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The interplay of social class and gender on Chinese international postgraduates' mobility and cultural consumptions in the UK

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Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract

While the orthodoxical transition framework is likely to position transition as the normative and linear process, my thesis aims to explore the fluid and unique Chinese international students' experience of transitions. To record the dynamics of transitions, my thesis adopted longitudinal method to track the same Chinese international postgraduates in the UK across one year. Participants were asked to send me the audio diaries via Chinese social media (WeChat) each month to share their social and academic experiences, perceptions and reflections. Draw on the current each month entries, participants' transitions were found to be fluctuating, changing and even unstable and their transitions did not fit into a single adjustment model. Although my work is still in progress, participants' transitions and overseas experiences were found to relate to their social identities in terms of the interplay of gender and social class.

Full paper

The paper draws on my doctoral project that deploys an intersectionality orientation for examining gender and social class in Chinese international postgraduates mobility to the UK . Particularly, applying inter-categorical approach allows for comparison between different social groups in terms of gender and social class. To record

the dynamics of transitions, I adopted longitudinal method to track the same Chinese international postgraduates in the UK across one year to investigate their perceptions of their transitions. Participants were asked to send me the audio diaries via Chinese social media (WeChat) each month to share their social and academic experiences, perceptions and reflections.

I collected a range of Chinese postgraduates' overseas experiences and transitions in the UK and examine men and women and middle-class and working-class within the context of the UK universities. While the orthodoxical transition framework is likely to position transition as the normative and linear process (Quan et al., 2016), drawing on the current data, participants' transitions were found to be fluctuating, changing and even unstable and their transitions did not fit into a single adjustment model. Also, their overseas experiences and transition processes tended to relate to their social identities in terms of the interplay of gender and social class. The paper discusses two trends that emerged from the current data.

First, Chinese female students' choices of studying abroad were constrained by their gender and family backgrounds. Middle-class families were more likely to focus on children's studying by transmitting high level of cultural capital inside the family (Zhang & Tang, 2021). Female participants from middle-class families were found to have more opportunities to exposure to the activities such as going for educational visits and exchange projects, which helped these participants think of more educational choices, shape their aspirations of achieving educational success in other countries, not just limiting to China. The cultivation of the thought of going abroad helped middle-class female participants weaken the concept of boundary between countries, giving them more opportunities to find the best way to pursue their studying. However, female participants from working-class families were less likely to receive sufficient educational resources when they were young to accumulate cultural capital. While these participants are all females, the intersect of family background forms the complex social relationships that impact their mobilities. Also, gender was found to influence

individuals educational mobility physically and their choices of job destinations. On the one hand, constrained by the marital status and the reproductive responsibility, it was not desirable for women to work or study far away from their families if they considered of having children. On the other hand, women were expected to take care of their parents in China, which narrowed down their choices of working places and possibility for future work mobility.

Second, social class influenced female participants cultural consumption in the UK. After studying in the UK, most of the female participants from middle-class families tended to participate in the local cultural events frequently and consume cultural goods to accumulate more cultural capital. Also, their parents provided sufficient economic capital to support them to do various cultural events. From participants' perspectives, visiting local museums or watching musicals was one of the benefits of studying in the UK. In contrast to the middle-class participants who intend to accumulate more cultural capital abroad, participants from working-class family, getting international institutionalized cultural capital and expanding social network seem to be more significant for them to achieve upward social mobility. They were more likely to attend practical activities to improve their skills and enhance competitiveness in the labour market. Aspirations and experiences of working-class participants were different from those of their middle-class counterparts, and they generally possessed less cultural capital but seeking for more social capital and practical experiences.

While my work is still in progress, gender and social class are found to intersect and interplay to form complex inequalities in higher education to influence Chinese international postgraduates' mobility and experiences in the UK.

References

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