DEPOSIT AND CONSULTATION OF DISSERTATION

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

Please use block capitals

Surname LIANG
First names (in full) AIYI
Faculty board EDUCATION
Degree name and pathway MSC EDUCATION (DIGITAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE)
Title of dissertation The role of technology in the school to work transition of vocational students in China N.B. The title stated here must be precisely the same as that stated on the title page of the thesis submitted. **A candidate wishing to amend the title previously approved by the faculty must apply to the faculty board for permission to do so.**
Supervisor Niall Winters
Subject keywords *vocational education; technology; school to work transition*
Research methods used *Interview*

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Niall Winters, who supported and inspired me throughout the whole year. I appreciate the guidance and encouragement that helped me to complete my master dissertation.

I am also grateful to my study group members in Kellogg College, thank you for your love, encouragement and inspiration. You are always supporting me when I feel struggling, discussing and sharing insightful comments on the educational issue. To my family, your love and support makes me stay motivated.

In addition, this study would not have been possible to be completed without the participation of my interviewee. I would like to thank all of the participants who kindly share their time, experiences and opinions.

Content

Abstract

This dissertation examines the school to work transition of Chinese vocational students and how technology affects the transition. School-to-work transition is an important stage in an individual's career development and is influenced by different factors. Technology's role in school-to-work transition, however, remains under-researched, especially among vocational students at higher educational levels. In China the employability of vocational students has been subject to various changes over the last few decades, leading to the stigmatisation of social inferiority and difficulties finding employment. Examining how technology impacts this group, therefore, may be illuminating, as technology has the potential to decrease social inequalities and facilitate social mobility and inclusion by providing a variety of access to information and promoting social networks. More particularly, technology may be able to help Chinese vocational students during their transition experiences, which offers better job opportunities and achieve social upgrade. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, this study surveys 22 students and one teacher on technology and school-to-work transitions, with results suggesting that vocational students tend to have a smooth transition with the aid of technology. While technology does not play a key role when applying for jobs, it is an important source of job-related information, showing that it is possible for them to gain useful information for the job hunting from the technology but may not fundamentally alleviate the social injustice on the students. Overall, the dissertation makes a new contribution to studies on technology's contribution to school-to-work transitions in the Chinese context and vocational school employability.

Chapter 1 Introduction

With the Chinese government's recent push to enhance technical education, several policies and guidance measures related to vocational education have been passed over the last decade. In June 2021, a draft for the updated Vocational Education Law was published, clearly stating that a position of equality should be stressed between vocational students and their academically oriented peers in terms of education and employment. The draft resulted in a controversial debate among China's populace, with one social media group garnering over 900,000 page views. Many parents and students believe that this 'position of equality' means that the government wants half of all Chinese students to enter vocational schools, and are concerned for their children, as vocational schools are commonly considered to be of poor quality. There is some scholarly support for this view, which indicates that vocational school in China is socially disadvantaged and is frequently a place for students with poor academic performance and low socioeconomic status (Hansen and Woronov, 2013; Ling, 2014; Shi, 2013; Schulte, 2013; Wang and Guo, 2019; Wang, 2020). While these scholars have focused on vocational students' schooling experience (e.g., Wang and Guo, 2019) or labour market outcomes (e.g., Wang and Wang, 2020), little is known of transition experiences from education to employment, particularly during the job-hunting process. Since technology is now widely used during this process, with over 90% of Chinese graduates using apps to find a job (TalkingData, 2020), this dissertation examines the school-to-work transition of Chinese vocational students, with a focus on the role technology might play in bettering their socially disadvantaged position.

An examination into the transition experiences of vocational students and technology's role in facilitating this transition contributes to existing literature in at least three ways. First, research shows that an individual's School-To-Work Transition (hereafter STWT) is vital for their career

development and has long-term effects on students' subsequent career management and vocational futures (Koivisto, Vuori and Nykyri, 2007). Outlining the process of STWT in detail is therefore just as important as looking at this process's outcomes, but remains under-researched. Second, vocational students as a group are generally considered to be 'bad students' (Ling, 2015) in China, but this general heading does not account for their heterogeneous makeup and experiences, nor does it explain their particular stigma. Third, research on technology's role during STWT has generally been carried out in western contexts (e.g. Akkermans, J., Nykänen, M. and Vuori, J., 2015; Buechtemann, Schupp and Soloff, 1993; Lorentzen et al., 2019), so an inquiry into STWT in China should be considered. Given scholars' diverse views on technology's role in STWT, particularly among socially discriminated groups (Clayton and Macdonald, 2013; Lindsay, 2005; Wiescher 2021), this study will fill a research gap in this area while raising greater awareness of vocational students' marginalised experiences.

This dissertation begins by reviewing literature on STWT, reviewing the possible factors that influence this process and acknowledging its complexity. The background of vocational education in China is then presented, demonstrating how vocational students are frequently marginalised with the theories of credentialism and social closure. Literature on the advantages and limits of technology in aiding socially disadvantaged groups will also be considered. The study then adopts a qualitative research method to analyse the nuances between vocational students, using in-depth interviews with students from a vocational school in Southeast China to understand vocational students' STWT experiences. A teacher is also interviewed for this study, in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the STWT process.

Following this introduction, which states this study's research motivation, question and outline, Chapter 2 of this thesis explores relevant literature on STWT, vocational students in China and

technology as a tool for achieving social mobility and greater social inclusion. Drawing on the notion of the credentialed society and social closure theory, the position of vocational students in China will be examined and the mechanisms for understanding these students presented. Moreover, the possible roles that technology might play in aiding disadvantaged groups will also be discussed. Chapter 3 delineates this study's research question, methodology and overall research design, while also accounting for several study limitations and researcher positionality. Chapter 4 provides this study's findings, showcasing the themes identified from the collected qualitative data and comparing them with the relevant research literature. Chapter 5, this study's discussion section, reviews the key findings and explains its research findings. Finally, the dissertation concludes by summarising this research's overall endeavour, recommending paths for future study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter begins by defining school-to-work transition (STWT), its importance for career development and the factors influencing its process. The complexity of STWT calls for a thorough review of contextual factors, so the historical development of technical and vocational education in China and changes in vocational student employability will be discussed. The chapter will then outline the disadvantages vocational students face as they approach their STWT, drawing upon the notion of a credentialed society and social closure theory. This section will also address how institutional factors have eventually resulted in the stigmatisation of Chinese vocational students. Finally, technology's possible role as a tool for improving vocational students' STWT will be analysed.

2.1 School-to-Work Transition (STWT)

School-to-work transition (STWT) refers to the process in which a student leaves the formal education system and begins to participate in permanent, full-time employment. According to the International Labour Organization (2020), this transition is divided into three stages: transition not yet started, in transition and transited. The transition, however, is not linear (UNICEF, 2019), as people can transit back and forth between these stages, described as 'pendulum trajectory' by Jeria (2009, p.319); for instance, an individual who has graduated from school and entered the workforce may return to school afterwards, reactivating a transition after graduation, while there may also be students who work and study simultaneously. This transition focuses on an individual's first STWT, which has been found to be vital for both students and different social institutions. An individual's first STWT may be a significant change to their vocational identity, helping them achieve economic freedom and pass into adulthood (Blustein, 1997), while

universities and colleges may benefit from how well their students perform on the job market, reflecting their educational quality (Babarovic, Devic and Blazev, 2019; Falco and Steen, 2018).

Factors influencing STWT quality may be categorised into four groups: institutional, organisational, group and individual (Ng and Feldman, 2007). On an institutional level, extensive research has concentrated on economic and educational systems and policies impacting STWTs. Wolbers (2007) has compared graduating students' opinions on STWTs in 11 European countries and found that, with some variation, employment protection legislation and vocational specification influence individuals' performance on the labour market. Velden and Di Stasio (2014) focus on the link between European education systems' characteristics and 'education-to-job matching' (p.342) and argue that graduates in a highly stratified education system are more likely to find jobs as such a system contains clear levels of educational credentials. These researchers also found that job matching for vocational students was positively correlated to education systems with strong institutional links. In terms of organisation, research literature has focused on companies' recruiting processes and 'staffing strategies' (Ng and Feldman, 2007, p.120). Aiming to attract more applicants, companies tend to provide only positive information during their recruitment processes, which may result in a wide gap between applicant expectations and organisational reality (Thorsteinson et al., 2004 cited in Ng and Feldman, 2007). This incomplete provision may result in employee dissatisfaction or a high turnover rate following the STWT period (Hall and Wanous, 1981, cited in Ng and Feldman, 2007). Research on group factors has investigated both school and work contexts for STWT. Iannelli (2004), exploring the variation of these contexts between Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands, has revealed the limitations of schools' impact on this process (notably, the Irish case is notably the most complex, as not only do schools and individuals influence the transition but also religious and components unique to

the Irish system). Finally, individual factors such as personal traits, family support and vocational competence have attracted much discussion. Hu and Gan (2017) use structural equation modelling to suggest that students with "future-oriented coping"methods – that is, people whose thoughts and behaviours can successfully manage stressful, future-oriented situations – frequently have positive job-seeking outcomes (Hu and Gan, 2017). Kogan and Gebel (2013) have revealed the important benefits of personal contacts on STWT in Ukraine and Croatia, countries with mature market structures.

Overall, the landscape of STWT is complex (Pavlova, Lee, Maclean, 2017) because it is influenced by a variety of factors and varies according to context. It is important to situate this process within these contexts and for specific groups of students who will be involved in STWTs, so the next sections review the historical development of technical and vocational education in China and the changing employability of vocational students, providing background information about the education system. The status quo of Chinese vocational education will be described in terms of vocational education quality and graduate transition outcomes. Moreover, the rationale Chinese vocational students' disadvantaged position on the labour market will be analysed using the theories of social closure and credentialism.

2.2 Chinese Technical and Vocational Education

2.2.1 The History and Development of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) in China

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) in China has undergone a series of changes since its inception and continues to develop, frequently in response to students' different levels of

employability. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, TVE has undergone five key stages, the first of which lasted between 1949 to 1978 under the country's planned economy. Throughout the 1950s public-sector employment was high, and TVE was conducted in schools associated with factories or firms, while central and local governments established secondary technical and vocational schools to enhance the country's industrialisation process. In 1958, the country's supply of skilled workers was found to be insufficient, leading to the development of a new way of learning called 'working with studying'. First developed at the Tianjin Cotton National Factory to meet production demands, working with studying organised students' days with six hours of work and two hours of study, with a curriculum that included both theoretical and practical knowledge. Students were taught not only general information such as Chinese, mathematics, physics and chemistry, but also engineering and mechanical design, allowing them to engage in production work more efficiently. Following graduation, students were automatically allocated jobs that were valued for their decent pay, stability and long-term benefits (Ling, 2015). In the first stage, therefore, vocational education was mainly directed by industries and governments and could often result in positions of high social status, with students not overly concerned with their STWT.

The second key stage in Chinese TVE occurred between the 1970s and 1990s. Following China's 'Cultural Revolution' (1966-1976), which involved the closure of the vocational school sector (Wu and Ye, 2018), vocational schools were reopened in 1976. Two years later, China's 'Reform and Opening Up' period began, a critical period in Chinese history in which the state, setting economic development as a key national goal, promoted new levels of international trade. In this context, vocational schools were encouraged to train more skilled workers to support the Chinese economy, and in 1985 a comprehensive vocational education system was built from the secondary to higher

education levels, with emphasis on the former (Wu and Ye, 2018). This system sought to rectify the previous TVE system's underdevelopment and included the clarification of students' STWT, with clear options in students' educational progression made available: both secondary and high school graduates had the options of attending a general academy or a vocational counterpart. Moreover, secondary vocational school graduates could enter the job market without any higher educational qualification or, if unable to enter secondary vocational school, students could enter the workforce if they participated in short-term vocational training. Overall, this stage was marked by the government's concentration on vocational education's economic benefits and overall impact on the education sector, as well as its comprehensive reorganisation of the state's TVE system.

Stage three of TVE education in China, lasting from the 1990s to the early 2000s, saw the further regulation of Chinese vocational education and a shift in emphasis from the secondary to higher education level. In 1996, the Chinese government enacted the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Vocational Education*, which aimed to place vocational and general academic education on the same status level from a policy perspective. This law gave greater recognition to vocational credentials, increasing the education system's flexibility and providing details on how to transfer vocational to academic credentials. Also, the law offers incentives to industries sponsoring vocational education opportunities and cooperation with vocational schools. Moreover, in 1999 the 'massification' of Chinese higher education impacted the shift of TVE focus away from secondary toward higher education. Despite the changes, China's transformation from a planned to a market economy and educational massification dramatically changed the social status of TVE, as well as impacted students' career development. Since industries now had to adapt to market changes, the public sector that had provided TVE to citizens since the 1950s underwent a profound decline, with jobs no longer allocated to vocational students following graduation. Increased

participation in higher education, particularly in academically oriented universities, made vocational school a less popular option for students, and from 1998 to 2002 the number of high-school level vocational students underwent a 20% drop, from 58% to 38%, respectively (Qianzhan Database, 2022). The number of high-school level vocational education also decreased, from 10074 to 7402 (Qianzhan Database, 2022). In stage three of Chinese TVE, therefore, while vocational education was valued on the policy side, China's economic transformation reduced the expected returns, and therefore the appeal, of vocational learning.

Stage for of Chinese vocational education lasted from 2005 to 2010, when greater attention was given to TVE through a publicity campaign and government investments in improving vocational school quality. The first television advertisement for a vocational school, Shandong Lan Xiang Technician College, aired in China in 2006 to an audience of an estimated 1.4 billion citizens (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). The advertisement was highly memorable to the general public, featuring a prominent advertising slogan and a famous spokesman, Huang Bo. In 2008, TV advertisements for the vocational New East Cuisine School (in Chinese, *新东方烹饪学校*) also caught the attention of Chinese audiences, with catchy phrases that played upon China's socio-cultural tropes. One popular advertisement for the school depicted a mother discovering her daughter's new boyfriend was a chef, a choice approved of by the mother and others, suggesting that a career as a chef could provide a stable future and loving life partner. In terms of government policy, in 2006 the Ministries of Finance and Education initiated a scheme for the 'Construction of a Demonstrative National Model for Higher Vocational School', sponsoring 100 'model' vocational schools to act as benchmarks for the rest of the country to improve overall TVE quality. Soon, the Chinese public's ideas of vocational training and education began to shift, with the

impact of TV advertisements and government investment presenting TVE as both a key economic driver and holding potential for people's futures.

The current stage in TVE development, which has lasted from 2011 to the present, has seen an increase in the scale, quality and government support of vocational schools, but has also found vocational school graduates struggling with employability. In March 2019, the Government Annual Report stated that plans to increase vocational school student intake by one million, encouraging individuals from different sectors to participate in TVE. Moreover, the government vowed to ensure TVE sector quality by shutting down private-sector higher vocational schools that were underperforming or had low teaching quality. The Chinese government continued to change narratives around vocational schools, attempting to alter stereotypes toward vocational schools by presenting them as intimately linked to Chinese culture. The Ministry of Education has presented vocational students as the 'Craftsman of the Nations' (in Chinese *大国工匠*), promoting the idea that society should respect technicians and craftsmen as dedicated, meticulous and innovative workers. On Labour Day 2015 the China Media Group, directed by the Chinese government, aired documentaries on the 'Craftsmen of the Nations' composed of hardworking technicians who have practised their skills for years, becoming experts in their fields without formal education.

Still, while the government has taken considerable steps toward promoting TVE, vocational students still carry a stigma of inferiority next to their peers in higher academic universities (Wang and Guo, 2019; Wang, 2021). This stereotype seems to run counter to Chinese government efforts, as state policies have been key in developing TVE (Fan, 2020) while the country's economic development and increasing industrialisation has not directly impacted education. Instead, stereotypes of vocational education seem to stem from the employability of vocational school

graduates, their limited educational opportunities and lower socio-economic backgrounds (Benavot, 1983; Wang and Wang, 2022).

2.2.2 Current Vocational Education and Employment Outcomes in the Chinese Context

The current quality of Chinese vocational education tends to be low (Woronov, 2011), with poor curriculum design and weak industry links (Jing, Chung, and Gregory, 2022). In Xu and Zhang's (2020) empirical study analysing the curriculum design of early childhood education in 8 vocational schools in Western China - Chongqing, they found four issues including ambiguous learning goal of the curriculum, limited courses in the general education, segmented course delivery in the academic major, and wide gap between practical placement and course. The poor education quality might affect the acquisition of professional skills for students and weak industry links does not help students neatly fit with the practitioner in the work, influencing the STWT. In an assessment of Chinese vocational high school students' learning outcomes, internship experiences, school behaviour management and level of satisfaction, Yi et al. (2018) found that the vocational schools made minimal contributions to students' vocational or general skills. For example, nearly 70% of students claimed that their school's internship programmes lacked clear educational goals, leaving almost half of the students dissatisfied with the programme. Moreover, around 65% of students observed classroom misbehaviours such as cheating on tests. Over 60% of students were found to be unhappy with their upper secondary vocational school experience. While the studies were limited to several geographic locations in China (Chongqing and Henan Province), it is at least a partial reflection of vocational education quality.

While some scholars have studied vocational students in China (Glewwe, Huang and Park, 2017; Hawkins, 1976; Hung, Liao and Wang, 2021; Peng, 2020; Tian, 2016; Xu, Dempsey and Foreman, 2014; Ye, 2012), few have explicitly addressed the STWT experience of vocational graduates (Hao and Zhang, 2020; Wang and Wang, 2022; Zhou and Shu, 2009). Seeking macro-level explanations for delayed STWT in developing countries, Hao and Zhang (2020) found a causal relationship between China's massification of higher education in 1999 and delayed timing of technical college students' STWT. Notably, students from academically oriented four-year colleges were not affected by the expansion, indicating a substantial difference in the early adulthood experiences of technical college and academic university graduates. This difference partially comes from the low-quality instruction of technical colleges, an issue that worsened after massification, as well as existing social inequalities that plague the Chinese education system, which organises students according to social class beginning in childhood, thereby establishing structural disadvantages. Students who attend technical colleges and vocational schools tend to have less capital and fewer resources that might assist them in their STWT. Meanwhile, Wang and Wang (2022) have found poorer employment outcomes for Chinese vocational graduates than their academic counterparts in terms of income (a difference of around 30%), job type and job stability. The marginalised position for vocational graduates is therefore not determined by only one factor, but entangled within a series of elements related to Chinese technical and vocational education that must be addressed structurally. Zhou and Shu (2009) summarise the risks for vocational graduates during the process of looking for a job, the possible causes for these issues and offer policy implications and recommendations. Rather than analyse China's vocational education system internally, the above studies compare vocational schooling with the academic 'track' in order to demonstrate how vocational students are left at a disadvantage for STWT. This study will examine the vocational

student context by using theoretical framework - Social Closure Theory (Parkin, 1979) and credentialism to uncover the reasons for vocational students' marginalisation and stigmatisation. The following paragraph will examine these issues in terms of historical development, socio-cultural issues and policy implementation.

2.3 Social closure and credentialism: Vocational Students in the Chinese content

Social Closure and Credentialism

In general, the disadvantaged position of Chinese vocational students in the STWT can be explained by the social closure and credentialism. Originated from the conflictual idea in the field of sociology (Weber et al., 1978), social closure refers to the phenomenon of dominant groups in society monopolising opportunities and resources while closing off or restricting the access for other groups in order to maximise the rewards for dominant groups. Social closure helps to explain the domination and inequality in society. Also, it is considered as a way to 'conceptualise how power is derived from the process of exclusion' (Weber et al., 1978, p. 638). Conflicts between groups as the key to social closure results in a stratified society full of competing and conflicting individuals and groups. One of the key features of social closure is that it is dynamic as struggles for resources and opportunities are consistently happening. The dominant groups are always working on preserving their resources and opportunities by setting up theholds for the possession of the resources while the subordinate groups are also fighting for more access to resources and opportunities. It is possible that the subordinate groups 'usurp' the power from the dominant groups (Parkin, 1979). The form of closure can be in a variety of forms, including race, religion, language and social status.

Credentialism is one of the most popular forms perceived as a form of social closure that uses educational credentials to stratify individuals and groups or deny access to certain groups of people (Khalanyane, 2012). A 'credential society' , or a society characterised by the use of formal educational qualifications as its means of social mobility, which is a form of social closure. This society runs on two types of labour, one "productive" and the other "political", the former concerning the "material production of wealth" and the latter setting "the conditions under which the wealth is appropriated" (Collins, Cottom and Stevens, 2019, p.66). This distinction results in the stratification of social classes and occupations, as political labour is associated with a society's organisation (e.g., management, law enforcement) and therefore plays a dominant role over the working class and its productive labour (e.g., cloth production). Possession levels of cultural resources thus indicate an individual's social status, and opens greater opportunities for social mobility.

In a credential society, school is the formal social institution that produces cultural resources (Collins, Cottom and Stevens, 2019), although other informal sources of information exist in groups such as the family. Educational credentials are key indicators of an individual's educational attainments and a symbol of the cultural resources a student owns. Cultural production such as schooling has its own form of 'monetary currency', similar to that of the material market's, which reflects the value of the culture product and may be used as a means of exchange for facilitating the flow of cultural resources. Existing power structures continue to control and determine the allocation of cultural resources while individuals and families participate in positional conflict, securing privileged positions for themselves over others. School has become a key area for such social positioning, as well as a locus of social reproduction among dominant groups (Brooks, 2018); the free flow of cultural resources between working and dominant classes are less likely to occur.

Education, therefore, is used by certain groups of students and their families to secure privilege. The education system is a key function for powerful individuals to leverage their privilege by catching threats to their way of life early on and reacting with decisions that secure their own advantages. The Chinese vocational students have been experiencing social closure for a long time influenced by the idea of confucianism and the Empirical Examination in ancient China.

1) The Legacy of Confucianism

Confucian culture, which has had a long-lasting impact on Chinese society, connects types of knowledge with individuals' highly stratified social status, with people with practical vocational knowledge given an inferior position (Xiong, 2011). Confucianism considers learning to be the most important human task, as it is the only way to be a *junzi* (君子, "superior man"), the role model for Confucian society (Wang, 2022), and one's social status is influenced heavily by one's education. Valuable learning content in Confucianism comprises moral and ethical knowledge at the expense of practical skills or crafts; practices such as gardening are perceived as less important and only to be learned by 'small people' (小人), those who are directly opposed to *junzi*. As Confucius said, "a cultured [well-educated] man (*junzi*) is not a tool [i.e., a specialist, a tool used for a special purpose]" (Wang, 2022, p.6). These attitudes are still influential, with practical knowledge still positioned as lower in Chinese society to more abstract pursuits. Consequently, these influences extend even to Chinese TVE (Wang, 2022; Xiong, 2021).

In ancient China, one's social status, prestige and power was highly influenced by the Imperial Examination ('keju kaoshi', *科举考试* in Chinese), which was held in China for over 1,000 years,

from 681 CE to 1905. This examination system was implemented to select government officials and included several stages of assessment at the local, provincial and capital levels; beginning at the local level, those with the strongest marks on the exam would move to the next stage. This form of examination can be seen as establishing thresholds that promote social exclusion. While the examination's content changed over the centuries, it always stressed students' understanding of Confucian philosophy, classical literature and writing rather than specific skills (Wang, 2022). A student's particular qualities, such as Confucian virtues such as filial piety and justice, tested whether he could be considered a *junzi*, enter the government bureaucracy and join Imperial China's highest social class (the gentry class or 'literati', 士in Chinese). The Imperial Examination, therefore, was a distinct form of social mobility, as members of China's different classes – the peasantry (农), craftsmen and artisans (工) and merchants (商), from lowest to highest, respectively – could upgrade their standing by receiving a successful mark. Although the exam was only open to men, it would impact the whole family, as if the male student succeeded his whole family would gain a high reputation (Wang, 2022).

Additionally, there are many old and popular Chinese sayings emphasising the importance of learning and achieving success through the Imperial Examination. One 1,000-line poem from the Song dynasty includes the line:

'All things are inferior, only studying (or learning) is superior'

万般皆下品，唯有读书高。

This reflects the social prestige of officers who have excelled in their education, and how the officer class is the highest in Chinese society. Another saying, also from the Song dynasty, stresses the attractive benefits of joining the gentry through one's studies:

'In the book, there is a house of gold;

In the book, there is beauty'.

书中自有黄金屋，书中自有颜如玉。

The underlying meaning of the term 'book' in this saying is the material needed to pass the Imperial Examination, with the insinuation that, once one succeeds at the exam, one will gain wealth (i.e., gold) and beautiful women (i.e., beauty).

In sum, traditional Confucian society and its Imperial Examination consistently asserted the low position of practical work when compared to the educated for a thousand-year period (Wang, 2022). When compared with the gentry, the craftsman and artisan class has traditionally been held in low esteem, and this has begun to change recently. With greater demands for skilled workers in the Chinese economy (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 2021), China's central government is now trying to change social sentiment, creating more positive attitudes toward vocational education. However, the rooted Confucianism in Chinese culture still impose negative influences on the social status of vocational education (Xiong, 2011).

2) Increased Credentialism and Stratified Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Although social culture and socio-economic structure has witnessed enormous changes, the conflicted tradition remains and thus the social closure continues in Chinese society, influencing from education to employment. And credentialism as a form of social closure is prevalent. In a recent study on the northern Chinese city of Dalian, Kim, Brown and Fong (2016) found that high school students generally choose their majors motivated by credentialism, as opposed to personal interest or the desire to obtain certain knowledge or skills. Guan and Blair (2020), studying the motivations of Adult Higher Education (AHE) students, confirm the finding that credentialism prevails in China, with qualifications seen as allowing individuals to acquire further learning opportunities, high-level jobs and positions of power and influence.

China's massification of higher education in 1999 has been a key driver of the 'cultural market', legitimising and normalising participation in higher education and the attainment of school credentials. In June 1999, the Chinese government published an emergency notification calling for a transition from an 'elite' to 'mass' higher education system, calling for the expansion of the number of higher education students from 230,000 to nearly 340,000 individuals. That September there was a dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled at higher education institutions: 1.6 million, a 48% increase when compared with 1998 (1.08 million). By 2002 this number of students reached 3.2 million, with a gross enrolment rate of 15%, a high point in higher education massification (prior to 1999 gross enrolment had stood around 5%). Admissions rates also increased: in 2007 admission to higher education among students taking the National College Entrance Exam was around 50%, while in 2019 this had risen to 80%, with 7.9 million students. At academic universities, the most prestigious type of higher education institution, admitted students rose from 85.07% to 95.45%, respectively, between 2004 and 2014; these admissions

numbers are almost 40% higher than among four-year bachelor degrees in the United States, signalling that the number of graduates holding qualified credentials entering the job market in China is extremely high. As the number of graduates from academic universities increases, attending such universities to gain cultural resources in a credential society becomes a 'must-have' or 'preferable' option for middle- and upper-class families (Woronov, 2011). The transformation from elite to mass higher education system has increased the possibilities for everyone entering higher education, indicating that the subordinate groups are likely to usurp the power from the dominant group. Based on the conflicted tradition and the dynamic nature of the social closure theory, the dominant group tends to secure their advantaged position by monopolising resources and opportunities in different forms, and the dominance has persisted for some groups of students (Tholen, 2017).

In contrast to their academic counterparts, Chinese vocational students as a subordinate group have faced varying degrees of social closure, which refers to the monopolisation of scant resources within an area through boundary-setting, identity construction and community building, carried out for the purposes of social exclusion (Tholen, 2017). There is now a clear boundary in Chinese higher education between academic and vocational pathways, and it is difficult for vocational students to cross this boundary. The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates student progression within the Chinese education system from primary school (6 years old) to junior high school (15 years old), with all students attending nine years of compulsory education. Students encounter their first divide within the learning pathway at the end of junior high school and select either an academic senior high school or technical and vocational high school through the Senior High School Entrance Examination. In general, technical and vocational high schools have lower entry-level requirements (i.e., lower exam scores) when compared to the academic senior high school.

The next key divide is the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), in which both academic and technical vocational students take different educational pathways depending on their scores. In general, students from academic senior high schools are more likely to enter academic higher education institutions because their curriculum devotes a considerable amount of time to exam preparation, while the exam comprises six key academic high school subjects (i.e. Chinese, Maths, English, Politics, History, Chemistry and Geography). 'Academic pathway' students also tend to place higher education institutions as their primary focus for continued education, with the technical and vocational pathway perceived as a 'failure' of academic performance. Meanwhile, while vocational high school students have a choice between the two pathways, it is difficult for them to shift toward the more 'prestigious' academically oriented universities as they have not received training in exam content from their schools. Therefore, while these students are technically allowed to participate in the NCEE, the disconnect between the exam's material and student's learning content essentially prevents student flow between vocational and academic pathways.

Figure 1. Student Progression in the Chinese Education System

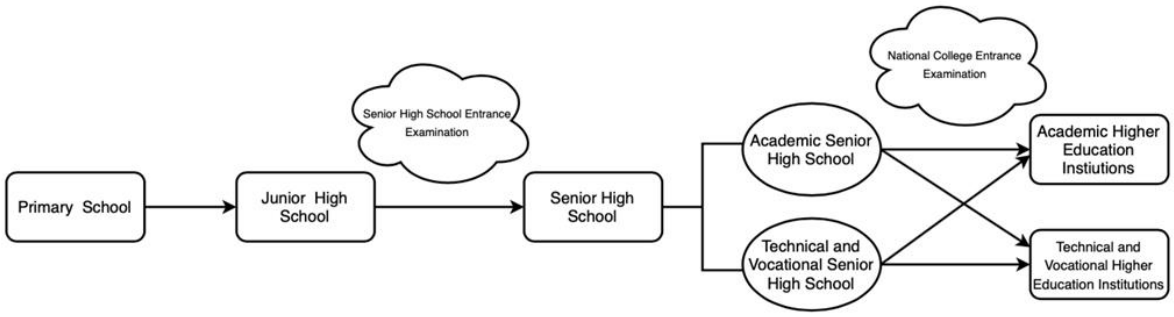


Figure 2. Four Types of Schools (in Technical and Vocational Senior High School)

School Type -	Vocational High Schools（(in Chinese, *职业技术中学，又称职业高中*)	Specialised Secondary Schools (in Chinese, 中等职业学校，又称普通中专	Skilled Workers Schools (in Chinese, 技工院校)	Adult Specialised Secondary School (in Chinese, 成人中等专业学校，又称成人中专)
Curriculum	• Similar learning content to academic senior high school, covering compulsory subjects such as Chinese, Maths and English. Elective subjects such as Physics, Politics, Chemistry, History, Arts, Physical Education and IT are also available • Vocational knowledge categorised by industry (e.g., Early Childhood Education, Secretary, Hospitality, Music, English, Culinary) offered.	• Vocational knowledge accounts for a higher proportion of the curriculum • Compulsory subjects for general high schools are not included • Social and natural science courses are offered, but in a lower proportion than to Vocational High Schools	• Specific skills offered • Learning contents do not match NCEE exam content • No social or natural science courses offered	• Varied by school
Managed by	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE)	MOE	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China (MOHRSS)	MOE

NCEE Participation	Students can participate in the NCEE but tend to have lower scores than their academic counterparts due to different courses taught in school	Can participate in the NCEE but tend to be less competitive due to lack of compulsory subject knowledge	Can participate in the NCEE but rarely attend academic university due to high exam score requirements	The school is only for mature student
Diploma	High school diploma	Technician certificate	Technician certificate	Technician certificate

By creating a significant social divide between academic and vocational schools, constructing stratified identities and separate communities, China's educational bureaucracy has marginalised vocational education and students. Three tiers of schools in the higher education levels have been identified based on the scores in NCEE to differentiate students (Xiong, 2011). The first tier is the most prestigious academic oriented universities which are the schools in Project 211 and Project 985. The next tier is also academic oriented universities but they are provincial. The last tier is largely made of technical and vocational schools. Students who gain high scores can go to the top tier while the low-score students can only choose the vocational schools (Xiong, 2011). In contemporary Chinese, score is not only an indicator for education achievement, but also a notion for the social value for a student (Woronov, 2011). Students with lower scores in the exam reflect that their social value is small and is a failure in the education system (Woronov, 2011). Hence, vocational students as the lowest tier in higher education with academic performance are perceived as a failure.

The gap between dominant groups and subordinate groups has widened with setting up separate communities with different levels of resources investment. In the 1990s, the Chinese government initiated Projects 211 and 985 to develop key subjects and world-class universities, respectively. Project 211's focus is on improving school infrastructures, developing key subjects and constructing higher education public services, while Project 985 reforms school management, improves teaching quality and teaching and learning equipment, encouraging international collaboration and communication (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017). The government listed 115 and 39 universities, respectively, for Projects 211 and 985, but all of the schools chosen were academically oriented, similar to the 'G5' and 'Russell Group' universities in the UK's higher education sector. Since then, higher education resources have been highly concentrated in these schools, widening the gap between 'Project 211' and 'Project 985' universities and schools not featured on these lists, including vocational schools. In 2018, Shenzhen Polytechnic was the vocational school with the largest amount of funding with 65.96 million yuan (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020), while Tsinghua University, the highest-paid university among the 'Project 211' and 'Project 985' schools, received 269.45 billion yuan (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Only 53 vocational schools received funding of more than 10 million yuan, while funding for the top 75 academic schools was over 400 million. Overall spending in higher education was 12,013 billion yuan, but expenditure on higher vocational education was 2,150 billion yuan, just under one fifth (17.9%) of the total. Vocational education is less developed than academic education and gains less support from the Chinese government. While the 'Double High Levels Plan' initiative was proposed in 2019 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019), which would provide greater support for vocational education, this is over two decades after the academic

university projects, showing a considerable lag in government priorities toward TVE. The imbalance in development within the higher education system suggests that vocational students continue to stay in a disadvantaged position.

The closure mechanism is not limited to the education system, but also extends to employment. Credentials currently are used to create new or solidify old patterns of social exclusion and stratification, through active categorical within the graduate labour market. (Tholen, 2017). The dominant groups try to construct a discourse that occupation is stratified and only certain educational experiences can fit in some jobs, in order to restrict or close off chances to other groups. The rationale explained by the dominant group is that credentials from prestigious universities signal possession of particular characteristics, skills and abilities and the possession of these makes an elite graduates component of the jobs. In the workplace, some employers have effectively excluded vocational students by establishing qualification thresholds for applicants, with different forms of exclusions shown in job advertisements, which might influence the job hunting process for vocational students. For instance, some job requirements state that they "only hire students from Project 985 or 211 universities", "prefer that applicants have graduated from QS Top 50", "favour students from key universities" and "only accept students from a full-time course degree". No vocational schools are featured in these advertisements. Vocational students are also more likely to undertake part-time courses, as there are a large number of part-time vocational training courses offered when compared to academic courses. In setting these standards, employers filter out job candidates according to cultural resources and educational credentials. Labelling applicants as 'Project 985/211 students' or 'non-985/211 students' stratifies them by assuming that the former are higher-performing workers. This overemphasis on educational credentials devalues the 'absolute value' of education, which refers to the skills, knowledge and abilities obtained through

learning activities (Collins, Cottom and Stevens, 2019). In contrast, a credential society stresses education's 'relative value', or prestige and markers of formal education, and as such significant traditional educational aims, including learning and self-improvement, may be neglected. In sum, vocational school graduates are considered to be individuals who have gone to school to "learn to become a production worker", and thus are considered to be of inferior quality to higher academy graduates, garnering a lower social status (Willis, 2016). This perception of vocational students may be partially attributed to divisions caused by China's exam-oriented education system, and results in a credential society where qualifications act as a form of social closure. Education, therefore, acts as a form of exclusion rather than inclusion. Thus, in the STWT of vocational students, their occupation opportunities might be limited and constantly encountering rejection from the dominant groups (Tholen, 2017).

2.4 Technology, Social Inclusion and Employability

Technology in the context of STWT refers to the online products or tools used during the transition period assisting graduates going through the process, including the search engine, social media platform, application portal and job hunting apps. According to Zhilian (2021), more than 85% of graduates applied for jobs online and above 90% of companies have organised campus recruiting online (Xiaoguo, 2021), indicating that the Internet is prominent in the job seeking and recruiting process. For graduates, technology is suggested as an effective and useful tool during the STWT by providing access to information, filtering relevant job information for specific needs, offering detailed information, tracking updated application processes and building up social relationships.

What's more important, technology can promote social inclusion, and may therefore be used to help marginalised and stigmatised communities such as Chinese vocational students (ILO, 2001 cited in Lindsay, 2005). More specifically, the internet is a technological innovation that has widened access to social networks for disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed or minorities, helping them gain a foothold in the job-hunting process (Lindsay, 2005). Moreover, information and communication technologies such as telephone access can be crucial in facilitating social networking among marginalised communities (Haddon, 2000 cited in Lindsay, 2005). Abu Jarour, Köster, Krasnova and Wiescher (2021) claim that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can empower disadvantaged people toward facilitating social relationships and inclusion. In a study on refugees in Germany, they found that ICT not only helped these refugees connect with friends and family back home but also solidified relationships between the refugees and their local community in various ways, including through employment.

Some scholars have argued that the internet may be an effective network-building tool for vulnerable individuals who struggle to form social relationships (McKenna and Bargh, 2000; Katz et al., 2001). There is evidence that those who become involved in exchanging ideas and information online may transfer these virtual activities and relationships to the 'real world', with internet interactions filling in the gaps opened by a lack of face-to-face contact, leading to the expansion of social networks (Wellman et al., 2001). Technology thus has the potential to supplement 'participatory' social capital, empowering individuals and countering the characteristic localism of life in disadvantaged urban areas (Carter and Grieco, 2000; Wellman, 2001; Hampton, 2002). While not every vocational student struggles with social relationships, the internet still opens the possibility that these students may increase their social capital, enhancing their STWT.

That said, scholars have also noted how technology may be limited in aiding in social inclusion. Assessing the impact of technology on socially excluded neighbourhoods in Sunderland, England, Clayton and Macdonald (2013) have found that technology plays a significant but limited role in influencing individuals' futures. Technology tends to play a critical role in the middle-class employment sector, even in neighbourhoods that are socially marginalised, resulting in privileged access to emerging technologies and training through the workplace, as well as the financial capital needed to secure this technology. In contrast, lower occupational groups' lack of access to this capital reveal the limits of technology in facilitating social mobility. Wheeler and Dillahunt (2018) argues that the benefits on the online platform are not evenly distributed as the resources concentrated on the groups of people who have already been successful in the job search, which is explained by the Amplification theory. For the seeker who did not familiarise with the technology, the benefits are very limited. For this dissertation, an empirical study has been designed to explore how technology is employed in Chinese vocational students' STWT, and whether this technology can be considered an enhancement or limitation on this marginalised group's improved social mobility and inclusion.

Chapter 3 Research Questions and Methodology

This chapter begins by stating this study's research question and sub-question, indicating the direction of the research project, and then providing an overview of the research design, methodology, site, sampling and analytical methods. In addition, the limitations and ethical considerations of the study will be acknowledged, followed by a reflection of my own positionality on this research.

Research Question

- What is the transition process from school to employment for vocational students?

Research Sub-question

- What is the role of technology in vocational students' transition from school to employment?

3.1 Research Design

This research's enquiry is both descriptive and explanatory. Beginning with its descriptive enquiry, the study will provide a profile of vocational students' learning and employment experiences in order to answer the research question. This description will then lead to an explanatory enquiry of how technology plays a role in the transition process, addressing the study's sub-question. As its research strategy, the study selects one vocational school as its case study, and to avoid self-

reporting bias multiple informants are used, not only students but teachers, to enrich the study's sources of information and analyse different demographics for different perspectives. The school chosen as a case study is located in Guangdong, a province in south-eastern China, and comprises 16,000 full-time and 2,700 part-time students. The school is in the top tier in the vocational school rankings as the scores required for entering the school are close to those for a low tier academic oriented university. Also, the school has a good reputation among the vocational schools because of its good campus environment, some leading majors and strong school-industry linkage. In terms of the school service related to the STWT, there are three key activities: career guidance from classroom teachers, on-campus job fairs and internship programs in the final school year. There is no regular schedule or class for career guidance. Instead, the form of career guidance is completely designed by the classroom teacher. For the on-campus job fairs, two types of fairs are organised at the school and department level. Compared to the job fairs organised by the school, the fair held by the department offers more major related jobs and are only available for students in the department. The internship program is suggested by the government that in the three-year vocational school, the curriculum should be designed into a 2+1 mode with two years for theoretical learning and one year for internship placement.

3.2 Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to collect data in the form of online surveys and online in-depth semi-structured interviews. To collect basic information on students, an online survey was sent to them (see Appendix 1), who were asked to complete the survey prior to their interviews. Students were asked to provide their names, hometown, age, major, year of graduation, kind of

technology they use while job hunting and number of internships while in school. Answers to these questions tended to be simple and short, allowing for some understanding about the interviewees and opening the way for semi-structured interview questions. Thus, survey questions open up communication between the researcher and research participant, with interviews providing follow-up questions with more detailed experiences and perspectives.

The key method for exploring students' STWT was the study's online semi-structured interviews, which allowed for insight into participant experiences. Interviews were approximately 30-to-60 minutes, with an interview guide (see Appendix 2 and 3) established to ensure the inclusion of key questions. Students were asked to talk about their college and work experiences and how technology has influenced their employment and future career development. Teachers, meanwhile, were asked to talk about their feelings and teaching experiences during students' STWT. The semi-structured interview format encourages two-way communication between researchers and research participants (Galletta, 2016): while these interviews frequently begin with researchers taking the leader and participants as passive respondents, they soon develop as the researcher builds on participant answers, allowing for greater insight into participant behaviours, experiences and perspectives (Choak, 2013). This may be particularly helpful when the researcher's experience departs from participants: I myself did not attend vocational school, so I sometimes had difficulty understanding participant experiences. Compared with the structured interview format, therefore, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask broader follow-up questions and gain a deeper understanding of interviewees.

3.3 Sampling

This study uses purposive sampling to select students who fit criteria on graduation year. Students were selected who were going to graduate in June/July 2022 or have graduated within the past three years, as the study intends to look at the most recent STWT experiences and recent graduates can easily reflect on their current working status. Moreover, students who have graduated within the past three years tend to have more vivid memories of the transition process, which minimises recall biases resulting from unclear or missed memories (Spencer, Brassey, and Mahtani, 2017). Additionally, students from all school departments were sought after to gain a more complete understanding of the school's makeup. I had an existing connection with the school's students, as the student is one of the classmates from my secondary school, and I asked this connection to refer me to class- or schoolmates according to my criteria. I also had a connection with a teacher from the school, and also asked her for referrals. Ultimately, the study had 22 student participants (7 male and 15 female), seven of whom graduated in 2020 and 2021 and the remainder graduating in 2022. One female classroom teacher who is responsible for the career guidance for students was also interviewed. Students' ages were between 20 and 28 while the teacher was above the age of 40.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a flexible approach for analysing qualitative data, has been used in this research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis begins by identifying and developing key codes within collected data, which are then grouped into patterns that are then categorised as themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) locate six steps in the process of thematic analysis: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and writing down

the themes. The process begins with familiarisation, in which data is read multiple times, which is then followed by coding, where the data's smallest units, codes, capture features that are relevant to the study's research question (Clarke and Braun, 2017). For this study coding was initially inductive, focusing on students' experiences of their chosen vocational pathway and workplace experiences. Codes were then formed from students' perspectives (e.g., "student status allows me to seek guidance", "the community does not trust me" and "the teacher is the best person to assess my learning and competence") and compiled into a list in order to identify patterns and diversity. The aim of this approach, following Braun and Clarke (2006; see also Terry et al. 2017), is not only to organise and summarise but also interpret these patterns, theorising their significance in relation to the research literature and combining or collapsing them into concepts useful for this research.

Theme development was considered in relation to the research literature and comprehensive dataset during the coding process, eventually leading to abductive analysis arising from participants' experiences but also acknowledging the study's theoretical background. This approach emphasises that the study's themes do not emerge from the data, but are created by the researcher, and therefore require quality assurance strategies that include a strict review of the themes to ensure their compatibility with the coded data and entire dataset (Terry et al. 2017). Ultimately, five themes were chosen to interpret participants' experiences of workplace learning as a part of vocational training: the meaning of context and their chosen vocational pathway; work needs and practices and how they shape individuals' participation; the meaning of social practices and interactions related to employment; and how learners decide to participate in experiences and exercise agency within the workplace.

3.5 Study Limitations

While this research has been carefully designed, it has potential limitations. First, it is possible that bias exists in the study sample, and the students interviewed tend to be high-achieving and therefore frequently have had positive school experiences, a fact that may influence the research outcome. More than half of the students were referred to this study through their teachers, who prefer to select their best students and with whom they have good relations, and interviews showed how the students tended to perform better in school, had smoother STWTs and a positive relationship with teachers. Second, interviewee answers may not reflect real experiences or perspectives but social expectations, as some students are likely to provide answers based on social norms rather than subjective experience. Third, answers could be missing or at least be partially inaccurate: although I am asking about experiences that have occurred over the previous three years, it is likely that participants do not clearly remember all of their past feelings and experiences.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues have been considered in all stages of the present research project. The research follows the *British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011), *Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines* (2021) and the *British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice* (2017). Prior to data collection, approval was gained from the Department of Education, Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) (Appendix 4). During the recruitment stage, and following stipulated guidelines, sufficient information (information sheet for participants in Appendix 5) was gathered to provide for interviewee consent and confidentiality, will all participants set consent forms (Appendix 6) informing them of this research's intentions. Students were asked to fully check these forms before

signing them, and prior to interviews I would double-check with the students to determine whether any further information was necessary. During the transcription and analysis stage, pseudonyms were used to protect participant privacy. All data containing participant details, consent forms and audio and textual transcripts were stored on the university Nexus 365 One Drive for business account, and all will be deleted upon this thesis' submission.

To address any ethical issues specific to this study's Chinese context, I must first state my awareness of this important cultural consideration. As a Chinese citizen and resident of the country since I was born, I am familiar with the country's cultural and societal norms and practices. However, prior to this study I was unaware of vocational school practices, and had not had numerous opportunities to communicate with vocational school students. For this study, I talked to a friend who was a vocational student to acquaint myself with vocational school culture and norms. Moreover, to cultivate my knowledge of China's vocational education system I read different sources of information, including research papers, articles and websites, and watched documentaries on vocational schooling. Most of these sources, like this study's interviews, were in Chinese for more direct sources of research and communication.

3.7 Positionality

It is necessary to describe my own positionality as this study's researcher, disclosing my situatedness in this study and shifting identities during research. It is impossible for a researcher to achieve a full level of neutrality and objectivity in a qualitative study as our social identities, positions, experiences, perspectives and biases affect the analytical process, interpretation of data and knowledge production. Different experiences and social positions are likely to result in

different understandings and interpretations of participant experiences, meaning that the same data may be explained in different ways by researchers with differing perspectives. While analysing and interpreting data from a conscious position may be criticised as lacking generalisability, it is important to understand positionality in order to make a clear distinction between researcher and research participant (Nazneen and Sultan, 2014). This distinction is crucial for the ontology of qualitative research, which values differences in data sources and theories (Darwin, 2020). Consequently, an explicit statement on positionality is important for a study, as without a clear demonstration of this positionality the research cannot provide a complete understanding of the truth. The following paragraphs are an attempt to describe my social identities, including my educational and STWT experiences.

My status as researcher constantly changed throughout this study's interviews and analysis, as I acted as both insider and outsider in vocational education/students at different levels (Abimbola, 2019). Regarding the education experiences of participants, I was seen as an outsider by interviewees. My own educational background involved attending an international school that followed the 'British system' for high school, progressing from the IGCSE to A-Level and then entering a UK university. In contrast, this study's participants remained in the Chinese education system for both high school and college, attending either vocational or general high school and then moving on to vocational college. The British and Chinese education systems have different learning cultures that stress different values, meaning that students trained in these systems may approach similar problems in various ways. For example, I did not attend the Chinese National College Entry Examination (NCEE), a critical event for most Chinese students, so do not have insight into how this exam could influence a student's life. All of this study's interviewees, meanwhile, had sat for their NCEEs, a process that had impacted their college experience, STWTs

and future development. A second factor that makes me an outsider to my participants' experience is my lack of knowledge around vocational schools, as I have previously attended academically oriented universities whose curriculum design, learning objectives and expected outcomes differ from vocational school curricula. This is compounded by the 'social reputation' of my educational background: I am currently studying at one of the world's top universities, and to my interviewees I am considered knowledgeable due to my cultural status; for example, a participant responded to one of my questions, "if you ask me to share the learning tips, I am afraid I am not as good as you", assuming that the big gap between academic achievement and methods for learning.

At the same time, while I am an outsider to my participants' educational experiences, I have also shared several experiences with the vocational students interviewed, making me an 'insider' on several levels. First, the student participants and I are currently at similar life stages, that is, undergoing a STWT and seeking employment during a similar historical period. Second, I identify as female, aligning my experience with my female interviewees, and we have likely witnessed similar gender-related issues while hunting for jobs, possibly including discrimination toward women in the workplace. Additionally, I come from the same place as many of the interviewees so I understand the local cultural factors that may influence participants' STWT process. Overall, while I am both and outsider and insider in relation to my study participants' experiences, this does not mean that my positionality is simply binary; rather, I carry with me a hybrid of social identities that can emerge when speaking with different interviewees, demonstrating how positionality is dynamic and hybrid.

Chapter 4 Findings

Theme 1: A Smooth STWT

All participants stated that their post-college STWT went smoothly, with one reason being most frequently mentioned that their school's internship programme helped place them into positions prior to graduation. Students could choose to stay with the company, becoming a permanent employee, or apply to other companies with full-time internship experiences:

- *'I think my transition is good because I can get a return offer from companies and don't need to rush to settle down for a job.' (Jim, student)*

- *'I am an illustrator. Sometimes I don't know what to do, so my colleagues [full-time employees] will help me. I mean, they are quite friendly. If it is not a big issue, I will also ask for help from the internet. I watch videos online teaching how to draw illustrations and practice by myself at home. I think I am doing better as I practise more.' (Ann, student)*

Generally speaking, graduates require some time to find jobs, as they must submit their CVs and interview with more than one company, waiting before a decision is made. Students who obtain job offers prior to this recruitment period are spared this stressful effort and have less to worry about in terms of their careers.

Also, teachers from the school made great contributions to the smooth STWT of vocational students. Teachers constantly monitor the employment status of students and offer help when students need it.

- *'My teacher has a connection with the company so she introduced me to the boss.' (Jim, student)*

- *'We missed all of the job fairs on campus because we were in a competition. My teacher knew this situation and she introduced us to several companies. Through her recommendation, we can directly move to the final round interview.' (Jack, student)*

- *'As a classroom teacher, we will constantly check whether students have found a job or not. Although I will not have an in-depth conversation for every student in my class, I will put more focus on the students who encounter challenges.' (Iris, teacher)*

In addition to the school factors, the smooth STWT is attributed to the organisation factor. One participant, Ann, believes that her smooth STWT can be attributed to her employer's friendly working culture, colleagues and knowledge she learned from the video website Bilibili:

- *'I am an illustrator. Sometimes I don't know what to do, so my colleagues [full-time employees] will help me. I mean, they are quite friendly. If it is not a big issue, I will also ask for help from the internet. I watch videos online teaching how to draw illustrations and practice by myself at home. I think I am doing better as I practise more.' (Ann, student)*

A friendly organisational culture helps graduates adapt to the new environment quickly, while students take their own initiative to improve their working competences through the internet.

Emma thinks her smooth transition is due to her competitive experiences in college:

- *'I founded my studio by participating in a start-up business competition. It was during the pandemic. All of the courses were delivered online and we were working on our business in the studio. It was exhausting and the darkest period of my life, but I changed a lot, improving my thinking skills, and gained valuable experience by participating in the competition. Each time I talked about this experience in my [job] interview I felt confident. Almost every*

interviewer was attracted by my start-up experience and acknowledged my abilities.' (Emma, student)

The start-up business competition becomes a highlight of Emma's CV, flaunting her skills and showing that her abilities are not merely limited to educational achievement and vocational skills.

Different factors have therefore contributed to vocational students' smooth STWT. Notably, none of the participants indicated that technology was primary to this process; rather, their school's curriculum structure, organisational culture and their own personal experiences and achievements had a greater impact on their STWT. The (non-)role of technology on participants' STWT will now be explored in greater detail.

Theme 2: Technology Does Not Play a Key Role in Applying for a Job

Although job-hunting technologies are easily accessible, vocational students are less likely to apply for jobs using technology such as job-hunting apps or websites and social media platforms. The reason most frequently mentioned by participants for neglecting these means was that there was a significant gap perceived between the app's information and reality, making it difficult for participants to know the real situation of the employer and the position. This gap could include differences in the payment description, days off, job duties and company information.

Gap Between App Information and Reality

- Job Payment

Many students mentioned that salaries provided on job-hunting apps and websites tended to be higher than they were in reality:

- *'You know, as a graduate, we really care about the salary of the job. For example, they [the company] said that they could offer 8,000 or 9,000 Yuan, even more than 10,000 Yuan. In fact, they only offer less than half of what they show in the job description, only 3000 or 4000 Yuan, promising that this salary level is only for a probationary period, but when you become a permanent employee you still cannot get the payment shown in the job description.' (Tina, student)*

- *'I prefer looking for a job in the career fair organised by our school. I think my school is more reliable. In the job-hunting app, you cannot make sure that they are 100% accurate. Also, I have realised that companies often exaggerate salary levels - they said they could offer nearly 10,000 Yuan while it's only 2000 or 3000 Yuan. That's quite a big gap!' (Andy, student)*

Some companies on the job-hunting app advertise higher salary levels in their job descriptions in order to attract more people to their company, alienating vocational graduates and convincing them that technology cannot help them in their search for employment.

· Days Off

This information gap could also be see in numbers of days off, with students stating that some companies offered longer holidays than they actually provided:

- *'There is a large amount of fake information on the app. The companies describe the job as having two-day weekends and all the statutory holidays, but when you confirm with the human resources manager it is not the case.' (Tina, student)*

False information on work and companies is therefore a primary reason for why vocational students do not apply for jobs through online applications.

· Company Information

Frequently, vocational students' concern over deceptive advertisements stems from their own lack of work experience, which would help them better diagnose the accuracy of the posed information, affecting work benefits. What's worse, inaccurate information on their working conditions and duties may threaten their health and safety, as companies that do not provide applicants with authentic information are likely to be conducting illegal operations:

- *'You know why I prefer a job that is recommended by my friends? I am afraid of being engaged in a Ponzi scheme [by some companies]. My parents have talked about that… sounds horrible, you know? So I tend to trust my friends because I know a lot about my friends.' (Jim, student)*

Similarly, both Mia and Tim worried about safety when looking for a job online:

- *'The information on the internet is difficult to verify. I don't know whether it is a real or fake company. Some businesses engaging in Ponzi schemes might lie to newly graduated students without much work experience and force you to join the scheme. It becomes difficult*

to leave the company once you join in. It's difficult to assess the reliability of the information online.' (Mia, student)

- *'I watched a TikTok video about an illegal company hiring newly graduated students to work for them. The students don't know what they are doing is illegal. In the end, the whole staff were arrested by the police. So the company shown on the internet was not reliable!' (Tim, student)*

Ann also worries about internet job seeking, and so offers a solution to reduce the risk of information gap.

- *'I remember the first time I used the job-hunting app I felt a little afraid. I would not go to an offline interview on my own. I was just afraid that the company was doing something illegal, so I asked my friends to come with me. Before we went there, I would discuss with my friend whether it is a good company, and one of the most important factors is its location. Some companies are situated in the city whereas some are in the middle of nowhere. Location really matters.' (Ann, student)*

False information on companies and job duties may therefore result in serious effects on graduates, a fact compounded by difficulties checking information on the app. While students are aware of the issue, it is still a source of concern and makes them less likely to use the app to apply for work.

Excessive Information

In addition to information gaps on salary level, holidays, work duties and company status, receiving excessive information through the job-hunting app leaves many students dissatisfied:

- *'A large number of HR departments from different kinds of companies send you messages every day. These jobs are completely not the job I would like to do and my previous working experiences do not match their requirements. I don't know why they always send messages to me. Those HR departments just want to contact as many applicants as possible to increase the number of people they reach, achieving the KPI.' (Zoe, student)*

For some recruiters, they are required to interview a certain number of applicants to achieve the requirements for the working performance.

- *'The app is weird. I figured out how it works after some time. If you make some of your personal information public, a large number of HR departments will send you messages online or even call you directly. It's annoying!' (Nora, student)*

Applicants can hide their personal and contact information by setting it on 'privacy mode' in the app, but it frequently takes time for students to familiarise themselves with this function, meaning they may be bothered by an excess of information from recruiters.

Tendency to Choose Local Jobs

Some students claimed that they prefer jobs within their area, so one of the key advantages to using technology for work – the ability to cover a broad range of geographical locations – might not

apply to these students. Many of the interviewees knew that their job's location was likely to affect living costs, length of time spent with family and time and cost spent on transportation to work.

- *'I think the geographical location of the job is an important factor to consider when looking for a job. If it is close to my home, I can go back home every day and don't need to rent a house. Also, I really want to spend some time with my parents and my grandma.' (Ann, student)*

- *'I would check whether a company is close to my home or if it provides accommodation for staff. I am going to graduate and start work so I think I need to carefully consider where to live and mode of transportation to work.' (Tina, student)*

- *'You know, in our local culture, family members tend to suggest that it is good to stay in the local area and stay with family members, so I prefer a local job. When I was looking for an internship, I just went around to stores near my home to see whether they needed staff.' (Zoe, student)*

False or excessive information makes internet job hunting less reliable or useful for students, who prefer finding their jobs through teachers, schools and friends. Moreover, students who are inclined to choose a local job are more likely to use offline and traditional job-hunting methods such as door-to-door job hunting and local social networking. Technology, therefore, is less likely to be used as a first choice among vocational school graduates when applying for a job.

Theme 3 Technology Offers Access to a Wide Range of (Mis-)information

Although interviewees were less likely to apply for jobs through the online app or website, they still sought information on the labour market, job description, CV editing, interview preparation on the internet and skills related to a specific job. For these students, technology provided access to a large amount of job-related information, both prior to and after obtaining a position. During the job-hunting process, vocational students used different online resources to learn about positions, and after they had been placed they could use technology to learn new skills and knowledge for job-related problems.

During the job-hunting stage, vocational students looked for information on job-market trends and job descriptions, including salary and company information:

- *'I will look through the job requirement and salary so that I can have some information to compare with in the future job-hunting process.' (Mia, student)*

- *'I think the job-hunting app provides really detailed information about what kind of worker they need, what specific skills are required, their location and rewards system, offering a holistic view of the job.' (Ann, student)*

Due to posting requirements for job advertisements on the app, recruiters must upload key information so that detailed material can be provided for users.

Some vocational students looked on search engines, video websites and social media platforms for templates and tips to improve their CV:

- *'I looked for information on how to briefly show my strengths and weaknesses on my CV.' (Ann, student)*

Most of the students sought information on interview preparation only after they had received an interview invitation, using different search engines, online forums, video websites and job-hunting apps:

- *'I think looking for information on social media doesn't mean I am fully prepared for an interview. Rather, knowing some possible questions prior to the interview makes me less nervous in the interview.' (Ella, student)*

- *'I remembered that I didn't know what to ask when the interviewer asked me if you had any other questions. This is because I have never been asked this kind of question. Thus, when I went back home, I searched for information about how to ask questions on a video website, Bilibili. I wrote down the key points presented in the video in my notebook so that I will know what to do next time.' (Tim, student)*

Students use information from the internet not only during their job search, but also once they have a job:

- *'Although my line manager taught me knowledge about accounting and finance on the job, I looked for the theoretical framework for accounting on a video website - Bilibili. On this website there are systematic courses on accounting and finance that help me understand accounting.' (Linda, graduated in 2021, working as a hotel accountant)*

Linda uses video websites as a complementary resource for improving the skills required for her job. Moreover, students also search for solutions on these websites when they encounter challenges at work:

- *'It is not necessary to ask for help from experienced colleagues for those small tasks. I tend to seek solutions on the internet. My colleagues are quite busy. Looking at information online can be considered as a way to save other's time.' (Jim, student intern)*

- *'I remember that for a time I didn't know how to write our project proposal so I looked for information online. I gained detailed information, provided by people from the same industry, about the process of operating a project from proposal planning to project implementation. You know, we don't have much working experience so information from the internet can help us quickly build up our knowledge.' (Henry, graduated in 2020, working as a project manager in an education company)*

Technology is actively used among students and graduates during the job-hunting process and on the job.

Theme 4 Getting Rid of Vocational Student Identity vs. 'We are Not Bad Students!'

Two opposite perspectives were identified during interviews: while one group of students had a strong desire for an academic degree and struggled with their vocational-student identities, others were not worried about their vocational-student status, claiming they worked just as hard as, and were not inferior to, their academic peers.

More than half of the interviewees were concerned about their vocational degrees and did not plan to join the labour market immediately but instead gain higher educational credentials and were waiting for the results from the exam that would transfer them to academically oriented universities.

Intriguingly, all of the students who took this exam had planned to take it even before they had entered vocational school:

- *'I went to a good high school and performed well academically. All of my close friends went to academically oriented universities. I am the only one who went to vocational school as I did not do well on my college entrance examination. Since graduating from high school, I never go to their parties because I am afraid they look down on me because of my school. I hope I can become a student at an academically oriented school so the gap between my friends and I would be narrowed. In addition, I still cannot find a job which meets my salary expectations, job responsibilities and description, so I think improving my educational credentials is needed.' (Amy, student)*

Amy's motivation to go to an academically oriented university is to reduce the pressure within her social network and increase the possibility of looking for a suitable job in the labour market. Andy had similar motivations, although he decided to go to work:

- *'I made a promise with my best friend in high school that we would go to academically oriented universities. He made it, but I failed to do so, so I always feel uncomfortable when I meet with my friends. I always think I am inferior to others. In addition, my family hopes I can get an academic degree. When some of my relatives learned that I was going to vocational school, they thought that if you could only get into vocational school it would be better to start working right away, rather than waste time in vocational school.' (Andy, student)*

Nora said that a key reason for taking the exam was that she had been discriminated against by her internship manager due to her education level:

- *'In one of my internships, my manager frequently mentioned that almost everyone else had an academically oriented degree. I feel like he wanted to emphasise that I was the only person with a vocational degree. The manager also said that it was a privilege and honour that I work for the company so I had to take on more tasks and responsibilities to keep my job. I was really angry with him.' (Nora, student)*

Zoe experienced the disadvantage of vocational credentials on the labour market, so she thinks that obtaining an academic degree is important:

- *'Even if you do well at your previous job, concerns about your abilities are still raised because you are a vocational graduate. I hope that an academic degree can reduce difficulties in my career.' (Zoe, student)*

Students who desire an academic degree recognise their disadvantaged position in society and hope to raise their status, benefiting social networks, job searches and reputation.

The other students interviewed are more likely to enter the labour force directly. While these students understand their disadvantaged position and have experienced discrimination, they still emphasise the value of their vocational education and said they had a positive experience in vocational school learning useful skills, building good relationships with teachers and classmates and enjoying their school life.

- *'The key motivation for participating in this interview is that I just want to say we are not bad students! I hope that everyone knows that we work hard to cultivate our vocational skills. Some of my mom's friends would say it was a pity to go to vocational school. I mean, we are*

not lazy students who are going to sit around for the rest of our lives. We practise a lot and have many working experiences. We are as good as the students in the academic track.' (Ann, student)

Ann was a student who progressed from vocational high school to vocational school. In an election in the college, although she won the position, she was still challenged by the peers who graduated from the academic school.

Andy comes from an academic orientated high school and entered a vocational school in higher educational level.

- 'I felt upset at the beginning of my vocational school life. At that time, I really hoped that I could go for an academic degree. However, I have changed a lot. I started to engage in different kinds of activities in school and joined the photography society. I also worked for the school's media centre and connected with many schoolmates. I think I learned a lot in school.' (Andy, student)

- 'I found that our school provides lots of opportunities for us to practice our skills, which is important. When I was looking for a job after graduation, I was confident at school and tended to recommend it to others. I am not ashamed of recommending it. I know that some people would not like to tell others what school they come from as it is a vocational college.' (Emma, graduated in 2021)

Theme 5 Credentials are Important, but Not Vital, for Success in the Job Market

The vocational students planning to enter the workforce, or who had been working for one or two years, believed that their credentials were still important in the labour market, with some mentioning the desire to gain a 'better qualification' if they had a chance in the future:

- *'I am very busy with my job right now but I am still considering ways to improve my credentials. I have thought about quitting this job and looking for a job which is easier and gives me more time to prepare for the examination for these credentials.' (Jack, student)*

While this student graduated from school, he still believes further credentials are important.

That said, some students did not agree that higher credentials necessarily led to better employment opportunities:

- *'Society needs different kinds of credentials. People with different credentials can do different kinds of jobs. I think we should value the working experience. In certain industries, working experiences might be more valuable.' (Jim, student)*

This student thinks credentials are not the only determinants for a job. For some technicians, work experiences may be more valuable.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This dissertation set out with the aim of understanding the STWT experience of Chinese vocational students and assessing the role of technology in the transition. This chapter starts with reviewing for the key findings in the study. Then, the interpretation of the findings will be presented in a way taking into account the existing literature, possible alternative explanations and limitations of the study. Finally, implications from the findings will be given.

An interesting finding is that all of the students stated that they have a smooth transition from school to work. The finding seems to contradict with the general negative narrative on vocational students (Jing, Chung and Gregory, 2022; Ling, 2015; Schulte, 2013; Wang and Guo, 2019; Wang, 2021). Based on the findings, it seems that there is no social closure for the vocational students: none of the students mentioned about the rejection in the job hunting and not many challenges during the STWT directly arised from the vocational identity. However, this study suggests that the smooth STWT does not mean that vocational students are not suffering from the symbolic disadvantage or social closure. Instead, the students are still in the stratified system with a disadvantaged position.

This study suggests that the reason why students did have positive experiences in STWT is because they are still trapped in their social position by the social closure, following the existing narrative of the vocational student career pathway (Wang and Guo, 2019; Wang and Wang, 2022). The companies that the students choose to apply to are mostly the small to medium size companies in the local areas and mainly in the manufacturing and service industry. The type of jobs applied for are mostly low-wage service jobs and blue-collar jobs, including customer service staff, waiters, factory workers, reception staff and staff assistants. None of the students mentioned jobs in high-wage positions such as finance, investment or consulting. Those low service jobs and blue-collar

jobs tend to have lower socioeconomic status in the Chinese context (Wang, 2008). The vocational students are in the continuation of the low social status from education to the labour market (Ainsworth and Roscigno, 2005) and confirms the idea developed by Willis (2016) : learning to be a worker. Students feel relatively comfortable in the STWT because they are still in their field and they learn to do this kind of job. And the students know about norms in applying for this job and thus more easily adapt to the new working environment (working culture) from the school (Willis, 2016). Therefore, for the students, a good understanding of low-wage jobs or manual labour and being trained to do these kinds of jobs in school partially contribute to a smooth STWT for the students.

Second, the stratification of different levels of power is still existing and a stratified system is within the vocational school system, neatly following the credentialism. The students in this study come from the top vocational school in China and they are in an advantaged position with higher social status and more resources and opportunities from schools and teachers. In job hunting, compared to the applicants from other vocational schools, the students from the top vocational school are defined as a better applicant because they are the students who gain higher scores in the NCEE. This corroborates the idea from Woronov (2011) describing the value of scores in Chinese society. Woronov (2011) states that the score represents multiple meanings not only education achievement but also social values such as value in the labour market. The students from top tier vocational schools are considered to be more valuable for employers compared to their peers from the low-tier vocational schools. Also, a top vocational school is more likely to be able to equip their students with more useful skills, resources and job opportunities. Based on the findings, the students in this school tend to be satisfied with their schooling experiences and acknowledge the help from the schools in assisting with STWT. Many students argue that school and teachers are

playing an important role in the STWT. Due to the strong school-industry linkage of the school and scrutiny on the company information, the school is able to organise meaningful and safe internship programs for students. Also, the teachers from the school pay close attention to the employment status of students and offer help when students need it. Thus, with more resources and capitals, it is more likely that the top tier students tend to have a smooth STWT. The positive internship experience in this school differs from the findings presented in Smith and Chan's research showing that students who have negative experience as a constrained labour managed by two stakeholders: schools and managers (2015). The finding about the smooth STWT of vocational students may also suggest that there are differences between vocational students and not every vocational student has a negative experience as the vocational education system is hierarchical structure with students having different levels of resources and power.

Surprisingly, although the technology is easily accessible nowadays, it is not the first choice for the students making a job application. This is in line with the point that technology does not necessarily help the socially excluded group (Clayton and Macdonald, 2013). In essence, being trapped in the existing social level can interpretare why technology is not the first choice for vocational students in applying for the job. First, due to the fact that the students tend to apply for the small and medium size companies, it is less likely for these companies to have their own official recruitment system or website for applicants. The companies tend to post their job information on third party channels such as the job hunting apps or websites. If the channels lack regulation on the company and their recruiting behaviour on the channels, it is likely to raise the problem of misinformation or decisive information. The companies which offer high-wage positions or white collar positions tend to have their official entry for job applicants, which is easy to identify, avoiding deceive information during the application process. The students realised the issues from

the third party job hunting channels so they are less likely to use it in the STWT. Second, some students claimed that they prefer a job in the local area so one of the key advantages of using technology which could cover a wider range of geographical locations might not apply to the students. The location of the job is likely to influence the way that they use technology. When students tend to seek a job in a local area, they are more likely to look for a job in an offline way which might be more useful for them: local connection, door-to-door job hunting and campus recruitment events in school. Thus, the size and type of companies chosen by the vocational students and the tendency to choose a local job are likely to become the reasons why technology is not that necessary for the job hunting process.

Although vocational students in China are considered as failures in education (Ling, 2015) and some interviewees accept the failure they made in the NCEE and would like to get rid of the vocational identity, there are some vocational students who do not see themselves in a disadvantaged or marginalised position. Rather, they are creating a 'new class culture' in order to respond to the existing narrative on vocational students and construct a way differentiating from it and 'seek new forms of dignity' (Woronov, 2011, p.93). The students who want to get rid of the vocational identity are still with the credentialist idea. They believe that 'learning is earning' and higher credentials come with higher levels of social status. Therefore, for this group of students, they are eager to transform their identity from vocational to academic and hope to quickly deviate from the current track. As for the advocates of vocational education, the students show acceptance or even confidence of the vocation life and see it 'different' from academic cohort rather than 'lower'. Furthermore, the students are seeking more power in the context of social closure by participating in a more central role among students, which is consistent with that of Parkin (1979) who proposes the dynamic feature of social closure scrambling for resources and opportunities

between groups is consistently happening. Some students realised the disadvantaged position and would like to fight for the situation and seek for a leading power compared to the students from academic high school.

To critically reflect on the theoretical frameworks of credentialism and social closure, the relationship between education, credentials and the labour market should be taken into consideration as their relationship is changing in the context of globalisation (Tholen, 2017). And this echoes research by Xiu and Gunderson (2013), who have found a decline in the importance of credentials as firms have gained greater discretion to select the best-suited employees, irrespective of credentials. The changing nature of the labour market means a loose relationship between credentials and education.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This dissertation, motivated by a need for filling the academic gap on describing the STWT for stigmatised vocational students in China and examining the possible solutions, technology on the STWT, uses a semi-structured interview and thematic analysis to explore the STWT experience of vocational students and examine the role of technology in the transition.

To understand the previous literature relevant to this research topic, the dissertation reviews the literature on STWT, Chinese vocational students and technology as a tool for achieving social mobility and greater social inclusion. The complexity of the STWT which is influenced by a variety of factors calls for positioning of a specific context for further discussion. By examining the STWT in the context of Chinese vocational students, this dissertation first illustrates the changing employability of vocational students with changing policies, education system and society in China. This dissertation then identifies the poor education quality and labour market outcomes for vocational students nowadays and explores reasons for stigmatisation and marginalisation of Chinese vocational students from the lens of social closure and credentialism. Technology as a tool can help vocational students achieve better STWT experience but some studies indicate its limitations.

To investigate the STWT experience and the role of technology, this dissertation uses a purposive sampling method to select students from a top vocational school in Southeast China. The research design is limited in sample in which many of the participants were top student schools. I have developed systematic ways by looking for participants from other sources of samples and inviting a teacher, minimising its limitations. In addition, this dissertation describes the personality of the author to disclose the author's situatedness in this study and shifting identities during research.

With this caveat, this dissertation offers three major findings. First, the vocational students have witnessed a smooth STWT but this does not imply a social mobility and greater social inclusion as they are being trapped in their social position. Second, technology offers a wide range of access to information for vocational students whereas it does not play a key role in applying for a job without providing better job opportunities for social upgrade. Technology as a tool for achieving social mobility and greater social inclusion is still limited in this case. Third, although the vocational students are continuously being stigmatised and marginalised, they are creating a new form of youth culture to seek for dignity.

The key contribution of this study is to provide empirical confirmation on STWT of vocational students and important insight on the role of technology in helping socially excluded groups. This could be used to help students themselves understand their STWT and provide career centre in vocational schools with understanding of STWT of the students. The findings suggest two policy recommendations. Given the misinformation, deceptive and excessive information on the job-hunting channels struggling graduates, increase in regulation and scrutiny on these channels should be made to advance the quality of job-seeking information and increase the possibility to find a job for graduates. Second, educational progress and NCEE that reproduce and exacerbate educational inequality, should be considered to reduce the stigamitation and discrimination on vocatioanl students. Further studies can explore STWT of vocational students from other vocational schools due to the heterogeneity of student's experiences.

Reference

Abimbola, Seye, 2019. The foreign gaze: authorship in academic global health. *BMJ global health*, 4(5), p.e002068.

Ainsworth, James W & Roscigno, Vincent J, 2005. Stratification, School-Work Linkages and Vocational Education. *Social forces*, 84(1), pp.257–284.

Akkermans, J., Nykänen, M. and Vuori, J., 2015. Practice Makes Perfect? Antecedents and Consequences of an Adaptive School-to-Work Transition. In: V. J., B. R. and P. R.H, ed., *Sustainable working lives : managing work transitions and health throughout the life course*. Dordrecht, pp.65-86.

Baartman, Liesbeth K.J & de Bruijn, Elly, 2011. Integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes: Conceptualising learning processes towards vocational competence. *Educational research review*, 6(2), pp.125–134.

Béduwé, Catherine & Giret, Jean-François, 2011. Mismatch of vocational graduates: What penalty on French labour market? Journal of *vocational behavior*, 78(1), pp.68–79.

Benavot, Aaron, 1983. The rise and decline of vocational education. *Sociology of education*, 56(2), pp.63–76.

Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria, 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp.77–101.

Brooks, R., 2018. Chapter 2: Contested Purposes of Education in *Education and society: places, policies, processes*, London, England.

Choak, C., 2013. Asking questions: Interviews and evaluations in *Research and research methods for youth practitioners*, Routledge, pp. 102-124.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2018. *Research methods in education* Eighth., London, England ; New York, New York.

Collins, R., Cottom, T.M.M. & Stevens, M.L., 2019. The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification, New York, NY.

Darwin Holmes, A., 2020. Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, [online] 8(4), pp.1-10. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1268044.pdf> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Davies, Karen, 2008. Job hunting in the UK using the Internet: finding your next information professional role in the health care sector and the skills employers require. *Health information and libraries journal*, 25(2), pp.106–115.

Fan, Xiaoxian, 2020. Policy-Driven Development and the Strategic Initiative of One-Million Enrollment Expansion in China's Higher Vocational Education. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(1), pp.179–186.

Feldman, Daniel C. & Klaas, Brian S., 2002. Internet job hunting: A field study of applicant experiences with on-line recruiting. *Human resource management*, 41(2), pp.175–192.

Galletta, A., 2016. Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond : from research design to analysis and publication, New York.

Guan, Shanshan & Blair, Erik, 2020. Chinese adult higher education as a heterotopia. H*igher education*, 81(3), pp.471–489.

Guo, Z. et al. (2010) International comparisons of China's technical and vocational education and training system / by Zhenyi Guo, Stephen Lamb. Dordrecht ;: Springer.

Hall, Francine S. & Wanous, John P., 1981. Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, and Socialization of Newcomers. *The Academy of Management Review*, 6(3), pp.513–514.

Hansen, Mette Halskov & Woronov, T. E., 2013. Demanding and resisting vocational education: a comparative study of schools in rural and urban China. *Comparative education*, 49(2), pp.242–259.

Hu, Yueqin & Gan, Yiqun, 2017. Future-Oriented Coping and Job Hunting Among College Students. *The Psychological record*, 61(2), pp.253–268.

Iannelli, Cristina, 2004. School variation in youth transitions in Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands. *Comparative education*, 40(3), pp.401–425.

International Labour Organization. 2020. *Transition from school to work remains a difficult process for youth - ILOSTAT*. [online] Available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/transition-from-school-to-work-remains-a-difficult-process-for-youth/> [Accessed 25 July 2022].

Jing, T., Chung, E. and Gregory, M., 2022. Vocational Education in China: Its History, Roles, Challenges and the Way Forward. *Journal of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development*, 8(1), pp.112-121.

Khalanyane, T., 2012. Social Closure in Lesotho: Forms and Manifestations. *Education*, 2(7), pp.227-230.

Kim, Sung won, Brown, Kari-Elle & Fong, Vanessa L, 2016. Credentialism and Career Aspirations. *Comparative education review*, 60(2), pp.271–292.

Kogan, Irena, Matković, Teo & Gebel, Michael, 2013. Helpful friends? Personal contacts and job entry among youths in transformation societies. *International journal of comparative sociology*, 54(4), pp.277–297.

Koivisto, Petri, Vuori, Jukka & Nykyri, Elina, 2007. Effects of the School-to-Work Group Method among young people. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 70(2), pp.277–296.

Koo, Anita, 2016. Expansion of vocational education in neoliberal China: hope and despair among rural youth. *Journal of education policy*, 31(1), pp.46–59.

Levels, Mark, Velden, Rolf van der & Di Stasio, Valentina, 2014. From school to fitting work. *Acta sociologica*, 57(4), pp.341–361.

Lindsay, Colin, 2005. Employability, Services for Unemployed Job Seekers and the Digital Divide. *Urban studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 42(2), pp.325–339.

Ling, Minhua, 2015. "Bad Students Go to Vocational Schools!": Education, Social Reproduction and Migrant Youth in Urban China. *The China journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)*, 73(1), pp.108–131.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017. *走出中国建设世界一流大学的路子 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站*. [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5148/201703/t20170307_298454.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017. *A way to build up the world-class universities* [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5148/201703/t20170307_298454.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018. *教育部2018年部门预算 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站*. [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A05/s7499/201804/t20180413_333043.html> [Accessed 8 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018. *Ministry of Education 2018 Departmental Budget.* [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A05/s7499/201804/t20180413_333043.html> [Accessed 8 August 2022].

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019. *职业教育"双高计划"建设名单公布 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站*. [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/201912/t20191219_412650.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].
Translated into English:

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019. Vocational education "double high plan" construction list announced[online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/201912/t20191219_412650.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020. *2018 年高等学校科技统计资料汇编 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站*. [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A16/A16_tjdc/202009/t20200918_488776.html> [Accessed 10 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020. *2018 Statistics of Colleges and Universities.* [online] Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A16/A16_tjdc/202009/t20200918_488776.html> [Accessed 10 August 2022].

Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 2021. *人力资源社会保障部关于印发"技能中国行动"实施方案的通知_劳动就业_中国政府网*. [online] Available at: <http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-07/06/content_5622619.htm?_zbs_baidu_bk> [Accessed 10 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China,. 2021. *Notice of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security on the Implementation Plan of the "Skilled China"*[online] Available at: <http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-07/06/content_5622619.htm?_zbs_baidu_bk> [Accessed 10 August 2022].

Nazneen, Sohela & Sultan, Maheen, 2014. Positionality and transformative knowledge in conducting 'feminist' research on empowerment in Bangladesh. *Women's studies international forum*, 45, pp.63–71.

Ng, Thomas W.H & Feldman, Daniel C, 2007. The school-to-work transition: A role identity perspective. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 71(1), pp.114–134.

Parkin, F., 1979. *Marxism and class theory : a bourgeois critique, New York: Columbia* University Press.

Paul, Ogwang Tulibaleka, Kuluthum, Nakalema & Divine, Effoude Ndohtabi, 2021. Family support and school-to-work transition: Perceptions and experiences of university graduates in Kampala city, Uganda. *Educational research and reviews*, 16(12), pp.428–437.

Qianzhan Database. 2022. *全国:职业中学学校数_中国宏观经济数据_前瞻数据库*. [online] Available at: <https://d.qianzhan.com/xdata/details/69f20467a07e4665.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].
Translated into English:

Qianzhan Database. 2022. *Nationwide: Number of Vocational Secondary Schools* [online] Available at: <https://d.qianzhan.com/xdata/details/69f20467a07e4665.html> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Schulte, Barbara, 2013. Unwelcome stranger to the system: vocational education in early twentieth-century China. *Comparative education*, 49(2), pp.226–241.

Shi, Weiping, 2013. Issues and Problems in the Current Development of Vocational Education in China. *Chinese education and society*, 46(4), pp.12–21.

Smith, Chris & Chan, Jenny, 2015. Working for two bosses: Student interns as constrained labour in China. *Human relations (New York)*, 68(2), pp.305–326.

Spencer, E., Brassey, J. and Mahtani, K., 2017. *Recall bias*. [online] Catalog of Bias. Available at: <https://catalogofbias.org/biases/recall-bias/#cite> [Accessed 13 July 2022].

TalkingData 2020. *【TalkingData】2020 年高校毕业生求职研究报告*. [online] Available at: <https://www.fxbaogao.com/view?id=2352368&query=%7B%22keywords%22%3A%222020%E5%B9%B4%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F%E6%B1%82%E8%81%8C%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%22%7D&index=0&pid=> [Accessed 11 August 2022].
Translated into English:
TalkingData 2020. *【TalkingData】2020-Chinese Graduate Job Search Research Report*

. [online] Available at: <https://www.fxbaogao.com/view?id=2352368&query=%7B%22keywords%22%3A%222020%E5%B9%B4%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F%E6%B1%82%E8%81%8C%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%22%7D&index=0&pid=> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Tholen, Gerbrand, 2017. Symbolic closure: Towards a renewed sociological perspective on the relationship between higher education, credentials and the graduate labour market. *Sociology (Oxford)*, 51(5), pp.1067–1083.

Tholen, Gerbrand, 2020. Degree power: educational credentialism within three skilled occupations. *British journal of sociology of education*, 41(3), pp.283–298.

UNICEF. 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/60366/file/Transitions-from-school-to-work-2019.pdf> [Accessed 24 July 2022].

Van Dijck, J, 2013. 'You have one identity': performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society*, 35(2), pp.199–215.

Wang, Anyi & Guo, Dong, 2019. Technical and vocational education in China: enrolment and socioeconomic status. *Journal of vocational education & training*, 71(4), pp.538–555.

Wang, Geng, 2021. 'They are bad seeds': stereotyping habitus in Chinese VET colleges. *British journal of sociology of education*, 42(7), pp.1008–1021.

Wang, Geng, 2022. 'A cultured man is not a tool': the impact of confucian legacies on the standing of vocational education in China. *Journal of vocational education & training*, pp.1–18.

Wang, Geng & Wang, Zhonghan, 2022. Vocational education: a poor second choice? A comparison of the labour market outcomes of academic and vocational graduates in China. *Oxford review of education*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), pp.1–20.

王延中, 2008. 蓝领职业的理性思考. *吉林广播电视大学学报*, (2), pp.76–108.
Translated into English:
Wang, Yanzhong, 2008. Investigating blue-collar workers in China. *Journal of Jilin Radio and Television University*, (2), pp.76–108.

Weber, M. et al., 1978. *Economy and society : an outline of interpretive sociology*, Berkeley ; London: University of California Press.

Wheeler, Earnest & Dillahunt, Tawanna, 2018. Navigating the Job Search as a Low-Resourced Job Seeker. *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*, 2018, pp.1–10.

Willis, P.E., 2016. Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs, London ; New York.

Woronov, TE, 2011. LEARNING TO SERVE: URBAN YOUTH, VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS AND NEW CLASS FORMATIONS IN CHINA. *The China journal* (Canberra, A.C.T.), 66(66), pp.77–99.

Xiaoguo, 2021. *【校果】2021 大学生求职趋势洞察*. [online] Available at: <https://www.djyanbao.com/report/detail?id=2948894&from=search_list> [Accessed 12 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Xiaoguo, 2021. *2021 Job Seeking Trend of University students*. [online] Available at: <https://www.djyanbao.com/report/detail?id=2948894&from=search_list> [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Xiong, Jie, 2011. Understanding Higher Vocational Education in China: Vocationalism vs Confucianism. *Frontiers of education in China*, 6(4), pp.495–520.

Xiu, Lin & Gunderson, Morley, 2013. Credential Effects and the Returns to Education in China. *Labour: Review Of Labour Economics And Industrial Relations*, 27(2), pp.pp225–248.

Yi, Hongmei et al., 2018. Assessing the Quality of Upper-Secondary Vocational Education and Training: Evidence from China. *Comparative education review*, 62(2), pp.199–230.

Zhilian, 2022. *【智联招聘】2021 大学生就业力调研报告*. [online] Available at: <https://www.djyanbao.com/report/detail?id=3067953&from=search_list> [Accessed 11 August 2022].
Translated into English:
Zhilian, 2022. *2021 College Student Employability Report*. [online] Available at: <https://www.djyanbao.com/report/detail?id=3067953&from=search_list> [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Appendix 1 Online survey

- What is your name?
- What is your gender?
- Where are you from?
- What is your major in school?
- What is your graduation year?
- Time available for interviews

Appendix 2 Interview guideline for students

Student version (45mins-60mins)

Guide	Notes
Section 1 Rapport - Where are you from? - Why did you choose this school? - What is your major in school? Why did you choose this major? - Have you graduated? What is the year of graduation? - What did you do after graduation?	
Section 2 Transition from school to work - Tell me about your experience of job hunting (Hint: the kind of jobs you are looking for; the business you would like to join; three factors that you value most for a job) - What is/are the way(s) that you look for a job (e.g. networking, career center in school, referred by family or friends)? Advantages and disadvantages Could you provide more details about how these different ways support your job hunting? - Which way you are using the most? Why? - Have you used technology in the process of finding a job? - What are these technologies? Could you provide more details? - What kind of technology you think is popular? - Different types of technology - Do you think that technology is more useful than other ways? - Can you give me a way that how you useful? - Do you think the transition from school is smooth? Why? - What alternative you benefit? What ways are more useful?	
Section 3 Post school experience - How is your job? - Is that anything you would like to tell me? - What do you think your STWT without the use of technology?	

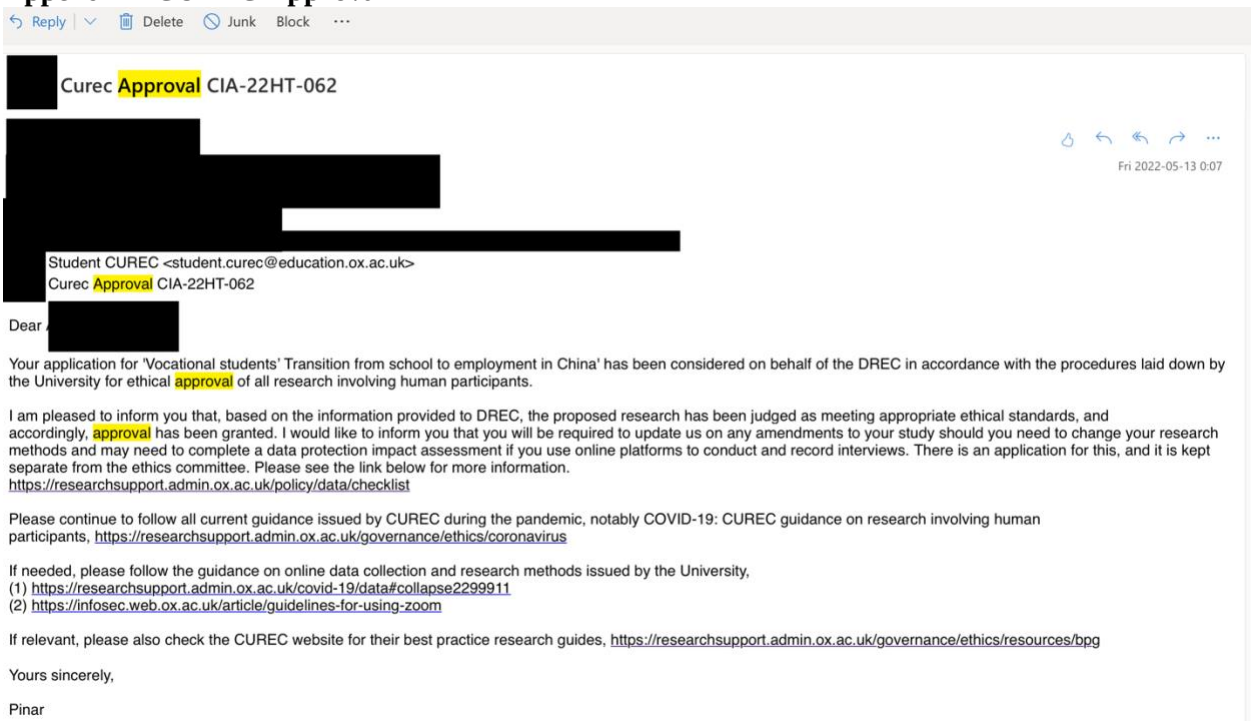
Appendix 3 Interview guideline for teachers

Teacher version (45mins-60mins)

Guide	Notes
Section 1 Basic information (collected before the interview by survey question) - Where are you from? - Why did you choose this school? - When did you join this school? - What kind of subject are you delivering? - How many teaching experiences do you have?	
Section 2 Transition from school to work - What is your key role? - What is the difference between students using technology in the transition and the students who don't use it? - Do you think technology benefits student's transition? - Has your role changed as a result of the technology? - Do you actively support students to use the technology?	

Section 3 Post school experience - Have you talked to graduated students about their job? How are the students? - Is that anything you would like to tell me?	

Appendix 4 CUREC Approval



Reply | Delete | Junk | Block | ...

[redacted] Curec Approval CIA-22HT-062

[redacted]

Fri 2022-05-13 0:07

[redacted]

Student CUREC <student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk>
Curec Approval CIA-22HT-062

Dear [redacted]

Your application for 'Vocational students' Transition from school to employment in China' has been considered on behalf of the DREC in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, based on the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted. I would like to inform you that you will be required to update us on any amendments to your study should you need to change your research methods and may need to complete a data protection impact assessment if you use online platforms to conduct and record interviews. There is an application for this, and it is kept separate from the ethics committee. Please see the link below for more information.
https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/policy/data/checklist

Please continue to follow all current guidance issued by CUREC during the pandemic, notably COVID-19: CUREC guidance on research involving human participants, https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus

If needed, please follow the guidance on online data collection and research methods issued by the University,
(1) https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/covid-19/data#collapse2299911
(2) https://infosec.web.ox.ac.uk/article/guidelines-for-using-zoom

If relevant, please also check the CUREC website for their best practice research guides, https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg

Yours sincerely,

Pinar

Appendix 5 Participant Information Sheet

[Study title – Vocational students' Transition from school to employment in China]

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference:

1. Introductory paragraph

My name is xxxand I am a student from xxx at Department of Education, University of Oxford. You are being invited to take part in my postgraduate research project.

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

2. Why is this research being conducted?

The aim of the research is to understand and explore the transition process from school to employment for vocational students and how technology can play a role in this process. The research could offer insights on vocational student's experiences and allow more understanding in this group of students.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

You are one of the students/teachers/principals from xxx. I would be very interested in your transition experiences and your attitudes towards the use of technology in the transition process. I am going to use snowballing sampling method so it is good that if you could recommend your friend/colleague who is from the school to take part in the interview. The number of participants will be around 20.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the study, without giving a reason and without negative consequences, by advising me of this decision. And you can decide whether to destroy the data has already been collected or used for the research.

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

I am going to conduct online interviews via TencentMeeting or WeChat audio call. No observation is taking place and the interview will be recorded by an App on my device and then it will be storage on the researcher's university Nexus365 OneDrive for Business account. The number of questions would be around 20. The interview will last for 30-60 mins. You can ask to pause or stop the research activities at any time. It is better to answer each question as specific as possible. The questions are mainly around learning experience, job hunting process and the use of technology in the transition. You can refuse to answer the question you don't want to answer. Here are some examples of the questions:

- What is your job?

- What is your motivation for using the technology in transition?

- How important do you think technology is in the transition process?

The informed consent form will be delivered to you through email or WeChat. Details can be referred to the form. With your consent, I would like to audio record you because this is important for the analysis of the transition process and I can have an accurate record of our conversation

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

For vocational students, you can have more insights on your transition process and reflect on your learning experience and career development. However, you might feel stressful through your reflection. To solve this, you could ask help from your teachers, friends and families.

For teachers, you can have more understanding on how students progress after graduating from the school and could adjust the course to increase the practicality. The research might require you to contribute some time.

For principals, this study could help you reflect on the career support from school for students and offer insights on improving employability of the students.

Individuals are less likely to be identifiable from the data as the researcher will use a pseudonym for every participant. Participants will have their Chinese names so the researcher will use an English name for every participant. The English name will not have any similar characters as the Chinese name so that the participants are less likely to be identified. However, it is possible to Students: their job and major in vocational school might be identifiable from the study but all these do not connect to the personal information. To increase confidentiality, what a teacher teaches in the school will be categorised in a wider subject group so that the teacher is difficult to be identified. For example, if the teacher is delivering the course of Hospitality management studies, the researcher will categorise the teacher into Hospitality and Tourism.

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

Consent records (including written consent forms and audio-recorded consent), contact details for the purpose of this research and the transcript of audio recordings will be collected. The consent records are for asking permission from participants and achieving good ethical and integrity practices. The contact details are for liaising different participants engaging in this research. The transcript of audio recordings is for analysing and producing the final research output.

Identifiable data (including consent forms) will be stored by student researcher's university Nexus365 OneDrive for business accounts. All data will be destroyed after the completion of the study on 12.08.2022. Other research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

The researcher xxx and principal investigator xxx will have access to the research data.

Research data will also be translated in Chinese, and stored at the researcher's university Nexus365 OneDrive for business account.

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

The findings from the research may be written up in my postgraduate thesis. It is less possible to for participants to be identifiable from the outputs but if you are happy to be identifiable from the output you can inform the researcher

I would like your permission to use direct quotations and for your name to be attributed to these but without identifying you in my thesis.

9. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at.

10. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: xxxxx).

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

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact primary researcher xxx (Email: ox.ac.uk) and I will do my best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern within 5 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Include the contact details for the relevant committee:

The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee;

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

12. Further Information and Contact Details

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

Name of the primary researcher: xxx

Department of Education

University email: xxx

Appendix 6 Consent form

Consent to take part in [Vocational students' Transition from school to employment in China]

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference:

Purpose of Study: [understand the vocational students' transition experience from school to employment]

	Please initial each box if you agree with the statement
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version _____, dated _____ for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point during the interview, without giving any reason.	☐
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
I understand that I could be probably identifiable from any publications but in the researcher try to decrease the extent to be identifiable as much as possible.	☐
I consent to being audio recorded.	☐
I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.	☐

Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (select *one* option): a) I do not wish to be quoted. or b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable. or c) I agree to the use of direct quotations, attributed to my name, in research outputs.	☐ ☐ ☐
I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information.	☐
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
I agree to take part.[1]	☐

_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date[2]	Signature

[1] In certain projects researchers may want to add an additional statement: [I hereby assign to the researcher all copyright in my contribution for use in all work stemming from this project and future projects.]

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