



Department of Education, University of Oxford

# **Navigating Employment: How Chinese Humanities Master's Graduates from Selective Universities Transition into the Job Market**

Yutian Wang

Supervisor: Dr. James Robson

Course: MSc in Education (Higher Education)

Academic Year 2023-2024

Word count: 20134

# 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 allow the Department to deposit on my behalf a copy of this 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](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 (unless permission has been obtained from the 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 [[https://ora.ox.ac.uk/deposit\\_agreements](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/deposit_agreements)] 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]:	Yutian Wang
Date:	2024/8/7

## **Abstract**

The expansion of higher education has led to a surplus of graduates relative to labor market demand, creating significant employment pressure. Humanities graduates face particular challenges due to a perceived mismatch between their theoretical knowledge and professional skills. This research explores the opportunities and challenges faced by humanities graduates integrating into the labor market in a society marked by uncertainty and the rapid development of artificial intelligence. Using a qualitative case study approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with humanities master's graduates from a prestigious university in China. Employing the conceptual framework of agency, this thesis examines the dynamics between student agency and external structures during the transition from higher education to employment. The findings suggest that, despite the influence of external structures, individuals retain a degree of autonomy and initiative. As they navigate rapidly changing circumstances, individuals experience increased personal responsibility and the necessity of making informed choices. The agency and self-formation of individuals develop rapidly during this transitional phase, even surpassing their higher education stage. Humanities higher education fosters independent thinking and rational reflexivity early on, enabling students to continually assess limitations and opportunities, reposition themselves effectively, and build a strong foundation for exercising agency in the workplace amid uncertainty. Resources such as autonomy, intentionality, reflexivity, positivity, and a commitment to learning are crucial throughout this process, with different resources predominating at various stages. Finally, this thesis offers recommendations for the development of humanities disciplines in higher education, emphasizing the importance of fostering agency and adaptability to better prepare students for the uncertainties of the modern labor market.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, James Robson, who provided me with thoughtful guidance and encouragement throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. From selecting the topic to designing the research, and finally to writing the thesis, his feedback and our discussions helped me clarify my thoughts step by step. I also want to thank the entire team from Higher Education Pathway at Oxford, especially Simon Marginson, Xin Xu, and Yushan Xie, who created an inclusive and inspiring learning environment. During this journey, I had the opportunity to explore various topics in the field of higher education. I am also grateful to the entire community at the Department of Education. The discussions and interactions with classmates and friends have been a source of inspiration and have significantly contributed to my journey of self-formation and finding a sense of purpose.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	5
1.1 Research context	5
1.1.1 Contentions about humanities degree in China	5
1.1.2 The purpose of higher education	8
1.2 Research questions and aims	10
1.3 Dissertation outline	10
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	11
2.1 Humanities and employability	11
2.2 Living in an age of uncertainty	15
2.3 Entering the era of AI	17
2.4 Gaps in the current literature	18
<b>Chapter 3: Operatizing the framework of agency</b>	21
3.1 Conceptualizing agency	21
3.2 The framework of agency	23
3.2.1 Temporal perspective: Past-present-future	23
3.2.2 Spatial perspective: Relationships and surroundings	24
3.3 The tension between agency and external structure	26
<b>Chapter 4: Methodology</b>	29
4.1 Research design	29
4.2 Rationale and philosophical underpinnings	29

4.2.1 Why qualitative approach	29
4.2.2 Philosophical underpinning	30
4.3 Sampling strategies	31
4.3.1 The selection of university	31
4.3.2 The selection of participants	32
4.4 Research procedure	34
4.5 Positionality	36
4.6 Data analysis	37
4.7 Ethical considerations	38
4.8 Limitation of this research	40
<b>Chapter 5: Findings</b>	40
5.1 Agency resources	41
5.1.1 The agency in choosing humanities	41
5.1.1.1 Autonomy and initiative	41
5.1.1.2 Influence from environment	42
5.1.1.3 Sense of purpose	42
5.1.2 The agency in integrating into job market	45
5.1.2.1 Self-knowledge	45
5.1.2.2 Personal Values	47
5.1.2.3 Transformation	48
5.2 The value of humanities to transition	50
5.2.1 Reflexivity	50
5.2.2 Mindset	51
5.2.3 Skills and Capabilities	53

5.3 The relationship between agency and structure	55
5.4 The future of humanities	60
<b>Chapter 6: Discussions</b>	61
6.1 From findings to discussions	62
6.1.1 Iteration	62
6.1.2 Practical-evaluate	63
6.1.3 Projective	65
6.1.4 Supportive surroundings	67
6.2 Locating this project in the literature	71
6.3 Recommendations and implications	75
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>	76
7.1 In summary	76
7.2 Limitations	77
7.3 Directions for future research	78
<b>References</b>	79
<b>Appendix A: CUREC 1B</b>	101
<b>Appendix B: CUREC 1B, Approval</b>	112
<b>Appendix C: Recruitment Materials</b>	113
<b>Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet</b>	116
<b>Appendix E: Written Consent Form</b>	120
<b>Appendix F: Interview Questions</b>	122
<b>Appendix G: Table of Codes</b>	124

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This chapter offers background information on the humanities and related employment issues. It examines the debates surrounding humanities degrees and the purpose of higher education, particularly within the context of Chinese society. Additionally, this chapter outlines the research questions, objectives, and the overall structure of the dissertation.

### **1.1 Research context**

#### **1.1.1 Contentions about humanities degree in China**

The humanities encompass the study of human culture, both past and present, and the practices of meaning-making, with a strong emphasis on interpretation and critical analysis. Essential elements of the humanities include individual response, creativity, imagination, and subjectivity (Small, 2013, p. 24). There is ongoing debate about whether knowledge should be considered an end in itself or evaluated based on its instrumental value, such as the satisfaction of desires or its contribution to democratic culture. The humanities aim to foster serious reflection and study of these issues (Small, 2013).

Students in the humanities acquire valuable skills during their university education, including independent thinking, research abilities, time management, and proficiency in writing and communication. These skills are highly beneficial for their future careers. However, it has been observed that additional development is needed in areas such as interpersonal skills, project management, and crisis handling when these students enter the job market (Lyonette et al., 2017).

Since 1999, China has significantly expanded its higher education enrollment, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of graduates entering the labor market. In 2000, the national graduate employment allocation system was abolished, and a

two-way selection and self-employment system for graduates was implemented (Yeung, 2013). This new system allows employers to freely choose employees and enables graduates to select their preferred employers. However, the market economy conditions characterized by resource reconfiguration, coupled with recent economic downturns, have led to increasing employment pressure for graduates.

China's current employment situation has evolved into a survival of the fittest scenario. In 2024, the number of college graduates in China is expected to reach 11.79 million, an increase of over 210,000 from 11.58 million in 2023 (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This record high marks the entry into an increasingly challenging employment season. In the context of an oversupply in the job market and the lingering impacts of COVID-19, the employment outlook for graduates, particularly those with degrees in the humanities, remains bleak.

Many studies highlight that the benefits of the humanities extend beyond economic considerations. Firstly, the humanities impart meaning to life and help individuals navigate their place in the world. They offer students unique perspectives for understanding and interpreting human experience and culture, while also fostering critical and creative thinking skills that positively influence career development (Belfiore & Upchurch, 2015). The humanities contribute to the happiness of individuals and communities. This happiness is not merely measured in terms of instrumental value but, more importantly, enhances individuals' understanding of the essence of happiness and the connection between personal psychological well-being and societal well-being (Small, 2013).

Second, a degree in the humanities allows students the freedom and flexibility to choose their life trajectories and careers. Chan (2016) found that while humanities students may have unclear opinions about their career paths due to the lack of direct links to specific occupations, they still identify qualities such as criticality and empathy in themselves, nurtured by their research and education (p. 1664). The humanities enable students to experience self-expression, "a sense of freedom," and "a

deeper self-understanding" (Thomson et al., 2020, p. 553). Through the humanities, students can develop "a better thought-out value system," contributing to personal development (Chan, 2016, p. 1663). Kakooza et al. (2019) suggested that compared to graduates in science and technology fields, graduates in humanities-related disciplines, including literature, history, linguistics, philosophy, and art, have a wider range of job opportunities. A significant proportion of them are employed in public services, informal sectors, and other private institutions. A final report by the British Academy (2019) also illustrates those arts, humanities, and social science graduates in the UK share similarities with STEM students in employment and income, while the former possess greater flexibility in occupations, roles, and fields due to the extensive skills gained through their degrees.

Third, the humanities contribute to the public sphere and public discourse as common goods. Bate (2011) highlighted the public value of the humanities, which unveil the origin of human creativity and reveal what is lacking in an instrumentalism-oriented modern society. Public dialogue on common interests cannot be separated from the preservation and curation of culture and distinctive understandings provided by the humanities (Small, 2013). The kinds of goods presented by humanities research cannot be expressed simply as "economic goods," but rather as "human goods," which are "richly diverse and heterogeneous in character" (Keat, 2000, pp. 23-30), and they directly or indirectly contribute to human well-being. The arts and humanities help cultivate active citizens who can think independently and take responsibility (Hillygus, 2005).

However, the humanities have been criticized in many countries for various reasons. In China, the demand for professional and technical graduates is relatively high, while the demand for liberal arts graduates is comparatively low (Li, 2008). This discrepancy has placed humanities graduates at a disadvantage due to the mismatch between their majors and job skills, as well as the lack of employment opportunities. A humanities degree may not equip young people with sufficient competencies for the labor market. Some humanities students admit that their research is not as valuable or applicable as STEM research (Ferguson, 2020). Graduates of computer science and

other sciences have more job opportunities compared to graduates of the humanities and social sciences (Woya, 2019; Livanos, 2010). Moreover, humanities and social sciences graduates are more likely to face unemployment than their engineering counterparts (Abel, Deitz, & Su, 2014). One of the main reasons for the increase in unemployment is the oversupply of graduates (Gokulsing & Tandrayen, 2018).

Additionally, liberal arts students often face confusion about their career choices due to the difficulty of finding jobs that align with their majors and knowledge in the job market. Studies have found that job skill mismatches have led some graduates to seek careers that are not aligned with their fields of study, further contributing to unemployment among graduates from various disciplines (Shierholz, Davis, & Kimball, 2014). Li (2009) noted that many humanities graduates are in a "random" state when seeking employment, often relying on luck. Graduates with majors in philosophy, history, and literature are primarily employed as civil servants and in public institutions (Li, 2009). The rapid development of technology-driven industries has given graduates of science and engineering majors a more competitive advantage. Conversely, government departments and public institutions place a higher value on comprehensive quality and management ability, which aligns with the core content of humanities education (Wang, 2020). Moreover, these jobs often have strict professional requirements for recruitment, allowing liberal arts students to find positions that meet their professional qualifications.

### **1.1.2 The purpose of higher education**

From 1998 to 2015, the expansion of higher education increased China's higher education enrollment rate from about 6% to 43% in less than two decades (World Bank, 2019). This expansion was a response to market transformation and the growing demand for educated labor. However, this rapid growth inevitably created various social and economic contradictions and posed challenges to graduates' employment and career development (Xiong et al., 2022). Despite the increase in the number of degree holders, higher education institutions have failed to align teaching with job market needs, resulting in the unemployment and underemployment of university graduates (Mok & Jiang, 2018).

Higher education serves dual roles: it contributes to economic productivity through knowledge creation and the preparation of job-ready graduates (Marginson et al., 2023). However, its significance transcends mere economic outcomes, encompassing intrinsic values such as enriching students' comprehension of and engagement with the global landscape (Ashwin, 2020).

Biesta (2015) argues that education should extend beyond merely imparting knowledge and skills. It should also address the subjectification dimension, where individuals evolve into “subjects of initiative and responsibility” rather than being passive recipients of others' actions (Biesta, 2008, p. 77). Additionally, the socialization dimension, which involves adopting specific “ways of thinking and doing,” is crucial. Higher education should not be considered solely from the perspective of credentials and human capital. It is also an important channel for cultivating social and cultural capital, offering an opportunity to empower individuals and change habits (Kang & Mok, 2022). Education must foster beneficence, humanity, compassion, and the ability to live harmoniously with others (Rousseau, 1762, p. 261). Pure learning, driven by the desire to understand the world better, frees people from the restrictions of utility, which is necessary for the common good of society (Russell, 1926, p. 197). An economically-driven model in universities that neglects research on culture and knowledge for its own sake will be harmful to humanity (Gallagher, 2004). The increasing instrumentality of purposes and outcome-oriented culture in higher education gradually impairs students' initiative, independence, and critical thinking abilities (Frankham, 2015), which are highly valued and expected by employers (Tholen et al., 2016).

Skill development varies across different disciplines and degrees (Wilton, 2008). As previously noted, graduates from the humanities often face disadvantages in the job market and economic returns. However, the humanities cultivate critical thinking skills that align with goals beyond economic metrics in higher education. Given these employment challenges, it is crucial to explore how humanities graduates can leverage these untransferable skills and abstract qualities in practical ways to facilitate

a smoother transition into the labor market and better integrate into society. This is the central focus of the forthcoming discussion in this thesis.

## **1.2 Research questions and aims**

The research aims to investigate how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into the job market. It focuses on answering the following sub-questions:

1. How did these graduates choose their major and what did they expect from the major?
2. How did these graduates view the skills and knowledge developed through their major?
3. What challenges and facilitators did graduates experience when entering labor market?
4. What is the relationship between graduates' agency and external structure?

On a broader scale, the research highlights the value of humanities education in fostering critical and reflective citizens, contributing to a more thoughtful and culturally aware society. It emphasizes the meaning of self-exploration and agency. Meanwhile, it will further reflect on the macroeconomic structure and labor market, offering a comprehensive and critical perspective on the clash between agency and the job market.

## **1.3 Dissertation outline**

Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines the background, research questions, and purpose of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the employment of humanities students, the challenges they face in integrating into the labor market, and the broader impact of AI on their employment. Chapter 3 develops a theoretical framework for

understanding the concept of agency and its relationship with structure. Chapter 4 details the research design, methodology, philosophical underpinnings, and positionality of the study. Chapters 5 and 6 present and discuss the results of the interviews, highlighting key findings and their implications. The conclusion addresses the study's limitations and offers recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on the employment and integration of humanities students into the labor market. The first section discusses the employability of humanities students, analyzing the rationale and limitations of using human capital theory to explain their employment status. The second section introduces literature on Bauman's concept of liquid modernity to explore the opportunities and challenges facing humanities students today. The third section examines the relationship between the development of AI technology and the transition and integration of humanities students into the labor market, specifying the uncertain changes within the humanities. The final section summarizes the research gap and outlines a specific direction for this research.

### **2.1 Humanities and Employability**

The transition from university to the labor market is a critical period for graduates. Nicholson (1990) describes this transition as an ongoing process that begins during higher education and continues until the graduate secures employment. Incomplete knowledge of the labor market can result in insufficient time to acquire necessary information, potentially leading to unemployment (Hicks, 1964). Córdón-Lagares, García-Ordaz, and García-del-Hoyo (2022) argued that this transition period is marked by a high degree of uncertainty, where self-efficacy may significantly impact the smoothness of the transition. The effect of this transition on graduates is largely influenced by their perceptions (Schlossberg, 2011). Graduates' perceptions of self-

efficacy affect their decision-making, efforts to overcome obstacles, resilience, and overall potential, all of which are crucial for finding employment or adapting to the workplace (Lent et al., 1999). Factors such as graduates' field of study, internship experience during higher education, and parents' educational background are related to self-efficacy (Cordón-Lagares, García-Ordaz, & García-del-Hoyo, 2022). The transition from higher education to the labor market arises from a confluence of various factors (Grosemans & Kyndt, 2017), including age (Almeida et al., 2016), gender (Valadas et al., 2018), social class, and parental educational level (Holmes, 2013).

Compared to graduates from other fields, humanities graduates face a more challenging transition from higher education to the workforce in many countries (Louvel, 2007; Kempster, 2018). Cordón-Lagares, García-Ordaz, and García-del-Hoyo (2022) found that in the Spanish context, the time to secure the first job for graduates in the Sciences, Legal Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, and Health Sciences was approximately 6.77%, 14.04%, 22.37%, and 53.35% shorter, respectively, compared to graduates in the arts and humanities. In the Greek labor market, arts and humanities graduates experienced longer periods of unemployment than their counterparts in science-related fields, which tend to offer better employment prospects (Nunez & Livanos, 2010). Chow (2019) noted that in the US and the UK, a degree in computer science is often perceived as a direct pathway to employment.

Næss and Wiers-Jenssen (2023) found that in Norway, master's graduates in the humanities are more likely to be unemployed and significantly more likely to be overeducated compared to other graduates. In many European countries, there is a societal preference for science and engineering disciplines, humanities graduates also face higher rates of labor market mismatches (Klein, 2010) and lower wages (Louvel, 2007). Thune and Støren (2014) observed that in countries with well-established apprenticeship and internship programs, like Germany, graduates, including those in humanities who engage formally with the world of work tend to transition more smoothly into the labor market. However, in many Scandinavian countries,

humanities graduates generally lack these experiences compared to graduates in other fields (Næss et al., 2012).

Klein (2010) pointed out that high levels of over-education and job mismatch among humanities graduates can be partially attributed to the perceived lack of occupational specificity in the humanities. From the employer's perspective, Humburg, van der Velden, and Verhagen (2013) found that employers anticipate higher training costs when hiring humanities graduates and prefer candidates who can be deployed immediately. Byrne (2022) noted that employers may overlook the potential of humanities graduates, failing to recognize valuable general skills such as communication and analytical thinking.

Within the humanities discipline, Næss and Wiers-Jenssen (2023) found that language graduates in Norway experienced relatively favorable labor market prospects, while graduates in literature, art history, archaeology, cultural studies, and philosophy faced significantly higher unemployment rates. The unemployment rates for English and philosophy graduates have notably increased over time. Humanities graduates from the University of Oxford have transitioned into the job market more smoothly, achieving not only economic success but also recognizing value beyond financial returns (Robson et al., 2023). This success is attributed to individual agency, knowledge, and other factors (Robson et al., 2023). This research highlights the importance of leveraging agency and knowledge to assist humanities graduates in securing employment. However, it is important to note that the signalling effect of an Oxford degree plays a significant role in these outcomes. An Oxford degree carries significant prestige and global recognition, as well as access to a vast and influential alumni network, all of which facilitate smoother transitions into the job market.

Human capital theory helps explain why humanities degrees are often undervalued in the labor market. According to this theory, the general skills provided by higher education can enhance economic productivity and offer job seekers better job prospects and economic returns (Becker, 1975). Becker (1962) described human

capital as the knowledge and skills individuals acquire that contribute to enhancing the production process. In terms of supply and demand, technological progress has led to a growing need for highly skilled and educated workers, a trend anticipated to persist in the knowledge economy (Goldin & Katz, 2008). The absence of these necessary skills can hinder university graduates from seamlessly entering the job market (Cumming, 2010).

However, many abstract values and skills brought by the humanities are incommensurable, meaning there is a lack of a common measure. While two careers may be incommensurable in terms of well-being, they can be compared in terms of economic security (Chang, 2013). Moreover, there is considerable debate over whether future employers can reliably assess the transferability of skills acquired in university classrooms to the workplace (Tan, 2014). Many creative industries lack formal certification systems and emphasize skills and experience that cannot be easily certified (Dowd & Pinheiro, 2013). For humanities graduates, the connection between academic training and work outcomes is particularly vague (Frenette, 2013). While human capital theory links higher education and skills to better employment outcomes, it often overlooks the complexity of the real world and attempts to apply universal theories to all scenarios, which has not consistently stood up to empirical scrutiny.

Moreover, the smoothness of graduates' transition into employment is highly correlated with their employability. Employability, as described by Harvey (2001), is dynamic, cumulative, and oriented towards market or employer needs. Hillage and Pollard (1998) define employability as comprising baseline assets such as basic skills, intermediate assets including occupation-specific skills, and high-level skills that enhance organizational performance. Thijssen (2008, p. 168) categorizes employability into societal, organizational, and individual levels, encompassing themes such as human, social, cultural, and psychological capital (Williams et al., 2016). Social capital relates to the potential social connections and career networks of employees. Cultural capital encompasses the value of academic qualifications and additional expertise (Harvey et al., 2002), while psychological capital includes traits like resilience, self-efficacy, and confidence (Luthans, 2002). Additionally,

employability is influenced by self-management skills, which are based on personal interests, values, and goals (Bridgstock, 2009, p. 37). Career management also encompasses contextual factors and systems that affect the demand for an individual's skills (Brown et al., 2003). From "transferable skills" (Kalfa & Taksa, 2015) to "soft skills" (Moore & Morton, 2015), various aspects contribute to an individual's employability and their ability to effectively navigate the job market transition.

From human capital to psychological capital, a humanities degree can contribute to employability in a changing society to some extent. The classification of skills within the concept of individual employability often treats it as a concrete, divisible, and additive characteristic. This approach unintentionally detaches employability from the individuals who embody it, as well as from the broader social contexts of jobs, occupations, and civic engagement (Wheelahan et al., 2022). However, true meaning and identity for individuals arise from genuine, reciprocal relationships with others (Bernstein, 2000, p. 59). Bernstein (2000, p. 59) emphasized that individuals should not be merely trained to adapt to a changing future but should instead "project themselves meaningfully rather than relevantly into this future and recover a coherent past."

Therefore, the success of graduates' employment transitions should not be measured solely by economic returns but also by their career choices and job satisfaction. Focusing exclusively on individual employability as an investment reduces people to "homo economicus," overlooking other essential aspects of human values. Individuals seek purposeful and meaningful work (Spencer, 2008), which contributes to their sense of self-worth (Roessler, 2012). Graeber (2018) further argued that self-worth and dignity are deeply connected to work, potentially outweighing the importance of a paycheck.

## **2.2 Living in an age of uncertainty**

In today's era of accelerated social transformation, Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" aptly describes the continuous changes and uncertainties faced by individuals and society. Globalization, technological advancements, and economic shifts have introduced increasingly complex and unpredictable risks. Social structures and interpersonal relationships have become more fluid, and modern lives are characterized by constant change. As a result, individual life trajectories and careers have become unpredictable, necessitating constant adaptation to new environments and challenges (Bauman, 2000). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified this uncertainty, permeating all aspects of life and business. Concurrently, traditional social ties and collective identities have weakened, compelling individuals to navigate a highly competitive environment. This process of individualization has exacerbated the uncertainty of modern society (Bauman, 2001), leading to heightened individual insecurity and confusion regarding personal identity and meaning.

Predicting future skill demands is increasingly challenging, and education systems are struggling to address this uncertainty. Educators often face the daunting task of preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist, utilizing technologies that have not yet been developed, and addressing problems that remain undefined (McClaran, 2018).

To navigate this search for meaning, students must learn to diverge from conventional paths (Penlington, 1976). A robust humanities education allows students to confront existential truths and critically examine fundamental collective and personal assumptions (Penlington, 1976). This approach encourages students to discover their own sense of meaning. In these uncertain times, crises present opportunities for individuals to break away from the group, harness their creativity, and contribute meaningfully to humanity. The study of the humanities can facilitate this process, and humanities educators play a crucial role in guiding students toward this goal. However, this can only be achieved when we ourselves recognize and value the humanities (Penlington, 1976).

Thus, in the context of liquid modern life, can the humanities help individuals position themselves amidst change and uncertainty? In an unfavorable employment environment, can humanities graduates leverage their experience and knowledge to effectively transition from higher education to the labor market? These questions will be explored further in the following chapters.

## **2.3 Entering the era of AI**

The rapid advancement of technology has shifted the balance of power in favor of potential employers, resulting in a labor market characterized by fewer complaints, reduced leave allowances, and even lower wages (Arthur, 2019). This shift poses a threat to the labor market and contributes to rising unemployment (Peters et al., 2019). Investment in high-level skills remains crucial, as technological transformations underscore the scarcity of labor with employability skills.

Traditional human capital theory suggests that an increase in the number of well-educated workers should lead to greater demand for skilled labor, enhancing productivity and wages (Becker, 1975). However, despite having the most educated workforce in history, skill deficiencies continue to exist (Wheelahan et al., 2022). This problem arises because the skills acquired during the first and second industrial revolutions have become outdated due to the rapid advancements of the third and fourth industrial revolutions (Wheelahan et al., 2022). Additionally, AI and deep learning technologies are anticipated to replace humans in roles requiring cognitive skills, with significant job displacement expected across various industries due to automation (World Bank, 2016).

Therefore, effectively addressing uncertain changes requires prioritizing the development of social-emotional capabilities rather than focusing solely on training for emerging skills. These capabilities are essential for adapting to "new job types that

don't yet exist" (WEF, 2020, p. 5). Untransferable skills are increasingly sought after in the labor market (Colvin, 2015; Weise et al., 2018) and are considered crucial for students' career success (Colvin, 2015; Teng et al., 2019). In China, the focus on transferable skills stems from an educational system that emphasizes results-oriented and efficiency-driven approaches, influenced by the college entrance examination system and a factory model of higher education. However, as technology increasingly permeates complex aspects of daily life, Colvin (2015) contends that the characteristics defining our humanity—who we are, rather than just what we can do—are becoming more important in the digital economy. While professional skills are more measurable, transferable, and deliverable (Mok, Xiong, & Ye, 2021), human traits and attributes play a vital role in career development.

## **2.4 Gaps in the current literature**

Currently, most studies examine the overall relationship between higher education and employment, often mentioning the employment situation of humanities graduates only in broad comparisons of disciplinary differences (Li, Whalley, & Xing, 2014; Lee & Chung, 2015; Snieska et al., 2015), or focusing on factors influencing graduate employment (Holmes, 2013; Almeida et al., 2016; Valadas et al., 2018). Discussions specifically about humanities graduates tend to concentrate on objective issues such as the value of humanities education, career choices, skill mismatches, unemployment, and economic returns. Most of these studies focus on developed countries, with comparatively less research on developing nations and emerging contemporary factors like COVID-19.

In the Chinese context, research typically focuses on the broader social factors influencing the development of humanities disciplines and the career prospects of their graduates. The liberal arts in China have deep roots in the Confucian tradition, where education was primarily focused on cultivating moral character and administrative ability. The "Six Arts" — ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics — were considered essential skills for a cultivated gentleman, reflecting an early form of a liberal arts education. This classical education

aimed at producing well-rounded individuals who could serve in government roles (Elman, 2000). The introduction of Western liberal arts education to China during the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to significant changes in how these disciplines were perceived and taught. Influenced by Western models, Chinese universities began to adopt a broader curriculum that included humanities and social sciences, expanding the scope of traditional liberal arts education (Hayhoe, 1999). In recent decades, the liberal arts disciplines in China have faced challenges due to the increasing emphasis on STEM education and the job market's demand for technical skills. However, there has been a renewed interest in liberal arts education, particularly as universities aim to cultivate creative and critical thinking skills among their students (Mok & Jiang, 2016).

Recent literature in China has predominantly focused on the employment challenges faced by humanities graduates. Chen (2012) explored the root causes of the growing number of unemployed humanities graduates, arguing that the influx of humanities students has surpassed the absorptive capacity of China's economy and society. Consequently, civil service positions have become the most viable career option for the majority of these graduates. Li (2010) highlighted that, in the era of mass education, humanities graduates face a significantly more severe employment situation compared to their peers in science and engineering fields. The phenomenon of "educated unemployment" is particularly evident among humanities graduates. Li (2010) noted that the lower entry barriers and quicker learning curve in most humanities disciplines have enabled science and engineering students to easily take over job opportunities traditionally reserved for humanities graduates. He suggested that establishing stronger barriers in humanities disciplines is necessary to fundamentally enhance the quality of education for humanities students.

Furthermore, the demand for professional and technical talents in China far outweighs that for humanities graduates, with the latter constituting only 24.8% of the total recruitment demand (Li, 2008). Additionally, the low status of the humanities in China has led to subtle yet pervasive discrimination against liberal arts disciplines. While the introduction of the academicians' system aimed to honor knowledge and

intellectuals and has bolstered the development of the humanities, the humanities and social sciences have not received equivalent recognition through such a system. Consequently, scholars in these fields, despite their significant contributions, lack the same level of honor and recognition afforded to their counterparts in the sciences, with the exception of a few aging "Members of the Academic Division" acknowledged in the 1950s (Li, 2010). This academic undervaluation is also evident in the declining enrollment in liberal arts programs, as these disciplines are often seen by teachers and parents as a fallback option for students who are not excelling in the sciences (Zeng, 2001).

Miller et al. (2023) discovered a significant decline in campus recruitment in China in 2023, with fewer than half of recruiters participating in campus interviews and headhunting activities. The implementation of stringent Covid-19 containment measures, including lockdowns, exacerbated the unemployment rate among Chinese graduates, particularly impacting fields commonly pursued by humanities graduates, such as retail and consumer services (Miller et al., 2023). Miller et al. (2023) also noted that literature graduates showed little interest in the emerging, stimulus-driven vocational trades. Ji (2010) identified several key factors affecting the employment prospects of humanities graduates, including their relatively weaker skills, imbalances in employment opportunities across regions and industries, and fewer internship opportunities. Huang, Sun, and Zhang (2021) focused on the challenges faced by female humanities graduates in the job market, highlighting issues such as gender discrimination during recruitment, familial pressure and expectations for stable employment, and the idealization of careers by humanities graduates, all of which complicate job selection for this group.

There is a notable lack of studies specifically targeting Chinese humanities students' career aspirations and transitions. Consequently, the relationship between humanities higher education and employment remains unclear. Additionally, the number of students pursuing master's degrees in China saw a significant increase of 25% in 2021, leading to degree inflation and placing additional burdens on recent graduates. This trend suggests that jobs previously accessible to bachelor's degree holders now

often require a master's degree (Atonoy, 2023). Currently, it is not uncommon for bachelor's degree holders in China to find employment as delivery drivers (Beddor, 2023), raising further questions about the value of a master's degree in the humanities.

This research aims to focus on the transition of humanities master's graduates from higher education to the job market, analyzing individual agency from an internal perspective. It will also consider modern uncertainties such as the development of AI and COVID-19, to provide a new view of how these unprecedented factors impact humanities graduates during job hunting and when entering the workforce.

### **Chapter 3: Operatizing the framework of agency**

To address research questions, this chapter situates the conceptual analysis of agency and the discussion of the relationship between agency and structure within the context of humanities graduates transitioning to the job market. First, it conceptualizes the connotations and associated resources of agency based on the theoretical contributions of various scholars. Second, it deconstructs agency along the dimensions of temporality and spatiality to develop a conceptual framework. Finally, this chapter draws on theories on the relationship between agency and external structure, thereby laying the groundwork for the subsequent results and analysis.

#### **3.1 Conceptualizing agency**

In a modern world characterized by contingency and uncertainty, individuals must become more proactive and take control of their lives. However, achieving this heightened need for agency can be challenging (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This research aims to investigate how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into the job market. Agency theory

provides a valuable lens for examining how individuals make decisions regarding their major and career expectations. This framework underscores the significance of self-exploration and personal agency, central to humanities education. Incorporating agency as a conceptual framework can help understand both the internal motivations and expectations of graduates and how these factors interact with external structures.

Different disciplines offer varied interpretations of agency. In psychology, agency is often linked to concepts such as self-efficacy and autonomy (Bandura, 2006). Bandura (2006) further explores agency through the dimensions of intentionality, self-reflectiveness, self-regulation, and forethought. While psychological scales can effectively measure self-efficacy and self-regulation, they tend to be descriptive and may not fully explain the "why" and "how" of agency. Philosophically, agency is associated with free will, moral responsibility, and voluntary action (Biesta et al., 2009). Biesta and Tedder (2007) approach agency from an ecological perspective, viewing it as the outcome of the interaction between individuals and their environments. They define agency as "the capacity to exert control and direction over one's life" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p.13). In this framework, higher education and the labor market can be conceptualized as a self-narrative ecological system comprising actors, available resources, and structural factors. Learning becomes a process in which individuals develop agency throughout their lives, receiving guidance and a sense of purpose to act (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Agency thus spans an individual's lifetime, fostering a greater sense of personal responsibility and freedom, and preparing them for an uncertain future. Crocker and Robeyns (2009) argue that agency reflects individuals' and groups' abilities to shape their own destinies and support each other in becoming active participants in processes of change. Wyn and Dwyer (1999, p.14) emphasize that young people need to rely on individual agency to envision and establish patterns that imbue their lives with positive meaning.

Sarid (2017) proposed that reflexivity plays a crucial role in agency. According to Archer (2007), reflexivity involves a process where individuals engage in internal dialogues before taking action. Through these dialogues, individuals can assess their social environment, evaluate their choices and constraints, and make autonomous decisions in complex contexts. Reflexive agency involves critical self-assessment and is essential for self-formation, allowing people to navigate their lives more effectively by consciously reflecting on their evolving goals and self-concept (Marginson, 2023). Hitlin and Elder (2007) highlight self-efficacy, optimism, social support, and self-esteem as significant components of agency. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete specific tasks or achieve goals, thereby fostering a sense of capability and confidence in their actions. Self-esteem, on the other hand, bolsters intrinsic motivation and self-confidence, contributing to overall agency.

## **3.2 The framework of agency**

### **3.2.1 Temporal perspective: Past-present-future**

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) situated agency within a temporality framework that incorporates the past, present, and future. This framework comprises three core elements: iteration, practical-evaluation, and projective dimensions. It offers a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of agency. “Iteration” involves drawing strength from past experiences and habits. The actions of an individual are deeply connected to their historical experiences, which include their economic background, family upbringing, education, and cultural experiences (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). “Practical-evaluation” refers to the individual's immediate actions in their current situation, involving the reflection and assessment of various possibilities and constraints (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). “Projective” thinking allows individuals to conceive future goals and plans. As Bandura (2006) discusses, this involves “forethought”, which is a key component of reflexivity. The projective nature of agency serves as a foundational step in reflexivity, providing direction and shaping future possibilities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Agency is not merely an individual attribute but a process that evolves and develops within a specific context. Individuals continually adapt and adjust their behavior to navigate change and uncertainty (Hopwood, 2010). The concept of “possible selves” and “future selves” is influenced by social networks, psychological resilience, and community engagement (Harrison & Waller, 2018).

### **3.2.2 Spatial perspective: Relationships and surroundings**

Biesta and Tedder (2007) argued that agency is both temporal and situational, meaning that individual agency evolves over time and varies according to context. Actions are accomplished through complex interactions with one's environment. Consequently, understanding agency requires considering an individual's life course and specific context. Different social and physical environments offer varying resources and constraints, which influence the choices and abilities of individuals (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Bourdieu's (1984) Field Theory examines how social position and capital within social spaces impact agency. An individual's social position determines their access to resources and power within the social structure, which in turn affects their capacity for action. Different positions in the social field endow individuals with distinct types of capital and strategies for action (Bourdieu, 1984).

Social surroundings can either facilitate or hinder agency. Agency does not exist in isolation; it is influenced by the resources, social relations, and support systems within an individual's environment (Hopwood, 2010). When external regulations align with an individual's needs, they can integrate these external values and norms into their sense of self, as noted by Ryan and Deci (2000). In tertiary education, various elements provide essential tools and conditions for socialization (Bragg, 1976). Students who engage more fully in curricular and extracurricular activities often gain access to supportive peer networks, mentors, and other social resources that can enhance their success in university (Friedlander et al., 2007).

The power of agency is significant and can be cultivated through techniques and knowledge (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 132). According to Bandura (1993), "A major goal of formal education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, self-beliefs, and self-regulatory capabilities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime" (p. 136). These abilities are essential for developing agency. Pragmatists like Dewey (1916) emphasize that the main goal of education is to cultivate agency, autonomy, and self-determination.

The scope of agency in self-formation includes both external resources or support systems from institutions and educators, as well as individual traits like adaptability and resilience (Marginson, 2014). Effective teaching not only provides these external resources but also directly enhances students' adaptability and resilience (Walsh et al., 2020). For example, exposure to diverse concepts and viewpoints through teaching facilitates students' reflexivity, shaping their understanding of their identity and potential (Bernstein, 2000). Additionally, educational institutions and organizations play a role in nurturing students' backgrounds, identities, learning practices, perspectives, and decision-making processes, thus actively constructing conscious student agency (Marginson, 2014). By engaging with diverse knowledge, students expand their resources and understanding, which supports their ongoing self-improvement (Marginson, 2023).

In summary, the development of individual agency is informed by two key dimensions: temporality and spatiality. From a temporal perspective, individuals engage in judgments and actions based on their past experiences, current circumstances, and future aspirations. This dimension highlights the individual's inherent propensity for agency, including their inclination and willingness to exercise agency (James & Biesta, 2007). From a spatial perspective, the external environment and available resources offer additional opportunities for individuals to actualize their agency and achieve their goals. In the context of higher education, agency is demonstrated through practical-evaluative capabilities, which are enhanced by direct interactions with various university environments. These include courses, academic

resources, career guidance, and alumni networks. Such interactions enable individuals to integrate their past habits and future plans into their current situation (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

### **3.3 The tension between agency and external structure**

The primary issue is not the lack of skills sought by employers but rather the nature of poorly paid and insecure jobs (Keep & James, 2012; Brown & Lauder, 2010). The expansion of higher education has led to an oversupply of graduates in the labor market. “The rising enrollments will make the employment issue a serious challenge for China in the years to come” (Min, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation by worsening the socioeconomic environment and job market. The pandemic has triggered a severe global economic recession, which economists argue is more intense than the impacts of World War II or the global financial crisis (World Bank, 2020). Employment inequalities are increasingly tied to the nature of employment itself—such as shifts in labor market structures, stratification, segmentation within and between occupations, and emerging work patterns—rather than simply the skills of employees (Brown, 2020b).

Given these constraints imposed by external structures, what role can agency play? Is there a meaningful relationship between agency and structure?

Archer (2007) highlighted the dynamic interplay between social structure and agency. Social structures provide the context and constraints for individual actions, yet individuals can navigate and potentially reshape these structures through reflexivity and action. Archer (1995, p. 2) argues that individuals are "simultaneously free and constructed," highlighting the dual influence where individuals both shape and are shaped by their environments. Tomlinson (2022, pp. 53-54) also emphasizes "enhancement of the self" and "engagement in knowledge" as key aspects of subjectification. Learners are molded by external forces yet maintain their agency

(Taylor, 2017). Agency freedom denotes an individual's capacity to make self-determined decisions and shape their own life and identity (Sen, 1985, p. 203).

Archer (2003, p. 103) asserts that “self-knowledge is something that we produce internally and dialogically; it is not something that we discover 'lying inside us.” Inner dialogue is essential in the development of agency and reflexivity. This view posits that individuals are not merely products of socialization but actively engage in internal conversations that shape their agency (Archer, 2000, p. 221). Moreover, individuals do not passively accept social norms and structures; they actively construct their identities through their thoughts, actions, and choices (Skinner, 2013). As a result, agency is not fully determined by external structures; instead, it has the capacity to resist and reshape these influences (Archer, 1995).

Individual agency is influenced by social networks, institutions, and structures, often unconsciously reproducing the sociostructural environment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). Bourdieu (1984) proposed that the interplay between agency and structure is mediated through habitus, capital, and the specific fields in which individuals operate. Habitus is both a product of the social structures individuals are embedded in and a means by which individuals navigate and reproduce those structures (Bourdieu, 1984).

Without social liberation, there is no individual liberation. Changes in external structures cannot be separated from collective agency. Giddens (1984) proposed the duality of structure, arguing that structure and agency are inseparable; structure both constrains behavior and results from it. In adapting to and responding to changes, the self becomes a process of continuous construction and reconstruction of identity, described as a "reflexive project" (Giddens, 1991). Human motivation extends beyond self-interest to include commitments and empathy for others, such as common goods like environmental protection (Sen, 2009) and community development. The exercise of projective freedom can pursue these common goods (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Collective agency depends on the confidence of group members in shared goals and

their collective ability to achieve them (Bandura, 2006). It is not merely the sum of individual agencies but a collective capacity formed through interaction and cooperation, allowing groups to pool their skills, knowledge, and resources to shape their future together (Bandura, 2006).

Identity links structure, which limits individual choices through social group constraints, with agency (Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 9). Brown (1997) found that individual agency and social norms interact dynamically and iteratively in the discourse of career identity. The meaning individuals ascribe to their professional identity evolves as they enter the workforce, continually reinterpret past experiences, and project possible futures to guide their current actions (Brown, 1997). After entering the labor market, career identity develops under the pressure of integrating diverse experiences into a meaningful whole (Markus & Wurf, 1987) while also being influenced by interactions with others (Goffman, 1959). Bauman (2000, pp. 31-32) proposed that “individualization” involves transforming one’s “identity” from being “given” to being a “task,” requiring individuals to assume responsibility for executing this task and the consequences of their actions. Bauman emphasized that whereas identities were once “given” within a relatively narrow set of expectations provided by social, cultural, institutional, and local frameworks, individuals now face a broader array of choices. The weakening of societal, cultural, and institutional influences means that finding one’s place has become a significant challenge. While aspects of individualization may be driven by a heightened sense of individual agency, the abandonment of clearly defined but limited choices means that actors must increasingly utilize their agency in institutional and social contexts (Beck, 1992).

This chapter outlines a framework for understanding agency, characterized by self-efficacy, autonomy, intentionality, reflexivity, positivity, and learning. It also examines the resources available for developing agency from the perspectives of temporal and spatial context, thereby offering a comprehensive analytical scaffold for this study. Various scholars hold differing views on the relationship between agency and structure. This study aims to further analyze and validate this analytical framework within the context of higher education and the transition to the job market.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

This study employs qualitative research methods to address the research question: how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into the job market. This chapter outlines the research design and explains the rationale for adopting case study and semi-structured interview methods. Additionally, it describes the philosophical underpinnings, specifically the constructivist approach, and details the sampling strategies and overall research procedures. Furthermore, it explains the process of positionality and data analysis. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

### **4.1 Research design**

This research employs a qualitative case study design to investigate how Chinese humanities master's graduates from selective universities transition into the job market. Given the complexity of transitions and the personal nature of experiences, a smaller, more manageable number of participants is ideal for conducting an in-depth analysis. The primary aim is to gain a deep understanding of the nuances in each participant's experience. One-on-one semi-structured interviews are employed as they are effective for achieving detailed insights and may uncover unexpected data (Sutton, 2011, p. 111).

### **4.2 Rationale and philosophical underpinnings**

#### **4.2.1 Why qualitative approach**

The research design is guided by the nature of the research question, the desired outcomes, and the extent of control needed over the research process (Merriam, 1998).

The case study design is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2013, p. 16). It is particularly suited for addressing “how” and “why” questions related to contemporary events (Yin, 2013). This study aims to explore “how” graduates of Master of Humanities programs from prestigious universities transition from higher education to the job market, and how the agency developed by these students helps them navigate the external structures of the job market.

Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the need for a deep understanding of graduates' experiences, qualitative case studies are an appropriate choice. Qualitative case studies are advantageous for understanding complex phenomena and their significance (Merriam, 1998). This approach allows for in-depth insights into personal narratives, decision-making processes, and experiences during the job market transition. Semi-structured interviews, which include both closed and open-ended questions, offer flexibility for prompts while allowing the interviewer to maintain some control (Drever, 2006).

#### **4.2.2 Philosophical underpinning**

A paradigm represents a comprehensive framework encompassing philosophical foundations and theoretical perspectives that shape how researchers understand and investigate their subject matter (Mertens, 2007). This research is grounded in a constructivist approach, which posits that social reality is co-constructed by individuals and society, emphasizing the significance of interactions between individuals and their social environments (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

The personal narratives and decision-making processes of humanities master's graduates transitioning from higher education to the job market illustrate how they construct and interpret their employment experiences through interactions with society, peers, and employers. Each decision made by graduates during their employment process is formed through these interactions and their own reflections

within a specific social and cultural context. Constructivism facilitates an in-depth analysis of these interactions and the logic behind decisions, as well as an understanding of how graduates construct their personal and social identities during the transition. It also directly addresses the research question concerning the relationship between graduates' agency and external structures.

Additionally, this research is supported by interpretivism, which aids in understanding the subjective realities of participants and how they interpret their experiences of transitioning from education to employment.

### **4.3 Sampling strategies**

This study was designed to conduct an intrinsic case study on students from a specific institution. According to Stake (1995), an intrinsic case study is conducted when the primary interest is in the case itself, rather than in generalizing findings to other cases. The case is of particular interest due to its unique characteristics or context (Stake, 1995). In this research, the focus is specifically on humanities master's graduates in Fudan University, examining their unique experiences and challenges as they transition into the job market. This intrinsic interest in Fudan University's context, rather than a broader generalization, aligns with Stake's definition of intrinsic case study. It often involves detailed, rich descriptions of the case to provide in-depth understanding (Yin, 2018). This research focuses on individual Master's graduates from Fudan University to provide detailed insights into their specific challenges and successes. The study examines recent graduates, typically those who have completed their Master's programs within the past 1-3 years. This timeframe ensures relevance to current job market conditions.

#### **4.3.1 The selection of university**

On the one hand, due to accessibility and time constraints, participants were recruited from Fudan University in China. As an alumnus of Fudan University, I have more

direct contact channels for recruitment, such as social media groups comprising current students and alumni. On the other hand, Fudan University is a prestigious institution known for its high academic reputation and quality of education. Its humanities programs are highly regarded both domestically and internationally, representing a typical example of high-level humanities education in China. The experiences of its graduates might provide specific insights related to this elite educational context. The research results from this study may provide valuable insights applicable to other institutions. Graduates from Fudan University have diverse career options, spanning various industries. Thus, choosing Fudan University as the focus of this study provides a wealth of cases and data, offering a comprehensive understanding of the employment transition process for humanities master's graduates.

#### **4.3.2 The selection of participants**

The case university and interviewees for this research were selected using purposive sampling, a method that identifies and selects individuals or cases based on specific criteria or qualities relevant to the research (Merriam, 1988). In this research, the criteria include: 1) Prestige of the university: Fudan University, as one of China's top-tier and highly selective institutions, was chosen for its reputation and influence; 2) Field of study: The focus is specifically on graduates from humanities disciplines; 3) Recent graduation: Interviewees were selected based on their recent transition from academic study to the job market, typically within the last 1-3 years. This approach ensures that participants are representative of the study's focus. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to reach as many respondents as possible who met the criteria.

This study specifically targets graduates who entered the job market within 1-3 years for several reasons: First, this period is crucial for transitioning from an academic environment to a professional career. During this time, graduates typically undergo an adaptation phase in their initial employment and begin to stabilize or adjust their careers, offering valuable insights into the transition process. Second, those who graduated 1-3 years ago have relatively recent memories of the job search process and

their first employment, allowing them to recall the challenges and opportunities they encountered with greater accuracy and detail, thus providing reliable first-hand data. Third, early in their careers, graduates often reflect on the alignment between their academic background and job requirements. Their career satisfaction, adaptability, and reflections on career choices during this period offer important information on the relationship between education and employment. The study focuses exclusively on graduates from humanities programs. It does not extend to graduates from other disciplines such as STEM or business. It is limited to Fudan University, a selective and prestigious institution, to explore the particular challenges and advantages experienced by its graduates.

This research focuses specifically on Master's graduates because they occupy a unique position between undergraduate and doctoral studies, representing a critical transition from academia to the professional world. While doctoral students are primarily oriented toward research careers, Master's students often pursue a wider range of career paths, including those outside academia. Unlike undergraduates, Master's students typically have a clearer understanding of their disciplines and goals, allowing them to engage in more autonomous exploration and decision-making. Studying their experiences offers comprehensive insights into the value of the humanities and how humanities education can be enhanced to better support this transition.

The selected participants are both homogeneous and heterogeneous. They come from various humanities disciplines, such as philosophy, history, literature, and linguistics, which allows the research to capture a broad and diverse perspective.

It is also important to note that the recruited respondents have navigated the impacts of COVID-19 during their job search or early employment. This context provides valuable insights into university and labor market experiences in the post-COVID-19 era.

## 4.4 Research procedure

The recruitment process began by distributing an initial invitation via popular Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo. The invitation was specifically targeted at potential participants who fit the study's criteria. Additionally, a more focused effort was made by sharing the invitation in the Fudan Humanities Employment Information WeChat group, a platform frequently used by recent graduates to discuss job opportunities and career-related topics. This approach ensured that the invitation reached a relevant audience. Interested individuals received follow-up communication via official emails to schedule interviews and discuss the meeting method. Consent forms were sent electronically and returned through email. This process resulted in the recruitment of 9 qualified participants. Subsequently, the snowball sampling method was employed to extend recruitment. Current participants were asked to refer the study to their peers, which led to the recruitment of an additional 8 participants, bringing the total to 17. This number aligns with similar qualitative studies in this field. The final pool of participants included a diverse range of degree subjects within the humanities.

Participants information :

Name (Pseudonym)	Degree	Years of working experience	Industry
Mary	Master of Marxism philosophy	2	Banking
Paul	Master of Philosophy in Science and Technology	1	Investment
Linda	Master of Western philosophy	1	Chinese language and literature

			education
Susan	Master of Chinese Philology	2	Journalism
Sarah	Master of Western philosophy	1	Automotive industry
Jessica	Master of Aesthetics	1	Art exhibition
David	Master of Marxism philosophy	1	Civil service
Richard	Master of Chinese language and literature	2	Chinese language and literature education
William	Master of Marxism philosophy	1	State-owned enterprise
Lisa	Master of Ethics	3	Political teacher
Emily	Master of Chinese Literature	2	Internet industry
Karen	Master of western philosophy	1	Political education
Carol	Master of Aesthetics	1	Private enterprise
Emily	Master of Linguistics	2	Foreign company
Steven	Master of Chinese philosophy	1	Public affaris
Elizabeth	Master of Marxism	1	Private company

	philosophy		
Donna	Master of Chinese philosophy	1	Press

In June 2024, a semi-structured pilot interview was conducted with a Chinese humanities graduate to test the validity of the interview questions. This pilot interview allowed for adjustments and refinement of the questions, including the elimination of redundant ones.

The main interviews were conducted one-on-one, semi-structured, and involved 17 humanities graduates who had entered the job market 1-3 years prior. These interviews were conducted using Teams and Tencent meetings, with sessions lasting between 40 to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.

Before the interviews, an outline was sent to some interviewees upon request. The interviews followed a general guide but allowed flexibility for specific questions tailored to each interviewee's background and responses. The interview protocol included 18 open-ended questions (see Appendix F), divided into four main sections: professional choice, career decision, knowledge and skills, and future planning. The questions were designed to explore the graduates' experiences from past, present, and future perspectives.

Immediately after each interview, memos were recorded to capture initial thoughts and observations. During the transcription process, follow-up questions were posed to some respondents to clarify any ambiguities.

## 4.5 Positionality

Positionality refers to the consideration of how our various lenses—shaped by our social identities, social capital, and researcher status—affect and potentially bias our understanding of the world. These lenses may align with or, conversely, diverge from the perspectives of the people and contexts we study (Bennett et al., 2022, p. 635). Achieving complete neutrality in research is challenging, as researchers inevitably bring their own interests, motivations, biases, and worldviews into the project.

As a graduate of the humanities, I might establish a more trusting relationship with interviewees due to shared disciplinary backgrounds. However, this familiarity also presents the risk of bias. Specifically, I may overemphasize certain aspects of the problem while neglecting equally important but less familiar details, or I might overly sympathize with and understand the interviewees' situations, which could influence the analysis and interpretation of the data. To mitigate these potential biases, I aim to maintain a balanced perspective, remain open to unexpected data, and uphold the rigor of the research process.

## **4.6 Data analysis**

The purpose of data analysis is to derive well-supported generalizations and conclusions "based on a preponderance of the data" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139). This study utilized NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software to code and analyze the interview transcripts. Coding involves assigning labels or tags to document fragments to identify and categorize key themes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), thus capturing the content or dimensions of the text.

The analysis followed the five-stage framework outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). The process began with immersion and familiarity with the interview transcripts, which involved re-reading the texts, listening to the audio recordings, and creating indices for the interviews. The second stage involved thematic analysis, where NVivo was used to categorize the qualitative data and develop a structured

framework for coding. This framework was used to identify key concepts and themes emerging from the data.

Subsequently, the data was organized by theme or concept in Excel, displayed in sheets arranged by rows and columns. The raw material was indexed, retaining the interviewees' language, and systematically applying the thematic framework to the data. This descriptive approach helps capture participants' perspectives accurately and describes the status of categories and their fit with the data.

In the process of categorizing and fitting the data, a refined conceptual framework index was developed. By reviewing the themes column by column, the dimensions of these categories were further examined and refined. The final step involved mapping and interpreting the data by identifying patterns, clustering related themes, comparing findings, and establishing connections (Miles et al., 2014).

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

This study received approval from the Department Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Education at the University of Oxford and adhered to established ethical guidelines (see Appendix A for the full form). Informed consent was obtained from all participants through a series of procedures. Potential respondents were initially contacted with an invitation letter that outlined the study's objectives. Before the interviews commenced, each participant was provided with an information sheet and consent form via email, and written consent was obtained for both participation and recording.

This research involves specific risks for participants, primarily concerning confidentiality. Given the small, specialized group of humanities Master's graduates from Fudan University, there is a risk of identification even with anonymization, potentially exposing personal opinions and career struggles. Additionally, participants

may share critical views on their educational experiences or job market challenges, which could have negative consequences if linked to institutional practices, possibly affecting their relationships with the university or future employers.

To mitigate these risks, participants will be fully informed about the study's aims, methods, and potential risks, in accordance with BERA (British Educational Research Association)'s guidelines on informed consent. Participation is voluntary, and individuals can withdraw at any time. Participants are encouraged to contact the researcher with any concerns. Despite naming the institution, every effort will be made to anonymize participants through pseudonyms and by removing identifying details from the published research. In addition, all data will be securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Care will be taken to ensure that anonymized data does not inadvertently reveal participant identities.

Naming Fudan University is essential for providing context to the experiences of humanities graduates in China. Fudan University, as a prestigious institution, plays a significant role in shaping the opportunities and challenges faced by its graduates. Naming the institution allows for a more accurate and contextually relevant analysis of these dynamics. However, this decision requires careful balancing of institutional transparency and the protection of participant confidentiality. The research will adhere to BERA's guidelines on integrity and respect, ensuring findings are presented fairly without causing undue harm to the institution or its graduates.

The interviews began with rapport-building and casual conversation to put participants at ease. Video was not used during the interviews, which helped maintain anonymity and privacy while allowing participants to speak freely. At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or provide additional comments about the process. Feedback from participants indicated no potential harms. The interviews concluded positively, with participants expressing willingness to recommend the study to their peers.

## **4.8 Limitation of this research**

There are numerous complex structural factors that influence transitions and outcomes after graduation, such as individuals' prior educational background and social class (Wilton, 2011). Employment experience, life experiences (Purcell et al., 2007), as well as variables such as gender, age, ethnicity (Dickerson & Jones, 2007), and employer preferences (Wilton, 2011) also play significant roles in employment attainment.

Due to the inherent complexity of the research and privacy considerations, this study does not delve into the analysis of social class, gender, family background, and other related factors. Furthermore, the scope of this study is somewhat limited by recruitment challenges. Despite efforts to encompass a broad range of humanities disciplines, the distribution of respondents' majors is not entirely uniform, and certain fields such as history and regional studies are underrepresented. Additionally, the study's focus on graduates from a single university further narrows the diversity of the student population and their experiences.

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

This chapter provides a comprehensive description and presentation of the interviews related to the research questions. This chapter will answer the first research sub-question from participants' agency in choosing humanities. Regarding the third research sub-question, this chapter will describe the agency in integrating into job market in response to the challenges and facilitators faced by graduates when entering the labor market. In addition, this chapter will present the research results of the value of humanities to transition, the relationship between agency and structure, and the future of humanities to answer the second and fourth sub-questions.

## **5.1 Agency resources**

### **5.1.1 The agency in choosing humanities**

#### **5.1.1.1 Autonomy and initiative**

Most participants indicated that their decision to pursue a master's degree in the humanities was both deliberate and driven by their personal interests. Mary, for example, noted that she found spiritual enrichment through the study of humanities. The development and reinforcement of their interests were largely influenced by their undergraduate courses and lectures (William, Susan, Donna), the books they had read (Paul, Donna), and their overseas exchange experiences (Sarah, Jessica). These experiences helped clarify their academic direction over time (Carol).

*I was very happy in every class and enjoyed engaging with my teacher. I consistently received positive feedback during this process (Sarah)*

*The books I read and the questions I pondered deepened my interest in philosophy. (Paul)*

Throughout their personal development, participants' genuine passion for the humanities became increasingly apparent, leading them to make a spontaneous choice to continue in this field.

The participants thoroughly considered their prior learning experiences and felt that their chosen graduate major was either consistent with or similar to their undergraduate field, and in which they excelled (Emily, Richard, Linda, Mary, David). They believed that switching fields would involve greater competitive pressure (Karen), thus reinforcing their active decision to pursue a master's degree in the humanities.

### **5.1.1.2 Influence from environment**

Participants also reported varying degrees of influence from their undergraduate environment, including teachers and classmates. Emily mentioned that the atmosphere at her undergraduate institution subtly shaped her perspectives. Karen and Elizabeth indicated that they were influenced by peer behavior, seeing high-achieving classmates pursue further studies or continue in related fields created a sense of pressure to follow suit. This led them to feel that they should not fall behind and should continue their education. Linda noted that the choice of major was partly influenced by her mother's occupation.

Conversely, some participants stated that their decisions were entirely independent of external influences. Sandra and Paul emphasized that their choices were made based on their personal preferences. Steven, for instance, mentioned that his decision to study Philosophy in Science and Technology was met with resistance from those around him, yet he persisted in his choice due to his genuine interest in the field:

*Most people, including my family, were against me studying philosophy. They would tell me that it's not a good field for finding a job. But I chose it purely out of personal interest. I read a wide range of books, and during my undergraduate years, I attended some philosophy lectures. That's when I realized I was really passionate about it.*

### **5.1.1.3 Sense of purpose**

Many participants articulated clear goals and plans for their master's degrees. From a personal growth perspective, they aspire to enhance their cognitive abilities (William), gain spiritual fulfillment, and develop stronger independent thinking skills (Lisa). Some also seek to derive greater happiness (Linda), engage in systematic professional learning (Donna), and gain deeper insights into the world (David ) through their studies.

Elizabeth expressed a desire for philosophy to contribute to her personal development:

*I hope that philosophy can provide me with more cognitive growth, helping me to shape myself into a more complete individual. I want it to aid me in adapting to societal changes while maintaining a positive character and mindset. My goal is to focus inwardly rather than outwardly, seeking personal enrichment rather than worldly success.*

From a more pragmatic standpoint, participants aim to study at prestigious universities. They seek to enhance their academic credentials to secure better job opportunities (William, Lisa) or to have more career options (Richard). Additionally, they are drawn to the academic atmosphere and learning environment of renowned institutions (Emily). The academic reputation and resources associated with Fudan University, as well as its location, are significant factors in attracting participants (Lisa, Jessica). Fudan's high ranking in humanities disciplines was also noted as a major appeal (Carol).

Regarding career goals, Lisa highlighted that her choice of major was largely motivated by employment considerations, having already defined her initial career path. Emily noted that this major aligns well with her future development plans. Linda expressed:

*I aim to work as a reporter or editor in the journalism, so studying philosophy with a focus on political philosophy is particularly relevant to my career goals.*

In contrast, Sarah emphasized her intrinsic enjoyment of the major, stating that her primary motivation was the personal fulfillment it brings. She had thoroughly considered and accepted any potential challenges or negative effects associated with this career path.

Some participants indicated that they did not extensively deliberate their decision at the time. Despite receiving warnings from relatives and friends about potential difficulties in future employment, they largely disregarded these concerns and chose to proceed incrementally. Paul noted:

*I didn't pay much attention to employment issues and took things one step at a time.*

Steven explicitly stated that career considerations were not a primary factor in his choice of major. Karen and Elizabeth admitted that their career goals were somewhat ambiguous, while Donna acknowledged having a general employment direction but lacking clarity on specifics.

For some participants, the master's degree serves as a transitional phase, providing additional time and flexibility for exploration. Karen Said:

*On the one hand, I am unsure whether I want to pursue an academic career. On the other hand, since I did not develop a solid career plan during my undergraduate studies, I find myself wavering between academia and employment. Given my limited internship experience, continuing with a master's degree seems to be the best choice. It can enhance my qualifications and provide me with more time to explore my options.*

Similarly, Elizabeth mentioned that pursuing a master's degree in this field offered her more time for exploration.

In summary, despite varying degrees of clarity regarding employment directions, participants shared a clear goal in choosing to pursue further studies. Their motivations ranged from personal growth and self-exploration to pragmatic considerations.

## 5.1.2 The agency in integrating into job market

### 5.1.2.1 Self-knowledge

The job choices made by those humanities graduates are primarily influenced by their self-perception. Elizabeth noted,

*First, think clearly about what you want most and what you want least, and then make a choice between these preferences.*

This self-perception is shaped by interactions with the surrounding environment, past experiences, current judgments, and future plans.

Past experience provides participants with initial direction and guidance, helping them connect actively with the world. Many participants emphasized that their internship experiences during the master's program were crucial in shaping their job decisions (Paul, Sarah, Carol). These internships offered opportunities to explore various industries, engage in trial and error, and refine their preferences (Sarah).

Karen shared:

*I interned during my first and second years of master's program, trying out various popular jobs at the time, such as internet companies, marketing, and human resources. Although these roles were accessible to humanities students without specific professional thresholds, I found that I wasn't particularly interested in them or that they weren't aligned with my field. These experiences didn't directly enhance my skills but rather provided me with a broader perspective and a way to connect with the world.*

Linda also mentioned that while her internships were not directly related to her final job, they helped her understand what she did not want to pursue. David noted that his internships significantly broadened his horizons. Some participants discovered areas

they were both suited for and passionate about during their internships, allowing them to focus and deepen their expertise in those areas (Paul). Sandra reflected that her internships were instrumental in clarifying her job seeking direction. By experiencing various types of companies, she developed a clearer understanding of the types of companies and corporate cultures she preferred and adapted more swiftly to the work environment and rhythm.

University functions as a microcosm of society, offering students opportunities to explore their identities, preferences, and aspirations through learning and interactions (Elizabeth). The rigorous intellectual training, extensive reading, and academic writing encountered during master's program significantly influence participants' thinking processes, problem-solving approaches, and creative thought (William, Lisa). Corporate visits organized by the university expose students to valuable social and employment resources, such as understanding corporate profit models and market operations. Sarah reflected:

*After the visit, I realized the complexity of the world, which greatly broadened my horizons. Understanding the landscape of opportunities is crucial before you can prepare effectively, you can't anticipate and prepare for what you don't know.*

The personal connections and community experiences facilitated by the university enrich participants' experiences (Sarah). For instance, the internships and teacher recommendations provided Jessica with numerous exploration opportunities. Linda found substantial value in both the formal instruction and the self-directed learning she engaged in during her studies. While attending a prestigious institution carries undeniable advantages, the ultimate success of graduates depends on the knowledge, capabilities and skills they have accumulated through their experiences (Paul).

Planning and future considerations significantly influence participants' career choices. Self-reflection during university helps in shaping projective aspirations. Interactions with classmates, friends, and teachers enable participants to gain a better

understanding of themselves. Exposure to diverse experiences, the perspectives of peers from various backgrounds, and shared insights help bridge information gaps, guide decisions, and influence career choices (Paul). Emily noted:

*I see numerous possibilities in my classmates. It's not necessarily the constraints imposed by my major but rather my own personality that has shaped my limitations.*

Similarly, Lisa's reflections were influenced by observing her peers, leading her to recognize her preference for stable and secure jobs. Richard mentioned that both his classmates' career choices and his mentor's advice played a crucial role in finalizing his career direction.

"Future self" also plays a major role in career decision-making. Participants consider factors such as salary, personal growth opportunities, company training programs, and organizational structure. Emily highlighted that these considerations were central to her decision-making process. Linda emphasized that long-term career prospects and stability were her primary concerns. Engagement with workplace communities and social networks fosters reflections on future selves. Unlike the relatively homogenous environment of academia, participants face more diverse information when entering workplace environment, further prompting individuals to contemplate their future plans (Emily).

In China, many humanities master's programs are oriented more towards academic pursuits rather than employment. Paul noted that his department focuses on training and encouraging academic research. Deviating from this path to enter the workforce requires additional subjective initiative, which he acknowledged as a reasonable expectation of his program.

#### **5.1.2.2 Personal values**

The university's career planning guidance played a pivotal role in helping Karen navigate her period of uncertainty. The one-on-one consultations enabled her to gain a clear understanding of her personality, revealing her preference for a job that offers a sense of achievement, dedication, and stability with minimal pressure. Similarly, Sandra perceived her personal value and unique capabilities through career planning consultations. Susan highlighted the impact of her teachers on shaping her professionalism, worldview, and values. Richard, valuing social responsibility and a sense of achievement, chose to pursue a career as a high school teacher.

Many participants reported applying for civil service positions, influenced by the desire for stability in a market characterized by high uncertainty and economic turmoil (Lisa, Elizabeth, Richard). Some were motivated by family expectations and China's official-oriented mentality, viewing a career in politics as a meaningful pursuit aligned with their personal values (William, David, Steven).

### **5.1.2.3 Transformation**

Many participants experienced significant transformations while pursuing a master's degree in the humanities and transitioning into the job market. Higher education plays a crucial role in helping individuals establish a preliminary direction for their lives. Throughout their master program, participants often reported feelings of confusion, uncertainty about their future paths, and indecision regarding how to achieve their goals (Sarah, Paul). The primary purpose of universities is to provide a conducive environment for self-development, offering students ample time and space for contemplation, which can be highly beneficial (William, Lisa). The comprehensive education and diverse course offerings at universities serve to broaden students' perspectives and stimulate new ideas (Carol). The critical thinking skills cultivated during university are often considered more valuable than specific skills and professional knowledge, playing a significant role in personal growth and self-formation (Paul). Furthermore, experiences of studying abroad have a profound impact on personal transformation. As Sandra mentioned:

*During my exchange program in Germany, I traveled to various European countries. The exposure to different languages and cultures had a profound impact on me. Interacting with local people provided significant cultural stimulation, leading to substantial changes in my worldview, values, and outlook on life. My aspirations and life goals also evolved gradually during this period.*

Many participants identified a general direction during their university experience, which became more defined as they transitioned from higher education to the job market. Lemire (2023) notes that graduation signifies the end of one era and the beginning of another. This transition may facilitate personal transformation even more profoundly than the higher education experience itself. The goals at the university level are relatively singular and clear-cut, with thoughts being more pure and idealistic (Susan). This stage lays a foundational groundwork, upon which one will gradually discern specific directions for development and effort upon entering the workforce (Paul). Karen said that while university provided her with a framework for understanding the world, the process of transitioning from a student to a working professional introduced challenges that her university experience did not address. Steven expressed that university exposure was limited, making it difficult to form clear preferences. The realities of the job market, with its associated choices and uncertainties, provided a more painful yet transformative experience (David, Steven). Through ongoing job interviews, feedback from employers, and self-reflection, Sandra gained a clearer sense of direction. This process, coupled with a deeper understanding of the industry and society, encouraged exploration of personal interests and strengths (Paul, Sandra, Susan). Susan noted that her shift from a student mentality to a professional one necessitated demonstrating competence and engaging with clients on a more practical level. This realization prompted her to reflect on his communication style and occupational identity. Donna mentioned that while her master program offered some clarity regarding her goals, it was only after starting work that she was able to refine and adjust her original aspirations.

During the transition to the job market, participants experienced significant shifts in identity. They often encountered challenges such as insufficient industry knowledge, fear of inadequacy (Paul), difficulties in interpersonal relations (Sarah, Richard, Susan), and reduced freedom (Sandra, Emily, Richard, Jessica). This period marked a

gradual shift from academic to professional thinking (Emily, Susan). Emily highlighted that while academic performance metrics are straightforward, the workplace demands a more comprehensive set of skills:

*Success in the job market requires not merely outstanding professional competence, but proficiency in every aspect including client communication, social interaction with colleagues, and organizational skills.*

Donna noted that the academic environment often functions as an 'ivory tower,' where individuals are somewhat insulated and receive information in a protected manner. Upon entering the workplace, she experienced a more independent and responsible role, necessitating direct interaction with clients and peers.

Participants noted that their difficulty in adapting to the transition period was less about the work content itself and more about their mindset, their ability to adapt to changes, different environments, and interpersonal relationships (Carol). Changes in environment can significantly accelerate shifts in identity and cognition. Carol Said:

*Studying in university provides limited exposure to real-world experiences, as individuals cannot fully grasp societal dynamics early in life, which makes timely adjustment in cognition and self-positioning crucial. For people in their 20s, adapting to social norms and making necessary adjustments are essential for thriving in society.*

## **5.2 The value of humanities to transition**

### **5.2.1 Reflexivity**

The humanities play a crucial role in self-reflection and personal development. Participants noted that their initial self-positioning and self-exploration were largely shaped during their study of the humanities. Linda and Richard observed that the humanities prompt students to confront fundamental questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" early in their academic careers. This early introspection

facilitates the formation of a personal identity, although it does not provide definitive answers. It is the tension between ideals and reality that prompts Sarah and Mary to reflect on these questions and observe how others address them. As a result, their actions from higher education through their entry into the job market are continually influenced by these inquiries.

Humanities education profoundly impacts an individual's fundamental thought processes, worldview, life outlook, and values (Paul, Emily, William, Richard). Linda reflected that much of the knowledge and critical thinking gained through the humanities directed her towards her current self. She likened the study of the humanities to nourishing oneself with the wisdom of the past, while work becomes a process of applying this knowledge.

Following their transition to the labor market, participants experienced a clash between the theoretical ideals of the humanities and the practical realities of their jobs. This confrontation led some to reconsider the significance of their degrees and the rationale behind their choice of major (Emily, Sarah). Others, however, integrated their humanities education into their personal and professional lives, using it as a guiding framework for their actions and decisions (Carol, Sandra, Elizabeth). For example, Sarah found that her humanistic approach led her to critically evaluate tasks rather than accept them passively, enabling her to proactively undertake work that others might overlook or be unable to conceive.

### **5.2.2 Mindset**

The untransferable skills acquired through studying the humanities deeply influence and shape participants' thinking patterns in their professional lives (Paul, Mary), with these effects becoming increasingly apparent over time (Paul). Sarah noted that the structural thinking developed through her humanities education allowed her to appreciate not only the specific tasks she was involved in but also the broader operational framework and overall structure of her projects, which proved highly beneficial in her work.

William described how the humanities shaped his mentality and worldview, serving as a fundamental driver of his personal growth. The guidance and encouragement participants received from their thesis advisors significantly boosted their confidence (David, Elizabeth). When facing work-related challenges, the critical thinking skills honed during postgraduate studies provided Emily with comprehensive guidance.

The humanities serve as an essential spiritual foundation for individuals, helping them to establish their own sense of meaning and value system. This allows participants to focus less on external standards of evaluation and more on internal self-exploration. This plays a fundamental and supportive role in participants' lives (Mary, William, Lisa, Karen). Sandra said:

*The humanities imbue my life with value and significance. I noted that it has transformed me from a mere executor of tasks into someone with a broader vision, capable of converting needs into future strategies, a perspective I attributes to my background as a humanities student.*

Entering the workplace inevitably involves encountering situations that may be less enjoyable or challenging to adapt to. The humanities offer participants a means to navigate these challenges by helping them find personal meaning and lessening the impact of external pressures, thereby fostering greater flexibility and satisfaction (Steven). For Linda, the humanities serve as both a teacher and a friend. She explained:

*The humanities have provided insight into problems I once found confusing and troubling, revealing that these issues have been explored by others whose deeper and more comprehensive perspectives offer guidance and inspiration.*

Elizabeth noted:

*The humanities have alleviated my sense of isolation, allowing me to feel a sense of support, quickly adjust my mindset, and effectively address workplace challenges.*

The values and qualities emphasized by the humanities subtly influence and shape individuals' values and behaviors. Carol expressed:

*Studying the humanities instills higher-level pursuits such as sincerity, kindness, and truthfulness. These qualities, while deeply ingrained in human experience, become part of my internal value system. As a result, they naturally guide my actions and decisions in the workplace, aligning them with these cherished qualities.*

### **5.2.3 Skills and Capabilities**

During their humanities masters' degree, participants predominantly developed untransferable skills and ways of thinking, such as communication and critical thinking abilities. While many participants noted improvement in communication skills during their graduate studies (Sarah, Sandra, Elizabeth, Donna, Linda, Emily), this communication was often limited to interactions with peers. Consequently, those who entered the workplace frequently exhibited a deficiency in upward communication skills (Lisa, Steven). Many participants emphasized that their communication abilities, particularly with individuals at different hierarchical levels and from diverse backgrounds, significantly improved after entering the workforce (Susan, Jessica, Emily, William).

In addition to enhancing existing skills such as social interaction, writing, resilience, and comprehension (defined as the ability to quickly and accurately understand workplace needs), participants made substantial progress in acquiring industry-specific knowledge (Sarah, Elizabeth, Emily, Paul) and holistic thinking capacity (Sarah, Carol), which emerged as crucial factors for a smooth transition and adaptation to the professional environment. The independent learning skills and structured thinking developed during their humanities master's degree served as a stepping stone for gaining industry knowledge and fostering holistic thinking in their professional roles (Karen, Carol, Sarah).

The following table, based on participants' responses, outlines and compares the skills developed in universities, the skills lacking when entering the labor market, and the skills cultivated in the labor market:

Skills developed in universities	Lack of skills when entering the labor market	Skills developed in labor market
Learning ability and learning autonomy	Industry-specific knowledge	Industry-specific knowledge
Communication ability	Upward communication	Multi-level communication skills
Problem analysis and problem solving ability	Verbal communication skills	Public speaking skills
Multi-tasking ability	Strategic planning skills	Planning and scheduled skills
Resilience	Transition from student to professional mindset	Resilience
Information retrieval skills	Computer skills	Execution skills
Writing ability		Writing skills
Perception and Comprehension		Demand insight skills
Social ability		Social skills
Critical thinking ability		Holistic thinking
Adaptability		

Many participants view the untransferable skills developed through humanities education as significantly more important for their transition to the workplace than professional skills. Opinions vary on whether acquiring professional skills during higher education is necessary. Some participants believe that career planning should be the primary focus, with different fields requiring varying levels of specialized knowledge (Karen, Donna). Some argue that while professional skills may be essential for entering a particular industry or for early career stages, the unpredictable nature of career development makes untransferable skills—such as adaptability and communication—more critical (Emily, Carol, Sarah, Mary, David). They suggest that individuals should enter the industry first to identify their specific needs and acquire skills on the job. Additionally, some feel that personal interest should be considered, as universities primarily aim to foster intellectual and personal growth rather than technical skills (Paul, William). Conversely, others assert that possessing specific skills remains important. They argue that the power of thought needs to be complemented by skills in order to be fully realized (Lisa, Sandra, Richard, Linda).

### **5.3 The relationship between agency and structure**

Despite many students having established a general life direction during their university experience and preparing extensively, they face significant structural challenges when seeking a job.

Firstly, humanities graduates often encounter disadvantages due to the limited job market for their field. Opportunities for humanities graduates are fewer (Sarah), and employers at career fairs frequently focus on recruiting candidates from science and engineering backgrounds (Richard). The mismatch between the knowledge acquired in the humanities and the requirements of available positions (Emily) further complicates the job search for humanities graduates.

Secondly, there is often a lack of understanding and persistent stereotypes about humanities majors among employers. Participants reported being frequently asked in interviews about the relevance of their major to the job at hand and how they could transform their humanities background into practical skills (Paul, Jessica, Mary). Employers are often concerned that degrees in non-practical subjects, such as the humanities, may not contribute directly to business operations.

Thirdly, economic instability and changes in social environment have led to a reduction in available positions. The job market has become increasingly competitive, and the prestige of graduating from a selective university no longer guarantees access to desirable positions (Carol, Sarah). Both Linda and Susan mentioned that their target companies halted recruitment during their graduation year, after they had interned there for six months. Linda explained:

*They told me that the company was significantly affected by the overall economic climate. With limited positions available and no one willing to leave, no new hires could be accommodated.*

Sarah commented:

*The job market resembles a pyramid. It used to be quite broad, accommodating many individuals. Graduates from prestigious universities could secure decent and well-paid jobs. Now, however, these opportunities are dwindling, and despite having an excellent background, it is increasingly difficult to find a satisfactory job. The top of the pyramid is becoming narrower.*

Acknowledging these structural challenges is crucial. Given the limitations imposed by external factors and the imbalance in market supply and demand, individual initiative can feel relatively constrained. Participants expressed feelings of helplessness (Paul, Susan). Emily said:

*As a student, I felt a great sense of agency and believed I could change many*

*aspects of my life. However, after entering the workforce, I realized that many things are not solely within one's control. While it is important to work hard and proactively strive for change, larger factors such as the era and environment we live in fundamentally shape the choices available to us.*

However, the actual external constraints may not be as insurmountable as individuals imagine and perceive. Many participants recalled feeling that there were very few job openings for their target positions when they were job hunting. Lisa said,

*At that time, I always felt I couldn't find a job. I lacked confidence and thought no schools were hiring teachers. But after entering the profession, I discovered that many schools were indeed hiring.*

Karen recalled being hesitant to apply to many big-name companies, feeling she wasn't a good fit, but her final attempt exceeded her expectations, resulting in an ideal job offer. When asked about the limitations faced by the humanities, Steven mentioned, "Don't worry, just apply," which sometimes led to unexpected opportunities. The gap in information and resources further reinforces the perceived external constraints, and a lack of self-efficacy and confidence to some extent limits the exercise of personal agency.

Nevertheless, there is still room for agency in navigating these external constraints. Adjusting one's mindset, altering thinking patterns (Paul), enhance the ability to think independently and make informed judgments, and finding one's unique position are ways to exercise agency (Richard, Elizabeth). Karen mentioned that daring to take risks is essential to keeping up with new developments and seizing opportunities in a rapidly changing era. Participants who had smoother and more adaptive transitions mentioned that their rich experiences during university helped them handle work-related stress better (Paul, Carol, Donna, David). Agency brought them limitless possibilities. Sarah noted that one's major is not a restriction on their career. David found that studying the humanities provided him with more time and flexibility, which opened up opportunities for learning, personal growth, and gaining wisdom.

Susan described her struggle during the transition period, where daily tasks seemed trivial and the gap between ideal and reality caused discomfort and resistance. By actively changing her mindset, she was able to redefine her relationship with work and improve her overall experience. As Linda reflected:

*If the world doesn't align with my ideal, it might not be because the world is flawed but because my ideal is unrealistic. This could be an opportunity to rethink what it takes to realize my ideal.*

The significance of the humanities lies in their ability to help individuals establish a stable and robust spiritual core and develop their own worldview. Once in society, this perspective can engage constructively with prevailing mainstream views, potentially leading to new insights (Jessica). Participants also mentioned that while it is not always necessary to resist prevailing trends, there is always room for individual choice. Exploring and reflecting on these choices can create new opportunities (Donna, Sarah).

In response to the external environment, individuals continually adjust their agency. Self-awareness and employment direction are gradually developed during the postgraduate period. However, the social environment shifts subtly by the time participants are actively searching for jobs. When seeking employment, participants evaluate the pros and cons based on the current social context and make prompt judgments and decisions. Emily noted:

*My initial interest was in traditional media. However, during my master's studies, I observed a decline in traditional media and recognized that it no longer aligned with my career goals. By the time I graduated, the rising prominence of the Internet Companies led me and many of my classmates to shift towards careers in this growing field.*

Susan described her career choice as serendipitous. The company where she had long been interning and hoped to secure a position suddenly canceled their hiring plans due to the impact of the Shanghai lockdown during the pandemic. With limited opportunities to intern elsewhere, she ended up at a company she hadn't initially considered, thanks to a recommendation from a senior colleague. Sandra, graduating in 2023, chose to enter the popular new energy sector, a field she deemed unmatched by other industries in terms of growth potential. Linda characterized her job search as marked by "contingency" and "haste," as she had to pivot from her initial plan to pursue a Ph.D. to seeking employment. Drawing from her past internship experiences and the job offers she received, Linda ultimately defined her career direction during the job search process. Agency is not static, participants often make immediate adjustments based on current changes, engaging in "practical evaluation."

Agency is continually reshaped by external changes. Almost all participants were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during their job search or while pursuing their master's degrees. The pandemic disrupted plans and routines, blocked internships (Paul), caused missed opportunities to study abroad (Jessica, Sarah, Elizabeth), and led to job cancellations (Linda, Susan). Jessica mentioned, "I feel like my window to explore the world has been closed." Karen noted, "my university was locked down on the first day of my internship. I'm unsure if I would have chosen a different career path had I completed an offline internship for three months."

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, participants adapted to the new reality after experiencing initial negative emotions (Linda, Jessica). Some mentioned that their mindset shifted during this period, leading them to appreciate the present and seek enjoyment in their lives (Steven), while gaining a deeper understanding of themselves (Elizabeth). These changes in reality and thought have subtly influenced their life choices and developmental paths.

When discussing their future goals and plans, many participants indicated a focus on adhering to current circumstances and living in the present (Sarah, Emily, Lisa,

Sandra, Richard, Steven, Elizabeth). They expressed a desire to enhance their spiritual well-being, seek a greater sense of purpose, and wait for new opportunities (William, Susan, Linda).

## **5.4 The future of humanities**

Despite the uncertainties of modern society and the rapid advancement of AI, many participants remain optimistic about the future of the humanities. While AI may pose challenges in basic text editing and processing by automating content search and organization from extensive knowledge bases (Paul), it struggles with tasks requiring depth, continuous personalization, and creativity. Fields such as the arts, which demand nuanced interpretation and innovation, remain resistant to AI's current limitations (David, Emily, Lisa, Jessica).

Beyond material needs, spiritual and existential needs are equally crucial for human well-being. The humanities play an irreplaceable role in fostering individual spiritual growth, including the pursuit of meaning, emotional understanding, empathy, humanistic care, and the collective memory of humanity (William, Karen, Mary, Donna). Carol and Paul argued that as material resources become more abundant, there will be an increasing demand for spiritual meaning in the future. Linda observed:

*Artificial intelligence can imagine a better reality, but it cannot envision a fundamentally different reality. It tends to produce a more one-dimensional existence, where humans might become mere tools rather than spiritual and dignified beings.*

In addition, society operates as a complex system with humans at its core, encompassing social dynamics, resource allocation, and power structures. In the context of China, a society deeply rooted in human relationships, the nuances of interpersonal interactions and highly valued communication skills are crucial in the

workplace and cannot be replaced by AI (Sarah, Sandra, Susan). AI should be viewed as a tool rather than a replacement for these human-centric skills.

Other participants argued that the humanities may seem out of touch with the realities of modern society, where science and technology are increasingly dominant. They foresaw a greater demand for technological positions and a corresponding decline in the need for humanities expertise (Lisa, Mary). The rise of modernization and AI may indeed reduce opportunities for humanities graduates. However, the core attributes required for these professions—such as individual creativity and humanistic thinking—are precisely the qualities that humanities students cultivate. The problems lie in these qualities are often underutilized in university or not fully applied in the job market (Karen). Mary highlighted shortcomings in her university's humanities training, such as inadequate school-to-industry connections and a lack of career planning compared to business programs. Humanities students often approach the job market with idealism and may lack practical economic thinking, leading to a mismatch between their skills and job market demands. The expansion of graduate programs in China and the mismatch with labor market demands, as noted by Elizabeth, create significant challenges for humanities graduates. Many humanities students lack practical job skills and have not fully mastered the knowledge offered by their disciplines (Karen). This undoubtedly poses numerous barriers for humanities students transitioning into the workforce. If university humanities programs could better integrate with real-world applications and specific technical skills (Elizabeth, Donna), and if humanities students actively seek out diverse experiences (Sarah), it could lead to a different and more promising future.

## **Chapter 6 Discussions**

This chapter further discusses the research results by integrating the theoretical framework from Chapter 3 with existing research. First, it reconstructs the resource framework of agency combining the dimensions of temporality and spatiality. Second, it examines the relationship between agency and structure in the transition of

humanities graduates from higher education to the labor market, contextualized within Bauman's literature on liquid modernity and individualization, and specific to the national conditions of China. Finally, based on the research's findings, it provides recommendations for the development of humanities disciplines in higher education within a modern society characterized by uncertainty and the rapid advancement of AI.

## **6.1 From findings to discussions**

In this research, the theoretical framework integrates both temporal and spatial dimensions to construct a comprehensive theory of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualized agency within a temporality framework, identifying iteration, practical-evaluation, and projective thinking as its three core elements in the time dimension. Individuals leverage past experiences and habits to inform their immediate actions, reflecting and evaluating various possibilities and limitations in the present. They also employ projective thinking to conceive future goals and plans, thus providing direction for their future through reflective processes. From a spatial perspective, individual agency is not isolated, it is influenced by the resources and social relationships within one's environment (Hopwood, 2010).

The research's findings consistently highlight resources and factors associated with agency as discussed in the literature, including autonomy (Bandura, 2006), learning (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), reflexivity (Sarid, 2017), optimism (Hitlin & Elder, 2007), and intentionality and forethought (Bandura, 2006). However, self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006; Hitlin & Elder, 2007) did not prominently feature in the results. This thesis will systematically analyze these elements within the dimensions of temporality and spatiality, aligning them with the identified agency-related resources, and reconstructing the theoretical framework for understanding the transition of humanities students.

### **6.1.1 Iteration**

The career choices of humanities graduates are predominantly influenced by their past experiences during university and subsequent reflections. Participants shared narratives of their internships, active involvement in social practices, student work, impactful courses, exchange programs abroad, and the support received from teachers and peers. These experiences illustrate how they derive meaning from their past, undergo mental changes, and engage in self-formation. As noted by Brown, Bimrose, and Merrill (2014), the identity of adult learners is shaped by their educational, familial, and workplace experiences. However, isolated experiences alone do not directly foster self-formation and transformation. Instead, it is the reflective process on the meaning and internal impact of these experiences that drives personal growth. This is particularly evident among participants who engaged in exchange programs abroad, displaying notable reflexivity, a finding consistent with Marginson (2014), and Jin and Ball (2019)'s research on international students. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggested, "actors who are positioned at the intersection of multiple temporal-relational contexts can develop greater capacities for creative and critical intervention."

Reflexivity extends beyond university experiences. As participants navigate the workplace and evolve in their careers, they reinterpret past experiences and project possible futures to guide current actions. Crossley (2000) characterized reflectivity as an individual's "dialogue with oneself," which mediates between external events and internal psychological development (Kohlberg, 1968). This reflective process enables individuals to integrate disparate experiences into a coherent narrative (Markus & Wurf, 1987), thereby influencing their career development and identity.

### **6.1.2 Practical-evaluate**

Individual agency manifests within the constraints and opportunities provided by the surrounding environment. Although humanities graduates often face challenges in securing jobs due to the mismatch between their academic background and the job market demands, many participants highlighted how experiences with peers, mentors, networking, and access to resources allowed them to exercise a significant degree of autonomy in a relatively passive environment.

During the transition from higher education to the workplace, individuals develop rational career choices and identities through reflexivity. This transition involves conscious decision-making and selective actions, particularly when navigating complex career paths (Roberts, 1997). Individuals need to possess reflexive awareness of their career significance and how their thinking and practices align with their career goals (Brown, Bimrose, & Merrill, 2014). Participants not only leveraged their past experiences but also evaluated the current environment—considering interests, strengths, industry trends, and potential career development opportunities—to make informed and active choices.

The concept of agency in the school-to-work transition has been interpreted in various ways, including reflective and strategic behavior, resistance, and rational choice (Willis, 1977; Goldthorpe, 1996; Evans, 2002). Some participants prepared extensively for their chosen careers, yet unforeseen circumstances like Covid-19 forced them to abandon their original plans and reorient themselves. This process exemplifies the reflection of agency. Tran and Vu (2018) suggested that when individuals feel powerless against broader social structures, it reflects the internalization of agency. Adapting to or resisting these discursive structures illustrates the repositioning of the self as a form of personal agency.

New social relationships and networks in the workplace play a crucial role in intensifying individual reflexivity and shaping professional identity. The process of developing a professional identity occurs within a specific community where interaction, socialization, and learning are integral components (Brown, Bimrose, & Merrill, 2014). Transitioning from higher education to the workplace involves navigating significant environmental changes and discontinuities between education and work (Heinz & Krüger, 2001). In the workplace, individuals engage with diverse groups characterized by different majors, ages, positions, and goals, which exposes them to a broader range of perspectives and ideas. This exposure catalyzes further individual reflexivity and agency.

The formation, maintenance, and evolution of professional identity are continually influenced by the nature of surrounding relationships. Interactions with colleagues contribute to the ongoing shaping and reformation of professional identity (Goffman, 1959). The new workplace environment, therefore, not only introduces individuals to varied viewpoints but also enhances their capacity for reflexivity and self-position.

It is important to recognize that participants reflect on their transition to the workplace from a retrospective viewpoint. According to identity narrative theory, the construction of a shared sense of self relies significantly on the personal narratives individuals create (Brown, Bimrose, & Merrill, 2014). As participants navigate their professional journeys, they may develop new narratives, adjust or discard old ones, which impacts how they perceive their adaptation and professional identity. This narrative construction process challenges the objectivity of how individuals view their transition and identity development.

### **6.1.3 Projective**

Intentionality and future planning align with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) concept of projective among human agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identify personal values, future plans, and reflexivity as intrinsic aspects of agency. Tran and Vu (2018) highlight that mobility and future aspirations drive individuals toward self-transformation. These studies underscore the role of intentionality and future-oriented change in the formation and transformation of the self. Unlike undergraduate students in the humanities, who often choose their field passively due to not meeting the required scores on the college entrance exam, many participants pursuing a master's degree in the humanities out of active and deliberate choice. This choice reflects a clearer understanding of the degree's meaning and purpose, whether driven by genuine interest, a desire for extended exploration, or a pursuit of personal growth.

Participants facilitated their self-formation through internships, overseas exchanges, and social practices during their higher education. Initial career planning and preparation, coupled with reflective practice during the transition period, further clarified and implemented specific career plans. As Ashwin et al. (2016) concluded, personal projects—referring to individual initiatives or efforts undertaken by students during their tertiary education—provide a flexible method to help students understand their objectives at university, thereby contributing significantly to their self-formation and transformation. This process significantly aids in the transition from student to professional identity, allowing for better adaptation to a changing social environment. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) describe this “transformative” quality as inherent to agency. Clear goals enable individuals to navigate and adapt their identities in dynamic contexts. Many participants noted that while university provided ample opportunities for self-exploration, the experiences were relatively homogeneous compared to the diversity encountered in the workplace. The transition phase, marked by environmental changes, diverse information, and societal integration, has intensified individual self-cognition and clarified their goals. This process further enhances the development of their agency and professional identity.

Intentionality reflects agency as a dynamic, continuous process of learning and development. Agency should not be narrowly defined by skill acquisition alone but rather understood through the concept of "learning as becoming" (Wenger, 1998). Learning and identity development are central to both transition and career development. Learning not only facilitates transitions but is also propelled by the experiences of these transitions (Merriam, 2005). For humanities graduates, ongoing learning during university, internships, and job searches is crucial as they navigate the evolving job market. Once employed, the need to acquire industry knowledge, project management skills, and engage in continuous learning and communication with colleagues and leaders further drives the development of individual agency and professional identity. Wenger's (1998) concept of "learning as becoming" aptly describes this developmental process: individuals do not possess a fixed identity but are perpetually in a state of becoming. In the face of various limitations and possibilities, this learning becomes increasingly active (Billett, 2007). For humanities graduates, whose professional skills may initially be less developed, “learning as

becoming” becomes a powerful driver for individual agency, contributing to identity formation and career advancement.

The humanities play a crucial role in both the iterative and projective phases of this process. They provide a framework for students to reflect on their identities and reassess their valuable goals (Walker, cited in Clegg, 2011). By posing existential questions such as "Who am I?", "Where am I going?", and "How will I get there?", the humanities encourage early reflection on past experiences and future aspirations. Even in the work environment, participants continue to engage in this reflective process, using it to shape their future. The humanities not only impart knowledge but also imbue it with meaning, helping individuals navigate and find purpose in their lives. As Albert Camus (1955, p. 3) asserted, "The question of life's meaning is the most urgent question of all." The quest for meaning involves identifying goals, values, and directions that fulfill individuals' lives (Penlington, 1976). The intrinsic values and modes of thinking cultivated by the humanities become embedded in graduates' personalities and approaches to life, serving as an internal impetus for the ongoing development of their agency and identity. This enables students to remain authentically human in a changing world.

#### **6.1.4 Supportive surroundings**

Selective universities offer learning opportunities, academic freedom, and flexibility for self-exploration, which are foundational for developing autonomy and reflectivity. MacFarlane (2012) emphasizes that academic freedom not only represents the right to freedom and full expression but also facilitates genuine "higher education" by nurturing critical thinking skills. Additionally, student engagement and social networks play a crucial role in helping graduates secure their first jobs (Martin & Frenette, 2017). The freedom to explore during university supports humanities graduates' transition into the job market. Experiential learning programs that emphasize action-based, firsthand experiences, such as service-learning, internships, and career development courses, positively impact student development (Kolb, 2015). These programs foster lifelong learning skills through reflective adaptation and flexible thinking (Moon, 2004). They also enhance students' understanding of their

subjects and build practical expertise for their careers after graduation (Eyler, 2009). Internships, in particular, increase the likelihood of finding employment before graduation (Miller et al., 2017). Students from elite institutions who engage in internships are more inclined to pursue careers in business and management after graduation (Martin, 2013).

In addition, the positivity that students bring to their transition from higher education to the workplace is significantly shaped by their education in the humanities, along with the social and supportive resources available in higher education institutions and workplaces. While science-related degrees equip graduates with professional capabilities and technical skills, the analytical and critical thinking skills fostered by the humanities provide lifelong knowledge and competencies that are not easily replaced (Király & Géring, 2019). Research indicates that the humanities and arts are crucial for developing individuals who can navigate uncertainty, seize opportunities, and shape the future (British Academy, 2020). The influence of humanities education is deeply internalized, shaping students' mentality, cognition, and approaches to challenges. This education imparts spiritual values and a sense of meaning, fostering resilience and calmness in the face of difficulties, thereby shielding them from being overly affected by external pressures. Education, particularly in the humanities, fosters critical thinking and enhances students' ability to engage in independent thought and rational reflection. Through education, students can develop rationality, enabling them to make independent judgments and laying the foundation for agency and autonomy (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 133).

Many participants reported that interactions with like-minded peers during university, envisioning the future, and support from classmates became significant sources of inner strength in their professional lives. They drew inspiration from their peers, which fostered optimism about their current circumstances and future prospects. Additionally, the support from mentors and professors served as a crucial psychological pillar during challenging times. Beyond practical assistance and resource recommendations, the encouragement and guidance from teachers bolstered

students' confidence in their future endeavors. Participants noted that the values and mindsets imparted by humanities professors reshaped their perspectives, leading them to view success not merely as worldly achievement but as a broader, more fulfilling journey. This shift in perspective allowed them to maintain a positive outlook and explore new possibilities when facing setbacks. For instance, Elizabeth found that the iterative process of working on her graduation thesis, with ongoing feedback from her mentor, not only provided positive reinforcement but also contributed to her personal growth. Similarly, David drew significant inspiration and strength from his mentor's encouragement and shared experiences, which continued to influence him in his professional life.

It is evident that the development of a positive mindset is largely attributed to the interactions and support received from teachers, classmates, and friends during the higher education phase. This mindset, as a relatively stable quality, is often established early in adulthood. This research supports Simon's assertion that higher education is a crucial stage for self-formation, where "agency, freedom, and conscious reflexivity have the opportunity to flourish, and the person's sense of self and social relations are permeated by specific knowledge" (Marginson, 2023, p. 63). However, the research also reveals that as students transition from higher education to the job market, the influx of diverse information, shifting interpersonal relationships, and rapidly absorbed industry knowledge significantly intensify their reflexivity and sense of self. This process appears to be crucial in enhancing their agency and self-formation.

In summary, resources such as autonomy, intentionality, reflexivity, positivity, and learning are integral to the formation of individual agency, interwoven through both the temporal dimensions and the surrounding environmental factors. These elements do not function in isolation, instead, they collectively contribute to agency formation. Reflexivity and learning, in particular, are ongoing processes that continuously shape individuals' future plans and intentionality, guiding their autonomous choices and actions. The significance of these resources varies across different stages of agency development.

During the iteration stage, individuals primarily rely on reflexivity on the meaning and internal impact of past experiences. This reflective process is crucial for understanding how past experiences shape their current identity and future direction. In the practical-evaluate stage, students reassess their position by evaluating current limitations and possibilities as they prepare to enter the labor market. This evaluation informs their strategic choices, whether through adaptation, resistance, or conformity, reflecting their proactive engagement with their career development. At this stage, reflexivity and autonomy are central to shaping their professional trajectory. In the projective stage, intentionality becomes the predominant resource. Individuals' purposefulness and future planning drive continuous learning from university through to their entry into the workplace. This ongoing motivation facilitates goal attainment and supports identity transformation. Humanities education, alongside the surrounding environment, plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' mindsets and values, fostering a positive attitude in the face of uncertainty. It is worth noting that the concept of self-efficacy, as discussed by Bandura (2006) and Hitlin and Elder (2007), is not prominently reflected in the responses of participants. Faced with structural limitations, many students transitioning from higher education to the job market lack confidence in their future prospects and doubt their ability to achieve their goals. As Susan recalled her job search experience, "I didn't know which company would eventually choose me; I could only keep submitting resumes." However, this does not hinder their capacity for reflexivity and agency, enabling them to adapt to changing environments and successfully integrate into the workforce.

This is a summary table of agency resources, linking to temporal and spatial perspectives:

Agency	Temporary perspective: Past-present-future	Space perspective: Relationships and surroundings
autonomy	internships , choice-making,	Opportunities and resources provided by seniors, peers

	reflexivity, self-positioning	and university
Intentionality	Future goals, plans, learning, motivation, self-knowledge	Peers' choices and experience
Reflexivity	university experience, internships, mobility, choice-making, transformation, self-positioning, humanities education	Peers' choices and experience, networking
Positivity	Humanities education, personal values	Encouragement from supervisors, communications with peers
Learning	Transformation, transition, challenges	Influence from peers, colleagues

## 6.2 Locating this project in the literature

This thesis further explores the interplay between agency and structure within the framework of Bauman's concept of fluid modernity and its application to the context of China. The findings align with Archer's (2007) perspective, which posits a bidirectional relationship between social structure and agency. Social structures set the context and constraints for individual actions, yet individuals can navigate these structures through reflexivity, finding space for agency. However, the extent to which individual actions can influence and transform these external structures remains more aspirational than actual in this research. The realization of such influence necessitates the emergence of collective agency. The study highlights the variability in the motivations for choosing a major, employment considerations, and future expectations among humanities graduates from a prestigious university. If the sample were extended to include graduates from less selective institutions, these differences would likely be even more pronounced. This disparity underscores the challenge of achieving a shared vision for shaping the future of humanities students and the

confidence required to realize this vision, which is essential for the emergence of collective agency.

In an environment marked by uncertainty and instability, the interaction between the individual agency of humanities graduates and external structures is evident. Confronted with uncertain structural factors such as economic instability, an oversupply of graduates due to the expansion of higher education, and recruitment freezes, participants did not passively acquiesce. Instead, they actively responded to these constraints by enhancing their skills, seeking additional internships, and leveraging social resources to bridge information gaps. This mirrors the findings of Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), who noted that the interaction between individual agency and structural factors is a common theme in the experiences of adult learners, who strive to engage in learning while navigating restrictive structural conditions.

Bauman (2000) argued that individuals, navigating rapidly changing social and personal circumstances, face an increasing demand for personal responsibility and choice. This transformation from a predetermined to an autonomous identity, as discussed by Bauman (2000), signifies a heightened sense of individual agency. Concepts such as responsibility, autonomy, choice, and subjectivity converge within the phenomenon of individualization.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that individuals often have limited control over their development after graduation, particularly in the context of the Chinese job market, which is characterized by a scarcity of vacancies and a rising unemployment rate. Furthermore, the transition of humanities graduates from higher education to the job market is constrained by their past experiences. Although participants' responses suggest that their choices are not predetermined but reflect individual agency, it is crucial to understand that these choices are influenced by cultural capital, socioeconomic status, and habitus. Class dynamics not only directly impact the formation of transition choices through factors such as family income, parental education, and career achievements, but also indirectly through ingrained habits and levels of cultural capital. Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the ingrained

tendencies to act, interpret experiences, and think in particular ways, underscores how these factors shape individual agency and decision-making (Bourdieu, 1990).

Despite external structural constraints, humanities graduates maintain a degree of initiative and autonomy. As Anisef et al. (2000, p.22) observe, "personal agency is always present in the transition from youth to adulthood. Young people make distinctive choices about their education and career pathways at critical junctures." This perspective holds true for humanities students entering the job market for the first time after obtaining a master's degree, as indicated by this study. Evans (2002, p.246) similarly notes that young people can actively shape certain significant dimensions of their experiences, suggesting that the impact of social structure on youth transitions is neither direct nor completely deterministic. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p.980) suggested:

“it allows one to get things done through habitual interactions and negotiations (allowing Bourdieu to speak of the paradox of ‘intentionless intentions’). As Bourdieu notes, there may be much ingenuity and resourcefulness to the selection of responses from practical repertoires, even when this contributes to the reproduction of a given structure of social relationships.”

Despite habitual constraints, the intentional nature of individual decisions remains evident. Structural factors are not the decisive elements of agency, rather, transformation is reflected in the shift of individual identity and the formation of subjective power.

Moreover, Jenkins (1992) critiques Bourdieu's concept of habitus as overly deterministic in explaining agency and resistance. “Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.133). Thus, even within the constraints of external structures, there is always a certain space for individual agency. Participants strive to enhance their employability by gaining diverse internship experiences, building social networks, and increasing mobility. These efforts encourage reflexive resources that help resist

the external employment environment. Through reflexivity, some participants reposition themselves, shift their mindsets, and reconcile their relationship with structures in different ways, thus adapting to the job market.

Most parents hope their children secure stable, respectable, and safe jobs. Stable employment and fixed working hours ensure economic stability and quality of life. Jobs in civil service, government agencies, schools, or hospitals are often viewed by parents as ideal for their children (Wang, Shi & Gao, 2005). This aligns with the expressions of the study's participants, especially under the influence of COVID-19, as many businesses faced difficulties or even closure. Consequently, finding stable employment, particularly through the national civil service exam, has become a significant priority for many graduates.

However, this differs from the findings of Xu and Sun (2008), who found that many Chinese graduates in the humanities and social sciences, especially those with independent ideas, may change their choices under the persuasion of family or friends. Although the participants in this study also faced family persuasion and the influence of traditional Chinese employment concepts, they were more inclined to incorporate self-reflexivity, personal value judgments, projections of their potential future selves, and autonomous planning for their future development. These factors were given greater importance. In the unstable society, the ultimate goals of orthodox education—such as established customs, preferences for stable values, and solid cognitive references—have become disadvantages (Bauman, 2005). To address the uncertainty of a mobile world, higher education needs to equip individuals with the ability to self-direct, self-regulate, and self-learn to adapt quickly to new and emerging professional environments. The participants in this study rarely changed their minds due to family persuasion or merely followed the crowd in applying for civil service examinations. Even if they ultimately chose the so-called "stable" job in the public eye, it was an independent choice based on a thorough understanding of themselves, representing a dynamic adaptation to a changing and uncertain society.

### **6.3 Recommendations and implications**

In the interviews with the 17 participants, several common suggestions emerged regarding the future construction of university humanities programs. The following recommendations are particularly valuable:

First, combine the teaching of general skills with the cultivation of humanistic thinking. The underlying values, communication skills, critical thinking skills, and comprehension that humanities students develop during university have a long-lasting impact on their integration and development in the workplace. Although AI can excel in cognitive skills to some extent, untransferable skills such as communication and emotional intelligence are crucial for handling complex social and interpersonal interactions. These skills are increasingly important in the job market (Chui et al., 2016; Teng et al., 2019). The World Economic Forum's report (2016) showed a significant shift in the skills needed in the job market over recent years. Creativity and emotional intelligence, for example, moved from outside the top ten and tenth in 2015 to third and sixth in 2020, respectively (Gray, 2016). This rising demand for untransferable skills challenges higher education institutions that traditionally focus on cognitive skills (Seldon & Abidoye, 2017). Lee, Moon, and Kwon (2019) suggested that addressing the new job market demands requires substantial time and effort and that it might be more effective to reintegrate humanities education into the core of higher education. Many high-demand untransferable skills have historically been central to humanities education. Mok, Xiong, and Ye (2021) argued that liberal arts education is the most appropriate way to cultivate the untransferable skills needed in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by technology and artificial intelligence, even though it does not guarantee a perfect response to the new era's skill requirements. The skills most needed for future jobs are increasingly social rather than technical. Therefore, humanities education, which fosters these untransferable skills and human traits that are difficult to replace with technology, will hold a significant position. Combining humanistic thinking with practical skills training can unlock the potential of humanities graduates. Individuals can pool their skills, knowledge, and resources to collectively shape their future (Bandura, 2006).

Second, promote the further refinement and classification of skills to facilitate a smooth transition from higher education to the labor market. Communication, a common untransferable skill in high demand, is often mentioned by respondents. However, communication is a broad and multi-layered skill system that varies significantly depending on the specific environment. Many participants noted that their communication skills improved substantially during their higher education, yet they also reported a gap in their upward communication skills when they entered the labor market. Multi-level communication skills are also in need in the workplace, indicating the need for a more nuanced classification of skills required in the labor market (Weise, 2018) to better align with job market demands. Additionally, further clarification is needed on what constitutes good versus poor communication.

Third, the ideal world of humanities should be more closely aligned with real society. Many participants noted experiencing a gap between ideals and reality, and between education and workplace demands, after entering the workforce. They reported only beginning to understand societal operations once they started working. The correlation between education and employment is not linear (Brown, 2020b), and the widening of graduate wage inequality mostly occurs within disciplines, not between them (Lindley & McIntosh, 2015). Over time, improved cognitive skills and occupational dispersion have contributed to this widening inequality (Lindley & McIntosh, 2015). Early cognitive training and resource links may help humanities graduates break the limitations of professional labels. For instance, universities can introduce more alumni resources. These resources should not be limited to providing internships and job opportunities but should also include sharing about the "real world" and "concrete work experiences." This exposure allows students to become aware of diverse employment directions earlier, connect with society, and experience the workplace atmosphere. Such initiatives can foster self-reflexivity, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

### **7.1 In summary**

This research offers an agency perspective on the graduate experience during the transition from higher education to the job market. It integrates temporal and spatial dimensions to construct a theoretical framework for understanding agency. By examining the iterative, practical-evaluation, and projective stages, the study identifies key agency-related resources—including autonomy, intentionality, reflexivity, positivity, and learning. This approach reconstructs the overall resource framework of agency, acknowledging that reflexivity and learning are ongoing processes that support continuous self-positioning, autonomous decision-making, and action. The prominence of these resources shifts across different stages of transition.

Additionally, this research contextualizes the relationship between agency and structure within the specific context of this study. It incorporates considerations of liquid modernity and the rapid development of AI, extending beyond structural determinism to an ecological understanding of this relationship. The study explores how external constraints impact agency and highlights how the values and mentality shaped by humanities education enable students to maintain independent thinking and rational reflection. This foundation supports their ability to adapt and navigate the uncertainties of the job market. As the transition period is characterized by rapid and significant change, individuals experience an accelerated development of agency, personal choices, and responsibilities.

A key finding is that participants did not exhibit strong self-efficacy during the transition. Despite the oversupplied and uncertain labor market, their pessimism about future prospects and goal attainment did not diminish their individual initiative. Resources such as reflexivity, a positive attitude toward setbacks, and intentionality continued to empower their agency.

## **7.2 Limitations**

One limitation of this study is its small sample size. With only 17 respondents from a single selective university in China, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population. Alumni from prestigious institutions generally have higher incomes and better employment outcomes than those from less selective universities (Long, 2008). Additionally, the study's focus on humanities graduates from a limited range of disciplines does not account for internal variations within the humanities field. Future research should aim to generalize the experiences of graduates across a broader spectrum of humanities disciplines, institutions, and populations, assessing the broader applicability of these findings.

Additionally, this study did not account for the impact of socioeconomic status, cultural capital, gender, and habitus on job choices and workplace integration. Socioeconomic status significantly influences students' transitions from higher education to the labor market. Ecclestone and Hughes (2009) found that working-class and middle-class students have unequal access to educational and social resources, affecting their agency and mobility. Wealthier students often benefit from social networks and financial support that facilitate their success in the job market, including access to internships and the ability to cover living expenses during unpaid internships (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Greenbank, 2009; Rivera, 2015). Furthermore, graduates from high-income families tend to earn more than those from low-income families four years after graduation (Witteveen & Attewell, 2017). Gender also plays a role. Female graduates are less likely than their male counterparts to secure bachelor's-level positions shortly after graduation (Sagen et al., 2000).

### **7.3 Directions for future research**

Future research should consider conducting quantitative studies with larger sample sizes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the employment transition experienced by humanities students, incorporating diverse biographical information. By using well-designed questionnaires, researchers can systematically collect background data, such as parents' educational levels and socioeconomic status. This

approach will help identify specific challenges and strengths faced by students and explore potential correlations in the data. Such research can provide insights into how different family socioeconomic statuses impact the transition to work post-graduation, leading to more targeted solutions.

Additionally, while this study found that integrating technical and untransferable skills is a promising strategy for a smoother transition into the labor market, further investigation is needed into how to effectively balance and combine these skills. Research should explore optimal teaching methods and course designs that achieve this integration. In a society that often measures success through economic returns, it is important to reaffirm the value of cultivating personal attributes. Similarly, in a highly specialized and market-oriented environment, examining how humanities education can foster innovative thinking and individual agency to navigate uncertainties, contingencies, and risks is essential. These areas warrant further discussion and exploration in future studies.

## References

- Abel, J. R., Deitz, R., & Su, Y. (2014). Are recent college graduates finding good jobs?. *Current Issues in Economics and Finance*, 20(1).
- Almeida, António, Helena Quintas, and Teresa Gonçalves. 2016. Estudantes Não-Tradicionais no Ensino Superior: Barreiras à Aprendizagem e na Inserção Profissional. *Laplage em Revista (Sorocaba)* 2: 97–111.
- Altonji, J. G., Kahn, L. B., & Speer, J. D. (2014). Cashier or Consultant? Entry Labor Market Conditions, Field of Study, and Career Success NBER Working Paper No. 20531. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w20531>
- Amineh, R. J., & Asl, H. D. (2015). Review of constructivism and social constructivism. *Journal of social sciences, literature and languages*, 1(1), 9-16.

- Anisef, P., Axelrod, P., & Baichman-Anisef, E. (2000). *Opportunity and uncertainty: Life course experiences of the class of '73*. University of Toronto Press.
- Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge university press.
- Archer, M.S. 2007. *Making our way through the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Arthur, C. (2019). Is Entrepreneurial Education the Solution to the Automation Revolution?. In *Education and Technological Unemployment* (pp. 79-93). Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6225-5\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6225-5_6)
- Ashwin, P. (2020). "Chapter 2: Challenging myths about the purposes of university education". In *Transforming university education: A manifesto*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 1(2), 164-180
- Bank, W. 2020. *COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii>
- Bate, J. (2011) *The Public Value of the Humanities*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bauman, Z. (2001). *The Individualized Society*. Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2005). *Challenges of Education in the Liquid Modernity*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational psychologist*, 28(2), 117-148.
- Beddor, C. (2023). Zero Covid Policy. Source: *Deputy China Research Director Dragonomics*. <https://research.gavekal.com/gavekaldragonomics/> CIER. (2023). Source: China Institute for Employment-Research. (Accessed September 6, 2023).
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Becker, G. S. (1975). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Bennett, C., Fitzpatrick-Harnish, K., & Talbot, B. (2022). Collaborative untangling of positionality, ownership, and answerability as white researchers in Indigenous spaces. *International Journal of Music Education*, 40(4), 628–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614221087343>
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: Theory, research, critique* (Vol. 5). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Biesta, G. (2008). Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educ Asse Eval Acc*, 21(33), 33-46.
- Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability (formerly: Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education)*, 21, 33-46.

- Biesta, G. (2015). What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, 50(1), 75-87.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109>
- Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), 132-149.
- Billett, S. (2007). Exercising self: learning, work and identity. In: Brown, A. et al. (eds). *Identities at work*. Dordrecht: Springer. Technical and vocational education and training series: issues, concerns and prospects; Vol. 5, pp. 183-210.
- Bloomer, M.; Hodkinson, P. (2000). Learning careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning. *British educational research journal*, Vol. 26, No 5, pp. 583-597.
- Bourdieu P (1990 [1988]) *Homo Academicus*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu P (2011 [1986]) The forms of capital. *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* 1: 81–93.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). Outline of a Theory of Practice. In *The new social theory reader* (pp. 80-86). Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago press.
- Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. C., & Nice, R. (1977). Education, society and culture. *Trans. Richard Nice*. London: SAGE Publications, 15-29.

- Bridgstock, R. (2009). The graduate attributes we've overlooked: Enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *Higher education research & development*, 28(1), 31-44.
- British Academy (2020), Qualified for the Future: quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills. London: British Academy
- Brown, A. (1997). A dynamic model of occupational identity formation. In: Brown, A. (ed.). *Promoting vocational education and training: European perspectives*. Tampere: University of Tampere, pp. 59-67.
- Brown, A. D., Bimrose, J., & Merrill, B. (2014). Navigating difficult waters: learning for career and labour market transitions.
- Byrne, C. (2022). What determines perceived graduate employability? Exploring the effects of personal characteristics, academic achievements and graduate skills in a survey experiment. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(1), 159-176.
- Camus, A. (1955). *The Myth of Sisyphus* (J. O'Brien, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1942)
- Chan, E. T. Y. (2016). Being an English major, being a humanities student: Connecting academic subject identity in literary studies to other social domains, *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(9), 1656-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.1000291>
- Chang, R. (2013). Incommensurability (and Incomparability). *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*.
- Chen, Z. (2012). Analyzing the lack of labor-intensive industries for university graduates through the expansion of unemployed liberal arts students. *China Youth Studies*, (10), 19-23. <https://doi.org/10.19633/j.cnki.11-2579/d.2012.10.005>

- Chow, T.Y. (2019). *Is a Computer Science Degree the Golden Ticket? Effects of Race, Place, and Degree Institution on First Job Outcomes in Texas*. University of California, Santa Barbara, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. 13805520.
- Chui, M., J. Manyika, and M. Miremadi. 2016. "Where Machines Could Replace Humans—and Where They Can't (Yet)." *McKinsey Quarterly* 3: 58–69.
- Clegg, S. (2011). Cultural capital and agency: Connecting critique and curriculum in higher education. *British journal of sociology of education*, 32(1), 93-108.
- Colvin, G. 2015. *Humans are Underrated: What High Achievers Know that Brilliant Machines Never Will*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin.
- Cordón - Lagares, E., García - Ordaz, F., & García - del - Hoyo, J. J. (2022). The transition from higher education to first employment in Spain. *European Journal of Education*, 57(4), 659-673.
- Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (1999). Using codes and code manuals: A template organizing style of interpretation. In B. F. Crabtree & W. L. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research in primary care: Multiple strategies*. (pp. 163–177). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Crocker, D. A., & Robeyns, I. (2009). Capability and agency. *Amartya sen*, 60-90.
- Crossley, M. (2000). *Introducing narrative psychology*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Cumming, J. (2010). Contextualised Performance: Reframing the Skills Debate in Research Education. *Studies in Higher Education*. 35 (4): 405–419.
- Côté, J.; Levine, C. (2002). *Identity, formation, agency and culture: a social psychological synthesis*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Dowd, T. J., & Pinheiro, D. L. (2013). The ties among the notes: The social capital of jazz musicians in three metro areas. *Work and Occupations*, 40, 431-464.
- Drever, E. (2006). *Using semi-structured interviews in small-scale research* (2nd ed.). Glasgow: The SCRE Centre.
- Durkheim, E. (2018). The division of labor in society. In *Social stratification* (pp. 217-222). Routledge.
- Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G., & Hughes, M. (2009). Transitions in the lifecourse: The role of identity, agency and structure. In *Transitions and learning through the lifecourse* (pp. 25-39). Routledge.
- Elman, B. A. (2000). *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. University of California Press.
- Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency?. *American journal of sociology*, 103(4), 962-1023.
- Evans, K. (2002). Taking control of their lives? Agency in young adult transitions in England and the New Germany. *Journal of youth studies*, 5(3), 245-269.
- Eyler, J. (2009). The power of experiential education. *Liberal Education*, 95(4), 24-31.
- Ferguson, C. F. (2020). Experiences of arts and humanities students engaging in undergraduate research. *Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports*. 7775, 1-28
- Frankham, J. (2015). Much ado about something: The effects of the National Student Survey on higher education.

- Frenette, A. (2013). Making the intern economy: Role and career challenges of the music industry intern. *Work and Occupations*, 40, 364-397.
- Friedlander, L., Reid, G. J., Shupak, N., & Cribbie, R. (2007). Social support, self-esteem, and stress as predictors of adjustment to university among first-year undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48, 259-274.
- Gallagher, M. P. (2004). University and culture: Towards a retrieval of humanism. *Gregorianum*, 85(1), 149-71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23581232>
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gokulsing, D & Tandrayen, V. (2018). Globalisation, Higher Education and Youth Unemployment: The Case of Mauritius. Conference Paper, 5th International Conference on Managing Organizations In Africa, Mauritius.
- Goldthorpe, J. H. (1996). Class analysis and the reorientation of class theory: the case of persisting differentials in educational attainment 1. *The British journal of sociology*, 61, 311-335.
- Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2009). *The race between education and technology*. harvard university press.
- Gray, A. 2016. "The 10 Skills You Need to Thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution." *Global Agenda*, 19 January 2016, <http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution>

- Greenbank, P. (2009). Re-evaluating the role of social capital in the career decision-making behaviour of working-class students. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 14, 157-170.
- Grosemans, Ilke, and Eva Kyndt. 2017. Transitions from Higher Education to the Labour Market: State of the Art. In *Higher Education Transitions: Theory and Research*. Edited by Eva Kyndt, Vincent Donche, Keith Trigwell and Sari Lindblom-Ylänne. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 209–18
- Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2018). Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education. *British educational research journal*, 44(5), 914-938.
- Harvey, L. (2001). Defining and measuring employability. *Quality in higher education*, 7(2), 97-109.
- Harvey, L., & Morey, A. (2002). *Enhancing Employability, Recognising Diversity: Making Links Between Higher Education and the World of Work: Executive Summary-Parliament*. Universities UK.
- Hayhoe, R. (1999). *China's Universities, 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict*. Routledge.
- Heinz, W.; Krüger, H. (2001). The life-course: innovations and challenges for social research. *Current sociology*, Vol. 49, No 2, pp. 29-45.
- Hicks, J. R. (1964). *The theory of wages*. Macmillan.
- Hillage, J., & Pollard, E. (1998). Employability: developing a framework for policy analysis.
- Hillygus, S. D. (2005), The Missing Link: Exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement. *Political Behavior*, 27 (1): 25-47

- Hitlin, S., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2007). Agency: An empirical model of an abstract concept. *Advances in life course research*, 11, 33-67.
- Hitlin, S., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2007). Agency: An empirical model of an abstract concept. *Advances in life course research*, 11, 33-67.
- Holmes, Leonard. 2013. Competing Perspectives on Graduate Employability: Possession, Position or Process? *Studies in Higher Education* 38: 538–54.
- Hopwood, N. (2010). A sociocultural view of doctoral students' relationships and agency. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 32(2), 103-117.
- Humburg, M., R. van der Velden, and A. Verhagen. 2013. “The employability of Higher Education Graduates: The Employers’ Perspective.” Final Report. European Union.
- Huang, Q., Sun, R., & Zhang, Y. (2021, October). Reviewing the Employment Difficulties of Chinese Female College Students Majored in Humanities. In *2021 International Conference on Public Relations and Social Sciences (ICPRSS 2021)* (pp. 95-100). Atlantis Press.
- James, D., Biesta, G., & HODKINSON, P. (2007). Improving learning cultures in Further Education?. In *Improving learning cultures in further education* (pp. 23-40). Routledge.
- Jenkins, R. (1992). *Pierre bourdieu*. Routledge.
- Jin, J., & Ball, S. J. (2020). Meritocracy, social mobility and a new form of class domination. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41(1), 64-79.
- Ji, H. (2011). Discussion on the employment problems and countermeasures for liberal arts students in engineering schools. *Chinese Higher Education*, (06), 49-50.

- Kakooza, V., Wamala, R., Wokadala, J., & Bwire, T. (2019). Do Graduates from Arts-Related Disciplines have a Higher Impact on Unemployment than Graduates from the Science-Related Disciplines?
- Kalfa, S., & Taksa, L. (2015). Cultural capital in business higher education: reconsidering the graduate attributes movement and the focus on employability. *Studies in Higher Education, 40*(4), 580-595.
- Kang, Y., & Mok, K. H. (2022). The broken promise of human capital theory: Social embeddedness, graduate entrepreneurs and youth employment in China. *Critical Sociology, 48*(7-8), 1205-1219.
- Keep, E., & James, S. (2012). A Bermuda triangle of policy? 'Bad jobs', skills policy and incentives to learn at the bottom end of the labour market. *Journal of Education Policy, 27*(2), 211-230.
- Kempster, H. 2018. "Humanities Overview." In *What Do Graduates Do? 2018/19 Insights and Analysis from the UK's Largest Higher Education Survey*, 42–48. UK: Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services.
- Király, G., & Géring, Z. (2019). Introduction to 'Futures of Higher Education' special issue. *Futures*.
- Klein, M. 2010. *Mechanisms for the Effect of Field of Study on the Transition from Higher Education to Work*. Working Papers Nr. 130. Mannheim: MZES (Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung).
- Kohlberg, L. (1968). Early education: A cognitive-developmental view. *Child development, 10*13-1062.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experiences as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

- Lee, K. W., & Chung, M. (2015). Enhancing the link between higher education and employment. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 19-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.014>
- Lee, Y., G. G. Moon, and Y.-K. Kwon. 2019. "Implementing Liberal Arts Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Lessons and Implications for Korea's Higher Education Policy." *International Review of Public Administration* 24 (4): 282–294. doi:10.1080/12294659.2019.1700646.
- Lemire, S. (2023). Graduation Remarks. Source: Today – April 20, 2023. <https://www.today.com/life/holidays/graduationquotes-rcna79742> (Accessed October 3, 2023).
- Lent, Robert W., Gail Hackett, and Steven. D. Brown. 1999. A social cognitive view of school-to-work transition. *The Career Development Quarterly* 47: 297–311.
- Li H (2013) Rural students' experiences in a Chinese elite university: capital, habitus and practices. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34(5–6): 829–847.
- Li, D. (2008, February 15). Why are liberal arts students keen on civil service exams? A reflection of the crisis in liberal arts education. Xinhua News. <http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2008-02-15/content-7608744.htm>
- Li, S., Whalley, J., & Xing, C. (2014). China Economic Review China's higher education expansion and unemployment of college graduates. *China Economic Review*, 30(71103019), 567-582. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2013.08.002>
- Li, Y. (2009). An analysis of knowledge unemployment in liberal arts from the perspective of dual labor market segmentation theory. *Higher Education Development and Evaluation*, 25(3).
- Li, Y. (2010). Analyzing the value of building barriers for liberal arts majors through the phenomenon of knowledge unemployment. *Teaching Research*, (04), 17-21.
- Liang SM (1987) The essence of Chinese culture. *Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing House*.

- Lin N (2002) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, vol. 19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindley, J. and McIntosh, S. (2015). Growth in within graduate wage inequality: the role of subjects, cognitive skills dispersion and occupational concentration. *Labour Economics*, 37:10
- Livanos, I. (2010). The relationship between higher education and labour market in Greece: the weakest link? *Higher Education*, 60(5), 473-489.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9310-1>
- Long, M. C. (2008). College quality and early adult outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 27, 588-602.
- Louvel, S. 2007. "A Place for Humanities Graduates on the Labour Market in the So-Called Knowledge Society: The French Case." *Higher Education in Europe* 32 (4): 291–304. doi:10.1080/03797720802065957.
- Luthans, F. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 16(1), 57-72.
- Lyonette, C., Hunt, W., & Baldauf, B. (2017). Occupations and skills of arts, humanities and social sciences graduates and postgraduates. *British Academy*.
- Macfarlane, B. (2012) 'Re-framing student academic freedom: a capability perspective', *Higher Education* 63(6): 719–732.
- Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *Journal of studies in international education*, 18(1), 6-22.

- Marginson, S., Cantwell, B., Platonova, D., & Smolentseva, A. (2023). "Chapter 2: Intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes of higher education". In *Assessing the Contributions of Higher Education*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Marginson, S. (2023). Higher education as student self-formation. In S. Marginson, B. Cantwell, D. Platonova, & A. Smolentseva (Eds.), *Assessing the Contributions of Higher Education* (pp. 61–87). Edward Elgar Publishing.  
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035307173.00012>
- Martin, N. D. (2013). Forms of social capital: Family resources, campus networks and dominant class advantage. In S. McDonald (Ed.), *Research in the sociology of work: Vol. 24. Networks, employment, and inequality* (pp. 359-386). London, England: Emerald.
- Martin, N. D., & Frenette, A. (2017). Lost in transition: College resources and the unequal early-career trajectories of arts alumni. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(12), 1487-1509.
- McClaran, A. (2018). The Quality Assurance Agency. In *Handbook of Quality Assurance for University Teaching* (pp. 19-30). Routledge.
- Merriam, S. (2005). How adult life transitions foster learning and development. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, No 108, pp. 3-13.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mertens, D. M. (2007). Transformative paradigm: Mixed methods and social justice. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 1(3), 212-225.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Miller, A. D., Batsaikhan, E., Gankhuyag, Z., & Ganbaatar, J. (2023). The Chinese Graduate Unemployment Crisis 2023. A Comprehensive Geo-Educational Study. *Valley International Journal Digital Library*, 1603-1618.
- Miller, A. L., Rocconi, L. M., & Dumford, A. D. (2017). Focus on the finish line: Does highimpact practice participation influence career plans and early job attainment? *Higher Education*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s10734-017-0151-z
- Min, W. (2001). Current Trends in China. *International Higher Education*, (22).
- Mok KH, Jiang J (2018) Massification of higher education and challenges for graduate employment and social mobility: East Asian experiences and sociological reflections. *International Journal of Educational Development* 63: 44–51.
- Mok, K. H., Xiong, W., & Ye, H. (2021). COVID-19 crisis and challenges for graduate employment in Taiwan, Mainland China and East Asia: A critical review of skills preparing students for uncertain futures. *Journal of Education and Work*, 34(3), 247-261.
- Mok, K. H., & Jiang, J. (2016). The quest for world-class universities in China: Critical reflections. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(3), 238-261.
- Moore, T., & Morton, J. (2015). The Myth of Job Readiness? Written Communication, Employability and the ‘Skills Gap’ in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1067602.
- Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Nee V, Opper S (2010) Political capital in a market economy. *Social Forces* 88(5): 2105–2132.
- Nicholson, N. (1990). The transition cycle: Causes, outcomes, processes and forms. In S.

- Fisher & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *On the move: The psychology of change and transition* (pp. 83–108). Wiley.
- Nunez, I., & Livanos, I. (2010). Higher education and unemployment in Europe: an analysis of the academic subject and national effects. *Higher Education*, 59(4), 475-487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9260-7>
- Næss, T., & Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2023). Labour market mismatch among master's graduates in the humanities from 1995 to 2015 in Norway. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(4), 558-577.
- Næss, T., Thune, L. A., Støren, and A. Vabø. 2012. *Samarbeid med arbeidslivet i studietiden Omfang, typer og nytte i studietiden* [Cooperation with the Working Life While Studying. Amount, Types and Benefit While Studying]. Report 48/2012. Oslo: NIFU.
- OECD. 2019. *OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work*. Paris: OECD.
- Penlington, N. (1976). Humanities in an Age of Uncertainty. *Perspectives (1969-1979)*, 8(2), 6.
- Peters, M. A., Jandrić, P., & Means, A. J. (2019). Introduction: Technological Unemployment and the Future of Work. In *Education and Technological Unemployment* (pp. 1-12). Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6225-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6225-5_1)
- Richards, L. and Richards, T. (1994) 'From filing cabinet to computer' in A. Bryman, A., & Burgess, B. (Eds.). (2002). *Analyzing qualitative data*. Routledge.
- Rivera, L. A. (2015). *Pedigree: How elite students get elite jobs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Roberts, K. (1997). Prolonged transitions to uncertain destinations: the implications for careers guidance. *British journal of guidance and counselling*, Vol. 25, No 3, pp. 345-360.
- Robson, J., Murphy, E., Nuseibeh, N., Tawell, A., Hart, B., Stewart, J., ... & Marginson, S. (2023). The value of the humanities: understanding the career destinations of Oxford humanities graduates.
- Roessler, B. (2012). Meaningful work: Arguments from autonomy. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 20(1), 71-93.
- Roussau, J. (1762). The essential writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (P. Constantine, Trans.) (L. Damrosch, Ed.) Vintage Books.
- Rudolph, J. (2018). Graeber, D.(2018). Bullshit jobs: A theory. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Russell Keat,'Market Boundaries and Human Goods, in John Haldane (ed.), philosophy and Public Affairs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Purcell, K., Wilton, N., & Elias, P. (2007). Hard lessons for lifelong learners? Age and experience in the graduate labour market. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(1), 57-82.
- Sagen, H. B., Dallam, J. W., & Laverty, J. R. (2000). Effects of career preparation experiences on the initial employment success of college graduates. *Research in Higher Education*, 41, 753-767.
- Sarid, A. (2017). Self-critical appropriation: An assessment of Bauman's view of education in liquid modernity. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 49(5), 462-472.
- Schlossberg, Nancy. 2011. The challenge of chance: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling* 48: 159–63.

- Seldon, A., and O. Abidoye. 2017. *Fourth Education Revolution: Will Artificial Intelligence Liberate or Infantilise Humanity*. England: University of Buckingham Press.
- Sen, A. K. (2009). *The idea of justice*. Harvard University Press.
- Shierholz, H., Davis, A., & Kimball, W. (2014). The class of 2014: The weak economy is idling too many young graduates. Economic Policy Institute, 1.
- Skinner, D. (2013). Foucault, subjectivity and ethics: Towards a self-forming subject. *Organization*, 20(6), 904–923. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508412460419>
- Small, H. (2013). *The value of the humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snieska, V., Valodkiene, G., Daunoriene, A., & Draksaite, A. (2015). Education and unemployment in European Union economic cycles. *Procedia-social and behavioral dsciences*, 213, 211-216.
- Spencer, D. (2008). *The political economy of work*. Routledge.
- State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2023, December). Department information. The State Council of the People's Republic of China. [https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202312/content\\_6918995.htm](https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202312/content_6918995.htm)
- Sutton, C. (2011). Social surveys: Design to analysis. In T. May, (Ed.), *Social Research*, pp. 93-130. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
- Tan, E. (2014). Human capital theory: A holistic criticism. *Review of Educational Research*, 84, 441-445.

- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods*. New York: Wiley.
- Taylor, C. A. (2017). Is a posthumanist Bildung possible? Reclaiming the promise of Bildung for contemporary higher education. *Higher Education*, *74*(3), 419-435.
- Teng, W., M. Chenwei, S. Pahlevansharif, and J. J. Turner. 2019. "Graduate Readiness for the Employment Market of the 4th Industrial Revolution: The Development of Soft Employability Skills." *Education + Training* *61* (5): 590–604. doi:10.1108/ET-07-2018-0154.
- Thijssen, J. G., Van der Heijden, B. I., & Rocco, T. S. (2008). Toward the employability—link model: current employment transition to future employment perspectives. *Human resource development review*, *7*(2), 165-183.
- Tholen, G., Relly, S. J., Warhurst, C., & Commander, J. (2016). Higher education, graduate skills and the skills of graduates: the case of graduates as residential sales estate agents. *British Educational Research Journal*, *42*(3), 508-523.
- Tomlinson, M. (2022). Missing values: Engaging the value of higher education and implications for future measurements. *Oxford Review of Education*, *48*(1), 46-62.
- Thomson, P., Hall, C., Earl, L., & Geppert, C. (2020). Subject choice as everyday accommodation/resistance: Why students in England (still) choose the arts. *Critical Studies in Education*, *61*(5), 545-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2018.1525754>
- Thune, T., and L. A. Støren. 2014. "Study and Labour Effects of Graduate Student's Interaction with Work Organisations During Education. A Cohort Study." *Education Training* *57* (7): 702–722.
- Tran, L. T., & Vu, T. T. P. (2018). 'Agency in mobility': towards a conceptualisation of international student agency in transnational mobility. *Educational Review*, *70*(2), 167-187.

- Valadas, Sandra T., Liliana Paulos, and Scott Revers. 2018. A transição de estudantes não-tradicionais para o mercado de trabalho: Género, idade, experiência e insegurança. In *Estudantes Não-Tradicionais no Ensino Superior*. Edited by António Fragoso and Sandra T. Valadas. Coimbra: CINEP, pp. 275–96.
- Wang, Q. (2020). Employment challenges for humanities graduates in the private sector. *Journal of Higher Education*, 18(5), 55-68.
- Wang, Z., Shi, K., & Gao, J. (2005). Analysis of influencing factors of college students' professional self-efficacy.
- Wedderburn, D. (1965). *Redundancy and the railwaymen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, occasional paper; No 4.
- Weise, M. R., A. R. Hanson, R. Sentz, and Y. Saleh. 2018. *Robot-Ready: Human+ Skills for the Future of Work*. Indianapolis, IN: Strada Institute for the Future of Work. 16th March 2020. <https://www.economicmodeling.com/robot-ready-reports/>
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, Vol. 9, No 5, pp. 1-5.
- Wheelahan, L., Moodie, G., & Doughney, J. (2022). Challenging the skills fetish. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(3), 475–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186>
- Willis, P. (2017). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Routledge.
- Williams, S., Dodd, L. J., Steele, C., & Randall, R. (2016). A systematic review of current understandings of employability. *Journal of Education and Work*, 29(8), 877–901. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2015.1102210>
- Witteveen, D., & Attewell, P. (2017). Family background and earnings inequality among college graduates. *Social Forces*, 95, 1539-1576.

World Bank (2019) *World Development Indicators*. The World Bank Group. ([World Bank, 2019](#))

World Bank. 2016. *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Economic Forum. 2016. *The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

World Economic Forum. 2017. *Accelerating Workforce Reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution: An Agenda for Leaders to Shape the Future of Education, Gender and Work*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

World Economic Forum (WEF). (2020). *Schools of the Future: Defining New Models of Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. WEF.

Woya, A. A. (2019). Employability among Statistics Graduates: Graduates' Attributes, Competence, and Quality of Education. *Education Research International*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/7285491>

Xu, W. & Sun, X. L. (2008). Analysis and Countermeasures of Graduate Employment Psychological Problems. *Human Resource Management*, (012).

Yeung, W. J. J. (2013). Higher education expansion and social stratification in China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 45(4), 54-80.

Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Zeng, F. (2001). Reflections on the status of contemporary humanities. *China Higher Education*, (4), 27-29.

## Appendix A: CUREC 1B

### Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) CUREC 1B Application form for research projects in the social sciences and humanities with low-risk ethical issues



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics review process has been established to ensure that research involving human participants is conducted in a way that respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants, and minimises risk to participants, researchers, third parties, and to the University itself. It is assumed that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously, and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to established principles and good practice in their field and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements.

**This form is currently being piloted in the following Departments: Asian & Middle Eastern Studies (AMES), Computer Science, Education, Geography and Environment (SoGE), International Development (ODID), Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics (LPP), Music and Sociology, and is not yet available to researchers in other Departments.**

Before completing this form, please refer to the [guidance](#) and [flowchart](#) on the Research Support website. To avoid delays, it is incumbent on applicants to apply using the appropriate form. Only type-written forms will be accepted. Applications are to be reviewed and approved by the student's supervisor (if student research) or by a senior colleague within the Department (if staff research). Once an application has been approved, the application form and supporting documents (such as the participant information sheet and consent form) must be emailed *either* to the [Departmental Research Ethics Committee \(DREC\)](#) (for applicants from Computer Science, Education, SoGE, ODID, LPP, Music or Sociology) *or* to [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk) (for applicants from AMES) so that there is a record of the review and approval. Please contact your [DREC](#) or the [SSH IDREC](#) if you have any questions about completing this form or the review process.

SECTION A: Researchers		
1.	Name of researcher or student	Yutian Wang
2.	Department or Institute	Department of Education

3. Degree programme, if student research	MSc		
Copy and paste the following four rows as necessary to complete for each additional researcher who will be involved in this study, including student(s).			
4. Name of <a href="#">Principal Investigator (PI)</a> (if different from the answer to A1), student's supervisor or other researchers	James Robson		
5. Department or Institute	Department of Education		
6. Role in research	Supervisor		
7. The <a href="#">introductory core research integrity course</a> is compulsory for all University of Oxford research students (either on graduate taught courses or taking research degrees). There is also a <a href="#">refresher course</a> which may be more suitable for experienced University of Oxford researchers. Please confirm that all staff and research students have undertaken either the core or the refresher course, or that undergraduates have received suitable training.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	<b>Yes</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Yes</b>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

## SECTION B: Filter questions

This section determines whether this CUREC 1B form is suitable for the research project.

Please indicate with an 'X'.	Ye s	No
1. Does the research involve the <a href="#">deception</a> of participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Are the research participants <a href="#">vulnerable</a> in the context of the research, or classed as <a href="#">people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question</a> ? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants younger than 16;</li> <li>• Participants aged 16 – 18 (refer to <a href="#">competent youths</a> for guidance);</li> <li>• <a href="#">adults at risk</a>;</li> </ul> Note the University's <a href="#">Safeguarding Guidance and Code of Practice</a> and its implications for researchers involving young people or adults at risk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution or significant harm?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act ( <a href="#">the Prevent Duty</a> ), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? <a href="#">Best Practice Guidance 07 on the Prevent Duty</a> provides further guidance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

5. Does the research involve topics that could be considered <a href="#">sensitive</a> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Are there any risks to the <a href="#">safety</a> and <a href="#">wellbeing</a> of the researchers or others involved in the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Will participants be taking part in the research without their knowledge and <a href="#">informed consent</a> (e.g. <a href="#">covert observation</a> )?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Is this international or collaborative research where there may be issues of <a href="#">local practice and political sensitivities</a> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Are there any potential <a href="#">conflicts of interest</a> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Is permission from a <a href="#">gatekeeper</a> required for access to the participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11. Are the researchers in a position of authority over participants, e.g. as employers, lecturers, teachers or family members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12. Will the research involve <a href="#">third parties</a> collecting data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13. Is there scope for incidental findings, e.g. concerns for the safety or wellbeing of participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14. Is the Principal Investigator based in a Department other than AMES, Computer Science, Education, SoGE, ODID, LPP, Music and Sociology?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If you answered 'No' to all the questions above, continue to <b>Section C</b> . If you answered 'Yes' to <b>any</b> of the questions above, please submit a <a href="#">CUREC 1A</a> or <a href="#">CUREC 2</a> form <b>instead of this form</b> .		

### SECTION C: The research project

1. Title of the research project	
How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market?	
2. Anticipated start date of the aspect of the research project involving human participants and/ or personal data ( <b>dd/mm/yy</b> ).	The research will start once ethics approval is obtained
3. Anticipated research end date ( <b>dd/mm/yy</b> ).	30/08/2024
4. External organisation funding the research and grant reference (if applicable)	
None	

<p>5. Provide a brief lay summary of the aims and objectives of the research. (max 300 words)</p>
<p>The research aims to investigate how Chinese humanities Master’s graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market. It focuses on answering questions of how these these graduates chose their major and what they expected from the major, and what challenges and facilitators graduates experienced when entering labor market. Through those questions, the research will use a conceptual framework that draws together ideas of self formation to understand the degree in the economy through the eyes of the graduates, and to figure out challenges of structure and agency within the clash of a degree and the labor market.</p>
<p>6. Provide a brief lay summary of the research design and methods. What will research participants be asked to do? What data will be collected? (max 300 words)</p>
<p>This research will be grounded in an interpretivist and phenomenological philosophy, aiming to understand the subjective realities of the participants and how they interpret their experiences of transitioning from education to employment. Regarding this, it will adopt a qualitative research for exploring the complexities of graduates' experiences, allowing for in-depth insights into personal narratives, decision-making processes, and the socio-economic factors in relation with their humanities master’s degree influencing their job market transition. Purposive sampling will be used to select participants who are humanities Master’s graduates from selective Chinese universities, ensuring they are representative of the study's focus. Then one-on-one semi-structured interview will be conducted and participants will be asked about their choices and perceptions about their degrees, university experience and professional decision.</p> <p>Please note that your contact details or any documents linking the interview data with personal data will not be stored.</p> <p>The interview will be carried out online through Teams. The audio of the interview will be recorded in a separate encrypted dictaphone device and transcribed verbatim using a Chinese transcription tool online and edited manually in Nvivo and MAXQDA for data analysis.</p>
<p>7. List any <a href="#">professional guidelines</a> that will be followed.</p>
<p><a href="#">British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</a></p>
<p>8. List the location(s) where the research will be conducted, including any other countries. Clarify which parts of the research will be conducted in-</p>

person and which will take place remotely, e.g. <a href="#">online</a> .			
I will conduct the interviews in Oxford online and the participants will be in Shanghai, China.			
9. If your department requires a fieldwork risk assessment, please confirm that a risk assessment will be undertaken and authorised by your Department before the fieldwork is undertaken. Refer to guidance available from your Department, the <a href="#">Safety Office</a> , the <a href="#">Social Sciences Division</a> , and the <a href="#">Humanities Division</a> , and on <a href="#">travel for University business</a> . If you are travelling overseas, you are advised to take out <a href="#">University travel insurance</a> .	<b>Yes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Not required</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
10. Indicate which <a href="#">CUREC Best Practice Guidance</a> are relevant and which have been used to develop your research.	<b>Please indicated with an 'X'.</b>	<b>Relevant?</b>	<b>Used?</b>
	<a href="#">BPG 01 Researcher safety</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 02 Ethnographic and other types of qualitative research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 03 Elite and expert interviewing</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 04 Competent youths</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 05 Payments and incentives in research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 06 Internet-mediated research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 07 Prevent Duty</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 08 Psychological distress</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 09 Data collection, protection and management</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 10 Conducting research interviews</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 12 Mobile app design</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<a href="#">BPG 14 Research in archives</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<a href="#">BPG 15 Ethics review of research with human tissue</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	<a href="#">BPG 16 Social science research conducted outside the UK</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--	---	--------------------------	--------------------------

## SECTION D: Research participants – recruitment and informed consent

1.	Number of participants	15-20
2.	How will potential participants be identified and approached?	
<p>The recruitment poster adverts will be posted on Chinese social media such as Wechat circle and Xiaohongshu.</p> <p>Potential participants will be contacted through the mailing list: yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk</p>		
3.	<p>Explain how <a href="#">informed consent</a> will be obtained from the participants and how this will be recorded. Make sure participants are aware of any limits to withdrawing their data, e.g. once the data has been anonymised or published.</p> <p><b>NB: For ethics applications using the CUREC 1B form, the information provided to participants and the consent form must be based on the <a href="#">University templates</a>.</b></p>	
<p>The first step is to send out the initial invitation and then follow that up with the participant information sheet. For those that express interest in taking part, I will sent consent form to them and get it back through email.</p>		
<p>Please submit copies of all participant-facing materials for review. E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment material (e.g. emails, posters)</li> <li>• Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. written information or, if applicable, an outline oral information script).</li> <li>• A document to record informed consent.</li> </ul>		

## SECTION E: Research data

Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the [University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#).

In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#) and [Data Protection Screening Assessment](#) and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#) may

<p>also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from <a href="#">Research Data Oxford</a> and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from the <a href="#">Information Compliance team</a>.</p>				
<p>1. Confirm that, during the project, research data will be stored according to <a href="#">University guidelines</a>; i.e. on University servers or Nexus365 One Drive if possible, or on encrypted personal devices.</p>		<p><b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>		
<p>2. Participants must understand what information will be collected from them, how the data will be used, who will have access to the data and how identifiable they will be from the data and from the research outputs. Confirm that you will obtain participants' informed consent for the use of their data.</p>		<p><b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>		
<p>3. Confirm that the research data will be stored according to <a href="#">University guidelines</a> for at least 3 years after first publication or public release and that <a href="#">any additional research funder policies</a> will be adhered to.</p>		<p><b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>		
<p>4. Please complete this section if your research involves the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) personal data.</p>	<p><b>Please indicated with an 'X'.</b></p>		<p><b>Yes</b></p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
	<p>Are data access agreements in place for access to and use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>Did the individuals agree that their data could be used for research purposes?</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>Could anyone (including members of the research team) link the data back to an individual or individuals? If this is a possibility, please explain how the associated ethical issues will be addressed:</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

**Either Section F** (for student projects) **or Section G** (for staff projects) will need to be completed.

## SECTION F: Endorsements and ethics approval (student projects only)

Please ensure this form is endorsed by

- i. the student
- ii. the student's supervisor (who is also [Principal Investigator](#))
- iii. the Head of Department (or nominee)

Endorsement may be provided [by email](#) or by signing the form.

The PI is responsible for ensuring a copy of the endorsed form is kept.

### Student signature/ endorsement

I confirm that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that I will submit a revised version of this form should changes become necessary.

Name of student	Yutian Wang
Student's signature	<a href="mailto:yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk">yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk</a>
Date	

### Ethics review by the Principal Investigator/ student supervisor

- I understand my responsibilities as the student's supervisor and Principal Investigator as outlined on this form and in the CUREC glossary and guidance.
- I understand that I must ensure that all researchers are suitably qualified and trained to conduct the research described, or are appropriately supervised until deemed qualified/ trained.
- I will ensure that personal data collected from participants will be held in accordance with the requirements of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act and that the data collected is only used for the research for which approval has been given.
  
- I have reviewed the above application on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (SSH IDREC) in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Policy. I confirm that the research is suitable for review under the CUREC 1B process, that the ethical issues have been identified and that suitable measures have been put in place to address the ethical issues. I agree to notify the DREC if the Principal Investigator changes. I agree to notify the DREC in writing immediately of any proposed changes to the research that would require review by the DREC.

Name of Principal Investigator	James Robson
Principal Investigator's signature	<a href="mailto:james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk">james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk</a>

Date	
<p><b>Departmental endorsement</b> – from the Head of Department or nominee</p> <p>Another senior member of the department may sign where the head of department is the Principal Investigator, or where the Head of Department has appointed a nominee. Example nominees include Deputy Head of Department, DREC Chair, Director of Research, or Director of Graduate/ Undergraduate Studies.</p>	
<p>On the basis of the information available to me, I confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am aware of the research proposed and have read this application;</li> <li>• To the best of my knowledge, the proposed design and scientific methodology do not raise ethical concerns;</li> <li>• I support this research in principle, subject to ethical and other necessary reviews.</li> </ul>	
Signature	
Name	
Role	
Date	
<p>If changes to the research result in the research no longer meeting the criteria for review under the CUREC 1B process, a separate CUREC 1A or CUREC 2 application will need to be submitted to the DREC or IDREC.</p>	
<p>Approved applications must be emailed to the relevant DREC or SSH IDREC so that there is a record of the approval. The ethics reference will be provided at this point.</p>	
Ethics reference:	C1B-24HT-Educ-012

### SECTION G: Endorsements and ethics approval (staff projects only)

Please ensure this form is endorsed by

- i. the [Principal Investigator](#)
- ii. the Head of Department (or nominee)
- iii. a senior colleague

Endorsement may be provided [by email](#) or by signing the form.

The PI is responsible for ensuring a copy of the endorsed form is kept.

<b>Principal Investigator signature/ endorsement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I understand my responsibilities as the Principal Investigator as outlined on this form and in the CUREC glossary and guidance.</li> <li>• I confirm that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that I will submit a revised version of this form should changes become necessary.</li> <li>• I understand that I must ensure that all researchers are suitably qualified and trained to conduct the research described, or are appropriately supervised until deemed qualified/ trained.</li> <li>• I will ensure that personal data collected from participants will be held in accordance with the requirements of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act and that the data collected is only used for the research for which approval has been given.</li> <li>• I agree to notify the DREC if the Principal Investigator changes. I agree to notify the DREC in writing immediately of any proposed changes to the research that would require review by the DREC.</li> </ul>	
Name of Principal Investigator	
Principal Investigator's signature	
Date	
<b>Ethics review by a senior colleague</b>	
<p>I have reviewed the above application on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (SSH IDREC), in accordance with the University's <a href="#">Research Ethics Policy</a>. I confirm that the research is suitable for review under the CUREC 1B process, that the ethical issues have been identified and that suitable measures have been put in place to address the ethical issues.</p>	
Name of reviewer	
Reviewer's signature	
Role	
Date	
<b>Departmental endorsement – from the Head of Department or nominee</b>	
<p>Another senior member of the department may sign where the head of department is the Principal Investigator, or where the Head of Department has appointed a nominee. Example nominees include Deputy Head of Department, DREC Chair, Director of Research, or Director of Graduate/ Undergraduate Studies.</p>	

<p>On the basis of the information available to me, I confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am aware of the research proposed and have read this application;</li> <li>• To the best of my knowledge, the proposed design and scientific methodology do not raise ethical concerns;</li> <li>• I support this research in principle, subject to ethical and other necessary reviews.</li> </ul>	
Signature	
Name	
Role	
Date	
<p>If changes to the research result in the research no longer meeting the criteria for review under the CUREC 1B process, a separate CUREC 1A or CUREC 2 application will need to be submitted to the DREC or IDREC.</p>	
<p>Approved applications must be emailed to the relevant DREC or SSH IDREC so that there is a record of the approval. The ethics reference will be provided at this point.</p>	
Ethics reference:	C1B-24HT-Educ-012

## Appendix B: CUREC 1B, Approval

CUREC 1B - How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from...



✉ Yutian Wang <yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.a...

2024年6月7日 星期五 下午2:42

收件人:  Student CUREC; 抄送:  James Robson;  Student CUREC

---

发件人: Student CUREC <[student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk)>

日期: 星期日, 2024年3月3日 上午12:17

收件人: Yutian Wang <[yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk)>

抄送: James Robson <[james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk)>, Student CUREC <[student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk)>

主题: CUREC 1B - How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market?

Dear Yutian Wang,

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your CUREC 1B application entitled '*How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market?*'. The application was reviewed and approved by Dr James Robson, your supervisor. No further approval from the Education DREC is required for applications reviewed under the CUREC 1B process. As such, the project will not receive a formal letter of ethical approval from the SSH IDREC.

The ethics reference for your application is **C1B-24HT-Educ-012**. Please add this reference to your CUREC 1B form and include it on documents for the research participants such as the participant information sheet.

## Appendix C: Recruitment Materials

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
University of Oxford  
15 Norham Gardens Oxford  
OX2 6PY

Yutian Wang  
Yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk



### **How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market**

Ethics Approval Reference: C1B-24HT-Educ-012

Research shows that humanities graduates gained skills in universities such as independent thinking, research ability, time-management skill, writing and communication ability, which are very helpful for their future development. However, Arts and Humanities degrees are increasingly criticised in policy contexts for failing to provide students with knowledge and skills that are valued in the labour market, and adequate financial returns on their educational investments. This study aims to explore the value of humanities to student's self-formation and future development.

We are looking for:

- Humanities Master's graduates from Fudan University.
- Graduates who have been in the job market for at least one year.

Eligible participants would be asked to participate in a 60 minutes semi-structured interview. Interviews will be conducted online via Teams, providing a convenient and flexible way to share your experiences.

- Participants can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on and articulate their experiences, expectations, and challenges.
- By participating in the study, graduates have a chance to contribute to potential changes in how humanities degrees are structured, marketed, and valued in society and the labor market.
- Participants will have access to research report about humanities students' career development, which may give enlightenment to you.

If you're interested in contributing to this important research or if you have any questions, please contact us at [yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk] or [Wechat: kalila1115]

Your story matters. Share it with us.  
Thank you!

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study and Schedule Zoom Meeting

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to invite you to participate in our research study focusing on the transition experiences of Chinese humanities Master's graduates from Fudan University. Your background and experiences align perfectly with the criteria we are looking for, and your insights would be invaluable to our research.

**About the Study:**

My study aims to explore how graduates like yourself navigate the transition into the job market after completing your Master's degree. I am interested in understanding your decision-making process when choosing your major, your expectations from the program, and the challenges and opportunities you encountered as you entered the workforce.

**Participation Details:**

I would like to schedule a one-on-one, semi-structured interview with you, which will last approximately 70-90 minutes. The interview will be conducted online via Zoom, allowing for flexibility in scheduling and ensuring your comfort and convenience.

If you are interested in participating and scheduling the Zoom meeting, please reply to this email with your availability over the next three weeks, and I will follow up with a confirmation and Zoom meeting invitation.

If you have any questions about the study or need further information, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [\[yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk\]](mailto:yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk). I am here to assist you with any queries you may have.

Thank you for considering this invitation, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,  
Yutian Wang  
MSc Higher Education student  
University of Oxford

## Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: [C1B-24HT-Educ-012]

### 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.

### Why is this research being conducted?

The research is conducted to explore how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market, aiming to guide potential students in their choices of majors and career paths, and provide evidence-based recommendations for universities, policymakers, and employers on how to better support humanities graduates in their transition to the job market.

### Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been identified as a potential participant because you meet the inclusion criteria: Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities. Your experiences as a recent humanities Master's graduate from a selective university in China, navigating the transition into the job market, make your insights invaluable to this study. Your participation would contribute significantly to understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in your situation and help in developing recommendations for supporting future graduates in their career paths.

### Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part.

At any time during the data collection process and afterwards, up to the point when the data has been anonymised, you can withdraw yourself from the study any personal information you have provided by sending an email stating your request.

The submission date for the thesis is 30/08/2024, after which it will not be possible for you to withdraw their data anymore.

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

Where and How the Research Will Take Place: The research will be carried out online through Teams. Once you express interest in participating and meet the inclusion criteria, you will receive an email with a link to the virtual meeting platform (e.g., Teams) where the interview will take place. There is no need for a physical visit, so you can participate from the comfort of your home or any other convenient location.

The audio of the interview will be recorded in a separate encrypted dictaphone device and transcribed verbatim using a Chinese transcription tool online. Recordings will normally be deleted after transcription has been completed, unless there's a reason to keep them. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the research data during the project. Fully anonymized research data and consent records will be stored for three years after completion of the study.

**Consent Process:** Before the interview starts, we will go through the consent form together. This form outlines your rights as a participant, the purpose of the study, and how your data will be used. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions before you decide to give your written consent electronically.

**Duration of Participation:** Your participation will involve a one-time, 1-hour interview.

**Interview Details:** The interview will explore topics such as your decision to choose your specific humanities major, expectations from the major, experiences transitioning into the job market, challenges faced, and any facilitators that helped in the transition. The questioning style will be semi-structured, allowing for both specific questions and the flexibility for you to share your experiences in a conversational manner. We aim to create a comfortable and respectful environment for you to share your thoughts.

**Audio Recording:** With your consent, I would like to audio record the interview to ensure we have an accurate record of our conversation. This will help in accurately capturing your experiences and insights. Video recording or photography will not be required. The reasons for audio recording are purely for research accuracy and data analysis purposes.

**Frequency and Breaks:** You will only need to participate once for a duration of 1 hour. Should you need to take a break during the interview, you are welcome to request one at any time.

**Follow-Up Sessions:** No follow-up sessions are planned as part of this study. Your participation is limited to one interview session.

**Your Rights:** It's important to understand that your participation is entirely voluntary. You can ask to pause or stop the interview at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?**

I am committed to ensuring that my research is conducted ethically and responsibly, with your welfare as a priority. It is important to me that you understand any potential risks or discomforts that might arise from participating in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality Risks:** One of the primary concerns may involve the privacy of your responses and the confidentiality of the information you share. Given the nature of the topics discussed, you may be sharing personal experiences or opinions that you consider private. There is always a slight risk that confidentiality could be compromised; however, I am taking several measures to mitigate this risk. Your data will be anonymized, which means that your name or any identifying information will not be attached to your responses in any reports or publications. All data will be stored on secure, password-protected servers, and only the research

team will have access to the raw data. You will have the autonomy to skip any questions you do not wish to answer, and you can withdraw from the study at any point during the interview.

**Emotional Discomfort:** Discussing experiences related to job searching, career expectations, and possibly unmet goals or challenges might evoke feelings of stress or discomfort. We aim to approach these topics sensitively and respectfully, and you will have the complete freedom to not answer any questions you are not comfortable with. If at any point you feel distressed, I will provide you with contacts for support services.

**Time Commitment:** The time commitment required for this study is approximately one hour, which might be a disadvantage for those with a busy schedule. I hope the insights gained from this research and the opportunity to reflect on and share your experiences can offset this investment of your time.

### **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that participants can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on and articulate your experiences, expectations, and challenges. This reflection process can offer insights into your own decisions, the value of your degree, and your career trajectory, potentially guiding future development.

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

I am interested in your experiences of transitioning to job market and your views of humanities master's degree. The information you provide will help me better understand the value of humanities degree in order to answer my research question on how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market

All identifiable data, including consent forms, will be securely stored in password-protected electronic files on university servers. Recordings will normally be deleted after transcription has been completed, unless there's a reason to keep them. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the research data during the project.

### **Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?**

We will not collect any data that could directly identify you.

Please note that contact details or any documents linking the interview data with personal data will not be stored.

The responses you provide will be stored in a password-protected electronic file will be written up *in a dissertation*, and may be used in academic publications. Identifiable information will be deleted as soon as it is no longer required for the research, prior to completion of the study. Fully anonymized research data and consent records will be stored for three years after completion of the study.

## **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 research. 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 from the University's Information Compliance web site at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

## **Who has reviewed this research?**

The application was reviewed and approved by my supervisor on behalf of the Departmental of Education's Research Ethics Committee.

## **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 research, please contact [Yutian Wang and [yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk) email address] or [James Robson and [james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:james.robson@education.ox.ac.uk) email address], 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:

The Chair, Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee

Email: [student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk)

Address: 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY

## **Further Information and Contact Details**

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

[Yutian Wang]  
[the Department of Education]  
[15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY]  
University email: [yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:yutian.wang@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk)

## Appendix E: Written Consent Form

### Consent to take part in [How do Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market?]

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: **C1B-24HT-Educ-012**

Purpose of Study: The research aims to investigate how Chinese humanities Master's graduates from selective universities navigate the transition into job market.

**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 time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty, and that I may withdraw all data collected.

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 identifiable from any publications.

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.

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.

\_\_\_\_\_

dd / mm / yyyy

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

dd / mm / yyyy

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

## Appendix F: Interview Questions

- Degree choice
  1. What were the main reasons you chose your post-graduate degree?  
What were the main reasons you chose Fudan university?  
How did your past experience and education affect you?
  2. What were your professional aspirations at the time?
  3. How did you expect the degree to bring you towards to those?  
Did you consider any other degrees?
  
- Professional decision
  4. How did you choose your first job after university?
  5. Did you encounter any challenge during the process?
  6. How qualified did you feel for the jobs you applied for out of University?
  7. What experiences from your postgraduate degree contribute to your choice of jobs to pursue?
  8. Do you think the degree of humanities contribute to your career?
  9. How well informed did you feel about career options for graduates in your field?
  
- Knowledge and Skills
  10. What aspect of your experience in Fudan university was most useful in preparing you for your career?
  11. To what extent did you feel it was important to develop professional skills while you were at Fudan University?
  12. What are the most important skills you feel you've developed since graduating from Fudan University? How were these developed?
  13. How satisfied are you with the way Fudan University prepared you for your career?  
  
What changes, if any, should Fudan University consider making to their humanities degrees ?
  14. Do you think skills developed by humanities will be replaced by AI?

15. Do you have different perceptions on your humanities degree before and after you enter job market?

- About Future

16. What does the humanities mean to you?

17. Do you have any expectations or goals for the future?

18. What advice would you give to your teenage self thinking about doing a Humanities degree at Fudan University?

## Appendix G: Table of Codes

▼ ● 代码列表	<b>591</b>
● reasons of choosing huma...	19
● initial career prospects	16
● degree expectat... + X	17
> ● career choices	42
> ● challenges	18
● transition adaptation	18
● the values of humanities	33
● university experience	26
● the importance of professi...	17
● skills developed in universi...	31
● lack of skills	17
● skills acquired in the labor ...	18
● future of humanities	16
● reflections on humanities	16
● AI	18
● transformation	13
● agency and structure	15
● uncertainties and stability	2
● goals and expectations	15
● influences of Covid-19	10