of a financial burden compared with the longer duration of master's programmes available elsewhere (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Rudd et al., 2012; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006). For those selecting Canada or Australia as their study destination, the advantages of the lower tuition fees compared with other popular countries has been attached some weight (Chen, 2007; Wang, 2017; Yang, 2007).

### **2.2.6 Research gap (2)**

With regard to previous studies about Chinese students' motives for studying abroad in the UK, the most common case is that both the students doing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees participated in the research (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Huang &

Turner, 2018; Rudd et al., 2012). Studies that focus on only Chinese undergraduates or postgraduates appear fewer in number. So far, there have been only two studies of Chinese students' motivations for undertaking master's degree programmes in the UK. Zheng & Dai (2006) conducted a survey of 150 undergraduates in their first or second year at a university in Guangdong Province who planned to do their postgraduate study in the UK. Although carrying out the research when the participants were in freshman or sophomore year could allow the researchers to access the students' perceptions of pursuing further study in the UK, chances are that the students might change their thoughts as they moved into later years of their undergraduate study or even give up the idea of studying abroad. Considering this drawback, collecting data from students who have already embarked on their postgraduate study in the UK seems to provide a more stable and reasonable platform for ascertaining a greater level of certainty.

By contrast, the participants in Wu's (2014) study were students who had enrolled in master's programmes in three universities of different type in the UK, meaning that they could provide more thorough and grounded explanations for their decision-making. This research revealed that the students' choices were influenced by such factors as age, type of course programme, and region of origin in China. What makes this study significant is that instead of treating the Chinese students studying for a master's degree in the UK as a whole group, the researcher was aware enough to probe the within-group differences in the weight laid on various influencing factors. Nevertheless, this study has not paid any attention to how the participants' study experience prior to doing their master's study in the UK could influence the formulation of their ideas regarding whether to pursue further study or not and the choice of study destination.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the graduates of Sino-foreign cooperative universities tend to differ from other Chinese undergraduates due to the special features of the education they receive from their institutions. The noticeable preference for doing postgraduate study in the UK among graduates of Sino-British cooperative universities invites exploration into the reasons for their international study destination choice. There has been no previous research on this subject. Thus, this study examines and establishes correlations between studying at a Sino-British cooperative university as an undergraduate and choosing to study for a master's degree in the UK. In exploring these related issues, this research reveals the impact that this special Sino-British university study experience has on students' decision-making and in turn illuminates how the

students enrolled in transnational higher education differ from those studying at traditional universities in mainland China.

## **Chapter Three Methodology**

This methodology chapter presents a detailed description of the research procedures applied in conducting the study along with various considerations underlying the research design. The first section summarises the research design, including an overview and descriptions of the participants, how the data collection was carried out and how the data analysis was performed. The remaining four sections reflect on trustworthiness of the research, ethical issues, the researcher's positionality, and the limitations of this study.

### **3.1 Research design**

#### **3.1.1 Overview**

The research design serves as a bridge connecting the research questions with the research data (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Given this study's aims of exploring Sino-British university graduates' motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK, the ontological assumption underlying this research was in alignment with 'idealism', which believes that '[r]eality consist of representations that are the creation of the human mind' (Blaikie, 2010, p. 93). The social reality of the students' motivations was perceived to lie in their articulation of their own ideas concerning the rationale behind their academic pursuits. In order to seek the knowledge of this reality, the present study adopted the epistemological assumption of 'constructionism', which assumes that 'all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world' (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, the study attempted to enter into the students' points of view to examine their decision-making and to seek their individual interpretations of the reasons behind their choices. Accordingly, a qualitative interview-based research design appeared ideal for answering the research questions. Research using a qualitative approach is concerned about things located in their natural settings and pursues an understanding of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 7). In Guba's (1981) words, this kind of research stands as the 'naturalistic' inquiry paradigm. By applying this approach, the researcher was able to probe what studying abroad in the UK meant to the students and their related concerns

revolving around their decisions.

The qualitative data were collected from ten Chinese graduates of a Sino-British university (see **3.1.2 Participants** for more details). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection tool due to several advantages. The participants are allowed great latitude to provide detailed narrative versions of the individual logics underlying their decisions (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). In this way, they were more likely to make mention of contextual information about how they chose their future development path and overseas study destination as well as the influences they felt from their undergraduate experience. Perceptions from their own points of view were thus generated. Compared with survey questionnaires and more structured interviews, semi-structured interviews could impose fewer constraints on both the interviewer and the respondents (Bryman, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The format was flexible enough to allow room for spontaneity to emerge during the interviews, which was crucial for eliciting views seen through the participants' eyes. An elaborate description of the data collection process is presented in **3.1.3 Data collection**. The qualitative research data were then analysed using the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013), the procedures of which are introduced in **3.1.4 Data analysis**.

### **3.1.2 Participants**

Out of all the Sino-British cooperative institutions in mainland China, T University was chosen in this study, for it is one of the very few institutions that have been granted legal status by the Ministry of Education, which suggests the university is more fully developed than others might be (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2019). With the presence of its own physical campus, facilities, and special system of administration, T University provides its undergraduates with a thorough immersion in Sino-British cooperative higher education. Thus, the students graduating from this university appeared to be the ideal participants for this study that aims to investigate the impacts of study experience at such a university on the undergraduates' further study choice. Undergraduates at T University can choose between the '4+X' pathway and the '2+2' pathway. The students taking the former pathway spend the entire four years at T University and then pursue further study or enter the job market, whereas those taking the latter pathway spend the first two years at T

University and then transfer to the partner university (H University) in the UK for another two years of study. At the end of both pathways, students receive two degree certificates, one from T University and the other from H University. This study focused only on students who had taken the '4+X' pathway, for they had experienced a longer duration of Sino-British cooperative higher education compared with their '2+2' counterparts. The overseas study experience at the undergraduate level might have posed a confounding factor for the present study.

In total ten Chinese students who had graduated from T University in 2018 and then enrolled in a master's programme (2018-19) in the UK participated in this study. Considering the difficulty of recruiting participants by using top-down means in the Chinese context such as contacting the university authorities, the researcher adopted snowball sampling instead. This approach enabled the research to identify cases of interest through acquaintances (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher got in touch with a personal contact who had studied in the '2+2' pathway at T University as an undergraduate and later pursued postgraduate study at the University of Oxford. Through this contact, the researcher was referred to students qualified for this research, who in turn introduced more potential participants at different universities in the UK. Table 5 summarises the profile of the participants:

**Table 5**  
*Profile of Participants*

	Name	Gender (M/F)	Undergraduate major	UK university
1	Suzie	F	Economics & Finance	Imperial College London
2	Penny	F	Economics & Finance	Durham University
3	Kent	M	Economics & Finance	Durham University
4	Yvette	F	Accounting	Durham University
5	Oscar	M	Accounting	Durham University
6	Xavier	M	Financial Mathematics	University College London
7	Whitney	F	English & Finance	University of Edinburgh
8	Bonnie	F	Applied English	The London School of Economics & Political Science
9	Fred	M	Communication Studies	University of Warwick
10	Luke	M	Electrical Engineering	University of Edinburgh

The proportions of the participants' undergraduate majors were approximately representative of the make-up of T University's graduates in the year 2018 (Official data: 38% from Business School, 17.29% from Department of Mathematical Sciences, 11.64% from Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, 2.97% from Department of English, and 2.67% from School of Film and TV Arts).

### **3.1.3 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, with the researcher being the interviewer. In the preparation stage, the researcher formulated an interview guide (see **Appendix A**) based on the literature review of previous relevant studies and introductory materials published on the T University website. The guide served as 'a checklist of topics to be covered' (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 285), but the sequence of questions asked, the wording, and the time allocated to each question were subject to change according to the situations in the actual interviews.

The researcher did a pilot interview with the personal contact used for participant recruitment at the University of Oxford in mid-March, 2019. Although having been in the '2+2' instead of 4+X' pathway at T University, this contact was still able to provide detailed first-hand information about the study experience as an undergraduate and peers' opinions of pursuing further study abroad. Based on this contact's feedback given at the end of the piloting, the researcher refined the wording and sequence of the questions in the interview guide and added more relevant prompts for eliciting responses.

The data collection process took place from late-March to mid-April, 2019. The researcher travelled to Coventry, Durham, Edinburgh, and London to conduct one-on-one face-to-face interviews in Chinese with the participants. The interviews were carried out in common areas at their respective university sites. Each participant received a 'Participant Information Sheet' (see **Appendix B**) that introduced this research prior to the interview. If willing to take part, he or she was invited to sign a 'Participant Consent Form' (see **Appendix C**) at the beginning of the interview. The interviews each lasted for about an hour and were audio-recorded using a mobile phone.

### **3.1.4 Data analysis**

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then analysed in Chinese following the Miles and Huberman framework for qualitative data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). The process consisted of three components, namely data condensation, data display, as well as drawing and verifying conclusions. Based on the literature review, the researcher developed a provisional list of codes prior to conducting the interviews. Once the transcription of the audio recordings was completed, the researcher carried out the first cycle of coding by referring to the codes initially produced. New codes emerging outside the initial frame were added to the coding scheme. Subsequently, the codes were put into clusters to be abstracted into pattern codes. Cross-case analysis generated several aspects of the differences in the motives among the participants. With regard to displaying the data, the analytic display method of network was used and a flowchart was drawn to illustrate the decision-making pattern based on the participants' responses. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn via the tactics of noting patterns, making comparisons, counting, and factoring. For the purpose of verifying the meanings uncovered, the researcher sought follow-up feedback from all the participants at several points throughout the data analysis process, including when the first cycle coding for each participant was finished, when patterns were noticed from the second cycle coding, and when the flowchart for displaying the data was designed.

### **3.2 Trustworthiness**

According to Guba (1981), to ensure trustworthiness in carrying out research, four factors need to be addressed: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. As the present study leans towards the 'naturalistic' inquiry paradigm, these aspects were realised in the following ways. After coding each interview transcript, the researcher checked the interpretations with the corresponding respondent to confirm whether his or her views were accurately represented. Such verifications were also conducted in the later procedures of data analysis. This was to make sure that the analysis was credible and consistent. Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions, this research did not attempt to seek generalisations, for it was believed that 'all social/behavioral phenomena are context-bound' (Guba, 1981, p. 86). However, the rich

descriptive data still made it possible to transfer the findings obtained from this context to other possible contexts. With regard to neutrality, naturalistic inquirers, with themselves being the instruments, sometimes attempt to achieve greater flexibility at the cost of a certain level of objectivity (Guba, 1981). Despite the inevitable interviewer-respondent interrelatedness, the researcher managed to maintain a reasonable distance from the participants throughout the interviews.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations**

This research strictly adhered to the ethical guidelines for educational research issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and received ethical approval from the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford (see **Appendix D**). As mentioned in **3.1.3 Data collection**, the researcher sought voluntary informed consent from the participants for taking part in this study and being audio-recorded. The researcher also made efforts to protect the participants' rights to confidentiality by securely storing and using the data. The paper records of Participant Consent Form' were kept in a locked cupboard in the researcher's accommodation and the audio recordings as well as transcripts were stored in a personal password-protected laptop until the research project was completed. For pseudonymisation, each participant was given an English name beginning with a randomly assigned English letter (A-Z) for identification in data storage and in reporting the findings in this dissertation.

### **3.4 Researcher's positionality**

In the course of conducting this study, the researcher was constantly switching between being an insider and being an outsider. As a Chinese international student with an undergraduate degree pursuing master's studies in the UK, the researcher shared some commonalities with the participants: speaking the same language, having the same cultural background, and being familiar with the application procedures as well as the experience of doing a master's degree in the UK. In this sense, the researcher could be seen as an insider belonging to the group of Chinese tertiary international students at the postgraduate level in the UK. This positionality brought advantages of

easier entrée and desirable contextual knowledge of the topics discussed (Kacen & Chaitin, 2006; Padgett, 2008). Both the researcher and the participants enjoyed a higher level of comfort during the interviews. Nevertheless, the researcher was alert to the effects of the 'insider' position in framing the interview questions asked and tried to suppress as much as possible any personal thoughts about the motives for studying abroad. For instance, in one interview, the participant seemed somewhat unsure about his responses, saying relatively little about his motivations and afterwards asking about the researcher's experiences. In order to minimise any external influences that might have held him back, the researcher shared very few of her thoughts and then redirected the focus back to the respondent's thoughts. With more probes, this participant began to open up a bit more and was given maximum space to present his views.

Meanwhile, since the researcher did her undergraduate study in a traditional university in mainland China, where the study experience was quite different from that in a Sino-British cooperative university, the position as an outsider in this respect affected the research as well. Based on the information gleaned from the previous literature, the university website and the piloting, the researcher had to make a concerted effort when designing the interview guide to imagine what it was like to study at a Sino-British university,. Also, during the interviews, the researcher had to continuously seek explanations from the participants about the education mode practiced at their university. Despite these obstacles, this outsider position enabled the researcher to approach the impacts of the study experience at a Sino-British university on overseas study decision-making from a fresh perspective and, in turn, to uncover the uniqueness of Sino-foreign cooperatively-provided higher education in comparison with the undergraduate education offered at traditional Chinese universities. This reflected the advantage of outsider position in potentially leading to innovative research directions (Berger, 2015). The researcher took delight in placing the participants in 'the expert position' (Berger, 2015, p. 227), giving them a chance to inform an outsider about how a Sino-British cooperative university operated and also an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of their special study experience on their life trajectory that they might have otherwise taken for granted.

### **3.5 Limitations**

According to Guba (1981), an essential aspect of ensuring the trustworthiness of a 'naturalistic' enquiry is to maximise the range of information discovered by covering all the differences. In this respect, this study potentially falls short by focusing on only one Sino-British cooperative university while ignoring possible differences across universities of this kind. The same drawback is also applicable to the sampling of participants, which did not include students from every undergraduate major offered by the university. This was due to the limitation of snowball sampling as well as the time constraints for completing a master's degree research project.

Besides, due to constraints of time, travel expenses, and available resources, the researcher had to recruit the students who had already graduated from T University and were studying in master's programmes in the UK when this research was carried out. Although this arrangement was more convenient for collecting the data, it seems more ideal to seek responses from undergraduates who were still in China as they were approaching the end of their final year at T University. Since the participants in the present study had already graduated from T University and moved to the UK for a while pursuing master's degrees, their memories of how they decided to study abroad might have become vague or altered by their study experience in the UK. This change in status might have adversely affected the truth value of their responses.

## **Chapter Four Findings**

This chapter reports the main findings regarding the participants' motivations, which are divided into two sections. Section 4.1 presents their motives for pursuing postgraduate study abroad as Chinese international students and section 4.2 demonstrates their specific reasons for choosing the UK as their overseas study destination. Both sections cover multiple themes, some of which appear to be more closely related to their previous Sino-British university experience than others.

### **4.1 Motivations for pursuing postgraduate study abroad**

The participants' motivations underlying their decision to pursue postgraduate study abroad intersect with four major themes: their academic motives, career development motives, self-formation motives, and the impact of their peers' norms. Some of the motives stemmed from their own thinking and beliefs while others were influenced by their family members, university teachers, alumni, and peers. Their previous experience at a Sino-British cooperative university cut across all four themes, though the study found that it was less significant regarding their career development motives compared with the other three motives.

#### **4.1.1 Academic motives**

Several aspects of the academic appeal of pursuing postgraduate study abroad emerged from the participants' responses, including academic environment, outsider perspective, English-medium instruction, education quality, and obstacles to pursuing postgraduate study at home. Most of these motives were influenced by the participants' study experience at a Sino-British cooperative university. Their teachers especially played an important part in constructing and influencing their perceptions of overseas higher education.

With regard to academic environment, studying at a Sino-British university as undergraduates provided Chinese students with a singular opportunity to be immersed in a Western education mode right at their doorstep. Some students thus had a prolonged chance to form favourable impressions of Western higher education. In most cases, this immersion nurtured their growing aspirations to undertake further study abroad where this type of intellectual atmosphere was more

pervasive. Two participants, Oscar and Whitney, mentioned that the pleasure of studying in a free, equitable, and respectful academic environment at T University had a positive impact on their desire to study abroad. Whitney attributed this to the influence of her teachers from overseas educational backgrounds. She found them to be less bureaucratic' compared with those in traditional Chinese universities, where the teacher-student power relation was asymmetrical and more unequal. She especially enjoyed being in an atmosphere where the teachers were in favour of a 'student-oriented education mode' and always encouraged her to be critical of their views. Based on this positive experience, she wanted to study abroad where the academic environment emphasises this kind of equal atmosphere to an even greater extent'. Meanwhile, Bonnie and Fred said that they were drawn by the desirable intellectual setting overseas where they believed research quality and academic integrity were taken more seriously. It was unclear, however, whether this appeal was in any way influenced by their academic experience at T University.

Apart from academic environment concerns, two participants treasured the outsider perspective that could potentially be inspired by foreign study experience. Bonnie already felt strongly about the charm of such a perspective when studying at T University:

*Bonnie: I used to have discussions with some foreign teachers, who would approach issues happening in the Chinese context with an 'outsider' perspective. Personally, I'm very interested in social and political topics relevant to Chinese society, so I really wish to study abroad and make use of the perspective derived from a foreign environment to take a step back and explore the subjects concerning China from a fresh angle.*

Similarly, Fred also thought that studying abroad could inspire him to shift his perspective from being an 'insider' to an 'outsider', which would be a distinct advantage in further exploring his academic interest in the Chinese film industry. In the interview, though, he did not connect this motive directly to his previous experience at T University.

Although the participants' academic motives for studying abroad had a lot to do with the admiring impressions they had developed at a Sino-British cooperative university regarding overseas higher education, some of their interview responses revealed certain flaws in the University's attempt to replicate a foreign education mode in the Chinese context. Consequently, some of the students expressed the desire to go abroad in search of an 'authentic' international education. Altogether five participants pointed out the difficulties in fully implementing English-medium instruction on a campus located in mainland China where the dominant language is unavoidably Chinese. According to Whitney, Penny, and Yvette, the Chinese teachers at T

University would stick to using English in the classroom, but some of them often switched to Chinese when dealing with individual student enquiries. The participants found this disappointing and distracting. Penny also expressed her discontent with the Chinese teachers' incompetence for not accurately conveying essential academic knowledge in English. She described how her Chinese teachers would usually use their Chinese thinking patterns first to process the information from the English textbook and then give lectures in English. She felt 'the meaning got distorted after such processing' and sometimes found that what the teacher taught differed from her own understanding based on her reading of the original texts. Also, since the students at T University were mostly Chinese, the Chinese language was far more frequently used in their daily communications than English. As Luck observed, there were about 100 students taking the '4+X' pathway in his major, but only two of them were international students. He therefore described the so-called 'global' environment at T University as 'fake' or at least 'not global enough'. This is why the participants were not so satisfied with the language environment at T University and yearned to pursue further study in an English-speaking country.

It is worth underscoring, however, that the participants themselves ascribed little importance to the perceived higher quality of education abroad and did not perceive it as immediately relevant to their undergraduate study. Bonnie and Penny cited the influence of their family members. Bonnie's parents generally had a good impression of advanced education in foreign countries. Penny's uncle, a professor working in the US, thought highly of the quality of education abroad. Suzie did have certain expectations for receiving better education when applying for postgraduate study abroad, but she stressed in the interview that this was not her primary concern. For Oscar and Luke, the education quality overseas did not necessarily outperform that available at domestic universities. In other words, their choice of going abroad was not due to a perceived bias in favour of the quality of education outside mainland China.

Another aspect regarding the participants' academic motivations was associated with the obstacles to pursuing postgraduate study in mainland China. Except a small number of those with postgraduate recommendations, Chinese undergraduates who wish to do a master's degree in domestic universities mostly have to take the national postgraduate entrance examination. Three participants in this study mentioned the high pressure and extremely fierce domestic competition as major deterrents to pursuing postgraduate study in China. Moreover, seven participants

expressed the view that the undergraduate education they received at a Sino-British university made it nearly impossible for them to succeed in competing in the postgraduate entrance examination with their counterparts from traditional Chinese universities. There existed an obvious gap between what they learnt in the Sino-British system and what they would be tested on from the conventional Chinese undergraduate education curriculum, particularly in political education and advanced mathematics. These two points of concern are presented in the bottom left part of Figure 1 (see below), which demonstrates why most students at T University did not really regard doing a master's degree in mainland China as an option.

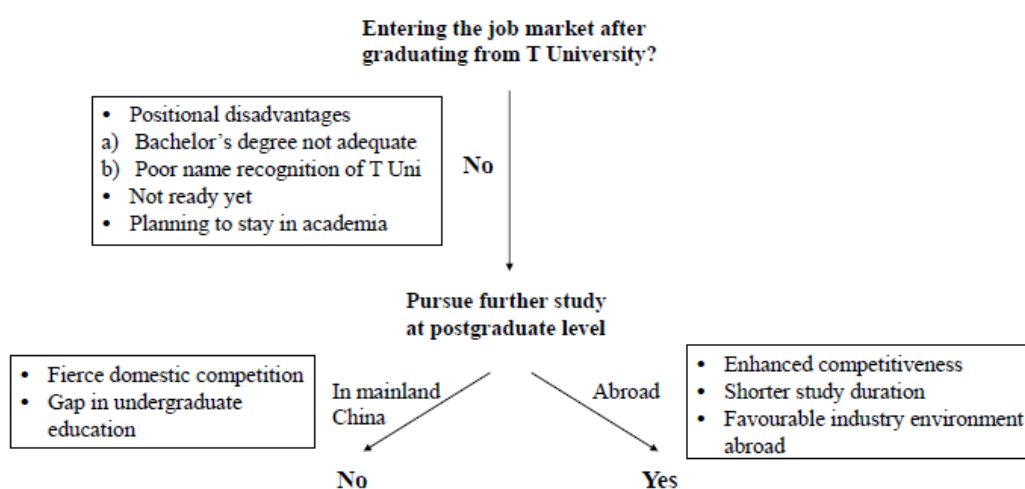


Figure 1. Decision-making pattern for choosing between future development paths.

#### 4.1.2 Career development motives

The participants considered enhancing their future career development as another critical aspect underlying the motives for undertaking postgraduate study abroad. More specifically, the participants put much weight on the positive outcomes of continuing with further study as well as gaining a foreign education background. Compared with the academic motives described in the previous section, the participants' career development motives seemed not so closely related to their experience at T University, though their university alumni did exert some influence.

For the participants, entering the job market right after obtaining their bachelor's degree could have been an option, but this seemed to be a path rarely taken. The participants chose to continue with further study for three reasons (shown in the upper part of Figure 1). The first reason had to do with the value of academic qualifications in job seeking. Five participants

expressed their awareness of the positional disadvantage they would have if they only had an undergraduate qualification in the labour market in mainland China. They regarded obtaining a higher degree as a necessity. The experience at T University also had some impact on how the participants measured their relative competitiveness. Five participants acknowledged that T University, at least for now, lacked prestige and had poor name recognition in Chinese society, due to its short operating history and unique education mode that diverges from traditional Chinese universities. This is to say that the graduates of such Sino-British cooperative universities had a slim chance of succeeding in their job searches compared with their counterparts graduating from more prominent traditional Chinese universities. For three out of the five participants, this idea was partially inspired by their university alumni who had gone overseas for further study after completing their undergraduate degree at T University. These alumni demonstrated through their own experience that pursuing postgraduate study was crucial to facilitating their career development and could be a fruitful choice. As for the second reason, three participants felt that they were not ready to start working upon graduation from their undergraduate studies. Two of them considered pursuing postgraduate study to postpone experiencing the pressure of seeking a job. The other participant believed that he needed more time to figure out an area of specialisation before pursuing a career. Regarding the third reason, two participants planned to stay in academia, making postgraduate study a must.

When making the decision to pursue further study at the postgraduate level instead of beginning to work after graduating from T University, the participants generally expressed the sentiment that the benefits of gaining a master's degree abroad would improve their career prospects (shown in the bottom right part of Figure 1). Four participants believed that being a 'returnee' could enhance their competitive advantage in the domestic job market, though another three participants pointed out that this reflected more their parents' view rather than their own view. In Yvette's words, 'If you don't do further study abroad after graduation, you will lose the chance of *getting gilded* with an overseas degree'. In addition, Whitney mentioned how her parents made her realise that it normally took three years to complete a master's degree in mainland China, which was longer than most master's degree programmes abroad. They thus suggested that she might as well finish her postgraduate study in a shorter time so she could launch her career earlier and in turn accumulate additional working experience. Moreover,

regarding future job hunt, Luke, studying artificial intelligence, was attracted by the more 'humane' working culture in the Internet industry in Western countries compared to the adverse working conditions that prevailed in mainland China. He wished to make use of his time and resources while doing a master's degree abroad to look for graduate job opportunities.

Taking into consideration 1) the advantages of pursuing further study at the postgraduate level and obtaining overseas qualifications for career development and 2) the infeasibility of doing postgraduate study domestically, the graduates of T University were inclined to choose the ideal and perhaps the only path left, which was to pursue a postgraduate degree abroad to enhance their career prospects (see the presentation of this decision-making pattern in Figure 1).

#### **4.1.3 Self-formation motives**

In addition to academic and career development motives, the participants expressed the common feeling that self-formation played an essential role in their decision-making in two aspects. They believed that the international experience of studying abroad could help them realise their potential for self-development and they often connected this idea with their parents' expectations as well as their own study experience at T University. Furthermore, the participants valued the increased amount of freedom they would enjoy in a foreign context, which would allow them to take more control over their own lives. Many of the participants felt that they were already well along on their journeys of self-exploration thanks to the conducive extended space for development they found available at a Sino-British university. Their undergraduate experience inspired them to make rational choices regarding their postgraduate study.

Acquiring an international experience attracted the students mainly because it enabled self-transformation. Six participants expressed an interest in leveraging their time abroad to have a taste of a foreign lifestyle and culture, which they believed could enrich their personal experience and enhance their life skills. For instance, Suzie felt that by encountering unfamiliar things overseas, she could become a different person in terms of her overall development, like 'adding some new colours on my piece of paper'. Whitney wished to cultivate a sense of independence to prepare herself for adjusting to the demands of her future life and career living on her own in a city other than her hometown. In all, seven participants attested that their parents expected them to

broaden their horizons by studying overseas.

The previous experience at T University to some extent reinforced the significance which the participants attached to acquiring international experience. Responding to the University's mission of fostering 'global citizens', two participants identified with the value of going abroad in facilitating their self-development. In Fred's opinion, he could not become a 'global citizen' if his experience was limited to China. For Luke, his whole idea of going abroad was based on his fundamental wish of becoming a 'global citizen'. Dissatisfied with what he perceived as the repressive environment in mainland China, he felt the need to immerse himself in a broader context so that he may open up and be able to live on a global platform. Besides, the teachers with foreign experience at T University seemed to be an additional source of influence. The teachers that Yvette admired were either foreigners or Chinese teachers with impressive overseas backgrounds. The wisdom of those teachers helped her to understand how such positive changes in the environment abroad could impact one's state of mind and life trajectory. These role models encouraged her to follow suit to gain similar competitive advantages.

The participants frequently mentioned the expanded freedom associated with studying abroad as an essential contributor to effective self-formation. Luke considered studying abroad a way to break away from the oppression he had experienced in China's domestic educational system. As a female Chinese student, Bonnie related it to the constraints caused by the gender factor. From her point of view, her own will and potential would be confined to prescribed roles back at home, given the gender inequality common in marriage and the workplace in Chinese society. She resented her family's potential interference in such personal affairs as getting married and having children. To insulate herself from the pressures of such external social norms in China, she expressed her desire to seek job opportunities abroad. 'I just found it unacceptable that my parents would plan my life for me, like finding a job that is friendly to women, getting married, having kids, etc. They just thought that a girl's life is supposed to be like this...', she said.

In fact, from the participant's perspective, the atmosphere at T University was already freer compared with that in traditional Chinese universities. This additional freedom allowed the students greater space for self-agency to navigate their life paths and studying abroad was a crucial stage in this process. For Fred, who was rather critical of China's oppressive political system, T University was a haven from China's ideological influences. According to him, many

students at T University took pride in this fact. With more room to exercise their free will, seven participants pointed out how this freedom for self-exploration at the undergraduate level inspired their intention to pursue postgraduate study abroad. As Bonnie expressed it, 'When doing my undergrad, I was always thinking about identity politics, my position in this world, and what I could bring to this world'. Most students traditional Chinese universities are less likely to subscribe to such liberal and humanistic values. She wanted to continue this kind of self-exploration that she assumed would only be possible abroad. Likewise, Penny thought that students educated at Sino-British cooperative universities would probably grow up faster and figure out at an earlier stage what they wanted.

Whitney and Luke described more specifically how they explored their own needs during their stay at T University. By joining a student career development society, Whitney had opportunities to attend events where the alumni and recruiters shared their experience. She said if the University had not offered a congenial space for students to organise various extra-curricular activities, she would not have started planning for her future career that early and finally decided to pursue postgraduate study abroad. Meanwhile, Luke—having muddled along in his freshman and sophomore year not knowing what to do with his future—felt fortunate to become acquainted with a bunch of friends with whom he shared common interests and acquire an opportunity in his junior year to participate in a project about deep learning. It was this project and the friendships that inspired him to discover where his academic interest lay and decide to study artificial intelligence abroad at the postgraduate level. Yvette also mentioned about being 'pushed' by her peers to seize control of her life, take responsibility for her own future, and take steps to improve herself. She called this push 'positive peer pressure'. Although the general atmosphere at T University was quite open and free of constraints, she reported that most of her classmates were excellent role models and worked very hard. They stimulated her to do the same or else she would have felt ashamed.

As demonstrated above, the lack of external restrictions at the Sino-British university enabled the participants to make decisions on their own and take responsibility for their own choices. This degree of freedom facilitated the development of self-awareness and care about their individual needs as well as their interests. These sorts of transformations stemmed in part from their independent explorations and partially from influences from their peers whose self-agency thrived

in the relative free milieu at T University. The participants in turn became capable of making informed choices about studying abroad based on their enhanced self-knowledge.

#### **4.1.4 Norm among peers**

Apart from academic, career development and self-formation motives, the participants also cited peer group norms as an important factor influencing their decisions to pursue postgraduate study abroad. Among T University undergraduates, there was an overwhelming preference for continuing with further study overseas. This consensus made it a common way of thinking and behaving. Aside from one participant who was absolutely sure about the trajectory he was to follow, the rest of the participants all believed that their choices were shaped fundamentally by the attitudes of those around them.

Kent admitted that he knew very little about studying in a foreign country and had no idea why he should choose to go abroad when he was trying to decide what to do. All he did was simply follow what everyone else was doing, in his words, 'going with the flow'. Similarly, Whitney initially did not have a strong desire for doing a master's degree abroad. She was quite confused about what to do following her undergraduate study. Having witnessed how many students around her had a clear plan of studying overseas, she gradually became inspired to follow suit so as to access the same benefits she felt her peers would get from making this choice. For Suzie and Penny, the norm at T University played a decisive role in their decision-making. They pointed out that if they had gone to a traditional university where it was more common to pursue postgraduate study domestically, they might have attended the national graduate entrance examination and stayed in China. It could be said that the overall atmosphere at T University offered a fertile ground for the choice of studying abroad to take shape.

## **4.2 Motivations for choosing the UK as overseas study destination**

Regarding their motives for preferring to study the UK for postgraduate study, the participants' responses involved five aspects. Apart from stronger knowledge and awareness about postgraduate education in this country, the participants ascribed major significance to the relatively less demanding admissions requirements and to the education quality. They also gave some

consideration to career development, the social environment and the financial cost, but these three aspects played a smaller part and had less relevance to their study experience at T University.

#### **4.2.1 Knowledge and awareness**

The participants were found to have distinctively greater knowledge and awareness of the UK as their overseas study destination. This obviously had much to do with their previous Sino-British university experience for two specific reasons: more UK-relevant information sources easily available to them and their familiarity with the British education system from studying at T University.

According to the participants, it seemed to be a general trend among their undergraduate peers at T University to choose the UK as their destination abroad. When considering where to study, they were much more likely to access sources of information about going to the UK rather than other countries. Three participants pointed out that the current students tended to routinely consult T University graduates on their postgraduate applications. Since most of these graduates were studying or had studied in the UK, the focus from the start was usually on the UK. Besides, three participants regarded their peers as an important information source, particularly their classmates from the '2+2' pathway who had two years at H University in the UK. Through this kind of personal contact, the students who stayed in China for four years could more easily get information about studying and living in the UK. Moreover, some participants mentioned education agencies as an additional source of information, though they maintained that these agencies had a less significant influence on their final decisions. Two participants introduced that the agencies which targeted T University students mostly promoted applying for postgraduate study in the UK. This sector accounted for the largest part of their services. Despite such preferences embedded in the education agencies' marketing, three participants made it clear that they used the agencies' service as a tool to save the trouble of completing the complicated application procedures on their own rather than relying on them for guidance on choosing the destination country. With the ample information provided by university alumni and peers, the students actually had better knowledge of why to apply for postgraduate study in the UK than the agencies, so it was already a foregone conclusion for the participants.

In addition to access to convenient sources of information about studying in the UK, the participants cited the Sino-British atmosphere at T University as another critical factor contributing to their relatively strong awareness of the UK. With a Chinese university and a British university as the parent universities, T University featured noticeable traits of the British higher education system in its education mode. This enabled the students to become intimately familiar with the education mechanisms in the UK. As four participants suggested, due to the familiarity with the British system from their Sino-British undergraduate study, they found it desirable to pursue further study in the UK where they could be more confident in their ability of adjusting to study abroad. Also, based on their knowledge of the UK educational system gained at T University, two participants were curious about exploring the differences between the British system as implemented at a Sino-British university in mainland China and the 'authentic' version of a British education as experienced in the UK. Although the British way of instruction appeared to play a part in some participants' choice of studying in the UK, there were also exceptions. Kent and Luke, for instance, expressed reservations. They said that their greater knowledge and awareness of the British system did not mean that they would necessarily choose the UK as their overseas study destination. From their perspective, both the UK and the US were acceptable and they did not have a bias in favour of studying in the UK.

#### **4.2.2 Academic considerations**

The academic motives for selecting the UK as the study destination mainly covered two aspects: one concerning the relative level of difficulty that international students had in getting admitted to master's programmes in various countries and the other regarding the impression of the superior quality of British higher education. The former aspect was directly related to the participants' undergraduate study experience, whereas the latter did not prove to bear the same relation.

The participants revealed that the majority of T University students would choose from three main destinations when applying for postgraduate study, namely the UK, the US, and Australia. The relative magnitude of admission requirements for studying in these three countries had a significant impact on their decision-making. In terms of the level of ease in getting admitted, the master's programmes in the US seemed to them the most challenging. Four participants admitted

that they were not competent enough to reach the high threshold of admission criteria for undertaking postgraduate study in American universities. Seven participants thought it a nuisance to take the GRE or GMAT for applying to study in the US. They believe that the requirements were extremely hard, especially given the heavy burden of workloads for their final year at T University. Compared with the US and the UK, applying for Australian master's degree programmes appeared to be the easiest, but many students found them perhaps too easy as their best choice. As far as five participants were concerned, the application process for programmes in Australia was not so rigorous for Sino-British university graduates. The IELTS score was not required and students with even low undergraduate academic scores were still able to receive offers instantly as long as they applied. Consequently, most students dismissed choosing Australia for master's degree programmes as a back-up or safety option.

Less demanding than the admissions in the US and more rigorous than the process in Australia, applying for postgraduate study in the UK appeared to be the ideal choice for most undergraduate students at T University. For nine participants, the ease of applying for master's programmes in the UK was their primary reason for picking this study destination. The Sino-British undergraduate degrees gave them certain privileges in their application process. According to four participants, Sino-British university undergraduates, with their dual degrees, were probably treated the same as UK undergrads by the postgraduate admissions committees at British universities. Granted by a British higher education institution, their bachelor's degree gave them a competitive advantage over other Chinese candidates in gaining recognition from universities in the UK. Besides, since T University's grading system was compatible with the way scores were calculated in the British education system, there was no need for the participants to transfer their scores before submitting their applications as they were required to do for US universities. Meanwhile, it saved UK universities the trouble of authenticating these applicants' scores and the participants believed that this might improve their chances of being admitted.

Another point of academic consideration additional to the magnitude of admission requirements was the perceived excellent quality of education in the UK, as expressed by five participants. Three of them had the impression that British universities had a significantly long historical standing in the English-speaking world and were world-leading in teaching and research. They thus admired the prestige of higher education institutions in the UK. Two participants also

took the university rankings into account and they believed that the UK hosted a larger number of top-ranked world-class universities compared with most other popular overseas study destinations. According to the participants' responses, there appeared to be no obvious link between their favourable perception of education quality in the UK and their study experience at T University.

#### **4.2.3 Career development**

The participants' preference for studying in the UK was also related to their career development concerns regarding the duration of postgraduate study as well as the comparative value of their academic qualifications and credentials in the labour market. Compared with programmes in the US and Australia, a distinctive feature of the master's programmes in the UK was their relatively short duration, normally only one year. Four participants considered this a strength of doing a master's degree in the UK. They thought that the shorter the course, the earlier they could enter the job market to explore their interests and gain more working experience.

As for the recognition of their qualifications in the fiercely competitive job market back in China, Whitney ranked degrees obtained in the UK as more favourable in most cases than those gained in Australia but less valuable than those granted by Ivy League schools in the US. Taking the relative magnitude of admission requirements in these three countries into consideration, Penny added that it took less effort to get admitted to universities in the UK than in the US, but the level of recognition in the CV screening process in job hunting in mainland China was roughly the same for G5 universities and Ivy League schools. For her, this meant that undertaking a postgraduate degree in the UK could enable students to get a better career development payoff for their investment in postgraduate education.

#### **4.2.4 Social environment**

Although not as significant as the aspects mentioned in the previous sections, the factor of social environment had some impact on the participants' decision-making about country selection. Safety concerns over public security affected two participants' preference. The distressing issue about shooting accidents and the controversy surrounding gun control deterred them from going to the US, where they or their parents thought the social order might be less stable. Apart from this, the

circle of friends also counted as part of the social environment where they would stay. Four participants explained the reason why they chose to study in the UK was that most of their friends they had at T University were going to this country. After all, pursuing study alone in a foreign country could be somewhat intimidating for international students who were not so used to living abroad. As Yvette said, studying overseas to some extent forced her to step out of her comfort zone, which would have been extremely tough without company from friends. Given such worry about unfamiliarity with the life overseas, she would rather not stay outside China for too long. The shorter duration of master's programmes in the UK seemed long enough for her to have a taste of the international experience.

#### **4.2.5 Financial cost**

As the expenses of undertaking postgraduate study vary from country to country, the amount of financial cost for doing a master's programme could affect international students' study destination choice, though there seemed no overwhelming evidence that the concern over spending was common among the participants. Only Kent pointed out that the relatively low cost due to shorter study duration in the UK acted as a substantive reason for him to choose the UK instead of the US. He was concerned that two-year master's courses in the US could be much more costly, especially without funding. For the other two participants who did mention about financial consideration in the interview, Xavier and Suzie said their parents could afford to pay for their fees wherever they went but would indeed be more pleased with the country choice that cost less. With sufficient financial support from their parents, they did not feel the need to measure the expenses when comparing different country options. It could be seen that saving the amount of money spent on tuition and living costs did not serve as one of the motives for selecting the UK in the cases of most participants.

### **4.3 Summary of findings**

To summarise the findings, the participants' motivations for pursuing postgraduate study abroad included academic motives, career development motives, self-formation motives, as well as influence of the norm among peers. Their motivations for choosing the UK as overseas study

destination were associated with knowledge and awareness, academic considerations, career development, social environment, and last but not least financial cost. It was found that these two aspects of motivations entailed some overlapping themes, covering academic concerns and perceived benefits to their future career development.

Apart from intrinsic motives that the participants formulated by themselves, external influences from university teachers, peers, alumni, and family members played cross-cutting roles in all the emerging themes. Some of the teachers they met at the Sino-British university inspired them to look up to education abroad with a more desirable academic environment and possibility of developing an outsider perspective. Also, those teachers with overseas experience demonstrated potential positive outcomes of studying abroad in terms of facilitating self-development, which encouraged the participants to take the same path. Their peers at the undergraduate level played a significant role in stimulating their self-exploration which led to their choice of pursuing postgraduate study abroad and in creating an environment where this choice became the norm. Additionally, their peers acted as one of the information sources enhancing their knowledge and awareness of studying in the UK and contributed to the preference for this country due to the existence of stronger social support. The participants' career development motives partially came from lessons learnt from their university alumni, who guided them to improve their competitive advantage through acquiring overseas qualifications. With most of them undertaking postgraduate study in the UK, the alumni served as an information source as well. Though not exerting noticeable influence, the participants' family members still to some extent had a role to play in constructing their favourable impression of education abroad. Besides, the sufficient financial support from their family allowed them to focus less on financial cost and put more weight on other aspects when choosing their study destination. Generally, the participants' decision-making appeared to be inextricably intertwined with their undergraduate experience at a Sino-British cooperative university.

## **Chapter Five Discussion**

This chapter discusses the main findings of this study through the lens of the results derived from the previous literature. The similarities and differences with the existing findings are analysed. The first two sections (5.1 and 5.2) address the first research question, examining the motivations for Chinese graduates of a Sino-British university for pursuing postgraduate study abroad and choosing the UK as their study destination. Synthesising the motives influenced and not influenced by their stay at a Sino-British university, the third section (5.3) addresses the second research question, reviewing how the subject students' undergraduate experience at this type of university influenced their decision-making.

### **5.1 Motivations for pursuing postgraduate study abroad**

Referring to the findings of the previous research on Chinese international students' motivations for pursuing study abroad, the main motives emerging in this study could fall into the four major themes, including academic motives, future development motives, self-formation motives, and others' influence. For each theme, some aspects showed a similarity with the results found in the existing literature, but the study also uncovered additional considerations that seemed distinctive and unique for Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university.

#### **5.1.1 Academic motives**

Among the five themes of academic motives expressed by the participants in this research, considerations regarding education quality and impediments to pursuing postgraduate study within China overlapped more with the findings of similar studies, compared with the other three themes.

The previous literature stated that Chinese international students' academic motives for studying abroad were often associated with the perceived better quality of higher education available overseas, particularly in Western developed countries (Bodycott, 2009; Fang, 2010; Kajanus, 2015; Li, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006). The findings revealed that many Chinese students are convinced that a global education hierarchy exists and admire the prestige and quality of foreign education (Fong, 2011;

Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015a; Liu, 2000). However, such a bias in favour of the education quality available abroad appeared to have little significance for the participants in the present study. Two respondents even questioned the common perception of the superiority of education in the West. Even though the participants maintained that they gave little weight to education quality in their decision-making, they did cite two additional aspects of their academic motives that were rarely mentioned in the previous research, to wit: the more equitable academic environment abroad and the outsider perspective inspired by studying in a foreign intellectual setting. These perceptions were closely connected with the Western academic atmosphere they had experienced as undergraduates at their Sino-British university, including the influences from foreign teachers as well as Chinese teachers who had overseas experience.

Besides, the previous literature often cited the aspiration of both Chinese undergrads and postgrads to access more international education abroad (Liu et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2014). Similarly, the participants in this study wished to seek a more 'authentic' version of international education by pursuing postgraduate study in a foreign country due to their dissatisfaction with the flaws in T University's attempts to develop an 'international' university. The interview responses revealed that they tended to relate a pure English-speaking environment with a genuine international education experience. Since their Sino-British university was located in mainland China and the majority of the students were Chinese, the participants expressed the feeling that the dominance of the Chinese language hindered full implementation of English-medium instruction. Also, owing to the lack of international students in certain majors with whom Chinese students could interact with, the campus environment was deemed not 'global' enough. It is interesting to note that the reason why the participants yearned for a pure English language environment abroad was not mainly to improve their English language skills, as reflected in the previous research (Chen, 2017; Kajanus, 2015; Li, 2007; Wang, 2017; Wu, 2014; Xie, 2013; Zheng & Dai, 2006). Instead, it was more about seeking an international education that could live up to their expectations.

With regard to the academic motives underlying the Chinese undergraduates' decisions to undertake postgraduate study abroad, the intention of trying to escape the fierce competition of the postgraduate admission process in China's domestic universities played a part (Lu et al., 2014; Wang, 2017; Wu, 2014). The participants in this research shared this concern regarding the

intimating pressure they felt about taking the national postgraduate entrance examination. An additional motive unique to the graduates of T University was that their curriculum differed from the one taught in traditional Chinese universities. This factor placed them at a disadvantage in the exam when competing with their counterparts. Therefore, it could be said that, compared with the undergraduates of domestic universities, those studying at a Sino-British cooperative university were faced with more daunting impediments to pursuing postgraduate study inside China.

### **5.1.2 Future development motives**

Regarding choosing between future development paths, the participants in the present study presented a rather clear decision-making pattern that seemed common among Sino-British university graduates (see Figure 1 for reference). The impracticality of the other two options, namely entering the job market right after graduating from T University or pursuing postgraduate study in mainland China, directed them to the only remaining path that they believed could offer them more potential benefits.

The limited amount of existing research on Chinese undergrads' motivations for undertaking postgraduate study abroad had very little to say about their specific reasons for continuing with further study after gaining a bachelor's degree (Wu, 2014; Zwart, 2013). The present study filled this gap by revealing the participants' concerns about the drawbacks of starting work right after completing undergraduate study. It should be stressed that the low prestige which this newly emerging Sino-British cooperative higher education mode currently enjoys in the domestic labour market was a mitigating factor. It to some extent reinforced the participants' belief in the necessity of working towards a higher degree to acquire a competitive advantage in their job hunting.

As for the positive outcomes of their overseas study experience pertaining to their future career development, the participants' views resonated with the concerns often cited in the previous research findings, namely the perception that being a 'returnee' could improve their employment opportunities back in China and increase their potential financial rewards (Fang, 2010; Kajanus, 2015; Liu et al., 2012; Martin, 2017; Wu, 2014; Zwart, 2013). For those who were attracted by the industry environment abroad and intended to work outside China, pursuing postgraduate study overseas could help pave the way for their graduate job seeking. Interestingly, unlike some

Chinese international students in other studies who wished to prepare for immigration through first doing a degree in a particular host country, no respondent in this research mentioned the same intention for their future development (Li, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006).

### **5.1.3 Self-formation motives**

In addition to offering more empirical evidence for Chinese international students' academic and future development motives, the current study proved the applicability of the concept of 'self-formation' as a valid way for describing the students' motivations concerning self-development. As an important enriching contribution to the existing research, the participants' responses demonstrated a special relation between their enhanced self-agency as an outcome of their Sino-British cooperative higher education and their respective decisions to study abroad at the postgraduate level.

Similar to the students investigated in previous studies, the participants in this research acknowledged the value of international and intercultural experience in broadening their horizons and providing an incomparable opportunity to acquire rich life experiences (Bodycott, 2009; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Chen, 2017; Huang & Turner, 2018; Kajanus, 2015; Li, 2007; Liu & Fang, 2011; Liu et al., 2012; Sánchez et al., 2006; Wu, 2014; Xie, 2013; Zheng & Dai, 2006). Resembling the Chinese international students' motive for self-development cited in relevant research, the participants anticipated transforming themselves via studying abroad (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015b; Martin, 2017). It is worth highlighting that the students found motivation in the promotion of becoming 'global citizens' that they absorbed at T University and the inspiration they got from their teacher role models. These elusive factors contributed to raising their awareness of the potential of overseas study for facilitating self-transformation. This sense of empowerment reflected the significance of their unique Sino-British university experience in their decision-making.

Moreover, the expanded sense of freedom that the participants expected to find in a foreign setting resonated with the conditions for 'self-formation' through international education proposed by Marginson (2014). What appealed to them was the chance of navigating their life trajectories

more freely. In this sense, the current findings provided further proof that increased self-directed agency for fashioning oneself could constitute an important motive for studying abroad, building on the students' 'identity motivation' as revealed in Martin's (2017) study. Intriguingly, for some participants in this research, the decision to pursue postgraduate study overseas turned out to be the result of the 'self-formation' process which had already started when they were still undergraduates at T University. Having availed themselves of the space they had for expanded self-exploration in the Sino-British education mode, they were able to begin reflexively piloting their life paths earlier than their counterparts in traditional Chinese universities and make their own conscious choices regarding their future development. Once again, this suggested the impact of the special features of their Sino-British university education experience on their emerging perceptions of studying abroad.

#### **5.1.4 Others' influence**

This study uncovered discrepancy between the students' motives due to the influence of others presented in the previous research as opposed to the findings of the current study. The participants attached less significance to the part played by their family members but placed more emphasis on the influence of the norm among peers.

Inconsistent with previous findings highlighting the significant influence of the Confucian cultural heritage on the students' decision-making in the Chinese context (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Lee & Morrish, 2012; Li, 2013; Lu et al., 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006), the participants in this study gave little weight to their families' influence. Even though they did need to seek permission from their parents due to their financial dependence for funding their study abroad, none of the students reported having been pressured into abiding with their parents' will regarding pursuing postgraduate study overseas. It was they themselves rather than their parents who had the final say in choosing their life path, with their family members giving support or at most some general advice.

Compared with the kinship influence, peer group pressure and norms seemed to play a much more crucial role in affecting the participants' decisions. This presented itself as an exclusive motive among Sino-British university graduates. The literature review found no evidence for it in

the previous research. As it was a common choice among their friends and university alumni to continue with further study abroad, most of the participants tended to follow suit. This suggested that graduates of Sino-British universities could stand as a unique segment among Chinese tertiary international students.

## **5.2 Motivations for choosing the UK as overseas study destination**

As presented in the literature review, previous studies on the motivations for Chinese international students for selecting the UK as their overseas study destination revealed five major themes, namely knowledge and awareness, academic considerations, environment, future development opportunities, and financial considerations. Filling the gap in the limited research focusing solely on Chinese students choosing to undertake postgraduate study in the UK, the current study found some similar views under each of these five themes. Furthermore, two themes—knowledge and awareness as well as academic considerations—were found to have considerably closer relations with the participants' undergraduate experience at T University. This discovery made up in part for the lack of probe in Wu's (2014) research into how the students' experience prior to doing their master's degree in the UK would affect their study destination choice.

The previous studies demonstrated that greater knowledge and awareness of studying abroad in one certain country often served as a reliable predictor of Chinese international students' overseas destination choices (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Zwart, 2013). This study confirmed this finding. For the participants in this research, common information sources included family members, friends, university alumni, and education agencies, with peers and university alumni playing the most significant part. As pursuing postgraduate study in the UK was a trend at T University and with friends in the '2+2' pathway already studying in the UK at the undergraduate level, the undergrads in the '4+X' pathway had privileged access and were particularly susceptible to information related to studying in the UK. Apart from this aspect, the impact of the experience at a Sino-British university were also reflected in the participants' familiarity with the British higher education system which, in some cases, contributed to their preference for continuing with their studies at a higher level within the same system, thus in the

UK.

The influence of T University's British education mode was also noticeable in the participants' academic considerations concerning the relative magnitude of admission requirements for master's programmes in different countries. Thanks to their Sino-British university experience, the competitive advantages they enjoyed in applying for postgraduate study in the UK appeared critical to their bias in favour of the UK as their ideal study destination. They put more emphasis on this aspect than the students in similar studies (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Dong, 2012; Lu et al., 2014). This again demonstrated the unique features that set Sino-British university undergrads apart from other Chinese international students. The other academic considerations discovered in this research resembled those commonly described in the previous research. Most notably, the students regarded British universities most favourably for their world-renowned prestige stemming from the criteria of global university rankings (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Dong, 2012; Huang, 2013; Li & Lv, 2004; Rudd et al., 2012; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006; Zwart, 2013).

When taking into account in a broad sense the importance of an amicable social environment, the students' experience at T University also played a part, for the friends that the participants made during their undergraduate study would constitute an integral part in the environment where the participants intended to stay in a foreign country. This led to them selecting the UK, for it would be the same destination chosen by the majority of their friends. Although no previous studies considered the influence of friends under the theme of environmental motives, some overlapping aspects did emerge. The previous research cited prominently Chinese international students' concern about safety issues, especially the unfavourable impression many of them expressed regarding studying in the US (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2017; Lu et al., 2014; Mazzarol et al., 2001; Wang, 2017; Zwart, 2013). Some participants in this study shared this concern.

Aside from the three themes discussed above, this research uncovered no evidence that the remaining two themes bore relevance to the participants' experience at T University. Similar to findings in the existing research, the distinctively short duration of master's programmes in the UK was associated with both motives of boosting career development and of saving on the financial cost of pursuing study overseas (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Rudd et al., 2012; Wu, 2014; Zheng & Dai, 2006). Besides, this feature carried greater weight among the participants

regarding their career development considerations in comparison with their concerns over expenses. This could probably be attributed to the socioeconomic status of the participants' families. Research has demonstrated that most undergraduates studying at Sino-foreign cooperative universities come from middle-class family backgrounds, with their parents' incomes well above the national average (Dai, 2018). It could be implied that the parents of the participants in the current study could afford to pay their children's educational fees, no matter which foreign country they chose.

### **5.3 Influences of Sino-British university experience on decision-making**

As illustrated in the findings and the discussions above, the participants' previous experience of studying at a Sino-British university as undergrads had various effects on the formulation of both motivations for pursuing postgraduate study abroad and for choosing the UK as overseas study destination. The extent to which this experience impacted their decision-making varied from theme to theme.

With regard to the motives for undertaking postgraduate study overseas, academic motives, self-formation motives, and peer group norms seemed to have a closer association with the participants' stay at T University than their career development motives. The undergraduate experience at T University enabled the participants to become aware of the strengths of Western higher education in terms of intellectual atmosphere. They also spotted the flaws in the attempt of their university to provide 'authentic' international education on campus within China. In addition, thanks to the process of self-exploration inspired by the relaxed environment at T University, combined with the influences from teachers and peers, the participants underwent a crucial stage of self-development throughout their four years spent at a Sino-British university. It could be said that in most cases, the education mode of this kind of university provided ideal conditions for nurturing their aspirations for studying abroad. Nevertheless, it should not be neglected that the participants readily perceived that studying at a Sino-British university to some extent hindered them from pursuing paths other than doing postgraduate study abroad. As noted above, the gap in their curriculum might impede success in the national postgraduate entrance exam and the poor name recognition of such Sino-foreign universities could put graduates at a disadvantage in job

hunting. Given these obstacles to undertaking postgraduate study in mainland China and to starting a job right after earning a bachelor's degree, the participants were somehow pushed to follow the only alternative path they felt was open to them.

When it comes to selecting a particular country as a study destination, the involvement of a British higher education institution in the Sino-British cooperative university appeared to play a markedly significant role. Kumari's (2018) report suggested how transnational education provision by British universities could serve as a deliberate promotional channel for directing tertiary international students to the UK for further study. In line with this statement, the findings in this research proved that studying at a Sino-British university was most likely to influence the students to prefer the UK as a destination over other popular countries. This mainly pertained to more accessible information about the British higher education system and greater ease with postgraduate admissions for programmes in the UK due to the connections between the Sino-British university and its parent British university. Having decided to undertake postgraduate study abroad, the undergrads at this kind of university would attach great weight to practical issues when comparing different countries. In other words, they were more concerned about in which country they were capable of being admitted into master's programmes as well as the potential payoffs for obtaining a master's degree there. Meanwhile, less directly relevant to the experience at a Sino-British university, the special appeal of the shorter study duration and safer social environment in the UK had additional impacts on the participants' preference for this country.

## Chapter Six Conclusion

Contributing to the limited literature on Chinese tertiary students' motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK, this study has illuminated the considerations of Sino-British cooperative university graduates, who stand as a unique group among the whole Chinese international student body. It has responded to two research questions: 1) Why do Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university choose to pursue postgraduate study in the UK? 2) How does the experience of studying at a Sino-British cooperative university influence these students' decision-making? By addressing these questions, this research has gone beyond previous studies that treated Chinese international students in pursuit of postgraduate study abroad as a single category. It has given visibility to some distinct features of the education mode provided in Sino-British cooperative institutions.

In dealing with the first research question, this study broke it down into two aspects: one concerning the motivations for pursuing postgraduate study abroad and the other regarding the choice of the UK as the preferred overseas study destination. The participants' motives for undertaking postgraduate study abroad included academic motives, career development motives, self-formation motives, and the normative influence of peers. As for their reasons for selecting the UK, the participants cited two themes as their critical considerations: their greater knowledge and awareness of postgraduate study in the UK as well as the less demanding admission requirements. In addition, such factors as career development, social environment, and financial cost also played a part.

Closely intertwined with the first question, the second research question has addressed the research gap in examining the relations between undergraduate study experience at a Sino-British university and the students' decision-making. Regarding the motivations for studying abroad, the participants' academic motives, self-formation motives, and impact of the norm in the peer group were found to have more significant associations with their undergraduate experience. Meanwhile, the positional disadvantages of having a Sino-British university qualification in job seeking to some extent reinforced their choice of pursuing postgraduate study abroad among several future development paths. This study also highlighted how the education available at a Sino-British cooperative university helped to steer the students towards seeking international education in the

UK. The university provided them with a convenient information platform and a viable springboard for acquiring 'fast track' admissions into master's programmes in the UK.

Building on the present study, it could be potentially fruitful for future research to follow the idea of probing latent variations within the overall Chinese tertiary international student body. Given the common choice of undertaking postgraduate study in the UK among Sino-British university undergraduates, it might be worthwhile examining the similarities and differences in motivations between students in the '4+0' pathway and those in the '2+2' pathway. In addition, by relating the current findings with the previous relevant literature, this research has already made some comparisons between the motivations held by Sino-British university students and their counterparts from traditional Chinese universities. Nevertheless, future investigation could be carried out in more rigorous ways, such as conducting a cross-group analysis of students from the same major in these two types of universities. This could contribute to further exploring the uniqueness of Sino-British university education and more generally transnational education in this global era.

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## Appendix A Interview Guide

### Chinese version

#### 1. 引入：教育经历

先了解现在所就读的专业及本科专业；

请你简单描述一下你的教育经历（从小学至今）（解释小升初、初升高、高考择校）。

- a) 小学
- b) 中学（初中；高中）
- c) 本科
- d) 硕士

#### 2. 本科毕业继续读硕的原因

请问你本科毕业后为什么决定继续升学读硕士而不是直接工作呢？

- a) 未来规划（学历认可度；职业发展需要-晋升）
- b) 学科特性（专业特点；转专业的打算）
- c) 个人发展（素质提升）

#### 3. 出国读硕士的原因

请问你为什么决定出国而不是在国内读硕士呢？

- a) 学术层面（教育质量；国内硕士教育不利因素-竞争压力；某些专业没有提供课程；英语能力）
- b) 未来发展（就业 - 回国/留在国外；移民打算）
- c) 个人提升（海外经历，跨文化经历；受限制较小，自主空间大）
- d) 他人影响，例如父母（出国留学是你自己的决定吗？有没有受其他人影响呢？）
- e) 经济因素（本来本科阶段就打算出国，但学费太贵）

#### 4. 选择在英国读硕士的原因

请问你为什么选择来英国读硕士呢？

- 请问你之前有没有考虑过其它国家呢？
  - 请问你有没有申请其它国家的硕士项目呢？
  - 请问你最后是怎么决定来英国的呢？（英美都申请，国家/学校的考虑）
- a) 对英国的了解程度（父母/亲戚/朋友/校友；本科大学是中英合办大学，英国元素）
  - b) 学术层面（英国教育质量；英国学校名气-大学排名；英国学历的认可度；课程特点；申请难度-项目，签证）
  - c) 环境层面（英语语言环境；文化多样性；自然环境；安全）
  - d) 未来发展（就业-留英工作机会，就业市场对英国学历认可度，海外留学经历，硕士项目时长短，较早开始积累工作经验；移民打算）
  - e) 经济因素（英国硕士学制短）

（处理被访者对问题 2-4 的回答时灵活应对，被访者可能会联系其在中英合办大学读本科的经历讲述原因，如果被访者没有直接提及，则更直接地询问问题 5）

#### 5. 本科在中英合办大学就读经历对选择英国读硕的影响

请问你会觉得在 T 中英合办大学读本科的经历有影响你决定来英国读硕吗？

- 请问你是读本科之前就有出国读硕的打算吗？

如果有：当初想要出国的想法是出于什么考虑呢？之前就想来英国读硕吗？来 T 大学读本科只有你的打算有没有什么变化呢？（最初仅有出国打算，逐渐清晰决定要来英国；本科国际化经历让自己对海外求学更有信心-熏陶，为出国做准备；本科经历还不够国际化，仍需出国）

如果是本科阶段才有此打算：本科国际化经历；同学影响

- a) 全英文授课（包括第一学年的学术英语课程） - 语言能力
- b) 学制（选课、教材、授课方式、教学活动、作业、考核、成绩） - 国际学术视野
- c) 外教/有留学背景的中国老师
- d) 有海外求学经历的同学，国际学生 - 跨文化沟通能力，开放的心态
- e) 和跨文化相关的课外活动
- f) 学校对出国升学的宣传和支持（学校设有出国考试中心）
- g) 校园文化

### ***English version***

#### **1. Introduction: Asking about education history**

Could you please tell me about your educational experience (perhaps starting from primary school)? (Expand a little bit on each educational choice.)

- a) Primary education
- b) Secondary education (Junior high; Senior high)
- c) Undergraduate
- d) Master's

#### **2. Why doing a postgraduate degree?**

Why did you choose to do a postgraduate degree following your graduation from T University?

- a) Future plans (Recognition by employers; Career development)
- b) Subject
- c) Self-formation

#### **3. Why going abroad to do a postgraduate degree?**

Why did you choose to go abroad to do this postgraduate degree? (Why not in China?)

- a) Academic ( Quality of education; Unfavourable conditions with domestic tertiary education – competition, disciplines unavailable; English language skills)
- b) Future development ( Employment – back to China/work overseas; Immigration)
- c) Self-formation ( International/intercultural experience; Freedom with self-fashioning)
- d) Family's influence (Is this your own decision? Has anyone else influenced your decision? How?)
- e) Financial (Could have studied abroad for undergraduate study, but too expensive)

#### **4. Why doing a master's degree in the UK?**

Why did you choose to come to the UK to do this postgraduate degree?

- Have you considered other countries as overseas study destination? Why?
- Have you applied to postgraduate programmes in other countries? Why?
- How did you decide on choosing the UK? Why?
- a) Knowledge and awareness ( Family/relatives/friends/alumni; One of the parent universities is a British university – familiarity)
- b) Academic ( Quality of the British system; Reputation of institutions - rankings; Recognition of qualifications; Course features; Ease with application)
- c) Environment ( English-speaking social environment; Cultural diversity; Natural environment; Crime and safety)
- d) Future development ( Career: job opportunities overseas/widely-recognised qualifications, international studying experience, shorter duration of master's programmes; Immigration)
- e) Financial (Shorter duration of master's programmes)

(Flexible in relating responses to question no.2-4 with the participant's study experience at T University as an undergraduate student. If the connection is not explicitly mentioned, then directly ask question no.5)

#### **5. Influence of the study experience at a Sino-British university on the decision-making**

What are the influences (if any) of your study experience at T University as an undergraduate student on your decision-making? (Explain)

- Did you decide to pursue postgraduate study abroad before the start of or during your undergraduate study?

For those having made the decision early on: Has your desire to do a master's degree abroad got reinforced by your experience at T University? (Due to international experience / Experience at a Sino-British university not international enough? At first only having the idea of studying abroad, later favouring the UK?)

For those making the decision later: International experience? Influence from peers?

- a) English as the medium of instruction (including first year EAP course) – English language proficiency
- b) Curriculum (materials, instructional methods – small class, activities, assignments, evaluation methods) – perspective broadened
- c) Foreign faculty
- d) Classmates with studying abroad experience, International students – ability to live in a pluralistic context, open-mindedness
- e) Extra-curricular activities that are international
- f) University supportive of study abroad, marketing of international education opportunities
- g) International examinations centre
- h) Campus culture

## Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

### UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Director Professor Jo-Anne Baird



### **Motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK: Perspectives of Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-CIA-19-115

**1. *What is the purpose of this research?***

This study aims to investigate the motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK among Chinese students who have finished their undergraduate study at a Sino-British university (university cooperatively run by a Chinese higher education institution and a British higher education institution) in China. It is conducted in order to explore the reasons for this particular group of Chinese international students to choose to do a master's degree in the UK and how their experience of studying at a Sino-British university as an undergraduate student has influenced their decision-making.

**2. *Why have I been invited to take part?***

You have been invited because you are a most recent graduate of the Sino-British university chosen as the case for this research, who is currently studying for a master's degree in the UK. Participants have been selected based on the subjects that they were enrolled in as an undergraduate student, which spread across different departments within the university. Only those who spent the entire four years in China (4+X pathway) have been included to take part.

**3. *Do I have to take part?***

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason, by advising the researchers of this decision.

**4. *What will happen to me if I take part in the research?***

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to attend a one-to-one face-to-face interview carried out by the researcher, asking you about your reasons for choosing to do a master's degree in the UK after obtaining your undergraduate degree and the influence of your undergraduate study experience on your decision-making. This should take approximately one hour. The entire interview will be audio-recorded for the purpose of data analysis. If you are still happy to take part, you will then be asked to sign a consent form.

**5. *Are there any potential risks in taking part?***

There is no known risk to taking part except that there is a slight possibility that you might be identifiable due to recognition by participants' undergraduate institution and subjects in the final report. In order to reduce any potential risks, the researcher will make every effort to preserve confidentiality.

**6. *Are there any benefits in taking part?***

The direct benefit to you from taking part in this research is that you are provided with a chance to look back reflecting on your master's study decision-making. In a broader sense, you will be able to contribute to deepening the understanding of Chinese students' study abroad choice, particularly associated with the graduates of Sino-foreign universities in China. Moreover, you will help to add to the knowledge about the influence of Sino-British universities on the attractiveness of British higher education institutions, which is beneficial to the development of marketing strategies for these higher education providers.

**7. *What happens to the data provided?***

The information you provide as part of the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified (eg. your name, audio recording), is known as **personal data**. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data).

We will minimise our use of personal data in the study as much as possible.

The **research data** (written consent forms) will be stored confidentially in a locked cupboard in the researcher's accommodation until the end of the research project and then shredded.

The **personal data** (audio recordings) will be stored confidentially in the researcher's personal password-protected laptop under file name of an English name beginning with a random English letter (A-Z) replacing your name. This English name is the pseudonym that identifies you throughout this study and the linkage information entailing the match between the pseudonym and your name will be saved separately from the research data on a password-protected USB flash drive. The audio recordings and the linkage information will be deleted after the research project finishes.

The researcher and her supervisor (as needed) will have access to the research data and the personal data. Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the research.

We would like your permission to use direct quotes with your name replaced by an English name beginning with a random English letter (A-Z) in the final report.

Transcriptions of the audio recordings will be stored in the researcher's personal password-protected computer after the study has finished. The files will be deleted 3 years after the publication of the thesis in the University Archives.

**8. *Will the research be published?***

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

The research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be openly accessible.

**9. Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: ED-CIA-19-115).

**10. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the relevant researcher ( ) or her supervisor ( ), who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk); Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

**11. Data Protection**

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/>.

**12. Further Information and Contact Details**

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

(MSc student)  
Department of Education, University of Oxford  
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
Tel:   
Email:

# Appendix C Participant Consent Form

## UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027  
[general.enquires@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:general.enquires@education.ox.ac.uk) [www.education.ox.ac.uk](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk)

Director Professor Jo-Anne Baird



### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-19-115

#### **Motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK: Perspectives of Chinese graduates of a Sino-British cooperative university**

**Purpose of Study:** This study aims to investigate the motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK among Chinese students who have finished their undergraduate study at a Sino-British university in China. It is conducted in order to explore the reasons for this particular group of Chinese international students to choose to do a master's degree in the UK and how their experience of studying at a Sino-British university as an undergraduate student has influenced their decision-making.

*Please initial each box*

- |    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1  | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2  | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3  | I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4  | I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5  | I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6  | I understand how this research will be written up and published.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7  | I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8  | I consent to being audio recorded.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9  | I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 | I agree to take part in the study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

dd / mm / yyyy  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

dd / mm / yyyy  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix D CUREC Approval

Dear [REDACTED]

Title: "A decision made early on? Chinese Sino-British university graduates' motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK"

The above application (reference number ED-CIA-19-115) has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted. In response to this approval, **please provide a copy of the CUREC application form that has also been signed by your supervisor.**

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/questions/reporting\\_child\\_abuse\\_wda74908.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/questions/reporting_child_abuse_wda74908.html)

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to [research.office@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:research.office@education.ox.ac.uk) for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua McGrane

Member of DREC

# CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

## Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution.

They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check "[Where and how to apply for ethical review](#)" and the [CUREC flowchart](#) first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your [supporting documents](#), to your [Departmental Research Ethics Committee \(DREC\)](#) (if applicable). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk) using your official [ox.ac.uk](#) email address. **Only emailed applications will be accepted.**

### WHAT THIS CHECKLIST IS DESIGNED FOR

This **CUREC 1A checklist** is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities where ethical issues are relatively few and straightforward. Interviews, field work and oral history are also included in the CUREC process.

The **full CUREC 2 application** is only required where certain project characteristics (e.g. type of participants, or procedures) result in a more complex set of ethical issues. It is expected that only in a limited number of cases will it be necessary for researchers to complete a CUREC 2 application. The checklist below will direct you to a CUREC 2 application if needed.

### WHAT THIS CHECKLIST WILL NOT ASSESS

This checklist does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, or compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires. As **principal researcher (i.e. principal investigator)**, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met.

CUREC does not review studies classed as **audit** (see [Glossary](#) and [Decision Flowchart for CUREC](#) on our website).

If your study involves **NHS patients, NHS staff / data / facilities, or human tissue**, please check the [Decision Flowchart for NHS approval](#) and contact the [Clinical Trials and Research Governance \(CTRG\) team](#) in the first instance.

Further information on the University's research ethics procedures is available from the [CUREC website](#).

**SECTION A: Filter for CUREC2 application**

This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues which require the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application.

**(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column as appropriate to indicate your response.)**

<p>1. Are research participants classed as <b>people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question</b>? (This may include those under 18 (though see "<b>competent youths</b>"), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's <b>Safeguarding Code of Practice</b> and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk, including the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training.</p> <p><b>(Note: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, please answer „Yes“ here and also answer question 5 below.)</b></p>	Yes	No X
<p>2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?</p>	Yes	No X
<p>3. Does the research involve the deception of participants?</p>	Yes	No X
<p>4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (<b>the Prevent duty</b>), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our <b>Best Practice Guidance web page</b>.</p>	Yes	No X

If you have answered „No“ to all of the questions above please go to **Section B**. If you have answered „Yes“ to any question above continue to question 5 below.

<p>5. Is your project covered by a CUREC <b>approved procedure</b> (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?</p>	Yes	No
---	-----	----

If yes, please give research procedure number(s):

If you answered „Yes“ to **ANY** of questions 1-4, and answered „No“ to question 5, **please stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, please complete the **CUREC 2 application form** from the CUREC website. Then submit the CUREC 2 form for ethical review.  
 If you answered „Yes“ to ANY of questions 1-3, and answered „Yes“ to question 5, please go on to **Section B**.

**SECTION B: Contact details and project description (NB: must be typed not handwritten)**

<b>Contact details:</b>	
1. <b>Principal investigator / supervisor</b> (if student research (title and full name):	[Redacted]
2. Name of student (if student research):	[Redacted]
3. Degree programme, e.g. DPhil, BA, MPhil, BSc, MSc (if student research):	MSc in Education (Comparative and International Education)
4. Department or Institute name:	Department of Education
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above):	[Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]
6. University e-mail ( <b>not</b> private email) and telephone:	[Redacted]

7. Name and status of others taking part in the project, e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant:	N/a
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**SECTION B continued**

**Project description:**

8. Title of research project:	A decision made early on? Chinese Sino-British university graduates" motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted:	London, Durham, Edinburgh
10. If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? (This has to be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out <u>University travel insurance</u> .)	Yes No Not required in this instance X
11. Anticipated duration of research project overall:	6 months or years (maximum 5)
12. Anticipated start and end dates of the research project involving human participants:	From: 11/03/19 To: 09/08/19 Please note that you will need ethics approval <b>before</b> you start your research. CUREC 1As may take up to 30 days to process.

13. External organisation funding the research (if applicable): N/a

14. Title and very brief and simple lay description of **research** (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants.

a) Title, brief description of research (150 words) in lay language. When describing the research, please include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. **Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.**

Title:  
A decision made early on? Chinese Sino-British university graduates" motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK

Description of research:  
This research aims to investigate the motivations for pursuing postgraduate study in the UK among Chinese students who have finished their undergraduate study at a Sino-British university (university cooperatively run by a Chinese higher education institution and a British higher education institution) in China. One-to-one face-to-face semi-structured interviews each lasting for about an hour will be conducted with the participants, asking about their reasons for choosing to do a master's degree in the UK and how their experience of studying at a Sino-British university as an undergrad has influenced their decision-making. The researcher will carefully apply „British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research" when carrying out the research. The data obtained through the interviews will be transcribed and analysed for the researcher to write a master's dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MSc in Education (Comparative and International Education).

## SECTION B continued

b) Description of participants and [obtaining informed consent](#) (200 words). When describing participants, please include

- criteria for inclusion/exclusion
- method of recruitment
- processes for consent to participate

Please ensure you attach as separate documents (if applicable, in English translation):

- your [recruitment and advertisement material](#) e.g. a poster or brief invitation letter/ email
- information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part e.g. [written information sheets](#) or (only if applicable) [oral information scripts](#).
- a document to record informed consent. Templates for [written consent forms](#) and/or [oral information scripts](#) (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- a guide to interview questions (this may be a list of questions to be asked, or a preliminary scope of questions), or a sample of other instruments (such as a sample questionnaire)
- (if relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part

This research plans to recruit ten Chinese students who finished undergraduate study at [REDACTED] (a Sino-British university) in China in 2018 and are currently pursuing a master's degree in the UK. Since this Sino-British university offers undergraduate programmes where students could choose to spend the whole four years in China or study in China for the first two years followed by a transfer to its parent British university, only students who have spent the entire four years in China will be chosen as the participants.

With regards to recruiting potential participants, the researcher will use a personal contact who is a graduate of this Sino-British university and now studies at University of Oxford. Through this contact, students qualified for participating in this research will be reached via Wechat.

The researcher will explain what this research entails and send them a written information sheet to offer more detailed information. Once they agree to take part in this research and arrange with the researcher the exact time and place (ideally in/near the participant's university in the UK), they will be asked to sign a written consent form before the interview starts for the purpose of recording informed consent.

15. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? Please do not answer „none“. The committee needs to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. These issues could relate to:

- your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher (please see the [University's](#) and [Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork](#) guidance
- participant burdens and/or risks, and
- data protection/ confidentiality (please also see section 18).

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see <http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>

- Ethical issue with snowball sampling:

There exists some concern that snowball sampling might lead to the referring individual's divulgence of information about other potential participants that they would prefer to be kept confidential. To address this issue, the researcher will pay attention to not asking the referring individual about too much personal information of the potential participants except their name, subject, UK institution and way of contact. This is to ensure that most of the detailed personal information will be obtained directly from the participants rather than being disclosed by the referring individuals.

- Voluntary informed consent:

The researcher will make sure that the participants are fully informed of the content of the research by providing them with accurate and detailed information sheet. The researcher will then take their written consent using the consent form before the data collection process begins. It will be ensured that they don't feel pressured taking part in this research and that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any point for any or no reason. Particularly, the participants will be clearly informed that the interviews will be audio-recorded. Their specific consent regarding this issue will be asked for.

- Privacy:

The questions covered in the interviews of this research might touch upon some personal issues, such as family background and individual life experiences. The researcher will make every effort to protect the participants' rights to confidentiality by securely storing the data collected in line with the Data Protection Act (1998) and carefully removing any means of identification while using the data.

### Section B continued

16. Will you obtain [informed consent](#) according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline before participation?

Yes X

No

If you have marked „No“, please give a brief explanation and justification for this decision here:

17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues?

This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.

Yes

No X

If you have marked „Yes“, please make sure that you have included some **supporting information** (as directed in question 14 of this section) showing the range of questions covering these issues.

### 18. Management and handling of personal and other research data

Your management and handling of [personal data](#) and [special category data](#) of human participants, either directly or via a third party, will need to comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the new Data Protection Act, as set out in the [University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#). In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#). For advice on research data management and security, please consult with the University's Research Data Team ([researchdata@ox.ac.uk](mailto:researchdata@ox.ac.uk)) and/or your local IT department and the University's [web pages on research data management](#).

<p>a) Will your research involve the collection of <b>records of consent</b> (e.g. written forms, audio-recorded, or other recorded consent)?</p> <p><b>If 'Yes', these will be classed as fully identifiable personal data (directly linked to an individual).</b></p>	Yes X	No
<p>b) Will your research involve the collection of <b>other personal data</b>?</p> <p><b>If 'Yes', specify in what form(s) this will be stored:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully identifiable (directly linked to an individual)</li> <li>• Pseudonymised (potentially identifiable as data may be attributed to an individual if linkage information can be accessed elsewhere by researchers)</li> <li>• Fully anonymised (i.e. cannot be linked to an individual)</li> </ul>	Yes X	No
<p>c) Will any of the personal data you collect classify as <b>special category</b> data?</p> <p><b>If 'Yes', in what form(s) will this be stored:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully identifiable (directly linked to an individual)</li> <li>• Pseudonymised (potentially identifiable as data may be attributed to an individual if linkage information can be accessed elsewhere by researchers)</li> <li>• Fully anonymised (i.e. cannot be linked to an individual)</li> </ul>	Yes	No X
<p>d) How will any personally identifiable data be collected, <a href="#">transferred and backed up</a>? Please describe the arrangements for any physical transfer of personal data (including paper records and data captured electronically via portable media) from where it is collected to local storage.</p>		

The paper records of the written informed consent signed by the participants will be collected before each interview starts and then brought back to Oxford by the researcher from the interview setting.

Each of the interviews conducted with the participants will be audio-recorded by the researcher using „Voice Memos“ app on a mobile phone.

After each interview, the researcher will transfer the audio file stored in the mobile phone to a personal password-protected laptop and save the recordings under file names of random letters replacing the participants' names. The folder containing the files will be protected by a password.

The researcher will then use the Oxford University's HFS to manually make backup copies of all the files stored on the laptop.

e) Where, and for how long, will participants' personally identifiable data be stored during and after the study? (Please outline the procedures for ensuring confidentiality, eg security arrangements, anonymisation or pseudonymisation of such data. Please distinguish between records of consent and other forms of personally identifiable data stored)

The paper records will be kept safely in a folder and placed in a locked cupboard in the researcher's accommodation throughout the duration of the researcher's master's study until the end of the research project.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be stored in the researcher's personal password-protected laptop under file names of random letters replacing the participants' names. The folder containing the files will be protected by a password and will be kept throughout the duration of the researcher's master's study until the end of the research project.

f) If storing pseudonymised data, please confirm that identifiers will be held separately from the research data and linked through a unique study number. Specify how and at what point the pseudonymisation will occur, how the linkage information will be stored and state whether or not (and when) the linkage will be destroyed.

Pseudonymisation will occur when the audio recordings of interviews are transferred and stored in the researcher's personal password-protected laptop. Each of the participants will be given a randomly assigned English letter (A-Z) to replace his or her real name. The linkage information entailing the match between the pseudonyms and the participants' names will be saved separately from the research data on a password-protected USB flash drive until the end of the research project and then promptly destroyed.

g) Who will have access to the personally identifiable data? If personally identifiable data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred/disclosed securely?

The researcher and her supervisor (as needed) will have access to the data.

h) When and how will personally identifiable data be destroyed? (NB. Personally identifiable data should be destroyed when no longer required.)

Personal identifiable data will be destroyed at the end of the research project. The paper records of consent will be shredded and the audio recordings as well as the linkage information will be deleted completely.

i) How, where and for how long will other research data be stored after the study has finished? For more information about University and research funder retention policies, please see the University's web pages on [research data management](#).

Transcriptions of the audio recordings will be stored in the researcher's personal password-protected computer after the study has finished. The files will be deleted three years after the dissertation has been published in the University Archives, in compliance with the University Policy on the Management of Data Supporting Research Outputs.

**SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used**

<b>Method used:</b> Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet	<b>Please mark 'X'</b>
1. Analysis of existing records	
2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	X
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	
4. Participant observation	
5. Covert observation	
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	
9. Using social media	
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	
12. Focus group	
13. Interview	X
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	X
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
17. Others (please specify):	

**SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training**

In this section, please mark „X“ against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. **Note:** this is not an exhaustive list.

**Please mark ‘X’**

<b>Research specialism/ methodology</b>	<b>Association and guidance document</b>	
Anthropology	<a href="#">Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth</a>	
Criminology	<a href="http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics/">http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics/</a>	
Education	<a href="#">British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</a>	X
Geography	<a href="#">Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics</a>	
History	<a href="#">Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines</a>	
Internet-based Research	<a href="#">British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet</a> <a href="#">Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide</a> Also see our <a href="#">Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research</a>	
Law (Socio-Legal)	<a href="#">Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research</a>	
Management	<a href="#">Academy of Management’s Professional Code of Ethics</a>	
Political Science	<a href="#">American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science</a>	
Politics	<a href="#">Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct</a>	
Psychology	<a href="#">British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct</a>	
Social Research	<a href="#">Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines</a>	
Sociology	<a href="#">The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice</a>	
Visual Research	<a href="#">ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research</a>	
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		

Please indicate what training in research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at <http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/support/training/ethics>).

If no formal training has been undertaken, please indicate any discussions of research methodology between researchers and supervisors here.

The researcher has completed “Foundations of Education Research 1: Concepts and Design” course in the Michaelmas Term 2018, in which the Week 5 session (combining both a lecture and a workshop) discussed ethical issues and responsibilities integral to social research, particularly educational research. Several ethical dilemmas and challenges that researchers might encounter in their own research questions were addressed. In addition, the researcher wrote her summative assignment for this course on the challenges in developing ethically responsible research, which deepened her understanding of research ethics.

**SECTION E: Signatures** (The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a [DREC](#), check which signature option it prefers.)

- **Option 1:** „Electronic signatures“, i.e. email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address, can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities. **Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted in the sections below.**
- **Option 2:** Handwritten (wet-ink) signatures. Please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.

**Please ensure this checklist is signed by:**

For staff research:	For student research:
1. <a href="#">Principal investigator</a>	1. <a href="#">Principal investigator</a> (project supervisor)
2. <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>	2. <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>
	3. <b>Student researcher</b>

**1. Principal investigator signature/supervisor signature (if student research)**

I understand my responsibilities as [principal investigator](#) as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal investigator on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

**Signature:** .....

**Print name** (block capitals): ..... **Date:** .....

**2. Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

- (i) consider the principal investigator to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
- (ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal investigator's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
- (iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate [peer review](#); and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the [public interest](#).

**Signed by Head of Department or nominee** (example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies):

**Signature:** .....

**Print name** (block capitals): ..... **Date:** .....

**3. Student signature (if student research)**

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal investigator properly authorised by the CUREC system.

**Signed by student:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Print name** (block capitals): .....

SECTION F: SUBMITTING THE COMPLETED CHECKLIST	Please mark 'X'
1. Check you have completed all sections (A-E)	X
2. Ensure your application is signed by you, your supervisor (if student) and department	X
3. <b>Please attach all supporting documents (see section B, question 14b for details).</b> If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. <b>This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.</b>	X
4. Ensure you have declared conflicts of interest (if any) in Section B, question 14a.	
5. If your department has a <a href="#">Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)</a> , submit this checklist and supporting information to the appropriate departmental officer.	X
6. If your department does not have a DREC, submit the checklist and supporting information to the SSH IDREC (email <a href="mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk">ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk</a> ).	
7. Applications must be sent by email from your official ox.ac.uk email account. Please do not send applications by post.	X