



Factors Influencing '*Baosong*' Students' Foreign Language Major Choice in China

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MSc in Education (Higher Education), 2024

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ABSTRACT

2024 marks the first year of implementing the newly-reformed *baosong* policy released by the Ministry of Education of China. *Baosong* students are those who can be exempted from taking the *gaokao*, namely China's national college entrance exam, and gain direct admission of several prestigious universities because of their outstanding abilities in foreign languages. According to the official regulations, from this year onwards, only three public higher education institutions (HEIs) will be eligible to enroll *baosong* students in English-language majors. *Baosong* students who apply for other HEIs can only choose from language majors other than English. Consequently, the choice of foreign language and university has become a major concern for this cohort.

This study aims to understand the decision-making process of *baosong* students regarding college and major choices and to empower prospective *baosong* students by providing them with information and insights. It also seeks to inform administrators from higher educational institutions to support students in their decision-making process. To this end, a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was used to gather the experiences of *baosong* students who have recently navigated this process. Thematic analysis was employed to reveal deep insights from the participants' accounts, using the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) theory and Hossler and Gallagher's three-phase model of the decision-making process as the theoretical basis.

The research found that Chinese *baosong* students' decisions were not a linear progression but rather an upward spiral trajectory, as they continuously adjusted and optimized their university and major choices. Many informants adopted a utilitarian perspective on language learning, while only a few language-loving *baosong* students emphasized the unity of the instrumentality and humanity of language education. As a result, they tended to prioritize universities over specific foreign language majors. Additionally, *baosong* students were influenced by multiple factors throughout the process, including their personal interests and learning backgrounds, surrounding people, high schools and universities, policy reforms, and technological factors. In particular, the Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and learning experiences bore different

weights at different stages, with the former two having a paramount impact. When the Ideal L2 Self conflicts with the Ought-to L2 Self, *baosong* students often need to reconcile these divergences. While some follow suggestions from surrounding people and external pressures, students with clear objectives tend to be more determined and less influenced by others' voices.

LIST OF TERMS

BFSU: Beijing Foreign Studies University
BRI: Belt and Road Initiatives
CFAU: China Foreign Affairs University
CUREC: Central University Research Ethics Committee
E-LOTE: English and languages other than English
FDU: Fudan University
HEI: higher education institution
HIT: Harbin Institute of Technology
KOL: key opinion leaders
L2: second language
L2MSS: second language motivational self system
LOTE: languages other than English
MOE: Ministry of Education
MOF: Ministry of Finance
NDRC: National Development and Reform Commission
NKU: Nankai University
P.R.C.: People's Republic of China
SES: socioeconomic status
SDU: Shandong University
SISU: Shanghai International Studies University
SJTU: Shanghai Jiao Tong University
STEM: science, technology, engineering, and math
THU: Tsinghua University
TJU: Tongji University
USTC: University of Science and Technology of China
WHU: Wuhan University
WTO: World Trade Organization
XJTU: Xi'an Jiaotong University

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education in China

1.1.1 China's education system

Education phases

Education in China mainly involves three phases, namely compulsory education, secondary education, and higher education. Children usually start pre-primary education at the age of 3. Three years later, primary education commences and lasts for 6 years. After graduating from primary schools, students are streamed based on their test results in the *zhongkao* (high school entrance examination) and enter middle high schools, where they can choose between *gaozhong* (general academic education) and *zhongzhuan* (vocational education) (Zhai, 2023). Normally, students and their parents favor the three-year general academic education over the vocational option, as it provides wider access to higher education. After completing *gaozhong*, most Chinese students take the *gaokao* (national college entrance exam) to enter higher education institutions (HEIs). This exam takes place in the last year of high school, usually at the beginning of June.

The *gaokao* can trace its roots back to the *keju* system in the imperial era, which aimed at selecting talents for the emperors. It facilitated social mobility by providing opportunities for people from lower social strata (Liao, 1999). Continuing the tradition of selecting elites through nationwide examinations, the *gaokao* now serves as a screening system for talents in contemporary China. The once-a-year exam score is the sole criterion for college admission for most students. Due to the high stakes and intense competition (Zhang, 2004), the *gaokao* is considered a “watershed moment” for many Chinese families, imposing enormous pressure on high school students (Chen et al., 2020; Bian, 2021).

HEIs in China

HEIs in China can be categorized into academic universities and vocational education institutions. Up to June 2024, there are 1,308 academic universities and

1,560 vocational education institutions in mainland China.¹ Public universities are generally divided into “985 Project”, “211 Project”, “Double First-Class”, and others.

The “985 Project” was proposed by then President Jiang Zemin in May 1998 with the purpose of implementing the national strategy to develop the country through science and education, selecting a total of 39 colleges and universities. The “211 Project” was initiated in 1995 to meet the challenges of the world’s new technological revolution in the 21st century, including 115 colleges and universities. The list of “Double First-Class” universities and disciplines was announced jointly by the State Council, Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Finance (MOF), and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in September 2017. More than 140 colleges and universities were chosen, with many institutions from the former two programs included in this scheme. All these programs share the common goal of cultivating talents, promoting the country’s scientific and technological development, and thus enhancing its international competitiveness.

In this regard, HE in China exhibits several distinctive features as being stratified and government-led. Institutions involved in these projects usually have high-quality faculty, advanced teaching equipment and rich educational resources. As a result, a quest for entering top HEIs is universal in China, with competition considerably intensifying. In 2023, the admission rate to top 9 universities was estimated to be only 0.36 percent.² To enhance the likelihood of entering top universities, Chinese parents invest significant time and money in their children’s education. This aspiration even extends to earlier educational stages (Zhai, 2023).

Entering HE in China

To promote the overall development of students and enhance educational equity, the last decade has witnessed progressive reforms of the *gaokao* (P.R.C. State Council, 2014). Since the reform, the dichotomy between liberal arts subjects and natural science subjects has been replaced by two models: the “3+1+2” model and the “3+3” model. Prior to the reform, students had to choose one route, either studying social sciences (Politics, History, and Geography) or natural sciences (Physics, Chemistry, and Biology). In provinces that adopt the “3+3” model, apart from the

¹ Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China, http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/s5743/s5744/A03/202406/t20240621_1136990.html. Accessed in June 2024.

² Tencent News. <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20240615A04NJD00>. Accessed in May 2024.

core subjects - Chinese, Mathematics, and a foreign language - students can freely choose three out of six subjects. Under the “3+1+2” model, students choose between Physics and History, and then select two out of the remaining four subjects according to their preferences. These two models, which allow more flexibility for students in choosing subjects that interest them, indicate a shift towards “students’ self-directed decision making” (Zhao et al., 2024, p. 2).

Apart from policy changes of college entrance exams, alternative approaches that take more diverse factors in student selection have also contributed to students’ whole-person development and educational equity (Yang, 2021). In particular, students with outstanding academic or athletic performance can be directly recommended to a university without taking the *gaokao*, this cohort is called *baosong* students. Only sixteen foreign languages schools across China are eligible to recommend *baosong* students of foreign languages pathway (P.R.C. MOE, 2004). After obtaining a recommendation from their high schools, *baosong* students must take exams organized by the target colleges or universities, which can be a written test, an interview, or a combination of both. Before taking the test, *baosong* students choose from a variety of available foreign languages offered by the HEIs and rank their preferred majors. Once they meet the entry requirements, they will be given an offer based on their preference list and test results. The higher the score, the more likely they are to be admitted to their first-choice major. This process is usually completed by March, two months before the *gaokao*. *Baosong* students who fail to get accepted by a college or university must return to their schools and take the *gaokao*.

1.1.2 Foreign language education in China

Foreign language education plays an important role in China’s education system. Interestingly, English has become the most widely learned and used foreign language in the country, despite having no official status (Wang, 2022). It has been one of the three compulsory subjects in elementary and secondary education since the beginning of the 20th century (P.R.C. MOE, 2001). Proficiency in English is important not only in high schools and the *gaokao* but also as a graduation requirement for almost all undergraduates and as a basic skill in the workplace.

Foreign language education in China has experienced many ups and downs over the past 60 years, with its development trajectory marked by two distinctive features. One is that it has always changed in response to societal needs and has primarily served national development strategies (Zhang, 2019). The other is the shift from bilingualism to the cultivation of plurilingual and compound talents (Jiang, 2020).

During the 1950s, in line with the country's foreign policy, seven colleges teaching Russian were established (Fu, 1986; Mao and Min, 2004). From 1957 onwards, education in foreign languages other than Russian began to be resumed, and the number of English-specialized schools increased rapidly (Hu, 2009). However, from 1958 to 1960, foreign language education in China was severely hindered by the political movements. Four years later, following the issuance of "Notice on the Establishment of Foreign Language Schools (*Guanyu kaiban waiguoyu xuexiao de tongzhi*)" by MOE, "the Seven-Year Plan for Foreign Language Education in China (*Waiyu jiaoyu qinian guihua gangyao*)" was approved by the State Council, recognizing English as the primary foreign language in China. Although this first macro-guideline for foreign language education was not fully realized due to the Cultural Revolution, foreign language schools established in major cities during that time became leading models of foreign language teaching in their regions (Liu, 2008). Since 1972, when U.S. President Richard Nixon visited China, foreign language universities gradually resumed enrollment. However, during that time, there were few language options, the enrollment rate was low and mainly at the undergraduate level, and there was a severe lack of talent (Zhang, 2019). It was until 1978, when a national symposium was held in Beijing, that foreign language education in China began to develop again. This conference was a milestone event, re-emphasizing the significance of English (Li & Xu, 2006). In the late 1980s, the former Editorial Review Committee was renamed the National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Panel, becoming the consulting and guiding body for China's foreign language education. In response to increasing socio-economic needs, the "Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities" approved by the Ministry of Education in 2000 made it clear for the first time that the mission of English majors in universities was to

cultivate interdisciplinary composite talents (Huang, 2001). Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) was one of the first implementers (Dai, 2018).

China's joining of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were two symbolic events that greatly promoted the significance of English in China (Nunan, 2003). Another significant milestone occurred in 2012 when the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed the national policies of the "New Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," involving 65 countries and regions. The English-oriented monolingual teaching mode could no longer fulfill the demands (Wang & Yu, 2017). Given that languages play a fundamental role in communication and cooperation with different countries involved in these initiatives, a combination of professional knowledge, foreign language skills, and cultural literacy became the target for most higher education institutions (Cai, 2009; Lu, 2016). By 2024, there are more than 100 language majors offered in Chinese HEIs.³

Albeit the achievements made, current foreign language education in China has several obvious problems. One major problem is the significant disparity between universities. Top-tier foreign language institutions with long history of development enjoy high-level faculty and favorable conditions, which are exemplary for other universities but irreproducible (Cai, 2009; Wang, 2018). Other two problems are the severe lack of English professionals and the prominent English-Languages Other Than English (E-LOTE) imbalance, which can mainly be attributed to the excessive expansion of English majors in contrary to the limited capacity of existing faculty and facilities (Hu, 2009, 2014; Lu, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2017; Zhang, 2019). In response to these questions and to facilitate foreign language talents cultivation, regulations concerning *baosong* were reformed.

According to "Guidance on Students' Enrollment in Colleges and Universities in China (2024) (*Putong gaodeng xuexiao bufen teshu leixing zhaosheng jiben yaoqiu*)" by MOE,

³ Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/moe_1034/s4930/202403/W020240319305498791768.pdf. Accessed in June 2024.

To meet the demands of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), HEIs should continue their preferential admission of baosong students from foreign language high schools into foreign languages majors. From 2024 onwards, apart from Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), and China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) that can continue to recruit baosong students into English language-related programmes, other colleges and universities should only enroll baosong students into majors in languages other than English (LOTEs). All institutions are encouraged to cultivate inter-disciplinary talents. Baosong students should not change majors during undergraduate study.

The new policy highlights several key features. First, the significance of LOTEs was emphasized to align with the country's foreign policy strategies. Second, the total number of English *baosong* students has been reduced to mitigate the oversaturation of English-major graduates and ensure a more reasonable allocation of resources. Third, students' comprehensive qualities and over-all development were stressed, reflecting the reforming trends of foreign language education in contemporary China.

Against this backdrop, this research aims to explore factors that influenced *baosong* students' college and major choices, empower prospective *baosong* students to make more informed decisions, and inform the HEIs administrators to support students in their decision-making process. To this end, it has two research questions:

RQ 1: What are the factors that influence *baosong* students' college and major choices?

RQ 2: How do *baosong* students weigh the different factors to make a final decision?

1.2 Significance of the study

Since 2024 marked the first year of implementing the latest *baosong* policies, this research holds multi-fold significance. Practically, for prospective *baosong* students, this research aims to help them make more informed decisions by providing the experiences and practical guidance of previous *baosong* cohorts. Additionally, this study can assist prospective *baosong* students in better preparing for the latest policies

and the constantly changing job market. For interviewees who have gone through the process, participation in this research helped them reflect on their trajectories. This in-depth reflection can enhance their independent thinking and decision-making abilities, laying the foundation for their future development.

Furthermore, this research helps university administrators better understand *baosong* students' motivations and aspirations, allowing them to improve their admission strategies and program offerings to enhance the graduates' overall quality and meet societal needs. For policymakers, this research can serve as a reference for policy optimization by evaluating the effectiveness of existing regulations.

1.3 Structure of the study

Chapter One laid the foundation for the study by providing an overview of China's education system and foreign language education, followed by an introduction to *baosong* students in the language pathway. Chapter Two reviewed the literature exploring the factors influencing *baosong* students' choices at both macro and micro levels, establishing a solid theoretical foundation for this study. In Chapter Three, the research design, data collection, and data analysis processes were introduced. Specifically, the chapter detailed the philosophical underpinnings, sampling and recruitment strategies, interview design, and coding process. Chapters Four and Five reported the findings and further discussions based on the coding results, arranged into themes and sub-themes. Finally, Chapter Six proposed several suggestions for future studies, discussing possible improvements in research designs.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, literature about the college decision-making process and foreign language learning was reviewed in sequence. While the former provided a comprehensive background and framework at the macro level, theoretical and empirical studies on foreign language learning served as a framework and conceptual tools to explain *baosong* students' motivations and strategies at the micro level. To ensure the high relevance of literature with this study, we first reviewed 10 most cited essays with keywords "decision-making process", "influencing factors" and "second

language (L2) learning” respectively. Key themes were drawn based on these works, including “*baosong*”, “college and major choice”, and “L2 teaching and learning”. In total, more than two hundred literature from abroad and at home were chosen and reviewed.

2.1 Decision-making process

Unlike elementary and primary schools, will-be collegians have more freedom and autonomy to make decisions (St. John, 1990; Huang et al., 2021), and their choices of institutions and academic majors are of great importance. It is arguably one of the most crucial life decisions, and the choice of major can largely influence students’ commitment to their studies (St. John, 2000; Simpson, 2003; Coles, 2007; Edmonds, 2012; Ilgan et al., 2018). Besides, these decisions exert profound impacts on their lives (Litten, 1980; Yost and Tucker, 1995; Raposo and Alves, 2007), potentially affecting their intellectual identity construction, careers, social networks, residence, personal satisfaction, life quality in the long run (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Kotler and Fox, 1995; Hossler and McDonough, 1998; Broekemier and Seshadri, 2000; Coles, 2007; Robst, 2007; Ma, 2011; Carnevale et al., 2012; Mullen, 2014; Fricke et al., 2018; Zhai, 2023).

The last few decades have witnessed a paramount number of literature exploring students’ choice of HEIs and majors (Anderson, 1999), using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Relevant studies were mainly based on economic models (Kotler and Fox, 1995), status-attainment models (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987), and combined models (Raposo and Alves, 2007). Economic models assume that students make their college choices mainly out of rational utility-risk assessment and that they will always choose what is best for them (Raposo and Alves, 2007). Whereas status-attainment models, rooted in Social Theory, do not view students as rational deciders. More attention is attached to the process *per se*, for example, how families, social networks, and other factors influence this process (Raposo and Alves, 2007). Combined models, as the name suggests, combine the relative essence of previous models, addressing the rationality of individuals as well as the sociological aspects of the decision-making process (Raposo and Alves, 2007).

The existing literature was based on two different premises, namely education as an investment or a public good. For people with the former point of view, students are considered as rational consumers, who make decisions based on cautious cost-and-benefit analysis. Its rationale partly derives from the neoliberal contexts, where competition among universities, limited resources, and new demand patterns for talents has been intensifying. While the harmonization of academic degrees increases the general mobility and employability of graduates and academic staff, it also results in the loss of students and human capital, including professors, researchers, and technicians, for less competitive universities (Raposo and Alves, 2007). Hence, in the context of Human Capital Theory where students are regarded as rational decision-makers, education is a substantial investment for not only students but also their parents because of the promise of future high returns in many senses, such as academic success, decent financial and social status, and higher living standards (Broekemier and Seshadri, 2000; Lee and Morrish, 2012). Consequently, they will be very careful when making the cost and benefit analysis to maximize utility (Becker, 1976; Jackson, 1978; Smith and Cavusgil, 1984; Hoenack et al., 1985; Plank and Chiagouris, 1998; Sidin et al., 2003). Against this backdrop, where customer satisfaction plays a primary role in measuring accountability (Pierre, 1995), universities have been making endeavors to market their institutions (Kusumawati, 2010) and compete for funding and students (Ma, 2011). However, taking students as consumers were opposed by some scholars (Sharrock, 2000). One classic rebut against the appropriateness of educational institutions' engagement in marketing is that the profit-oriented market contrasts with the essence of education (Bartlett et al., 2002). Nevertheless, although the primary educational function of schools and universities emphasized by this kind of argument is valuable, it may be invalid in contemporary societies where competition exists as a result of increasing education massification and limited intervention of government (Pasternak, 2005; Ma, 2011). As Vrontis et al. (2007) argued: "The new era demands a re-interpretation of HEI's product through the eyes of the customer - that is, students, parents, and the public. The power is increasingly shifting towards the customer end" (p.988). From a marketing perspective, consumer behaviour is underscored during the decision-

making process, and various determinants of the process are highlighted, including the students, surrounding people, high schools, HEIs, and society.

Theorists have proposed many models to further explain the complex process. Some of the most well-known include Ihlanfeldt (1980), Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Litten (1982), Kotler and Fox (1995), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Different from Ihlanfeldt (1980), who described the process in accordance with students' changing roles, from prospective candidates, applicants, admitted students, matriculants, and finally to alumni, Chapman (1981) divided the college choice process into two stages, namely "search" and "choice". Jackson (1982) proposed a three-phase model: "preference", "exclusion", and "evaluation". All of these models suggested the complexity of students' decision-making process. In the same year, Litten (1982) described the same process from "deciding to go to college" to "investigating colleges" and final "application, admission, and attendance". Kotler and Fox (1995) contributed a more detailed description of the steps completed in the complex process, which involved the "initial decision" to "investigate college", "information gathering", "evaluation and elimination of choices to generate set of options", and "final decision". Drawing upon the models of Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982), in *Studying Student College Choice: a Three-phase Model and the Implications for the Policymakers*, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described students' decision-making process as "predisposition" (whether continue formal education or not), "search" (proactively gathering information of institution options), and "choice" (making the final decision). Consistent with economic theorists' claim, this model takes students as rational decision-makers weighing costs and benefits when selecting colleges and majors. As the most widely cited one in the relevant literature (Mullen, 2014), Hossler and Gallagher's model bears unique advantage over other similar models: it provided a systematic framework for understanding student behavior and decision-making mechanisms.

Based on the aforementioned literature, we can see that students' decision-making processes are characterized by fluidity, dynamics, and complexity. Students constantly acquire information and adjust their options as their interests, values, and external environments change over time.

2.2 Factors influencing institution and major choice

“A learner’s personal growth can be not only about extending their existing strengths and actualising their potentialities but also about understanding their own desires, personalities, identities and aspirations” (Wang, 2022, p.239). Particularly for some first-generation students, college choice is one of the determinants of their future (Coles, 2007). Students do not make their decisions in a vacuum and they are affected by various factors (Ilgan et al., 2018). An overwhelming quantity of studies have explored the driving factors that influence students’ decisions. Inspired by Chapman (1981), to offer clearer results, diverse factors found to be considered by students were divided into two groups, namely the internal factors and the external factors.

Internal factors

Internal factors primarily consisted of students’ characteristics. Students’ socioeconomic status (SES) is an index of a variety of variables. While some families are highly aware of the profound impacts of college and major choice, some who are less informed do not fully understand the consequences (Coles, 2007). The impact of families in facilitating successful education has been proved by extensive literature (Dijkstra and Peschar, 2003), where parental education, incomes, occupations, and incomes play a role (Coles, 2007; Ma, 2009; Shelton, 2013). It is an important determinant in the decision process (Chapman, 1981; Hearn, 1984), as it affects students’ educational expectations and perception of majors and careers (Rehberg, 1967; do Taveira and Araújo, 2009). SES will not only affect students’ choices but also their learning experiences and outcomes (Walpole, 2003). In particular, students coming from higher SES tend to have higher aspirations, and thus pay more attention to the education quality. Furthermore, students from financially modest backgrounds are more concerned about the lifestyle they will enjoy and social opportunities, whereas students from lower SES backgrounds attach more importance to future employability and job prospects (Delaney, 1998). However, the economic postulate of people as totally rational decision-makers that make cost and benefit analyses to maximize utility cannot fully explain students’ choice of college and field of study (Menon et al., 2007). Interests and hobbies in the field are important (Siegfried and

Raymond, 1984; Gati et al., 1995; Worthington and Higgs, 2004), and are even “the most important determinant” (Noble Calkins and Welki, 2006). Strong interest in certain disciplines would motivate students to choose related majors and to pursue careers in that field, which are closely linked to expected enjoyment. Furthermore, students with a stronger sense of identity are found to have clearer objectives concerning learning and occupation (Erikson, 1994), and they may participate in activities that they are not interested in as their self-regulation improves with age (Roberts et al., 2001).

Personal traits influencing people’s aspirations for education and occupation explain their different preferences towards certain fields of study (Balsamo et al., 2013). For instance, students majoring in natural and applied science tend to value personal achievement and social recognition embodied by high income more than social sciences students (Cassar, 2008). This preference was found to be partially attributed to students’ previous exposure to the fields that familiarized students with the discipline (Fricke et al., 2018). Apart from personal interests and traits, objective factors, such as performances at high school, stand as one of the determinants for their final college and major choice, as students inclined to choose majors in which they have received high scores in exams (Avery et al., 2018). Slightly different from positive and enjoyable emotions that normally provide impetus for learners to act (Fredrickson, 2001; Wang and Fisher, 2023), negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, insecurity, and fear of failing to achieve ideal LOTE self can either dampen learners’ enthusiasm and confidence or fuel their motivation to work harder (Peng and Wu, 2022; Liu and Oga-Baldwin, 2022; Li and Liu, 2023; Wang and Fisher, 2023). To put this in concrete terms, while good performance, early interest and success in class act as positive reinforcement for students’ decision to choose a major (Noble Calkins and Welki, 2006), stressful learning experiences can undermine learners’ persistence (Wang and Fisher, 2023) or produce incentives.

Genders and races also play an important role, especially in major selection. In particular, more females choose humanities and social sciences but are underrepresented in fields such as natural sciences and engineering (Rosser, 1995; Jacobs, 2003; Roksa, 2005; England and Li, 2006; Mullen, 2014). Generally perceived qualities of different fields can influence students’ major choices. And

language major is often considered “feminine” as it is linked to qualities of emotional response and subjectivity (Thomas, 1990). It is therefore taken for granted as a major suitable for females. In addition, emotions and intuitions sometimes exert impacts on the decision-makers (Murtagh et al., 2011).

External factors

External factors include an even wider range of elements and were claimed to be more influential than internal factors by Martin and Dixon (1991).

To begin with, the impacts of HEIs hold salience in students’ decision-making. Whether the institutional characteristics fit the students’ strengths is important (Broekemier and Seshadri, 2000; Mullen, 2014). Many high school applicants are under-informed due to lack of guidance (James et al., 1999; Scott-Clayton, 2015), and their perception of universities can be “vaguely reputational, idealistic, or limited to impressions of the campus buildings and surrounds” (p.1). Therefore, institutional reputation is one of the most cited factors, and usually the first factor considered not only by students but also by their parents. Because a good reputation often implies high-quality education, a wide variety of programme offerings, high recognition of the certificates, and higher marketability in the job market or opportunity to pursue advanced degrees. Chances are that students studying in prestigious universities can achieve higher academic success and have more post-graduate options. Universities’ marketing strategies like dissemination of brochures and arrangements of campus visits, as well as the college representatives’ dressing and attitude can contribute to students’ perceptions of institutions as well, especially in the information-gathering stage. In addition, tangible environment, including physical facilities and campus size, and intangible academic atmosphere are important (Gorman, 1976), because they provide immediate clues of the institution for prospective students and their parents (Hinson, 2006; Hayes, 2009). A specific academic environment may attract particular applicants (Balsamo et al., 2013). Yet normally, most students do not have opportunities to inspect these before they get enrolled in college (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002).

In the meanwhile, the impacts of costs are relatively more straightforward. Families who deem “college choice as an investment decision and assume that students maximize perceived cost-benefits in their college choices” (Hossler and

McDonough, 1998) tend to attach more attention to this aspect. Economic factors, namely tuition, financial aids, and cost of living and travel are considered by families, so are the non-financial costs such as commuting time (Hayes, 2009), which was closely related to the institutions' geographical location (Anderson,1999). But findings concerning institutions' proximity to home were mixed. While some students preferred to choose colleges that are close to home to maintain ties with families and friends (Pimpa, 2005; Turley, 2009), some preferred metropolitans in which they can gain new experiences (Ilgan et al., 2018). Yet Mullen's (2014) research suggested that the cost was not an influential factor for whether to attend university or not, since some parents disregard this factor because of their willingness "to do whatever it takes for their child to attend a good school" (p.716).

Moreover, surrounding people were found to have direct or indirect impacts on students' decisions. Educational levels, occupations, incomes, and expectations of parents affect students' educational attitude, attainment, outcomes, persistence, social skills, as well as self-regulate behavior in a profound way (Brody et al., 1999; Gutman and Midgley, 2000; Senechal and LeFevre, 2002; Simpson, 2003; McWayne et al., 2004). Although the father's educational level, job, and income have traditionally been determinants for a student's family background (Simpson, 2003), it was found that children's values, vocational choices, as well as educational attainment, can be affected especially by their mothers (McBroom, 1985; Tickamyer and Blee, 1990; Rose and Pyong, 1992; Chao, 1995; Steele and Barling, 1996; Wolfer and Moen, 1996; Khazzoom, 1997; Simpson, 2003; Li, 2006). Additionally, recommendations and expectations of family members play a primary role in students' college choice decisions (Martin and Dixon, 1991; Hossler and Stage, 1992; Flint, 1992), partly because of the financial support they provided (Lien et al., 2015). Nonetheless, divergencies often exist, and students often need to mediate their aspirations with their parents'. Furthermore, recommendations from teachers, counselors, alumni, peers, and friends are underestimated influences (Raposo and Alves, 2007; Coles, 2007), who mainly stood as information sharers.

According to the aforementioned literature, we can see that students' decision-making processes are characterized by fluidity, dynamics, and complexity. They are directly or indirectly influenced by multi-dimensional factors, which intertwine to

form a complex network. The tension between personal enjoyment and external requirements (Nakamura, 2019; Wang, 2022) further adds to the multidimensionality of decision-making, and students need to adjust their options over time.

2.3 Motivation for L2 learning

Also complex, fluid, and dynamic (McEown et al., 2014; Duff, 2017; Dörnyei, 2019; Wang, 2022) is motivation, which is crucial for successful L2 learning (MacIntyre, 2010; Boo et al., 2015; Lanvers, 2016; Ushioda, 2016). Existing literature mainly centers on learning English as L2, while studies about languages other than English (LOTEs) learning and teaching are relatively in scarcity (Boo et al., 2015; Duff, 2017; Ushioda and Dörnyei, 2017; Chen et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2021).

Motivations for learning English and LOTEs

As “a cog in the neoliberal wheel in the service of the global marketplace, capitalism, consumption, and national and global security” (Duff, 2017, p. 603), English stands as the primary language for communication in social and academic settings (Richards, 2015; Duff, 2017), and exerts profound impacts on many countries’ policies and practices as a result (Nunan, 2003). For immigrants or refugees, learning a second language can be primarily linked to survival (Thompson, 2020). While for other learners, subjectivity and agency in language planning and multilingual learning are more prominent (Wang, 2022; Lu and Shen, 2022). Since well-established future self-guides contribute to motivating people’s behaviours (Harter and Bosacki, 1999), an extensive body of literature explored motivation as a psychological construct (Boo et al., 2015). For L2 learners, motivative factors were found to include personal improvement, interest in the culture and community of the language speakers, academic and occupational prospects, feasibility, entertainment, competition, and so on (Wang, 2005; Huang et al., 2015; Huang, 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Su et al., 2023). English learners in Asia aspire to “build global awareness” and “promote global competencies” (Jakubiak, 2020, p. 214) in the perceived international community (Lamb, 2018; Zheng et al., 2019); in comparison, people with English as mother tongue wish to learn other languages with the aspiration to “participate in a global multilingual world” (Lanvers, 2018, p. 141). Although proficiency in English seems to no longer be a competitive edge for the present job market (Siridetkoon and

Dewaele, 2018), it still tends to be a “must” with LOTE standing as a “plus” (Lu and Shen, 2022, p.8) as a result of pragmatism (Pennycook, 2017).

While mastery of English tends to be a “default-like” demand for people (Dornyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017, p.465), the quest for learning a LOTE is always stronger and usually linked with some specific external and/or personal reasons (Dornyei and Chan, 2013; Chen et al., 2021; Lai, 2023). For instance, people may aim to enhance their competitive edge when applying for jobs (Siridetkoon and Dewaele, 2017), or to meet social expectations (Huang et al., 2015). Notably, given that language learning requires a great amount of effort (Lasagabaster, 2017), mere externally imposed motives cannot serve as a sustainable impetus for successful language learning (Coffey, 2018; Peng and Wu, 2022). Therefore, factors that drive students to learn third foreign languages - often a LOTE - usually involve “self-accomplishment and expanding horizons, visions of being fluent in the L3, and personal development” (Lai, 2023, p. 1). Learners’ past experiences of learning - be it positive or negative (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012; MacIntyre et al., 2019) - and subjective understanding of the target languages also contribute to their humanistic orientation and motivations (Wang, 2022), enabling more in-depth appreciation of the culture and community. In addition, “a feeling of freshness and a sense of achievement” when learning a new language (Huang et al., 2021; Wang and Fisher, 2023, p. 138), and positive attitudes toward the community the LOTE is attached to can enhance learners’ motivation to learn the language (Dornyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). The internal motivations interact with each other and with the external environment, collaboratively constructing a multilingual motivational system (Waninge et al., 2014; Papi and Hiver, 2020; Huang et al., 2021).

In summary, the motivations for learning English usually include its importance in the education system, the demands of the job market, and its usefulness in the context of globalization. Whereas the motivations for learning LOTEs are more diverse, involving cultural exchange, specific occupational needs, personal interests, and so forth. This difference could partially be attributed to the long-standing dominance of English worldwide.

Imbalance between English and LOTEs

This language bias in theorizing L2 - mostly English - motivation primarily derives from the global presence and pragmatic value of English across the world (Huang et al., 2015; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017; Ushioda and Dörnyei, 2017; Thompson and Liu, 2018; Wang, 2022). Robert Zajonc's (1968) Mere Exposure Effect Theory offered an explanation for the dominance of English across the world: people are more likely to develop a preference for things they are familiar with. In other words, people's positive attitude towards a certain thing may grow with increasing exposure to it. Many other theorists provided alternatives to explain the competing relationships between English and LOTEs. According to Henry (2010), motivation resources are finite, which will mainly be distributed to the learning of the first L2, with fewer left available for additional language learning. This claim, supported by Lu et al.'s (2019) empirical findings, shares some similarities with the contention of competing language selves (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017), with the ideal English self being predominant. In other words, for the same learner, motivation for learning LOTEs is normally higher than that for learning English, and it may exert negative impacts on LOTE learning, especially on learners' attitudes towards LOTEs (Henry, 2010; Busse, 2017; Wang and Zheng, 2019). On the other hand, the transfer from learning English to LOTEs could be far more than a positive or negative binary (Huang, 2019). By applying their perception and learning experience of one language to another, learners can mediate the complex interrelationships among different languages in linguistic, aesthetic, cultural, historical, and socio-economic senses (Wang, 2022). Howard and Oakes (2024) also found the conducive role of the long-standing status and global predominance of English to LOTE learning. While some learners develop separate ideal selves that are mutually independent (Thompson, 2020), some English and LOTE learners were found to have more enjoyable L2 learning experiences in the past and consequently tend to have higher interest in learning languages overall, as well as clearer visions for the future (Huang et al., 2021). In this regard, the E-LOTE relationships could be harmonious.

Be the relationship positive or negative, this E-LOTE imbalance has twofold negative consequences. According to Lu and Shen (2022), from an ecological perspective, this can lead to the marginalization of other languages and diminished

linguistic and cultural diversity; and from a utilitarian perspective, it can widen disparities in different language resources by reinforcing the high status of English. Hence, alleviating the E-LOTE imbalance is important for not only language development, but also individuals and nations, and students' motivation to learn LOTE can serve as a key role.

2.4 Research gaps

Several notable research gaps in the existing literature are as follows. Despite a substantial amount of research exploring students' decision-making processes, most existing studies primarily focus on Western contexts, with few studies specifically addressing the Chinese context. Additionally, the impact of society, culture, and technology on students' decisions is still a largely unexplored issue. In addition, *baosong* students' decisions warrant more specific analysis, because they face different situations from most *gaokao* students: they must choose from a limited scope of options. Moreover, *baosong*-relevant policies have undergone considerable changes, and 2024 marks the first year of implementation of the new policy. Consequently, there is a natural lack of literature on how these reforms affect the choices of *baosong* students. Therefore, this study aims to fill these voids.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical framework

Among current available motivational theories, the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework (Dörnyei, 2009) has gained paramount prominence specifically in the field of language learning studies (Wang, 2022). By viewing learners as “irreducible and complex entities” (Wu and Liu, 2023, p. 1254), it offers a holistic picture of language learning motivation.

Drawn from Markus and Nurius's (1986) Possible Selves Theory and Higgins's (1987) Self Discrepancy Theory, the framework constitutes three

components: Ought-to L2 Self, Ideal L2 Self, and L2 learning experience. Ought-to L2 self is what learners think they should become to meet external expectations; the Ideal L2 Self is what learners themselves want to become as a L2 speaker. In other words, while the former stresses external factors, the latter highlights the internal ones. L2 learning experience can be influenced by the immediate L2 learning environment, such as school context, teachers, peers, and learning resources (Wang, 2022).

L2MSS framework as a key component of relevant theories has been validated through a vast number of empirical studies in various contexts (see for example, Papi, 2010; Kim, 2012; Papi and Teimouri, 2012; Islam et al., 2013; Sylvén and Thompson, 2015; Thompson and Erdil-Moody, 2016; Apple et al., 2016; You and Dörnyei, 2016; Thompson, 2017; Yashima et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2018). Compared to Ryan and Deci's (2017) Self Determination Theory (SDT) which highlights amotivation (lack of motivation), intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation, L2MSS has a particular focus on examining the dynamic language learning experience. Therefore, we believe that this influential theory is well-suited to explain *baosong* students' decision-making process of language major choices. Nevertheless, being aware of the limitations of the L2MSS framework - such as its limited applicability to primarily English-speaking contexts (Wang, 2022) and its neglect of the ongoing synergy between language learners and the contexts they are in (Thompson, 2017), we adapted the interview questions to make it better fit the context of Chinese students, thereby ensuring the validity of the theory.

3.2 Study design

The ontological stance of this study is constructivism, which asserts that reality is constructed by individuals through social interaction and personal experience. This coincides with this study's focus, where the choices of *baosong* students are considered a subjective and multidimensional process influenced by various internal and external factors. Epistemologically, we adopted an interpretivist stance, emphasizing that knowledge is gained through understanding people's subjective experiences and social contexts, rather than through quantitative data. As a result, this study was framed within qualitative paradigm. A qualitative approach was employed to uncover the trajectory of this cohort, as it allows for drawing rich

insights from participants who have recently navigated this process and helps to understand how they constructed the meaning of their experiences (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In-depth interviews were used to collect data for this research and participants were invited to recount their journey. By doing this, we gained insights about *baosong* students' motivations and decision-making processes.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Participants' sampling and recruitment

Purposeful sampling was used in this research due to its strengths compared to other sampling strategies. Specifically, it enables a more effective selection of individuals with specific characteristics or experiences, allowing researchers to obtain more focused and in-depth data. Different from most *gaokao* students, *baosong* students have unique considerations when choosing universities and language majors. Therefore, the use of purposive sampling was believed to be suitable to help us gain insights into this cohort's selection process. To better ensure the diversity of samples and achieve data saturation of the research, I divided the 16 foreign language schools in China into two groups: schools from eastern China and others from the middle and western regions. I then recruited 10 to 11 students respectively from each group. This classification aligns with the regional divisions established by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, with the eastern region comprising the economically developed coastal provinces and municipalities, and the middle and western regions including the less-developed and underdeveloped provinces.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China website.

https://www.stats.gov.cn/hd/lyzx/zxgk/202107/t20210730_1820095.html.

To recruit potential interviewees, a poster advert and the researcher's contact information were released on social media and online forums with relevant hashtags. Students willing to join this research reached out to me. While this allowed me to efficiently find sufficient participants, it also limited the diversity of the sample, which may consequently affect the generalizability of the study's findings.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, as their adaptability and flexibility allowed informants to share their views and ask questions without being constrained by a fixed guide. Additionally, compared to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews provided a basic framework that helped to ensure the relevance of the discussions. Moreover, the coherence between interview questions facilitated the comparison and synthesis of data. By adjusting the order of questions and asking follow-up questions, more in-depth information could be obtained (Bryman, 2016).

The preliminary interview questions, concerning a list of choosing criteria, were first deductively generated based on the researcher's personal experiences and the literature reviewed. Informed consent was obtained from the research participants before the commencement of interviews, using the researcher's off-line mobile phone. Following a quick warm-up and a brief introduction to the research, informants were asked to answer several questions, such as personal information, motivations for choosing *baosong*, views on the newly-reformed *baosong* regulations, factors influencing their choices, and future plans. To ensure the accuracy of data, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin by the same interviewer and lasted approximately 40 to 70 minutes each. All of the interviewees and interviewer are native Chinese speakers.

3.4 Data analysis

A large corpus of data was gathered from 21 informants. All interviews conducted in Mandarin were recorded by the interviewer's off-line mobile phone and transcribed verbatim into English by the interviewer, which was then translated into English. The translation was reliable because the interviewer majored in English and had won a national first prize in English-Chinese translation in China. The semi-constructed interviews as research instrument, and the thematic narrative analysis as research method, align with social constructivism (Polkinghorne, 1988). Hence, the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to code and analyze the data, because the flexibility and systematic nature of this approach enabled me to reveal deep insights underneath the data.

In particular, after reading the transcription for multiple times and noting down initial thoughts, initial codes were generated based on the data and the reviewed literature. These codes were manually organized into themes and sub-themes using Excel, which were then rearranged into a mind map using X-mind. After that, the internal connections and distinctions between these themes and codes were carefully reviewed, with some of them being merged, split, or deleted. The final coding results were reviewed and validated by my supervisor.

3.5 Positionality and validity

In this study, my positionality may have impacted the research process and results. To begin with, as a former *baosong* students who chose English as the undergraduate major, I am able to design clear interview outlines with precise questions, resonate with informants' feelings, and better understand their narratives. Our similar experiences enhanced the interviewees' willingness to share more information during the interview, which added to the authenticity and richness of the data. In addition, my familiarity with the *baosong* system and procedures enabled me to quickly identify key points in informants' narratives when analyzing the data. However, my first-hand experience may also have introduced bias. For instance, I might have unconsciously paid more attention to stories that mirrored my experiences while overlooking those that I have not personally encountered. This could reduce the

comprehensiveness and representativeness of the findings as a result. Additionally, I might over-sympathize with the respondents, thus compromising the objectivity and validity during data analysis.

Several measures were taken to minimize the impact of bias caused by my positionality. I tried to remain as neutral and open-minded as possible when designing the research questions and interview outlines. I also conducted small-scale pilot research with former *baosong* students (n=7) in advance, and they were invited to offer suggestions to improve my research at the end of each pilot interview. This process contributed to the credibility of the final interview questions. Moreover, my supervisor and I met regularly to discuss my interview questions and coding results. This triangulation helped to increase the reliability and credibility of the findings.

3.6 Ethics

This study only commenced with the approved CUREC 1A application for research projects in the social sciences and humanities granted by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). Some detailed ethical procedures followed by this study were as follows. Prior to the interview, the research topics, aims, questions, and requirements for potential participants were clearly outlined in the recruitment posters, ensuring that no sensitive information was included. A written information sheet was provided for every participant to agree on to ensure that all interviewees were voluntary to join the research. It clearly reiterated the research procedure, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights to withdraw any time before the submission of this study. Participant were given 3 days to consider whether to consent to participate in the research. Throughout the research, I treated the participants with all due respect and dignity, avoiding jargon that might cause confusion or discomfort. Participants could choose whether to have their name affiliated with the information they contributed. If they chose to remain anonymous, any information provided by them would be assigned a pseudonym.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Students from 16 foreign language schools in China went through two major decision-making processes. After deciding on their admission paths, namely whether to take *baosong* or *gaokao*, they are faced with issues of college and major choices. To better understand *baosong* students' experiences, factors influencing both processes are significant. Therefore, in this section, respective factors influencing these two phases were examined.

4.1 Decision-making process on *baosong*

Based on their reasons for choosing *baosong*, participants in this research can be classified into two groups: students with clear objectives at an early stage, and students as rational deciders. The former group (n=5, 24%) had their early educational choices directly influenced by their goal of obtaining the *baosong* qualification. In particular, these students went to middle high schools or primary schools affiliated with the foreign language schools (P12, P20). Their parents planned their educational paths to enhance their L2 proficiency through advanced courses and to familiarize them with relevant regulations and practices from a young age. In addition, this cohort also started preparing for the *baosong* exam early, by proactively attending language courses after school (P2), or by participating in relevant competitions (P7) to enrich their resumes. Compared to other students who made up their minds to take *baosong* pathway in the final year of high school, this group of students was more likely to get the qualification and gain admissions to target universities by implementing effective learning strategies since middle school or even earlier. This finding echoes with McDonough and his colleagues' (1998) observation that students from higher social milieu are more likely to attend highly selective high schools and prestigious HEIs, as their parents may plan for their children from an early stage (Simpson, 2003).

Another group of students chose *baosong* after cautiously weighing the pros and cons (n=16, 76%), and their decision was made as a result of a cost-and-benefit analysis. For these participants, a frequently mentioned push-reason was the intense competition of *gaokao*. Many informants viewed *baosong* as "less competitive and less risky" compared to the one-time *gaokao* (n=12, 57%), as its final results were

based on multiple exams in many foreign language schools. In addition, *baosong* students were more likely to get admission to elite universities in the end, which might otherwise be “out of reach” if they took the *gaokao* exam. For students who felt interested in learning languages, *baosong* was considered as a “shortcut” (n=3, 9%). This cohort felt that *baosong* not only alleviated the pressure of preparing for the *gaokao* but also provided a less stressful path to their ideal universities and majors. In contrast, for those with moderate or even no interest in learning the language (n=7, 33%), *baosong* tends to be a compromise. When asked about their college and major choices if they took the *gaokao* pathway, the majority of interviewees (n=15, 72%) indicated they would have chosen majors other than languages. Given the intense competition of *gaokao*, participants choosing *baosong* often agreed that they had to prioritize gaining admission to more prestigious universities over their aspirations for specific majors (P3). In other words, these students attached greater significance to the choice of college rather than the choice of major, with *baosong* enhancing their likelihood of achieving this purpose.

Nevertheless, instead of a promise, *baosong* could also be competitive and risky. In some schools, the *baosong* selective exams are conducted once a year, the similar to the *gaokao*. Students’ performance in that exam would serve as a precondition for their university application. The selection strategies vary among the sixteen foreign languages schools in terms of the number of exams, the subjects tested, and the total scores for each subject. Unlike schools that determine the results based on a single exam, some schools offer students multiple chances by proportionally assessing their midterm and final exam scores. Besides, while students in some schools need to take exams in all six subjects, some others only require exams in Chinese, Mathematics, and English. However, there seemed to be concerns about the effectiveness of such scheme, particularly regarding the total marks of each subject (P8, P11). In most schools, the full marks for Chinese, Mathematics, and English are 150 points each, but students selected based on a composite ranking of all subject grades might not excel specifically in foreign languages. In comparison, some schools assign greater weight to English and include listening and speaking sections in the exam (P9). This strategy was considered to be a more effective way to select qualified students.

Another interesting finding about the reason for students' choosing *baosong* is that, for those with no preference to any particular major, it was the long vacation after *baosong* that appealed to them more (n=3). According to the informants, the eight-month vacation allows them to relax (P5, P21) and, more importantly, to engage in self-reflection (P7).

4.2 Decision-making process on college and major choices

After deciding to take *baosong* pathway, students went through the second decision-making process, namely the choice of colleges and majors. Overall, participants were influenced by a variety of factors, including their educational backgrounds and performances, personal characteristics and future planning, characteristics of the target languages, surrounding people, universities, contextual factors, and technological factors. Additionally, it was noticed that many participants prioritize universities over specific majors. In other words, when making decisions about foreign language majors, it was the universities that seem to matter more.

4.2.1 Educational backgrounds and performances

Learning experiences

All of the participants in this research have been learning English from a young age. Some began studying the language as early as first grade in primary school (n=5, 24%). Nearly one-half of the interviewees (n=10) said that they commenced even earlier because they went to bilingual or international kindergartens. Only one interviewee from northwestern China acknowledged that she did not learn foreign languages systematically until third grade in primary school, and considered English courses in her hometown as “not effective” (P3).

It was found that language learning experiences during the pre-university phase, be it compulsory or optional, could contribute to students' interest and perception of particular languages, as well as motivation to continue learning. For instance, P6, who studied Spanish in middle school, acknowledged that these courses greatly enhanced her motivation to continue Spanish at university. P9, who developed

an interest in German after attending optional courses at schools, shared a similar experience. In addition to the early exposure to L2 in classroom settings, learning experiences abroad also influenced *baosong* students' in a similar way. Exposure to the L2-speaking countries and interaction with local people helped students gain confidence in their capacity and increase their motivation to proactively seek opportunities for further language development (P19). Furthermore, the studying experience enhanced their agency to reflect on not only the purposes of learning languages, but also their "views of the world" (P20). However, at the same time, students faced with challenges when learning a new language could suffer from negative emotions, and became resistant to learning the language (P10). By contrast, outstanding performances in academic settings were conducive to providing students with more motivation.

Academic performance and extracurricular activities

Among all the interviewees, some showcased overall academic excellence since an early stage (n=5, 24%), while some acknowledged that they performed (below)-average at first but gradually excelled in especially English subject as grades increased (n=4, 19%). For the latter group, some were motivated by their English teacher, who offered academic support and encouragement (P12), and some were driven by a sense of achievement from excelling in exams (P18). This supports the assertion that higher educational attainment and better academic performance are closely linked, which contributed to fueling positive emotions and sustaining their efforts to continue language learning (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2019). Many participants actively engaged in students' clubs and language competitions after class, which fueled their interest in the disciplines. For example, P19 became interested in International Relations and Politics after taking part in the Model United Nations conferences; P3 became passionate about languages after winning awards in English debating competitions. These experiences not only helped them practice their overall language skills but also enhanced their preferences for certain languages and universities (P18). In the meanwhile, there were also students who deliberately engaged in certain activities, with the aim of enriching their resumes for application (P3). According to P15, language courses and extracurricular activities offered by foreign language schools bolstered their sense of readiness for *baosong* exams as well

as university studies. However, P4 noted that even in foreign languages schools, where relevant resources were abundant, there was an imbalance in E-LOTE (English and Languages Other Than English) activities: apart from the Foreign Language Festival organized by their high schools, few other activities were available for LOTE learners.

4.2.2 Personal characteristics and future planning

Interests and hobbies

It was found that interests and hobbies consistently influence students' major choices, learning process, and future career aspirations. *Baosong* students in this research expressed their interest in the culture associated with the foreign language they chose or the process of L2 learning. Some participants in this research showcased strong interests in, for instance, anime and manga (P4 and P6, majoring in Japanese), fashion industry (P9, majoring in French), Latin-American literature (P12, majoring in Spanish), football (P11, majoring in Spanish), and mythology (P3, majoring in Icelandic). In the meanwhile, some students expressed a general interest in learning language *per se*. By sharing occupational aspirations as an English teacher, P8 confirmed the motivational role of interests in the learning process, as it consistently fueled her with passion and confidence. Her love for the language also shaped her long-term occupational objectives as an English teacher and her desire to assist others achieve their language learning potentials. Students may also develop new interests during their language learning journey. For example, P18 said that she became increasingly attracted to linguistics as she read more research papers in this field, and chose a language major for undergraduate studies as a result (P18). Similarly, students' consistent L2 learning could be influenced by their preference for the subject. P14 confirmed that she would continue to choose optional language courses even if she did not major in the subject in college.

Personality traits

Some interviewees highlighted how personalities had influenced their decision-making process. In particular, students with a preference for unconventional choices would favor German over French or Spanish, because the latter two options were more commonly chosen as third language by students in China. Those wishing

to avoid severe competition during undergraduate years might opt for relatively lower-ranking HEIs other than top-tier universities like Tsinghua University (THU) and Peking University (PKU) (P4, P16), yet the ones they chose remained among the most prestigious institutions. This desire to live a balanced life with less pressure also influenced their selection of city for study and residence. As a result, busy cities including Shanghai, were excluded from their wishing list (P8). Additionally, students with a strong sense of social responsibility, who wish to offer assistance to marginalized groups in the future, tend to choose Laws (P4) or Journalism (P2) as minors alongside their language majors. Moreover, this study also found that students' dietary habits would affect their language major choice, as they tend to choose to study in countries with food cultures similar to China, such as Japan (P4). This illustrated the significance of a comfortable living environment for some students.

Career goals

A small percentage of participants in this research claimed that they would love to learn things apart from their language majors as a result of interest in its culture or simply curiosity (n=4, 19%). Because, according to P2, English could already fulfill the communication needs in professional settings, hence, LOTE learning is inclined to be more of a personal choice. In contrast, more than three-fourths of participants in this research took career objectives into consideration when choosing universities and language majors (n=17, 81%). Students with a clear preference for particular industries or occupations would possibly choose relevant minors to complement their language majors, aiming to meet multiple career goals and gain an edge in the labor market. In such cases, applicants would first consider universities with more course offerings or specialized disciplines. To this end, sometimes they attached more importance to the minors than to the language majors, and chose universities mainly based on their targeted minors (P5, P13). In the meanwhile, a few students regarded minor studies as merely an “icing on cake” that would be conducive to their language majors (P20). Such plans, to some extent, demonstrated would-be collegians' concerns about the competitiveness of sole language major, especially less commonly taught languages. On the other hand, some participants emphasized the potential of LOTEs, holding the view that instead of limiting their occupational prospects, language majors opened more options for jobs

(P11, P14). Students without a particular language major preference tended to prioritize employment prospects as the main factor (P16), whereas there are students who do not take future career opportunities as the primary reason for attending university, focusing instead on learning and personal growth in a broader sense (Christie and Munro, 2003; Mullen, 2010; Pryor et al., 2011; Mullen, 2014). At the same time, there were participants who had not decided on their minors yet (n=4), but acknowledged the necessity to learn a minor in university out of utility considerations. According to them, they planned to “experience more” before deciding on this matter. One exception in this research was P18, who explicitly stated no intention to pursue other disciplines in undergraduate years due to the perceived stress of language majors.

Post-graduate education

Apart from long-term career goals, considerations about graduate education also played a role in students’ decisions regarding undergraduate institutions and majors. Students intended to continue further education often emphasized the postgraduate recommendation quotas offered by the universities, and destination countries for studying abroad. A few informants shared their plans to change majors after graduation (n=6, 29%), with some mentioning guaranteed admissions to postgraduate programs as a vital factor in their decision-making. Universities offering more places for guaranteed admissions were seen as advantageous, as they reduce competition and increase the likelihood of entering graduate education. This cautious consideration implied students’ prospects for their long-term development. Preferences towards or against particular countries for further education stood as another reason for their language choices. P19 explicitly stated that she chose French because she wanted to study in France in the future, while P1 gave up German out of concerns about academic pressures in Germany.

4.2.3 Characteristics of the languages

“Language as a tool”

A surprising percentage of interviewees agreed with the view that deemed language as a tool (n=14, 67%). The practical utility of the target languages in daily communication and professional settings largely influenced their choices. The

argument of “there is no need to be proficient in L2 as long as you can use it to communicate with others” deriving from their past learning and traveling experiences and the deteriorating job market reoccurred multiple times in the interviews. The necessity of mastering English, in particular, seemed to gradually diminish given its widespread use among Chinese students. Another reason for this perception may be the relatively lower difficulty of language majors in comparison with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects. This stands in line with He et al.,’s (1999) opinion that “foreign language is a skill ... it becomes a major only when it is combined with another practical major” (p. 24). Consequently, the mode of “language plus another major”, where language stands as the complementary one, has become increasingly popular among students and universities in China, as it contributes to students’ employability. In this regard, this view is essentially rooted in people’s aspirations for jobs in the future. Nevertheless, some interviewees argued that language means far more a than tool, and its significance should not be confined to this narrow view.

“Language is indeed a tool, but it is certainly more than just a tool. Through language, people can communicate with each other from all over the world... especially for diplomats who need to negotiate with people from other countries, proficiency in local languages would certainly contribute to establishing a more intimate relationship. So I think language has a kind of cohesion and affinity. It’s also a carrier of human culture. So language is definitely more than just a tool.” (Excerpt from P18)

P18 affirmed the rationale behind instrumentalism based on the differences between foreign languages and other disciplines, but also emphasized the deeper connotations of languages, namely the underlying literature and culture (Wang, 2018). The utilitarian view of language learning has led to foreign language majors being seen as “social and market adaptors” (Jiang, 2010, 18), often overlooking its vital role of educating people (Wen, 2016).

Perception of the language

Linguistic characteristics, including pronunciation, grammar structures, and vocabulary, allure to learners. For example, P1 and P9 were drawn to French partly because of its romantic associations with France. This kind of positive impression gradually extended to not only the language but also the L2-speaking community over time. In addition, the similarities between L2 and L3 were found to increase or decrease learners' interest in the latter. Particularly in this research, similarities between English and French made some learners feel familiar with French, and thus became willing to learn it. While for some other students (P18), this kind of similarities could lead to less sense of freshness (P3). Learners' decisions were also influenced by linguistic characteristics of the languages. Taking German as an example, while some favored it over other LOTEs due to its lack of trills and rigidity (P20), some were deterred by the complex grammar rules and relatively stiff pronunciation (P8). Besides, the match between personalities and targeted languages, as well as the learners' learning experiences of those languages mattered (P20, P21). Furthermore, perceived difficulty and time commitment were found to be influential as well. P5 acknowledged that she chose Japanese because she felt like it was easier to learn. P6, who also chose Japanese, agreed with this assertion: "I am quite familiar with its culture, so I think learning Japanese is easy." Another probable reason for choosing a seemingly simpler language was that "it might save more time for me to study another minor" (P11), since "learning a LOTE from scratch requires a great deal of time". P16, on the other hand, found learning French was too time-consuming and was not as worthwhile as learning English, given more than fifteen years of efforts made. As a result, some *baosong* students tended to choose relatively less complex languages to achieve a better balance between their majors and optional minors.

4.2.4 Influence of surrounding people

Parents and relatives

Similar to what Fosu and Poku (2014) have found in contemporary Ghana, students' parents' emphasis on future employability and aspiration for elite universities were prominent in this research. A probable reason for Chinese parents' concerns about post-graduate destinations may be the high unemployment rate in present society, which pressures students to be highly cautious when choosing college,

major, and courses. For example, in terms of language choice, P1 mentioned that his parents showed a strong preference towards French “simply because they think that French-major graduates can have more occupational options in the future”. Similarly, P2’s parents encouraged her to study French or Spanish because “there are more job opportunities”. According to the interviewees, parents showed a clear preference for more widely-used LOTEs (P3), since it would be easier for their children to find a job in governments (P6) or international companies (P9). Likewise, their consideration about their children’s future employability led to disapproval of particular languages that are less commonly-learned, such as Icelandic (P3) and Persian (P21). Another finding was the disapproval by some members of the elder generation of students choosing Japanese majors, primarily due to historical reasons (P4, P17, P21). This was in line with previous findings regarding the influence of societal and cultural climate: the unfavorable socio-political attitude towards Japanese, rooted in wartime history, diminished some learners’ motivations to study this language (Wu and Liu, 2023).

Chinese parents’ quest for 985 universities was found universal in this research. Compared to universities specialized in foreign languages, the overall reputation and rankings held more significance. P3, for instance, mentioned that although she preferred to go to BFSU, she ultimately chose a comprehensive university to meet her parents’ wishes. This was not a single case, other interviewees shared similar experiences. At the same time, there were exceptions where the situation was reversed: students prioritized universities’ rankings while their parents remained more conservative and favored HEIs that were relatively easier to get admission to. Furthermore, parents could be influenced by the study and work experience of other surrounding people. Family members’ studying, working, and living experiences could contribute to the families’ positive impression of a country, which could further motivate parents to prefer specific foreign languages and improve children’s confidence in learning this language (P6, P12).

When faced with divergence, different parenting styles could lead to different results, though in either case, regardless of parenting styles, consistent support and encouragement from parents throughout the decision process were significant for children. For families that were more authoritarian, students’ aspirations could be

neglected not only in the selection of college and major, but also in learning strategies (P6, P12). In these cases, parents played a decisive role in students' choices. On the contrary, albeit influential the traditional values are, many families adopt a more liberal parenting style with less authoritarian intervention as a result of globalisation and economic reforms, leaving the decision up to their children (Pearce, 2006; Chen et al., 2021). For this cohort, students were given more space and freedom to choose, with parents mainly serving as supportive roles. This finding lends support to what Chen et al. (2021) have suggested about the intergenerational relationships in contemporary China, where children are given more rights to make decisions on their will while showcasing respect and trust to their parents. P2, P5, and P7 all mentioned the limited influence of family members other than providing financial support and their full autonomy in selecting colleges and majors. Some parents would also assist their children with preparation work such as information collecting. Interviewees' habitual use of "we" during the interviews implies the collaborative efforts made by their parents and themselves. According to P3, two possible reasons might be their dependent personalities and their parents' unfamiliarity with relevant policies. In the case when parents knew little about the target language, they tend to seek advice from people around them. P9 mentioned that his mother suggested Spanish after consulting a friend and learned that this language was relatively easier to learn; P12's cousin, who has been studying in Spain for years, recommended Spanish to her. However, while students from wealthier families start to gain information from supportive parents and networks at an early stage (Hossler and McDonough, 1998), families lacking experience and institution-related knowledge (Briggs, 2006; Briggs and Wilson, 2007) can be largely dependent on word of mouth (James et al., 1999; Lee and Morrish, 2012).

Teachers and counselors

Teachers that influenced *baosong* students' decisions could be divided into three groups: language teachers and class mentors at high schools, and counselors at cram schools.

To begin with, apart from academic support, language teachers always consistently encouraged students towards *baosong* based on students' personal circumstances and in-class performances. They also shared personal experiences with

baosong students, enabling them to have a clearer understanding of related universities, which in turn facilitated their interest in language learning. By sharing former students' educational experiences, P3's English teacher fueled her passion to apply to BFSU. P18 shared a similar experience with P3, as she became determined to study English at BFSU after her teacher, who "introduced her to the world of English", told her that "BFSU is a paradise for English students." Teachers with experience studying abroad also provided valuable insights about the prospects of different language majors with their students. For instance, P1's teacher explicitly asserted that students should apply for German major at Tongji University (TJU), because "there will be increasing cooperation between China and Germany and thus more opportunities for German learners." P7's teacher gave similar advice based on the employment prospects as well. In addition to major-specific guidance, foreign language teachers provided practical suggestions regarding university choice. For example, they would encourage students who were not high achievers in Mathematics to choose schools that only required exams in Chinese and English, thereby increasing their likelihood of admission (P1, P8). But for some class mentors, it was the aspiration for elite universities that mattered more. According to the informants, their mentors showcased a strong preference for elite universities, such as THU and PKU (P3, P21). Yet this kind of suggestion may not play a decisive role in students' final decisions, as students would carefully consider the high entry requirements of these institutions. Nonetheless, it often instilled a subconscious desire to aim for prestigious HEIs.

When in-school teachers lacked relevant experiences or information and could only provide limited guidance regarding college and major choices (P9, P15), a few students depended on their family members (P13), whereas many others turned to counselors at cram schools (P1, P6, P7, P19). Surprisingly, counselors at cram schools sometimes provided a wider range of assistance for students, from academic support to advice concerning colleges and majors. In particular, compared to high-school teachers, an advantage of counselors at cram schools was that "they are quite familiar with both *gaokao* and *baosong* procedures ... they provided every student with personalized selection and preparation strategies ... they are very professional" (P6). Yet some counselors may be biased or excessively dependent on universities'

reputations. Consequently, some suggestions from them were unhelpful and even misleading. This may not only undermine students' confidence, but also misguided the deciders (P6). Some informants mentioned that suggestions from some counselors at cram schools were unsatisfactory, and they even caused confusion to students by forwarding an overwhelming quantity of information that was easily accessible on the Internet. All these phenomena suggest the profit-driven nature of cram schools. Aware of that, students should critically assess the validity and effectiveness of the suggestions from cram schools by cross-checking multiple resources.

Alumni

By providing information, personal experience, and mental support, alumni and at-college collegians can act as "institutional ambassadors" for HEIs (Anderson, 1999, p.130).

For many foreign languages schools, memoirs edited by previous *baosong* students were a valuable tradition. It facilitated students' understanding by providing detailed explanations of the exam procedures, contents, and former *baosong* students' personal experiences. Students can also reach out to the editors to ask additional questions regarding campus life and so forth (P16). Tailored guidance offered by the alumni considerably "reduced the time of trial and error" (P9). Better preparation further contributed to mitigating students' stress and confusion while enhancing their confidence. Additionally, the authentic information provided by at-college students, which may always be different from what official prospectus presented, was of great importance for the decision-makers. P10 and P3 noted that some previous *baosong* students would even dissuade them from choosing certain universities and encourage them to have second thoughts when deciding. Moreover, P15 mentioned that previous *baosong* students' parents offered suggestions to their parents, which greatly helped the families navigate the entire process.

However, when it comes to college and major choices, the overall impact of alumni was found to be limited, particularly for students who already had clear objectives. According to P20, former *baosong* students' advice always solidified their existing preferences rather than radically changing their initial thoughts. This idea was shared by P7, who took alumni's suggestions merely as references. Therefore, it is safe to say that although alumni can indeed provide valuable information and

suggestions, students ultimately make decisions based on their own considerations. Another explanation is that because college students are unfamiliar with the latest policies, they almost had no influence on high school students.

It seems plausible to posit that during the selection process, alumni tended to offer information and reinforce students' preferences. Their role seems to be more prominent after *baosong* students got admissions from the target universities. P11 expressed gratitude for at-college students, who invited him into the university. By visiting the campus, attending lectures, and dining in the cafeteria, he gained a more intuitive feeling of university life.

Friends and peers

Students were mutually influenced by each other. Through sharing information, they help each other to make more informed decisions. P4 mentioned that she discussed university applications with her peers. Though these discussions, some students may change their options. Relationships played a significant role in these decisions, as some students preferred to apply to the same institutions that their close friends had chosen. Beyond personal connections, the overall trends in the class could also change students' choices. For example, P8 was influenced by her classmates and chose the same universities as they did in the end. However, peer competition sometimes led to pressure and anxiety. P11 noted that "because the total quotas are limited and we are competitors to some extent, so in the early stage, everyone was guessing which colleges and majors others would choose." Although it may result in more stress, this could also made students more cautious when filling out applications. Moreover, P18 described how anxious she was during the preparation phase: "I became very anxious when I noticed my classmate had already completed the tasks that I have not...it was such a nightmare."(P18) On the other hand, the atmosphere of collective learning was found to be conducive, as it significantly promoted some students' learning efficiency and motivation (P9, P13).

Self-awareness

Self-awareness was included in this section because the Ought-to Self, primarily composing instrumentality mindset and externally imposed motivations, cannot fully explain reasons for students' major decisions and intended endeavors (Huang, 2019). Instrumentality can be the "immediate antecedent" for deciders

(Dornyei, 2010, p.79), but its facilitative role in the long run remains uncertain (Huang et al., 2021). We found the vital role of self-awareness in *baosong* students' decision-making process, which mainly showcased in their autonomy, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation. P7 emphasized that she only asked for others' suggestions when she already had an initial plan: "I don't care much about the so-called mature suggestions. I feel like there will always be a way out and I will make the right choice." In agreement with P7, P6, P18, P20, and P21 asserted that autonomy was crucial, as well as being self-responsible. P21 also stressed that "instead of aimlessly following others' suggestions, we should ask ourselves what we really like." P18 shared how strong interest and clear objective had sustained her motivation as well: "I wanted to go to BFSU when I just entered high school. With that goal in mind, I would then ask for others' ideas."

4.2.5 University factors

University reputation

University reputation has a prominent impact on students' choices, particularly in the context of Chinese higher education. Other than the institutions' global rankings, whether the universities belong to "Project 211/985" is more important for Chinese students. A probable reason for this may be the generally poor performance of Chinese HEIs in world university rankings, with exception of a few top-tier universities. While global and national ranking systems might be "inherently flawed" due to their underrepresentation of individual's special needs and specific contexts (Espeland and Sauder, 2007; Shahjahan et al., 2017), the significance attached to universities' reputation by *baosong* students is notable. P1 described the stratification among HEIs in China: "Tier one includes Tsinghua University and Peking University, undoubtedly; tier two involves Fudan University (FDU), Shanghai Jiaotong University, Nanjing University, Zhejiang University, and University of Science and Technology of China (USTC); tier three are other local universities such as Wuhan University (WHU), Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU), and Nankai University (NKU); and the rest belongs to tier four." In this hierarchy, Tsinghua University and Peking University represent the highest level of academic reputation, widely regarded as the most prestigious institutions in China. The second tier comprises high-level

institutions that are also highly respected, though not to the same extent as the top two. Tier three institutions, while perhaps not as nationally renowned, enjoy strong reputations within their respective regions. The lowest-tier institutions are generally less competitive and have a more limited reputation.

The pursuit of admission to top universities is arguably natural for most Chinese students, even if some majors of these universities may not be as good as those offered by other HEIs that specialize in foreign language education. “If I get an offer from Peking University or Tsinghua University, there’s no reason that I will choose others.” (P18) The allure of being associated with a prestigious institution often outweighs the consideration of individual major choices. Because compared with universities known for foreign languages, the elite comprehensive HEIs enjoy overall higher-quality education and more abundant resources that can better facilitate students’ over-all development.

After deciding on their preferred institutions, students then consider the rankings of specific language majors within those universities. An example of this is the French major at Wuhan University, which P1 described as “a distinct major in an elite university”. On the contrary, Xi’an Jiaotong University, although renowned for its strengths in natural sciences, is not a popular choice among many *baosong* students (P6).

Locations

The geographical location of a university directly affect the living costs and quality of university students (Delaney, 1998). Some informants in this study prioritized cities before the HEIs and majors.

Most participants in this research expressed a strong preference for major cities (n=16, 76%), particularly Beijing and Shanghai, which are respectively China’s political and economic centers. One reason is that universities in these cities generally offer superior facilities and higher teaching quality. Moreover, HEIs hubs with various activities within these cities are considered beneficial for students’ all-round development (P9). For example, Haidian District in Beijing, mentioned by P9, hosts many prestigious universities like THU and PKU. Students studying within this area can easily establish connections with outstanding peers from across the country and abroad.

For another, these international metropolis, where a large number of multinational companies and high-tech enterprises are located, provide students with abundant internship and employment opportunities. Some cities are popular among prospect collegians for their industrial characteristics, such as Shenzhen, known for technology giant,s and Shanghai, known for financial firms. By contrary, some other inner-land cities with fewer opportunities tend to be less attractive to *baosong* students. According to P1, “Last year, there were 78 *baosong* students from my high school, 70 of whom went to Beijing and Shanghai.”

In addition, municipals also provided richer social and cultural experiences. Owing to its high transportation accessibility, students could conveniently participate in extracurricular activities and entertainment activities. P18 from western part of China posited that multicultural experiences in costal cities could significantly broaden her horizons. P4 specifically described the rich cultural experience in Shanghai: “There are many comic exhibitions and cafes, which should be fun.” Some students’ emotional attachment to certain cities also influenced their choices. For example, P3 and P10 from northern part of China said that they naturally bear a special attachment to the capital city, and this connection drove them to choose universities in Beijing.

In line with Mullen’s conclusions (2014), mixed are the findings regarding how proximity from universities to home. On the one hand, some students chose universities close to home because of emotional attachment and living habits. For example, P3’s preference for northern cities drove him to choose universities within this region. According to him, the preference for familiar environments may stem from past living experiences: “I lived in Beijing for several years when I was little and I really want to go back.” (P10) On the other hand, many students preferred universities in cities far away from home to seek new experiences and opportunities (P2, P5, P9) They believed that in this way they could grow more independent and self-reliant. The natural environment and climate of the city are important as well. Cities with more favorable climate are popular destinations. For instance, P9 favored northern cities with heating over humid and cold southern cities. In the meantime, some interviewees expressed their preference against particular cities for several reasons, including the low convenience of universities located in suburbs (P4),

unsatisfactory living quality due to a lack of heating facilities during winters, and issues with pests (P9).

One exception was P14, who did not initially consider location as a factor in her decision-making process but later realized that all of the universities chosen were located in either Beijing or Shanghai.

Available majors and course design

The availability of options directly influences students' decisions. When there are only limited major options, students may have to prioritize universities over their preferred language majors, and end up choosing a major that was not their first choice. For example, P6 and P7 chose Japanese because it was the only option offered by their target university.

Another key factor is programme offerings. Interdisciplinary programmes have become particularly popular nowadays in China, as they provide prospective students with a wider range of choices. One example of this is the dual-degree experimental class at Wuhan University. At the same time, however, some students expressed their concerns about such newly established majors. For instance, P1 was worried that these programmes would take up much time and could be very immature at current stage. In addition, while the dual-degree policy theoretically provides students with more learning opportunities, the difficulties and pressure demotivate some students from choosing them (P2). Despite these concerns, given the increasing market demands for interdisciplinary talents, double-major programmes and various minors could serve as a form of “double insurance” (P11) to increase students' employability. However, students' choices can sometimes be constrained by the subjects they studied in high school. P6 noted that “all majors in Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) are open to all language-major students to choose freely. But I can't study fields relevant to physics because I chose liberal arts back in high school.”

Some informants attached great importance to interdisciplinary learning opportunities and the universities' distinctive disciplines. For example, the course design at SJTU attracted some *baosong* students because of its uniqueness: “In a course called Speech Pathology, we will use some experimental equipment in the laboratory, for example, to listen to people speaking, or to observe their mouths moving, which is quite interesting ... and I don't think we can do this in other

universities.” (P4) The up-to-dateness and practical application of course contents also appealed to many *baosong* students: “many AI-related topics have been incorporated in our major, which I think may be conducive in the contemporary era.” (P6)

Pre-university courses are also important. This year, universities like Nankai University, Wuhan University, and Shandong University (SDU) offered online courses to *baosong* students before they made their final decisions. Teachers of different languages took turns lecturing (P1, P6), introducing some basic knowledge of the language and its associated culture. These sessions provided students with a glimpse of their upcoming university studies, helping them to better understand their future academic paths.

Admission campaigns

Especially pertinent are the university admission campaigns. By disseminating information and building connections with students and their parents, these activities contribute to enhancing students’ knowledge about and interest in the university.

Admission seminars serve as the primary role for universities to attract prospective *baosong* students, when most universities present detailed information about their faculties, curriculum systems, exchange opportunities, and employment prospects. University representatives are crucial as well, as they directly shape students’ impressions of the HEIs. For example, P19 noted that, professors from SISU, by sharing their personal experiences and learning methods, sparked his interest in applying to the university. Similarly, the gentle and welcoming vice president from Fudan University successfully drew the attention of many students who had not originally considered FDU (P15). The meticulousness and care shown by representatives can leave a lasting positive impression on *baosong* students. One example is the administrator from SJTU, who showed great patience throughout her interactions with students and their parents, even inviting them to teahouses outside of school to answer their questions (P12, P6). On the contrary, unprofessional conduct during the seminars can significantly damage a university’s image and attractiveness. For example, some university representatives were vague about the number of admissions, which led students to quickly question the credibility of their publicity (P12). At the same time, some informants asserted that the admission campaigns did

not influence their decisions. This group of *baosong* students typically had clear objectives and were less susceptible to the influence of promotional efforts by universities. Their decisions were primarily guided by predefined goals, rather than external marketing or admissions strategies. This suggests that admission campaigns can have a greater impact on students who are still uncertain about their choices.

Promotional materials also played a significant role in shaping universities' public images and attracting prospective *baosong* students. For example, photos and videos posted by universities on social media (P10) and souvenirs distributed during admission seminars (P21) were found to be useful in creating a favorable impression. Besides, interactions between universities and foreign languages schools further contributed to students' perceptions of the universities. As P9 recounted, she became determined to apply for the English major at BFSU after its President delivered a lecture about the necessity of learning foreign languages in the era of AI at her high school. This engagement enabled her to have a deeper understanding of the universities at an early stage and cultivated a stronger sense of connection with the university.

Entry requirements and exam schedules

Except for subjective preferences, objective entry requirements such as admission quotas, exam difficulty, and format are must-consider factors for *baosong* students.

The impact of admission quotas on students' choices is obvious. Some top universities have very high benchmarks for students' academic performance in high schools. P1's high school was given only 6 places, and these places were only available to the top 20 students in her school. As a result, many students gave up applications to this university. Perceived difficulty of exams also affect students' choices in a prominent way. To enhance the likelihood of getting admitted to distinctive majors in prestigious universities, a large percentage of interviewees gave up universities that examined their weak subjects but prioritized those testing subjects they were better at (n=13, 62%). For example, students good at Chinese and English would choose universities that have lower requirements for Mathematics. Likewise, some students would choose LOTE majors at Peking University to increase their chances of admission even if they were not very interested in these languages. To

enhance recruitment potential, some HEIs may choose to lower their entry requirements. However, high entry requirements can contribute positively to students' perception of the institution's status and quality. This was partially the reason why many *baosong* students involved in this study had referred to the *gaokao* entry requirements when selecting their target universities. Hence, "a low requirement could act as a disincentive" (Anderson, 1999, p.130). Consequently, HEIs need to ensure that they attract a diverse applicant pool without compromising their perceived prestige and academic standards.

The exam schedules as well as the timing of releasing results are additional factors influencing *baosong* students' decisions, though they might not be the most decisive. To attract *baosong* students, universities, especially those of similar prestige, usually schedule their exams on the same day. For example, exams of BFSU, SISU, and CFAU, three prestigious foreign languages universities, have been on the same date for years. This scheduling conflict can force *baosong* students to make difficult choices, as they might have to travel between cities to take exams, potentially causing them to give up some preferred universities. In addition, if some universities schedule their exams later in the admission cycle, students who have already received offers from earlier institutions might choose not to attend those exams.

University atmosphere and living conditions

What students also considered is the universities' academic atmosphere. Universities known for a strong literary culture, such as WHU, attracted students with passion for liberal arts (P1, P2, P8). Institutions like TJU, on the other hand, characterized by their academic rigor and strict management, appealed to students who sought to improve their self-discipline and preferred a disciplined learning environment (P8).

Some students placed special focus on the university's historical background. For example, the history of SJTU, an institution established during the Second Sino-Japanese War, enhanced its appeal for *baosong* students interested in historical significance (P4). Similarly, TJU, with close ties with Germany, attracted students who were interested in relevant history (P8). In comparison, findings about how living conditions had influenced students' decision-making were mixed. Part of the interviewees regarded the overall campus environment, teaching facilities, dormitory

conditions, and canteen conditions as important factors that decided the quality of life in the next four years. Albeit not decisive, these aspects were normally viewed as “icing on the cake” (P15). First-hand experience of visiting the campus in person had a notable impact on students’ impression of the university. For example, after visiting TJU, P11 acknowledged he was deeply impressed by “the decoration and atmosphere of the university”, especially when he saw “students reading on the lawn”. Similarly, SJTU’s modern classrooms and dormitories reinforced some students’ intention to apply (P6, P12). NKU with relatively older facilities, in comparison, discouraged some prospective *baosong* students (P10).

However, not all students took facilities as a primary consideration. A small number of students had only basic requirements for accommodation and canteen (n=4, 19%), who attached most significance to the teaching quality. Some did not consider living conditions until they took exams on-campus and realized that some universities were different from what they had imagined (P13). In addition, some students said that they were willing to accept less favorable living conditions if the university was their top choice (P18).

Costs

This study contradicts the prevailing assumption of the major role of costs for would-be collegians. It was found that tuition fees had varying degrees of influence on Chinese *baosong* students’ choices. Most interviewees did not consider tuition fees as a significant factor (n=16, 76%), with some explicitly saying that they realized the existence of tuition fees the moment when they were asked about it during the interviews (P2, P10). According to the informants, one possible reason might be the generally affordable tuition at most public universities in China (P18, P13). Even the relatively expensive joint programs specifically mentioned by some interviewees are still “acceptable” for some students (P16).

Scholarships also played a role. For example, some students chose WHU because of the Leijun Scholarship worth 100,000 yuan per person (P8), but it was uncertain whether this finding applies to all students who chose this university.

Students also pay additional attention to the costs of exchange programs overseas provided by the universities. For example, the dual degree in rocket engineering and Russian at Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT), which promised to

cover students' living expenses and tuition abroad, was especially appealing to some interviewees (P11, P12).

Overall, tuition fees and financial aid were more of a bonus rather than a primary decision-making factors for *baosong* students in this research, especially for students from more affluent families.

4.2.6 Contextual influences

Socio-political factors

The socioeconomic context of contemporary China, with increasing emphasis on enhancing international communication and cooperation, has driven *baosong* students' attention to less commonly taught languages like LOTEs. The Belt and Road Initiatives, as cited by many interviewees (n=17, 81%), was a key factor influencing their choice of majoring in LOTEs. More than half of the interviewees believed that the newly reformed *baosong* policy was a clear signal of the country's intent to address the needs of the increasingly globalized world. According to P13, compared to English-speaking graduates, it is "students specialized in LOTEs and interdisciplinary talents that are in more urgent need nowadays." Both P17 and P18 agreed that the reason for reforming *baosong* policies was to comply with the BRI. P2, P9, P10, and P11 further explained that the latest policy was designed to facilitate communication and strengthen multilateral ties between China and non-English-speaking countries.

However, this study noticed a mismatch between the policy objectives and the policy outcomes. Other than devoting to the diplomatic arena, some students took *baosong* as a springboard, on which they could jump to other majors in prestigious universities and secure a well-paid job after graduation. This discrepancy, to some extent, may have contributed to the reform of *baosong* regulations. Another reason for the reform was MOE's aim to enhance educational equity, as presumed by the interviewees, by reducing the number of institutions with English majors available, as well as the total quotas of *baosong* students (P4, P12, P16). In this way, more *gaokao* students with a passion for language learning could have more options to choose from.

Baosong policy reforms

Foreign language schools, as the actual implementors of the *baosong* regulations, made timely adjustments according to the recent reforms. One of the most striking changes was the overall declining quotas for *baosong* students. P1 observed that his high school used to allocate most places to English majors, but this year saw a dramatic shift: “The ratio between English and LOTEs students became nearly 3:1.” The steep reduction has led to severer competition for the limited number of English majors slots (P1, P18). Both P7 and P8 argued that this was mainly because of the decreasing national demands for English majors, given the saturation of English speakers in the job market. Against this backdrop, proficiency in English is now considered as a basic requirement rather than a competitive advantage, reinforcing the necessity of mastering LOTEs for those aiming to stand out (P10, P13).

4.2.7 Technical factors

Some participants described the Internet as a “double-edged sword” during their decision-making process. On the one hand, it enables students to make more informed choices by obtaining a wealth of information about the universities. For example, P19 benefited from online resources to learn about her target university’s curriculum, campus environments, and career prospects for graduates. Similarly, P11 said that the Internet greatly contributed to her knowledge of the graduation requirements and course schedules of the universities. Others also agreed that, overall, the Internet had expanded their access to much more information (P6, P17).

Online channels commonly used by students to obtain information identified in this research can be categorized into three types according to their different functions, namely search engines, official websites, and social media. Search engines were mainly used by *baosong* students to search for basic information about the HEIs, such as their rankings, locations, entrance requirements, and relevant news reports at the initial stage. Then, students usually turned to official websites and official accounts of the institutions for more detailed and authoritative information, including enrollment procedures, curriculum schedules, academic activities, and so forth. Compared with information gained through search engines, official platforms were more authoritative and were one of the primary sources for *baosong* students’ initial selections. Another major source of information mentioned by the respondents was

the accounts on the WeChat application. Although some of these accounts were run by individuals, information provided by these accounts was surprisingly timely. After admitted their applications and reached the last “choice” phase, students turned to social media, mainly Zhihu (similar to Quora), Xiaohongshu (similar to Reddit), and Weibo (similar to Twitter), to find at-college students’ real-time feedback about the universities, which was often more candid. Nonetheless, information accessed from these channels might be misleading sometimes. P8 and P12 said they were skeptical about the authenticity of the information on such platforms due to the anonymity and lack of accountability. Moreover, the Internet served as a means of entertainment, alleviating pressures for *baosong* students from time to time.

On the other hand, the Internet also exerted some negative impacts on students’ decision-making process. The overwhelming information available online sometimes might cause confusion and stress. For example, P6 mentioned that key opinion leaders (KOLs) frequently criticized foreign language majors, which led to widespread misunderstanding and negative perceptions of the majors. This, in turn, directly affects the reputation of the universities involved and subconsciously hampers some *baosong* students’ confidence and determination in their choices.

CHAPTER 5: DISSCUSSIONS

Baosong students went through two main decision-making processes: selecting between *baosong* and *gaokao* pathways, and choosing specific universities and majors. University and major choices were made simultaneously because students’ decisions were not a linear progression, but followed an upward spiral trajectory, where they continuously adjusted and optimized their choices.

The empirical study revealed that a large proportion of respondents chose the *baosong* pathway due to factors such as the intensifying competition of *gaokao*, the longer vacation, and the higher likelihood of being admitted to universities otherwise out of their reach through *gaokao*. Only a very small number of participants were driven by a genuine passion for foreign languages. It is therefore easy to understand why many informants would choose non-foreign language majors if they took the the

other pathway. This study also found that many *baosong* students tend to prioritize universities over foreign language majors. In other words, they usually consider specific majors after they decide on their target universities. This finding suggests a predominantly utilitarian approach to language learning among *baosong* students, focusing more on practical outcomes and university prestige rather than intrinsic interest in the languages themselves. However, we would love to share Yu's (2010) opinion that "languages are both instrumental and humanistic" (p.14). Foreign language education should focus on both teaching of linguistic skills and cultivation of humanistic qualities. In addition, it is possible to say that admission into prestigious universities seems to overshadow the personal interests and aspirations of *baosong* students. Naturally, stratification was found in their list of target universities: from top choice to mid-range and safety schools. It is usually after the decisions about target universities that they start considering specific foreign language majors. *Baosong* students' reasons for choosing English or LOTEs were found to be different: while a few participants made their decisions out of a passion for the specific languages, some adopted a utilitarian approach, prioritizing the importance of getting admissions to target universities, future employability, and so forth.

Overall, throughout the decision-making process, *baosong* students were influenced by multiple factors, mainly including the individuals, surrounding people, high schools and universities, society, and technology. Firstly, personal factors included personal interest, learning experiences, academic performances, and extracurricular activities. Interests and hobbies serve as a significant role in driving *baosong* students' college major choices and sustaining their motivation. By choosing majors that fit with their personal traits, students are more likely to persist. Likewise, long-term goals concerning occupations and further education exert similar impacts by fueling students with motivation. Learning experiences and academic performances not only indicate their learning ability but also influence their future academic and professional choices. In addition, extracurricular activities further enhance students' skills and confidence by familiarizing them with the disciplines. Students' language views and the perception of languages play a role in the selection process as well. While the latter directly demonstrates characteristics of the L2 to the learners, the former indirectly influences *baosong* students' perception of the role of

language in society. All of these have influence on their understanding of studying, intrinsic motivation, and learning efficacy (Fricke et al., 2018; Jin, 2020).

Secondly, when choosing a major, students are prominently influenced by the opinions and advice of surrounding people, with teachers and parents serving as the primary sources of guidance (Anderson, 1999). Additionally, peers, friends, alumni, and counselors at cram schools contribute to *baosong* students' decision-making process as well. Yet this paper found that surrounding people only have limited impacts and do not play a decisive role in students' final decisions, especially for those with clear objectives. The influence can vary significantly depending on parenting styles. Nonetheless, during the information-gathering stage, parents - especially mothers (Simpson, 2003) - friends, peers, and alumni provide not only suggestions and experiences but also comfort and support (Mullen, 2014). In comparison, university factors were much more prominent, since the reputations, locations, major and programme offerings, exam difficulties, facilities and atmosphere, and costs are crucial factors to consider.

Furthermore, the seemingly individual choice of a university and a field of study is deeply rooted in societal contexts (Ma, 2011), and *baosong* students as agentic subjects interact with the multi-layered and dynamic contexts (Thompson, 2017; Ushioda, 2009, 2020; Henry, 2020). Therefore, socio-political factors, *baosong* policy changes, economic factors, and regional disparities collectively influence their college and major choices. China's diplomatic strategies and according policy adjustments directly affect *baosong* students' and their parents' preferences for language majors. As a result, many students will make decisions that better adapt to the demands of contemporary society for foreign language talents.

Finally, as students are self-motivated to seek information (Freeman, 2005), online platforms with different functions offer diversified access to information. Notably, information from various sources is crucial for the applicants, yet information is not equally accessible and fully credible, and students can be constrained by limited access to information and inadequate resources (Jackson, 1982).

We can safely conclude that *baosong* students have considered a wide array of factors in their decision-making process. Generally, they tend to place more emphasis

on universities rather than on specific language majors, although they often have more autonomy in the latter, given the aspirations of their parents and the objective entry requirements of the institutions. The Ideal L2 Self was found to be particularly significant during the predisposition stage, when students formed their first impressions of different universities and majors. During the information-gathering stage, when students constantly weighed the risks and benefits, the influence of the Ought-to L2 Self became increasingly apparent. Because during that phase, students may face the dilemma of choosing a major they are genuinely interested in or a more “secure” major preferred by their parents. As suggested in Yang’s (2021) research, high school students in China generally have insufficient understanding of their interests, future academic and occupational objectives. Consequently, given the increasingly competitive job market in China, many *baosong* students, as well as their parents, wish to enhance their overall employment likelihood by choosing majors that are in high demand in the job market. However, when the Ideal L2 Self conflicts with the Ought-to L2 Self, not all students obey the external aspirations and pressures. Their self-awareness plays a more decisive role. In other words, *baosong* students with clear objectives tend to be more determined and less prone to aimlessly follow others’ footprints. Additionally, the constantly changing job market and the unpredictability of the prospects for foreign language majors are worth mention, as they require *baosong* students to be more cautious when making decisions, which also implies many *baosong* students’ perception of education as an investment.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of findings

This study tries to explore Chinese *baosong* students’ college and major choices, by using L2MSS and three-phase decision models that have been found relevant in the literature. In line with some recent literature, students in this research went through the three stages of “predisposition”, “search”, and “choice”, with each stage being influenced by a wide variety of factors. These influencing factors, respectively as Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and learning experiences, bear

different weights at different stages, with the former two exerting more paramount impacts. *Baosong* students' Ideal L2 Self may motivate them to choose majors that are more challenging, whereas Ought-to L2 Self may drive them to make more secure decisions. In particular, in the phases of "predisposition" and "search", the relationship between Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self can be synergistic or contradictory. While some of them tend to be more conservative and choose the safer options, some others stick to their ideal selves. It is worth reiterating that when the Ought-to L2 Self and Ideal L2 Self are in conflict, the students' final decision is often a compromise balancing both ends. This process might be influenced by their personalities, parenting styles, and so forth. Moreover, it is found that *baosong* students' well-established goals and awareness could be one of the most robust motives in their decision-making process.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of not only focusing on *baosong* students' intrinsic motivations but also considering the influence of external factors in their decision-making process.

6.2 Contributions of the study

This study's contributions are twofold. Theoretically, it extends the conceptualization of L2MSS by unpacking the processes of Chinese *baosong* students' selection of colleges and foreign language majors. It was found that the choice of languages by *baosong* students was not only driven by their personal interests and career aspirations (Ideal L2 Self), but also by familial and social expectations (Ought-to L2 Self). Some students chose less commonly-taught LOTEs as undergraduate majors considering their occupational goals, hoping to gain a competitive edge in the globalizing world; while others chose English or more widely-used LOTEs as a safe and secure option with consideration of efforts made and expectations to learn other fields. The complexity and dynamics of these motivations confirm the universal applicability of the L2MSS theory in explaining students' motivations for foreign language learning in a non-Western context. In addition, this study enriches related research by focusing on the special group of *baosong* students in China. Furthermore, it lends support to previous literature by validating the influencing factors on students' decisions of colleges and majors.

In a practical sense, the findings of this research intend to offer implications for students and their parents, high school teachers and counselors at cram schools, institutional administrators, and HE policymakers. First, for students and parents, this study provides a more comprehensive perspective to understand *baosong* students' decision-making process, which can be influenced by a wide range of factors, including personal interests, career goals, familial expectations, policy reforms, and the Internet. Recognition of all these factors can help prospective *baosong* students make more informed decisions. Second, for teachers at schools and counselors, who play a vital role in offering guidance and suggestions, should pay more attention to students' personal traits and overall development, rather than merely pursuing for top-tier universities with high reputation. In addition, HEIs should strengthen communication and cooperation with foreign languages high schools in a more frequent and innovative manner to build connections with prospective *baosong* students and to fulfill their needs for all-round development by refining the programmes offered. Finally, for policymakers, this study unravels some problems in the implementation of the newly-reformed *baosong* regulations. A mismatch between the policy intents and the actual results was identified: while the reform originally aimed to cultivate multilingual and interdisciplinary talents, a notable proportion of students took *baosong* as a stepping stone to enter prestigious universities, compromising the importance of language majors. To address the discrepancy, more measures ensuring the policy's effectiveness should be taken into practice.

6.3 Strengths and limitations

The strength of this study lies in its relatively comprehensive and in-depth exploration of *baosong* students' college and major choices. Through interviews, the study captures the complex and detailed experiences and perspectives of this cohort, revealing a multitude of drivers that *baosong* students faced when making decisions. Second, narratives in this study followed a clear structure, using the L2MSS theory and Hossler and Gallagher's decision-making model. In addition, the study enriches the existing empirical studies related to students' decision-making in a non-Western context by paying special attention to the *baosong* cohort in China's educational systems. In the meantime, this study has some shortcomings. To begin with, the

relatively small sample size may have limited the generalizability of the findings, and the purposeful sampling strategy may have led to a certain degree of selection bias, making some important views or experiences underrepresented. In particular, the uneven gender distribution of participants in this study may have rendered the influence of gender factors under-explored. Besides, although the qualitative methodology used in the study provided deep insights of informants' personal experiences, they have limitations in terms of data generalizability. In addition, qualitative data can be subjective, as the analysis and interpretation of interview data may not be completely free from my bias. Furthermore, this research only provides a static picture and does not demonstrate the dynamic changes in students' choices over a longer time span, for example, after they entered universities and even in their post-graduate stage.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Considering the aforementioned shortcomings, several recommendations for future research are as follows. First, longitudinal study and comparative studies can be designed to explore this topic. Because the longitudinal study can reveal the dynamic nature of students' growth by revealing the consistent changes in their motivations and choices during different stages, and examine how these changes impact their learning efficacy over time. By comparing similar and different motivations of students choosing language majors in different countries, the role of different cultural contexts can be explored. In terms of the research method, future research could adopt quantitative approaches to complement the qualitative findings in this study by using large-scale questionnaires, which can contribute to higher representativeness and wider applicability of results. Additionally, follow-up interviews or questionnaires with participants could provide nuances of specific experiences of *baosong* students upon and after entering universities. This can reveal specific challenges that *baosong* students face in university life. In addition, future studies can enlarge the sample size by including more stakeholders. Apart from *baosong* students, studies can also include students who did not choose *baosong* pathway, students who did not choose language majors, their parents, teachers at high schools, university administrators, and policymakers, whose perspectives can provide a multidimensional understanding of

students' educational choices and relevant policies. Finally, additional attention can also be placed on students with more diverse backgrounds, for example, ethnic minority, *baosong* students from rural areas or raised in bilingual families, whose experiences may differ from those of the mainstream *baosong* cohort because of specific cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors. Likewise, students in underrepresented settings including non-elite colleges, and primary and secondary schools can contribute to addressing educational inequality, further enhancing the breadth and depth of discussions.

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APPENDICES A: INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION

List of Interviewees

Participants	Gender	Group No.*	Time of Interview
P1	Male	2	April 8
P2	Female	2	March 26
P3	Female	2	April 9
P4	Female	1	April 11
P5	Female	1	April 13
P6	Female	2	April 10
P7	Female	2	April 19
P8	Female	2	April 14
P9	Female	1	April 11
P10	Male	2	April 13
P11	Male	1	April 13
P12	Female	2	April 12
P13	Female	1	April 9
P14	Female	1	April 10
P15	Female	1	April 23
P16	Female	1	April 12
P17	Female	1	April 23
P18	Female	2	April 23
P19	Male	2	April 23
P20	Female	2	April 19
P21	Female	2	April 18

Group No. 1: East China

Guangdong Experimental Foreign Language School (Guangdong)
 Hangzhou Foreign Languages School (Zhejiang)
 Jinan Foreign Language School (Shandong)
 Nanjing Foreign Language School (Jiangsu)
 Shanghai Foreign Language School (Shanghai)
 Shenzhen Foreign Languages School (Guangdong)
 Shijiazhuang Foreign Language Education Group (Hebei)
 Tianjin Foreign Languages School (Tianjin)
 Xiamen Foreign Language School (Fujian)

Group No. 2: Middle and West China

Changchun Foreign Languages School (Jilin)
 Chengdu Foreign Languages School (Sichuan)
 Chongqing Foreign Language School (Chongqing)
 Nanchang Foreign Language School (Jiangxi)

Taiyuan Foreign Languages School (Shanxi)
Wuhan Foreign Languages School (Hubei)
Zhengzhou Foreign Languages School (Henan)

Recruitment Materials

Recruitment poster (on English social media)

I am looking for volunteers, aged 18 and above, to share their experience as *baosong* students. You are invited to participate in a 60-minute online interview. You would be asked to share your decision-making process while choosing a foreign language major as well as your insights regarding the *baosong* system in China.

You have the right to withdraw any information you have provided by informing me without giving a reason before 31 July 2024. You also have the right to choose whether to have your name affiliated with the information you contribute. If so, any information provided by you will be anonymized with a pseudonym. All information obtained during the research will be destroyed once the dissertation is submitted to the University of Oxford in August 2024.

If you are interested and would like more information please contact xxx at the Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY, Oxford on xxx. There is no obligation to take part.

Thank you!

Recruitment post (on Chinese social media)

大家好! 我正在为我在牛津大学的硕士研究论文招募受访者。我的毕业论文想要探究影响 2024 届中国外语保送生专业选择的因素。采访大约持续 40-60 分钟, 形式为线上, 全程使用中文。受访者的个人信息会被严格保密。欢迎有兴趣的同学私信我了解更多细节!

APPENDICES B: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Informed Consent

Oral Consent Script (Chinese)

非常感谢你参与我的访谈。在开始之前我想先给你介绍一下我这个项目的大概情况。这是我的硕士毕业论文，是一个实证研究，主要想探索一下有哪些因素影响到了 2024 届保送生的院校和专业选择，因为今年是教育部新保送政策实施的第一届。如果访谈期间有任何你不想回答的问题，你随时可以暂停或者退出这个访谈。我还请想问一下我能不能对我们的访谈进行一个录音？主要用于之后在转写成文字稿时比较方便听，但是所有录音都会被妥善保存，不会发给任何人。数据转写完成后这个文件会被立刻删除。

CUREC Approval from the University of Oxford, UK

Dear Luyao,

Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_24_109

Research title: Factors Influencing Baosong Students' Foreign Language Major Choice in China

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 application.

Please ensure that you state the research ethics reference on relevant supporting documentation, for example, consent forms and participant information.

Good luck with your research.

Best wishes

Dr Ian Thompson

Associate Professor of English Education

Co-PI: Excluded Lives: The Political Economies of School Exclusion

Department of Education, University of Oxford

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY



APPENDICES C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

***Baosong Policies* 保送制度**

1. How did you first learn about the *baosong*?
最初你是如何了解到保送制度的?
2. How long have you been studying English/LOTES?
你学习英语/外语多少年了?
3. When did you decide to take *baosong* pathway?
你是什么时候决定走保送这条路的?
4. Why did you choose *baosong* pathway? Why do you want to learn foreign languages as undergraduate major?
为什么选择保送这条路? 为什么想学习外语?
5. Which universities and language majors did you apply for?
保送报考了哪些学校的哪些专业?
6. Which universities and language majors did you finally choose?
最后选择去哪个学校的哪个专业?
7. Was this your first choice?
这是你的第一志愿吗?
8. If you choose to take national *gaokao*, will you still choose this university/foreign language major?
如果你去高考的话, 还会选择这个院校吗/外语专业吗?
9. Do you know the latest *baosong* policy issued by the Ministry of Education? How did you learn about it?
你了解教育部最新的保送政策吗? 你是从什么渠道了解到的?
10. What did your high school select *baosong* students?
可以简单介绍一下你们高中保送生的选拔机制吗?
11. As far as you know, are there any changes concerning the selection mechanism of *baosong* students in your high school?
据你的了解, 近几年里, 你们学校的保送生名额和选拔机制有发生变化吗?
12. What do you think does the newly reformed *baosong* policy imply?
你认为新保送政策体现出一个什么大趋势?
13. Did the reform influence your choice of colleges and majors?
新保送政策对你的专业选择有影响吗?

***Surrounding People* 身边的人**

1. What do your parents think about your decisions?
你的家长对你的专业选择有什么看法?
2. Did other people around you (friends/classmates/alumni/teachers) influence your decisions?
你身边的其他人 (朋友/同学/学姐学长/老师) 对你的专业选择有影响吗?

***University Factors* 大学**

1. Did the admission seminars affect your college and major choices?
大学的宣讲对你的选择有影响吗?
2. Did the curriculum and program design of the university influence your choices? 大
大学的项目课程设置对你的选择有影响吗?
3. Did the exam (schedule, location, subjects involved, difficulty) influence your choices?
考试形式 (时间、地点、科目、难度) 对你的选择有影响吗?
4. Did the university's reputation influence your choices?
大学的声誉对你的专业选择有影响吗?

5. Which do you think is more important: major or university?
学科排名和院校排名, 你认为哪个更重要?
6. Did the geographical location of the university influence your choices?
大学的地理位置对你的选择有影响吗?
7. Did you visit the university before making your final decision?
最终决定之前有去参观学校吗?
8. Did campus facilities and accommodation conditions influence your choice?
校园设施、住宿条件、学生生活对你的选择有影响吗?
9. Did tuition fees/scholarships influence your choice?
学费/奖学金对你的选择有影响吗?

Personal Experiences 个人经历

1. Did your personality influence your choice of major?
你个人的性格对专业选择有影响吗?
2. Will you continue to major in English/LOTEs after graduating from undergraduate studies?
你本科毕业之后还会选择英语/外语专业吗?
3. Did your past experiences in learning foreign languages and extracurricular activities influence your choice?
你过去的外语学习经历、课外活动经历对你的选择有影响吗?

The Internet 互联网

Did the Internet influence your choice?
互联网对你的选择有影响吗?

Major Prospects 专业前景

1. What are your expectations or preliminary plans for the upcoming university life?
对即将到来的大学生活有什么设想或者初步计划吗?
2. Apart from the language major you chose, do you plan to learn another foreign language?
除了你选的这个专业语言外, 还打算再学一门外语吗?
3. Do you have any plans for this summer holiday?
保送后的这个假期还有什么计划和安排吗?

Others 其他

Anything else you'd love to share or add about this topic?
关于这个话题还有什么别的想分享或者补充的吗?