



# Comparing Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education from Chinese Students' Perspective

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## **Abstract**

In the recent decade, few studies explored students' perceptions of the comprehensive implementation of citizenship education in the literature. Besides, concerning the high level of internationalisation of higher education, international students who have studied in different national contexts can offer comparative opinions on distinctive citizenship education systems. Therefore, this dissertation project aimed to investigate how Chinese students compare citizenship education in Chinese and British universities. This qualitative study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with fourteen Chinese students who have studied in both Chinese and British higher education and drawing activities. The textual and graphical data were interpreted using thematic and content analysis. The findings revealed students' perceptions of the formal and informal learning contexts, pedagogies and assessment, and aims and compositions of citizenship education in Chinese and British universities. Unexpectedly, students also pointed out cultural-specific hidden curriculum in both contexts. Discussion section identified the filters that students unconsciously used to make these comparisons and illustrated them with the complicated social, political, cultural, and civic environments in China and the UK.

**Key words:** Citizenship education, Chinese citizenship education, British citizenship education, citizenship education in university, higher education, students' perspectives of citizenship education

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## 1. Introduction

In this rapidly developing and highly globalised world, cultivating citizens capable of navigating civic life and challenges in the 21st century has become crucial for many countries. National citizenship education plays a pivotal role in fostering the "civil, political, social and cultural aspects of political belonging and responsibility" in citizens, thereby enhancing their understanding of "national values, histories and political procedures" (Fozdar & Martin, 2020, p, 372). The unique contexts in which citizenship education is situated give rise to diverse educational objectives, characteristics, and intertwinement with various forms of education. Moreover, many countries are now nurturing global citizens responding to the United Nation's (n.d.) call (Pashby, 2016; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013). A comparative analysis of different national citizenship education systems can significantly contribute to the discourse of international citizenship education, providing valuable insights to policymakers for enhancing national policies and adjusting educational practices.

Higher education is a significant phase in educating citizens (Davids & Waghid, 2016). It is responsible for assisting students' academic and occupational development and encouraging students to reflect on social, political, and civic issues and participate in civic life to benefit the country's development (Veugelers et al., 2017). In China and the United Kingdom (UK), in both formal and informal learning contexts, higher education and social organisations deliver citizenship knowledge to university students (Li, 2017). Their distinctive contextual backgrounds, philosophical orientations, and developmental goals explicitly and implicitly impact their university citizenship education systems.

Chinese citizenship education is shaped and regulated by the governing of the Communist Party, its theoretical source of Marxism and collectivism, the cultural legacy of Confucianism, the local cultures and development stages, and the import of values and ideas from Western

or other Asian countries during globalisation (Guan et al., 2015; B. Gao, 2012; Party Leadership Group of the Ministry of Education of the Communist Party of China, 2011; Law, 2006). Ideological and Political Education (IPE) is most relevant to the topic of Chinese citizenship, which is taught in many mandatory and highly theorised courses and diverse forms of compulsory social practice. These courses train students to stand in solidarity with the Chinese collectivity and have virtues like being patriotic and committed to work (Zhu & Tao, 2021; CPC Central Committee, 2013). The extra element of Chinese citizenship education also contains education on traditional cultures, morality, aesthetics, arts, and labour (Lin et al., 2024; Liao, 2018). It echoes the pedagogy of implementing *suzhi jiaoyu*, which supports the comprehensive development of students (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Chinese education is also exam-oriented, assessing students' knowledge accumulation.

For the proliferation of a multicultural, liberal, and democratic society, British citizenship education aims to sustain political coexistence and reconcile groups with conflictual interests, which forestall conflicts and create a more liberal and emancipative environment for future generations (Callan, 1997). British citizenship education intends to cultivate active citizens who participate voluntarily and ardently in community and civic life and think with a critical and cosmopolitan perspective (Wait, 2016). Without a standalone curriculum, British universities teach citizenship through academic courses by facilitating conflict-oriented discussions and extracurricular activities by encouraging students' independent and active participation in political and civic activities (Evagorou et al., 2023; Sant et al., 2021; Morris, 2020). Individual thinking is respected and supported in class.

However, the practical effects of citizenship education are not solely determined by policy objectives, but also by its implementation. Students are the direct receivers and beneficiaries of citizenship education, equipped with the competence to collect, report, and evaluate the practice of citizenship education (Zhang, 2020). Their perspectives are invaluable for inspecting and improving the implementation of educational policies in higher education. In the past decade, there has been a limited focus on investigating local students' perceptions of

national citizenship education in Chinese and British universities. Furthermore, many studies have only covered specific aspects of citizenship education, rather than providing a comprehensive overview.

This study aims to provide a comparative insight into citizenship education, leveraging the competence of international students to evaluate different citizenship education systems and uncover their differences. The exchange of contexts enables these students to 'acquire a delicate balance of cultural, national, and global identifications and attachments' (Banks, 2006, p. 7) from international higher education. As a result, students who have experienced both Chinese and British universities are well-positioned to observe, narrate, and appraise the implementation of citizenship education in both contexts. With only a small amount of existing research focusing on such comparisons (S. Zhang, 2023; Fu & Li, 2022), this dissertation project fills the significant research gap by providing a comprehensive comparison of Chinese and British citizenship education based on students' opinions.

This qualitative study aims to explore how Chinese students who have studied in Chinese and British universities compare citizenship education in both contexts. Three sub-questions are developed for fulfilling the research aim:

1. What are students' views of the formal and informal citizenship education in Chinese and British universities?
2. What are students' views of the pedagogies/assessment of citizenship education in Chinese and British universities?
3. What are students' views of the aims or compositions of CE in both Chinese and British universities?

The dissertation is composed of seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background, aims, and structure of the study. Chapter 2 exhibits the literature review, displaying how China and the UK define citizenship contemporarily and educate citizenship in higher education to echo and promote the nation's social, political, and cultural development. Chapter 3 illustrates the

methodology, elaborating on the design and process of purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews with drawing activities, and thematic and content analysis. Chapter 4 renders the findings of the study, including four themes. Among them, three themes serve the three subsequent research questions, and one displays participants' acumen to the hidden curricula of citizenship education specific to Chinese and British contexts. Chapter 5 discusses the six filters that participants used across their answers to research questions in comparing Chinese and British citizenship education in universities. Chapter 6 concludes the research findings, and Chapter 7 briefs on the research limitations and implications.

## **2. Literature Review**

This Chapter introduces the literature on national citizenship education in Chinese and British higher education. Section 2.1 underpins the definitions of citizenship and citizenship education, the potential goals and characteristics of citizenship education, and its intersection with various disciplines. This section also highlights the significance of implementing citizenship education in university contexts. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 present the historical backgrounds, educational policies and objectives, formal and informal learning, pedagogies and assessments, and critics of citizenship education in China and the UK, respectively. Last, section 2.4 discusses the importance of hearing students' voices regarding citizenship education in universities and the capabilities of international students in comparing different citizenship education systems. It proves that Chinese students who studied internationally are competent in contributing to this research. This Chapter aims to lay a solid foundation for understanding the research topic and contexts.

### **2.1. The Definition of Citizenship Education and its Relationship with Higher Education**

#### ***2.1.1 The Definition of Citizenship Education***

Citizenship education, also known as civic education, is underpinned initially as a form of education that cultivates citizens "*by* the state (through public schools) and *for* the (benefit of the) state" (Sundström & Fernández, 2013, p. 104). It derives from the political annotation of 'citizenship' which plays a significant role in guiding and regulating people's lives and living from civil, political, and social aspects, fundamentally supported by the national education system and social services (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Marshall & Bottomore, 1950). According to Dower and Williams (2016), citizenship is:

membership, determined by formal factors such as place of birth, parentage or act of

naturalisation of a political community (generally a nation-state) by virtue of which one has legally defined rights (including political rights not necessarily accorded to other residents) and duties, and moral responsibilities to participate in the public life of one's political community. (p. xix)

Scholars also discuss that citizenship not only refers to membership but also the quality of the membership in connecting individuals to the political community (Goldman & Perry, 2002). Correspondingly, citizenship education attempts to equip the members with skills and civic awareness of the "rights, duties, and responsibilities expected by the state" (Aboagye & Dlamini, 2021, p. 22; Pan, 2011). Such awareness of the masses demonstrates a country's "degree of civilisation, progress, and democratisation" (Wan, 2004, p. 356). Understanding citizenship and its education helps to comprehend the relationships between the nations, citizens, and the polity (Woodman & Guo, 2020).

Nevertheless, in the past two decades, the goals of citizenship education have been diversified and complicated. For instance, from a social perspective, it may focus on the "underprivileged, diversity, rights, freedom of choice, and the environment" (Haste, 2010, p. 182). It may also prioritise fostering expected individual qualities, virtues, and collective values conducive to a country (Sundström & Fernández, 2013). Regarding the characteristics of citizenship education, it can prioritise socialisation and be indoctrinatory in nature, conveying exclusion towards others (Bottery, 2003). Socialisation suggests transmitting norms and values to make them adapt to the standard ways of thinking and behaving (Joris & Agirdag, 2019). In contrast, citizenship education can focus on subjectification and be transformative and critical-democratic (Mirra & Garcia, 2023; Crick & Lockyer, 2017; Sibbett, 2016). Subjectification exercises students' agency in understanding others and the world relationally and critically and facilitates active civic participation (Brodie-McKenzie, 2020). It can also aim for multileveled polity and multiple imaginary communities (Pan, 2011; Law & Ng, 2009; Bottery, 2003). Therefore, the detailed composition of citizenship education is determined by the demands and requirements of a nation.

Furthermore, recent literature indicates that citizenship education intersects with various forms of education. For example, it shares commonalities with global citizenship education since national education objectives vary according to a country's globalisation process (Li & Ma, 2024; Badenhoop, 2021; Thomas & Banki, 2021). Besides, Citizenship education is implemented with art education (Matos & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020; Morgan, 2018) that guides political engagement and transformative actions and activates people's imagination, empathy, and critical thinking. Furthermore, it is taught with planetary, environmental, ecological, and sustainable education that promotes sustainable lifestyle and resonates with sustainable development goals proposed by the United Nations (Alam, 2022; Kopnina, 2020; Parra et al., 2020; Lewin, 2019; United Nations, n.d.). Hence, citizenship education exists in multifarious aspects of education systems.

### ***2.1.2 Citizenship Education in the Higher Education Context***

Higher education is a crucial pedagogical site for citizenship education, which also serves a country's economic, political, and social development (Davids & Waghid, 2016). As Davids and Waghid (2016) put it, "citizenship is a concept inherent to the idea of the university and the role of higher education" (p. 177). Not only does higher education foster the intellectual and vocational development of students, but it also unravels issues of social justice, equity, equality, social cohesion, and democracy by responding to governments' appeals or public events, either by supporting or opposing them (Veugelers et al., 2017; Veugelers et al., 2014; Arthur & Bohlin, 2005). Therefore, universities and colleges make themselves an empowering place to involve young adults in political life and activate the individual, collective, critical, and democratic praxis (Dewey, 2024; Nanggala, 2020). Besides, higher education institutions play a significant role in preventing violence and creating a safe space for students to learn and think, raising compassionate and deliberative citizens, promoting respect in individuals' responses to different cultures and opinions, and acting for transformation and decolonisation (Fomunyam, 2017; Davids & Waghid, 2016; Waghid, 2009).

Furthermore, higher education institutions are also significant places for internationalisation, conceiving practices such as international research collaborations, cross-national partnerships, internationally approved assessments, and international staff and students (Thomas & Banki, 2021; Aktas et al., 2017; Rumbley et al., 2012; Knight, 2008). The pedagogies and objectives in teaching citizenship education in higher education might influence and be influenced by the dynamic geopolitical relationships or global affairs, equipping global citizens with global social responsibilities and global knowledge and perspectives (De Wit, 2019; Aktas et al., 2017). Hence, it is meaningful to target the site of higher education to acquire a nation's requirements and expectations for future citizens.

For many countries, citizenship education is not framed by a particular curriculum since the dyeing process of citizenship is variegated and comprehensive, implicating both formal and informal contexts, local and international affairs, and various forms of educational activities (Allaste et al., 2022; Perrin & Gillis, 2019; Boni & Calabuig, 2017; Arthur & Bohlin, 2005; Wan, 2004). The policies and implementation of citizenship education in higher education in China and the UK can exemplify this statement as follows.

## **2.2 Citizenship and Citizenship Education in China**

### ***2.2.1 Chinese Historical Background Related to Citizenship Education***

As a brief introduction to the historical and political background of civil society in China, the People's Republic of China has been led by the Communist Party since 1949, and other parties engage in political affairs through cooperation and consultation (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). Regarding ethnic groups, China holds accountable all 56 ethnic groups and Han people make up over 90% of the whole population (Wan, 2004). The following paragraphs illustrate background factors that impacted Chinese narrative of citizenship.

First, it is necessary to offer Chinese underpinnings and usages of citizenship since this concept derives from the West. Though there are academic works titled Chinese Citizenship Education in English (Culp, 2020; Goldman & Perry, 2020; Baisotti, 2019), historical Chinese literature and policies used the synonym of *peoplesh* to benchmark Western citizenship (Yu, 2010). *People* (*renmin* in Chinese) are the masters of the country and the whole country is also dedicated to serving its people (Wang, 2019b; Yu, 2010). The mutual commitment and reciprocity between China enhance collectivism and nationalism, uniting the minds and strengths of all and caring for all (Lin et al., 2024; Wang, 2019b; Lin, 1993).

Though grounded in collectivism, China has gone through several revolutions and encountered global impacts. The social and economic development brought a market economy and a culture of individualism (Dauncey, 2020; Steele & Lynch, 2013). The socialist market economy from 1978 resulted in the "new socialist citizenship" (Law, 2006, p. 601), which brought in "diversification, pluralisation, and the reallocation of power and resources" (Law, 2006, p. 602). The assimilation of Western factors variegates people's values and life choices. However, China remains alert to westernisation and modernisation, assimilating and integrating merely the streams of values that can facilitate China's development and benefit Chinese people into Socialism with Chinese characters (Zheng, 1999) and spur the competitiveness and efficiency of the labour market to advance the national development (S. Zhao, 2021; Friedman, 2012). This consciousness of Western factors is reflected everywhere in the Chinese system, including the educational context.

In addition to China's historical development, Confucianism's cultural traditions also tremendously impacted Chinese citizenship education. This school of thinking was proposed by Confucius 2500 years ago. It advocates being a *junzi* (君子), an exemplary and self-disciplined man with noble character and virtue. Confucius preaches that an aspiring student's optimal goal should be contributing to the nation and benefiting the lives of all people through political participation (Confucius, 2023). Confucianism greatly influences modern China's citizenship-related policies and education. Take a typical example: the

Socialist Core Values (SCV) was popularised among all levels of education in 2012 (CPC Central Committee, 2013), highlighting the noble qualities of patriotism, dedication to work, integrity, and friendliness to individuals. Citizenship education also teaches traditional cultures. In 2015, the Chinese government also officially highlighted the significance of inheriting and developing China's excellent traditional culture (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2015), resulting in schools and universities launching official cultural classes (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2023).

### ***2.2.2 Current Policies and Objectives of Teaching Citizenship Education in Chinese Higher Education***

Citizenship education has a long-lasting role in the past Chinese education system (Yu, 2010; Tse & Lee, 2003). Chinese education system follows top-down management and is regulated by the Chinese authorities, such as the National People's Congress and the Communist Party of China (Rao, 2023). Since 1995, schools and universities have been legally obliged to transmit particular socio-political values to "train builders and successors for the socialist cause" (Law, 2006, p. 609; National People's Congress, 1995). Accordingly, most secondary and higher educational institutions possess individual Communist Party of China or Chinese Youth League branches that integrate students into the organisations of and for Chinese people (Yu, 2010).

The citizenship education curriculum in higher education was initially developed in the 1980s and first standardised in 1998 (Yu, 2010; Law, 2006), aiming to enhance Chinese students' collective identity through various forms of education such as ideological and political education (IPE), patriotic education, and moral education (Baisotti, 2019; Yu, 2010; Fairbrother, 2004; Wan, 2004). Among all, IPE is discussed with citizenship education most often. They shaped a congruent, consistent, conterminous, and progressive citizenship education across primary, secondary, and higher education to steadily and comprehensively foster students' character and civic virtues (MOE, 2022a). From the 2000s onwards, Chinese

citizenship education reflects a multilevel and multidimensional model covering education's individual, local, national, and international aspects (Pan, 2011; Law & Ng, 2009; Bottery, 2003). Recently, China established the first batch of prestigious Marxist Colleges in 2016 to advance the teaching of citizenship education curriculum and propagate China's interpretations of Socialism (MOE, 2016, 2020b, 2024).

Recently, there have been two versions of IPE guidelines that navigate Chinese citizenship education in higher education, promulgated in 2015 and 2021, titled the *Standards for the Construction of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Colleges and Universities* (referred to as *Standards*) (MOE, 2015, 2021a). Regarding the main functions and educational aims, IPE accommodates an "instillation of political ideology" and "the solidification of the role of social citizenship" in higher education "to realise the free and comprehensive development of people" (Zhu & Tao, 2021, p. 23).

The *Standards 2015* was issued to echo the national developmental goals, including "taking the path of socialist cultural development with Chinese characteristics", "the integration of the SCV in Chinese citizenship education", "the education with cultures and the inheritance and innovation of cultures", "the development of philosophical social science", "the abilities of schools and universities in serving the development of the socialist culture" (Party Leadership Group of MOE, 2011, pp. 1-2). The *Standards 2015* also required higher education to focus on educating the Marxist theory and China's political and historical development through several compulsory courses covering academics and practices (MOE, 2015, 2005).

The *Standards 2021* upgraded the prominence of instructions from General Secretary Jinping Xi on contemporary IPE, emphasised the leadership of the Party, improved the IPE curricula design, and optimised the training and evaluation of the teaching teams (MOE, 2020b). The new course of *the thoughts of Jinping Xi on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the*

*New Era* is integrated into IPE and primarily practised in the prestigious Marxist Colleges from 2021 onwards (MOE, 2020b). Table 1 summarises the most up-to-date compulsory credits for IPE in higher education (MOE, 2020b). The ideological and political participation includes visiting patriotic education bases and volunteering in society (Liu et al., 2023). Military education and training are also parts of patriotic education, reinforcing students' collective identity and resilience (Liu et al., 2023).

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*Note.* The course *the Thoughts of Jinping Xi on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era* is added to the undergraduate level curriculum in the 2021 version. Other courses are determined by the 2015 version of the Standards. The course names and the credit points of these courses in universities might be slightly adjusted according to specific course designs.

Regarding pedagogies, contemporary Chinese citizenship education is also entangled with the practice of *suzhi jiaoyu*, translated as *quality education*, which aims to facilitate the development of "personal qualities in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetics and labour aspects obtained through environment, education and social practice activities" (Lin et al., 2024, p. 41). This concept was initially proposed around the 1990s, addressed from 2003 to 2007, and promoted till today out of the concern that the Chinese educational system and institutions are likely to put too much emphasis on the intellectual aspect of students' development and overlook the other aspects (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). *Suzhi jiaoyu* targets comprehensive development advocates shifting the teaching pedagogies from exam-oriented to student-centred, fostering students' skills and abilities comprehensively, increasing their subjective initiatives and curiosity in learning, and engaging them in a variety of educational practices (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Zhou, 2004).

*Suzhi jiaoyu* can be identified from Chinese citizenship education in many parts. First, two versions of Standards (MOE, 2015, 2021a) encourage the diversification of teaching methods and the teaching model of medium-sized classes for teaching and small-sized classes for discussions in IPE. Second, Chinese citizenship education is combined with the teaching of subjects and courses like mathematics (Q. Chen et al., 2021; Song & Wu, 2020), computer programming (Li & Li, 2021; Sun & Dong, 2021), and sports (Li & Zheng, 2021; Wang, 2019a). MOE also highlights the promotion of art education for university students, the support of society building, and the volunteering activities that are themed on traditional Chinese cultures (MOE, 2015, 2021a; Party Leadership Group of MOE, 2011). Besides, the *Standards 2021* also laid a foundation for the following educational plan of vigorously promoting the *immense ideological and political curriculum (da si zheng ke)* throughout the whole Chinese education system (MOE, 2022b), integrating diversified social practice and building broad platforms to mobilise social resources. These educational goals and pedagogies suggested that Chinese citizenship education partially assimilates Western cultures while imbuing its own ideology.

Besides, Chinese citizenship education policies highlighted the construction of professional teaching teams to promote the quality of teaching (Zhu & Tao, 2021). MOE (2019) enacted the training plan from 2019 to 2023 to equip higher education teachers with solid knowledge foundations in Marxist theory and Jinping Xi's Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era. This training plan reinforced identity positioning, responsibilities and requirements, and the deployment and recruitment of teachers and lecturers (MOE, 2020a).

Concerning the assessment of the educational outcomes of Chinese citizenship education, the *Standards 2021* support diversification and innovation in the process and outcome assessments (MOE, 2021). Scholars proposed the significance of establishing a rigorous assessment system for Chinese moral education in universities, including self-assessment and incentive mechanisms like scholarship and employment advantages (Fang, 2020).

Researchers also highlighted issues like the lack of pertinent evaluation indicators, openness, and supervision (Zhang et al., 2023; Rui, 2022; Rong & Gang, 2021; Xu, 2021). Therefore, many highlighted the need for teachers and educators to apply digital tools like artificial intelligence models, machine learning, or big data to understand and monitor students' attainment in IPE (Du et al., 2023; Tian, 2022; Yu, 2022).

Regarding scholar's conceptualisation and theoretical critics of Chinese citizenship education, China's single-party system, the historical development centred on Marxism, and the directed cultivation of comprehensively developed talents often fit Chinese citizenship education into the typology of adaptive citizenship education, which leads people to commit to the social standards and the cultural norm (Veugelers, 2021), or a Marxist citizenship education that opposes the exploitative capital, portrays fictive class revolution and conceive a competitive labour market (Gaudelli, 2009). Libertarians may regard that coercion in education cannot shape students as democratic, autonomous, and liberated future citizens (Sundström & Fernández, 2013). They argue that compulsory IPE in public higher education may lead to the homogenisation of thinking and the monopoly of dominant power (Mill, 1998). Besides, though cosmopolitanism is identified from Chinese policies in many areas throughout history

(Alviar-Martin & Baidon, 2021), current Chinese citizenship education puts less emphasis on the international perspective since its educational objectives are mainly located national, local, and institutional affairs (MOE, 2022b). The indoctrination of nationalism can be excessive and hinder students from identifying themselves in the global community, developing their critical evaluation of international relationships, and contributing to global issues (Banks, 2006). Lastly, researchers consider that the accentuation of collectivism and the neglect of supporting individual rights in Chinese citizenship education might hinder students' activeness in political participation (Tu, 2011).

## **2.3 Citizenship and Citizenship Education in the UK**

### ***2.3.1 British Historical Background Related to Citizenship Education***

British society aims to construct a multicultural, democratic, egalitarian, and liberal civil environment with citizenship accommodating the "plurality of nations, cultures, ethnic identities and religions long found in the United Kingdom"(Crick, 1998, p. 17). From a political perspective, the underpinning of citizenship was a reliever for political tensions, such as issues like civil violence and the influence of Northern Irish politics (Shaw, 2009). It efficiently bolstered the "social trust, norms of reciprocity and community networks" (Tonge et al., 2012, p. 580; Kisby, 2006) in the multicultural environment in the UK and enhanced the "strong vertical citizen-state relationships through democratic and social renewal and participation" (Tonge et al., 2012, p. 582). Similarly, in the Prevent Strategy 2011, the UK government declared against terrorism and extremism and used citizenship education to unite diverse religious groups and defend peace and social justice (UK Government Home Office, 2011). The Prevent Strategy also set the fundamental British values, including "democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind" (UK Government Home Office, 2011 p. 34), which were also highlighted in citizenship education.

From a legal perspective, British citizenship policies define people qualified for a British identity (British National Act, 1981). In the more recent decade, the immigration system also requires that "a person must display certain features and must 'deserve' to access British citizenship" (Shaw, 2009, p. 6; Border and Immigration Agency, 2008), which contains qualified languages skills, no criminal convictions, a pass in a citizenship test, and the potential of actively participating in British civil issues.

The concept of *active citizenship* is unique to the British context, proposed around the 1980s and 1990s and contains the UK's civil, political, and social expectations on citizens (Kerr, 2003). This concept espouses individualism in society and the marketisation of the educational system. It encourages individuals to take responsibility for and act upon civil issues, paving "a workable 'third way' between the competing 'liberal-individualist' and 'communitarian' concepts of citizenship" (Kerr, 2003, p. 4; Tonge et al., 2012; Blunkett, 2003). Unlike in China, "neither the individual nor the social is given precedence" (Banks, 2006, p. 226) in British civil society. Individual autonomy is interwoven with obligations for communities (Banks, 2006).

The four areas in the UK, namely Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, have independent self-governance systems and nuanced objectives in educating citizens (Jerome et al., 2022). For instance, English citizenship tends to embody more liberal individualism and less nationalism, while Scottish citizenship identity shows more communitarianism and less nationalism (Condor & Abell, 2006). Citizenship education in different areas has nuanced focuses. British citizenship education is inclined to literacy in social studies in Scotland, global perspectives and social skills in Wales, political stability and human rights in Northern Ireland, and knowledge, rights, and responsibilities in England (Jerome et al., 2022; Jerome, 2018). The following literature might be inclined to introduce citizenship education in England to undergird readers' understanding of the interviewees' educational experiences in this study.

### ***2.2.2 Current Policies and Objectives of Teaching Citizenship Education in British Higher Education***

Unlike China, which implements citizenship education throughout all phases of education, British citizenship education is highlighted and arranged for primary and secondary education in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland but not pinned to higher education. The English government promoted citizenship education at a time similar to China's. The complexity of political and social factors gave rise to the first relevant educational policy, the 1997 White Paper *Excellence in Schools*, making citizenship education a statutory foundation subject during English secondary education in England from 2002 onwards (Tonge et al., 2012; Department for Education and Employment, 1997). Incentives included making up the "democratic deficit" (Kerr, 2003, p.3) of young people in their inactive civic participation and increasing social delinquency.

To impel students' active participation, the Crick Report marked that the citizenship education curriculum in England aimed to cultivate students' social and moral responsibilities, involve them in community practice, and promote their political literacy (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998). In the recent decade, the National Curriculum in England for key stages 3 and 4 also highlighted the understanding of law and government system, critical thinking towards social and political issues, understanding of international relations and law, and knowledge for participating in economic activities (Wait, 2016; Department for Education, 2013). Schools realise these aims by increasing young people's research skills, guiding them to act effectively and efficiently as a team, evaluating their impacts on social justice and propagating the significance of issues (Association for Citizenship Teaching, n.d.-b).

Higher education has higher standards for students' understanding and engagement in citizenship. Though there is no standalone curriculum of citizenship education in national policies, British higher education is "highly sensitive for citizenship" (Annette & McLaughlin, 2005, p. 62) and is capable of nurturing active citizens by conceiving students' volunteering,

democratic discourses, sustainability, community-building, and development of values and skills (Wait, 2016). The central pedagogy is conflict-oriented, participatory, and transformative, which prepares students to adapt, transform, and contribute to the multicultural society (Sant et al., 2021). Teachers empower students' expression, respect students' voices, and assist students in practice (Deakin-crick, 2008). Such co-intentional and problem-based education aims to help cultivate students' persistent critical reflection and transformative actions, transforming the reproduction of knowledge into innovation and resisting power hegemony in society (Freire, 2020; Mezirow, 2000).

According to literature (Cress & Stokamer, 2020), the common forms of citizenship education in British universities include course-based civic engagement (Tijmsma et al., 2020; Claramita et al., 2019), community-based learning (Shah et al., 2023; Russell Group, 2020), volunteerism (Dawson et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2018), and community-based research or engaged scholarship (Maytorena-Sanchez & Winch, 2022; Strand et al., 2003). These forms of teaching and learning were transformed from educational pedagogies to strategies for building and reflecting on "the symbiotic relationship between individual and community" (Cress & Stokamer, 2020, p. 184) practical issues of social (in)justice and (in)equality like healthcare and sustainability (Alam, 2022; Claramita et al., 2019).

In course-based civic engagement, academics are accountable for provoking students to think about fundamental questions of social justice and making education social and political (McLaughlin, 2000; Pring, 1999). Highlighting the significance of creating an interactive, transformative, and participatory atmosphere in class (Deakin-crick, 2008), British citizenship education adopts dialogues and discourses as the most crucial approaches to involve students in the learning of citizenship (Evagorou et al., 2023; Biesta & Lawy, 2006). Argumentation is seen as both the object to learn and the learning process (Ackermann & Kavadarli, 2022). Empirical studies also proved positive effects in normalising the expression of disagreement and emotions in British classrooms, where teachers bring "open-ended controversies into education" (Sant et al., 2021, p. 241), inspire students to explore social

injustice and generate re-articulated solutions actively (Ruitenberg, 2010).

Regarding the informal aspects of citizenship education, British universities value experiential learning, which asks students to reflect upon the activities with contextual factors critically and actively participate (Morris, 2020). Besides, community-based learning and volunteerism echo British higher education's aims in training future professionals with sensitivity to citizenship who can do good for local communities and industries (Annette & McLaughlin, 2005). The UK government also set "a national extracurricular bursary scheme" (Social Mobility Commission, 2019, p. 4) and advocated equally distributed opportunities to involve young people in abundant extracurricular activities to enhance their wide range of skills.

Besides, the UK education system also pays attention to teacher training for citizenship, as in China. For example, the Association for Citizenship Teaching (n.d.-a) designed various programmes to improve teachers' skills and knowledge in primary and secondary education teaching citizenship. However, as the citizenship curriculum is advisory but not mandatory for British higher education, scholars also questioned to what extent university teachers can unfold the complicated implications of British citizenship in teaching to meet the objectives of the national curriculum while exercising their own agency (Jerome et al., 2022).

Regarding assessment, British citizenship education does not set standards or examinations for university students, and only domestic students who select Citizenship Studies in GCSEs and A-levels have relevant examinations (AQA, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Students' awareness of citizenship might be displayed in other academic tests. British students' political participation beyond the education context might be assessed and reported at an institutional or national level (Grasso, 2018; Rainsford, 2017; Henn & Foard, 2012), yet not for assessment use.

Regarding critics of British citizenship education, researchers concentrated on multiculturalism, liberalism, and democracy. First, some scholars noticed that the plurality of

identities and ideologies led to nuanced understandings of British citizenship, which diversified the aims and functions of citizenship education and made it difficult for the government, the institutions, and individuals to reach consensus in the practical teaching of citizenship (Tonge et al., 2012; McLaughlin, 2000; Pearce & Hallgarten, 2000). Second, scholars are sceptical about racism embedded in the harmonious multicultural environment (McLaughlin, 2000; Osler, 2000). To qualify for British citizenship, the minority groups "subsume their cultural heritage within Britishness" (Kundnani, 2007, p. 26; Gray & Griffin, 2014), which increases the chances of White hegemony. Lastly, researchers interrogate to what extent British citizenship education is democratic and liberal. A democratic and liberal citizenship education does not equal a citizenship education that indoctrinates the ethical and behavioural codes of liberalism. The practice of British citizenship education in universities echoes the UK government's tenets and transmits "preferred societal ideals" (Sundström & Fernández, 2013, p. 110). However, it can risk transmitting the monocultural image of Britishness and marginalising the cultures and values of minority communities (Sundström & Fernández, 2013; Osler, 2008). Therefore, implementing British citizenship education should stem from a neutral stand, presenting students with various possibilities of world views and encouraging them to critically make their own decisions (Sundström & Fernández, 2013; Mill, 1998).

## **2.4 Students as Observers, Narrators, and Evaluators of Citizenship Education**

### ***2.4.1 Students' Competence in Reporting and Evaluating Citizenship Education***

The incentive of this section aligns with that of Zhang's (2020) in the preface:

"Please do not read this book if you are looking for a specific definition of Chinese citizenship, or a citizenship studies framework for understanding social and political changes in contemporary China. Instead, what you will gain from this book is a rich collection of data about Chinese international students' understanding of citizenship." (p. v)

What Zhang (2020) identifies as the most significant in understanding the ongoing status of citizenship education is unravelling the "'everyday' 'micro-level' and 'lived' citizenship" (p. 242). It is improper to assume that the macro-level stated policies have authentically led to all expected outcomes in real-life contexts. As policies and implementations of citizenship education are constantly evolving and adjusted, university students are the practical and active agents in recounting authentic real-life experiences and perceptions unfolded around the paired concepts of university and society and formal and informal education (Tu, 2011). These emerging adults are developing a "fuller realisation of agency"(Mezirow, 2000, p. 25), which enables them to critically analyse their contexts and experiences, justify their viewpoints, and reflect on their actions.

Nevertheless, there are limited empirical studies investigating university students' perceptions of citizenship education in China and the UK, as most empirical studies target primary and secondary education or the effects of citizenship education on university students. In China, little research focuses on students' accounts of IPE in universities. Though Chinese IPE in higher education improved students' awareness of civic engagement, Zhang and Fagan (2016) found that students were dissatisfied with the chasm between the ideal portrayals of civic participation and environment and the authentic implementation and effects at the institutional level. In addition, in the exam-oriented educational environment (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), students are confused and pressured to learn highly theorised ideological and political content in compulsory courses, resulting in passive learning (C. Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, though researchers also proved the possibility and efficiency of conducting citizenship education with academic courses (Wang & Wen, 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Xu & Wang, 2022), they did not investigate students' views and feedback. Tu (2011) acknowledged that extracurricular activities and university social practice were also influential in cultivating students' civic perceptions and participation. However, only some research studies have investigated them with the concept of citizenship education in China. Hence, a comprehensive exploration of what and how students identify as Chinese citizenship education in universities awaits.

Similarly, research exploring students' voices on British citizenship education in the university context needs to be supplemented in this decade. Most researchers targeted sporadic aspects of British citizenship education rather than the whole, discussing students' identity construction and participation in protesting, voting, volunteering, and student unions (Yang & Kinchin, 2022; Young, 2017). Evans et al. (2021) interviewed students' experiences and evaluations of citizenship education at Oxford and Cambridge universities, finding the effectiveness of their pedagogical environments in supporting students' subjective thinking and offering objective assistance. A longitudinal study by Yang (2017) proved the significant impacts of British higher education on promoting students' active citizenship based on students' evaluations. However, the investigation did not cover formal education contexts. Besides, researchers also investigated students' evaluation of the globalisation level of national citizenship education in the UK (Dharma et al., 2018). Apart from those studies, the literature still demands further exploration of the panorama of British citizenship education from students' perspectives.

#### ***2.4.2 International Students' Competence in Comparing Citizenship Education in Different Nations***

International students are suitable agents for not just evaluating but comparing citizenship education in different countries. Distinctive environments impact and change students' ways of thinking and behaving (Zhang, 2020), exposing students to cultural shocks (Amadasi & Holliday, 2018), requiring students to engage with intercultural communications (Jackson, 2020), leading them to connect and disjoin a variety of cultural communities and adjust their mixed identities (Gomes, 2017; Gomes & Tran, 2017). Studying abroad allows individuals to observe "the knowledge of their birth, origins, and specificity of place" (Bosio, 2021, p. 5) and develop critical and social agency drawing on cross-border information. Students studying in both Western and Eastern countries can demonstrate how students encounter and selectively adopt ideological and cultural influences in a multicultural context, display the engrained patriotism cultivated in Asian countries, re-appraise their national identities, and adjust their attitudes toward people from other countries (X. Gao, 2012). Their experiences in

different political environments also reveal a distinctive emphasis on citizenship education (Jerome, 2018).

Under the trend of globalisation, UK international higher education has become the second most popular destination (9% of the global market) (Bolton et al., 2024). The government reaches the "2030 international student recruitment target of 600,000 ten years early" (Bolton et al., 2024, "Research Briefing" section), with international students counting 24% per cent of the whole university student population. Chinese students count the highest percentage (22.3%) of the international student community (Studying in UK, 2023), making them a suitable agent for comparing citizenship across contexts.

However, more research is needed to excavate university students' comparative perspectives of citizenship education in different contexts. The literature contains Chinese international students' experiences and perspectives on citizenship-related concepts in Australian (Fu & Li, 2022) and Zelanian higher education (X. Zhang, 2018). Most studies implicating Chinese students and British universities focus on learning or socio-cultural experience, but only a few investigate students' views of citizenship education (S. Zhang, 2023). Besides, these studies adopting psychological, cultural, and educational lens might not focus on citizenship (S. Zhang, 2023; Wu, 2015). Therefore, this study highlights the demand for increasing comparative studies on citizenship education based on international students' narrations.

## **2.5 Research Questions**

As mentioned in the literature review, existing literature overlooked students' competencies in revealing and analysing citizenship education from the root and comparing citizenship education in different higher education systems in this era of globalisation. Besides, only some studies have comprehensively discussed citizenship education across formal and informal education. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Chinese students'

comprehensive views on Chinese and British citizenship education in higher education and render their comparisons. The research question is:

How do Chinese students compare citizenship education in Chinese and British universities?

The sub-questions are:

1. What are students' views of the formal and informal citizenship education in Chinese and British universities?
2. What are students' views of the pedagogies/assessment of citizenship education in Chinese and British universities?
3. What are students' views of the aims or compositions of CE in both Chinese and British universities?

These subsequent questions aim to unravel students' perceptions of the 'what', 'how', and 'why' of citizenship education in the two contexts. The first sub-question asks for an overview of citizenship education's formal and informal aspects, including curricula and practices. The second sub-question investigates the teaching and learning process. The last sub-question explores students' macro-level evaluation of citizenship education, asking them to compare the educational incentives and goals across contexts.

### **3. Methodology**

This Chapter discusses the study's methodology, including the philosophical positionings, participants sampling and recruitment process, interview questions design, data collection, and data analysis. Furthermore, it displays my reflexivity in this study by showing my critical evaluation of the potential impacts of my positionality on this study. Last, it attaches ethical considerations to this study.

#### **3.1 Philosophical Positionings**

Since the research paradigm determines the philosophical orientations and informs the adoption of methodology and each step of the research process (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), it is crucial to specify the chosen research paradigm first. This research followed an interpretivist research paradigm that inquires about participants' explanations of their subjective realities (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

This paradigm was associated with a constructivist *epistemology* (how one acquires the knowledge), believing that reality is socially constructed by humans, and a relativist *ontology* (how one understands the nature of reality), perceiving that people construct realities with various understandings and interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These philosophical assumptions effectively targeted the incentives behind the research questions of this study, expanding the possibilities of answers by collecting students' observations, comprehensions, and opinions of citizenship education curricula situated in different contexts. It also implicates an axiology (how to make ethical and right decisions) of benefiting participants and wider communities with a culturally sensitive presentation of research findings concerning participants' identities were at least exposed under and influenced by two political and cultural environments (Brosch et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Finnis, 2011).

The interpretivist paradigm and the following philosophical assumptions suggested a qualitative nature in this research, which aims to entangle the complexity of how people endow meaning to their experiences and contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Regarding citizenship education, it is necessary to unravel how the social, political, ideological, and cultural factors are assimilated, illustrated, and validated in concurrent education systems and power relations (Haste, 2010). In addition, to enhance my understanding of participants' meaning-making process concerning two contexts, it is significant for me to be sensitive in connecting students' experiences and their identities to the "mundane" (Xu & Storr, 2012, p. 4) details or knowledge they used to construct Chinese and British citizenship education (Terry et al., 2017).

This research was essentially inductive as it did not adopt any existing theoretical framework and aimed to generate findings from the interview data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Krauss (2005), the investigation should target participants' perspectives concerning their "situation of interest" (p, 764), unravelling what they intended to compare about two systems of citizenship education. The research design should be flexible, allowing knowledge to emerge from my interactions with these participants instead of the existing literature (Krauss, 2005).

### **3.2 Participants**

Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit 14 participants in total. Suitable for qualitative research, purposive sampling enhances the trustworthiness of research process and rigour of data by targeting the most qualified participants in answering research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). Meanwhile, snowball sampling is an efficient and cost-effective method for accessing eligible participants through existing respondents' recommendations (Naderifar et al., 2017). This method enabled me to extract "emergent, political and interactional" (Noy, 2008, p. 327) knowledge from the social dynamics revealed by participants.

The following detailed participant inclusion criterion in the sampling process strengthened the transferability of the research by explicitly disclosing the contextual factors related to the research topic (Guba, 1981). The target sample involved Chinese university students who (1) were undergraduates or postgraduates aged above eighteen or had graduated from the undergraduate or postgraduate programmes within two years; (2) had experienced at least half a year (six months) in Chinese universities and at least half year in British universities before participating in this project.

This criterion ensured that all these adult participants have lived experience of citizenship education in both British and Chinese higher education and can offer narratives that can (1) reveal and corroborate the social, cultural, and political dynamics that affect modern higher education, (2) provide considerably concise and detailed experiences and perceptions according to their memories. Furthermore, I recruited the same numbers of male and female students at different education levels and learning different subjects to increase sample diversity. I also mixed the cities of their universities since citizenship education implemented by different cities was found to teach nuanced compositions of local and national civic identities (Pan, 2011; Law, 2007).

First, I approached 11 qualified participants in my existing contacts through the social media application WeChat. I invited one of them to a pilot interview to rehearse the formal interview process, excluding practical issues and optimising interview questions (Majid et al., 2017; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). This participant's data was not included in the analysis. I continued to approach 3 participants through acquaintance references to enlarge the sample size and collect richer data. These 14 participants demonstrated a high sample specificity and high-quality conversations during interviews, indicating a favourable information power and an adequate sample size for this study (Malterud et al., 2016). The timetable for conducting the interviews is displayed in Appendix A to enhance the transparency of the research process (Moravcsik, 2020).

Once the willingness to participate was displayed, participants were emailed the information sheet (see Appendix B), consent form (see Appendix C), and demographic questionnaire for collecting basic personal information (i.e. age, gender, universities and their cities, programmes, years of studies in Chinese university and British university respectively). Appendix D shows their profiles with identifiable information removed or redacted. After participants offered voluntary informed consent by signing the documents and filling out questionnaires, the researcher invited them to negotiate appointments for the online or offline interviews.

### **3.3 Interview Questions Design**

Tested by the pilot interview, the ultimate version of interview questions aimed to explore and collect answers for the three subsequent research questions (see Appendix E). I critically reflected on the design of the interview questions after every research and found the framework and sequence of questions very effective in inspiring participants' thinking. By asking students to identify citizenship education in Chinese and British universities, from formal to informal settings, from specific experience to overall evaluation, I smoothly collected the knowledge from the participants' perspective without leading them to confirm my subjectivity (Wright & Alison, 2004). The fact that participants experienced Chinese higher education before British higher education was also advantageous for participants in understanding the concept of citizenship education, as China has an evident ideological and political curriculum in universities while the UK does not. Meanwhile, I proposed emerging questions to gain richer information about teaching values and knowledge pedagogies, materials and tools adopted, and assessment forms (Sundström & Fernández, 2013).

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Individual semi-structured interviews took 45 minutes to one hour each, conducted online or

offline according to the researcher's and the participant's convenience. The in-person interviews were conducted in quiet and safe public spaces. The online interviews were conducted on Teams, suitable for formally arranged meetings. Participants answered interview questions and used pen and paper to draw graphs or diagrams that assisted the expression of Chinese citizenship education, British citizenship education, and their understanding of citizenship education. Participants were free to choose their ideal types of graphs and diagrams to effectively explain the framework or the connectedness of elements in citizenship education. They could also decline to draw.

Though not equal to traditional drawings, graphs and diagrams clearly display the "topological *values* of order, connection (and disconnection) - and also containment" (Maynard, 2005, p. 56). They enabled interviewees to filter and amplify what they prioritise in conveying (Maynard, 2005). In practice, participants contemplated and displayed Venn diagrams, pyramid diagrams, pie charts, and simple label lists to unfold and disseminate their complex meaning-making process and visualise the complicated compositions and layers of citizenship education (Çetin, Z., & Güneş, 2021). I also asked them to explain their drawings, interpreting their evaluations of specific elements. In this study, the pictorial depiction was particularly useful in revealing what participants have taken for granted and have not reported verbally in previous questions. For instance, Linda proposed the educational goal of individual integrity in British citizenship education due to the British university's accentuation on academic rigour in assignments. However, she did not mention it as an answer to assessment standards.

Participants used their native language, Chinese, to optimise the chances of my collecting a fluent delivery of rich data. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using the transcribe function in *Nexus365 Word* associated with my institutional account. Once I revised and corrected these transcripts, I deleted the audio and emailed the transcripts to participants to review. The data will not be transferred to recipients in other countries or used again. All drawings were stored in jpg or pdf format in the same folder with transcripts in my

university OneDrive account.

Regarding anonymity, all identifiable information was redacted or removed. Participants' names were edited into random names or students' preferred pseudonyms, and their personal information was protected and used only for this dissertation. The names of universities were anonymised because some students were afraid of being found reporting negative experiences. Therefore, Chinese and British universities were labelled using local ways of categorisation. In China, there are two batches of universities. The first batch prioritises academic development, and the second focuses on cultivating technical talents. Within the first batch, several universities in *the 985 Project* and *211 Project* list target developing advantageous disciplines and nurturing elites for the nation (MOE, 2010). Similarly, British universities were classified according to the types of universities (i.e. focused on research or art and design) and whether they belong to the Russell Group list (Russell Group, n.d.). British cities were also blurred since many cities have few universities to make participants' universities unidentifiable.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The transcripts were analysed thematically, and the pictures were analysed symbolically. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was adopted to interpret textual data. The thematic analysis seeks patterns and reveals meanings across cases (McAllum et al., 2019), which benefits this dissertation project on positioning everyday experiences, secular views, and contextual differences between China and the UK. However, I was mindful of the 'outliers' in the sample and had critically decided whether to report them (McAllum et al., 2019).

As the researcher, I familiarised myself with data while transcribing and editing the texts. NVivo, a practical application for coding and identifying themes, was used to generate initial codes that capsulated adequate information (Lumivero, n.d.; Terry et al., 2017). Some codes

were semantic and descriptive, labelled 'China' and 'the UK' for comparative use (Terry et al., 2017). Some were latent, indicating participants' sentiments and attitudes embedded in the arguments (Terry et al., 2017). Iterative reading and coding revealed patterns in data. I went back to coded transcripts if I spotted novel codes benchmarking similar segments of meanings in the following documents.

I further sorted the initial codes into second-level conceptual codes by amalgamating those with the same focus (McAllum et al., 2019). Besides, I put my emerging considerations into memos. Afterwards, I reviewed and defined the themes and subthemes that displayed clustered meanings and told a clear and coherent story (Terry et al., 2017). The findings effectively answered the research questions and extended the vision of this study. The coding example is displayed in Appendix F and the thematic map is put in Appendix G.

The thematic analysis was reported mostly illustratively and partially analytically with the supplementary content analysis of visual data (Terry et al., 2017). In content analysis, I manifested the superficial meanings of the compositions of citizenship education in the graphs and excavated the latent meaning by illustrating how people arranged the layers and orders in the graphs (Saldana, 2011). It was a shared analysis between the participants and the researcher, as I interpreted the diagrams based on their elaboration (Mitchell et al., 2011). This method also enabled me to search for patterns across the drawings and identify distinctive perceptions (Mitchell et al., 2011).

### **3.6 Reflexivity and Positionality**

The researcher is the primary research instrument for collecting and analysing data and reflexively thinks of the impacts of her positionality on the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative researchers are encouraged to clarify personal identities early in the research to foresee what they could bring to the interactions between them and participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This consciousness marks the researcher's reflexivity on positionality,

of continuously and iteratively interrogating the composition and influences of the researcher's self-positions or social identities on the research interactions, knowledge production, and the research design (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020; Finlay, 2002).

Concerning the positions, the researcher may adopt an insider perspective, where he/she shares similar knowledge sources with the participants or an outsider view, where he/she cannot access the participants' knowledge (Merton, 1972). My reflexivity and positionality in this study supported knowledge as relational. They stayed congruent with the constructivist purpose of exploring different perspectives and comments on citizenship education in higher education curricula in two nations.

My identities are intersectional and intertwined with social locations sorted as follows (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I am a female Chinese student who grew up in Beijing and Shanghai until I was eighteen. I came to the UK for higher education after graduating from public high school and took a three-year undergraduate programme from Russell Group University in the UK. Currently, I am a 22-year-old postgraduate student at another Russell Group university. I have studied education for four years. My high school advocated and supported citizenship education, which caused my steady interest in reading about this topic.

I was conscious of the relationship between the identities of participants and me. The familiar territory of China and the UK and specific shared academic knowledge (i.e. social science, knowledge in Chinese secondary education) between the participants were helpful for me to empathise with their narratives and capture the essential message as an insider (Mannay, 2015). However, my lack of experience in Chinese higher education indicated that I was an outsider to my participants regarding their knowledge and understanding towards citizenship education in Chinese universities. Therefore, I asked every participant to introduce citizenship education in two contexts before sharing opinions to ensure I adequately understood their experiences and situations.

I took research journals (see Appendix H) to keep track of the real-time sense-making of my participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019), reflecting on my manners, practices, thoughts for provoking significant answers during the interview, and ideas for connecting data with existing concepts. This deed served as the "chronicle" (Watt, 2007, p. 96) of the researcher's thoughts evolution, enabling me to concurrently consider the benefits and limits brought by my personal life history and characteristics on data collection and analysis.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

This dissertation project was conducted under the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2018) and approved by the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) at the University of Oxford (see Appendix I). In the information sheet and the consent form, participants were informed of the anonymity, confidentiality, their rights to withdraw till 15 July 2024, and their rights to reject answering specific questions or participating in painting activities if they felt pressured. To do good to participants and the broader community and respect diverse life trajectories and cultural backgrounds theoretically and practically (Bailey, 2014), the interview procedure was conducted to facilitate democratic and friendly conversations for participants to express free will. Many participants also offered positive instant feedback after the interviews because they learned much in the co-discovery and co-construction of citizenship knowledge with me. As the researcher, I avoided generating judgmental responses and attempted to be sensitive to participants' political stances and attitudinal and emotional changes during the interview.

## **4. Findings**

This Chapter exhibits four themes as research findings. The first, second, and third themes target the three research sub-questions, respectively, depicting formal and informal learning, pedagogies and assessment, and aims and composition of citizenship education in Chinese and British universities in students' eyes. The fourth theme is attributed to participants' in-depth comprehension and critical evaluation of citizenship education, revealing the cultural-specific hidden curricula of Chinese and British citizenship education. This theme corresponds to the research aim and extends the scope of the subsequent research questions.

### **4.1 Students' Perceptions of the Formal and Informal Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education**

The first theme displays *students' perceptions of the formal and informal citizenship education in Chinese and British higher education*, depicting the forms of education, the learning content, and the intended educational outcomes juxtaposing the policies. The findings branch out into two sub-themes, formal citizenship education and informal citizenship education, covering what participants perceived as relevant to citizenship education in two contexts.

#### ***4.1.1 Formal Citizenship Education***

This sub-theme captured students' observations, experiences, and views of Chinese and British formal curricula or courses on citizenship. Though most participants expressed needing clarification about what citizenship education refers to, they pointed out very similar contents and offered overlapping opinions.

##### ***4.1.1.1 Formal Citizenship Education in Chinese Universities***

Regarding the most relevant curriculum to Chinese citizenship education, all participants proposed IPE, as previous scholars perceived (Yu, 2010; Wan, 2004). Their outlining of the

compulsory courses of IPE was comprehensive and accurate according to the Standards (MOE, 2015, 2021). The compulsory academic courses effectively taught Marxism, Socialist Core Values, Chinese history, the Chinese political and legal system, and national development. Many participants also included military training and education as a part of the formal citizenship curriculum. Since participants entered universities earlier or later, some have not taken the course *The Thoughts of Jinping Xi on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era*. Nevertheless, they developed a moderate understanding of the course content from conversations with their junior alums.

Among all these IPE courses, participants correspondingly perceived the *Cultivation of Ethics and Fundamentals of Law* as the most significant and valuable course threefold. First, this course helped them be legal citizens who understand and comply with the legal system and are competent in using it. "So that you would not accidentally break the law", explained Dallas. Second, this course equipped students with fundamental knowledge to identify illegal acts and incidents in life, defend civic rights, and legitimately protect themselves from violence and injustice. Interviewees' experiences and perceptions validated the effects of law education in raising students' awareness of the law, rights, equality, integrity and rationality, which are conducive to promoting social order and justice (Sheng, 2023). Besides, among all the courses in Chinese IPE, this course has the closest connection with everyday practice, which helps students better understand and apply the knowledge.

Overall, participants acknowledged the positive effects of IPE in guiding students to support and embrace the Chinese system. Except for *Cultivation of Ethics and Fundamentals of Law* and *Circumstance and Policy*, most learning content focused on the historical knowledge of Marxism and SCV to nurture political awareness and cultural confidence about China (Liu et al., 2023). Since these courses were highly theorised and complex, quite distanced from life, and superabundant for students' current social and political participation, all participants reported that most university students showed low interest in these compulsory courses and learnt them to pass the exams, identical to C. Zhang's (2023) findings. In addition, students

criticised that Chinese IPE intended to inculcate a perfect system and ideology in students, neglecting social problems and critical solutions to them, as Zhang and Fagan (2016) uncovered.

Besides this compulsory curriculum, students perceived some general and elective courses as part of citizenship education. To cultivate comprehensively developed citizens, some universities have assigned compulsory credits to drive students' learning in moral, aesthetic, and labour education. General courses involved the fundamental humanities (i.e. Chinese) and STEM subjects (i.e. mathematics) to elevate students' literacy levels. Regarding selective courses that taught citizenship, Iric studied from 2017 to 2021 in China referred to a Peking Opera course which carried traditional culture:

"It is not a compulsory course, but it is actually compulsory. We cannot drop out of it. Because at that time, China was promoting traditional cultures."

It meant that profound Chinese cultures could be pinned to formal citizenship curriculums to respond to the national appeals of revitalising traditional Chinese cultures. Similar tea culture and calligraphy courses were also established in Chinese universities and colleges to enrich IPE and cultivate students' sentiments (J. Zhao, 2021; Xue, 2018; Zhang, 2018). However, Iric regarded them as exciting but could have been more helpful to his academic or occupational development in general.

#### *4.1.1.2 Formal Citizenship Education in British Universities*

Unlike depicting Chinese citizenship education, when interviewees were asked whether there is a particular curriculum on citizenship, they answered 'no' straightforwardly. Many attributed this answer to their inadequate understanding of British citizenship, their short-term learning in the UK, and their identities as international university students who did not accept secondary education in the UK. According to their description, British higher education

mixes citizenship teaching into many academic programmes, briefing on social justice, sustainability, respect for minority communities and cultures, and public health care with an international perspective. Besides, it did not convey nationalism, as Starkey (2018) found. The education took place in lectures, workshops and cooperation between university departments and social charities. Several participants enjoyed this integration of citizenship education and academic learning as it has quietly and gently influenced their thinking and shifted attention to citizenship-related issues.

Apart from that, participants praised how the universities or authorities did not force them to understand any topic in depth or comprehensively. It validated that the British higher education system adopts an "autonomy maximising ideal of citizenship education" (Sundström & Fernández, 2013, p. 106) where students have significant autonomy in developing civic consciousness and attitudes for individual interests. This characteristic of British citizenship education serves the system of the liberal state, demonstrating Western modernist culture by supporting individualism and self-sufficiency (Sundström & Fernández, 2013; Pybas, 2004; Parekh, 1992).

#### *4.1.1.3 Citizenship Education in Majors and Disciplines*

Students' majors and disciplines also conveyed educational messages of citizenship in both contexts, which needed to be more relevant to contextual differences. Arts, humanities, and social sciences students encountered more citizenship-related topics in class (Evans et al., 2021). Many participants brought up English learning and the university departments' international collaborations as an insight into global citizenship. Similarly, Sienna, who studied German in China, explained that her teachers trained her to critically analyse how German newspapers delineate China and how students should speak for China. She regarded it helpful in developing critical thinking on understanding international relations and China's national identity in the global network. Her experience suggested that nationalism in Chinese education and cosmopolitanism in Western cultures can intersect all second language teaching programmes during higher education and impacted students' understanding of

citizenship (Xu & Wang, 2022; Baker & Fang, 2021).

Besides, Dallas identified architecture explicitly related to citizenship education because it drew students' attention to civic life, public demands, the needs of particular communities, and environmental issues in both Chinese and British contexts to inspire architecture designs (Mohamed & Ibrahim, 2024; Sheykhmaleki et al., 2021; Gyurkovich, 2020). Kevin talked about how Chinese and British higher education on medicine discouraged them from discussing social and political issues with each other rather than training their awareness of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice to help them cope with patients with multicultural backgrounds (Smith, 2023; Walker-Harding et al., 2020). Being quiet was also a way of preventing discrimination and marginalisation and boosting the efficiency of academic collaboration.

Hence, citizenship education can stem from academic majors and disciplines with few social, cultural, or political differences across contexts, nurturing distinctive manners of responding to social and political issues, nuanced literacy styles, diverse subject-related characteristics, and virtues conducive to students' further civic participation.

#### ***4.1.2 Informal Citizenship Education***

Participants identified rich informal citizenship education from extracurricular activities and university societies in both contexts. First, many extracurricular activities and practices are identical between China and the UK, such as serving local communities, arranging study tours to cultural attractions, physical exercise or competitions, and volunteering in social organisations. To many students, civic participation was more enjoyable than being excessively inculcated with socialism, collectivism and patriotism in formal classes in Chinese universities (Zhang, 2016). The findings accorded with existing studies that informal citizenship activities can diversify students' experience and skills, elevate students' understanding towards local and national contexts, increase students' attachment to communities, enhance students' self-efficacy and career aspiration, develop students'

prosocial values and behaviours, and promoting students' abilities of civic participation (Dickinson et al., 2021; Li, 2017; Li & Frieze, 2016).

Participants also mentioned the endemic practices and activities that exhibited ideological and political differences in Chinese and British citizenship education. The compulsory ideological and political practices, lectures, and Party-building events organised by the branches of Communist Youth League and Communist Party were unique to Chinese contexts, consolidating students' endorsement towards the Communist Party and Marxism (Cui, 2021). Besides, participants described the recruitment of Party members as a rigorous and interminable process that took at least one year of selection. Like existing studies, this study found students joining the Party mainly to attain places in postgraduate programmes or get job-hunting advantages rather than fidelity to the Party or enthusiasm for civic participation (Xie & Zhang, 2017; Dickson, 2014). Chinese students' engagement in informal education is closely associated with careerism (Shirk, 2020).

Meanwhile, protests and social movements were unique to British universities. Participants received emails about the ongoing peace and conflict issues, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Universities UK, 2023). They praised the universities' attitudes and actions in supporting peace, protecting students, and assisting students' needs to arrange legal protests, which were also identified by existing research (Bročić & Miles, 2021). However, participants were also dissatisfied that universities failed to preserve students' studying routines and examination arrangements due to emerging movements (BBC, 2024).

Regarding those extracurricular activities, British citizenship education was more internationalised than China. Drawing students' attention to diverse cultures, military security, cosmopolitan democracy, and global terrorism, all fell into Torres and Bosio's (2020) conceptualisation of the "plurality of globalisation" (p.101). These practices nourished students' empathy, solidarity, and respect to better conform to the multicultural British civil society (Torres & Bosio, 2020).

Apart from activities, students espoused the university societies' support for students' development of hobbies and soft skills and making friends in both contexts. There were two differences. First, Chinese societies organised competitions and had bonus mechanisms, while British societies did not. For example, being a leader of a Chinese society can improve the curriculum vitae and benefit job-hunting. As Linda perceived, Chinese universities adopted this mechanism only to widen the gaps in employability. Kevin also deprecated this action, believing that Chinese universities ought to encourage cooperation rather than competition to build harmonious social networks (Shirk, 2020).

In comparison, British societies offered premiums only to encourage participation and reward labour. Second, British universities emphasised students' respect for various cultures and communities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, whereas Chinese universities did not. However, no participants participated in societies and events like voting in British universities for nuanced reasons, limiting their experiences in British societies.

## **4.2 Students' Comments on the Pedagogies and Assessment of Chinese and British Citizenship Education**

The second theme centred on *students' comments on the pedagogies and assessments of Chinese and British citizenship education* and was followed by three subthemes. Two subthemes elaborated on the pedagogies of teaching citizenship in China and the UK, teachers' impacts on students' experience of citizenship education, and the assessment methods of Chinese and British citizenship education.

### ***4.2.1 Pedagogies of Teaching Citizenship in China and the UK***

The differences between the pedagogies of teaching citizenship in China and the UK were partially accordant with the literature. According to the participants, the Chinese citizenship

curriculum was often conducted in large-sized IPE lectures where one to two hundred students listened to a teacher passing on knowledge. It differed from the small-sized class the policy advocated (MOE, 2015, 2021a). Several teachers collectively taught a course, carrying distinctive teaching styles. There were a few routine discussions, and teachers and students' opinions never opposed mainstream values. Many suggested that the common model in class was the teacher talking and students listening.

Differently, in British higher education, the participants had different class sizes of lectures (15-200 people) and small-sized seminars (15 people or less). The intensity of discussions was higher than in China, even though China had more mandatory courses on citizenship. Participants were often involved in discourses of social justice, conflictual issues, and open questions (Sant et al., 2021). Some liked the dialogic course environment, but Amy disliked the routine discussion and questioned the freedom to join discussions:

"The discussions should be voluntary, but they seemed compulsory now. Like they force me to talk, but I do not want to."

In addition, participants considered that the supervision and tutorial scheme in British universities was more effective than in China in offering personalised support, boosting intellectual development, and assisting critical thinking (Evans et al., 2021).

Coincidentally, students perceived the pedagogies of teaching citizenship as more dependent on individual teachers rather than contexts, claiming that teachers were significant "curriculum-makers" (Leeman et al., 2020, p. 495) for citizenship education. They proposed four factors that impacted teachers' pedagogies on teaching citizenship and shaped their learning experiences, including teachers' professionalism and enthusiasm towards the subjects, attitudes towards standard answers, cultural backgrounds, and personal values.

First, teachers' professionalism and enthusiasm towards the majors in formal education were

the most effective facilitators for students to assimilate citizenship-related knowledge and values. Participants were content with lecturers with high professionalism in teaching IPE, enthusiasm in imparting and expanding knowledge, creativity in arranging teaching materials and contents, ability to conduct critical reasoning and patience in answering students' queries. Cavendish appreciated his British teachers in adopting the pedagogies of 'how we teach is what we teach'. Iric exemplified this notion by narrating how his accomplished British supervisor voluntarily spent an extra five hours weekly teaching fundamental theories to a fresher like him, which made Iric himself a patient guide for junior students. Hence, teaching is a moral practice where students view teachers as role models of citizens who are responsible for their job, keen on caring about national issues, rigorous and dedicated to academics, and generous to students (Pring, 2021; Lumpkin et al., 2008). Contrary teachers' behaviours like chatting on irrelevant topics caused students' dissatisfaction and disinclination towards citizenship education, especially in the Chinese context.

Second, teachers' attitudes towards standard answers differed moderately in Chinese and British universities. Chinese teachers were more likely to guide students to hit the default correct answer. In contrast, British teachers intended to support students in thinking outside the box critically and creatively in formal education. This distinction was a result of cultural differences between China and the UK. China has a long history of examination-oriented education, and the culture of Confucianism engrains people's reverence, worship, and dependence on authority and normalises political compliance in academia for the country's interest (Zhuang, 2024; Perry, 2020). Students need to render correct thinking in citizenship to display voluntary adaptation to Chinese ideology and politics (Zhuang, 2024). In the UK, critical pedagogy leads the transformative pedagogies in classrooms where students propose novel ideas to update and add to existing knowledge and help their critical participation in social events (Røe et al., 2020). Therefore, students raise opposite voices nonviolently and have higher levels of autonomy in deciding and mapping their academic projects (Fritzsche, 2022; Westwell & Ingle, 2020; Benhabib, 2013).

Third, participants' attainment in citizenship education was also associated with the diverse cultures carried by teachers due to the internationalisation of higher education. In China and the UK, students encountered teaching fellows from different countries who used distinctive pedagogies and created a unique classroom atmosphere. For instance, Dallas endorsed his Italian teacher in the UK, who advocated for an adventurous spirit. Those teachers can bring ideologies from other contexts into professional courses, shaping students' global citizenship identities without violating the inheritance of Chinese cultures and values (Ma & Wright, 2023), diversifying pedagogies in class (Baker & Fang, 2021), and resulting in students' intercultural identities even in a monocultural context.

Lastly, students also described teachers' values as a way of teaching citizenship education. Negative comments from teachers significantly impacted students' exploration of citizenship. For instance, Elira encountered a teacher in the ideological and political course who "publicly humiliated students in art majors", saying that they had low achievements in examinations and were incompetent to get good jobs. Teachers' disrespectful personal values exposed the common discriminations associated with the exam-oriented culture and multicultural environment, leading to negative influences on students' citizenship learning.

#### ***4.2.2 Assessment of Citizenship Education in Two Countries***

The assessments of citizenship education in Chinese and British contexts might differ since there is IPE in China but no particular citizenship education curriculum in British universities. However, they have different pathways for testing students' awareness of citizenship. According to participants, students' attainment of Chinese ideological and political courses was formally tested through papers and essays according to standardised answers or the proficiency level of using taught theories. Teachers usually guide students in highlighting key knowledge points for examinations. However, no participant depicted the assessment methods in IPE as practical, diverse, or creative, revealing that the researchers' proposal of assessing Chinese IPE using directed and multiple instruments like questionnaires and game-based assignments has not been practically and widely realised (L. Chen et al., 2021;

Daas et al., 2016). Other than IPE, students commented that the assessing standard in ideological and political practice was formalistic and unnecessary. As a common fact, teachers do not care about what students have done, and students only want a pass. Besides, only one participant, Olivia, mentioned a digital platform used to register and supervise students' presence in daily learning of IPE content (Gao, 2023). However, others have not identified the usage of digital tools.

In contrast, in British universities, students' understanding of citizenship is presented through their academic essays, projects, or group work. Moreover, students are not assessed in extracurricular activities on citizenship awareness. To answer the interview question, participants reflected on their knowledge and experience, feeling that they had learnt something imperceptibly.

### **4.3 Students' Views of the Aims or Compositions of Chinese and British Citizenship Education**

This theme briefs on the students' views of the aims or compositions of Chinese and British citizenship education. To obtain comments on the comprehensive systems, I inquired about the deficiency and surplus of citizenship education in students' eyes. Thus, there are three sub-themes, including students' understanding of the aims or compositions of Chinese and British citizenship education, the deficiency in citizenship education, and the surplus of citizenship education.

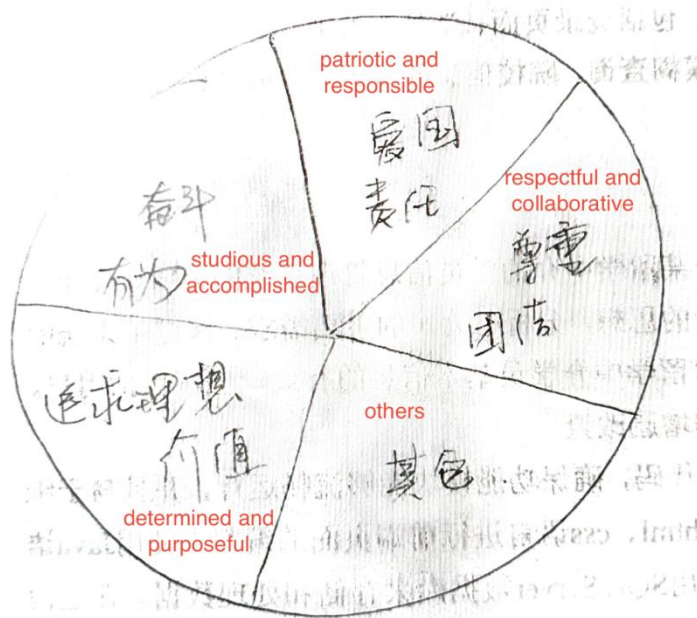
#### ***4.3.1 Students' Understandings of the Aims or Compositions of Chinese and British Citizenship Education***

Various graphs displayed participants' different understandings of the aims and compositions of citizenship education and variations in how they benchmark the two systems. Three criteria were identified as patterns across cases. First, several participants answered with

specific qualities and virtues in that citizenship education is nurtured in individuals. For example, Linda drew pie charts and attributed equal weights to virtues like being studious and accomplished, patriotic and responsible, respectful and collaborative, determined and purposeful, and others (see Graph 1). The phrase "duty and responsibility" also appeared iteratively. These virtues, social morality, and individual morals aligned with the values of patriotism, nationalism and collectivism in China (Lin & Shen, 2024; Eryong & Li, 2021). Many university mottos also accentuated qualities like resilience and courage. It hinted at China's determination to infiltrate the idea of *Li De Shu Ren*, which meant strengthening moral education to cultivate exemplary people in the Chinese education system (Eryong & Li, 2021). Confucianism also impacted it, asking people to discipline themselves and be exemplars, as stated in literature (Confucius, 2023; Muyunda & Yue, 2022). Some students regarded it necessary to cultivate these virtues.

**Graph 1.**

*Linda's Drawings of Chinese Citizenship Education*

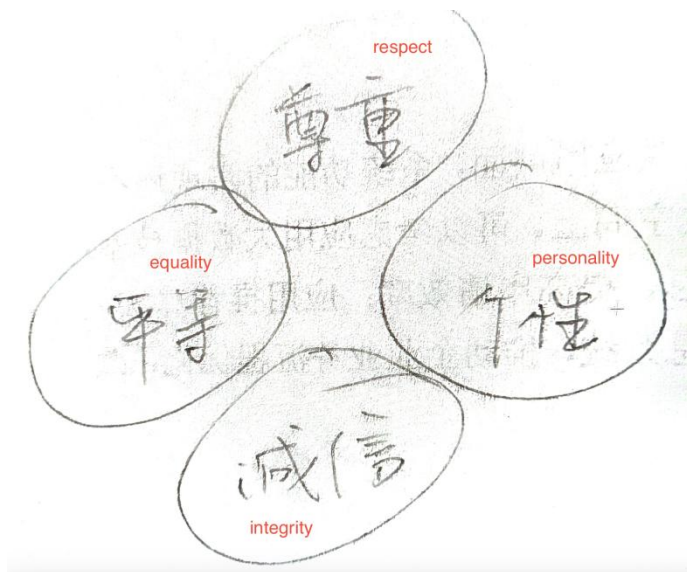


Simultaneously, Linda considered British citizenship education to value respect, equality, personality, and integrity (see Graph 2). These educational objectives on individual qualities

accorded with the fundamental British values that support democracy, equality, and the right to express and live (UK Government Home Office, 2011). Integrity is also addressed in other classifications appearing as research ethics since many participants identified it from the academic learning processes of their subjects. Many participants commented positively on these values, too.

## Graph 2.

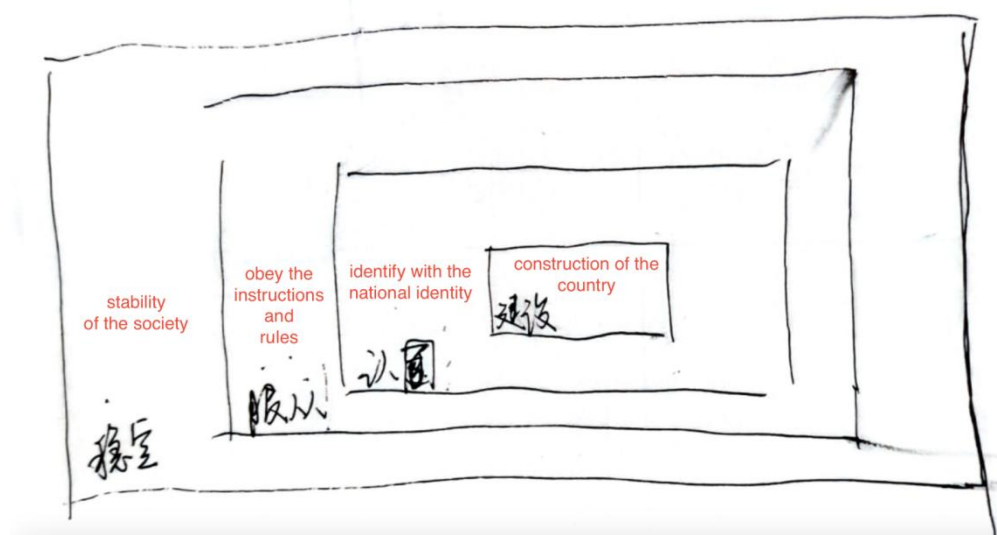
*Linda's Drawings of British Citizenship Education*



Second, some participants interpreted the aims of citizenship education as the type of citizens that national education aims to raise for the country. As the literature suggests, the Chinese educational system is engrained in collectivism, which promotes the unity and harmony of the social units ranging from a family to the entire nation (Hämäläinen & Wang, 2024). Cavendish creatively exhibited multilayered goals of Chinese citizenship education from the foundational task to the highest pursuit, where individuals are expected to guard the stability of the society, obey the instructions and rules, identify with the national identity, and devote themselves to the construction of the country (see Graph 3). This understanding echoed the principles of developing IPE in higher education, such as upholding the Party's leadership and the socialist direction of national development (Liu et al., 2023).

### Graph 3.

*Cavendish's Drawings of Chinese Citizenship Education*

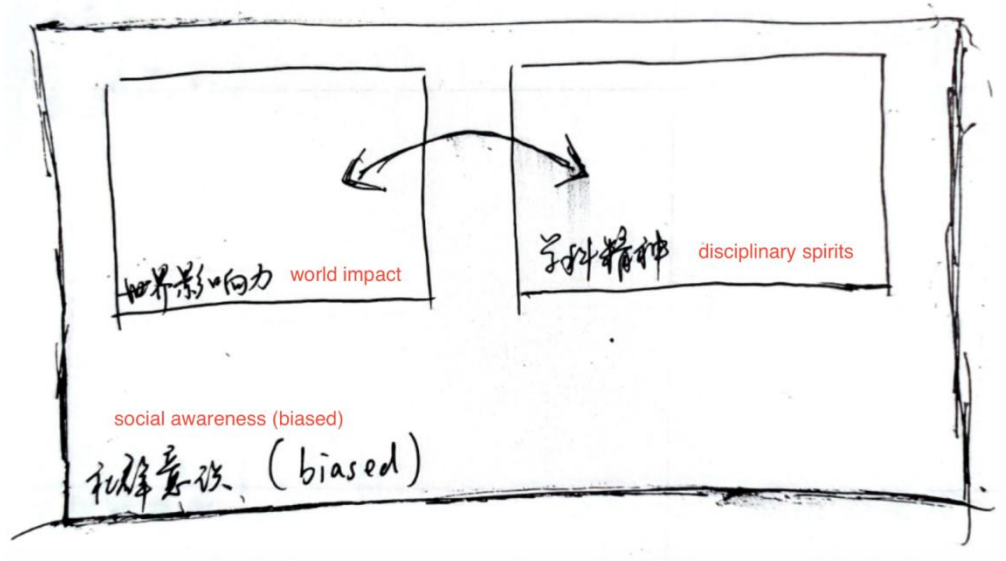


Other participants also mentioned that their university experiences in China particularly inspired their thinking on 'family'. It insinuated students' continuous reflections on the typical style of interactions proposed by Confucianism, where the young defer to the elderly (Confucius, 2023).

In contrast, Cavendish depicted promoting social awareness as the foundation of British citizenship education, zoning equal areas for world impact, and disciplinary spirits upon the awareness (see Graph 4). These two areas might be a result of the Russell Group University's academic pursuits and responsibility for boosting international scientific development (Evans et al., 2021). Many participants like Cavendish saw themselves as citizens of the British academic community (Bolden et al., 2014). However, he critically suggested that awareness cultivation is biased. Cavendish's account of bias was discussed further in the last theme, as it was described as the hidden educational content on citizenship. Participants who interpreted the aims of citizenship education in this way did not offer comments since the differences needed to be traced back to distinctive political systems.

#### Graph 4.

##### *Cavendish's Drawings of British Citizenship Education*



Third, other participants regarded the composition of citizenship education as what the university provided students. Most reported the missions of Chinese education on promoting ideology and political awareness, morality, laws and ethics, safety and health, traditional Chinese cultures, and understanding of the national context and historical development. Compulsory law education was highly recommended again, as appeared in all the graphs. It suggested that the promulgation of law is appropriate and effective during higher education (Dong & Zeb, 2022).

Differently, British universities provide education for students to develop critical reflections on social issues, engage in socialising and networking with respect for others, and commit to research integrity (see Graph 5 and 6). Safety education was also identified. Besides, Amy suggested that the training in critical thinking in British universities was lacking in Chinese universities, as in China, students were trained in a different style of critical thinking.

**Graph 5.**

*Dallas's Drawings of British Citizenship Education*



**Graph 6.**

*Sienna's Drawings of British Citizenship Education*



Many participants agreed that British citizenship education better guides students to build reciprocal relationships. Chinese examination-oriented education imbued the university environment with competitions that it overlooked guiding students to form reciprocal social and professional relationships with others. Participants' experiences validated that British universities offered instructions for students to work harmoniously and collaboratively with

supervisors and coursemates, promoting their prosocial behaviours and making them good citizens (Money et al., 2017).

Above all, many participants reached the final comparison of the aims and compositions of both citizenship education systems centred on the level of collectivism or individualism. They commented that Chinese citizenship education over-emphasised individual's responsibility of devoting to the nation that it overlooked students' life and their visions of academic and career development. Therefore, students appreciated how the British universities handled their personal issues and how their academic aspirations were supported by British tutors in a personalised way.

Nevertheless, British citizenship supported individual freedom too much to manage the operation of universities sometimes. For example, British universities educated students to question and oppose the authorities' requirements with individual critical reasoning. However, discussing conflictual issues that do not bother Chinese people also bored some participants. Besides, compared to China, the loose regulation of lectures and seminars in the UK might cause undisciplined and careless students to fail and easily miss the obtainment of foundational knowledge.

Finally, no participants mentioned the aim or component of cultivating a cosmopolitan perspective in either context, implying that students are accustomed to global thinking no matter where. An in-depth analysis of these findings is unravelled in the discussion Chapter.

#### ***4.3.2 The Deficiency in Citizenship Education***

Additionally, what participants perceived as deficient in citizenship education in both higher education systems was unexpectedly identical. They all criticised that both citizenship education systems lacked efficient "information on entering the society" or "transforming from university students to social workers". It implied that students deemed citizenship education's cultural and political aspects as sufficient, but the social and legal perspectives

were not. For instance, Bryce complained about both citizenship education systems failing to teach students how to make a living and understand economic activities. To him, universities should point out the potential obstacles and offer solutions regarding their transformation towards an adult worker. Kevin, who required permanent residency rights in the UK, deemed that the information and guidance on the immigration policies from universities were insufficient. It hinted that though international students can smoothly adapt to the cultural and social citizenship in the British environment, they still demand education on the legal and economic perspective of citizenship to make a living and develop their careers (Fong, 2011; Tu, 2011). Others highlighted that Chinese universities did not assist students' career development as effectively, personalised, and prolonged as British universities (Donald et al., 2019). In short, participants' experiences echoed previous research identifying the incompetence of citizenship education in connecting the ideal and practical civic participation in both contexts (Zhang & Fagan, 2016).

#### ***4.3.3 The Surplus of Citizenship Education***

While comparing Chinese and British citizenship education in universities, many participants found it meaningful to appraise and discuss the compatibility between citizenship education and the phase of higher education. They reported that citizenship education at universities should be responsible for getting all students educated on proper political literacy and civic engagement, increasing students' understanding of the countries and societies, strengthening their hard and soft skills, and transforming them from students to workers. However, some participants proposed the opposite opinion that citizenship education is overfull for university students. Instead, educating citizens should be the mission of primary and secondary education and society. The opinion was especially forceful for China as the whole IPE aims to nurture primary students with moral sentiments, equip junior high school students with an ideological basis, educate senior high school students with political literacy, and guide university and college students with errands and responsibilities (MOE, 2020b). However, Abby's experiences proved that elite schools in resource-rich cities could exceed those targets and make citizenship education for university students redundant.

In addition, Cavendish regarded higher education as prioritising the training of students' professional skills and academic abilities rather than raising their awareness of citizenship. Meanwhile, the country and its educational institutions should be fully competent in protecting its citizens and offering citizens a harmonious civil, political, and social environment. His viewpoint contradicted Barnett and Standish's (2003) argument that a person needs to find himself/herself entangled with the complexity of social justice to join in higher education discourses. Instead, Cavendish viewed higher education as a place for academic development without socialisation and community-building, even though such a utopian vision can hardly be realised in any context.

Participants' opinions diminished the significance of citizenship education during higher education. They also opposed existing research that advocated a more advanced and solid ideological and political curriculum at higher levels of education (Liu, 2021). Finally, their perceptions indicated the question of how and when citizenship education can be completed.

#### **4.4 The Hidden Curriculum in Chinese and British Citizenship Education from Students' Perspectives**

This theme converges the unexpected narratives in understanding citizenship education as participants collectively revealed the 'hidden' education of citizenship. Bryce proposed explicit and hidden curriculum while criticising two systems of citizenship education. He affirmed that the research questions in this study covered explicit citizenship education that taught the ideal and promising side of national citizenship. However, what was not investigated but infiltrated the university environment – often not positively - was the hidden curriculum indispensable to the entire spectrum of citizenship education. This kind of education comprises what students "unintentionally assimilated from the culture" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16), unravelling the social, cultural, and political factors that impacted students' experiences as citizens. Therefore, this theme explicated students' proposal of the hidden

curriculum, which was compatible with and extensive to the research questions. The hidden elements were extracted from the context-specific patterns of social interactions, including *guanxi* in China and racism in the UK.

The culturally specific hidden element in Chinese citizenship, *guanxi*, is a personalised, subjectively tighter, and presumably resourceful connection (Bian, 2019). It signifies closer attachment mutually acknowledged by individuals, implying higher possibilities of reciprocating each other a favour and building on social capital (Bian, 2019). This socialising and networking culture was initially common in the Chinese business context and has now drenched the higher education system, as suggested by this study and literature (Zeng, 2024; Padilla-Meléndez & Li, 2017). Participants were dissatisfied with peers flattering lecturers to obtain higher grades for process evaluation, creating bureaucratic environments, and ganging up in student societies. However, they agreed that *guanxi* is an indispensable social aspect of Chinese citizenship that helps students bridge capital and adapt to the Chinese patterns of interconnectivity (Guan & James, 2020).

The differences between Chinese and British socialising and networking cultures lay in the distance between personal and professional relationships. While people in China tend to use personal relationships as stimulators for occupational development, British culture tends to separate the private and the occupational. For instance, in China, people intend to contact each other through the WeChat application in both life and work. Adding the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students resulted from Confucianism (Confucius, 2023), participants assumed that tutors were regulatorily supervising students' overall university life rather than pure academics through WeChat, which made them uncomfortable.

In the UK, colleagues contacted using institutional emails for work do not necessarily add each other to social media accounts. Some preferred the British culture of socialising and networking because it made building relationships less utilitarian and concerned, hence skipping the recruitment of Chinese societies in British universities that carried *guanxi*

networks. However, these participants were also accustomed to this utilitarian thinking to an extent. They did not participate in international societies, and they were concerned that the to-be-built relationships would not be helpful for their further development after they returned to China. It contradicted existing findings that Chinese international students shied away from international societies due to cultural, lingual and adaptation barriers to making friends (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). This unconscious reasoning demonstrated the subtle influence of the Chinese *guanxi* culture on students' citizenship exercise.

Besides *guanxi*, participants identified racism as a hidden element of citizenship education attached to British contexts. For the harmony of the multicultural society, the UK has declared that it will guide citizens to live with respect and stand in solidarity with others, defend the voices and rights of minorities, and guide students to approach international perspectives (Osler & Starkey, 2003). However, though British universities confirmed the involvement of people regardless of race and ethnicity in the decision-making process, a few participants deemed it "superficial". They spotted engrained racial discrimination from the discriminatory treatment of different ethnic communities, such as being treated differently from their Indian counterparts. It reflected the different circumstances between the visible and invisible minorities in British society (Lander & Santoro, 2017; Banks, 2006).

Furthermore, Bryce expressed that his lecturers' distinctive attitudes in listening to him and his white coursemates can result from his stilted English speaking. Such reasons covered, trivialised, and normalised the potential racist behaviours in British higher education (Wong, 2022). In contrast, racism between ethnic groups might not be visible in Chinese universities, as two students with Manchu ethnic identity confirmed equal relationships and social capital between them and Han students, opposing existing literature (Sun et al., 2024).

In addition, the minority's voices might not be fully considered by the authorities in British universities. Cavendish raised his opinion of banning the scheme of supervisors paying extra fees to secure doctoral students' places at the university but has yet to receive a reply. The scheme remained. In this case, the scheme of reporting opinions concealed the appeasement

strategy, where institutions claim to assist diverse groups equally but fail certain coloured groups after negotiation and prevarication (Cho, 2018). Such institutionalised racism disabled certain groups of international students from being involved in the full structural integration into UK society (Banks, 2006). It also implied the temporal inclusion of non-local students in the structure for profits and labour, yet they hold parts of their political rights in custody (Banks, 2006). "It should be democratic enough for me to participate rather than asking me to contribute to the democracy of the system." Cavendish summarised his lesson learned.

Concerning the spotted institutional racism embedded in civic life in universities, participants criticised the self-proclaimed democracy in British higher education. They interpreted that British citizenship education associated democracy with their political system and cultural traditions so closely that it seemed like a Western property. However, they have not thoroughly achieved real democracy. Additionally, many participants' lived experiences attested that democracy also took place in Chinese classrooms, teacher-student relationships, and societal events, which made them disagree with British values in claiming the moral high ground of inheriting and illuminating democracy.

In short, this theme validated the perspective that citizenship is a "cultural politics of everyday social life" (Shotter, 1993, p. 187), which students could perceive from all settings in the university environment and accommodate into their identities and practice as citizens. These hidden curricula were not intentionally taught and were half-masked in higher education. Nevertheless, they enhanced students' consciousness of what type of civil societies they would face after graduating.

## **5. Discussion**

According to participants' delineation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, aims and compositions, and hidden dissemination of citizenship education, this study provides evidence of "how these citizenship processes are negotiated and understood, or of how these practices relate to the particular ways in which people are constructed, and construct themselves as citizens or as members of a national community" (Gray & Griffin, 2014, p. 311) through a comparative lens. Correspondent to Jiang's (2024) findings, university students' citizenship learning is decided by the civil environment of a particular country, the teaching of citizenship curriculum, teachers' modifications of contents, the examination system, previous education, and personal incentives. This Chapter discusses how students benchmark citizenship education in Chinese and British universities and evaluates the differences.

Students used several 'filters' to title the comparable perceptions of the two systems of citizenship education (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2000) perceive these filters as the "philosophical, economic, sociological, and psychological orientations or theories" (p. 17) that students retrieved and accommodated from the national and local environments. Thus, in this study, these filters carried students' critical thinking and views and effectively echoed the background information and policy objectives of the two nations, relating citizenship issues with individuals, institutions, and nations. Participations' perceptions were sorted under six topics, namely (1) collectivism and individualism, (2) significant impacts of teachers, (3) critical thinking and critical pedagogy, (4) double-standard democracy, (5) lack of support for students' role transformation, (6) citizenship education and higher education. The entire discussion was interspersed with answers to the three research sub-questions.

### **5.1 Collectivism and Individualism**

Participants iteratively compared their main philosophical orientations between Chinese and British citizenship education: collectivism and individualism. Evidence of what content was

taught, how students were taught, how students were assessed, and what type of citizens students were expected to be proved that citizenship education was compatible with the fundamental ideologies, politics, and cultures in each context. This study's findings corroborated that Chinese universities' political culture tends to lead students to cognitively, affectively, and evaluatively endorse Chinese ideology, politics, and cultures derived from Marxism and Socialism (Almond & Verba, 1963). The teaching content, teaching approaches, and assessment forms are often designed to ensure standardised knowledge transmission, indicating the function of socialisation in citizenship education (Biesta, 2011). The aims and compositions also serve the society's stable, harmonious, and collective development. Differently, the British context is multicultural and neoliberal, where the higher education system values democracy and equality and supports students' subjectification of citizenship-related issues and participation in civil society (Biesta, 2011). Further interpretations, comparisons, and critiques were displayed as follows.

First, students' understandings of the Chinese citizenship curriculum coincidentally unfolded around the *people* concept. According to B. Gao (2012), three definitions of *people* exist in Chinese historical literature. First, from the legal perspective, the concept of *people* refers to the national community that signifies the compass of the highest interests and justice with collective rights above any individuals. Therefore, Chinese citizenship education contained law and moral education, aiming to raise 'good' citizens who "obey the law and have good morality and high quality of spirituality" (Kuang & Kennedy, 2014, p. 39). The interesting coincidence of participants entitled 'duty and responsibility' as an aim of Chinese citizenship education instead of 'rights and responsibilities' implied that contributing to the collectivity occupied a more significant proportion than individual rights in their subconscious thinking. Second, regarding the transferable meanings of citizens and people, *people* signifies the sum of all Chinese citizens. This definition ascertains the relationship between the individual and the whole community. *Guanxi* symbolises connecting individuals into numerous social networks that help citizens reach others. This definition will be further discussed in the fourth topic, double-standard *democracy*.

Third, it ideologically hints at the most advanced groups in the Chinese population. This rhetoric accredits *people* as those who "create history and are the hope for the future" (B. Gao, 2012, p. 33), carrying the tag of revolutionary class (Fogel & Zarrow, 1997). It also excludes everyone who is reactionary or lazy (B. Gao, 2012). These competent people collectively realised the fast-paced development of China, benefiting the collectivity. Therefore, Chinese education attempts to conceive talents and elites who perform outstandingly across all stages of life, carrying high academic abilities and professional skills. Participants also identified and espoused *suzhi jiaoyu* in this educational process, which broadened their knowledge and strengthened their skills, as shown in Li's findings (2017).

Furthermore, the advanced group of people should have virtues like being hard-working, selfless, filial to the elders, and loyal to the nation (Gilliom, 1978). Such a description of people in Chinese is partially similar to *active citizens* in English (X. Gao, 2012), which requires citizens to act and make a difference in the community. In contrast, the British citizenship education's moral expectation for 'active' citizens is the awareness and ability to act to oppose the unjust (Yu, 2010). Both the participants' universities and participants approved such educational objectives, suggesting that Chinese students are preparing themselves and are being prepared as exemplary future citizens responsible for the country's development.

Apart from collectivism embedded in the concept of *people*, the Chinese citizenship curriculum highlights the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture for the good of collectivity. The intangible cultural heritage in diverse forms can enrich the spirit of IPE, enhancing students' appreciation of the Chinese style of arts, cultural identity, and patriotic sentiments (J. Zhao, 2021).

Regarding the British context, the culture of individualism mutually supports multiculturalism, highlighting the significance of inclusivity, diversity, respect, and equality,

as suggested in the literature review. Participants positively evaluated most practices. In comparison with Chinese citizenship education, British academic courses might be more responsive to the occurrent and diverse local, national, and global events and justice discourses (Tijmsma et al., 2020), which stimulates students' acumen towards the social, economic, and political dynamics and cultivates their subjectification (Hasslöf & Malmberg, 2015). The way the educational system and the teaching staff respected and supported individual students' academic ideas, their voices in life, and their will to launch a political activity was highly recommended by Chinese students. Furthermore, the practical, personalised, and prolonged career service also effectively involved students in the "economic activities in a time of rapid technological change and life in a culturally, ethnically and linguistically plural world" (Li, 2017, p. 664). There were also diverse civic participation options in informal educational contexts (Dickinson et al., 2021). However, the non-participation of international students moderately disenabled a convincing validation of British higher education's efforts in increasing students' sensitivity towards digital, social, economic, and cultural factors in a global context through diverse forms of citizenship education (Alazmi, 2022). These strengths of British citizenship education corroborated the British government's intention of cultivating students' confidence and autonomy in making novel ways of civic engagement (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998).

Though the citizenship education policies in many areas of the UK stressed responsibility, no Chinese participants mentioned it. A possible interpretation is that the UK's appeals for citizens' duties to society are weaker than China's due to the social, political, and cultural environment. Therefore, participants with long-term education in China could not identify the UK's efforts to balance communitarianism and individualism. They saw collectivism in China and individualism in the UK as the most distinctive differences in philosophical orientations. Besides, British citizenship emphasises cosmopolitanism based on respect for individualism and multiculturalism. On the one hand, without indoctrination of nationalism and collectivism, students with distinctive backgrounds identified themselves more freely on ethnicity and gender and connected to British identity flexibly (Starkey, 2018). The

multicultural environment promoted students' awareness of respecting different ethnic groups and communities. On the other hand, British higher education implicated more topics like global ecological protection, international affairs supported by non-governmental organisations, and moral considerations with cultural sensitivity (Gaudelli, 2009). It exhibited British universities' efforts to cultivate global citizens who learn across borders and interact across cultures, taking responsibility for solving international issues (Friedman, 2018).

However, global citizenship education in the UK did not equally emphasise global topics, as no participants brought up issues like poverty and unemployment (Guntoro & Gunawati, 2020). Though British higher education addressed overarching social injustice issues more frequently than China, it did not mean that the British education system has effectively covered all aspects of citizenship. Like McLaughlin's (2000) criticism of the Crick Report, the policy objectives unfolded around the more approachable and resolvable issues like gender equality and multiculturalism but overlooked other niche topics. Therefore, British citizenship education can be more diverse and offer more issues for individuals to discuss and contribute to.

After comparing Chinese and British citizenship education, students longed for a balance between these two philosophical orientations. Chinese citizenship education prioritised collective progress in teaching, learning, assessing, supervising, and guiding. However, it neglected individuals' progress and interests. Students' enjoyment in class significantly impacts their assimilation of citizenship knowledge and incentives for taking action (Evagorou et al., 2023). Concerning standalone citizenship education decreased students' interest in class, it might be challenging to vitalise their political participation (Garcia-Albacete, 2013). In contrast, the UK's subtle integration of citizenship education saved students' interest in these social topics in academic courses (Pike, 2007). Chinese citizenship education can assimilate specific approaches from British higher education to engage students in civic issues creatively and flexibly.

In contrast, British higher education granted too much individual autonomy in learning and participation, which might risk students missing the necessary knowledge and skills. For example, the participants in this study were detached from societies and events in British universities. Based on the significance of law education and other necessary knowledge transmission evaluated by participants, British education could offer more public lectures on citizenship knowledge and use robust incentive mechanisms to encourage students' learning.

## **5.2 Significant Impacts of Teachers**

From students' perspectives, how teachers taught symbolised an exercise of citizenship. The effects of teaching citizenship were directly determined by the individual teachers' pedagogies rather than the contexts' common practice. Participants prefer teachers who carry academic integrity and characteristics, respect students' freedom of speech, and extend students' thinking in class, which was more commonly spotted in the UK yet also existed in China. This finding is constructive for improving the teaching team of citizenship education. In contemporary China, policymakers and previous scholars are aware of the importance of constructing a high-quality teaching team with professional knowledge (Xu, 2021; Zhu & Tao, 2021; MOE, 2019). However, they neglected how teachers should guide and interact with students on citizenship-related issues in practice. Constructing a respectful and reciprocal teacher-student relationship supports students' learning and practice of citizenship and their adaptation to the increasingly pluralised world (Cao, 2017). Therefore, China can take inspiration from the UK regarding pedagogies, such as considering how British universities granted more individual support for students in small-sized classrooms and tutorials. Both contexts shall continue to pay attention to individual teachers' impacts on citizenship education and refine the recruitment criteria of the teaching team.

## **5.3 Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy**

Participants identified the different types of critical thinking in Chinese and British

citizenship education, which were worth discussing. According to Johnson and Morris (2010), it is significant to distinguish critical thinking and critical pedagogy from citizenship education. Critical thinking is the cognitive ability to investigate, develop, appraise, and make decisions (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007), which emphasises the process of logical reasoning and leads to "sound' conclusions" (Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 79; Doddington, 2008). The latest version of the academic dictionary also considers this term with subjectivity and objectivity, defining it as "the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., "Meaning of critical thinking in English" section). However, rather than promoting reconciliation thinking to sustain social just, the concept of critical pedagogy supports a radical, liberatory, decolonised approach to identify and problematise oppression and hegemony, uncover the process of marginalisation and exploitation, and encourage transformative actions for democracy (Freire, 2020; Pais & Costa, 2020; Giroux, 1980).

From the participants' descriptions, Chinese citizenship mainly activated students' critical thinking through exams and essays, while British citizenship mainly trained students' usage of critical pedagogy. Though there were Chinese teachers supporting students' independent reasoning, students listened to teachers "meekly" (Freire, 2020, p. 73) and raised no counter-view. Similarly, students' reports of Chinese citizenship education portraying an imaginary ideal Chinese-style Socialist society without exposure to civic problems also testified to avoiding conflictual conversations. Hence, the rhetoric around social justice might exist in trivial details rather than educational aims or curricular characteristics. This situation did not hinder students' development of critical subjectivities as the participants were discerning about the explicit and hidden aspects of Chinese citizenship education (Freire, 2020). However, it shifted students' attention away from social equality issues in China, contradicting existing findings (Li, 2019; Zhang, 2016).

Opposingly, participants all referred to the accentuation of social equality and similar issues to British citizenship education. There were also more counter-narrations in class. British

universities normalise conflictual issues by "bringing open-ended controversies into education" (Sant et al., 2021, p. 241) and allow students to tackle them collectively and creatively. This pedagogical environment is believed to be "corrigible" (Banks, 2006, p. 227) and "self-corrective" (Banks, 2006, p. 227) under the negotiation of various voices.

Nevertheless, similar to Li's (2017) investigation of Chinese students studying in a transnational British university in China, this study found that participants appreciated and joined in the discourse of social justice while paying little attention to the political reforms and movements in British universities. It might be attributed to their less interest in politics, the long-time socialisation process of the Chinese educational and political system, and the unlikeliness of the Chinese civil environment suffering from the social precarity led by the polarisation of diverse cultures and ideologies (Gray & Griffin, 2014). Chinese students might not feel the need to apply critical pedagogy in China's civic and political participation.

This discussion over critical thinking and critical pedagogy also raised a critical implication that students from different contexts might demand distinctive styles of citizenship education. Students from divided and multicultural societies need a critical and liberating citizenship education to preserve their minority cultures, defend their rights, and speak against the dominant power (Starkey, 2021). Further studies could investigate the comparative opinions of students in multicultural national contexts.

#### **5.4 Double-Standard Democracy**

Interestingly, when students compared the level of democracy in both citizenship education, they seemed to have used double standards. Participants' opinions objected to the literature's concerns on Chinese citizenship education homogenising students' thinking and discouraging democratic practice. No one used democratic or non-democratic to describe the university atmosphere in China. Though many classes were implemented with didactic teaching, some teachers offered critical opinions and supported students' self-development. Students

epitomised relevant characteristics of Chinese citizenship education as obedience and harmony, implying that students did not feel oppressed and acknowledged the positive result of peacefully, conveniently, and productively reaching an agreement (Sears & Hughes, 2006). Similar views were found in Zhang's (2015) interviews, where the interviewees defended that the Western suspicion of Chinese democracy was not an issue for Chinese people. Zhang's (2015) participants discussed the infeasibility of allowing the vast Chinese population to protest, the progress China made in promoting democracy, and the high work efficiency under the single polity government. Based on comparable concerns, Chinese people might be willing to partially displace their time for self-expression and decision-making for their stable and productive political system.

In addition, their perception of democracy in Chinese citizenship was related to the second definition of "people". Students identify themselves as a member of *people* and simultaneously see others as *people* (B. Gao, 2012). Under the culture of collectivism and the long-term IPE across different educational phases, they subconsciously take the responsibility of devoting themselves to the community and supporting others. A potential trajectory is that if students put this notion into their future practice with respect towards others, democracy – at least a content level of democracy - is automatically ensured. This perspective of reasoning offers another reason why students were not worried about democracy in China.

In comparison, British higher education was questioned and criticised by participants on its authenticity of democracy in both explicit and hidden citizenship curricula. British citizenship education generally enables more democratic and transformative practice in universities than Chinese citizenship education. The classes allow counter-narratives and independent thinking without teaching what to believe about justice (Gibson, 2020). Thus, participants evaluated the authenticity of democracy and discovered problems from different perspectives. First, real democracy engages all people in the discourses and decision-making process and allows them not to participate. In this case, making discussion a mandatory classroom activity oscillated the purity of democracy.

Second, spotted institutional racism in British universities suggested that "British citizenship has been designed to fail specific groups and population" (Tyler, 2010, p. 61). Even many British universities highlighted respect for different communities and applied the "students-as-partners" (Shah et al., 2023, p. 5) strategy to facilitate students' autonomy in running civil activities, they did not fully integrate international students in the structures, practices, and decision-making processes according to the participants (Banks, 2006). This circumstance negatively impacted participants' experiences in civil participation in the British context, making them disappointed with the self-proclaimed democracy in British universities.

It can be inferred that students assessed democracy based on whether the citizenship systems in universities realised what they claimed to achieve and create. Different levels of democracy should be compatible with the benign development of the civic world. Chinese citizenship education generally met society's demands for citizens and sustained the civil environment, while British citizenship education performed well mostly but sometimes failed international groups on integration. This led to Chinese students' double-standard comments on democracy.

This topic of discussion raised the alertness of British universities to introspect its potential "epistemic biases, neoliberal tendencies, gendered norms, and colonial-racist defaults" (Bell & Lewis Jr, 2023, p. 304) in informal citizenship education. This study advocates integrating international students' voices into civic participation in institutions, referencing their decisions in practice, and supporting all students' development of a global citizenship identity. Organising antiracist discourse and activities might be helpful (Arellano & Vue, 2019).

### **5.5 Demands on Citizenship Education Supporting Students' Role Transformation**

Many participants were concerned about low preparedness for work and the deficiency of

universities' support in bridging the role transformation from students to social workers. It revealed that citizenship education should teach more about subsistence in society and exemplify potential difficulties for students to target awareness and skills development. Possible ways of complementing this gap include researching students' self-evaluations on career readiness and providing professional training (August, 2020; Gonzales, 2017), supporting work-integrated learning in multimodal internships, fieldwork or practicums (Phelps et al., 2023; Stephen & Fru, 2023), and lecturing on economic activities mattered to all individuals (i.e. conducting tax education taught by universities or social firms) (Kurniawan, 2020; Miller & Woods, 2000). Chinese universities should focus more on students' academic and occupational development intentions. British universities should also be mindful of offering guidance to international students when applying for long-term residency.

### **5.6 Citizenship Education and Higher Education**

In both contexts, higher education alone has a moderate effect on comprehensively educating citizens, according to the participants. First, it needs the early-stage foundation from primary and secondary education, which is featured for national development and political life. Both citizenship education systems have designed curricula for prior education. Some participants also validated the effects of Chinese citizenship education before higher education. Second, a city's urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation indirectly impact students' attainment of citizenship education by moderating the educational resources and opportunities (Ye, 2019). It was exemplified by students' references to their resourceful cities' advantages in implementing citizenship education. Third, higher education needs the assistance of external forces and access for students to contribute to society (Smith et al., 2008). The collaboration between universities with social enterprises and organisations is crucial for facilitating students' social, political, and cultural participation. Lastly, higher education cannot and should not predict or model the authentic social environment. Chinese and British universities prioritise academic learning over civic participation, which participants also upheld.

## 6. Conclusion

This dissertation project comprehensively explores and compares citizenship education in Chinese and British university contexts using students' perceptions. It identifies the lack of students' evaluations of citizenship education and the potential of international students to compare different national citizenship education systems effectively. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the opinions of Chinese students who have experienced higher education in China and the UK to fill the gap.

The findings covered three sub-research questions with three themes and listed one more theme on unexpected angles of expanding the comparison of citizenship education about context-specific cultures:

1. Participants expressed their perceptions of formal education, which includes the compulsory IPE curriculum, general education, and cultural courses in China, the learning topics in academic courses in the UK, and the learning in their majors and subjects in both contexts. Informal education on citizenship was similar except for cultural-specific activities.
2. Participants identified teachers' significant impact on students' obtainment of citizenship knowledge and values. Chinese universities' assessment is standardised. British higher education does not test students on citizenship knowledge but encourages political and civil participation.
3. Participants delineated the aims and compositions of Chinese and British citizenship education using three types of classification, all echoing the educational objectives in national policies.
4. Students brought up the concepts of explicit and hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum suggests the pervasive cultural impact not claimed in policies or institutions but has a complex influence on students. Participants detected *guanxi* networks from China and institutional racism in the UK, attempting to minimise the negative influences of these cultures.

In the discussion of findings, this study identified six filters that students unconsciously applied to compare citizenship education in Chinese and British universities:

1. Participants compared the systems mainly based on the philosophical orientations of collectivism in China and individualism in the UK, anticipating a balance between them. In China, the historical definition of *people* and cultural traditions both adhere citizens to the collectivity. In the UK, inclusivity, diversity, respect, equality, and cosmopolitanism all support individual development of thinking of and participating in civic issues.
2. Participants decontextualised pedagogies, attributing their effects to individual teachers. They were also listless about the standardised tests in Chinese IPE courses.
3. Critical thinking is often taught in Chinese citizenship education, while critical pedagogy is practised in the British context. As a reasoning mode fits the host country's political system and civil environment, it was considered appropriate. Chinese students did not practice critical pedagogy in British political and social activities as they were used to not demanding it in China.
4. Participants used double standards in evaluating the democratic levels of Chinese and British citizenship education. Their judgement was based on whether the democratic level can appropriately serve citizenship practice in the university environment. Participants approved the Chinese system for securing harmony, stability, and productivity and opposed the negative consequences of a lower level of democracy in Chinese classrooms. Meanwhile, institutional racism in the British environment resulted in their negative comments on democracy in the UK.
5. Participants stressed the significance of assisting the transformation of the role from students to social workers facing various economic activities. It called on educators and educational managers to improve more relevant institutional support.
6. Participants were briefed on the relationship between higher education and citizenship education based on their learning experiences before university and their understanding of specific cities.

The discussions of these six topics summarise and interpret students' subjectivities on two systems concerning factors in the national contexts, collectively revealing how Chinese students compare citizenship education in Chinese and British universities.

## **7. Limitations and Implications**

This dissertation project can be improved in two ways regarding sampling. First, further studies can focus on the horizontal comparisons between Chinese and British citizenship education in higher education, which means comparing the same students' opinions on the same level of education (i.e. two undergraduate programmes in China and the UK). The participants who have not experienced the same level of education in China and the UK were conscious that the weights of citizenship education should differ in different education levels. Therefore, some felt that their arguments for comparing the Chinese undergraduate programmes with the British postgraduate programmes were not convincing enough. This improvement in sampling can decrease participants' worries about making their accounts and obtain effective comparisons for the same levels of education.

Furthermore, this dissertation project encourages further studies to recruit students from diverse types of universities and colleges. Many participants have graduated from 985/211 universities in China and entered Russel Group universities in the UK for further education. These top-tier universities are more likely to epitomise abundant educational resources and high-quality teaching teams for citizenship education. Further studies can investigate samples with different or more diverse educational experiences.

Lastly, this empirical study contributes to the literature on citizenship education in many ways. It reviewed citizenship education situated in national contexts and implemented in local educational institutions. The methodology was reasonably effective in distilling relevant data and stimulating participants' thinking, which could be repeated on different samples and contexts in further studies. Furthermore, due to participants' critical and in-depth thinking on this topic, this study validated students' capabilities in effectively comparing different national citizenship education systems. Their insights enable policymakers to appraise the effectiveness of the current citizenship education systems in preparing students for civil life and obtain inspiration from other countries.

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## Appendix A. Interview Timetable

Participants	Scheduled Interview
Abby	18/06 13:00-14:00
Amy	11/06 13:00-14:00
Elira	12/06 11:00-12:00
Lara	15/06 20:00-21:00
Linda	10/06 13:00-14:00
Olivia	17/06 10:00-11:00
Sienna	07/06 20:00- 21:00
Andrew	11/06 14:00-15:00
Bryce	13/06 17:00-18:00
Cavendish	16/06 18:00-19:00
Dallas	14/06 19:30-20:00
Felix	15/06 14:30-15:30
Iric	16/06 19:30-20:30
Kevin	14/06 16:00-17:00

## Appendix B. Information Sheet

Department of Education



Phone: +44 (0) 1865 274024

Principal Investigator:

[Nigel Fancourt]

[nigel.fancourt@education.o.ac.uk]

Primary Researcher:

[Siyue Chen, MSc (Research Design and Methodology) student]

Oxford University e-mail: shug7816@ox.ac.uk



[Comparing Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education from Chinese Students' Perspective]

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference:

[EDUC\_C1A\_24\_103]

#### **1. Introductory paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a dissertation 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. You can contact the researcher (shug7816@ox.ac.uk) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

#### **2. Why is this research being conducted?**

This research aims to explore Chinese students' perspectives of citizenship education in their Chinese and British universities, respectively. Citizenship education exists universally but varies in its aims and content across contexts. College students who have studied transnationally are recipients of citizenship education and they can identify the similarities and differences between the citizenship education in different nations. Therefore, this project attempts to unfold and compare citizenship education in Chinese and British universities by investigating Chinese students' perspectives.

### **3. Why have I been invited to take part?**

This project aims to recruit 14-18 Chinese students studying in Chinese and British universities, each for at least six months. This time requirement indicates that you are over 18 years old. You might be doing an undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, or exchange programme. Whatever subjects you are studying, you are encouraged to discuss your understanding and perceptions of citizenship education according to your experience in those different institutions.

### **4. Do I have to take part?**

No. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can decide whether to take part. Besides, you can withdraw yourself from the research without reason. There is no consequence for withdrawing your data, and the deadline for withdrawal is 15/07/2024. Once you withdraw, your data in all formats will be permanently deleted. All your data will be non-identifiable for research for confidentiality and data protection reasons.

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

This research is expected to start on 15/03/24 and finish on 15/07/24. You will complete a consent form after reading this information sheet if you decide to participate. Once you offer your informed consent and email the signed document to the researcher, you will be invited to an individual semi-structured interview. This interview will take 45-60 minutes. For your convenience, it can be conducted in person or online. The interviews will be conducted in the language preferred by participants for a fluent and natural content delivery (if you do not have a preference, Chinese is recommended for richer data).

During the interview, we will discuss your experience and perspectives on citizenship education in Chinese and British universities. You can reject answering specific questions if you are uncomfortable doing so. You can also ask the researcher to slow down the interviewing process.

Besides, you are encouraged to prepare a piece of paper, as there are several interesting drawing activities which enable you to express your perceptions creatively. You do not need to feel stressed about the drawing, as you can keep it simple. You can also refuse to draw. These pictures will be collected by the researcher in jpg format.

With your consent, our interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically using Nvivo. Your pictures will be used to supplement texts, interpreted thematically and symbolically if they indicate significant information. The textual and visual documents will be digitally stored and backed up twice. All identifiable information will be removed or redacted.

The researcher may also contact you before 10/07/2024 if any information in the interview needs further clarification. You still have time to decide whether to withdraw your data. You will be emailed a brief report of the findings of this research once it is finished.

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

This research will not lead to explicit disadvantages and risks. However, since the topic of citizenship education may implicate elements of politics and ideologies, it is possible that some participants feel uncomfortable when sharing their perceptions. Please feel free to talk to the researcher during the interview if you feel concerned or stressed. To reduce your stress, you can refuse to share your perceptions or experiences in depth.

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

There will be no direct material benefit to you from participating in this research. However, you are likely to gain a deeper understanding of the topic of citizenship education. After the interview, you will be more confident in comparing citizenship education in Chinese and British higher education, drawing on your experiences and standpoints.

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

I am interested in hearing about your perceptions of citizenship education. Therefore, I will collect the opinions that you conveyed in texts and pictures during the interview. The researcher and the supervisor will have access to the research data. Identifiable data (including consent forms) and other data (including the interview audio recordings, interview transcripts, your drawings, and the thematic maps) will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and backed up on the Nexus 365 OneDrive associated with the University of Oxford email account for up to three years.

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

This research is a dissertation project which will not be published on academic journals. Your data will not be used for other academic works. Besides, your data will be anonymised, and you will not be identified from the research output. In addition, the consent form asks whether you would like to give your permission to use direct quotations in the research. A copy of my thesis/ dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where its access will be restricted.

## **10. Data Protection**

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

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

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (EDUC\_C1A\_24\_103).

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

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact me ([shug7816@ox.ac.uk](mailto:shug7816@ox.ac.uk)) or the supervisor Nigel Fancourt ([nigel.fancourt@education.o.ac.uk](mailto:nigel.fancourt@education.o.ac.uk)), and we will do our best to answer your query. I/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, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee;

Email: [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk); Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

**Thank you very much for reading this information sheet.**

**If you have understood the processing of the data and would like to take part in this dissertation project, please sign the consent form attached.**

## Appendix C. Consent Form

Department of Education



Phone: +44 (0) 1865 274024

Principal Investigator:

[Nigel Fancourt]

[Nigel.fancourt@education.o.ac.uk]

Primary Researcher:

[Siyue Chen, MSc (Research Design and Methodology) student]

Oxford University e-mail: shug7816@ox.ac.uk



### **Consent to take part in [Comparing Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education from Chinese Students' Perspective]**

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: EDUC\_C1A\_24\_103

Purpose of Study: This research aims to explore Chinese students' perspectives of citizenship education in their Chinese and British universities, respectively.

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

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

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point [until **15/07/2024**], without giving any reason.

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.

I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications or academic papers other than this dissertation project.

I consent to being audio recorded.

I consent to draw pictures during the interview. I allow the researcher to store the pictures in digital formats.

I understand how interview transcripts, audios, and photos 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.

_____	<u>dd / mm / yyyy</u>	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	<u>dd / mm / yyyy</u>	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date <sup>1</sup>	Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> I hereby assign to the researcher all copyright in my contribution for use in this dissertation project.

<sup>1</sup> To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant. Once this has been signed by both parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form. The original signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents, which must be kept in a secure location.

## Appendix D. Participant Profile

Participants	Gender	Age	Ethnic	Chinese Higher Education				British Higher education			
				University and its City	Subject	Year	Level	University and its City	Subject	Year	Level
Abby	Female	22	Han	211 Beijing	Telecommunications Engineering with Management	09/2020-07/2023	BSc	Russel Group Southwest	Telecommunications Engineering with Management	09/2023-07/2024	BSc
Amy	Female	26	Han	985/211 Shanghai	Philosophy	09/2017-06/2023	BA	Russel Group Southeast	Higher education	10/2023-now	MSc
Elira	Female	22	Han	211 Beijing	Visual Communication Design	09/2020-06/2022	BA	Not Russel Group Southeast	Graphic and Media Design	09/2022-now	BA
Lara	Female	24	Han	985/211 Sichuan	E-commerce	09/2018-06/2022	BMgt	Russel Group Southwest	Management; Management	09/2022-09/2023; 2023/09-now	MSc; PhD
Linda	Female	22	Han	985/211 Liaoning	Information management	09/2020-06/2024	BSc	Russel Group Southwest	Computing and data science	09/2023-now	MSc
Olivia	Female	23	Manchu	First batch of universities Beijing	International economy and trade	09/2018-09/2022	BSc	Russel Group Southwest	International marketing	09/2022-09/2023	MSc
Sienna	Female	23	Hui	985/211 Shanghai	German	09/2019-06/2023	BA	Russel Group Southeast	Applied linguistics	09/2023-now	MSc
Andrew	Male	22	Manchu	211 Hebei	Electrical and	09/2020-06/2022	BEng (Hons)	Russel Group	Electrical and	09/2022-now	BEng (Hons)

					Electronics Engineering			Southwest	electronics engineering		
Bryce	Male	26	Han	Second batch of universities Tianjin	Business English	09/2018-05/2019	MSc	Russel Group Southwest	Education	09/2020-06/2023 09/2023-now	MSc; MRes
Cave ndish	Male	23	Han	985/211 Beijing	Microelectronic Science and Engineering	09/2019-06/2023	BEng	Russel Group Southeast	Scientific computing in physics	10/2023-now	Mphil
Dallas	Male	24	Han	First batch of universities Jiangsu	Architecture	09/2018.9-06/2023	BArch	Russel Group Middle	Architecture	09/2023-now	MA
Felix	Male	23	Han	985/211 Sichuan	Engineering	09/2019-06/2023	BSc	Russel Group Southeast	Engineering	09/2023-now	Mphil
Iric	Male	24	Han	985/211 Shaanxi	Material and engineering	09/2017-06/2021	BSc	Russel Group Southeast Russel Group Southeast	Material science; Science computing	09/2021-09/2022 09/2023-now	MSc Mphil
Kevin	Male	25	Han	985/211 Jilin	Biological Sciences	09.2018-06.2021 (graduate in advance)	BSc	Russel Group Northwest Russel Group Southeast	Biomedical Science Pharmacology	09/2021-06/2023 09/2023-now	BSc MSc

## Appendix E. Interview Questions

### Interview Questions (approximately 25-45 mins)

1. A warmup exercise: Please find a piece of paper and draw the timeline of your educational experience, displaying where you were at different stages of higher education.
2. Could you briefly talk about your formal learning experience in your Chinese university? This includes your experience in lectures, classes, self-learning sessions, and assessments.
3. Are there any compulsory or elective courses related to the concept of citizenship (implicate teaching you to be a good/qualified Chinese citizen)? How is the teaching implemented? Could you talk about the pedagogies and the intended educational outcomes of these courses?
4. How do you like the process of studying these courses in your Chinese university? Could you share your stories of learning a specific course / engaging with specific learning materials / discussing with your course mates or lecturers?
5. Besides formal education, do you feel that your experiences of informal learning such as participation in university societies and extra curriculum activities have something to do with Chinese citizenship education? If you do, could you give examples and explain?
6. (Optional) Could you please draw 'where the elements of citizenship education are in the Chinese university'. You can make it simple or complex if you can display where the elements of citizenship education are, both explicitly and implicitly. Could you illustrate your picture and explain how your experiences lead to your understanding of citizenship education in China?
7. Could you briefly talk about your formal learning experience in your British university? This includes your experience in lectures, classes, self-learning sessions, and assessments.
8. Are there any compulsory or elective courses related to the concept of citizenship (implicate teaching you to be a good/qualified British citizen)? How is the teaching implemented? Could you talk about the pedagogies and the intended

educational outcomes of these courses?

9. How do you like the process of studying these courses in your British university? Could you share your stories of learning a specific course / engaging with specific learning materials / discussing with your course mates or lecturers?

10. Besides formal education, do you feel that your experiences of informal learning such as participation in university societies and extra curriculum activities have something to do with British citizenship education? If you do, could you give examples and explain?

11. (Optional) Could you please draw 'where the elements of citizenship education are in the British university'. You can make it simple or complex if you can display where the elements of citizenship education are, both explicitly and implicitly. Could you illustrate your picture and explain how your experiences lead to your understanding of citizenship education in British?

12. Are there any similarities or differences between the intended educational outcomes of citizenship education in China and the UK, according to your opinions? You can also draw a picture creatively to support your answers, such as a Venn diagram. If you do not want to draw pictures, you could also talk about how they differ on the composition of citizenship education curriculum.

13. Overall, is there anything you appreciate or disapprove of in citizenship education in Chinese or British contexts? (If participants feel uneasy: Please do not feel stressed if you feel uncomfortable evaluating them. You can reject answering the questions as well.)

14. Do you think that there are important elements of citizenship education missing in your previous higher education institutions in China and Britain? What and why?

15. (Optional) Could you briefly talk about your current understanding of the term of citizenship education, please? How would you draw the composition of citizenship education using a pie chart?

16. Do you have anything else that you would like to share regarding citizenship education?

## Appendix F. Coding Example

Themes	Sub-themes	Index	Second-level codes	Initial codes
Students' Perceptions of the Formal and Informal Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education	Formal Citizenship Education	Formal citizenship education in Chinese universities	Chinese IPE curriculum	China - Marxism China - Socialist Values China - Contemporary history China - Ethics and law China - military training and practice China China - limited cases from other countries China - consistent IPE courses throughout all levels of education China - digital software for supervision China - History of the CPC
			China - Besides IPE curriculum	China - traditional culture (compulsory) China - some occupational assistance China - psychological development China - general education China - aesthetics
			Chinese IPE curriculum goals	China - obey the law China - understand the country China - political awareness China - patriotism China - support and endorse CPC China - ideology China - reciprocal relations between students and the

	<p>universities</p> <p>China - raising literacies in different fields</p> <p>China - suzhi jiaoyu (all rounded development)</p>
Students' perceptions of Chinese IPE	<p>Chinese IPE - some interested in IPE while most not</p> <p>Chinese IPE - Unenjoyable and merely endurable</p> <p>Chinese IPE - highly theorised and disconnected to life</p> <p>Chinese - updated</p> <p>Chinese IPE - focused on history rather than modern development</p> <p>Chinese IPE - unuseful</p> <p>Chinese cultural course - adapt to national development</p> <p>Chinese - lack the guidance for complaint</p> <p>Chinese - "shui" course</p>
Chinese academic courses	<p>Chinese academic courses - many discussions</p> <p>Chinese academic courses - long time length</p> <p>Chinese academic courses - too much to learn</p> <p>Chinese academic courses - cases from other countries</p> <p>Chinese academic courses - international cooperations</p> <p>Chinese academic courses - industrial information</p>
Formal citizenship education in British	<p>British citizenship education - no specific curriculum for it</p> <p>British citizenship education - social justice</p>

universities		<p>British citizenship education - minority groups</p> <p>British citizenship education - interdisciplinary knowledge</p> <p>British citizenship education - academic rigour</p> <p>British citizenship education - research integrity and ethics</p> <p>British citizenship education - decolonisation</p> <p>British citizenship education - rights and responsibilities</p> <p>British citizenship education - gender issues</p> <p>British citizenship education - no correct answers</p> <p>British citizenship education - cultural humility</p> <p>British citizenship education - more international</p> <p>British citizenship education - sustainability</p> <p>British citizenship education - social warefare</p> <p>British citizenship education - inclusivity</p> <p>British citizenship education - social responsibility</p> <p>British citizenship education - wealth gap</p> <p>British citizenship education - hunger</p> <p>British citizenship education - cooperation with social organisations</p>
	Students'	British citizenship education -

		perceptions of British Citizenship education	subconsciously learned British citizenship education - not clearly stated
	Citizenship education in majors and disciplines	-	<p>Citizenship education - architecture (people's needs)</p> <p>Citizenship education - medicine (avoid discussion to prevent prejudice)</p> <p>Chinese citizenship education - German (casing Chinese voices)</p> <p>Chinese citizenship education - international economics (international relations)</p> <p>British citizenship education - Design</p> <p>British citizenship education - Education</p>
Informal Citizenship Education		Chinese extracurricular activities	<p>China - physical development</p> <p>China - IPE practice</p> <p>China - volunteer</p> <p>China - study tours</p> <p>China - community service</p> <p>China - academic competitions</p> <p>China - internship</p> <p>China - entrepreneurship and innovation</p> <p>China - scientific competition</p>
		Students' perception on Chinese extracurricular activities	<p>Chinese activities - diverse</p> <p>Chinese activities - patriotism</p> <p>Chinese activities - formalistic</p> <p>Chinese activities - more interesting than academic courses</p>
		Chinese	Chinese societies - for students'

	societies	<p>interests</p> <p>Chinese societies - diversifying students' life</p> <p>Chinese societies - rigorous selection</p> <p>Chinese societies - hierarchical relationships</p> <p>Chinese societies - improving resume</p> <p>Chinese societies - sense of belonging</p> <p>Chinese societies - making friends and socialising</p> <p>Chinese societies - financial support</p> <p>Chinese societies - governed by students</p> <p>Chinese societies - bonus scheme</p> <p>Chinese societies - highly competitive</p>
	Students' perceptions on Chinese university societies	<p>Chinese societies - for switching a major</p> <p>Chinese societies - bureaucratic</p> <p>Chinese societies - formalistic</p> <p>Chinese societies - utilitarian</p> <p>Chinese societies - impractical</p>
	British extracurricular activities	<p>British extracurricular activities - charity</p> <p>British extracurricular activities - aesthetics</p> <p>British extracurricular activities - guide on protest and voting</p> <p>British extracurricular activities - volunteer in local schools</p>

		British extracurricular activities - political participation
	Students' perception on British extracurricular activities	British extracurricular activities - diverse (similar to China) British extracurricular activities - political participation (different to China)
	British societies	British societies - care more about students' psychological and physical status British societies - for students' interests British societies - bonus British societies - not competitive
	Students' perceptions on British university societies	Students' haven't participated in university societies Students' were not willing to join a student union full of Chinese people
	Career service and students' comment	British career service - long-term and personalised Chinese career service - not sufficient and personalised Chinese career service - did not care about students' will Chinese career service - for the universities' reputation Chinese career service - illusory propaganda for employment rate and reputation Both - aim to assist the role transition from students to social workers but is insufficient

## Appendix G. Thematic Map

Research Findings	1 Students' Perceptions of the Formal and Informal Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education	1.1 Formal Citizenship Education
		1.2 Informal Citizenship Education
	2 Students' Comments on the Pedagogies and Assessment of Chinese and British Citizenship Education	<i>2.1 Pedagogies of Teaching Citizenship in China and the UK</i>
		<i>2.2 Assessment of Citizenship Education in Two Countries</i>
	3 Students' Views of the Aims or Compositions of Chinese and British Citizenship Education	<i>3.1 Students' Understandings of the Aims or Compositions of Chinese and British Citizenship Education</i>
		<i>3.2 The Deficiency in Citizenship Education</i>
		<i>3.3 The Surplus of Citizenship Education</i>
	4 The Hidden Curriculum in Chinese and British Citizenship Education from Students' Perspectives	-

## Appendix H. Research Journals

Examples from my reflexive research journals:

1. Should I offer the prompt of the key characteristics of citizenship education? If I don't, they might not mention them, but the literature does. If I do, I might risk leading their answers. And mentioning certain points might give my participants pressure to discuss them. To cope with this, I learnt to comfort my participants when they were concerned about whether they understood citizenship education in a right way. "I would like to hear your definitions of it. So you can talk about everything you find relevant to it." It helps. Even they had different definitions of it, their answers were closely expanded around the topic.
2. How to cope with students' emotions when they talk about negative experiences? Some students cannot help taking about their complaints. The most effective way might be me listening to them without interrupting and intentionally look at the following research questions for several times. They would notice that they had gone too far on their stories.
3. The pedagogies, learning contents, and assessments might differ from undergraduate, postgraduate, or doctoral programmes. However, if the students have only experienced one of the stages of a national higher education, they might not be able to compare CE diagonally. To what extent shall I confirm their confidence in making a comparison?
4. It is likely that students perform less commitment to political participation if they have determined to be a long-term resident in a particular country. In this case, the students might not be familiar with a certain context, either Chinese or British.

## Appendix I. Ethical Approval

**SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES  
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Department of Education  
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[student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk); [staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk)



Siyue Chen,  
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division  
University of Oxford

08/04/2026

Dear Siyue,

### Research ethics approval

**Research title:** Comparing Citizenship Education in Chinese and British Higher Education - Chinese Students' Perspectives

**Research ethics reference:** EDUC\_C1A\_24\_103

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

**Personal data:** It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

**In-person activities:** Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

**Amendments:** Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to [staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk) / [student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk) or [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Wonnacott

DREC Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Elizabeth Wonnacott'.

cc: Dr Nigel Fancourt