

DEPOSIT AND CONSULTATION OF DISSERTATION

One copy of your dissertation will be deposited in ORA (Oxford University Research Archive), where it is intended to be freely available online. In order to facilitate this, you are requested to complete and sign the form below.

Please use block capitals

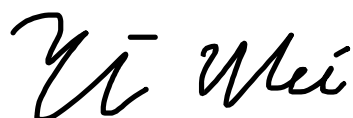
Surname WEI	
First names (in full) YI	
Faculty board	EDUCATION
Degree name and pathway Msc in Education (Higher Education)	
Title of dissertation A Qualitative Investigation of Parental Aspirations to International Education in China N.B. The title stated here must be precisely the same as that stated on the title page of the thesis submitted. A candidate wishing to amend the title previously approved by the faculty must apply to the faculty board for permission to do so.	
Supervisor James Robson	
Subject keywords	<i>Enter your own keywords or phrases to describe your work. This information helps us describe your work in ORA</i>
International student mobility, parental aspirations, Chinese policy	
Research methods used	<i>This information helps us describe your work on SOLO for future students e.g. quantitative, interviews, vocabulary test, systematic review, etc.</i>
Interviews	

--

Declaration by the candidate as author of the dissertation

1. I understand that I am the owner of this dissertation and that the copyright rests with me unless I specifically transfer it to another person.
2. I understand that the Department requires that I shall deposit one copy of my dissertation in the Oxford University Research Archive ('ORA') where it shall be freely available online for use in accordance with ORA's Terms and Conditions of Use [https://ora.ox.ac.uk/terms_of_use].
3. I understand that this dissertation should not contain material that can be used to personally identify individuals or specific groups of individuals, and that such material should be removed before this dissertation is deposited in ORA.
4. I agree to be bound by the terms of the ORA Grant of Non-exclusive Licence [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ora/deposit-in-ora/deposit-licence] and I warrant that to the best of my knowledge, making my thesis available on the internet will not infringe copyright or any other rights of any other person or party, nor contain defamatory material.
5. I agree that my dissertation shall be available for download in ORA in accordance with paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above.

Signed [an electronic signature is sufficient]:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi Mei'.

Date: 8/31/2022



Department of Education, University of Oxford

Assignment Cover Sheet

<u>Candidate Number</u> <i>Please note, your student number is NOT your candidate number</i>	1058976
<u>Assignment</u> <i>e.g. CDE: Interventions or CIE2</i>	Master's thesis
<u>Term</u> <i>Term assignment issued, e.g. MT or HT</i>	N/A
<u>Question</u> <i>If applicable, please note the question number and the FULL question title</i>	N/A
<u>Wordcount</u>	15220

A Qualitative Investigation of Parental Aspirations to International Education in China

Abstract

The 2020s witnessed a scene in terms of health, international relations, and policies. This article inquires into the shifting landscape of decision to international education in the People's Republic of China (PRC). *Shuangjian* and other recently enacted educational policies point to a trend in decentralization of English language and discouragement of mass liberal education in the Chinese context. While covid does not bring about a decrease in number of Chinese students studying in western countries in these two years, there is pervasive concerns surrounding health, safety, and discrimination that cloud student and parents' decision-making. China's world class university movement witnesses a rise in Chinese universities on global university rankings (GURs) schemes and China's emergence as a regional education hub attracting international students. With the increasing uncertainty in pursuing an international degree and growing quality in domestic education, this article explores shifting parental aspirations for international education in Shanghai.

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to thank my interviewees for their participation, enthusiasm, and dedication to my research project. I would like to thank the participants for trusting me and sharing their individualized plans for their children's futures. Charting out a future education plan can be particularly stressful to junior high school parents, and I am grateful towards those who shared their reasonings and aspirations with me during the interviews. I appreciate the parents who accommodated to online interview method and time zone differences. I thank my participants for their valuable time. My study would not have been possible without contributions from my interviewees.

I would like to thank my supervisor for his support throughout the year. He helped immensely with narrowing down my research topic and giving my thoughts a focus. I struggled with finding a focus and a scope that was doable in a year's time, for a master's thesis, and supervision hours with my supervisor was what helped to pin down a focus for my research. His advice in draft edits were also constructive.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude towards my family in China and my friends across the world. Many thanks to my friends in my pathway; my friends from my college; my friends in Vancouver and in Shanghai. I would like to thank my friends who hosted me in Vancouver as I was writing this thesis. Last of all, I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional support and company throughout the rigorous thesis writing process.

List of Abbreviations

GURs	Global university rankings
HEIs	Higher education institutions
Gaokao (高考)	National College Entrance Examination
Zhongkao (中考)	Senior High School Entrance Examination

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	8
Chapter 2 Literature Review	12
2.1 China's Shifting Education Policy Landscape.....	12
2.1.1 Institution of Senior Highschool Entrance Exams in Junior High Bilingual Schools	12
2.1.2 Decentralization of English Language	15
2.1.3 Discouragement of Mass Liberal Education	17
2.2 China's World Class University Building	18
2.3 Impact of Covid-19 on International Education	21
Chapter 3 Methodology	27
Chapter 4 Findings	32
4.1 Chinese education policy changes in context and proofs	32
4.2 China has come a long way with world class university building, but not quite yet ...	33
4.3 Majority still pursues the international path, ones that switch to the national path are exceptions	36
4.4 Reasons for Pursuing Undergraduate Degrees Overseas	37
4.5 Covid affect short-term decisions, but not long-term decisions to international education	39
4.6 Covid as a Push Factor	41
4.7 Predominance of Anglo-America as Higher Education Destination	42
Chapter 5 Discussion	43
Chapter 6 Conclusion	45
6.1 Summary	45
6.2 Limitations and Implications	47
References	49

Appendix A	CUREC Approval	55
Appendix B	Participant Information Sheet.....	56
Appendix C	Participant Consent Form.....	60

Chapter 1 Introduction

The 2020s witnessed a scene in terms of health, international relations, and policies. In the milieu of changing international terrain, this dissertation inquired into the shifting education landscape in the People's Republic of China (PRC). More specifically, this dissertation surveyed the impact of recent Chinese policy changes, China's world class university building projects, and covid-19 health crisis on bilingual junior high school parents' choice to send their children overseas for undergraduate degrees. This study, explorative in nature, examined changes and calculus in parents' decision-making due to an interplay of the three factors. The research study placed Shanghai, a city with an abundance of bilingual and international schools, as the site of inquiry.

Recent Chinese education policies revealed a discouragement of liberal education in China. Firstly, in August 2021, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission published a notice called "Shanghai Elementary and High School Annual Curriculum Plan and Explanation." The notice announced an elimination of English from final exams at public elementary schools in Shanghai (Shanghai Municipal Education Commission). The removal of English from final exams suggested a diminution of English from main subject status to elective subject status, pointing to a decentralization of English language in the public school system. Secondly, the "Implementing Regulations of the PRC Law on the Promotion of Private Education" (Revised in 2021) prohibited the use of foreign teaching material at grade 1 to 9 in public and bilingual schools, interdicted the variable interest equity structure for foreign investment in bilingual elementary and junior high schools, and maintained governing bodies of private schools must be consisted of only Chinese nationals (Marzheuser-Wood & Shi, 2021). The regulations impeded foreign investment in Chinese bilingual schools and showed China's stance to limit foreign influence in Chinese education sector, whether in public or in private bilingual schools. Lastly, due to changes brought through the Double Reduction Policy of 2021, all grade 9 bilingual school students were encouraged to take part in the Senior High School Examination (Sohu News). The inclusion of all students – in public and private systems, wishing to enrol in Chinese or overseas universities – in national unified exams signaled a tightening of national control on bilingual schools and international education in China. The decentralization of English language, altering regulations on

operation and founding of bilingual schools, and inclusion of bilingual school students in national unified examinations gestured a discouragement of liberal education in China.

Covid-19 has had ongoing impact on international student mobility. Figures from Higher Education Statistics Agency in the U.K. and the Open Doors Report in the U.S. both presented a decrease in first year entrants from China in 2020/21 academic year. The global health crisis led to problems of campus closures, emergent decisions of returning or staying, legal status of international students in host countries, online course delivery, and perception of decreased value of degrees. In particular, the U.S. and Australia enacted policies that were hostile towards international students during the pandemic, excluding them from pandemic financial assistance programs and possibly cancelling their work permits (Bilecen, 2020). In addition, covid incited anti-Chinese sentiments in western countries as media depicted the virus as stemming from China (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman). In turn, covid exacerbated existing escalating Sino-US relations (Mok, 2022). While preliminary application statistics from 2021/22 academic year illustrated rising figures of Chinese international students, concerns surrounding health, safety, and discrimination still factored in students and parents' decision-making.

In the past three decades, China engaged itself in world class university building projects. A world class university is “a research university with world-class capacity” and is central to a “nation’s competitiveness in the global knowledge economy” (Wang, Wang, & Liu, 2011, p. 33). With Project 985 and Project 211 in 1990s, and the Double First-class Project in 2015, China poured funds into its higher education sector, boosted research output, orchestrated systematic teaching evaluation, and incentivized publication in English journals. Through these efforts, Chinese universities rapidly climbed up in global university rankings (GURs). According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities, there were 2 Chinese universities ranked in top 500 in 2003, and that figure rose to 78 in 2022 (ARWU). From the perspective of GURs, the quality of Chinese higher education institutions witnessed rapid amelioration. In the same vein, China became not merely a “sending”, but also “receiving” nation of international education (Wen & Hu, 2019). China’s bright economic future (Jiani, 2016) and higher education quality (Wen & Hu, 2019) pulled international students to China. The enhanced quality of China’s higher education through world class university building projects and the emergence of China as a regional education hub may affect Chinese students’ decision to pursue education overseas.

The dominant framework employed by scholars analyzing motivations for study overseas is the “push-pull theory.” Proposed by Lee (1966) and employed in his study on population migration, unfavourable factors “push” people away from their home countries, and favourable factors “pull” people to host countries (Lei et al., 2021, p.2). Albatach employed Lee’s framework to the study of international student mobility (Lei et al., 2021, p.2). In this case, international students’ choice to study overseas is a “cost-benefit analysis between circumstances and educational opportunities” in their home country as compared to their opportunities in the “destination country” (Buckner et al., 2021, p.331). Classic pull factors in international student mobility include better curriculum, faculty, and research in destination countries; advantageous career prospects and enhanced onward mobility upon graduation; a cosmopolitan worldview gained through international education; favourable immigration policy with prospects of gaining foreign citizenship in host countries; and higher ranking of host countries’ higher education institutions in global university ranking schemes. Classic push factors encompass a perceived lower quality of higher education in home country; population density and competition rendering it difficult to enrol in top universities at home; political and economic problems at home; and employer preference for western degrees (Wilkins et al., 2012).

A classic push factor for Chinese students to pursue undergraduate degrees abroad was the “perceived weakness in Chinese higher education system” (Punteney & Wei, 2018, p.39). With China world class university building projects and enhanced quality of Chinese higher education, perhaps, the degree of this push factor is decreasing. Meanwhile, covid situation abroad and hostile stances adopted by some western countries towards its international students may cloud and factor into parents’ decision to send their children overseas for universities. In addition, recent policy changes creating an environment unfavourable to liberal education in China might interfere with parents’ choice of enrolling their children in bilingual schools and encouraging them to apply to universities overseas.

In China, students either took the national or the international path. Students who took the national path enrolled in public schools, partook in Senior Highschool Examination to enter senior high schools, and the National College Entrance examination to enter Chinese universities. On the other hand, Chinese students could take the international path and enrol in bilingual schools, studying AP, IB, and A-level courses at senior high level, and apply for universities overseas.

This dissertation interviewed bilingual junior high school parents and surveyed their plans about their children's choice of senior high schools and universities. The research explored whether some parents would revert from the international path to national path. In other words, it explored whether some current bilingual junior high school students would wish to enrol in public senior high schools and enter Chinese universities due to covid, ameliorating quality of Chinese higher education, and recent Chinese education policies that established an environment unconducive to international education in China. Meanwhile, this dissertation inquired into parents' rationale for choosing the international path for their children and their aspirations for their children's education futures.

Research questions:

How are the intersecting issues of world class university building projects, covid-19 pandemic, and anti-foreign education policies shaping Chinese parents' aspirations for their children to pursue undergraduate degrees overseas?

Why do some parents continue to aspire to international education for their children?

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 China's Shifting Education Policy Landscape

2.1.1 Institution of Senior Highschool Entrance Exams in Junior High Bilingual Schools

In China, gaokao (高考), or the National College Entrance Examination, is known for its rigour and determining effect on Chinese senior high school students. The score the student attains in gaokao single-handedly determine which university, or rank of university, he or she can enter, stratifying students' university and future choices. Similarly, zhongkao (中考), or the Senior High School Examination, impacts Chinese junior high school students' futures. Chinese students attending public junior high schools need to partake in the Senior High School Examination. Up until recently, not all Chinese students who study in bilingual junior high schools need to partake in the Senior High School Examination. The need to take Senior High School Examination depends on what type of bilingual senior high school the student wishes to enter.

There are three types of bilingual senior highs schools in China for Chinese citizens. The international schools solely for foreign nationals are not within the limit of this paper, so they are not explicated here. The first type of bilingual senior high schools for Chinese students is a group of schools that study IB, AP, or A-level programs. Meanwhile, students in these schools retain “domestic student enrolment record” (学籍). In such a way, these students are qualified to take Unified Examination (会考) during senior high school (examination taken to graduate from senior high school), can graduate with Chinese high school diploma, and partake in National College Entrance Examination according to their choice. The first type of bilingual senior high schools is known for “walking with two feet.” Students in these schools can pursue the national and international education path simultaneously (Wangyi News). In Shanghai, 21 bilingual schools belong to this category. In 2014, the Department of Education officially pronounce the schools as the “21 Schools” (Sina News). Junior high school students who wish to apply for the “21 Schools” must take the Senior High School Examination. In Shanghai, the first type of bilingual senior high schools, the “21 schools”, is the most competitive to enter.

The second type of bilingual senior high schools are set up with “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” (全日制普通高中办学许可证). Junior high school students who

wish to enter the second type of schools must also take the Senior High School Examination (Wangyi News). In theory, with “normal senior high school operation permit”, students in the second type of schools can also have “domestic student enrolment record” and participate in Unified Examination and in National College Entrance Examination. However, most schools in this category do not register their students with “domestic student enrolment”, and students in these schools do not take part in Unified Examination and in National College Entrance Examination. Indeed, differed from the first type of bilingual senior high schools, the second type of schools “walks on one foot” and focus on international IB, AP, or A-level education.

The third type of bilingual senior high schools are set up with “training school operation permit” (培训学校办学许可证). Junior high school students who wish to enter the last type of bilingual senior high schools do not need to take the Senior High School Examination (Wangyi News). The Senior High School examination is known for its rigour, long preparation, and the pressure it incurs on students. Some parents who hope to send their children outside for undergraduate degrees wish their children can bypass the Senior High School Examination and receive less pressure. Thus, they enrol their children in the last type of bilingual senior high schools, the ones that do not need Senior High School examination scores to enter. Until recently, this path worked for parents and children who commit to international route and wish to circumvent Senior High School examination.

The situation changed with *Shuangjian*, or the Double Reduction Policy. First introduced in July 24, 2021, the Double Reduction Policy seeks to ease pressure of students during the nine-years compulsory education period from primary to junior high school. The Double Reduction Policy altered regulations on founding tutoring institutions, curriculum in primary schools, and permits to establish new bilingual schools (Xue & Li, 2022). The Double Reduction Policy is People’s Republic of China (PRC) government’s way of reforming the educational landscape and instituting a tighter grip on education. For the purpose of this section, the Double Reduction Policy’s regulations on founding tutoring institutions and bilingual schools is worthy of attention.

On November 23, 2021, a notice from Harrow International School in Haikou city was published online, garnering attention of international and bilingual school parents in China. The notice expounded that all junior high school students from Harrow International School in Haikou must take the Senior High School Examination to enter the school’s own senior high school

division. Those who do not acquire a good grade in the Senior High School Examination can not remain in the school.

Harrow International School in Haikou is founded in 2020. In 2021, when Harrow International School in Haikou wishes to establish a new senior high school division, the school encounters the Double Reduction Policy (Sohu News). According to one of the documents of Double Reduction Policy, called “Ideas on Further Reducing Student Course Load During Mandatory Education Years and on Afterschool Tutoring and Training”, the government will no longer hand out permits for “subject-specific training school operation permit” (Ministry of Education). Indeed, the senior high school division that Harrow International School wishes to found in Haikou is the third type of senior bilingual high school explicated above. Students hoping to enter this type of bilingual senior high schools do not need to take the Senior High School Examination and focus solely on international education path.

However, due to the Double Reduction Policy, the government no longer issue permits to found the third type of bilingual senior high schools. As Harrow International School in Haikou can no longer use “training school operation permit”, it needs to obtain “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” to institute its senior high school division. Schools with “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” are the second type of bilingual senior high schools, and students who wish to apply for these schools must take the Senior High School Examination.

The case of Harrow International School in Haikou prompted bilingual schools across the nation to reflect on their operation permits and their futures. While Double Reduction policy does not point to existing bilingual senior high schools running with “training school operation permit” as of today, these schools fear that existing “training school operation permit” may be regulated in the future. In such a way, many schools are thinking of applying for “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” are requiring their existing students to partake in Senior High School Examination in case they attain the new permit (Sohu News).

While the effect of Double Reduction Policy on existing schools with “training school operation permit” remains to unfold, the policy’s effect on international education and bilingual schools in China is worthy of discussion. With Double Reduction Policy, some bilingual junior high school students who do not need to attend Senior High School Examination are now advised to attend the exam by their schools, as their schools may choose to apply for “all-day normal senior high school operation permit.” Taken one step further, this can be seen as PRC government’s take

to include international schools into the national education system. Regardless of what path the students wish to embark – international or national – with recent education policy adjustment, they all have to take the Senior High School Examination.

2.1.2 Decentralization of English Language

As mentioned earlier, the Double Reduction Policy also alters curriculum in primary schools. In August 2021, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission published a notice on “Shanghai Elementary and High School Annual Curriculum Plan and Explanation” (Shanghai Municipal Education Commission). The notice can be seen as a specific implementation of Double Reduction Policy at city level. In the notice, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission announced a cancellation of midterm exams for elementary students. There can be final exam for grade one and two students, but the final exam of grade one students can not be a written exam. For grade three, four, and five students, the only subjects for final exams are Chinese and Math, other subjects can be tested in forms other than exams.

Before this notice, the main subjects in Shanghai elementary and high schools are English, Chinese, and Math, vis-à-vis elective subjects, such as Arts, Music, and Natural Science. The playout of Double Reduction Policy in Shanghai incites varied opinions. Some holds that the policy indeed reduces stress for elementary students. With the leveling of the “three big mountains” of main subjects that pile over elementary students’ back – English, Chinese, and Math – to two mountains, or two subjects, the Double Reduction Policy reduces stress and workload at the elementary level (Tencent News).

Meanwhile, parents are concerned that the elimination of English from final exam at elementary level may lead to a devaluing and understudy of the language. With English still tested in Senior High School and National College Entrance examinations, parents worry that a lack of emphasis on English at elementary level may hinder students’ further learning of English at junior and senior high school level. Some authors hold that the parents need not to worry and that “Shanghai Elementary and High School Annual Curriculum Plan and Explanation” sends out a

message that in the future, at elementary and high school level, three main subjects may be reduced to two main subjects. The authors further reason that this does not express a de-emphasis of English subject. Instead, China may be turning “standardized test-taking English” into an “interest-driven subject” (Tencent News). In such a way, students who are interested in English can use afterschool time to delve into the subjects. On the other hand, for student who are not inspired by English language, they can use the time to focus on other knowledge. Furthermore, other authors even suggest that removing English from final exam at primary school level helps the learning of the mother tongue and vernacular. They contend that removing English from elementary final exams is a good decision. English, as a second language, is rendered to a place that it should belong (Baijiahao).

Others view the removal of English from final exams in Shanghai elementary schools suggest a diminution of English from a main subject to an elective subject, at least, on elementary school level. Most critics are simply surprised the withdrawal of English from elementary final exam took place in Shanghai, the most economically developed and liberal city in China (Sohu News). Other critics of the policy note that English is not merely a language, but a tool, an individual agency, to understand other peoples, knowledges, and worlds (Baijiahao). When emphasis on English is dismissed, fewer people will know the language, and have individual access and understanding of outside knowledge. Critics suggest that this will heighten difference between social classes, between those who hold language competency and those that do not. For students who treat English as an elective, and not a compulsory, their information network is monopolized and conveyed second-hand through translating agencies and domestic media. Thus, the concern for this policy trend is not merely an unease towards increased social class difference or language ability, but a concern towards the impact on individual children’s cognition and perception of the world as English is removed as a major education requirement.

Regardless of the positive, negative, or radical interpretations of the notice, it is clear that the removal of English from final exams in Shanghai elementary schools suggest a diminution of English from a main subject to an elective subject, at least, on elementary school level. This signifies a decentralization of English language in Chinese curriculum, at least in elementary level, at this point.

2.1.3 Discouragement of Mass Liberal Education

In 2017, a leading British independent school, the Westminster School, announced its plans to set up six schools in China. This is seen as the biggest expansion of a UK school brand in China (BBC). However, in November 2021, Mark Batten, chair of Westminster School's governing body, declared that the covid-19 pandemic and "recent changes in Chinese education policy" rendered the project into termination (Financial Times).

The recent changes in Chinese education policy came to force in September 2021, through the "Implementing Regulations of the PRC Law on the Promotion of Private Education" (Revised in 2021). The regulations prohibited the "use of overseas teaching material" at compulsory education years, from grade 1 to 9, in private bilingual schools. During these years, according to the new regulations, Chinese curriculum must be taught. All schools at compulsory education years, regardless of public or private bilingual schools, "should adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party of China and enhance core socialist values" (Marzheuser-Wood & Shi, 2021, p.4). Furthermore, the governing bodies of private bilingual schools must be comprised solely of Chinese citizens. No foreign governors are allowed (Marzheuser-Wood & Shi, 2021, p.6).

Foreign direct investment in schools providing compulsory education (grade 1 to 9) has always been prohibited. Before the issuing of "Implementing Regulations of the PRC Law on the Promotion of Private Education" (Revised in 2021), foreign investors use a variable interest equity structure to invest in grade 1 to 9 private education in China. With the variable interest equity structure, "proxies and voting rights are given to foreign parties that provide funding", putting foreign parties "effectively in the position of quasi-shareholders" (Marzheuser-Wood & Shi, 2021, p.3). However, with the recent regulation coming to force in September 2021, the variable interest equity structure (VIE) is no longer permitted for foreign investment in grade 1 to 9 private schools. The VIE structure is still sanctioned for foreign investment in senior high school and higher education levels.

The regulations do not prohibit the teaching of English at any age level. The regulations also approve the use of foreign teaching material at senior high school (grade 10 to 12), with AP and IB courses. Meanwhile, it is clear that China is maintaining a tighter grip on international education sector. The prohibition on utilization of foreign teaching material at compulsory education years suggest an emphasis on national education curriculum for all Chinese children, whether they attend public or private bilingual schools. The rule that governing bodies of private

schools must be 100% Chinese suggests government's stance to limit the degree of foreign influence in China, particularly, in education sector. The elimination of variable interest equity structure and altered condition for operating foreign schools discouraged foreign investment of bilingual and international schools in China. Existing projects, such as that of Westminster School, are abandoned. "Implementing Regulations of the PRC Law on the Promotion of Private Education" (Revised in 2021) discourages mass or an increase in liberal education in China.

2.2 China's World Class University Building

In its most simplistic terms, world class universities represent the "internationally excellent standard of the university" (Yang et al, 2021, p.421). They are seen as the most prestigious comprehensive, research-intensive universities across the world (Byun, John, & Kim, 2013). While the term "world class university" is an "aspirational concept", "somewhat subjective in nature", and perhaps, purposefully ambiguous to allow local interpretations, scholars made repeated attempts to provide a definition of "world class university" that attest to the global (Kim et al, 2017, p.94).

Altbach explicates that world class universities are characterized by research excellence, academic freedom and intellectual excitement, "a significant measure of internal self-governance", and "adequate facilities and funding" (Altbach, 2003, as cited in Li, 2012, p. 564). With the emerging global model of research universities, Mohrman, Ma, and Baker (2008) holds that world class universities emphasize global mission, international competition, and global collaboration. Lee commented that world class universities are research-intensive, technologically smart and resource-intensive, holds institutional autonomy, and is marked by a high-level of internationalization (Lee, 2013, as cited in Yang et al., 2021, 421). Kim et al. (2017) provides a tentative Chinese definition of world class university. In their qualitative study, faculty members at two highly prestigious universities in China – Peking and Tsinghua Universities – interpret world class universities should cultivate future leaders who "serve the nation and the world" (p.101). Drawing from the various definitions and debates, world class universities are characterized by international reputation and prestige, excellence in research output and teaching, talent amassment in faculty and student, a sense of global mission, abundance in resource, and institutional autonomy.

Although scholars' definitions of world class university are multifaceted and well-rounded, global university ranking schemes overwhelmingly and determine and dictate which universities are world class – the universities at the top of the league table are world class universities. The concept of world class highlights competition in international higher education, and increasingly, global university rankings are utilized as “national and institutional measurements of performance” (Hazelkorn, 2015, as cited in Yang et al, 2021, p.422).

China is one of the earliest countries that places emphasis on the project of world class university building (Yang et al, 2021, p.416). In an age of “knowledge economy”, research-oriented institutions, especially higher education institutions, are considered pivotal to national interest as the knowledge they produce enhance “economic, social, and political competitiveness of countries” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 92). Moreover, world class universities that attract a vast number of international students are an important part of a country's economy. In addition, world class universities carry symbolic power, represent a nation's status, and “increasingly reflect a nation's overall power” (Yang & Welch, 2012, p.646 as cited in Wei & Johnstone, 2019, p. 556).

China's agenda to foster world class universities is substantiated through Project 211, Project 985, and the Double First-class Project. In 1993, Project 211 appeared in the “national policy table” in the *Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China* (Li, 2011, p.568). Instituted in 1995, Project 211 is a “short form for building 100 excellent universities in the 21st century” through ameliorating these quality of research, teaching, and administration (Li, 2012, p.555). The project sets up special funds for three main areas and encourages universities to apply to be included in the project. The three main areas of funding provision include funding for “overall infrastructure and faculty”, including resources for both “hardware and software”; key disciplinary areas that correspond to societal and market demand; and “public service systems such as development of national databases for research” (Li, 2021, p.568). In the end, 112 universities are included in Project 211.

On 4 May 1998, then President Jiang Zemin declared that China “must have several universities of international advanced level” in a ceremony to celebrate Peking University's 100th anniversary (Ngok & Guo, 2008, p.545). Named after Peking University's centennial celebration in May, 1998, Project 985 is China's most “focused national project” for building world class universities (Li, 2012, p.568). In its first phase, nine universities (Tsinghua, Peking, Zhejiang, Shanghai Jiao Tong, Xi'an Jiao Tong, USTC, Harbin Institute of Technology, Fudan, and Nanjing)

are included in the project. These nine universities are later grouped the C9 League in 2009 and are seen as the Chinese equivalent of Ivy League schools (Costa & Zha, 2020, p.891). In the second phase, Project 985 expanded to include a total of 39 universities in its initiative. The leading schools in Project 985, Tsinghua and Peking, received a total of US \$280 million. Other HEIs in the project benefited less from national funding but acquired revenue and support from their municipal and provincial governments (Li, 2012, p. 568). To move up in global university rankings, Tsinghua, Peking, and the rest of 985 schools reformed teaching evaluation criteria, incentivized publications in prestigious English-language journals, extended research output in sciences, recruited internationally for faculty positions, standardly required P.h.D. degrees for tenure positions, and “tied faculty promotion to research productivity” (Yang 2009, as cited in Li, 2012, p.569).

The Double First-class Project, commencing in 2015, is also known as the World Class 2.0 initiative. “Double” denote the plan to cultivate both “world class university” and “world class disciplines.” (China Daily). The Double First-class Project aims to have a few world class universities and disciplines by 2020. By 2030, some of China’s universities and disciplines should be ranked “high and considered prestigious on a global scale” (Wei and Johnstone, 2019, p.558). By 2050, China’s universities and disciplines should be “among the best in the world” (Wei and Johnstone, 2019, p.558). Double First-class Project’s ambition is to raise China’s C9 universities, or top 9 universities, into the “top 15 rankings of world universities by 2030” (Sharma 2015, as quoted in Wei and Johnstone, 2019, p.559).

Overall, China’s world class university building projects have been a great success. In terms of research, in 1996, publications by Chinese scholars in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) amount to 1.62%, ranked 14th globally (Kim et al., 2017, p. 97). In 2008, that figure rose to 6.6%, ranking China fourth in publication representation in SSCI. The number of papers published by Chinese authors grew by 4.9 times between 2003 and 2016. In 2016, the number of annual Chinese-authored papers exceeded that of the U.S. (NSF, 2018, as cited in Yang et al., 2021, p.416). In terms of ranking, the number of Chinese universities ranked in top 500 increased from 2 in 2003, to 78 in 2022 (ARWU). According to Times Higher Education, Tsinghua and Peking share 16th place in World University Rankings 2022 (Times Higher Education 2022).

Kim et al.'s qualitative study sheds light on individual Chinese faculty members' interpretation of China's world class university building and its ramifications. The findings of the study are interesting for the scope of this paper. Firstly, Kim et al. discovers that with funding from 211 and 985 projects, research environments and hardware at leading universities have drastically changed. A professor in biology stated that "10 years ago, there was a large gap between U.S. and China", but in biology, "now, regarding the equipment, the scientific tools, and student training, I think they are the same level [as the USA] already" (Kim et al., 2017, p.102).

Relatedly, with the change in quality of instruction and equipment in Chinese HEIs, views on the value of overseas degree alter. In Kim et al. (2017), Chinese professors noted increased confidence in their institutions, and no longer considered "the quality of higher education in developed countries", such as that of the U.S., "as superior to that of Chinese higher education" (p.103). Twenty years ago, Chinese student would willingly go to any overseas HEIs because overseas HEIs' quality surpasses those in China, and overseas returnee and their international degree are prized in Chinese employment market. Now, Chinese professors no longer necessarily recommend their students to study abroad, unless the students choose to study at top-tier HEIs. One professor comments that if students go to "average universities [abroad], they do not even have good research environments like here [top universities in China]" (Kim et al., 2017, p.103). Similarly, 20 years ago, if you have an "American P.h.D., you can [certainly] get tenure", but that is "no longer the case anymore" (Kim et al., 2017, p.104).

2.3 Impact of Covid-19 on International Education

Covid-19 drastically alters the terrain, existing mechanisms, and deliveries of international education. The impact of covid-19 on international education and student mobility can be demonstrated in two sets of statistics. On the one hand, receiving countries monitor information of their international students. In the U.K., according to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the total number of international, or non-UK students grew from 556,625 in 2019/20 to 605,130 in 2020/21 academic year. Despite the overall increase in enrolment figure of international students, first year "entrants from China fell for the first time since 2007/2008" academic year (HESA). Number of first-year international students from China decreased from 104,240 in

2019/20 to 99,160 in 2020/21 school year. Moreover, in “The State of Higher Education: One Year into the Covid Pandemic”, OECD noted that in the year ending March 2021, U.K. issued 250,683 sponsored study visas, a 16% decrease vis-à-vis the previous year (OECD). The number of visas granted to Chinese students was 26% lower than the previous year (OECD).

In the U.S., the Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange presented a similar diminishing trend. The total number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions declined by 15% from 2019/20 to 2020/21. The number of Chinese international students enrolled in U.S. dropped from 372,532 in 2019/20 to 317,299 in 2020/21, presenting an unprecedented 14.8% decrease from pre-pandemic statistics (Institute of International Education).

On the other hand, sending countries also researches study abroad destinations and reasons its students pursue international education. Ka Ho Mok and his research team from Lingnan University conducted three rounds of surveys to non-local students in Hong Kong and students in Mainland China, examining their study abroad plans after covid-19 crisis. The survey conducted in May 2020 on Chinese students’ overseas study plans contained responses from approximately 2900 Chinese students. The May 2020 survey showed that 84.4% students chose not to study overseas, and only 16% of the respondents still had plans to “study overseas when the global health crisis was over” (Mok, 2022, p.238). It is interesting to note that students who had previous study abroad experience or are enrolled in Sino-foreign cooperative universities showed more interest to pursue international education than the rest of the group.

The research team at Lingnan University led another small-scale survey in October 2020, when the “global health crisis has become considerably stable” (Mok, 2022, p.239). Among the 220 interviewees, 46% of students indicated that they had plans to study overseas, while 54% held that they did not have plans to pursue international education. However, when researchers asked whether students would pursue overseas education after covid-19 is completely over, the majority, 62% of respondents, stated their interest. The “substantially positive” response to pursue overseas education post-covid reveal steady and significant interest on part of Chinese students to pursue international education (Mok, 2022, p.239). Yet, these interest and aspirations for overseas degrees are affected by the changing situations of covid across time.

The third round of online questionnaire survey conducted by Lingnan University in June 2021 secured 1987 valid responses. The June 2021 survey differentiated students’ intention to

study overseas into three periods: before, during, and after the pandemic. According to the study, before covid-19, 21.3% of students were interested in pursuing international education. The figure decreased to 7.6% during the pandemic, and “slightly recovered” to 20.6% for a speculative post-covid situation (Mok & Zhang, 2021, p.235). As shown in Lingnan Universities surveys, covid-19 negatively influences international student mobility.

Aside from numerical terms, the impact of covid-19 reverberates the terrain of international education. In particular, the pandemic has affected the “safety and legal status of international students in their host country”, the mode of their learning, and direct experience and “students’ perception of the value of their degree”, which all have dire consequences for future international student mobility (Schleicher, 2020, p.9). Covid-19 drastically altered the lives of international students in winter 2020 with campus closures, decisions on whether to return home with limited information on course delivery mode for next term, changing work permit and visa statuses. For instance, in the U.S., discussions were held on whether to revoke optional practical training rights (OPT) for international students (Bilecen, 2020). With OPT, international students in STEM are allowed a 24-month extension to stay in the U.S. for employment upon graduation. For other majors, OPT permits them to stay and work in the U.S. for up to 12 months. The rationale for possibly removing OPT was to “lessen the alleged reduction of job opportunities for U.S. citizens” (Bilecen, 2020, p.200). In Australia, international students faced a similar hostile stance as they were excluded from “all federal pandemic assistance programs, such as Job Seeker and JobKeeper”, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison utilized unwelcoming political rhetoric, stating that students should “return home” if they do not “have the financial means to fulfill their visa requirements” (Weng et al., 2021, p.39). Not all countries maintained hostile stance towards its international students. During covid, the Canadian federal government provided financial support through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program to all persons in its border affected by the pandemic, including international students. Moreover, the government loosened restricting on international students’ working hours and altered requirement on post-graduation work permits, allowing international students to apply for post-graduation work permits even if they completed their programme online outside of Canadian borders (Buckner et al., 2021, p. 334).

With ongoing lockdowns and students relocating to different parts of the world, many higher education institutions adopted online or hybrid – both in-person and online – modes of

delivering university classes. While most international students accommodated to temporary online learning, long-term, or completely online university experience and degree were not acceptable for most international students. In “COVID-19: reopening and reimagining universities, survey on higher education through the UNESCO National Commissions”, Australia and Qatar reported that they can not retain most of their international students through online courses. Virtual mobility can not replace physical mobility as international students can no longer benefit from immersive experience of being physically present in foreign countries, life in dorms and colleges, academic and career networking, and access to a foreign labour market (Schleicher, 2020, p.10). Meanwhile, international students accommodating to online and distant modes of learning have pay international student tuition, which remain the same despite changing modes of delivery and pandemic situation. In the case of North American universities, international students’ tuition is four to five times the fees for domestic students. In short, covid-19 altered students’ perception of the value of their degree and led prospective students ponder the worth of international education during the global health crisis.

Covid-19 instigated anti-Chinese sentiment. Mok (2022) remarked that Chinese international students faced “triple stigmatization” due to covid-19 pandemic (231). Firstly, Chinese international students were faced xenophobic attitudes through the ethnicization of the virus as Chinese (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020). The notion of coronavirus as stemming from China rendered Chinese living in western countries targets of blame, hatred, and attack. In Weng et al.’s (2021) study, Chinese Australians experienced “everyday racism” during the pandemic in “everyday spaces”, such as “child-care centers”, “supermarkets”, and in “busy streets” (p.46). Chinese Australians were discriminated for wearing masks, physically assaulted, and “told to go back to their own country” due to “China virus” (Weng et al, 2021, p.46). Similarly, in the U.S., covid escalated existing discrimination against Chinese and Asian in general. Thousands of violent attacks against Asian American were reported in the past year. To illustrate, in February 2021, an 84-year-old man died after he was pushed to the ground near his home in San Francisco. In 2020, a young family was attacked in a Texas grocery store. In March 2021, six Asian women were killed in Georgia during a series of shootings targeting workers at massage parlors (US News). These “hate crimes” against Asian Americans were heightened by notion of coronavirus as China virus (US News).

Secondly, Chinese international students were discriminated in multiple ways by the “anti-China politics triggered by the coronavirus” (Mok, 2022, p.230). Anti-China politics and sentiment triggered by covid was fueled by existing straining US-China relations due to trade war and U.S.’s intention to contain China’s rise in high-tech areas, manifested in a kind of “techno-nationalism” (Welch, 2021, p.220). U.S. banned US visas for 3000 to 4000 Chinese researchers and post-graduates in “key tech areas”, “revoking the visas” for further thousands of students and researchers (Welch, 2021, p. 220). Deteriorating US-China relationship led to a similar downturn in relationship between China and U.S.’s allies, notably Canada, U.K., and Australia. Weng et al (2021) noted that “escalating tensions in the geopolitical relationship” between Australia and China led to the return of “stereotypes”, such as Australian Chinese as ‘communist’ or ‘spy’” (p.46).

Lastly, Chinese international students were stigmatized not only in their host countries, but also in their home country. As China strived for “covid-19-free status” and prided itself on continued low levels of domestic cases, media centered its attention on “imported cases” and often associated them with “student returnees” (Mok, 2022, p.231). Chinese international students were stigmatized and guarded as potential or actual virus carriers in their home country. The stringent border control, strict public health measures, and centralized quarantines weigh “socio-psychological pressures” on Chinese international students, and may affect future students’ decision to pursue international education (McCarthy 2020, as cited in Mok, 2022, p.232).

While statistics from 2020/21 academic year reveal a negative impact of covid on students’ intention to study overseas, preliminary data from 2021/22 academic year demonstrate potential diminished influence of covid to international education mobility. According to the Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS)’s information on 2021 recruitment cycle, there is a 12% increase in number of applications from non-UK students (UCAS). As stated by the *2021 Fall International Student Enrollment Snapshot*, American higher education institutions announced a 68% increase in first-year international student enrollment, a notable increase from the 46% decrease in reported Fall 2020. According to the preliminary snapshot, “the total number of international students increased by 4% in Fall 2021, a rebound from the 15% decrease in Fall 2020” (Open Door). While official reports of enrolment figures in 2021/22 academic year awaits to be published, the trend is that when covid situation stabilizes in the receiving country, the number of international applicants, from China and elsewhere, recovers and grows in the long term. As covid

situations across the globe shifts, it is interesting to survey how perception of covid impact long-term study overseas decisions.

Chapter 3 Methodology

To better grasp how the factors of covid-19, recent Chinese education policy changes, and China's world class university building projects effect parents' aspirations for their children's higher education, I employed a qualitative approach, specifically, in-depth interviews with parents. Qualitative interviews allow the study to capture individual reasoning, emotions, and perceptions of parents who are making the choice of whether to send their children overseas for undergraduate degrees.

In China, education is embedded in the culture of Confucianism. Steeped in a history of imperial examination, Chinese believe education, and success in standardized exams guarantee a future as the scholarly, elite class. In Confucian China, parents are responsible for nurturing and educating the child, and the child pays the parents back with filial piety upon adulthood. Indeed, parents play an important role in shaping students' motivations and decisions in education in contemporary China (Liu & Morgan, 2015). This holds true in the context of Chinese students' decision to undertake international education. According to Bodycott and Lai (2012), "major decisions related to education and future employment are very much a family, if not a solely, parental affair" (p.253). In the same vein, parents are so vested in their children's education that studies demonstrate a strong correlation between Chinese children's academic performance and their parents' life satisfaction. In "Education Fever in China", Chen et al (2020) indicated a one-unit rise in the class ranking of the child increases the parent's life satisfaction score by 3.4 percentage points (p.927). In acknowledgement of a Chinese education culture embedded in Confucianism, this study chose to interview parents.

Shanghai, the "largest internationalized city in China", is selected as the geographical site of this study (Lizhong, p.142). Since China's economic liberalization, Shanghai established its place as China's economic centre and "a hub for foreign trade, industry, commerce and telecommunications" (Yamato & Bray, 2006, p.61). Shanghai is also the city housing the largest number of foreign nationals in China. In 2012, 173,000 foreign nationals legally resided in Shanghai (Kuka & Shi, 2013, as cited in Farrer & Greenspan, 2014, p.142). Shanghai is also a centre of international education in China, witnessing the success of many international and bilingual elementary and high schools, as well as Sino-foreign cooperative universities, such as NYU Shanghai. Many Shanghai middle-class families regard Western education qualifications,

especially at undergraduate level, as a class barrier and an important form of cultural capital. (Soong & Stahl, 2021). For these reasons, Shanghai is settled as the site of this research.

With respect to other choices with interviewee selection, this study chose to interview bilingual school parents because their children are of Chinese citizenship. As their children are Chinese citizens, bilingual school parents could choose to either enrol them in the public system and take the national route or enrol them in bilingual schools and take the international route. As this study explores parents' decision making, bilingual school parents are the ones had the ability to choose and are constantly negotiating between national and international paths with changing domestic and global education terrain. This research did not include international school parents in the interviewee sampling because children in international schools are of foreign citizenship. Their paths and chances of getting into Chinese universities and foreign universities respectively are different from children of Chinese citizenship.

This study limited the selection of interviewees to junior high school parents on purpose. The Chinese education system is divided into four levels, from elementary (grade 1 to 5), to junior high school (grade 6-9), to senior high school (grade 10-12), and to higher education. Parents whose children in bilingual junior high schools have the option to choose the type of senior high school they wish to enrol their children in, and the path they wish their children to take. Bilingual junior high school parents have the option to enrol their children either in bilingual senior high schools and pursue higher education overseas or prepare their children for the Senior High School Entrance Exam, return to public school with the prospect of entering Chinese higher education. Indeed, bilingual junior middle school parents present particularly valuable interview data as junior high school is a critical juncture for parental decision-making. This research chose not to interview senior high school parents because their children's paths are quite set – they are either preparing for National College Entrance Exam or studying AP, IB, or A-level courses.

Table 1. List of interviewees and their children's information

Name	Grade	Institution type	Gender of children	Gender of Parent
L	8	Bilingual school with “training school operation permit” (third type of bilingual school)	Female	Mother
C	7	One of the “21 Schools” (first type of bilingual school)	Female	Mother
A	8	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Male	Mother
M	8	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Male	Mother
K	8	Bilingual school with “training school operation permit” (third type of bilingual school)	Female	Mother
N	9	One of the “21 Schools” (first type of bilingual school)	Female	Mother
R	9	Bilingual school with “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” (second type of bilingual school)	Male	Mother
G	9	One of the “21 Schools” (first type of bilingual school)	Male	Father
J	8	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Female	Mother
Y	8	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Female	Mother
W	9	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Male	Mother
B	9	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Female	Mother
Q	9	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Female	Mother
F	8	One of the “21 Schools” (first type)	Female	Mother
T	8	Bilingual school with “all-day normal senior high school operation permit” (second type of bilingual school)	Male	Mother

For data collection, this study used snowball sampling. To ensure rigour, the researcher established a participant could only refer a maximum of two other participants. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted with 15 bilingual junior high school parents. Due to Chinese travel restrictions and the covid development in Shanghai at the time this research was conducted – May to Jun 2022 – the interviews were carried out online. Of the 15 parents interviewed, 14 are mothers, and 1 is father to bilingual junior high school students. Among the sampling, there are 6 male and 9 female bilingual junior high school students. The majority of students (11 of them) are from the “21 Schools” in Shanghai, or the first type of bilingual schools as identified in literature review. For the remaining, 2 students are from the second type of bilingual schools operating with “all-day normal senior high school permit” and 2 are from the third type of schools operating with “training school permit.”

Prior to the interview, participants were provided with participant information sheet, outlining the purpose and nature of the research, protection of data and interviewee’s anonymity, right to withdraw, and contact details in case of questions or formal complaints. Written consent was acquired from each participant prior to the interviews for participation, audio recording, and right to be quoted without identifiable information. At the start of each online interview, the researcher inquired the permission for audio recording once more and informed the interviewees their right to pause or end the interview process, and withdraw their data from the study, without penalty.

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, allowing the interviewees to fully express themselves in their mother tongue. The interviews commenced with several specific questions on biographical details, followed by around 15 open ended questions. Where the researcher found the topic intriguing or beneficial to the discussion, she added ensuing questions forthwith. All interviews were between 30 to 40 minutes in lengths, were digitally recorded using Voice Memos, and transcribed verbatim. The author then translated the Mandarin transcript into English. When clarifications in meaning were needed, the author contacted participants to ensure original meaning was not lost in transcription and translation process.

The transcripts were coded both deductively and inductively. Several themes were acquired deductively from the primary research questions of this study. Effect of covid on short-term and long-term decision-making, Chinese education policy change as felt on individual levels, commentary on Chinese world class university building efforts, and reality of switching from international to national paths were among some of the deductive themes derived from the data set. Furthermore, other themes inductively emerged from the transcripts: covid as push factor,

predominance of Anglo-American in higher education destination, and rationale for pursuing undergraduate degrees overseas.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Chinese education policy changes in context and proofs

Several interviewees noted the impact of Double Reduction Policy and a tightening of national regulations on bilingual and international schools. With the advent of Double Reduction Policy, parents whose children attend the third type of bilingual schools operating with “training school operation permit” remarked that their schools are applying for “all-day normal senior high school operation permit.” L’s mother explained:

“Yes, my daughter’s school is applying for ‘all day normal senior high school operation permit’. Well, I think 90% of schools currently running with ‘training school operation permit’ is applying for the ‘all day normal operation permit.’ It is really difficult to get this permit, but with current uncertainty, they are all hoping to transform into ‘all day normal senior high schools.’ After all, senior high schools with ‘training school operation permit’ are not normal high schools. They are more like comprehensive training institutions, and these are in the same group with the afterschool training institutions that are regulated and restricted with Double Reduction Policy.”

Schools that are successful in their application for “all day normal senior high school operation permit” need their students in junior high division to provide scores from Senior High School Examination to enter their senior high division. In such a way, junior high school students in the third type of bilingual schools running with “training school operation permit” are required to take part in Senior High School Examination if they want to advance to their schools’ own senior high division, a recent necessity developed out of Double Reduction Policy. K’s mother, with her daughter attending a Shanghai bilingual school with “training school operation permit”, said:

“Starting this year, students in my daughter’s grade, which is grade eight turning grade nine, have to participate in the national unified exam, that is, the Senior High School Examination.”

Other interviewees commented on a tightening of national regulations on bilingual schools. Parents observe that there is a monitoring of classes and of teaching material in bilingual schools. L’s mother reflected:

“There is a restriction on the use of English textbooks in my child’s school. As my daughter’s school is a bilingual school and the school’s attractiveness is its English specialty, teachers photocopy pages from English texts on to A4 papers for students to study. Also, there are people from Shanghai Education Committee who inspect school’s classes, checking if the

school is adhering to the compulsory Chinese curriculum for compulsory education years, for grade 1 to grade 9.”

In sum, the Double Reduction Policy and other Chinese education regulations alters the landscape of private education in China. As seen in the interviews, the impact of these policy changes is felt at individual school and on individual student level. The altering situation of permits of bilingual schools, subsequent requirement for bilingual junior middle school students to partake in Senior High School Examination, and a monitoring of the use of overseas teaching material suggest a tightening control on bilingual education in China, at least in the compulsory education years.

4.2 China has come a long way with world class university building, but not quite yet

The interviewees held multifaceted views on the progress of China’s world class university building efforts. Many commented that China has come a long way with world class university building. These parents spoke from their perception of the reputation and prestige of top Chinese universities. When asked to weigh their recognition of top Chinese universities vis-à-vis the American ones, A’s mother said:

“Take the comparison of Harvard and Yale, and Tsinghua and Peking, I would say that the American and Chinese universities are equally prestigious in my eyes. I don’t think Harvard and Yale is better than Tsinghua and Peking, or vice versa. It is just two different routes that students can take, a national one or an international one, and I think they are equally good routes.”

Indeed, several interviewees offered similar reflections on the reputation of major Chinese universities in contrast with western universities. M’s mother elaborated:

“In some ways, it is harder for Chinese high school students to get into Tsinghua and Peking than top American or British universities, for example Harvard, Yale, or Oxbridge. The acceptance rate of Tsinghua and Peking is like 1 out of 5000, which I think is way lower than top western universities. The amount of prestige, respect, or perhaps, even worship-like attitude Tsinghua and Peking entrants receive is hard to describe.”

As one criterion for the definition of world class universities is the perception of their reputation, and with the ever-increasing prestige of top Chinese universities in the eyes of parents, even those bilingual school parents who are thinking of sending their children abroad, China has

made considerable advances in its world class university building. In the same vein, a couple of interviewees referred to Chinese universities' rise in various global university ranking schemes, increased presence in scientific research and publication, glowing prospects of graduates at top Chinese institutions, and attraction of talent, both in students and professorship as evidence of China's success at world class university building.

Slightly differently, some parents acknowledged China's progress at world class university building but pointed out that growth was uneven and tiered. Namely, while China's world class university building projects targeted and financed more than a hundred Chinese universities, the parents maintained that in the end, perhaps, only Tsinghua and Peking could be considered as world class. N's mother said:

"I think the universities in China are great too. For example, Tsinghua, Peking, Harvard, and Yale are all good universities. For example, I think the top 30 universities in U.S. and G5 in U.K. are similar in quality to Chinese universities in the 985 Project. But for these Chinese universities in the 985 Project, I think Tsinghua and Peking are, very clearly, a level higher than the rest of the universities. This difference is similar to Oxford and Cambridge and the remaining three G5 universities in the U.K. Speaking about world class universities, I think world class universities are places that nurture future talent; research centers that discover knowledge and inventions that impact human civilization; and origins of new thought and isms. From these perspectives, I think Tsinghua and Peking are doing great."

While around half of the interviewees observed some Chinese universities could be called world class, the other half acknowledged China's progress with world class university building, but marked that Chinese universities were not on par with truly world class universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and Oxbridge. Firstly, these interviewees observed the quality of teaching, even at top Chinese higher education institutions, was not commensurate with those in the U.S. and the U.K. One parent, C's mother, said:

"I have been to campus tours, such as the one in Stanford. Stanford's faculty student ratio is very high. There is one professor to five students. Some U.S. universities have even higher percentage of something like one professor to three students. A higher faculty student ratio means the professor can pay greater attention to teach and cultivate each student. This kind of high faculty student ratio is something unimaginable in Chinese universities."

Secondly, these parents explicated the general societal attitude and atmosphere at higher education levels are not conducive to teaching and learning. R's mother explicated a phenomenon that she deemed was peculiar to China:

“The weird thing about China is that intensive learning happens in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, ending with the gruesomely competitive National College Entrance Examination. Learning does not happen in university. Some say that for Chinese universities, it is ‘strict entrance, and easy graduation,’ meaning that it is extremely difficult to get in, but easy to complete the degree and graduate. Meanwhile, for American or British universities, it is ‘easy entrance, and strict graduation,’ easier to get in, but requires intensive learning to complete the study.”

Prior to National College Entrance Examination, all Chinese students taking the national route, from elementary to senior high school, have one identical goal – to score highly in the exam and enter a good university. To that end, exam-oriented knowledge, learning, and tactics are taught by teachers, and the students passively take in what is required to score high in the examination. After the National College Entrance Examination and entry into universities, the norm or external pressure that “everyone must study hard and learn because there is an examination” disappear. Differed from high school students whose only path is to learn, learning in university is a choice, among other choices and paths that undergrads can choose from as they explore career prospects in civil service, public, and private sectors. Moreover, for Chinese high school graduates who are used to teacher-taught, externally enforced, and disciplined learning, active, self-driven learning and study is not what new Chinese undergrads are used to. In short, some parents elucidate the wider Chinese societal atmosphere is not conducive to quality learning at higher education level.

Lastly, an interviewee, G's father, critiqued top Chinese universities lack a sense of institutional autonomy and mission to be considered world class universities. He said:

“In some way, universities in China are not universities, because they do not have an independent spirit, an independent consciousness. Chinese universities are not independent entities with individual pursuit. This is not possible in China. But the universities in the West are different. Each university in the West has its institutional mission, pursuing a certain culture, and this culture unconsciously influence faculty and student, teaching and research. The mission and culture is a heritage from decades or centuries of university histories. I think this is very important. That is why I think Chinese universities still have a long way from becoming world class.”

4.3 Majority still pursues the international path, ones that switch to the national path are exceptions

Among the 15 interviewees, 14 parents communicated their children would remain in the international route, attend bilingual senior high schools, and apply to universities overseas. One parent, R's mother, revealed her consideration for her son to enrol in a public senior high school, and attend a Chinese university. In short, amid parents whose children attend bilingual junior high schools in Shanghai, the majority still encourage their children to pursue the international path; the ones that switch to the national path are rare exceptions.

Theoretically, children who were in the "21 bilingual schools" in Shanghai could "walk on two feet", taking the national and international route simultaneously. On the one hand, junior high division of the 21 schools have English specialty, and study foreign teaching materials. Senior high division of the 21 schools have IB, AP, or A-level courses that allow students to apply to universities overseas. On the other hand, students in the "21 bilingual schools" must partake in all the examinations that public school students of national path took – Senior High School Examination and Unified Examination – and senior high school students from "21 bilingual schools" could graduate with Chinese high school diploma. With this diploma, conceptually, they could take the National College Entrance Examination and attend Chinese universities. Indeed, in theory, these students could take national and international curriculum concurrently, and apply to both foreign and Chinese universities through two paths. In reality, among the 15 interviewees, not one reported to want their children to "walk on two feet", and only one considered the possibility to switch from international to national path. Many parents explicated that it was not possible to choose the two paths simultaneously, and nearly impossible to switch paths. G's father explained:

"My son is in grade 9, the highest grade for junior middle school. He's in one of the 21 bilingual schools. In his grade, no one is planning to go to a public senior high school next year. No one is considering switching from the international to a national path. First, I don't think many who are already in a bilingual school would want to re-enter the national system. Second, even if, perhaps, some of them want to go to a public senior high school, they wouldn't have the ability to do so, you know? Bilingual school students' ability in some STEM subjects, or test-taking ability, are not on the same page with students in public schools. In comparison with public school students, they are behind in some subjects."

In terms of "walking on two feet", A's mother expounded:

“I did not consider letting my son pursue two paths simultaneously. It is way too tiring. Both paths are academically rigorous. If you pursue both paths, you need way more energy. On top of that, there is also extracurricular and your own hobbies. You simply don’t have the time for all of this. If you study both national and international curriculum, it’s likely that you can excel in neither. I just don’t think it’s necessary. As I chose bilingual school for my son, I don’t want him to take the National College Entrance Examination. When he goes to senior high school, he should just study IB courses and go to university overseas. If he has time left, he should spend them on extracurricular, like his own hobbies or club activities.”

Of the 15 interviews conducted, R presented a rare case of a bilingual junior high school student considering the possibility of transferring to a public senior high school. However, R’s case is unique because he is a student with PE specialty. In China, students who excel in a certain area, such as music, art, or PE can become a student with disciplinary specialty. A student with specialty acquires more lenient standardized exam entrance requirement than ordinary students, in acknowledge of their excellence in their specialties. Put simply, in R’s case, it is easier for him to enter elite public senior high schools and universities in China than ordinary students because of his swimming specialty. R’s mother said:

“I chose bilingual schools for my son because the workload in bilingual schools is less than that in the public system. In that way, he has time for swimming. For now, I’m thinking about the possibility of him going to a public senior high school and attending a Chinese university. With his swimming specialty, I’m pretty sure he can get into a municipal key senior high school, and one of the 985 and 211 universities because the score for PE specialty student is different from the rest of the students. Take the example of Jiao tong University. If ordinary students need the score of 400 in National College Entrance Exam to enter Jiao Tong, my son only needs 70% of that score, that is 280, to enter. My son’s academic is not bad either, so I think this path is good for him.”

4.4 Reasons for Pursuing Undergraduate Degrees Overseas

The parents stated more push factors than pull factors in their reasoning to send their children abroad for university. Among pull factors, interviewees listed the advantage “wider and international perspective” would bring to later life and career, ability to “live and adapt to a different part of the world”, and “better quality of faculty, teaching, and curriculum.” The interviewees explicated a thorough set of push factors that prompted their decision to enrol their

children in bilingual schools and encourage their children to apply to universities abroad. Firstly, one of the push factors was the scarce chances of entering a good university, or universities included in Project 985 or Project 211, in China. R's mother said:

“Competition to get into good Chinese universities start very early. Take the example of Shanghai, public senior high schools are tiered. The best 12 schools are nicknamed ‘four greats and eight warriors.’ Ensuing these are municipal key schools, and then district-level key schools. If you are not in one of the 12 best public senior high schools in Shanghai, you can’t get into one of the 985 or 211 universities. Most people go to a very ordinary university, or even vocational college. Originally, I thought if you’re in one of municipal or district-level key schools, you still have some chance. But as I researched their past year results, the stats were not very positive. That is why a lot of my friends send their children outside for university education.”

The conception was that with current high unemployment, China's massification of higher education, and large number of university graduates, if a student was not a graduate of 985 or 211 universities, it was unlikely that they would be able to find a good employment on their own. In the same vein, many Chinese parents noted the competition in national education route was too fierce. There was competition at every age level – from elementary, junior high, senior high, to entry into university – and at every interval – weekly, monthly, unified exams. On a global scale, parents reckoned that it would be easier to get into good schools overseas as compared to 985 or 211 schools in China. N's mother said:

“There are a lot of parents in Shanghai, and in China, who are financially well off. If their children stay in China, it is unlikely for them to enter 985 or 211 schools. But if these parents spend 200 or 300 thousand USD in bilingual school education and in application agency, their children can likely enter top 100 universities in the U.S. From a comparative and global perspective, if you don't spend that money, your child will probably end up in a very average university that is outside any university rankings league table.”

Secondly, another factor that pushed parents to international education and bilingual schools was the exam-focused and result-driven curriculum in Chinese public high schools, in which all studies and time were dedicated to the taking of National College Entrance Exam. Parents commented that the public system education was not beneficial to the well-being and comprehensive growth of their children. Many interviewees indicated the lack of time to foster “creativity” and “critical thinking” in public high schools. L's mother mentioned that “P.E. class

time in public schools is not adequate” and she commented physical education time should not be replaced by Chinese, Math, or English class times. Furthermore, G’s father said:

“G’s mother and I thought the national education system does not allow a child to properly grow. We are both against the test-taking atmosphere starting as early as grade 1. So, from elementary schools, we wanted to choose a school that would benefit our son’s growth. So, we chose a bilingual school that took the time to foster children’s ideas, individual thinking, independence, cooperation with peers, and not one that only looked at marks.”

4.5 Covid affect short-term decisions, but not long-term decisions to international education

In the interviews, the parents indicated covid does not affect their long-term decision to send their children overseas for undergraduate degrees. Many interviewees explicated that as their children are still in junior high schools, they still have three to four years to monitor the covid situation in the prospective students’ host countries. By the time their children enter undergrad, the parents believe covid situation will be over, or at least, completely under control and stabilized. J’s mother said:

“If my daughter is in grade 11 or 12, for example, covid situation would worry me. But she is only in grade 8. So, it will be some time remaining before she applies for universities, and by then, we should be in a post-covid time. So, I don’t think covid will affect my decision to send my daughter outside for undergrad.”

Other parents expressed their confidence that their children would have nurtured adequate life and adaptability skills when they reach adulthood and go overseas for university education. Y’s mother noted:

“Covid does not influence my decision. Yes, the pandemic is quite serious in the West in the past two years. Every was talking and very concerned about elementary and junior high school international students who had to board more than 10 hours flights alone to return to China. I thought that yes, if the children are too young, then it doesn’t work. But when they are undergraduates, it is different. They are adults and have the necessary independence and survival skills. So, my perspective is that in any age, at any time, there are always children who want to outside for education. So, I’m quite firm with my choice.”

On the subject of anti-Asian sentiment and worsening US-China relations, which were exacerbated by the advent of covid-19, interviewees indicated that they were a little concerned,

but these did not influence their choice of sending their children abroad. Many had heard of anti-Asian hate crimes through media and their friends living in the U.S., Australia, U.K., but most interviewees regarded these attacks were “individual phenomenon”, not widespread. In addition, many followed the deteriorating US-China relations and stated their concern as parents of prospective international students; however, as N’s mother said, “for now, the trend of anti-globalization is not conspicuous.” All in all, parents held a concern for US-China future relations and anti-Asian sentiments aggravated by covid-19, but these did not deter their aspirations for their children to study overseas. L’s mother said:

“Yes, the broad environment is not ideal. We can only think about individual course of actions. So, I think we can only strive towards the direction that we set out and alter a little if there is drastic policy changes. I am concerned, but not too much, because at any time, there is bound to be some conflict and tension.”

While covid did not impact parents’ decision to send their children outside for education in the long-term, it did have some impact on parents’ choosing the host countries of their children’s international education. Notedly, a lot of interviewees who planned to apply only to the U.S. prior to the pandemic started to hedge their country choices. In addition, some considered countries that maintained friendlier policies towards international students and were considered more peaceful as the desired host countries for their children’s education. J’s mother said:

“Yes, I am a little worried about anti-Asian incidents in the U.S. and escalating US-China relations. Before, I was planning that my son would only apply to American universities, but now I think Canada is also a good choice. Canada seems safer and more peaceful in many respects.”

While covid-19 did not transform parents’ long-term decisions for international higher education, it did alter some short-term, immediate plans for going abroad during high school. Two interviewees mentioned they held original plans for their children to enrol in private senior high schools in the U.S., which they deemed would increase their children’s chances of applying to top U.S. higher education institutions in the future. Nonetheless, due to the pandemic, the two interviewees communicated they switched the timing for their children to go abroad. To illustrate, G’s father said:

“When my son was in grade eight, which was last year, my son took TOEFL and applied to several private senior high schools in the States. He was accepted to a school, and we were looking for a host family. But in the end, we thought covid situation was unclear and our son

was too young to go out on his own. So, we decided that he should go to the senior high school division of his current bilingual school in Shanghai, and study to the U.S. when he's in undergrad."

4.6 Covid as a Push Factor

As mentioned above, covid functioned as a factor that deterred some Shanghai bilingual school students from going abroad for senior high school in the past two years, when the pandemic situation was unstable in western countries. Meanwhile, the covid development in Shanghai commencing this February served as a push factor that prompted bilingual school parents and students to consider leaving for international education immediately. Thus, as covid situation in the West and in China altered, the pandemic served both as a factor that intermittently dissuaded and encouraged students to go abroad at different intervals. With regard to the covid outbreak in Shanghai and its effect on her plans for her child, N's mother said:

"Yes, covid changed my decision. I want my daughter to go abroad at an earlier age. Originally, I was thinking that she should go outside during undergrad. But now, I think she should go to the U.S. for senior high school. Yes, the pandemic in the U.S. is still broadcasted in the media, but the covid situation in China is not any lighter. I know that some high schools and universities in the U.S. still have online classes for some terms, but for my daughter's bilingual school, they're having online class from February till now. In a similar situation of lockdown, certainly, it is better to be in the U.S., U.K., or Canada. During Shanghai lockdown, we cannot even go to the lobby of our apartment. The measures are a little over. In other countries, western countries, you can still take a walk from time to time outside your place."

Indeed, the covid development in Shanghai and ensuing strict health measures and centralized municipal lockdown strengthened many bilingual school parents' existing wish to send their children outside for higher education. J's mother said:

"Shanghai's lockdown did have an impact on our mentality. Before this incident, we considered whether we should send our daughter outside, everything is pretty good here. But this time, we thought our daughter should still go outside for higher education."

4.7 Predominance of Anglo-America as higher education destination

Out of the 15 interviewees, 13 parents stated U.S. as the top host country choice for their children's international education. Out of the 13 parents, 8 indicated that their children were considering applying only to U.S. universities when they enter grade 12. Despite concerns with US-China relations and possible anti-Asian sentiments in the U.S., Anglo-America was the leading desired higher education destination for bilingual school parents in Shanghai. Some expressed that their children were enrolled in "bilingual schools with US as destination." A's mother revealed that for "students in my daughter's class usually just apply to North American universities, mostly U.S. schools, maybe Canadian ones." Other parents commented on the rationale of choosing U.S. universities as primary choices. R's mother said:

"Many parents want their children to stay outside after graduation. They don't want their children to return to China. Especially, parents who want their children to get into a top U.S. university want their children to stay in the U.S."

While some evinced that they chose U.S. as higher education destination for their children because they wanted their children to live in the U.S. upon graduation, others chose U.S. because they appreciated the American higher education system. L's mother said:

"The American education system is very good in that there are many top universities and diverse disciplines. Also, the higher education system and curriculum are very fluid and good for student growth. For example, for the first two years of university, students take uniform core courses. After exploring a wide range of disciplines, they can choose their major, and it is also possible for them to change their major. Furthermore, if you are currently in a community college, there is chance for you to transfer into a good university if you work hard. So, from these perspectives, I think highly of the American system."

Chapter 5 Discussion

While there were some changes to Shanghai bilingual junior high school parents' plans for their children's education paths due to covid, world class university building projects, and Chinese education policies, there was no sweeping trend of bilingual school students switching from international to national path. Of the 15 interviewees, only R's mother indicated the consideration to enrol her son in a public senior high school. In addition, R presented a special case. As he was a student with P.E. specialty, it was easier, on academic terms, for him to enter 985 or 211 universities as compared to ordinary Chinese students.

Conceptually, students in bilingual junior high schools could take part in Senior High School Examination and transfer to public senior high schools. However, bilingual junior high school parents in Shanghai explicated the feasibility of this transfer was low. The rigour of STEM subjects in public system was higher than that in bilingual schools, and bilingual junior high school students could hardly compete against public junior high school students in Senior High School Examination. In reality, it was difficult alter education path, even at junior high school level, for children in Shanghai.

Covid affected short-term decisions to international education but did not influence long-term decisions. As the interviewees' children still had three to five years before entry to undergraduate degrees, parents believed covid would have ended before they children study overseas. Meanwhile, interviewees did report changes to original short-term plans to send their children to U.S. for senior high school. These parents indicated health and safety concerns as reasons to alter the timing of sending their children abroad from senior high school to university.

At the time this research was devised, in December 2021, the covid escalation that took place in February 2022 Shanghai had yet to occur. Thus, when the research was first conceived, the researcher did not expect covid to be a push factor among parents' reasoning to send their children abroad. Contrarily to the researcher's conjecture that covid might deter parents from international education, the covid development in Shanghai actually pushed and affirmed parents' choice for international education.

Findings demonstrated that China made considerable advances in world class university building projects, but some interviewees noted top Chinese universities were still not equals to elite western universities. Prevalent to the discussion of world class university building was the presence and utilization of global university rankings (GURs) as legible measures of world class

status. One interviewee, C's mother, questioned the criteria of measurement in global university ranking and commented that GURs were fake. She remarked that government "pumped money" into higher education sector, purposefully directed funds to GURs criteria of measurement. As GURs were questionable, C's mother held that proclaimed success in WCUs through rise in GURs was questionable. This points to two bodies of literature: one that views global university rankings as constructs (Hammarfelt et al., 2017), and one that reveals the rankings' implication in western hegemony (Christian, 2018; Estera & Shahjahan, 2019; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021).

The prominence of Anglo-America as study destination in parental choice was conspicuous. One conjecture was that the majority of parents – 11 of them – in this interview sampling sent their children to the top bilingual high schools, the "21 Schools" in Shanghai. As Shanghai level their bilingual high schools, parents in these bilingual high schools also level host countries – with U.S. at the top, followed by U.K., Canada, Australia, etc. – and universities through global university rankings (Sohu News). Elitism in top bilingual schools in Shanghai might have influenced parents' inclinations to choose what they perceived the most elitist country choice and universities – the top 30 American universities.

Out of 15 interviewees, 14 were mothers, and only 1 was father to bilingual school students in Shanghai. While the study employed snowball sampling, and mothers might be more inclined to recommend other mothers, it was clear that the 14 mothers interviewed were more involved in their children's education than their spouses. This pointed towards a theme of Confucianism and gendered difference in Chinese parental involvement in children's education (Peng, 2021; Sheng, 2012). Patriarchal relationships persisted in contemporary Confucian China, with fathers holding a "controlling role" and mothers having a "serving one", caring for the family and educating children (Sheng, 2012, p.131).

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary

This dissertation explored parental aspirations towards international education in the milieu of China's world class university building projects, covid-19, and anti-foreign education policies. A classic push factor for Chinese students to pursue universities overseas was the perception in a lack of good Chinese HEIs. China's success at world class university building might have lessened the degree of this push factor. The American and British HEI enrolment statistics from 2020/21 academic year demonstrated a decrease in first-year Chinese entrants due to impact of covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 affected international student mobility and would continue to figure in international student choice as the pandemic persisted. China's anti-foreign education policies suggested a decentralization of English language in public system and pointed to a discouragement of mass liberal education in China. This dissertation surveyed the interplay of these three factors on parental aspirations to international HEIs.

This dissertation chose bilingual junior high school parents in Shanghai as interviewees. Students in bilingual junior high schools usually had the intention to study overseas. Meanwhile, in theory, they also had the chance to revert to national education system if they chose during senior high school. Thus, bilingual junior high school parents provided a rich focal point of analysis.

The findings demonstrated that the factors had some influence on parental aspirations and choices but did not alter most parents' choice to send their children overseas for undergraduate education. Covid-19 changed parents' short-term plans for international education. Some interviewees noted they deferred the timing to send their children abroad from senior high school to undergraduate. Covid-19 did not influence Shanghai bilingual junior high school parents' long-term plans to send their children overseas for the parents perceived the pandemic would have ended when their children entered undergraduate degrees. In addition, covid grew to be a push factor due to Shanghai's rapid covid development commencing February 2022. As covid became a concern and disruption to students' education both at home and abroad, bilingual school parents strengthened their wish to send their children overseas for education. Furthermore, Covid measures in host countries affected some parents' choice of study destinations. Hostile policies against

international students during covid had impact on prospective international students and their parents.

In terms of world class university building, interviewees reflected that Chinese HEIs had improved immensely in the past twenty years. However, most interviewees remarked top Chinese HEIs were not equals top western HEIs in terms of quality of teaching, curriculum, institutional autonomy, and mission. China's world class university building projects had diminished the disparity in quality between Chinese HEIs and foreign HEIs, but the disparity remained, and students still held the motivation to pursue degrees overseas.

Findings evidenced the impact of anti-foreign education policies on individual bilingual schools and students. While these education policies promoted an environment that was unfavourable to liberal and international education in China, it was difficult for students in bilingual schools to return to national public education.

Parental aspirations for international education persisted in the milieu of world class university building projects, covid-19 pandemic, and anti-foreign education policies because of a multitude of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, it was difficult for students in bilingual schools to switch to public schools as the curriculum, teaching style, and rigour of STEM subjects differ vastly between the two paths. Secondly, parents with financial means and who valued extracurricular activities chose to enrol their children in bilingual schools. These parents remarked that there were a lot more in life than test-taking academics, which was the emphasis of public schools.

Lastly, parents' perception of their children's chances of succeeding in national and international paths accounted for their aspirations to send their children abroad. While China's world class university building projected enhanced the quality of Chinese HEIs, that growth in quality was tiered. Indeed, while Tsinghua and Peking might be considered world class, other Chinese universities lagged far behind. In addition, to set Tsinghua and Peking aside, there was extensive difference in quality of education and employment outcome between 985 and 211 universities, and the rest of the universities. To put it plainly, there was an imbalance between the number of good universities in China and the number of grade 12 examinees each year embarking on the National College Entrance Exam. On a global scale, it was easier for students to enter good universities overseas than good Chinese universities. Chinese parents with financial means were

willing to pay for hundreds of thousands of dollars for bilingual school tuitions and application agency fees.

6.2 Limitations and Implications

This research has chosen bilingual junior high school parents in Shanghai as interviewees. There are limitations and implications brought through this sampling choice. The finding that covid does not impact long-term decisions to international education might be a result of this interviewees sampling. As interviewees' children are already in bilingual junior high schools, there are opportunity cost and difficulty for the students to transfer to national route. If the study chose public school junior high school students, the findings might vastly differ. In addition, findings demonstrate top Chinese universities are not as world class as elite western universities, such as Oxbridge and the Ivy League schools. Once more, this finding is limited to this interviewees sampling. As the parents already enrolled their children in bilingual junior high schools, presumably with the intention of sending their children overseas for undergraduate degrees, it is natural they would think highly of universities overseas.

The interviewees selections inherently limit the research to the geographical location of Shanghai, selection criteria of bilingual schools, representative of parent, and age of junior high school. Extant literature (i.e. Fu & Ren, 2010; Li, 2012; Whyte, 2010; Liu & Helwig, 2022) indicated an urban vis-a-vis rural and coastal vis-à-vis inland divide in education development across China. Thus, parental aspirations to international education in Shanghai is far from exemplifying cases from other parts of China with different, and perhaps, more restricted education opportunities.

The scope of this research is confined by what is achievable in a year's time for a master's dissertation. Bilingual junior high school students are not the only students in China that wish to study overseas for undergrad. Neither are bilingual junior high school students the only ones with the option to alter between national and international paths. Many public junior and senior high school students also consider the possibility of applying to foreign universities. They can utilize their scores in National College Entrance Exam, along with scores in IELTS or TOEFL to apply to foreign universities (Times Higher Education). Future research can delve into Chinese public high school students and their parents' motivations for simultaneously taking the National College

Entrance Exam (gaokao) and applying to foreign universities with gaokao and IELTS or TOEFL scores.

In addition, this research elucidated that international student mobility is impacted by policies geared towards international students in the host country. In stances, hostile policies towards international students during covid deter prospective students away from choosing that country as top study overseas destination. Thus, to maintain inflow of international students, host countries should consider their policy choices towards international students and their country image in face of prospective student population.

References

- 2021 *Academic Ranking of World universities*. ShanghaiRanking's Academic Ranking of World Universities. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://www.shanghai ranking.com/rankings/arwu/2021>
- 2021 留学生圈鄙视链曝光，看看你在哪一层？_美国_美国. (2021, September 17). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.sohu.com/a/490368300_404981
- Allen, R. M. (2017). A comparison of China's "ivy league" to other peer groupings through Global University Rankings. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(5), 395–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317697539>
- Andreas Schleicher. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 On Education: Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*. OECD.
- Baijiahao. (n.d.). 上海小学期末不再考英语，学数学也危险，只学语文最好. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707325557657855062&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- Bilecen, B. (2020). Commentary: Covid-19 pandemic and Higher Education: International mobility and students' social protection. *International Migration*, 58(4), 263–266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12749>
- Bodycott, P., & Lai, A. (2012). The influence and implications of Chinese culture in the decision to undertake cross-border higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(3), 252–270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315311418517>
- Buckner, E., Zhang, Y., & Blanco, G. L. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on International Student Enrolments in North America: Comparing Canada and the United States. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(2), 328–342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12365>
- Chen, Y., Huang, R., Lu, Y., & Zhang, K. (2020). Education fever in China: Children's academic performance and parents' life satisfaction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(2), 927–954. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00258-0>
- Cheung, C. S.-S., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2011). Parents' involvement in children's learning in the United States and China: Implications for children's academic and emotional adjustment. *Child Development*, 82(3), 932–950. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01582.x>
- Christian, M. (2018). A global critical race and racism framework: Racial entanglements and deep and malleable whiteness. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5(2), 169–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218783220>

Coughlan, S. (2017, December 7). *Westminster to open six schools in China*. BBC News. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-42255159>

Eryong, Xue, & Li, J. (2022). What is the value essence of “double reduction” (*shuang jian*) policy in China? A policy narrative perspective. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2040481>

Estera, A., & Shahjahan, R. A. (2019). Globalizing whiteness? visually re/presenting students in Global University Rankings websites. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 40(6), 930–945. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1453781>

FARRER, J. A. M. E. S., & GREENSPAN, A. N. N. A. (2014). Raising cosmopolitans: Localized educational strategies of international families in Shanghai. *Global Networks*, 15(2), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12068>

Fu, Q., & Ren, Q. (2010). Educational inequality under China's rural–urban divide: The *hukou* system and return to education. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 42(3), 592–610. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a42101>

Hammarfelt, B., de Rijcke, S., & Wouters, P. (2017). From eminent men to excellent universities: University Rankings as calculative devices. *Minerva*, 55(4), 391–411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-017-9329-x>

Jack, A. (2021, November 2). *Westminster school scraps plans for linked institutions in China*. Subscribe to read | Financial Times. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://www.ft.com/content/bec549c5-39c4-48c8-abf3-6bd3e7e14bcc>

Jiani, M. A. (2016). Why and how international students choose Mainland China as a higher education study abroad destination. *Higher Education*, 74(4), 563–579. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0066-0>

Kim, D., Song, Q., Liu, J., Liu, Q., & Grimm, A. (2017). Building World Class Universities in China: Exploring faculty's perceptions, interpretations of and struggles with global forces in Higher Education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(1), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1292846>

Lee, J. T. (2015). Soft Power and cultural diplomacy: Emerging education hubs in Asia. *Comparative Education*, 51(3), 353–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2015.1037551>

Lei, J., Xiao, L., & Li, B. (2021). African students' motivations for studying in China's higher education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 22(2), 319–332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-021-09680-2>

Li, J. (2012). World-class higher education and the emerging Chinese model of the University. *PROSPECTS*, 42(3), 319–339. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-012-9241-y>

Liu, D., & Morgan, W. J. (2015). Students' decision-making about postgraduate education at G University in China: The main factors and the role of family and of teachers. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 25(2), 325–335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-015-0265-y>

Liu, G. X., & Helwig, C. C. (2022). Autonomy, social inequality, and support in Chinese urban and rural adolescents' reasoning about the Chinese College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*). *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 37(5), 639–671. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558420914082>

Marzheuser-Wood and Emilia Shi. (2021). *New Education Rule in China: Coming into force on the 1st of September 2021*. Dentons.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (n.d.). 中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发《关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见》 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/moe_1777/moe_1778/202107/t20210724_546576.html

Mok, K. H. (2022). The COVID-19 pandemic and International Higher Education in East Asia. *Changing Higher Education in East Asia*, 225–246. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350216273.ch-012>

Mok, K. H., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Remaking International Higher Education for an unequal world. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(2), 230–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12366>

Mok, K. H., Xiong, W., Ke, G., & Cheung, J. O. (2021). Impact of covid-19 pandemic on International Higher Education and student mobility: Student perspectives from mainland China and Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 101718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101718>

OECD. (2021). *The state of higher education: One year into the COVID-19 pandemic* (Ser. June 2021, pp. 1–46).

Peng, Y. (2022). Gendered Division of Digital Labor in parenting: A qualitative study in urban China. *Sex Roles*, 86(5-6), 283–304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01267-w>

Punteney, K., & Wei, Y. (2018). Dynamics of internationalization in U.S. and Chinese Higher Education. *The Rise of China-U.S. International Cooperation in Higher Education*, 23–60. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368361_003

Shahjahan, R. A., & Edwards, K. T. (2021). Whiteness as Futurity and Globalization of Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 83(4), 747–764. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00702-x>

Shanghai Municipal Education Commission. (n.d.). 上海市教育委员会关于印发上海市中小学2021 学年度课程计划及其说明的通知. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://edu.sh.gov.cn/xxgk2_zd gz_jcyj_01/20210730/f45f960541cf42268bc69100ed11ee39.html

Sheng, X. (2012). Cultural Capital and gender differences in parental involvement in children's schooling and Higher Education Choice in China. *Gender and Education*, 24(2), 131–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.582033>

Sina News. (n.d.). 21. 21 所上海国际班招生. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <http://edu.sina.com.cn/ischool/2015-04-27/1045466777.shtml>

Sohu News. (2021, August 28). 小学不在考英语，上海成为首个试点城市，家长：有些手足无措。_教育。_教育. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.sohu.com/a/486257632_121124319

Sohu News. (2021, November 29). 海口哈罗学生需要参加中考，"中考分流"甬想躲到国际化学校_办学_国际学校_高中。_办学_国际学校_高中. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.sohu.com/a/504219582_101928

Soong, H., & Stahl, G. (2021). Negotiating ‘global middle-class’ teacher professionalism: Using transnational habitus to explore the experiences of teacher expatriates in Shanghai. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1942295>

Tencent News. (n.d.). 上海教委发布中小学课程计划，小学不考英语，不准联考或月考. 腾讯网. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://new.qq.com/omn/20220331/20220331A061GI00.html>

Tian, J., Ma, J., & Cai, J. (2018). Sino-Global higher education partnerships: *The Rise of China-U.S. International Cooperation in Higher Education*, 182–196. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368361_010

Tsinghua University. Times Higher Education (THE). (2022, July 4). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/tsinghua-university>

UNESCO. (2021). *COVID-19: reopening and reimagining universities, survey on higher education through the UNESCO National Commissions* (pp. 1–37).

Universities in Canada that accept the gaokao. Student. (2022, August 17). Retrieved August 20, 2022, from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/universities-canada-accept-gaokao>

U.S. colleges and universities remain top choice for ... - IIE open doors. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://opendoorsdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Open-Doors-2021-Press-Release.pdf>

US News. (2021, May 19). *Congress passes bill to fight hate crimes vs. Asian Americans*. Daily News. Retrieved August 25, 2022, from <https://www.dailynews.com/2021/05/18/congress-passes-bill-to-fight-hate-crimes-vs-asian-americans/>

Viala-Gaudefroy, J. & Lindaman, D. (2020). Donald Trump's 'Chinese virus': The politics of naming.' *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796>

Wang, L. (2012). Social Exclusion and education inequality: Towards an integrated analytical framework for the urban–rural divide in China. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 33(3), 409–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.659455>

Wangyi News. (n.d.). 首次放宽！国内社会组织和个人允许开办外籍子女学校！绿卡能否读外籍学校？. 网易新闻客户端. Retrieved August 25, 2022, from https://c.m.163.com/news/a/GSSLUT1T0536A0JX.html?from=wap_redirect&spss=adap_pc&referFrom=&spssid=4fe533f7a47b6c1e696f5ebef7b8473c&spsw=1&isFromH5Share=article

Wei, Y., & Johnstone, C. (2019). Examining the race for world-class universities in China: A culture script analysis. *Higher Education*, 79(3), 553–567. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00423-2>

Welch, A. (2021). A plague on Higher Education? Covid, campus and culture wars in Australian universities. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(2), 213–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12377>

Wen, W., & Hu, D. (2018). The emergence of a regional education hub: Rationales of International Students' choice of China as the study destination. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 23(3), 303–325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318797154>

Weng, E., Halafoff, A., Barton, G., & Smith, G. (2021). Higher education, exclusion, and belonging. *Journal of International Students*, 11(S2). <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11is2.3553>

Where do he students come from? HESA. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from#non-uk>

Whyte, M. K. (2010). *One country, two societies rural-urban inequality in contemporary China*. Harvard University Press.

Wilkins, S., Balakrishnan, M. S., & Huisman, J. (2012). Student choice in higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(5), 413–433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315311429002>

Yamato, Y., & Bray, M. (2006). Economic development and the Market Place for Education. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(1), 57–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240906061864>

Yang, Dennis T.. *The Pursuit of the Chinese Dream in America : Chinese Undergraduate Students at American Universities*, Lexington Books, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4182153>.

Yang, L., Yang, J., & Wang, C. (2021). The research-intensive university in a GLONACAL higher education system: The creation of the world-class university in China. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(4), 415–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2021.1884512>

Yousaf, S., Fan, X., & Laber, F. (2020). Branding China through the internationalization of Higher Education Sector: An international students' perspective from China. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 30(2), 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1710890>

Yu, L. (2018). An exploratory journey of NYU Shanghai: Reflections from a university chancellor1. *The Rise of China-U.S. International Cooperation in Higher Education*, 143–162. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368361_008

Zhai, Y., & Du, X. (2020). Mental health care for international Chinese students affected by the COVID-19 Outbreak. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(4). [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366\(20\)30089-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366(20)30089-4)

陈子琰. (n.d.). *Universities explore unique features under 'double First-class' plan*. China. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-03/15/content_28566811.htm

Appendix A CUREC Approval

Dear

Title: A qualitative investigation of parental aspirations to international university education in China

Ref: CIA-22HT-049

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethics 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.

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/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf>

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 for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Best wishes
Hamish Chalmers
Member of the DREC

Dr Hamish Chalmers
Departmental Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and SLA
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY
Tel: +44 (0)1865 284 091
Email: hamish.chalmers@education.ox.ac.uk

Director: The International Database of Education Systematic Reviews IDESR.org

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

Department of Education

Msc in Education Student



Study of Parental Aspiration to International Education in China

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: [CIA-22HT-049]

1. Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

2. Why is this research being conducted?

The research investigates parents' decision to encourage their children to pursue international university degrees in China. It inquires into what drives parents' aspirations, and how these aspirations interact with factors such as covid, Chinese education policies, and rise in ranking of Chinese universities. The research contributes to the researcher's master thesis.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

The research invites parents whose children are enrolled in international high schools in Shanghai. Parents who enrol their children in international high schools usually wish their children to study abroad at university level. Shanghai is chosen as site of case study as the city is

a main centre of international education at all levels. Around fifteen participants are invited to participate in the interview process.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the study, without giving a reason by advising me of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is **15/07/2022**. Your data will be deleted if you decide to withdraw.

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

- Interviews will be conducted online using WeChat;
- The participant information sheet and an informed consent form explaining the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as data storage will be circulated to you before the interview starts;
- The interviews are around 45 mins, starting with questions about biographical information, followed by around 20 descriptive questions;
- With your consent, I would like to audio record you so I can have an accurate record of our conversation;
- You can ask to pause or stop the research activities at any time, without penalty.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

As the topic relates to parents' aspirations for their children's future, certain anxiety may be triggered during the interview. Participants will have the right to pause or stop interview at any time. No real names are recorded. Participants will be identified by pseudonymised names. However, information including gender, age, hukou type (Chinese household register) will be recorded.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will lead to reflect on participants' choice for their children's educational future, and experience in participating in research.

8. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Interview notes, audio transcriptions, and other relevant documents, such as consent forms will be stored on a password-protected laptop. No identifiable data will be retained. Anonymised data will be deleted after three years. Only the researcher and her supervisor, Dr. James Robson will have access to the research data.

9. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in a master's thesis. Participants' names will be anonymized. Participants have a choice of allowing the researcher to directly quote from their interviews.

10. 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 is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: CIA-22HT-049).

12. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher and her supervisor and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible: Dr.Liam Gearson, the Chair, Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee
Email: Liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk

13. Further Information and Contact Details

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

Department of Education

University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

University tel: 01865 274024

Appendix C Participant Consent Form



Consent to take part in Study of Parental Aspiration to International Education in China

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: CIA-22HT-049

Purpose of Study: examine the drivers and nature of parent's aspiration for their children to pursue an international university experience in China

**Please initial
each box if you
agree with the
statement**

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point until **15/07/2022**, without giving any reason.

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.

I understand [that I will (not) be/ the extent to which I could be] identifiable from any publications or [list other research outputs here, e.g., reports for specific organisations, presentations, videos, websites].

I consent to being audio recorded.

I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.

Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (select *one* option):

a) I do not wish to be quoted. **or**

b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable. **or**

c) I agree to the use of direct quotations, attributed to my name, in research outputs.

☐☐☐

I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information.

☐

I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

☐

I agree to take part.

☐

Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy

Date

Signature

Name of person taking
consent

6 / 6 / 2022

Date

Signature