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**How Chinese Students Think: About British Education for Example**

**A Case Study of Chinese Students in Durham University**

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**2016**

**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of admission into the Masters by research in anthropology**

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My Master’s program began in October, 2014. Since then I have been indebted to numerous teachers and friends, all of whom have contributed to this thesis. First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Dr. Malcolm Smith. I had experienced a hard time during the Master’s study due to my limited academic ability. Dr. Elisabeth has always helped me with her kindness and profound knowledge, encouraging me continuously though my writing of thesis had not going well. She also gave me refreshing supervision and support both in and beyond my research, guiding the overall situation of my research. I also appreciate Dr. Malcolm very much for his patience in supervising me. Dr. Malcolm always prepared carefully in advance every time before our routine meeting and offered me inspiring suggestions. He even generously helped me with my English writing skill. It is my pleasure to be supervised under such a combination of two great mentors.

I would also like to express my gratitude to other faculties and staff of the Department of Anthropology at Durham University. It is their unfailing guidance allowing me to get into the field. I am especially grateful for Dr. Robert Layton who had kindly guided me to find a future research direction and agreed to be my doctoral supervisor. Additionally, I have debts to Dr. Claudia Merli, Dr. Paolo Fortis. I also show great respect to Kate Payne, the administrator for the research program in the department, she helped me greatly with all the things in relation with my program and she is always kindly. All of the aforementioned teachers and staff are instructors of my study.

Furthermore, I am grateful to my classmates and friends in the Department of Anthropology: Kai Wang, Lan Wei, Yixuan Wang, Boyang Zhou. I have learnt considerably from communicating with them. Special thanks to all my informants who have helped me in finishing this research. This research cannot be done without their supports and sharing. At last, I sincerely thank my parents for their financial support and spiritual support throughout my Master’s study. This thesis would been impossible without their love.

**ABSTRACT**

UK universities receive every year a massive number of students from mainland China at all study levels. The proposed paper addresses this phenomenon from the perspective of post-colonial critique. Based on original ethnographic data, my presentation discusses the extent to which student experience in the UK can be seen as a post-colonial encounter that engenders specific (asymmetrical) relations of power. Using Gramsci’s theory of hegemony I examine closely the everyday life of Chinese students in the University of Durham, in special relation to their career plans, parental expectations, and what appears to be a collective Chinese imagery of “a superior Western education”. My research has found that hegemonic narratives of the West circulate widely among Chinese students, shaping and motivating their educational choices. Reified representations of the West and the Orient, in their entanglement with ideas about “progress” and its relation with “Capitalism” produce new Chinese subjectivities “at home” and “abroad”. In the end, the thesis develops further by addressing two additional questions. How does this discourse ground and reproduce itself in subtle corners of daily life? How might the process of reproduction and discipline shape the present and the future of Chinese society?

**Chapter 1 Introduction**

* 1. Chinese Overseas Students: Daily Life, Popular Culture and Western Modernity

The origin of my research interest on Chinese students in the United Kingdom (UK) is closely related with my own overseas life experience. It is a choice of topic which comes from both personal life and academic concerns. There are large numbers of Chinese students coming to the UK for higher education each year and I am one of them. What I am here for and what are the other students here for? How do Chinese students in the UK experience their life overseas? I am curious about such issues. However, while designing my research, I was muddled and did not know which direction or question to focus on. I knew that I must find a research question which could guide my research as a compass. After my first observation of the Chinese students in Durham University in late 2014, I found that it is a large group of people which is quite mixed. I could hardly tell if such a large group had anything in common, and I had difficulty establishing a focus of interest. I asked myself, what is my stereotype of Chinese students in the UK, followed by constantly asking many questions of the culture and power behind my stereotype, which step by step, formed my research orientation today focusing on “students who self-identify as urban middle class”, who hold a pragmatic attitude toward Chinese society and politics and may become future social elites in China, in the Durham University.

China is still a conservative and technocratic state, which thinks highly of natural science and technology but gives rather less value to the humanities and social sciences. Top academic elites are more difficult to play a decisive role in shaping contemporary Chinese politics, let alone popular culture. But, the focus of this study, “urban middle-class students” are more likely to occupy pivotal positions in the contemporary Chinese business, political world, and in popular culture. There are already many studies focusing on how several “VIPs” with overseas education background have shaped China’s history and society. The vast majority of the “professional middle-class” is neglected in favor of the few social elites. This type of Chinese “professional class” are educated and can express their voice, but are not as academically or politically important as the “VIPs”. I entitle their culture as “Chinese middle class professional culture”. As individuals, they do not twinkle as the top notch, but as a group, they constitute the majority of the professional class and usually they are influential in contemporary Chinese popular culture. They deserve much more scholarly attention.

Nowadays, it is common to see armies of Chinese international students hurrying to classes in the campuses of popular overseas education destinations such as the United States (US) and the UK. The increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad has been a remarkable phenomenon related to globalization. Those educated out of China become pivotal to the development of both Chinese society and destination countries.

Studies on “overseas Chinese students” have flourished in the last 20 years. The majority of them take the subjectivity of overseas Chinese students for granted while failing to explore the broader power and structural factors in their daily life. Most of the research focuses on a specific aspect of students' learning or living issues such as language learning (e.g. Webster 2011), identity (e.g. Singh 2008), religion (e.g. Jenkins and Galloway 2009), mental health (e.g. Kuijing 2006), and social adaption (e.g. Jenkins and Galloway 2009). Several previous studies focus on the motivation of students' education choice (e.g. Counsell 2011) but have failed to analyze precisely the factors behind their choices. In short, most of the studies cannot explain China's "overseas study fever" in its historical or political-economic context.

Recently, a few studies have begun to shed light on overseas education studies by employing postcolonial theories. Lott-Havey's work (2013) on the educational encounter with a discussion of "a modern other" and "a non-modern self" is an interesting one. Based on blogs written by Chinese overseas students, Lott-Havey explores how the image of a modern West and a non-modern East has been shaped through various hegemonic narratives. However, it only analyzes the blog, a type of "text". It cannot reveal a much bigger picture of the influence of Western hegemonic narratives in Chinese students' daily life. Ishikawa (2009), based on several currently popular "university rankings", illustrates how the emergence of Western dominant models in higher education and the power they embody affects non-Western universities such as those in Japan. Another similar study by William (2011) focuses on the distinction between hegemony and self-determination in higher education. It proposes the soft-power perspective as an alternative to the anti-colonial perspective and reaches a final conclusion that university ranking is a kind of soft power used by a dominant group as a governance tool to shape the global higher education landscape. For Ishikawa and William's study, although they argue that higher education can be penetrated by Western hegemony, they use higher education and not the actual students as their subject of study of the education environment.

These inspiring recent studies are the point of departure for my study. Their perspective reminds me that overseas education, as a post-colonial encounter, deserves further exploration. Also, their disadvantages remind me that it is necessary to once again make Chinese students themselves the center of research. In addition to students' sentiments expressed in blog posts, many other aspects of their daily life may reflect the asymmetrical power relation between the “less modern” China and the “more modern” West.

This study focuses on daily life and the decision making process of Chinese students in the UK to shed new light on this research field. Based on original ethnographic data, my study discusses the extent to which student experience in the UK can be seen as a post-colonial encounter that engenders specific (asymmetrical) relations of power. Using Gramsci’s theory of hegemony I examine closely the everyday life of Chinese students in the Durham University, in special relation to their career plans, parental expectations, and what appears to be a collective Chinese imagery of “a superior Western education”. The research then discusses how the hegemony of Western modernity manifest itself in daily life and how this discourse has shaped Chinese popular elites’ perception of self, development and future. The dissertation finally concludes by articulating whether this discourse is problematic for the present and the future of Chinese society and reflects the possibility of breaking through this discourse.

* 1. Fieldwork Place: Durham University

This study chooses Durham University as the fieldwork place for its representativeness and its convenience for my participant observation. Durham University is an ancient comprehensive university located in the northeast of England in the city of Durham, which enrolls nearly 2,000 mainland Chinese students of various backgrounds each year, representing about 10 percent of the total number of students of the university. Whilst it is not the university with the largest number of Chinese students in recent years, Durham can be regarded as one of the most popular choices of destination universities without doubt. As a result, it can be selected as the representative of the appropriate fieldwork place.

Durham University is a collegiate university with 16 colleges distributed widely in the city of Durham. Several of them are located around the castle and the cathedral on the peninsula in the center of the city, while the others are mostly close to academic departments. Students are enrolled in different colleges through applications based on their own will. In considering postgraduate Chinese students here, the majority of them live on campus in Ustinov College, which is the only postgraduate student college. Others are either dispersed randomly among the other colleges or live off-campus.

Independently of college affiliation, Chinese students are registered on different programs in various departments. Many of the Chinese students study in the Durham Business School since most of them are in the UK studying for Master’s programs in the area of business. Other popular programs for the Chinese are education and law. In addition, Chinese students will also meet on students’ association and clubs, balls and formals.

Since I am a graduate student in Durham University, the choice of the fieldwork place helps me get into the field much easier. I can gain the general information about the city and the university naturally along with my life observation in the new life in the UK. Moreover, I have been able to come to understand the group of people I am studying more quickly as they are the kind of people I have encountered day by day in my overseas life. My life and my research can be closely combined which helps with each other.

* 1. Definitions of Key Concepts

There are two concepts in this thesis need to be defined in advance for better interpretation. The UK as a representation of a “more modern state” and a member of “Western Powers” and China as a representation of a rapidly developing but still “less modern state” and a member of the Eastern states. I use two phrases that may be a little awkward, “less modern” and “more modern”, to highlight the hierarchy of modernity in Chinese popular opinion: China as a rapidly developing nation state stands (in popular Chinese discourse) at the borderline of the modern and the backward, but the UK, as an old-brand capitalist power is seen as a mature modern state in the inner circle of developed states.

Chinese people think highly of the UK as an image of “the modern West”. First, in the mind of the Chinese public, the UK is a representation of the old-brand Western capitalist countries. Second, it always appears in the textbooks of modern world history in China together with other western countries like the US and France, in the image of “big powers of Western capitalism” or “Western invaders” which is one example of how the representation of “the modern West” has been indoctrinated to Chinese. Third, when speaking of studying overseas among the Chinese, it is considered as going to western countries like the US and the UK by default at present among the segment of people and families who self-identify as “urban middle-class”, which strengthens the UK as a representation of “the modern West”. While one goes to the US or the UK to study, others will have the reaction that “Oh, he/she is going abroad”. Which country one goes to, does not matter that much in the public consciousness of the Chinese in majority. This binary image also fits well with mainstream Chinese’ ideas of “home” and “abroad”.

In short, I consider the UK as to some extent the representation of a “more modern state” and “the more modern West”. And China itself represents to some degree a “less modern state” and “the less modern East”. Regarding China as “the East”, it is not completely equal to the tradition al view of the Oriental, but a statement relative to the UK as “the West”.

* 1. Outline of Subsequent Chapters

For the purpose of examining the extent to which Chinese students’ experience in the UK can be seen as a post-colonial encounter that engenders specific asymmetrical relations of power, in chapter two, the literature review part of the thesis, I try to present, explain and illustrate the educational encounter in the framework of Gramscian approaches to hegemony and critical post-colonial theory. In addition to the discussion of theoretical tools which help analyzing, the literature review also includes case studies on overseas experiences of Chinese students with special reference to relations of power.

In the section of theoretical review, I first review Gramsci’s theory of hegemony by focusing on its analytical use in understanding contemporary society. The definitions of hegemony widely used in postcolonial debates was presented first, followed by summarizing its apparatus and listing out its features. After that, I discuss colonialism, orientalism and capitalism in relation to the pivotal tool of hegemony. In the second section of theoretical review, the development of the usage of the theory since Talal Asad’s work (1973) on the relation between anthropology and colonial force is presented, followed by Edward Said's work of *Orientalism*, which has turned anthropologists’ direction to the deconstruction of Western hegemony. Furthermore, Eric Wolf’s work on explaining the formation of hegemony of global capitalism in his book *Europe and the People without History* is discussed as the next step. After discussing the incisive methodology which helps detect the asymmetrical relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the thesis further articulates how these theories inspire the present research.

In the section of practical review, I review relevant literature in three steps. The first step is an overview of studies on overseas Chinese students. The next step discusses the studies on Chinese students in the UK. The third and most important part of the review leads to a critical reflection on previous studies within overseas education, employing the theories of hegemony and post-colonialism. By presenting and analyzing each trend of research, I reach a preliminary conclusion that whilst the former trend of studies has advantages in highlighting the subjectivity of “student” experience, it does not have the capacity to interpret daily life in a broader theoretical pattern. At the same time, in the latter trend of research it is easy to neglect the subjectivity of students, to ignore the experience of daily life, and to lose sight of the wider cultural and historical background and the structural asymmetrical relations of power.

In the chapter of methodology, the discussion is carried out in three sections. It first reviews three basic approaches to fieldwork and ethnography in the history of anthropology starting from Malinowski to structural functionalism, to Geertz’s interpretive anthropology and finally to postmodernism. Regarding Geertz and his interpretation theory, first, I point out the importance of thick description in ethnography. Second, his reflection of reflexivity as well as how to deal with subjectivity and objectivity certainly influenced later studies, including my own research. Third, it discusses about the issue of representation in ethnography and how it relates to my work.

After reviewing theories, it delves into the advantages and disadvantages of this study in practice when considering my research as a study of indigenous anthropology. Also, I explain the specific research methods I have employed in the fieldwork: life history method and ethnographic interviewing in the end of second part. In the third part of the methodology discussion, fieldwork and ethics issues are discussed, rules I need to keep in mind and follow are presented.

In chapter four, the thesis first situates the educational encounter historically and contemporarily. Otherwise, the question cannot be understood completely by regarding it as a purely educational phenomenon. Historical backgrounds, governments’ policies, diplomatic factors as well as educational policies are all influential. I then examine these key issues through two angles: "China's policy towards overseas studies" and "international student recruitment in the UK". The dissertation then arrives at a brief conclusion that while the pre-1980 students dispatched by the Chinese government were abroad for the aim of “learning from the ‘modern West’ in order to construct China when back home”, the motivations of large number of students "going abroad" today appear different from and more complicated than they originally were.

Following this background is a description of the general conditions of Chinese students in Durham University. How are they distributed in Durham colleges and degree programs? What family backgrounds do they have and why are they here seeking a degree?

The main body of the description and discussion of ethnography contains seven sections. Among which the first two sections are the statement of my participant observation experience on my first sight of the UK along with hundreds of Chinese students on the way from Newcastle airport to the city of Durham, and an observation of the matriculation ceremonies. The other five sections are case study examples of five students in five different situations which represent different kinds of Chinese students in the UK. The ethnography of the five informants focuses mainly on their daily life in Durham University, their life in the UK, why they come to the UK and what are their future career plans in connection with the society in China, their life histories back to their days at home, and even days back to their childhood memories. The latter five narratives are based on my participant observation, usage of life history method and the method of ethnographic interview. I also try to mix the description, interpretation and illustration together in ethnographic writing.

Chapter four concludes that in the multi-faceted life values and motivations of various types of Chinese overseas students, there is one commonality: the discourse of Western hegemony has significantly shaped their life values in the UK. In chapter five, the thesis develops further by addressing two additional questions. How does this discourse ground and reproduce itself in subtle corners of daily life? How might the process of reproduction and discipline shape the present and the future of Chinese society?

The concluding chapter first summarizes the characters of the five student participants. The complex spectrum of hegemony is extensively argued by deconstructing two central themes, including: Chinese students' view of the “hierarchy” of the modernity of China and of the UK; additionally, modern social values’ expectation of self-development and self-progress in China. Finally, I put the discussion back to the Chinese context and analyze the potential effects of uncritically thinking of the students and speculate on positive possibilities for the future. In the last section of chapter five, the thesis ends by reflecting on methodological issues and future research directions.

**Chapter 2 Literature Review**

Postcolonial studies analyze the politics of knowledge (creation, control, and distribution). It is a discourse focusing on asymmetrical relations of power: the relationship between the imperial colonizer and the former colonized people, the West over the third-world countries; an emerging cultural imperialism throughout the world. In anthropology, according to Fischer, post-colonialism “records human relations among the colonial nations and the subaltern peoples exploited by colonial rule” (Fischer 2011, 2). For the purpose of examining the extent to which Chinese students’ experience in the UK can be seen as a post-colonial encounter that engenders specific (asymmetrical) relations of power, I am attempting to present, explain and illustrate the educational encounter in the framework of Gramscian approaches to hegemony, critical post-colonial theory and in the debates on orientalism and Occidentalism in contemporary social anthropology. In addition to gaining theoretical tools help analyzing, this literature review will include case studies on overseas experiences of Chinese students with special reference to relations of power.

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Gramsci and the Concept of Hegemony

Gramsci was the founding father of Western Marxism and a political strategist reflecting on possible stages for action (cf. Hobsbawm 1999; Vincent 2007). He first proposed the theory of hegemony for power within and beyond the institution of the state which proves the need for pre-war preparation (Vincent 2007, 218). Yet, his social thoughts which contain remarkably suggestive insights into the question of dominance and subordination in modern capitalist societies has become much more popular than his theory on pre-war preparations (Jackson 1985, 567). In discovering how power works to produce consent to asymmetrical relations through Chinese students’ own subjugation and exploitation under a perspective of post-colonial critique, this review focuses on its analytical use in understanding contemporary society by presenting its definition, apparatus and features.

What is hegemony? Initially, hegemony referred to the leader of polis in ancient Greece (8th century BC-AD 6th century) who owned politico-military dominance (Chernow and Vallasi 1994). In the 19th century, it was used to refer to the “balance of forces between states facing off in the international stage” by convention (Vincent 2007, 216). By now, thanks to the influential works written by Antonio Gramsci, hegemony represents a kind of power works to convince individuals and social classes to subscribe to the social values and norms of an inherently exploitative system. It is a form of social power that relies on voluntarism and participation, rather than the threat of punishment for disobedience. It is a kind of spontaneous consent “which is historically caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (Gramsci 1971, 12).

The apparatus of domination and hegemony was objectified in and mainly exercised through civil society, the incorporation of educational, religious and associational institutions such as libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture to permeate their influences (cf. Femia 1981, 24-26; Gramsci 1996, 53). What hegemony constructs is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination (Vincent 2007, 222). The process sounds mechanical: “ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to follow the dominant fundamental” (Jackson 1985, 568).

As a theoretical tool, hegemony helps us understand “how ideas reinforce or undermine existing social structures and social histories seek to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant group and relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimize” (Jackson 1985, 568). In other words, hegemonic power serves the interests of ruling groups at the expense of subordinate ones (Jackson 1985, 571). Hegemony theory believes that the leaders of a historical bloc must develop a world view that appeals to a wide range of other groups within the society and they must be able to claim with at least some plausibility that their particular interests are those of society at large (Jackson 1985, 571).

It is also noteworthy that in hegemony theory, people taking charge of power are not limited to those traditional political elites, but also include “parents, preachers, teachers, journalists, literacy, experts of all sorts, as well as advertising executives, entertainment promoters, popular musicians, sports figures and celebrities --- all of whom are involved in, shaping the value and attitude of a society” (Jackson 1985, 572).

2.1.2 Hegemonic Power: Colonialism, Orientalism, Capitalism

After the end of the Second World War, an age of worldwide decolonization began. Then, since the 1960s, influenced by the process of political decolonization, postmodernism and post-colonialism have arisen. Scholars then turned their attention to a focus on “colonialism and capitalism; anthropologies and histories; Marxism and feminism; domination and resistance” (Vincent 2002). Since then, as described below, one can easily find the “ghost” of Gramsci almost everywhere in the development of the post-colonial discourse. Hegemony theory has become a pivotal tool used by postmodernists and post-colonialists. According to Gramsci, international relations precede or follow fundamental social relations as well (Gramsci 1971, 186). Here, with post-colonialists’ need of criticizing colonial power in an international arena, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has been expanded from the ruler of a given country to the ruler of the world (the West).

In 1973, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, a collection of ground-breaking papers, showed a newly increasing academic interest in the relation of power to knowledge in situating the discipline of anthropology as a post-colonial encounter. This volume cast doubt on the political-economic background of the so-called neutral functional anthropology in the colonial era, by claiming that “the anthropological works have contributions on the investigated nations but simultaneously preserving the colonial system” (Asad 1973, 16). Asad, one contributor of this volume, points out that anthropology was born in “the power relationship between dominating (European) and dominated (non-European) cultures, an unequal power encounter between the West and the Third World goes back to the emergence of bourgeois Europe, an encounter in which colonialism is merely one historical moment” (Asad 1973, 16).

In this volume, the power of an “evil anthropology” is believed to be related to the hegemony of the West; however, “evil Anthropology” as an objective criticized by Asad here is beyond my focus. Asad’s research still reminds me that except for ethnographic studies, many other cultural, social or academic phenomena could be fields where the hegemony of the West exert its power.

Five years later, Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published, and further turned anthropologists’ direction to the deconstruction of Western hegemony; it was interpreted as “the anthropological critique of the Euro-centeredness of scholarship over Third World regions” (Vincent 2002, 133). Said began his discussion with the assumption that the Orient, in the same way as the West itself, is not “an inert fact of nature” (Said 1978, 22) but “an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (Said 1978, 22). That is, “the Orient” is a historical discourse produced by the Occident and “the two geographical entities thus support and reflect each other to some extent” (Said 1978, 22), a view which inspired my research that knowledge and history making are closely related with power. Said’s book also owes a lot to Gramsci. It recounts how the subjects understand initial encounters with Europeans in their indigenous cultural terms, “how they resisted, adapted to, cooperated with, or challenged their new masters, and how they attempted to reinvent their disrupted lives” (Vincent 2002). Hegemony theory is his tool in explaining the relationship of power, of domination, a complex of hegemony between the Occident and the Orient, the interpretation process of which benefits me very much.

After the discussion of anthropology of the Western hegemony, Eric Wolf (1982) explained the formation of hegemony of global capitalism in his book Europe and the People without History in a further step. Wolf began his discussion by giving out two explicit assumptions: firstly, every society is to some degree on changing; and secondly, a proper understanding of societal connections and transformations must start from an analysis of the material processes: “the production, circulation, and consumption of wealth” (Asad 1987, 594). Then, he presented the readers that with the emergence of capitalism in northwestern Europe, strong and centralized kingdoms were beginning to emerge in the meanwhile. After that, the growing of long-distance trade stood in front and center, military ambitions then were combining with commercial interests (Asad 1987, 594) to spread European hegemony abroad. Thus, capitalist accumulation continues to engender new working classes in widely scattered regions of the world. It recruits these working classes from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds and inserts them into variable political and economic hierarchies (Asad 1987, 595). The new working classes change these hierarchies by their presence and are themselves changed by the hegemony forces to which they are exposed (Asad 1987, 595). As a result, the capitalist mode of production has become a very powerful way in writing a particular history of relations, institutions and processes that dominated the world (Asad 1987, 603). The above interpretation was stated in the grant view of history which inspired me to expend my thinking pattern not limited to a political-economic background alone. Furthermore, what can also learn from Wolf’s epic story is that the control of information that enables autonomous activity is what matters to dominant power (Asad 1987, 606) and this is how the hegemony of world capitalism forms.

In short, since the mid-20th century, this expanded edition of hegemony theory has been an incisive methodology to detect the asymmetrical relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Thanks to all the above research finished by Gramsci’s followers, they inspired this research. Asad’s work pointed out a suppression of the West over the East and also indicated the inclusion relation between post-colonialism and the hegemony of global capitalism started from the Bourgeois Europe, which helps me in investigating if there is a same type of power engendered in the encounter of “Chinese students’ experience in the UK”. Said’s research helped me understand Chinese students’ experience in the UK under the context of “dominance and consent” between the West and the East. Additionally and perhaps, more importantly, its insightful interpretation of how the West dominate the East led me to see if there are any modern styles of dominance in the form of power, work and knowledge and how this role might get influence on against how the Chinese students living through, talking about and acting upon in their UK experience. Wolf’s discussion on global capitalism allowed me to realize that in addition to view the synchronically political-economic background of the higher education in the UK, it is of importance to pay attention to the diachronically historical background of this phenomenon.

As discussed above, the theoretical framework composed by post-colonial critique, hegemony and orientalism together inspired me in analyzing “student experience through overseas education”, which is designed to be a new form of post-colonial encounter. However, there is little literature using the perspective of post-colonial critique to analyze “student experience overseas”. I will try to interpret it in such perspective which will be apparent in my ethnography. But previous to this, related case studies will be reviewed in the next section first.

2.2 Case Studies Review

With the globalization of education (especially higher education) in recent decades, research concerning on overseas higher education has been a hot topic for a long time. In this research of why Chinese students come to the UK for higher education and how they live there by situating student experience in the UK as a form of postcolonial encounter, I attempt to review relevant literature in three steps. The first step is an overview of studies on overseas Chinese students. The next step discusses the studies on Chinese students in the UK. The third and most important part of this review leads to a critical reflection on previous studies within overseas education part, employing the theories of hegemony and post-colonialism.

2.2.1 Overseas Chinese Students, In General

The study of overseas Chinese students mainly started in the 1970s and has been a focus of intensive research since the beginning of the 21st century. Geographically speaking, all popular overseas-education destinations for Chinese students has been covered in previous studies, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the EU, Philippines, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Chronologically speaking, previous studies can be divided into two categories: overseas Chinese student in the pre-1980 era are mainly researched by historians; while social scientists and educators put much emphasis on the post-1980 era’s overseas Chinese students. Based on the nature of this research, studies of the pre-1980 era are not discussed here. Research after 1980s can basically be divided into two types: focus on students as “subject”; focus on overseas education experience as an “encounter”.

The existing research which concentrates on students as “subjects” is associated to a larger extent with living issues and to a lesser extent with learning issues. A representative study on learning issues is that of Webster who explored the goal, experience and learning outcomes of Chinese students in Hong Kong in 2011 (Webster 2011). It is conducted in quantitative method and reaches a conclusion that there has close relationships between students’ achievement of study abroad goals and host country experiences. This conclusion of the study is reasonable but appears rather small in research pattern by only present superficial explanations.

Research on living issues delves into various aspects of Chinese students’ daily life, such as identity (Singh 2008), religion (Jenkins and Galloway 2009), mental health (e.g. Chou et al. 2011; Kuijing 2006), social (e.g. Jenkins and Galloway 2009), cultural and psychological (Chou et al. 2011) adaption and medicine practice (e.g. Bishop et al. 2009), among which mental health and adjustment problem are the hottest topics. Under this trend of research approach, most research start with exploring one or several specific aspects of students’ daily life; however, the majority of them only land on superficial explanations and failed to provide profound analysis of what type of power relations produce those specific cultural phenomena in Chinese students’ daily life. Naming a few examples of one of the hot topics, the mental health of Chinese students, will well illustrate this disadvantage: Chou (2011) investigated the relation between stress, coping and depressive symptoms in a quantitative method. Mikal further continued the study of students’ mental health on the perspective of “the role of Internet” in dealing with stress issues in 2015 (Mikal 2015). Both of them only analyses different reasons caused the stress of Chinese student and how to deal with it, but they fail to point out what factors behind those superficial reasons cause the crisis in Chinese students’ daily life. Further, without a profound acknowledge of deeper reasons, they can hardly reach pertinent conclusions come to front. As the example shows, most research failed to take “relations of power”, which is an inspiring perspective, into consideration of the framework of research, such as the perspective of post-colonialism, the theory of hegemony and the power relation between China and the destination countries.

But, a small amount of past research did take the education experience as an “encounter” of post-colonialism, including the research of Brain Drain, Brain Gain and choice making. Brain Drain topics flourished in 1990s, David (1997) explored the reasons for Brain Drain through different methodologies. The topic turned cold until Kellogg refocused on it in 2012. He concludes from his research that a much larger proportion of students choose to go back to China after graduation nowadays, which can be regarded as a newly developed Brain Gain phenomenon (Kellogg 2012). And in his opinion, enlarged economic opportunities in China have contributed most to this phenomenon. Kellogg’s reflection on the Brain Drain and Brain Gain topic reflected his profound insight into old questions, and shows a critical perspective that keeps pace with the times and which deserves to be used by later scholars. Choice-making studies became popular in the 21st century and scholars such as Bodycott (2009) began to explore choice-making under the theory of push-pull, their data are of some help tome in taking into consideration fully the possible choice-making reasons, which provided me with a sound basis for the analysis of potential asymmetrical relations of power. However, the scope of their research is somewhat narrow, considering only the response to superficial phenomena, and addressing strategies for families and markets in considering the choice of whether to study overseas or not. Lott-Havey’s work on understanding the education encounter through discussion of “a modern other” and “a non-modern self” (Lott-Havey 2013) is an inspiring literature which shares a same mind with me. The research starts from Chinese blogs produced by individuals, study abroad experts etc. to explore uneven notions of modernity by using the method of digital humanities. It is organized coherently by providing fruitful literatures on transnational education, modernity, post-colonialism etc. in various aspects and integrate theoretical framework consist of discussion of modernity, Orientalism and Occidentalism. It finally reveals a contrasted image between the West (a modern other) and the East (a non-modern self). I appreciate the research for its real concerns with the phenomenon of increasing transnational education in contemporary China and its broad theoretical framework for exploring it; however, the author regards the blog as “text” and starts his interpretation based on such texts with the methods of big data, which in my opinion is not a suitable application of the method in such context. Moreover, it neglects the live subjectivity of the students. Furthermore, while the theoretical presentation in the first three chapters is powerful, the interpretation part reveals week in the last two chapters.

In sum, firstly, shown by the above studies, the majority of previous scholars mainly take a specific aspect of overseas Chinese students’ learning or living issues as a research target, such as focusing on language learning, mental health and social network. Most of the research tends to be descriptive and aims at providing practical solutions, or, towards exclusively interpreting the reasons behind the aspect they focus on. They fail to pay attention to the broader structural and cultural factors of overseas education. Secondly, in the studies of Brain Drain and Brain Gain, scholars did consider Chinese students in postcolonial context to examine how China as a country from the ‘Third World’ simultaneously experience Brain Gain and Brain Drain under the influence of the West. But, in these studies, Chinese overseas students are taken to represent a type of human resource and information is analyzed quantitatively. We cannot see how Chinese overseas students as a group of “people” experience overseas education in postcolonial context. Thirdly, the choice-making studies managed to explore reasons and strategies under the context of both the host and the destination countries and paid attention to the subjectivity of students; however, they progressed no further than the analysis of immediate causes while neglecting the root causes. There reveals a lack of desire in concerning “what’s going on” in contemporary Chinese society as well. Fourthly, Heavy’s exploration of contrasted modernity between the West and the East base on Chinese blog is conducted base on the interpretation of blog as text, it failed to focus on the live experience of students: what they say, do and act upon when in destination countries, the first-hand kind of material. Last but not least, the existing research on Chinese students in the UK, as a composition of an overall research of Chinese students abroad, basically shares a same pattern with the overall research trend discussed in this section both in topic distribution and in strength of analysis. Details will be further discussed below.

2.2.2 Overseas Chinese Students, UK

The general classification of the studies on overseas Chinese students in the UK shares the same strain with the overall condition. The studies on the learning and living of Chinese overseas students, which take students only as “research subjects”, compose the majority of research. Meanwhile, a small part of research to some extent situates education experience as an “encounter”. However, a difference revealed here is that works concerning the learning process are more numerous than studies that focus on the problems of living in the UK. Turner (2006) conducted research on academic learning and Liu (2013) carried out studies on language learning; while living-related topics are limited to adaption issues and mental health, such as Wang’s study on culture exposure (Wang 2012) and Li’s on identity (Virgil 2013), which represents the latest picture. The change of distribution of research type may have resulted from the short period of overseas experience (mostly one year) of the majority of Chinese students in the UK. In addition to this the unique UK condition also generated new research trends based on education as an “encounter”. These will be presented and analyzed in the following paragraphs.

Counsell (2011) paid special attention to why Chinese students choose the UK and how they see their future, using quantitative methods to explore various factors contributing to the students’ decision to study in the UK. The research also examines “the levels of (and reasons for) the career optimism/pessimism” (Counsell 2011) that these students felt. The author provided fruitful statistics and conducted rigorous data analysis which shows that students decided to study abroad because it gave them added value over studying in China: factors such as the opportunity to develop foreign language skills (67 percent of respondents), and the opportunity to gain foreign education experience and learn about different cultures (54 percent) were noted. Specific reasons for the choice of the UK concentrate on: a quicker route to a degree (17 percent of respondents), better links between Chinese educational institutions and the UK universities (10 percent), good nature of people in the UK (5 percent), ease of entry into the UK higher education system (4 percent), parental/family influence (4 percent) and other reasons like a safer country, a football country and cost considerations (Counsell 2011). Counsell’s study provides me with more integrated insights on the possible reasons of decision-making process among the students, which could further help me in a better consideration within a post-colonial encounter. However, the research was perhaps limited to rather superficial explanations of the potential reasons, and failed to situate the results in a bigger historical and political-economic context.

Rudd’s (2012) study, concentrating on students in a business school in the UK, researches the decision-making process of Chinese students guided by “customer decision and making” strategies. The result of the study shows not much novelty. However, examining the education encounter under a view of “consumer decision-making process” inspired me in taking student experience in the UK under a thinking pattern of “purchase intention”. This helped me to reconsider part of the reasons behind the education choice and explore further power relations behind these intentions.

Huang’s (2013) study on employability of UK Chinese students is the latest relevant literature in this topic. It investigates current Chinese students studying tourism in the UK, their motivations of being here, the relationship between choice making process and their future career expectation. Though it is a topic which deserves developing, the author failed to present and analysis it convincingly enough, focusing on descriptive published reviews of the literature, and failing to reach a clear conclusion. I have tried to avoid these problems in the current research.

In sum, the three literatures discussed above provide to some extent a departure point for my study. This previous research has made me vigilant about research design and analysis, and provided me with more complete background information. It has inspired my thinking of considering the daily life of Chinese students in the UK as a post-colonial encounter that engenders specific asymmetrical relations of power.

2.2.3 Overseas Education, Hegemony, Post-colonialism

As shown above, there are few contemporary studies of Chinese students' experience in the UK that make special reference to power relations. The present study has therefore used insights from several case studies with special concentrations on power-relation analysis within the field of overseas education that were based in countries other than the UK.

Tikly (2001) examines the correlation of globalization and education in postcolonial countries, with special reference to the education systems of sub-Saharan Africa. He chooses post-colonialism as a mode of critique for it places sub-Saharan Africa at the center of the problem and in the meanwhile is concerned with European colonialism’s impact on education systems. However, the article does not demonstrate well with such an intention by only presented the relationship between globalization with education in economic, politics and cultural aspects.

Ishikawa observes the “university rankings” in the hegemony of overseas education. The study analyses how the emergence of dominant models in higher education and power they embody affect non-Western universities such as those in Japan (Ishikawa 2009). Based on participant observation in a Japanese research university, this study is concerned with another dimension of the globalization of higher education: the emergence of a hegemonic power of “dominant models” that transforms identities and affects internal hierarchies both within individual institutions and across national system of higher education. Furthermore, the findings address the issue of emerging hegemony in the world’s higher education in the context of globalization.

Jie Zheng’s (2010) work on Chinese graduate student’s perspectives on pursuing higher education in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is the most adjacent one with my research, and it focuses on the encounter of Chinese students with education overseas in the present day. The author did not use ground theory in analysis but presented us with informative literature reviews on international student movements (ISM) which informed us that “researchers and scholars usually focus on national and institutional policies for and practices of ISM, as well as on comparative and quantitative studies of ISM, while qualitative studies of ISM are very rare” (Zheng 2010). The part of review on “external education politics” of the UK and China is a significant reference for me in my research.

Finally, the latest literature which expresses a new mode of thinking comes from William, who conducted a research project called “Soft Power, University Rankings and Knowledge Production”, focusing on the distinction between hegemony and self-determination in higher education. This research reveals a new direction: to analyze the nature of the global hegemonies in higher education (William 2011). While anti-colonial thinkers describe the dominance of the Western paradigm as an oppression of indigenous culture and knowledge and as neo-colonialism in higher education, their arguments lead to such questions as how much self-determination do non-Western countries have? On what basis can the colonized resist the colonizer? To what extent are non-Western nations aware of the Western hegemony? This article proposes the soft-power perspective as an alternative to the anti-colonial perspective and reaches a final conclusion that university ranking is a kind of soft power used by dominant group as a governance tool to shape the global higher education landscape.

As discussed above, all these studies are around several key words: hegemony, overseas education, globalization, post-colonialism, and China. These studies interpret materials fruitfully with their own research direction and intention, some of which might help or inspire me in my interpretation of Chinese students’ experience in the framework of postcolonial critique of hegemony generated from the more modern UK over a less-modern China.

In conclusion, as showed above, both the research taking the students as “subject” and the research taking education experience as “encounter” deserve further exploration. The former studies have advantage in highlighting the subjectivity of “student” while do not have interspace to generate larger patterns. In the meanwhile, the latter trend of research is easy to neglect the subjectivity of students, ignore daily life experience, lose sight of bigger cultural and historical background as well as a structural asymmetrical relations of power. My research explores how power forces and engenders impact on the students in their daily life pattern, their academic experience as well as their decision making process against the UK education experience under the framework of hegemony, post-colonialism and debate between Orientalism and Occidentalism. It tries to explore profound questions while concentrating on the subjectivity of student and their overseas experience. The framework I use is necessary in interpreting the power relation well; it is also important for that the hegemonic power generated from such encounter will affect the students’ mind and influence the whole process of their overseas education experience which maybe beyond their consciousness. With such perspective, I hope to help in better understanding such phenomenon with insight in the contemporary Chinese society.

**Chapter 3 Methodology**

3.1 Three Basic Approaches to Fieldwork and Ethnography

3.1.1 From Malinowski to Structural Functionalism

Malinowski has been regarded as the founder of the profession of social anthropology in Britain, for he established its distinctive apprentice -- intensive fieldwork in an exotic community. He was a positivist and held an opinion that aspects of culture cannot be studied in isolation; they must be understood in the context of their use. “Anthropologists should concentrate upon the processes which can still be observed in present-day stone-age communities in order to provide a firm base for reconstruction.” (Kuper 1983, 8).

He invented modern field methods in 1915-1916, putting emphasis on the collection of observable facts. In his research, Malinowski came to the view that there were three broad kinds of data, each of which demanded specific techniques of collection and recording. Firstly, there was the outline of institutions, of customs, which he studied by what he called "the method of statistic documentation by concrete evidence". The aim was to build up a series of synoptic charts, in which one entered the ranged of customs associated with particular activities. The chart at once summaried the elements of the activity, and indicated the connection between its aspects (Kuper 1983, 14). The second kind of record is what we called participate observation. Anthropologists must also observe the actualities of social action and minutely recording observations in a special ethnorgaphic diary since people have their subjective initiatives and the chart cannot include everything, what Malinowski called the “imponderabilia of everyday life”. Thirdly, the collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical oral or written statement, items of folklore and magical rules has to be given as a corpus inscriptions, as documents of native mentaity (Kuper 1983, 15). He regard the ultimite goal for an ethnorapher as to “grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (Kuper 1983, 15).

Structual-functionalist Radcliffe-Brown regarded social anthropology as a branch of natural science and ethnographic study as a scientific exercise. He conceived of social anthropology as the theoretical natural science of human society, which regarded the investigation of social phenomena by methods essentially similar to those used in the physical and biological sciences (Kuper 1983, 35). He put forward the contextual method which held the opinion that "every custom and belief of a primitive society , just as every organ of a living body plays some part in the general life of the organism" (Kuper 1983, 41).

3.1.2 Geertz and His Interpretive Anthropology

Geertz thought that Malinowski emphasized too much on individual and Brown paid over attention to society and they both failed to see these two aspects fairly. The concept of culture Geertz espoused is essentially a semiotic one. He believed with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spin, he took culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an in­terpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973, 5). This showed an interpretation tradition in anthropology in 1970s.

In Geertz’s opinion, culture is a kind of acted document. Culture consists of socially established struc­tures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal designing and join them or perceive insults and answer them (Geertz 1973, 12-13). “You can't wink (or burlesque one) without knowing what counts as winking or how, physically, to contract your eyelids, and you can't conduct a sheep raid (or mimic one) without knowing what it is to steal a sheep and how practically to go about it” (Geertz 1973, 12).

As discussed above, Geertz regard culture as a kind of text. As a result, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations --- second and third order ones to boot (Geertz 1973, 23) since by definition, only a "native" makes first order ones: it's his culture. “Fieldwork and ethnography as cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing ex­planatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Con­tinent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape” (Geertz 1973, 28). Anthropology is therefore a science of interpretation which exploring meanings, and one can only do good fieldwork and ethnography through a “thick description”.

3.1.3 Postmodernism Onwards

From postmodernism onwards, there came the trend of criticism on realist ethnography and decades of experimental ethnography by the leading of anthropologists like Marcus and Clifford. They first criticized the totality view of ethnographic realism, which conceived to encompass several projected volumes (as with those functionalists) and widely asserted the view that ethnographic truths are inherently partial—committed and incomplete (Marcus and Clifford 1986, 7), fashioning in problem-focused research which is single volume, combining several complex descriptive and interpretive tasks (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 27).

Of great interest is the debate on the determined nature of ethnography. At times there were still voices agreeing on an ideal for ethnography a neutral discourse that would render other realities "exactly as they are," not filtered through our own values and interpretive pattern. However, the idea is no longer being chased, and it is possible to suggest that ethnographic writing is as trope-governed as any other discursive formation (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 27). What was in question at that time was not ethnographic accuracy but a set of problematic links between ethnographic authority, personal experi­ence, scientism, and originality of expression (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 29).

The following criticism was made of the apparently "scientific" nature of ethnographic realism. Traditional anthropologists usually did not describe what they saw and experienced in the first person, as a result dissembled the relationship between the respondents and themselves. Besides, they attempted to focus more on the generality of the people they investigated, suppressing and overlooking the individuality of participants in their description. Furthermore, they seldom or never introduced their own fieldwork experiences in the ethnography except if it could help make the work appear more scientific and authoritative. Moreover, all too often, they did not respect the participants' views seriously enough. Descriptions relied more on the authority of the author (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 76).

The postmodernist trend of fieldwork and ethnography focused more on power relations and reflexivity. They put emphasis on self-reflection, criticized “the hegemony of the distinctive-other tradition” (Abu-Lughod 1991, 139), faced the problem of dissymmetry power relations between self and others, deconstructed the concept of culture.

3.2 In Relation to My Research

My research is a study on daily life of overseas Chinese students in the UK. The group of students principally have the following characters: First, the group of Chinese students studying in the UK are in their 20s in majority, among which about 10% are here for undergraduate or PhD’s studies while the rest are here for their Master’s. Second, most of the students came to the UK just after their graduation in different levels of studies in China, first and second class universities at most while others are here after a short period of work or after graduation from overseas’ universities. Third, the majority of them come from middle-class and rich families while at the same time, a small percentage from working-class as well. Considering the aforementioned social characteristics of the aiming group, I am attempting to use methods of participant observation, life histories and ethnographic interviewing in the research. However, before discussing the various techniques in fieldwork, issues on presentation of ethnography need to be put forward in discussion.

Why is the presentation of ethnography central to anthropology today? Because there seems have no authorized paradigm currently. “There are efforts to revitalize old research programs, such as British functionalism, French structuralism, cultural ecology and psychological anthropology; efforts to synthesize Marxist approaches with structuralism, semiotics and other forms of symbolic analysis; efforts to establish more encompassing frameworks of explanation, such as sociobiology to achieve the aim of a more fully ‘scientific’ anthropology; and efforts to merge the influential study of language in anthropology with the concerns of social theory” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 16). People have found that grand theories cannot explain the details of society. In consequence, the arguments about theory have transferred to methodology, epistemology, interpretative theory, presentation and forms of discourse used by social theorists which as a result made the presentation of ethnography a denominator in a very fragmented period.

What first discussed here is Geertz and his interpretation theory as well as its relation to my research. After the 1960s a confused age came, when several styles in explaining knowledge were generated: French Structuralism, the paradigm of linguistics, cognitive anthropology and symbolic anthropology. The interpretation of the theory of culture was influenced by them. This emerged in the 1960s and was put forward by Geertz in the 1970s. It was reflected in the practice of ethnography and the discourse of writing. Geertz regarded the work of the anthropologist as “choosing a specific cultural item which attracted his attention and using similar descriptions to enrich it” (Geertz 1973). It operated in two ways: an explanation of the other from within and reflecting on the epistemological foundation of the explanation. Fieldwork and ethnography as analysis of culture is therefore a science of interpretation. One can only do good fieldwork and ethnography through “thick description”. In relation with my research, I paid close attention to the micro-expressions of my informants, keen enough during the process of participant observation and presented the first-hand materials thickly by using similar descriptions in the first attempt of interpretation.

What comes next is the discussion of reflexivity as well as how to deal with subjectivity and objectivity in my fieldwork and ethnography. Postmodernism trend of fieldwork and ethnography focused more on power relations and reflexivity. They put emphasis on self-reflection, considering both the authority of ethnography as well the authority of rhetoric, criticized “the hegemony of the distinctive-other tradition” (Abu-Lughod 1991, 139), faced the problem of asymmetrical power relations between self and others and how anthropologists collect their materials. According to Rosaldo, anthropologists have tripartite author functions in fieldwork: “the individual who wrote the work, the textualized persona of the narrator and the textualized persona of the field investigator” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 88) and what should be admitted is that subjectivity can hardly be avoided by fieldworkers in any of the three roles. However, the attitude of objectivity and the spirit of respect on information provided by informants ought to be seriously taken. When considering the writing part, I regard it as a rather subjective work and an objective attitude of “just telling what you have learned” is a more proper kind of self-reflection process in this part.

Thirdly is about the issue of representation in ethnography and how it relates to my work. Since ethnography was put in the center of theoretical reflection, the problem of description changes to a problem of representation (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Post-modernism critics inspired us with experimental ethnography which aims to find new ideas, new rhetoric, new epistemology insights and new visions of representation. By the end of the 20th century, theory, writing and ethnography were material practices which are inseparable (cf. Clough 1994; Denzin 1997). The idea emerged that anthropologists cannot present an objective reality. They have their own understandings of what they want to be represented. Ethnography is more like “a moral allegorical and therapeutic project” (Denzin 1997, 274). More than a record of human experience, the ethnographer's story is written as “a prop or a pillar that paraphrases” (William 1967, 724; Denzin 1997). These developments set the stage for ethnography’s transformation and for new ways of writing culture to be generated. Ethnographers can act as scribes of the others or become a co-writer with the other, producing a joint document which has long been the tradition in critical, participatory research. The writer can also produce a purely auto-ethnographic text based on his/her own personal experiences or even a performance text can be constructed. In relation to my research, the spirit of auto-ethnography is represented in part of my representation since I am a member of “the others” participating in the field and my own experiences is part of the materials which support my analysis. Further, one of my informants, Hong, wrote down part of his life story for me other than the formal ethnographic interview between us. It is a very good attempt of co-writing in my research.

Additionally, what is special in my research is that it is an indigenous anthropology study which may result in new advantages and disadvantages in practice. Indigenous anthropology is proposed as “a working concept referring to the practice of anthropology in one's native country, society, and/or ethnic group” (Fahim and Helmer 1980, 644) and I conduct research among Chinese international students in the UK which I am a member of. The insider's advantages include a more comprehensive view of the micro-society to which the local community is linked and an ability to acquire intimate data and invaluable understandings of symbol and value systems whose complexities may perpetually confound the foreigner (Fahim and Helmer 1980, 646). In relation with my research, I am a member of the overseas Chinese students in Durham University. I can speak the language of Chinese fluently, I share the same symbol and value systems with the other Chinese students here and I have observed the students in my daily life already. In addition, it is easy for me to turn to Facebook (or other online social networks) where the students have “expressed themselves upon” (Fahim and Helmer 1980, 653) within my friends’ circle. Furthermore, I can understand my informants’ experiences of being overseas better since I share with them their background experience at home. Hence, I am in an especially good position to keep the facts and the theory in my most productive relationship (Fahim and Helmer 1980, 652). However, things also become difficult when I am undertaking the responsibility to “represent” them. I am concerned with my responsibilities to my informants and about how to reconcile the methods “at home” with traditional approaches in anthropology (Jackson 1987, 11). As Fahim and Helmer have claimed, an indigenous investigator may face various communication difficulties because his subjects, members of the same society as himself, a priori put him in a definite social category in which he remains trapped, usually throughout the entire research period (Fahim and Helmer 1980, 646). These disadvantages are inevitable. In associating with my own work, there sometimes reveal difficulties in relationships between my informant and me. The first problem is that some of them regard me as student like themselves and do not talk to me seriously. Secondly, since we came from the same “small community”, some of them do not trust me like a stranger investigator and do not like to share all their thoughts with me. Actually, people sometimes feel rather relaxed talking to strangers than talking to someone they may have connection with. When Lila Abu-Lughod did her fieldwork in the Bedouin society, she finally found her proper identity as “coming back to her hometown”, which in the end successfully maintained a good relationship with her informants in her fieldwork (Abu-Lughod 1986). When comes to my experience, I perform my role as “schoolmate or friend” just as usual, tell them honestly what I am doing. The majority of them loves to share their experience and thought with me naturally.

Along with the aforementioned general discussion, actual research methods used in my fieldwork will be discussed in the following parts. Among which the first one is the use of life history method and the usefulness of this technique. In sociological and anthropological research, a life history is the overall picture of the informant's life. In associating with my project, to understand the students’ choices of study in the UK cannot be observed just under “single and time-bound empirical investigations which are static, isolated in time” (Bertaux 1981, 133). By understanding this, I turn back to my informants’ lives in China as well as the education system in China, not just the observable facts at the moment when they are here in the UK. It is a process needs getting back to individuals as well getting back to history. Thus, I used life history method and consider it a proper approach in my fieldwork and ethnographic interviews with part of my informants.

Another method used mainly in the project is ethnographic interviewing which has both advantages and disadvantages in my research. Ethnographic interviewing emphasizes on duration and frequency of contact, on the quality of the relationship with respondents, and on the meaning of actions and events to respondents. These emphases are consistent with ethnography's aim to “grasp the native's point of view” (Malinowski 1922, 25). It has superiority in the conducting of my research since I share the particular experiences with my informants. In addition, it usually better conducted in unstructured, in-depth format with people, which counts another advantage in my research. However, as mentioned above, interviews can hardly able to generate knowledge about historical issues of individuals and society and it requires highly on duration and frequency of contact and the quality of relationship with informants. In other words, using ethnographic interviewing method alone seems not enough and it is also challenging in conducting. I have experienced such difficulty in my beginning period of interviews but tried my best to establish trust and long term good relationship with my key informants. In the end, some of them even contact and share their thoughts with me actively. I appreciate this very much.

3.3 Fieldwork and Ethical Considerations

Ethics, politics and the politics of knowledge are inter-connected and it cannot be avoided in any process of fieldwork (Caplan 2003). Ethics of anthropologists in the field as well anthropologists’ relation with and responsibilities towards informants are all key components need consideration.

Firstly, when considering ethics of anthropologists in my fieldwork, I inform participants of my research by giving them information sheets which could serve as a verbal summary, letting them know my presence and purpose. Besides, I managed to “protect all original records of my research from un-authorized access” (ASA 1999, 2). As an indigenous anthropological research, what should emphasis here is that I should not tell out my informants’ life stories when back again my identity as a student in the “community”. In addition, like what Caplan claims, anthropologists cannot avoid acting out a persona which is proper for better research, but an attitude of “just give us the facts” (Caplan 2003) is necessary. I will not say I know the truth; however, I can tell of what I understand. I believe that honesty is important in conducting fieldwork.

Secondly, “anthropologists should endeavour to protect the physical social and psychological well-being of those with whom they conduct their study and respect their rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy” (ASA 1999, 3) . In dealing the relations with and responsibilities towards my informants, I respect their rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy during interviews. At the same time, I try to protect the physical, social and psychological well-being of my informants at full stretch. For example, when I face my informants who suffers physical problems or have emotional risks, I always encourage them to turn to official services among colleges, university or local organizations which in relation with. In sum, a fixed position for me and a suitable relationship with the others are very helpful in my fieldwork experience, it fulfills my responsibility to my informants at the same time.

**Chapter 4 Main Discussion**

4.1 Situating the Educational Encounter Historically and Contemporarily

After 1980s, with China's opening up and the establishment of the Socialist Market Economic System as well as the formation of dominant ideology of neoliberalism in major western countries, the change of policies against transnational education followed closely. Sino-foreign educational exchange was largely encouraged and the US, UK, Canada, Europeans countries as well as Australia become the most popular destination countries for Chinese students. Among which the United Kingdom is the most popular destination country next only to the United States, which occupies a privileged position in the international student market. Why Chinese students come to the UK for higher education and how they live once here? To what degree can we see such student experience in the UK as an asymmetrical power encounter? The question cannot be understood completely by regarding it as a pure educational phenomenon, historical backgrounds, attitudes of government, diplomatic factors as well as educational policies are all influential factors that within the account. Hence, I am attempting to make an overall review of "China's policy towards overseas studies" and "international student recruitment in the UK" to acknowledge its historical and political economic background in this section before the interpretation of ethnography.

4.1.1 China's Policy towards Overseas Studies

The large scale of Chinese student mobility abroad can be first traced to early and middle Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) according to Tian (2004). Students are selected by western missionaries and then sent to European countries to study religion, theology and western culture. These dispatched Chinese students were expected to take on a religious position in China after graduation (Zheng 2010). Technically, China's modern history of overseas education started from the late Qing Dynasty. Some patriotic officials and scholars propounded " *Shiyi changji yi zhiyi* " (learning from foreigners to compete with foreigners 师夷长技以制夷) at that time when the "old China" is threatened by growing crisis. According to Zheng (2010), several batches of students were dispatched to Western countries in succession for learning advanced technologies in order to revitalize the country. Then, in a rather long period of time, Chinese students are dispatched to western countries financially supported by the Chinese Government in mastering advanced knowledge and skills in a variety of fields like navy, science and technology, development experience, teacher's education, military, law, culture and arts, most of which finally came back to China and played key roles in various construction works in China. The Sino-foreign educational exchange experienced dead-time in late 1960s for political reasons; however, revived after the reform of opening-up (Tian 2004) with the changing of Sino-foreign political and diplomatic relationships at the same time.

In addition to studying abroad supported by the Chinese government, overseas education at student's own expense was allowed in the year of 1980. Yet, owing to the official consideration of "Brain Grain", the review of qualification of applicants was quite strict at the beginning. Whilst since the 1990s, the adoption of a socialist market economy improved China's economic situation and citizens' income. Later on, the Ministry of Education of China simplified the review process of applications for self-funded overseas studies and associated organizations were established for related service. Since the beginning of 2000s, the number of Chinese students abroad grow rapidly. According to the Ministry of Education of China, the latest statistics by 2015 showed that the total number of students studying abroad in 2014 was about 459,800, about 423,000 of which were self-funded ones, about 21,300 were supported by the government and about 15,500 were sent by the unit (Ministry of Education of China 2015). Chinese students in the UK are mostly self-funded ones, while a small percentage of which are supported by government and unit instantly. We can therefore come to the conclusion that since the 1980s, the large number of self-founded Chinese students abroad contributes more to an enlarging free transnational education market than to a planned national level policy. The world industry of education formed and China takes the seat of "an import one".

4.1.2 International Student Recruitment in the UK

Before 1970s, international students in the UK were mainly seen as "contributors to international relations and development, as an enrichment of student life, a source of students for vacant places, and lastly a source of revenue" (Bolsmann and Miller 2008: 75). International students paid the same fees as home students and could even subsidized by public funds. However, the rapid increase of international students in the 1970s caused the British government great concern of the cost and the imbalances of recruitment of home students and international ones (Zheng 2010). As a result, new policies were implemented pertaining to recruiting international students. In the 1980s, "full cost" overseas fees were introduced, immigration and visa issues became a major feature and the British Council-established large-scale marketing operations overseas competition had begun (Zheng 2010, 8). The significant shifts in government's policy towards international students from attracting human capital to generating economic benefits certified that higher education in the UK has been turned into an "export industry" (Zheng 2010). The successful marketing strategy and operation in higher education have targeted a great amount of international students all over the world every year. According to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), China ran the first by 87,895 in the top ten non-EU Countries which have the largest higher education percentages in the UK in 2013/14 (latest data which can be found), which counts over 80% of non-UK students and near 28% of all UK HEPs (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015). Purchasing education in the UK becomes increasingly hot.

Based on the aforementioned information, we can distribute a short conclusion that while the pre-1980 students dispatched by the Chinese government are abroad for the aim of " *Shiyi changji yi zhiyi* ", the reason of large number of students "going abroad" today appears more complicated other than the single reason of "study".

4.2 Description and Discussion

Chinese students in Durham can be roughly classified into three categories: undergraduates, post graduate research students, postgraduate taught students (one-year-program masters). Each of the three categories has its own characteristic of education motivation and financial situation. Chinese undergraduates are mostly from the middle class or above, who can afford the high international-student tuition fee of a bachelor program. While most of them are in the UK for a better education, some of them come to the UK for more complicated reasons such as for seeking freedom or for their parents' expectation. Unlike undergraduates, postgraduate research students share a rather homogenous motivation, which is to seek for a higher academic degree. It is noteworthy that most of them are willing to pay expensive tuition fee for a research degree. Also some talented ones are government- or university- or organization-funded. Finally, for postgraduate taught students, which occupies the biggest proportion of Chinese students, are complex in education motivation and financial situation. Common education purposes of them include pursing a better education, studying a postgraduate degree easier to get, improving English, taking a gap year to escape from the employment market to experience an "exotic" culture and lifestyle. Some of them even simply view their master programs as a chance to travel and live in the UK and European countries. In this section, I attempt to present and analyze student experience in the University of Durham by sharing life stories of several students which can be seem as different kinds of representatives as a main line, combining with my participant observation in the field.

4.2.1 The First Scene

On a rainy afternoon on August 23, 2014, an international airline landed at Newcastle airport with hundreds of Chinese students arriving in the UK. "*I can finally breathe the air of capitalism*!" one of the students joked on the way off the plane. This has become a common scene in almost all large UK airports during university entrance season. I was one of the students on that airplane.

Since the number of Chinese students studying in Durham is large, students can easily get to know each other online several months before taking flights to the UK. Several of them have even been classmates or friends in China. And without doubt, most of them are here for the popular one-year master's program.

We spent a long time in customs since there's only one passageway for the large group of non-EU foreigners. Students became a little impatient about the endless line and some of them began to discuss and complain about the difficulty of getting a student visa as a Chinese student. But, they were happy anyway to now be in the UK. On the coach headed for Durham, students forgot about the unhappy customs experience and were quickly attracted by the new landscape outside the window, and chatting with others around them. A girl next to me seemed really confused: "*How can a well-developed capitalist country have buildings less than four floors? And besides, it is too quiet even though it is an airport far away from the city center*." I had never imagined what Newcastle airport would be like, but the majority of us might have imagined our first view of the UK as a place more modern and magnificent.

The coach drove onto the high-speed road and the landscape alongside us was getting more beautiful with cattle and sheep huddled in groups on farms. "*You see, this might be the typical English style countryside*." "*Yes, really and we can finally escape from the pollution haze in Beijing – ha ha*." "*But it will always be rainy in the UK*." "*Anyway, it is still better than China, isn't it*?" Then, they continued to complain about the bad living conditions, densely populated campus and pollution issues at home.

I studied in Beijing during my bachelor's so I am familiar with what they were talking about. Most universities in Beijing are located in a "campus area" in the Haidian District, a populous business district. The "campus area" left us with the impression of a large student population, high-speed pace of life, and poor traffic and environment. In contrast, students could easily get excited imagining England with its beautiful landscapes, fresh air, and quaint and quiet countryside.

We arrived shortly at the destination, Josephine Butler College, which is part of the old college system of Durham University. This was a fresh experience for the Chinese. I took a photo of the landscape of Durham on the hill and sent it to my parents with a comment: "*Safe journey and very nice place*." We then started our new lives in England with high expectations.

4.2.2 Matriculation Ceremonies

For Chinese students, matriculation is nothing special. Newly enrolled students are usually well-organized by class units and listen to the headmaster speaking on the platform either on the school playground or in an indoor auditorium. The place for the ceremony is usually chosen by chance. Meanwhile, students are not required to pay too much attention to dress, though they may have been required to wear school uniforms when in high school. There are no ceremonies beyond the speech given by the headmaster. The function of such a ceremony is to welcome new students, introduce the school and give advice about life and study on campus to engender an atmosphere of anticipation about the new academic year. I tried hard on the matriculation morning to remember what I had experienced during the past matriculations in China; unfortunately, nothing appears clear in my mind. Then, I turned to my college mates from China, who all failed to provide a description. The opening ceremony seems like such an ordinary event in China that students usually have little passion in discussing.

On the contrary, matriculation ceremonies in Durham are considered as honorable events by the Chinese. They are held annually in the Durham Cathedral to welcome new students to Durham University. Matriculation is the term used to describe students' formal entry into the university and is described in the University's regulations as "the act of placing a student's name upon the matriculation or roll of members of the University". Durham requires matriculants to wear academic dress with subfusc or a black gown during the ceremony and there are different ceremonies in the morning in each college.

I remembered being woken up that day by someone shouting loudly outside my room: "*Moring! Morning! Wake up for the matriculation!*" with sounds of drums and gongs at the same time. I picked up my phone to see the time and found my college mates from China chatting online:

(The following dialogue is translated from Chinese into English)

"*Have you heard any voices outside the room? What are they doing*?"

"*Yes, there are even drums and gongs*."

"*It seems like a morning call for matriculation*?" I typed.

"*I thought it was the fire alarm again. Ha ha*."

……

"*Sure, it is a morning call. I went out to see just now. It is really interesting*."

"*Yes, it seems like a college tradition every year on this day."*

"*Get it. I am going to rise from bed. See you guys later*."

……

After I verified the interesting experience that just happened, I got up from bed and began preparing for the ceremony. Like the majority of the Chinese here, I do not wear makeup or formal high-heels very often during term time. Therefore, a ceremonial feeling arose in me when I was formally dressed.

One hour later, about nine o'clock in the morning, we gathered at the college common room, ready for the ceremony. My college is located on the hill south of the cathedral, which is about a 10-minute walk. On the way down, a group of senior students appeared wearing our college hoodies shouting and dancing along the road. This is part of the welcome ceremony within the college.

"*This is really interesting*," one of the Chinese students said with intrigued shining eyes.

"*Yes, and you see, there are also pictures of a skunk, a mascot of our college*," a Chinese boy who got his bachelor's degree here explained.

……

As they were talking, my friend and I were listening to their conversation attentively with the other students nearby, who were also curious about the same issue. Shortly, we arrived at the back of the cathedral, waiting for an entrance guilder.

"*Jiangnan, would you please help me with my bag*?"

"*Sure*." I answered.

"*It is so amazing here, isn't it*?" my friend said while shooting a video.

"*No doubt yes*." I looked around and responded. The cathedral stands behind the Palace Green land, sitting opposite the Durham Castle. It is not big in size but it is really delicate. Groups of students with formal wear gowns were standing not far from me. They were engaged in casual chats with relaxed faces, acting naturally and properly, while "matching" perfectly with the ancient and sacred cathedral. The scene was much like what we used to see in UK historical dramas depicting the English "noble" temperament.

Soon, we were led to the cloister to the south of the central nave. It serves as a hub for the daily routine of worship and welcome. All matriculants waited here to enter the central nave. The cloister appeared peaceful and warm with the morning sunshine streaming through. As we were still waiting, a Chinese college mate began taking photos of the people around. Meanwhile, two Chinese girls were taking selfies with the cloister as the background. They were really excited to visit the cloister since it is one of the famous film locations of the Harry Potter movie series, which is full of childhood memories, according to their conversation. This complex is shared by most Chinese students in my year (Henningsen 2006).

The Harry Potter movie series was an adaptation of J.K. Rolling's novel series of the same name, which has been well received worldwide since its publication. I remembered that more than one fourth of my elementary school classmates held a Harry Potter book in their hand during after-class time after its first publishing in mainland China in 2000. Also, the adapted movie series flourished when I was in junior high school. "*We almost grew up with the actors in the movie*," according to one of my informants. Moreover, the Hogwarts School of Magic, the gowns worn by Magic school students, their classes in the ancient castle and the beautiful movie stills of the UK landscape composed part of our cultural geographical imagination of the UK. The Harry Potter book and movie series as a type of popular culture that represents an element of capitalism transmitted the UK culture abroad and expressed its cultural spirit throughout the world, engendering a sense of curiosity about UK culture among Chinese, especially children in my generation, as well as an acceptance of UK civilization (Erni 2008).

However, though the students were satisfied with the realization of part of their childhood imaginations outside the central nave, when they were finally at the ceremony, they regarded the content of the speech as dull as what they were used to at home. The flash and blood of the matriculation ceremony are far less attractive than taking photos in front of the cloister and cathedral wearing black gowns and posting them on Facebook. "*The matriculation ceremony is really cool, but there's nothing special about the speech*." Several of my college mates expressed their feelings, and basically, I felt the same.

The aforementioned influence of the Harry Potter series among Chinese students reveals a historically generated hegemonic narrative of Western popular culture (Erni 2008). On the other hand, hegemonic narratives are enhanced by students' direct experience in overseas education: The consent to the imagery of "the honorable cathedral", "academic dresses with subfusc", "the black gown" and "the cloister" reflects the ideas of the Chinese students on the progress formally permeated by a hegemony of Western civilization. Meanwhile, the act of taking selfies and posting photos on Facebook, as performances of "self" in the public sphere, insinuated a worship of the UK culture and perception of life as a higher standard by the Chinese students, though these views may reflect some curiosity or freshness towards the cross cultural experience. In short, the historically generated cultural imagination combined with the direct experience in the field help to bring about a superior image of UK culture and a clearer distinction between the UK (abroad) and China (at home), which reveals the asymmetrical power relationship.

4.2.3 Xiong[[1]](#footnote-1)

Xiong is now in his second year of a bachelor program at the University of Durham. He wished to study abroad when he was in middle school. However, his parents were rather conservative so he was not allowed to obtain an education abroad until age 18:

"*My aspiration of studying abroad began in middle school. My school organized an 'abroad summer camp' to select outstanding students to study at a UK school for two weeks. My school set up a competition for selecting two students. I failed in this competition. But I can still remember those beautiful pictures of the UK school and their advanced teaching technology and methodology in the summer camp program bulletin. After my two schoolmates came back from the UK, they were asked to speak in front of the whole school to introduce their experience in the UK. They talked in a very proud and happy way. I was very impressed and decided that I must go abroad one day*."

"*After I graduated from middle school, I told my parents that I wanted to study in a foreign high school. Although my parents were happy to see that I was aspiring to study abroad, they were kind of conservative towards this issue. They believed that I should not go abroad alone at such a young age. That was really a tough time. I quarreled many times with my parents. But this tough time turned out to benefit me to some extent. It enhanced my decision to study abroad. So after graduating from high school, I directly applied to foreign universities at once*."

In Xiong's opinion, Western countries represent more advanced staff, better social platforms, and more opportunities to meet outstanding people. After studying in the UK, his prior images of a "*superior Western modernity*" were strengthened through his job-hunting, change of undergraduate program, and studying experience in the UK.

"*You know, when I found intern opportunities in the UK, I got much experience and received more respect in the process than when I was in China. Such that I successfully made it to the final round of interviews at Rolls Royce Motors, and finally achieved that job, though I was just a first year undergraduate student at that time. This is almost impossible in China since normally no company will trust enough the ability of such a young applicant..."*

"*In China, you only get a chance to change your program if you do the best in tests, though the motivation for changing may largely come from your lack of passion for the program you are doing. And here in Durham, the process is more humanized and I successfully changed my program at the end of my first year's study.* "

When speaking of the situation at home, Xiong did not give a negative evaluation but regarded higher education in China as a mixed bag which can hardly meet his learning and life demands. "*You know, I can hardly bear a shared dormitory*." Xiong joked. "*And I could scarcely agree that higher education at home has provided students with conditions in which they are supervised by professors separately. Maybe it is because of the large number of students, national conditions or different kinds of educational concepts, but whatever it is, it can hardly change in a short period, correct? We have to go abroad to discover new ways*." Xiong also mentioned the newly founded University of Chinese Academy of Science in Beijing[[2]](#footnote-2): "*This is a very good developing direction that is more in the Western style. It can provide undergraduate students enough chances to get engaged in fields they have a passion for and be supervised by professors effectively*."

The education system in China does have some of the disadvantages mentioned by Xiong, but why did he firmly believe that China's education system is less developed and a mature "new way" should be found in the West even before he went abroad? Indeed, a higher degree of acceptance of the education in main Western countries is generally approved by Chinese society at present.

This perception reflects an asymmetrical relation of power between the evaluation of education quality in the West and that in China and other countries. It is a kind of hegemonic power that comes historically from parents, teachers, school books, popular books or mass media, various ways of receiving dominant information on "education quality with level differences". In Xiong's case, we can see how the "abroad summer camp" has influenced him. The public lecture of his proud schoolmates became a social ritual in China, but boosted the "advanced experience of the West". This would be unconsciously regarded as "knowledge or truth" that furthermore brainwashes ordinary people. In the end, Xiong voluntarily started to believe such an idea. This unconscious view of gaining modernity abroad fits well with Occidentalist discourses. Through Occidentalist discourses, colonized societies self-construct themselves as non-modern (Ong, 2006). In the Chinese context, people self-construct a weak self in education and believe that China should develop itself by imitating and chasing the "modern" West.

Nevertheless, Xiong admits that he still has regrets about his UK education experience. Interestingly, one of his regrets was influenced by his Chinese schoolmate: "*There are about 45 undergraduates who came from China with me, but only two or three I am happy to talk with. Most of the Chinese undergraduates here are to some degree ‘fickle’, let alone those on the Queen's campus[[3]](#footnote-3). Friends I talk to a lot are actually Asian students who came from Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia. We can talk to Europeans, but can hardly maintain close relationships*." Xiong spends most of his spare time reading. In his opinion, the level of studiousness of Chinese students here in the UK varies a lot. PhDs and some of the undergraduates are much more serious and more like "students", while most one-year masters and undergraduates have "more of an entertainment heart". "*Maybe they are attracted more by a Western kind of value of life, by some so-called ways of life. They may focus more on finding a job and see study as a way of self-promotion and better adaption to society simultaneously. I am not sure what they are thinking*."

In addition to the lack of friends sharing a common goal, Xiong thought that undergraduate study here is examined based on tests like what he used to experience in China, which is beyond his imagination and satisfaction. Moreover, the resources within the university sometimes cannot meet his learning demands fully. In short, a "superior Western education" seems not as perfect as Xiong thought previously.

Xiong regards part of the Chinese students here as "to some degree fickle" since they did not seriously concentrate on learning. This generated an important question: Do most students come to the UK for mainly the purpose of education? Or do they have other ambitions and reasons for going abroad? This will be discussed further in the following sections.

4.2.4 Wang

Wang is a hardworking postgraduate taught master student at the University of Durham. He has a clear aim of pursuing a PhD program. Most of his time was spent on readings, lectures and papers. Wang has four modules on average each term (which is about 10 weeks' length each), and in each module he must submit one final paper, and long reading lists before each lecture and seminar. Half of his holiday was spent reading literature and writing summative essays of each module, which comprised a very busy study life. Wang always uses the main library and during cold winter nights, he usually stays up late writing his essays. Wang once told me that:

"*One year ago when I was busy preparing my luggage, I wondered about a colorful overseas life. Now one year's gone. I am getting used to a life of 'one laptop, one lamp, a piece of essay, one bottle of beer, one person and one cold winter night'.*"

Wang studies very hard since his first day of the pre-sessional language course. Like most of the Chinese students in the UK, he chose to take language course before the formal academic term to better adapt to the new environment. He experienced a tough time during the language course together with his classmates.

*“You know that, we Chinese have absolutely different logic of thinking and logic of academic writing against the British. The teachers in the language course may regard our paper as not clear enough, though I thought it is very clear under the logic of Chinese. Later, I know that in the English style of academic writing, a paper in clear structure should contain a main argument, several sub-arguments and supporting details. The rule is used in a paper and also in a paragraph. I tried several months to get used to the English academic writing style. You cannot imagine that during the very first time period, I could not successfully interpret what I understood into proper logic of English, I wrote down them in Chinese, and translated them into English after that. That was really a tough time for me.”*

Wang’s experience clearly shows how a student outside the British education system breaks his original habit in the logic of literal expression in order to fit himself in and perform well in academic writing within this new system. His experience can be regarded as an epitome of the situation most of the Chinese students here had encountered in. More narrowly, one’s work would not stand out and be taken seriously enough unless it is presented in a proper standard first under the system. It works as a threshold. This means that the Chinese students who are new comers in the system have to work much harder in getting used to the rule. This clearly reveals a power relation of dominance and consent which is obviously asymmetric between the predominant UK academic standard and the subordinated Chinese students under its system, which fits well with the postcolonial discourse.

Back to Wang’s story, he snatched leisure time from his busy study life during long holidays and travelled around the UK and Europe. He usually gets together with several Chinese friends and has a party, cooks Chinese meals, drinks in bars, plays games; or goes hiking, bicycling or boating. He also attends local university activities for fun. Leisure time was half used for touring and experiencing a new life and half used for daily casual activities.

When I visited Wang one day, he had just come back from a driving tour to the Scottish Highlands and brought back two bottles of high quality Scottish whisky and several souvenirs, including two delicate glasses. Wang opened one bottle of whisky and happily tried his newly bought whisky glass. As compared with his daily life in China, he has made some changes in his lifestyle during the year, such as going to theaters, listening to classical music and paying attention to spirits culture and art. He seldom drank when he first came to the UK but now he drinks almost every day, listens to classical music and plays the piano occasionally. We went to Sainsbury's[[4]](#footnote-4) together that day after chatting, and Wang stopped before the shelf of alcohol and said to me that: "*Now every time when I drop by, I will intentionally pay attention to the information on the alcohol bottle. The next time when we go to parties at home, I can act in public cool, haha*."

This is a model of lifestyle many of the Chinese students here would agree with. Students will unconsciously regard Western classical music as of higher taste than popular Chinese music, even traditional Chinese music. Equally, if you can play piano or saxophone (Western instruments), you will be regarded as more charming than those who play "old-fashioned" pipa or erhu (folk instruments in China). Imitation of the Western spirits culture is also considered cultured. When I asked Wang whether Western-styled wine and whisky tastes that good, he told me that it is not that tasteful, but he enjoys trying new ones and learning that kind of culture, which fulfills his curiosity and meets his "performance" needs in front of others.

There appears to be an invisible hand which controls the standard of high taste in life. Hegemonic relations are crystallized through aesthetic choices and the construction of an aesthetic hierarchy of taste (cf. Bourdieu 1979; Argyrou 2005). People will subscribe to a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, acting upon western culture. No serious scholars will judge music only according to its "ethnicity"; however, Chinese music has not gained a reputation as being of a standard as high as the Western-styled music (Thorpe 2010). People will unconsciously evaluate Western music as better sometimes without reason (Kolb 2005). This idea is generated in the Chinese's early memory and is spread through various channels. For Wang, when he was a child, his parents reminded him to listen to some Western "classical music" to cultivate his taste, but never taught him to listen to Peking opera.

In addition to music, many other forms of ideas of "a better West" also have influenced Wang since he has been in China. He continues to receive information from parents and adults around him that portrays those who "go abroad" as promising, which glorifies the family.

In addition to surrounding adults' influence, his personal experience also strengthens his perception of the West. On considering the choice of the UK as a destination country, Wang said that it is a natural choice for him. On the micro-level, the UK education system is more favorable for him with more autonomy and freedom. The Chinese style is more based on inculcation. On the macro-level, he has been significantly influenced by British culture: "*When I was just a high school student, I volunteered at the British Council and got engaged in various activities, which left me with a very good impression of British culture. I love UK history and its cultural tradition, which has given me a kind of feeling of familiarity*." We had very frank conversations and Wang expressed his ideas on China and the UK. He regarded the UK as much more advanced than China:

"*In our history lessons, which start at a very early age, teachers told us and the textbooks showed us that China is a developing country while the UK is a developed one, an 'old-branded' developed Western capitalist country. When we were growing up, we could gain such information through various channels like the TV, internet, books and radio, even people around us no matter how old or young emphasized the gap between an advanced country and a developing one. And when I happened to get in touch with the British Council and got a clearer picture of the world I am living in during my undergraduate period of study, I was attracted by the advanced quality, ideas and insight of my department in the British Council, and at the same time appreciate the better ideology and humanistic quality of the British people. There is 'China' in the UK as well as the 'UK' in China. But, unfortunately, we only see the low-end manufacturing of China in the UK marked by 'Made in China', but what we see in China is the Western way of life; Western ideology; UK music, movies and dramas; UK superstars; and high-end consumer goods produced by UK companies, which is such a pity*."

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) explores how the colonized places were discursively structured as inferior in comparison with the West. Many social scientists (Ahiska 2003; Chen 2002) have further explored how this discursive construction was not only imposed, but also taken up within colonized societies leading to a colonization of the mind called Occidentalism. Wang's expression fits well with such discourse of Occidentalism, which was established in the history and strengthened over time. Furthermore, according to Wang's words, the Occidentalism discourse in China is permeated everywhere not only through unofficial platforms (daily chat) but also official channels (textbook).

Why would such a hegemonic narrative take shape? The answer must be found on the border of the historical context of the formation of Chinese modernity and its interaction with Western modernity. Since the 19th century, several Western powers have tried to discipline so-called pre-modern China to interact with it in a modern way (Hevia 2003). Soon after the beginning of Chinese modernization, the discourse on how the modern nation-state should be the paradigm of every nation in the world dominated Chinese thinking. Even in the seemingly anti-modernization Mao-era, its official ideology was still from the West. Its target was still "overtake the UK and the US (*Ganying chaomei* 赶英超美)" and build a socialist country better than the capitalist ones (Chen 2002, 1-10). In contemporary neoliberal China, the Chinese government changed its governance style to adopt the market economy but rejected liberal politics. This type of Occidentalism still maintains the hegemonic narrative that the West is the model of modernity and causes remarkable materialism and anti-intellectual characteristics in Chinese modernity (Gerth 2010; Chen 2002). Modern China's ordinary people have long been exposed to such a social environment full of "hegemony discourses of the West" inside their own country.

Wang also shared his experience and observation of Chinese students in Durham in the UK. In his analysis, different students are here for different reasons while everyone shares some of the following ones. First, for a degree and diploma, which in Chinese is called "*Dujin*" (gild/build one's resume), representing better competitiveness when going back home. Second, for a better qualified educational experience. Third, for better academic resources, platforms, experiment conditions and more opportunity to correspond with international academic circles or the latest state of development. Fourth, in Wang's words: "Sometimes it is not because you want to do but because your parents want you to do something." Chinese parents at large believe that the more expensive the better. Finally, Wang provides an interesting classification of Chinese students in the UK: those who "can" afford the tuition (show off one's purchasing power); those who realize that they "ought to" study abroad to get a better education; and those who "have to" go abroad due to character reasons that hard to make progress in educational system at home.

Based on the aforementioned reasons for studying abroad, let us consider the factors and ideas behind these targets. Why do the Chinese regard a diploma from Western universities as "gold", which refers to a higher quality experience that can enhance one's resume? The reasons basically focus on two aspects. The first is that parents and students will have received huge amounts of information both actively and passively that portray Western degrees as better. Second, the responsibility falls on the personnel market, which represents the employer: managers will always choose the more cosmopolitan foreign-degree holding students over the locally educated ones. Both the employer (mostly foreign-owned enterprises) and the potential employees are consenting to an inherently exploitative system, which has added to the hegemony of the West in reverse. So does the logic of a superior Western education. The "knowledge (or the history)" is established in this way, which dominates the historical premise and further dominates the mentality of men from the root. Ironically, it is a self-colonial discourse generated from the country itself that fits well with Occidentalism: Either manifested through highly localized conservative projects reaching back to a bygone era of glory, or pushing to strive for Western modernity by erasing their own culture (Ahiska 2003).

Near the end of our discussion, Wang told me that: *"I did not know if the UK was really that good, but what I know is that it is really not so good at home in China."*

4.2.5 Mei

Mei is doing an LLM program at Durham, although she already has a Master of Law granted by a Chinese university. She imagined a wonderful overseas life before arriving in the UK, but was disillusioned after a-few-months stay. "*We would never have known whether it is that beautiful unless we tried ourselves,"* Mei said to me when we were out for a walk near the Law School. "*I am here to study. I cannot doodle all day. But the weather in the UK is gloomy and always depresses me. I could have never imagined such a condition before. And since everyone is busy and lives separately, I cannot always turn to friends. I need to face everything myself in my little room*."

Mei's experience is a common problem for many Chinese students in the UK. Most Chinese students cannot adapt to the UK's weather or get used to local social life patterns. Furthermore, the difference between China's and the UK's campus life causes problems. Mei's case shows that some Chinese students prefer to live in a dormitory-style room with several roommates together to make friends more easily. Students doing the same program are not always as closely related as they are at home. As a result, they may feel a lack of emotional support. Mei "*frequently telephones her mother that she misses her so much and wants to go home for a rest*." Mei told me that, she tried to integrate into the UK and European students’ group in her class, but it is a totally tired work and it is just social need for her.

“*I tried to attend activities actively during the first two months with European students in my department. It was really tired. You know, since English is not my first language and we share totally different life experiences, I must try to find topics to chat with them and keep active in mind always. Or, you are very easy to be ignored. If you do not move one step forward, you would never be in the circle.”*

“*In the first month I came, a European girl in my class invited several classmates including me to celebrate her birthday party together in a local bar, drinking, gossiping and dancing. They are very nice persons; however, I am totally not used to such a pattern of relax. The bar is so tiny, full of people, the music is loud. I do not know where the fun is. We have to speak in very big voices to hear each other. But I have to act in positive mood for that everybody else is relaxing and enjoying.”*

Now, Mei is used to the pattern of getting along with her EU classmates well. She goes to bars, drinks and dances like her classmates. In Mei’s words, she has no choice but to imitate and adapt to their way of talk and relax. But Mei does not really enjoy this. There is power in relationships. For Mei, an Eastern international student, she has to consent to the way her Western classmates act, their daily chat, their social interaction pattern; also, how to act in public, how to organize a western stylized home party for that she is studying in a Western country. This demonstrates that at least part of the students’ daily life experience can be seen as a post-colonial encounter that engenders unequal power relations between the East and the West.

In Mei's imagination, life abroad should be colorful and fresh, but she found that "*it is somewhat like a trade-off; you cannot tell which one is a better choice unless you have tried." "Anyway, it is still a valuable experience for me,*" Mei said, *"a chance to 'grow up' and stretch oneself. Besides, it is obvious that the added value of 'going abroad' is a social fact at home, correct? I have to come in order to find a better job with a higher salary. It is an effective way to gild my resume and enhance my competitiveness at home.*"

While Mei showed dissatisfaction with life in the UK, she appreciates the Western way of life very much for its suitability with the lifestyle of a social person. "It is not because of the wide advocation of a Western view of life that attracts a large number of people but because the values are really convincing in some ways. I am trying to be better myself and I am taking interest in the capitalist view of life I must say, and I think it is a dominant value these days, so why not follow the trend and be charming and admirable in society?" Mei operates her image in her ideal way on the online social platforms. Her posts always include images of her fit body, beautiful face, high taste posts of traveling, parties, and social activities. In other words, all sorts of things worth showing off which reflect different kinds of "symbolic capital", and displays of personal image. As you may have recognized, Mei to some degree owns a rather conflictive heart.

Within the reform-era Chinese context, the Chinese dream of earning a middle-class lifestyle – a modern apartment, a car, and a high-salary job in an urban office building – is the result of neoliberal policies (Szelenyi, 2012). This hegemonic neoliberal discourse defines who can become "modern" in China. This characteristic of Chinese modernity drives its citizens to directly go to study in the "models of modern countries" to better approach their middle-class dream and makes Chinese students like Mei willing to endure depression for the dream of a better future modern life.

In addition, students may easily be influenced by trends of "capitalist fashion": the fashion in clothes, consumer goods, movies, and travel destinations, as well as life values[[5]](#footnote-5). All these kinds of fashion will act out like a subliminal force, and dominate students' choices by eliciting their consent through means other than by using force; Mei is one of them. The hegemony of Western values, culture and life is then combined with a hegemony of world capitalism. The dominant group of capitalists impose norms on social life, a world view that is suitable for the majority of the people and also meets the needs and features of humanity. The subordinates, then, accept it willingly – an imagined, superior Western education experience full of "added value" that exceeds difficulties they need to overcome, and is then mixed up with a dominating spirit of world capitalism. The two combine together, permeating the hegemonic power of the West over the Chinese, on education experience, on material bases; on what people buy, use, talk about and act.

4.2.6 Li

Li is a one-year master student at the Durham business school, where Chinese students occupy close to three quarters of the school. She wants to find a job after graduation and sees the experience of going abroad as mainly a way of getting a degree that can enhance her resume and at the same time give her one more year to have fun and relax before starting a hard career life. "Actually, we practically learn nothing new here in the master's program. Most of the things taught here are almost the same with what we have already learned during our bachelor's program. In addition, since business concentrates more on practical skills for those aiming at finding a job, doing more internships may be a better option unless you want to do a PhD program."

Li lives in a college on campus with about 18 Chinese compatriots of which most are girls majoring in finance and economics. Their social circles closely relate with each other. According to Li, most of them are here to "*dujin*", experience campus life in Western university and travel around Europe.

This is just the kind of "fickle" students Xiong mentioned above. They are mostly here to "buy a degree" for a better future life back in China since a degree from "old-branded capitalist countries" like the US and the UK is highly valued at home. It becomes a transnational capital operation – exchange economic capital for cultural capital to protect economic capital: seeking education abroad as a method to reproduce the social status of the family across generations at home. This can further ensure the social reproduction of their place in society, and functions as a mechanism of exclusion for the lower classes that could not afford to send their children abroad. The dominance of Western thinking is revealed behind such logic.

When I visited Li this time, I noticed that her room had changed a lot, with makeup and bags everywhere on the floor, most of which have luxury-brand logos, which strikingly contrasts with when I first entered her room, since we met on the very first day she came to the UK: She is my next-door roommate at that time. When I asked her about the change, Li told me that: "*I am* *surprised about myself as well and I would have never thought that I would have spent so much money on shopping. Maybe it is because I've followed several people on Weibo like 'the UK discount stations' and they are pushing different kinds of commercials every day such as 'things you must buy in the UK'. And you know, sometimes, girls will get-together to talk about such things and we will influence each other and shop together to try new stuff. Actually, I have no passion for buying luxury bags and I do not think they are that valuable. But since you are here in the UK, and all the girls around me are buying them, sometimes I may think I should have several of them as well. Just like it is a kind of a 'standard' to own one Burberry trench when you are in the UK*."

What also left me with a deep impression, when we cooked together in the shared kitchen, was the advice of her new roommate's mother, a business woman in China who said to us: "*Listen, my darlings, you girls do not need to work so hard here in town; you should go to London more often, buy more beautiful bags and clothes, dress yourselves up carefully. I will tell you things you do not know in career life. People will judge you over your appearance and you must not be looked down upon. Do buy more luxury bags and shoes!*"

This kind of consumption pattern is widely adopted among Chinese students in the UK, girls especially. It is like a victory of capitalist consumerism. On the one hand, students receive information passively through various forms of mass media, which represents the dominate power, following the ideas previously mentioned on what is fashion, what is called popular. On the other hand, with the wide spread of such an evaluation system and aesthetic tendency, mainstream of society, that is, most people in social life, will judge people inherently based on such standard. Commercial goods have added value as a consequence. As a result, as the representative of capitalists, the mass media has successfully won[[6]](#footnote-6). People are both shaping and shaped by the Western (or capitalist) hegemonic powers.

Another aspect of Chinese daily life, traveling, also shows the influence of Western capitalist power. Most of the Chinese students travel much within the UK and to Europe during holidays. For example, Li went travelling very often and her holiday plans were usually made months ahead of time. Li travelled to London before the academic year started, then to Scotland and to London again during the Christmas holidays. After that, she travelled to Europe almost once every two months with an average trip length of 15 days. She told me that every time when she returned from holiday, she would feel very relaxed in Durham; reading and writing was in contrast a form of relaxation for her. This is a typical style of life shared by many Chinese master students in the UK. When speaking of her travels to Europe, Li said that each time before travelling, girls will choose carefully which clothes to take to make the best impressions in photos. They went to the hottest countries, cities and scenic spots recommended by the hottest online travel guides and would post beautiful photos of themselves after their trips online.

Li and her compatriots know very well that they are seen as a main source of revenue under the latest UK policy on international students. As a result, they spend less time on academic study and pay much money to experience a Western life. For girls like Li, enjoying a one-year study tour in Europe will broaden their horizons and allow them to fully relax before starting a career life. This is their "fickle logic". As for their lifestyle here, they seldom think too much and just act out imitating what other's do and what the mainstream trends guide them to do. A typical culture of overseas Chinese student life represents a perfect conspiracy between the capitalistic logic and technical rationality.

4.2.7 Hong

Hong came from a small village in the central plain of China and he had almost finished his doctoral program in a branch of natural science in Durham when we first met. Hong said that he first thought of studying abroad based on the experience of an excellent student in his village who studied in the US in the 1990s. This student had been supported by the government and finally settled down in the US. People in Hong’s village talked about the student like a miracle.

"*My parents just encouraged me to work hard and go to a good university, but never expected that much. When I heard about the story of 'Harvard girl Liu Yi-ting', I just thought of it is as a life far away from mine. Not until I enrolled in W University in China did I start to imagine that such a life could be my own, since teachers always share such stories of past students to encourage us. At the same time, students on campus were all reciting words, preparing for TOEFL or GRE exams. It was also in that period that I got started with speeches from teachers in The New Oriental School and Crazy English (two famous organisations doing English education in China) and the idea of studying abroad began to grow*."

Based on Hong's words, we can easily receive the information that to "go abroad" invokes a kind of pride in both teachers and students within Chinese universities. After graduating from W University, Hong was admitted to the University of Chinese Academy of Science. He told me that when he decided to continue an academic life, he made up his mind to study abroad with a scholarship, which appeared greatly promising. Hong said:

"*There were about 80 students in my research institution, among which about 20 were preparing for studying abroad with scholarships, which can be regarded as an external reason for me. And in my research field, the Western academic world is far more advanced than that of China, so continuing an academic life at overseas universities was regarded as an inevitable step for those of us going into academia. You know, if we want to get a job in first-rate universities or research institutes, a PhD degree from well-known universities in Western countries is unavoidable. Among Western countries, doctoral programs from the US and UK are the most widely approved*."

Hong successfully got support from the Chinese government, with a full scholarship for four years, and started his PhD research studies at the University of Durham. In Hong's words, his parents are very proud of him and encouraged him to settle down in Western countries: "*In their minds, there is a kind of feeling that 'things abroad are no doubt better.* '" Classmates and people in his village also greatly admire him. In relation to considering studying at home or abroad, Hong said:

"*It depends on fields of research, although Western ones are more advanced in general. In addition, Western academic achievements have a higher chance of getting published, even if it is on the same academic level as those in China. Main-stream magazines are monopolised by the Western academic world, which simultaneously represents a rather strong power of discourse. The Chinese academic world is more in the way of imitating and chasing a Western-styled one.* "

Hong presented the common position, which agreed with several other Chinese PhD students I have talked to. They have no choice but to study and get a degree here in "old-branded Western capitalist countries", with various difficulties in study and life. No doubt, Hong works very hard. He works in his office six days a week on average and only gets some rest on Saturdays and at night. During spare time, Hong usually takes part in various sports, such as jogging, playing billiards, horse riding and swimming, with both Chinese and foreign students. He has travelled to Europe several times when attending conferences in European countries.

When talking about his life experience at Durham, Hong said that:

"*Overseas studies gathered Chinese students from different ages, backgrounds and classes together in a strange and fresh place, many of whom may never have had a chance to meet at home. When facing a brand new foreign world, we may feel anxious, we may have fun or have conflict. We influence, understand or despise each other. Some stick to their circle of Chinese friends, while some try to adapt more to a foreign culture. I myself went from being conservative to being more open-minded, and I have made foreign friends here now. They are much friendlier than I had imagined.* "

Hong also has a very positive attitude toward the phenomenon of more and more Chinese students coming to the UK to study. Chinese students will get chances to broaden their minds and learn good things from the UK. Additionally, it can be seen as a good way for China to make closer connections with the world. Hong also said that he strongly believes that China is not completely Westernised, but is instead currently going through a globalised era:

"*I do not like the word 'Westernisation'. We may be challenged by foreign culture and customs in some ways, which is unavoidable. In some cases, we approve the new styles and in other cases, we may stick to our old trends more than ever before. Therefore, I would rather say that we are in an era of globalisation. By the way, globalisation processes are widely expressed at home in China as well.* "

This is Hong’s story. His life history represents the "successful model" of Chinese international students in the ordinary Chinese imagination: a hardworking student studying a "good and profitable natural-science major" in an old-brand capitalism state. Studying overseas for them means a broader academic career, a better experience of life, and pride for their family. Hong has been influenced by the "exemplars" of previously successful overseas students since an early age, from the story of the student in his village in his childhood to his schoolmates in his graduate school. His parents did not receive good education, but still are proud of a successful son who is studying overseas. All of these storytellers shaped an atmosphere surrounding him that frequently hints at what "a successful Chinese" should be.

It is noteworthy that in the face of Western hegemonic power, Hong still keeps his own critical thinking, although limited. He applied for studying in the UK after much deliberation. Consumerism also does not influence him as much as some informants in this paper. He has his own understanding of Westernisation and globalisation, and he believes that what is currently happening in China can be roughly defined as the inevitable outcome of "globalisation". He never enquires about the potential dark sides of globalisation or wonders in what form China's culture will exist in his imagination of a "benign globalisation" era. Additionally, he does not have enough time or knowledge base to think through these complicated questions, as they certainly appear to him to be "useless" in his future career in China. His lack of time and knowledge for these questions are brought about by Chinese modernity. This important point will be further explored in the conclusion section.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

5.1 Hegemony Everywhere, Modernity Everyday

5.1.1 Key Characters of the Daily Lives of the Five Informants

In the previous chapters, we discovered the ethnography of several Chinese students’ thoughts and overseas life. It is now obvious that among the multi-faceted life values and motivations of various types of Chinese overseas students, there is one commonality: the discourse of Western hegemony has significantly shaped their life values in the UK. But how? How does this discourse ground and reproduce itself in subtle corners of daily life? How may the processes of reproduction and discipline shape the present and the future of Chinese society? In this last chapter, my main points will be discussed in relation to the latter two processes.

Regarding the life history of Xiong, both at home and abroad, an image of a middle-class ambitious Chinese student aiming for the development of self is shown on paper. In his self-development project, a degree from Western education is highly desirable and his daily life has been highly concentrated on study and internship. His project of development roots in his dream of going abroad when he was young, as it represents a proud and more advanced life. After studying in the UK, he gives positive comments on the environment of the UK for personal development, but he has gradually realised that there are some “problematic” things about the UK.

Wang’s story is slightly different, but shares the same influence of hegemonic power of the UK. Wang, also a middle-class student, is studying in a Master’s program. In addition, his study and career plan is to continue pursuing a PhD degree in a social science field and finally become a professor at a university. In respect to his career plan, his ethnography is more about taste and life. He appreciates not only the academic environment of the UK Universities but also enjoys life in the UK and admires UK culture. His good opinion of the UK partly originates from his intern experience in the British Council during his bachelor degree period. Similar to Xiong, Wang clearly expressed a negative evaluation of China in many aspects, although, interestingly, he himself cannot clearly articulate why he believes that China is worse than the UK.

The third informant, Mei, comes from a middle class family as well and is pursuing a LLM program in Durham with the aim of becoming a rich lawyer. Her wants to be a beautiful and delicate member of the white collar middle-class. From her ethnography we can learn that her life experience was not as smooth as those of the aforementioned two types of students. Mei experienced depression during the long winter time in the UK and felt bad about the food as well. She misses home very much, but has kept working hard from the beginning as she values the degree heavily. Furthermore, she cannot deny that UK life still attracts her very much, despite the occasional bout of depression.

Li is a Master’s student in the business school at Durham. Her plan is rather simple: find a good job, get married and live an easy life in her hometown. Her motivation for studying overseas is to receive a degree of greater value in China’s talent market and, more importantly, to experience a UK college life and travel around European countries before starting her long career life in her small city.

Hong’s story shows several characteristics. First, he comes from a working class family in rural China. Second, he came to the UK for a PhD program with a scholarship from the home country. Third, his reason for being in the UK is mostly to get a degree at a better school, which could improve his ability and experience, thereby helping him to get a better position after going back to China. Finally, his family is proud of him for going abroad.

By analysing the five above examples one by one, the conclusion can be reached that it does not matter what social class or life values students possess, nor does it matter what study period is pursued or what choice-making process leads to gaining higher education in the UK. Overall, there is one common point: the hegemony of UK education, UK life and culture exist everywhere in students’ everyday lives abroad and are involved in their whole choice-making process. This hegemonic discourse manifests itself in different forms in students’ daily lives. In order to understand the complex spectrum of this hegemony, two central themes need to be deconstructed: the view Chinese students have of the “hierarchy” of the modernity of China and of the UK, and the expectation of self-development and self-progress in China with respect to modern social values.

5.1.2 “Less Modern China” Versus the “More Modern UK”

In the 19th century, the era of old Orientalism, the West, as described by Said (1978), represented non-Western people as non-modern people, the non-Western self as the non-modern self. Through this discourse, Western powers built a hierarchy of modernity with non-Western people at the bottom. Based on this logic, Western empires then legitimised their rule over non-Western colonies as benign “supervisors” guiding non-Western people along the path to modernity.

After the end of the colonial era, the logic and hierarchy, as shown in this paper, was changed nominally but continued to function. Western discourse may acknowledge that non-Western nation-states are modern states, but their modernisation is incomplete. Western hegemony has employed new strategies to maintain its dominating role by forcing other states to continue to obey a set of rules made by Western powers (supervisors of modernity). This set of rules tries to convince people that the West represents a better modernity and that it should be the only “right” way and the model to learn from.

This hegemonic discourse helps the success of neo-liberalization and commodification of the UK’s higher education. The popular recognition that higher education in the UK is much better than its counterpart in China causes numerous Chinese students to willingly pay high tuition fees and living expenses to study in a foreign country. A large amount of capital flows from the Third World to Western powers, just as it did in the seemingly-departed colonial era, but now, interestingly, the capital flows through education.

As shown in all middle-class students’ examples, a large amount of Chinese middle-class families accept and even desire that their children live and study abroad. The idea of an advanced Western education shapes and motivates Chinese students’ education choices. Ironically, an uncritical worship of the advanced West has resulted from the collaboration between China and the West. “Going to the UK” evoked feelings of pride among the Chinese decades ago and to some extent this still continues today. The motivations of students' education choices and their lives abroad reveal a collective memory of the special Chinese discourse of "non-modern self" and a “modern other (the West)” in China's own history, which reifies representations of the Occident over the Orient.

The consent to a "better" Western modernity is shown in many subtle details of daily life. When they first saw the UK, students appreciated the fresh air and the beautiful landscape of the UK, and they regarded the typical English-style countryside as a representation of Western modernity. Matriculation ceremonies are considered to be honourable events by the Chinese. The positive feelings that the Chinese students harboured in respect to imagery such as "the honourable cathedral", "academic dresses and subfusc", "the black gown" and "the cloister" reflect how much their ideas have been permeated by a hegemony of Western civilisation. During the matriculation ceremony, students enjoyed the sense of ceremony, took photos and regarded the scene as “what we used to see in UK historical dramas depicting the English ‘noble’ temperament”. This phenomenon reveals the “stereotype” that the Chinese believe about the UK.

Also, the Harry Potter movie series, a collective childhood memory shared by most Chinese students in my generation, composed part of our cultural geographical imagination of the UK and reveals a historically-generated hegemonic narrative of Western popular culture in China’s own history. This is a common early memory for many Chinese youth and the idea is spread through various channels. Other aspects of taste and consumerism have also been embedded in Chinese youth. Wang’s appreciation of western alcohol culture and his effort in cultivating classical music appreciation show an obvious appreciation for western modernity, as does Mei and Li’s consent to UK university life and the convenient chance of travelling around Europe in the UK.

As mentioned earlier, when students first arrived in the UK they joked that they could finally breathe the air of capitalism with pride and a sense of relaxation. Mei’s and Li’s stories show that students may easily be influenced by trends of "capitalist fashion": the fashion in clothes, consumer goods, movies, and travel destinations, as well as life values. As Mei said, capitalism is a world view that is suitable for the majority of people and also meets the needs and features of humanity. Similarly, Li experienced consumerism as almost the theme of her UK life. Students were told, and they believe, that people will judge their value based on their appearance. Their ideas of what progress is and their efforts to make progress are both closely connected to the key words: Western capitalism. When speaking of life style, students like Wang admire the UK culture very much, regarding it as being of higher quality and more elegant. In short, hegemony of the UK widely permeates the study life of students like Wang.

Another example is Wang’s taste in music, which is influenced by his parents reminding him as a child to listen to some Western "classical music" to cultivate his taste, but never teaching him to listen to Peking opera, which also reveals a stereotype of high and low of taste among Chinese parents. From Hong’s life story, we can see that to "go abroad" evokes pride in both teachers and students within Chinese universities, not to mention family and relatives in rural China. In short, all the aforementioned examples show a historically-generated discourse of the “more modern other” and the “less modern self”.

In addition to education choice, in Xiong’s story, after studying in the UK, his prior image of a "superior Western modernity" was strengthened through his job-hunting experience, change of undergraduate program, and studying experience in the UK. He firmly believes that the internship opportunity and the working experience he received cannot be found in China. In short, it is better for him to make progress in the UK. The discourse of development and progress shows its power in shaping the values of contemporary Chinese. This will be discussed in detail in the following section.

5.1.3 Self-development and Progress

Chinese students possess a strong desire to make "progress" and develop themselves through studying abroad. This interesting and extremely popular idea shows a hegemonic narrative of Western capitalism. In all the projects of self-development mentioned above, no matter whether the informants were would-be intellectuals, lawyers, business elites or professionals, the UK is a pivotal step in their life-long project of development. For example, many students who aim to work in academia regard the UK as a better place that is able to provide more academic resources and more valuable degrees, all of which mean improving their competitiveness after they go back to China’s talent market. Students of business usually regard the UK as a better platform and a good environment for education and internship, which benefits personal development more than when they are in China. Additionally, generally speaking, students in middle class families regard going abroad to countries like the UK as a wise decision which helps to enhance social status back home.

It is tenable to say that today many middle-class families in China view the experience of going abroad as a key step in their life and career plan. A UK degree, Western-styled culture and the experience of living independently in another culture together attract students like Mei, even though these students, especially female students, will face various difficulties during their life abroad. The strong hegemony of the UK is distributed widely in the overseas life of students like Mei. In cases like that of Li, it is also not difficult to recognise that, from a practical point of view, the value of a UK degree is much greater than a degree from home. In addition, a constructed image of the UK university experience and the fever of European study tours further illustrate that the hegemony of the UK is spread widely among students like Li. Wang’s example shows that students in working class families will also appreciate their own children going abroad.

Indeed, this phenomenon is significant in the sense that it reflects the change of social values and individual outlooks in twenty-first-century China. Reified representations of the Occident and the Orient, entangled with ideas about "progress" and its relation to capitalism, produce Chinese subjectivity and modernity "at home" and "abroad". The construction of Orientalism and the construction of Occidentalism, interacting and mixing with each other, combine to develop a new discourse in China, influencing the next generation of Chinese elites studying abroad.

It is noteworthy that there is a neoliberal spirit in the career plans and family expectations of current Chinese students who will be a significant part of the future Chinese elites. In the pursuit of so-called classical liberalism, citizens are assumed to be responsible for actively engaging with political events in public spaces and should consider developing necessary skills for political engagement in education. However, the depoliticisation of this current generation of Chinese young students is obvious. None of my informants had any consideration regarding how to facilitate social reform and social justice in China. Also, none of my informants had ever taken this issue into consideration when deciding on studying abroad. In regard to the question of possibly immigrating, it is interesting that due to strict regulations on immigration to the UK, none of my informants considered immigrating to the UK in the future. Instead, all of them attempted to improve themselves for the purpose of finding a better job in China. None of them used a nationalist narrative to interpret their motivation for studying abroad; all were simply interested in personal development. In Kai’s example, he clearly expressed that it is natural for him to continue on to a PhD degree in the UK, as it would be of greater help to him in finding a better job in the future in his area than would a degree from home. In the case of Mei, she went to the UK for another LLM degree even though she had the same degree already from home, in order to work as a lawyer for a multinational company. In the talent market at present, managers will always choose the more cosmopolitan foreign-degree-holding students over the locally educated ones, which represents employers’ values in China.

For many Chinese future elites, responsibility to the state has been displaced by a career plan that merely focuses on self-development – in other words, profit-seeking. There is no place for the consideration of society or state. All these students are mainly thinking about shaping themselves according to the requirements of society, rather than changing it. This neoliberalisation of transnational elites has gradually become a global phenomenon, according to Aihwa Ong’s study on transnational Asian immigrants in California (Ong 2009).

The slang term “gilding the resume” through studying abroad is a great example showing the link between self-development and China’s social values. A resume is the perfect field to show values in Chinese business world. The idea that adding an entry showing the applicant holds a foreign degree could be called “gilding the resume” has important meanings. This popular discourse causes many job applicants to willingly pay high tuition fees to receive education in the West so that they can fit the requirements of multinational companies, which are regarded as great career options for young professionals.

Nonetheless, these uncritical values of career plans may have negative effects. Deng Xiaoping’s reform opened the doors of Chinese markets to foreign and multinational companies. The multinational companies’ criteria for job applicants are similar to their counterparts in the West, with high English proficiency required and preference given to applicants with educational backgrounds in Anglophone countries. Multinational companies in China employ a large group of Chinese returning students. The returning students have a better understanding of the so-called “Western business spirit”, which also means they could better help multinational companies earn profit in China. Again, no one in my fieldwork research queried the potential danger of China’s neoliberal attitude towards multinational companies. Almost all of my informants who aimed at working in business uncritically took working in a multinational company as a desirable target career. These kinds of prevalent values call for an academic query of how it will influence Chinese society.

5.2 Thinking in the Chinese Context

5.2.1 Potential Effect of Thinking Uncritically

Between Orientalism and Occidentalism, China has constructed its own modernity with a remarkable materialistic characteristic which worships an imagined economically progressive West, but lacks a critical reflection of the dark sides of modernity. Both students and parents in China dream of going abroad, regarding the West, such as the UK, as a place that can be described as rich, advanced, elegant and having higher standards. Though most families do not (or are not able to) send their children abroad, they still speak highly of such a choice. In addition, those who are “left at home” are in the meanwhile working hard at achieving and living a modern city life that takes their imagined West as a good reference, being composed of only big houses, nice cars, high salaries, high-class restaurants, luxury shoes and bags – a constructed Western style of modernity. Under the control of the hegemonic discourse of Chinese modernity, it is very hard for ordinary Chinese to hear the “dissenter’s voice” and to critically think about the neo-liberalisation of social values. This blindness has caused a "unitary imagination of modernity". It is hard for Chinese to find another reference frame of modernity to be able to critically think about the dark sides of modernity in general, and the problem of an imagined Western modernity caused by China’s Occidentalism in specific.

From the aforementioned ethnographies, we can see neoliberal values are prevalent among Chinese overseas students. As a transnational people, Chinese overseas students, when they consider their future, are more concerned about the “self” rather than the state. None of my informants seemed to care about the possibility of changing the current neoliberal system. All that they are trying to do is to develop themselves to be more suitable for the current neoliberal system so that they can pursue a better and more modern life. It raises the question whether the increasing number of returning students will facilitate the development of social justice and welfare in China or not.

Studying abroad exposes Chinese to the real image of Western modernity. On one hand, this enhances Western hegemonic power’s disciplinary control over Chinese students in some aspects, especially in consumerism and the irrational worship of a better “West” (Western education, Western value of life, Western taste, etc.). On the other hand, although they experience a real Western modernity, their reflection of modernity is still “congenitally” limited, unfortunately. This is because most Chinese students, under the influence of the materialism characteristic of Chinese modernity, hold a pragmatic attitude towards their studying and career plans, as shown by my research. Most Chinese students also have neither the academic knowledge nor the time to consider such a sophisticated question. Therefore, most of them are still “following the crowd”.

5.2.2 Escaping from the Fabric of the Hegemonic Discourse?

Generally speaking, the current critical thinking of Chinese students regarding modernity is not hopeful, as mentioned above. I do, however, see some glimmers of hope in the darkness. When I tried to grasp critical thoughts in my interviews with the informants, I realised that the situation and future may be more complex than I originally thought.

As we could see in Xiong’s and Wang’s ethnographies, it is intriguing to explore their critical, although limited, thinking regarding modernity and the UK. They do not deny the necessity of modernity and never theorise their thinking in a framework of comparative modernity as other scholars have done. Mostly, they focus on the specific problems and advantages of the UK’s academic environment or globalisation in China.

Although the current situation is generally pessimistic, the phenomenon of an increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad does provide the possibility and the chance for them to think about the actual disadvantages of both the so-called “cosmopolitan version” of modernity and the Chinese version of modernity. Chinese students in the UK environment can find a reference frame for modernity in which to reflect on their previous unitary imagination of modernity, which may cause them to bring a more diverse thinking of modernity back home. As time goes by, this currently low extent of critical thinking may be a seed of hope with which to break the current dilemma of Chinese modernity in the future, as more and more of the future Chinese social elite may become aware of the problem of the hegemonic Western discourse of modernity.

5.3 Reflection and Possible Future Research Directions

This paper examined the hegemonic discourse of Western modernity manifested in the daily lives of Chinese overseas students. In order to articulate this point, my paper also attempts to reflect on its methodology and predict possible future research directions.

It is always difficult to grasp the shapeless field of daily life, as it is highly inclusive and diverse. As anthropologists, however, we understand that the daily lives of many groups of people deserve to be explored. In my case, it is difficult to understand contemporary China without knowing what happens in the daily lives of its transnational overseas students. In order to overcome this difficulty, as I continually reflect on my research, I think that grounding the discussion on the change of cultural constructions and individual outlooks about the development and planning of self would be a good starting point. This research is just the first step in my future research project, which hopefully will provide a better picture of the changing subjectivity of Chinese overseas students.

In contrast, the context and stages of daily life may still need to be extensively discussed in future research. Here, we go back to the central problem that has haunted postcolonial scholars for a long time: "How should we understand the change of the unequal power relationship between the Western states and the non-Western states in this postcolonial independency era?" In future research, scholars could attempt to further explain the new form of contemporary Orientalism and the construction of “the less modern self”, as shown in my paper. Furthermore, in order to understand globalisation in this postcolonial era, what I attempted to do in this paper was to argue that focusing on transnational populations and the flow of values, instead of capital, may help us better understand unequal power relations in respect to the daily lives of people, from a perspective of both hegemony and discipline.

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1. For the purpose of respecting the research ethic and the requirement of informants, all informants' names are pseudonyms and, in some cases, some of the informants' details may not be discussed, for example, the name of their programs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This university adopts the supervisor system of the West, advocating one-vs-one supervision in undergraduate education. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Another campus of Durham University where most of the Chinese undergraduate students study, especially those who majored in business and study at the business school. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A British multinational grocery and general merchandise retailer. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Yang Jie's discussion (2011) on the influence of capitalist fashion on Chinese consumerism. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the relationship between mass media and the victory of capitalist consumerism in China, see Liu Zhengjia's study (2011) on the discussion of Steve Jobs in Chinese mass media. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)