

**TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND THE DESIRE FOR INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION AMONG ELITE FAMILIES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

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Abstract

Since the 2010s, Chinese students have become the biggest consumers of international education and made up the largest group of international students in English-speaking Western countries. Scholars have documented the motivation of Chinese international students studying abroad and their overseas experience. As previous research mostly treats Chinese international students as an unvaried and homogenous group, little attention has been paid to elite Chinese applicants. Although studying abroad is no longer exclusively attainable by only elites in China, they have different experiences than others as it has become a much-coveted commodity through “class-based consumption” (Liu-Farrer 2016). This thesis aims to advance the understanding of transnational mobility and desire for international education by zooming in on Chinese elite families.

The research draws on 30 in-depth interviews with students and parents of Chinese elite families and participant observations at an elite education agency that provides personalised services to support their goals of elite education overseas. The families’ narratives and the agency’s mission demonstrate that elite international education goes beyond class-based consumption that facilitates the conversion of economic, cultural and social capital. It also means social reproduction and capital accumulation among elite families in contemporary China. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that the ultimate goals of education migration among the elites in China is not settlement overseas but to become global elites who enjoy home-field advantages in China while expanding their networks and resources across the world.

Key words: International education, transnational mobility, elites, contemporary China

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Introduction

As a result of China's post-reform socio-economic transformation, growing participation and important role in the global expansion of transnational education mobility, this country sends more students to international schools abroad than any other. Through rapid social transformations, a new, cultural logic of migration has emerged by the elite, who are motivated by socio-cultural, instead of economic, strategies. In this recent direction in mobility, education migration has become a form of "lifestyle consumption" and a "value signifier" (Liu-Farrer 2016), similar to the practices of the global elite. As economic wealth is transformed into social prestige through elite consumer culture, an overseas diploma becomes synonymous with the idea of "successful global citizen", which is a main driver for Chinese elite education migration. Thus, even if studying abroad is no longer exclusively for elites in China, international education nowadays becomes a much-coveted commodity based on class-based consumption.

Numerous studies have explored the motivation of Chinese international students studying abroad and their overseas experience (Ma 2020, Kipnis 2011, Hansen & Thøgersen 2015, Miao & Wang 2017), but they mostly treat them as an unvaried group and "tend to "essentialise them, by seeing them as a homogenous group [...] that behaves differently than Western students." (Soong 2015: 220). While studying overseas has become "mass production" for increasingly more Chinese families, elites seek customized and personalised services for their education to maximise their payoffs. As a result, a number of private education agencies emerge to meet the needs of Chinese elite families, who intend to send their children abroad at a young age. They provide customised educational training and services for applications to prestigious schools overseas through exclusive means and strategies.

This paper aims to situate the recent phenomenon of this socio-cultural logic of education migration, as well as add to the newly emerging academic interest in the global forces effecting

social stratification and its relationship to inequalities in education, from the perspective of the elite class in contemporary China. My research questions are as follows:

1. Who are the elites in contemporary China?
2. How does the elite education agency support the elite families' strategies for international education?
3. What are the motivations and desire for international education among elite families in China?

The global perspective of international education can be illustrated through an analysis of a private training school in Shanghai for students aged 11-18, called *GoAP*¹. This institution, which also functions as a visa consultation agency, places clients through tailor-made programs to suitable schools in the UK. This training centre is attractive to parents as they have close connections to a wide variety of schools in the UK, preparing applications for foundation year where the child focuses on English language improvement, single-sex schools, boarding schools and scholarships to specialised schools where the child's talent can be cultivated with the help of professional faculty. Due to the foreign owners' education background and connections with schools both in China and the UK, parents hire the agency's services while spreading their reputation word-of-mouth, further facilitating the formation and cohesion of a transnational elite circle.

This paper is built on the structure of the concepts of class, migration strategies and migration outcomes. Chapter 1 outlines the background to the ethnographic field, Shanghai and its connection to my research, with a special focus on the private training centre, while providing a definition of the elite and elite education mobility. Chapter 2 situates the current theories on transnational social fields within previous literature, combined with a Bourdieusian framework of capital conversion and class reproduction, adapted to the Asian context by Ong (1999), Xiang, & Wei (2009) and Liu-Farrer (2016). In Chapter 3, I present the methodology applied for empirical

¹ In order to protect my interviewees, I will use a fictitious name for all actors and the training school, too. Thus, *GoAP*, as in "Go Abroad Program" is pseudonym for the company.

research in the field. In Chapter 4, I analyse the ethnographic findings to support the previously outlined concepts on class reproduction, migration strategies and migration outcomes.

1 Background

1.1 The increasing role of the education agency in international education

As part of the growing number of private actors within the education industry, there emerged a few private, vocational and extra-curricular education centres in Shanghai. They are mainly founded by foreigners, often with local Chinese investment and business partnership, such as GoAp. They operate on a different system to local international schools, offering courses that support overseas education preparation, advising parents on the most suitable institution for the child and arranging interviews, exams and personal meetings with the target school's admission committee too. These companies also take on the role of consulting, advising on visas and application paperwork.

Presently, ventures with full ownership by foreign investors are only permitted in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone and they only relate to non-academic training, such as language training, sports, and vocational skills. (Piat 2018). Piat argues that China currently “lacks expertise and reputation in certain areas of education that foreign providers can deliver only. The prestige of western programs, practicality of skills training, quality of industry standards, and holistic life skills are a distinct advantage for foreign providers” (Piat 2019). That is why private agencies have been on the rise, to fill the gap for the newly emerging needs for exclusive education services.

1.2 The elite and their relationship with international education mobility

The parents I identified as elite, mostly in their early 40s, were government cadres, managed state-owned firms or ran their own private businesses, such as construction and real estate, these latter two being some of the most dynamic market sectors of capital accumulation in Shanghai².

As Xiang and Wei argue, it is the elite class that can benefit the most from international education through “wealth concentration” since the 1990s, “different types of capital, the human, social, political and cultural (specifically foreign degrees) transform each other [...] and become concentrated in the top stratum of society” (Xiang & Wei 2009: 1). The locally and internationally provided international education, and the mobility it provides, have become a commodity, facilitated by the increasingly neoliberal education industry. “Possessing it signals the recipient’s class position and provides access to a perceived wholesome living environment and an imagined elite lifestyle overseas. Emigration also allows the first-generation rich to secure and advance the class position of their children among the global elites” (Liu-Farrer 2016: 2).

As an indicator for class stratification, having the financial background means that families, being clients at the elite training agency, are able to pay the highest tuition fees in the education market. Besides, they also pay high fees to the international schools their children attend full time, in Shanghai or other nearby towns, such as Changzhou and Nanjing. While the students attend international schools full-time, they take classes at GoAp in the evening and the weekend. Often, especially before entrance exams to overseas school, the child only attends GoAp, which will be discussed in 4.1. All three education institutions charge the highest fees in the market: at the international school, located in China, tuition fees soar up to USD 40K per academic year. GoAp also charges the highest fees for their customized training and education services of finding the best match with a private school abroad, which also has the highest fees in the UK context.

² For the real estate boom see e.g. The Shanghai Bubble, by Joshua Cooper Ramo. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1149379?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

GoAp attracts clients by the owners and staff's cultural and social capital. Their academic credentials and the mixed English and Mandarin speaking staff build trust with the students, parents and teachers both in their school in China and in the UK, as well. As a private education agency and consultancy firm, GoAp combines the roles of education and mobility, by providing resources. Specific test preparation of the target school, informing the parents about admission processes and particular requirements, connecting the families to networks of GoAp's partner schools within China and overseas make them a key actor in helping to navigate their ways through education migration and pursue transnational lifestyles. As families hire their services to seek admission at schools in the UK, they form a global network by using the infrastructure the education agency provides in order to pursue their goals, therefore successful migration is made possible by the agency itself.

Through empirical examples of biographies, an intricate system of personal and institutional interconnectedness can be observed. Social, political, cultural and economic capital ease the way for mobility, accessible by the elite only, and as such, constituting a class reproduction strategy.

1.3 Shanghai as a global city

Shanghai, as a global city and China's financial centre, plays a crucial role in facilitating the formation of national and global networks of transnational families. While many of the families featured in my research are local Shanghaiese, over half of them are from other places in mainland China, Hong Kong or abroad. Shanghai offers the educational infrastructure where the students prepare for overseas application and it is the place they will later want to return to, post-graduation. It is here where the strategies for capital conversion and transnational mobility are realised, which I will explain in part 1.3.

Saskia Sassen (2013) defines global cities as the centres of “flow of information and capital [...] which are no longer tightly bound to national boundaries and systems of regulation”. Through her conceptualization, Shanghai can be regarded as a city where “major nodes in the

interconnected systems of information and money, and the wealth that they capture is intimately related to the specialized businesses that facilitate those flows - financial institutions, consulting firms, accounting firms, law firms, and media organizations” (ibid).

As a result of the concentration of international communities in the city, high economic level³ and reputation as the world’s highest-ranking education⁴, the demand for international schools is high: Shanghai is currently home to 118 to such schools⁵, coming second only after Beijing⁶.

Shanghai ranks as top city for local Chinese people, as well. As Vanessa Fong points out, “Chinese citizens view the world as a hierarchy in which all places [are] ranked by their respective levels of development” [Fong 2011: 50]. My ethnographic experience has shown that parents from all over China send their children to Shanghai as it is perceived that here they can receive the most suitable training that can successfully prepare them for studies abroad.

³ After Deng Xiaoping’s reforms in 1978, Shanghai began to rebuild itself as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) with the support of the central and local governments. Together with Shenzhen, Tianjin and Chongqing, Deng’s ambition was to create “a few Hong Kongs” (Ong 1999: 37), “where market-driven capitalist policies are implemented to entice foreign businesses to invest in China” (World Bank 2010: 25).

⁴ How Shanghai Does It. Insights and Lessons from the Highest-Ranking Education System in the World. (2016). World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/how-shanghai-does-it>

⁵ Although the literature states that all these international schools are foreign-led, in my empirical experience, there is always a local Chinese co-principal, such as Shanghai American School, YCIS and Dulwich School. Often, they help with language, local legal papers, representing the school at local events and act as intermediaries with local authorities and parents. Besides, also based on my observations and experience, all the schools employ a Party official who ensures government policies are complied with.

⁶ Where in the world are the top cities for international schools? <http://www.globaleducationmagazine.com/world-top-cities-international-schools/>

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The elites in the West and China

Studying the elite is relatively scarce in anthropology and defining it as a social stratum is challenging both in the Western and Chinese contexts. Its original use in the west goes back to the 17th century, referring to goods of exceptional quality, which, according to Daloz, was later used for “social groups at the apex of societies” (in Schijf 2013: 29). In Wright Mill’s classic, power elite is defined as those, who control the economy, military and politics, the three structurally important institutional domains of society. By occupying these strategic places, they can “transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; [their decisions] having major consequences for the underlying populations of the world” (2000: 286).

Salverda and Abbink provide a general definition for elites in modern societies. In their conceptualisation, the elite is a “relatively small group within the societal hierarchy that claims and/or is accorded power, prestige, or command over others on the basis of a number of publicly recognized criteria, and aims to preserve and entrench its status thus acquired. [...] Elites are dominant in some sectors of society on the basis of certain (im)material characteristics, skills, and achievements” (2013: 1). However, we must also consider their “social mobility and complex procedures of inclusion and exclusion, [using] a variety of resources to exert and maintain their positions [as the] incumbents of top positions in decision-making institutions in both the public and the private sectors” (Schijf 2013: 29-31).

In the Chinese context, there is expanding literature on the effects of post-reform economic development since the 1980s on the social structure and, within it, the emergence of a new elite through “wealth concentration” (Xiang & Wei: 2009) since the early 2000s. The authors also draw attention to the elite’s connection to the state, linking them to economic and political power, stating that “government officials are now among the best educated and

economically most privileged”, which signals the transformation at a structural level of society, highlighting that the elite have close ties with the state, which is “in stark contrast to the situation in the 1980s when the rich were mostly household entrepreneurs with low social status. By the 2000s it had become nearly impossible for ordinary people to enter the top circle of the society” (2009: 3). Thus, the Chinese elite, echoing Wright Mill’s conceptualization, gains status not only through being a member of a “corporate clique” (2000: 133) but acquired power such as party membership or having top political positions.

2.2 Transnational social fields and mobility

Through overseas education, young Chinese students overseas travel back and forth between the UK and China, becoming simultaneously incorporated in both sending and host societies (Levitt-Glick Schiller 2004: 1004), while building transnational connections at the same time. The parents, while “parking” their child abroad and continuing business online and in China, also live and work in a transnational social field, having “interconnected social experiences that spread across state boundaries” (Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc, & Basch 1994: 6). This interconnectedness is enabled through global cities (Sassen 1992), flows of technology, capital and people (Held et al: 1999) and globalisation (Castell: 2009, Beck: 2000).

My research aims to fill the gap in the intertwining relationship between transnational mobility and the education industry showing social processes from the perspective of a private elite education agency, which “more or less guarantee progression into future dominant economic and social positions” (Nespor 2014: 27). The elite private education agency becomes an important non-state actor that facilitates the strategies as a local structuring process (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2009).

As “private brokers” in the education market (Peidong: 2016, Kajanus: 2015), they help with visa administration, registering the child at a local school, and act as a matchmaker between students and the most suitable schools abroad, enabling mobility for families who seek elite education for their children to gain global competence. The agency establishes and maintains a web of social relations in multiple social fields, which illustrates the embedded power asymmetries, “composed by network of networks that may be locally situated, or may extend nationally or transnationally” (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2009: 180).

Successful citizens of global capitalism are mobile (Nyíri: 2010, Ong: 1999) and education migration provides an increasingly accessible stepping-stone to become one. However, as private education programs for elite institutions come at a high price and the elite are the ones

who have the means to afford it, education mobility becomes a class-based consumption (Liu-Farrer: 2016).

As the most prevalent strategy among elite families is “migrating without settling”, these processes will facilitate the gaining of “transnational cultural capital” (Liu-Farrer 2016: 5) and successful global citizenship. The reproduction of the elite through the private agency intricately intertwines international education and mobility, through which the globally connected elite share common strategies.

2.3 Social reproduction through elite education

Using structuralist Bourdieusian concepts, the anthropological scope of this research attempts to map the micro-mechanisms of elite formation and reproduction, through processes of “cultural dynamics and the habitus formation that perpetuate their rule, dominance and acceptance” (Salverda and Abbink 2013: 2). Although Bourdieu worked in the Algeria and wrote for a French context, his theories are applicable and have been popular in Chinese social sciences as well (Mu, Dooley & Luke: 2019). His theories on habitus and social fields provide a tool to map the current mechanisms of new social realities and “explore social class, social classification and education in contemporary China” (Sheng 2014: 31).

Current studies combine the conceptualisation of the newly emerging transnational elite (Xiang & Wei: 2009, Nyíri: 2010, & Thøgersen: 2015) and the internationalisation of Chinese education (Liu: 2020). This is the result of current structural changes in Chinese society within which education plays an active role as a cohesive and structuring mechanism. Accordingly, the elite is identified by their education strategies, through “elite concentration in schools” (Khan 2015: 172). Zooming in on elite education therefore provides a tool for measuring social inequalities and the emergence of a new elite stratum in modern China and explores how they manage “by various means to shape educational provision to meet their needs” (Maxwell & Aggleton 2016: 16).

Chinese students preparing to study abroad are outside of the education hierarchy in the domestic context. Since they do not take part in the Chinese public-school system, their position stands beyond the pyramidal shape of “ranking, tiering and differentiation of the system” (Yang 2016: 137). Accordingly, elite overseas students do not compete with other international candidates in the field of a competitive overseas studies market. Thus, these stratifying mechanisms in the sector of education highlight strategies they use for distinction (Bourdieu: 1986).

The desirability for overseas studies and the seeking of global academic standards (Hansen & Thøgersen 2015), in Marxist terms, is a form of capital accumulation. As part of the elite’s neoliberal agenda, accumulating passports, residences and social capital, they acquire more economic capital and power, and through transnational mobility, this expands to multiple locations (Ong 1999).

A foreign degree is a symbol of cultural capital, accessed and obtained through economic, political, social and cultural capital of elite families. This is further convertible to gain more economic, political, social and cultural capital (Xiang & Wei 2009, Liu-Farrer 2016, Fong 2011, Liu 2020), facilitating strategies for elite reproduction. Through the convertibility of these capitals value is created, helping to secure and accumulate more resources through which the elite ultimately gains symbolic capital in their home environment and among the global elite. These families can afford to finance a prolonged stay abroad, sending their children to overseas boarding schools as young as the age of 12. Xiang mentions that these young, self-funded international students are the “new aristocracy, but they are real aristocracy. In Bourdieu’s words, they develop the proper habitus and the ‘competence’ for further capital accumulation and conversion” (2009: 18).

The motivations for overseas studies point to various strategies that reach beyond to only obtaining a degree from abroad in hope for better opportunities in the labour market. As

more and more well-off Chinese students are seeking education in Western countries, besides reputable education credentials from top universities, the main priority has shifted towards accumulation of cultural and social capital by “broadening the horizons” (Liu-Farrer 2015, Liu: 2020, Kajanus 2015), “personal development” & Thøgersen 2015: 7), pursuing “developed world citizenship” (Fong 2011: 41) and “social advancements rather than settling” (Nyíri 2010: 35). Thus, as Andrew Kipnis argued, education should be understood less as a means to an end and more as an object of desire in itself (in Hansen & Thøgersen: 2015).

As families do not settle in the host country but seek to make use of their acquired cultural and social capital back in China, capital conversion happens in multiple locations, in their home and host countries, although the real value of conversion is realised in their home environment. In the West they would not stand out with the education credentials, which can be overcome by moving back to China where they can convert their capital and accumulate a higher form of cultural and symbolic capital.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

This research focuses on middle and high school students’ education experiences, who are between 12 and 18 years of age and their parents at the elite teaching agency, GoAp. Between July 2018 and August 2019, I did 20 semi-structured interviews with students, and 10 with their parents in order to explore the various motivations for study plans abroad. Also, I had regular, informal chats before and after my classes with colleagues, students and parents, which formed part of my observation methods. Not all students at GoAp are elite. I chose those informants for my research who I observed to “stand out” from the others. How I identified them will be explained in Chapter 4.

I met most of my interviewees in my capacity as an English tutor at the training school in Shanghai or online platforms such as WeChat and Zoom, where some of the classes were

conducted with those living outside of Shanghai. Throughout extensive time we spent together in the classroom and socializing outside the school, I got the chance to get close to some of the families. They introduced me to other families who had similar plans for international education abroad.

3.2 Ethnographic methods

Besides the secondary sources from current literature on migration and the education industry, I used mixed ethnographic methods: field work combined with archival work by discourse analysis of online media platforms such as WeChat and websites such as publications by the agency and the China's Ministry of Education digital documents, which provided a macro-level scope of state policies.

The empirical research was carried out both in Shanghai and online through semi-structured interviews with colleagues, principals, parents and students. Since 2019 September, I have continued my interviews online, doing follow-up interviews with my old informants in China and with those families who have already moved abroad, mainly the UK and the US.

The interview questions focused on their general ideas and their significance in their personal life: "Why did you choose to study at this education agency?", "Why is studying abroad important for your future?", "Why did you and your family choose a school for you in the UK?"

My questions have been thematic, yet general, as I wanted to keep them less directed since "open-ended, semi-structured formats facilitate the collection of new information with the flexibility to explore topics in-depth with informants" [Bernard & Gravlee 2015: 362]. This technique provides more space for the narratives to develop freely, while we can also discuss together the issues and topics, which they found interesting or important, without limiting the scope or guiding them toward any specific thematic agenda. I did not experience serious issues with language boundaries. With most informants I communicated in English, and I used Mandarin with those parents who felt more comfortable in their native tongue.

Through a selection of narratives, the micro-level analysis will reflect on the current dynamics of elite reproduction through networks which form through a private education agency. The emerging migration strategies illustrate some common features of elite education mobility through which we also better understand the macro-level social processes and the policies that affect them.

3.3 Positionality

As a result of doing fieldwork in my capacity as a teacher and a researcher, I had to examine the different roles I had and the conflicting pressures emerging from them. As a fieldworker, my institutional role as teacher, was less central to identity than “my subjective commitment as an ethnographer” (Atkinson 2001: 328), which helped me address issues with the collection and interpretation of data. The agency, parents and teachers were informed each time I used data that emerged during class discussions and, in order not to interfere with the lesson, I always took notes by hand, instead of using recording devices. This way the talks felt more relaxed and informal.

All interviews thus were done with the interviewees’ consent beforehand. Since most of my interviewees are minors, I asked the parents’ permission for using data in my paper. For the sake of identity protection, all the names of parents, children and the private school’s name have been anonymised.

During my 9 years in China (2010-2019), I met some families through social circles who later also came to study at GoAp. Since by that time we had become friends, the agency and I reached an agreement that I would not tutor them at work. This allowed me to continue socialising with these families, at home dinners or weekend outings they invited me to, which provided ample opportunities for participant observation. In each case, the families were aware that I was a researcher in anthropology. They often asked me at what stage my studies were

doing and were willing to share their current experiences with school application processes, as well.

4 Ethnographic Analysis

4.1 Who are the elite?

Through select ethnographic vignettes, this chapter illustrates some patterns that emerged regarding the different meanings of elite status in contemporary China, providing a schematic overview of the reproduction strategies of the top stratum of society and the intertwining relationship of mobility and migration through private education.

Self-identification of elite in daily discourses

Defining the elite status of the families I met is challenging. Through informal conversations it emerged that in Mandarin Chinese, there is a different connotation to the words *jingying* (literally translates as “perfect outstanding person”) and *elite*, used both in Chinese and foreign company advertising campaigns and educational discourses in the media⁷. Sometimes I brought up the topic of success and status, as both terms are associated with the elite class, and I joked with my informants about the stereotypical terms used in daily, informal discourses: “Gaofushuai” (tall, rich and handsome) and “baifumei” (white skinned, rich and pretty), slang phrases to refer to attractive men and women, respectively. They laughed and waved their hand in disagreement. Many of my friends, colleagues and students gave me the same response:

“No, it’s not like this. The 4 things you need to have for a successful life and to start a family are to have your own apartment, a car, a good graduate degree, best if it’s from a good foreign university and a good job. These are important.”

Thus, a foreign degree is regarded necessary for home success. As more and more Chinese students acquire qualifications from overseas, there emerged a strong preference in

⁷ The word *elite* is often used both in English and in Mandarin as a part of the marketing campaign to attract new clients, such as preparing for scholarships at elite schools. Some companies even have the word elite in their name, such as Elite Education <https://www.eliteeducation.group/> and Elite Education Institute <https://www.eliteprep.com/lujiazui>.

degrees from the top Western high schools and graduate programs at universities, that create the values to become successful and elite. Accordingly, international mobility, similar to Liu-Farrer's concept of "migration as class-based consumption", is further reinforced by the hierarchy of global institutional ranking.⁸ As Xiang & Wei argue, "degrees from prestigious universities are regarded qualitatively different from those from colleges that are said to 'sell' seats. In response to this, ambitious parents send their children to elite schools abroad as early as possible, hoping the children would accumulate enough human and cultural capital over the years to get into top universities in the destination country. Thus, the route of conversion between financial and cultural capital becomes longer, and becomes more institutionalized." (2009: 4)

Jenny, one of my high-school student's mum, is Taiwanese. She moved to Shanghai 10 years ago with her Taiwanese husband, for her job as a regional manager for at the Shanghai branch of a French luxury watch company. When I ask her about today's Chinese elite, she gives two explanations.

"The elite now is up to the family background. Elite kids have elite parents. The family is nice, they have a nice cultural background, high education level. Maybe not very wealthy but can also be high profile politicians. The other ones are the second, third generation youth, with a good university education, working as interns or young professionals at multinational companies here in China. But they're not new rich, tuhao, like Ma Yun⁹. Because tuhao is not the elite, their behaviour is not right, they don't have culture, no attitude. Even in a 3-star restaurant they command the waiters to bring them chopsticks! They got rich too fast, benefited from real-estate companies and the digital market. The elite has a nice attitude, good manners."

⁸ Hansen & Thøgersen (2015) base the current imaginaries of a global education hierarchy through the emergence of powerful industry of world university rankings, influencing students' aspirations. "China is a very active player in this game through the Academic Ranking of World Universities conducted by Shanghai Jiaotong University."

⁹ Founder of the Alibaba Group, currently the richest person in China. Tuhao, literally "earth rich", is a derogatory term, referring to the nouveau riche or "country millionaires" (Liu-Farrer 2016: 8)

Jenny was referring to elite as those with manners, who have cultural capital through generations, international education and migration, by which they gain upward social mobility. GoAp, providing a path to elite education, creates a platform through which economic capital can convert to cultural and symbolic capital. The processes of social reproduction through the agency and overseas education is illustrated in Figure 1. Furthermore, as the clients become informed about the available scholarships¹⁰, art and science competitions and students gain access to prestigious private schools, the families gain symbolic capital through social prestige at the same time.

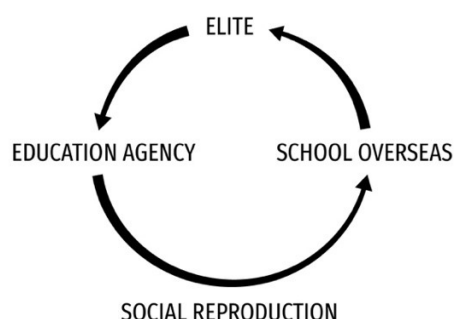


Figure 1. Social reproduction: Conversion of economic cultural and social capital through overseas schooling, facilitated by the education agency.

Opting for international schools, albeit at a high price, provide various benefits for families: some relief, among others, from the stress factors the Chinese national curriculum imposes on students, opportunity for asset management (e.g. by overseas investment) and social mobility through capital conversion. They can afford the high tuition fees in multiple institutions: the full-time school and the part time training school. Through elite circles, they learn which school to choose for their offspring. Thus, certainly, economic wealth and social capital are both necessary to successfully navigate their way in the increasingly complex international education market. As elite families can bear the expenses of the exclusive services of private schooling, through their network, they become informed about the institutions which can cater to their needs.

¹⁰ Receiving a scholarship at a school abroad is regarded the highest achievement for a student because it is regarded as merit, a form of cultural capital.

One child policy/having multiple children

Despite the one-child policy imposed in cities until 2016, most of my urban students at GoAp, born between 2000 and 2008, had an older or younger sibling. Although the second child may not have a local Shanghai hukou¹¹, necessary for school registration, the families enjoyed the benefits of what local international schools offered to them, which accept children with no restrictions. Besides, the overseas education and migration processes became much easier for the second child, by following the footsteps of their older sibling. Through the trodden path of the elder sibling, the younger child's migration process started before they left China as they were learning through personal narratives of their brother or sister.

Mae, my 11-year old student from Ningbo, echoes many families' experiences with multiple children.

"I didn't choose to study in the UK first. I wanted to go to Australia, where my elder brother lives. He's 16. I wanted him to take care of me. But then I realised he's too much older, in senior high school already and wouldn't have the time to play with me. He didn't go to the US because it is too dangerous. Many crazy people have guns (showing an imaginary pistol to her temple). So, I'll go to England. The schools have very good conditions there. I've been to the UK a few times with my friends and it's good fun."

Both Mae and her brother found placement to foreign schools through the same agency, GoAp. The younger siblings often shared with me that they think it's easier for them, learning from the previous experiences from their brother or sister. However, some families decide to send the children to different institutions, not only because they have different academic strengths that the same school could not cultivate equally well, but also due to changing

¹¹ Hukou refers to household registration system. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/655134?seq=1>

expectations of parents toward the school. This way the first child's trajectory serves as an experiment according to which the family adjusts its expectations over the years. As the first child have been accumulating experiences through schooling, the parents have the chance to learn if it would suit their second child, as well. Using the UK only as a testing ground, many families later transferred their first children to the US or enroll the second child directly in an American institution. This relates to a global education hierarchy, which I will explain further in Chapter 4.2.

“Freedom and Happiness”

Another sign of elite status is allowing their children more freedom of choice in their academic focus. Many children study for an art or music degree, instead of STEM¹² subjects that would secure high-paid jobs in their future. Focusing on the child's happiness is also a measurement of wealth, since having a stable financial background means these families don't have to worry about the child's future finance-wise, instead they can focus on self-realisation and enjoying childhood.

Jackie, my 16-year-old online student from Qingdao, finds attending an international school in his town much easier than a local Chinese school.

“There are too many people in China now. The competition is very high as everyone want to get in to BeiDa and Tsinghua¹³. The final exam at a Chinese high school is too hard. Easier to go abroad and take those exams. Much easier.”

¹² STEM – subjects of science, technology, economics and maths. Elite families do not follow this pattern as their finances allow kids to find their career for passion. Many of my students want to apply for English majors, journalism or fashion design.

¹³ Two of China's most reputable universities located in Beijing, where the highest entrance exam score is required for admission.

The mother of two little sisters, echoes the idea of pursuit of happiness through a more relaxed international education.

“It was always important for me that my children are happy. They must study hard but they can choose what they want to learn in school and what they want to be in the future.”

Her older daughter, when she was 13, told me that she felt very lucky through her parents. “My parents provide for everything. I’m happy. When they were young, they were poor and went to not so good universities in China. They both worked so hard and now own their big company. So, they can send me to an expensive school now. And I have a very happy and relaxed life.”

Identifying elite families

Personally, I have never felt comfortable asking directly about people’s income and it would also have been inappropriate in my capacity as their hired tutor. Instead, I relied on the daily observations while visiting their house for the classes and some of the interviews also illustrate, implicitly, about the financial background and whether they have the 4 things my interviewees mentioned for a “successful family life”. As I got closer to some of the families over the years, we often organised hang-outs outside the classroom as well, in forms of dinners and day-trips to nearby towns.

One of the common patterns among parents (both mother and father) is having a college or university degree mostly from mainland Chinese universities and a few of them had degrees from Western countries, such as the US, UK or Australia. They have multiple luxury cars per household and a large apartment or villa in a newly built residential compound in Pudong¹⁴ with

¹⁴ Shanghai is divided by the Huangpu River into two sides, Puxi (the older part of the city) and Pudong, which started to develop in the 1980s. This new part of the city features urban planning with large avenues, modern residential compounds, a large, spacious park Century Park and a business district with some of the famous landmarks such as the Oriental Pearl TV tower or the Shanghai World Centre, one of the tallest buildings in the world.

a full-time driver and at least one full-time *ayi*¹⁵, along with the child (or children in some cases) going to expensive summer camps abroad, combined with lengthy holiday stays, in the US or UK every year¹⁶. Also, a sign of wealth is the parents and their children speak English fluently and without a foreign accent.

Another sign of social prestige is navigating the state bureaucratic system by having more children per household. Up until the beginning of 2016 when the one-child policy in China was terminated, one of the signs of a family's wealth was to have multiple children. Urban elite families could bypass this system by having their child obtain Hong Kong citizenship, qualifying the child for a foreign passport, which grants them a cumulative advantage in the international education market.

As the population planning policies were ending only at the end of 2015, with families being allowed to have a second child from early 2016 onward¹⁷, some of the more affluent families opted for ways to have another child, by for instance giving birth to the second child in the US or Hong Kong, in order to register the child as a foreign citizen. While, as a foreign citizen, their second child could not acquire a hukou¹⁸ residence therefore basic rights such as free education up to 16 years of ages, families I met had multiple children.

The “elite agency”

I define the education offered at GoAp as elite since the company also self-identifies as elite, on their digital media platform Wechat¹⁹, their website videos and articles, where the word elite is used regularly, referring to the high standard of education offered by the highly qualified

¹⁵Literally translates as aunt in Mandarin but commonly refers to those domestic helpers who do the general cleaning, cooking and grocery shopping for the family. Often, they are “live-in” *ayis*, who also help with child-rearing duties.

¹⁶ Most of these families had already purchased property overseas, usually one apartment as investment in a big city and one close to the child's school where many of the mothers spent considerable time taking care of the children, “giving them a break” from the controlled environment at the boarding school. The father stayed back in China, taking care of the smaller children and business. Mothers in elite families, using these trips for consumption of luxury goods and their freedom, only stay for a short period then go back to carry on the business or socialise with friends in China.

¹⁷ Vanessa Fong's 2004 monography provides more details on the consequences of state-planned birth control in Only Hope. Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy. Stanford University Press.

¹⁸ Household registration in China. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/655134?seq=1>

¹⁹ Wechat (weixin) is a popular online social media platform, operated by the Tencent Group.

Western owners and teaching team, and the academic achievements by their students, some of whom getting into the schools with art or math scholarship.

The agency's elite status is further reinforced by the fact that families applied and successfully gained admissions for their children to some of the most expensive private schools in the UK, such as Cheltenham Ladies' College, Harrow, Eaton or Sevenoaks, all requiring over 35,000 GBP tuition fee per annum²⁰. One of the most expensive schools in England opened a Chinese branch in cooperation with GoAp, "sharing students" for school training and additional entrance exam preparation. This means that the training school is part of an international and national network through the students at the Shanghai Branch: the British school in Shanghai offers full-time tuition with the English school's imported curriculum and set academic standards, while GoAp serves as the part-time entrance exam preparation, visa agency and tutoring service to help students cope with the international curriculum both while studying in Shanghai and to be more prepared when they arrive in England, by for instance studying about religion, missing in the local school's curriculum²¹.

Elite Networks Through the Agency

Although there were a lot of exam preparation classes for the target school in the UK, the purpose of students attending these classes was to "just talk" and "learn creative and critical thinking", which they regarded missing in Chinese education and what their children needed in order to succeed in their future schools abroad. This echoes the strategy to learn to think like Westerners, to "broaden their perspectives", which Liu-Farrer emphasizes, mentioned in the earlier chapter (2016: 2), which already started while they were still in Shanghai.

Besides the students' perspectives, the motivation for choosing international education at an early age and while still in China, can be observed through the parents' narrative, as well. One

²⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-expensive-boarding-schools-uk-2016-3>

²¹ Many of the target schools in the UK have chapel and classes on religious education, which Chinese students are unfamiliar with. Classes at GoAp provides lessons on the subject of religion to familiarise students with their future UK school culture.

of the Chinese families who hired me as a private tutor in 2010, through another smaller, less reputable private teaching agency in Shanghai²².

The father, Michael, is a real-estate businessman from Hong Kong who had spent most of his twenties and thirties in Liverpool, UK. After moving to Shanghai, he married Lynn, originally from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. The city offers him both business opportunities and a wide selection of educational choices. Both their children enrolled at GoAp and both started preparation classes 2 years before leaving for England. The first child was sent to England as a full boarder at a prestigious all-girl middle-school, while her little sister, at kindergarten when we met, now in middle-school, is now also a student at GoAp, preparing for the admission exams. For the parents the biggest draw to enroll their children at GoAp was the fact that the owners are British with prestigious academic credentials.

“We, parents hear about these agencies word-of-mouth. Once there is a successful application of a child, we share the story with other parents. When I first wanted to send my daughter to the UK, my wife heard about BE as a good tip. The most attractive, you know, is that William, the owner graduated from Eton College, and that for us, parents that means we can trust he knows from the inside how the best schools work in the UK. But you know, the most important thing is that the staff speaks Chinese so my wife can also understand them. She can attend the teacher-parent meetings and work out together which schools are the best to choose in the UK for the future.”

²² I have met many families through the grapevine, by parents recommending me to their friends. I also met some of them through other training schools I had worked at earlier, from where, especially those who were interested in private schools in the UK, transferred to GoAp, which specialises in this field. Through social connections and being able to afford the high tuition fees, these families became further connected through the same agency and by having similar migration goals. If not familiar with the city, it is common practice for families to first try many agencies, inform about their curriculum and administration, and stick with the one that works out. In my experience, GoAp retains the clients through their success rate of placing students in British Schools. While GoAp has been expanding their business exponentially during the last decade, many of the smaller agencies disappeared as they have no social capital to establish strong ties with schools abroad. Over the 5 years I've worked at GoAp, I've noticed more and more families I met through other networks, transfer to GoAp.

Michael is dismissive when I tell him the international education market is booming and there are growing number of Chinese students present at schools in all levels in English-speaking countries.

“No, there are very few Chinese kids who study abroad. If you compare the population of China to the roughly half-million international students, that’s not many at all. Very few families can afford education abroad for their children. If you want to send your kid abroad, you need to make this decision as early as you can, even before kindergarten. If the child starts focusing on English, they won’t have that much time to learn Mandarin. And then they’d suffer later at the Chinese local school. The *zhongkao* and *gaokao*²³ are too hard. These kids have no life in those [public] schools.” Yet, he still believes more students will go overseas in the future, instead of China setting up transnational institutions²⁴. “The land has become very expensive to rent. In China no one owns the land, they can only rent it for 70 years. And the prices are getting too high. It’s not worth it. And a school is too large to make it profitable.”

Michael’s narrative illustrates many elements I discussed in this paper earlier. While international education is regarded as prestigious and more liberal, providing a more relaxed environment and a valuable degree for students, currently not everyone can share this dream as tuition fees are very high. Elite families can afford customized education services for their children, as GoAp acts as a liaison between the families and prestigious private schools both in China and the UK. Their elite position is strengthened for another reason: the information on what local agency to hire and which UK school to choose is shared among these families, within their network. Michael and Lynn’s migration started earlier than seeking overseas education for

²³ Zhongkao and Gaokao are exams students take at the age of 15 and 18, respectively, at Chinese public schools. While the zhongkao at grade 9 is considered a difficult exam, the high school final exam, gaokao, results determine which Chinese universities the student can apply to. During the interview, Michael and his wife shared, similarly to other children and parents I talked to, that they find the system unfair as they learn “too many useless things, which we forget after the exam and the entire outcome and the child’s future depend on this very one day of the exam. The stress is too hard and we don’t want our kids to have to go through that.”

²⁴ A handful new, transnational programs have been established in the past few years in Shanghai, for instance New York University Shanghai, Sino-British College, which is a joint program of Shanghai University of Technology and Engineering and Sidney University at Shanghai University. They run joint programs with the host universities abroad so all students have to study part of their degree in Shanghai and abroad.

their children. As they choose to settle in Shanghai, which is hometown for neither of them, education migration consists of domestic and international trajectories, as well.

Their locality and transnationality are both affected by these strategies since networks are built in Shanghai while preparing for migration through a local agency. Since the families, besides Shanghai, are from all over China, GoAp as a school and agency creates the network for these families. As Portes writes, “transnational activities would be those initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders. Many of these activities are informal, that is they take place outside the pale of state regulation and control. Even when supervised by state agencies, the key aspect of transnational activities is that they represent goal-oriented initiatives that require coordination across national borders by members of civil society. These activities are undertaken on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the state or other corporate bodies” (2001: 186). Elite networks are forming through the agency, and vice versa, clients hear about agency within their elite circles, recommending each other their services.

“TAKEN OUT” of local schools. Special allowances arranged by the agency

The agency, as an institution which facilitates particular interests, is a driver of migration processes. “Drivers do not work in isolation to initiate movement or to shape it once under way. Instead, migration drivers work in combination – in what can be termed driver complexes – to shape the specific form and structure of population movements. In any one migration flow, several different ‘driver complexes’ may themselves interconnect in shaping the eventual direction and nature of a group's movement” (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long 2012: 5).

While the families need to rely on GoAp to connect them to schools abroad, the parents’ social, cultural and economic capital help obtain additional benefits from the local school where the child is registered before leaving to study abroad. While seeking elite education abroad, the child still needs to be registered at a school in China, however the elite can circumvent some

rules. Through a multiscalar, network of networks (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2009: 180), the elite has the means and power to navigate their ways through concessions, through a web of connections between the local school, families and the education agency.

In China, the children are required by law to attend school up to grade 9²⁵. However, many of them only finish schooling in China in grade 5 and start grade 6 in the UK. Two other common tracks are to finish schooling up to grade 9 or grade 12 and start senior high school or university abroad. However, in order to prepare for their language exam and school interview, necessary for admission, the students need to dedicate more of their time to focus on specific classes to have a successful application, therefore they need to negotiate with their school to allow them to miss classes and be absent for certain period. While they stay registered at the school, they do not attend the classes, instead they opt for home schooling online (in the case of students outside of Shanghai) or move to Shanghai for a few weeks or months to prepare for the international exams through intensive courses offered by GoAp.

Since this special permission from the school is not permitted officially, the families use their social connections to get the green light for this special flexibility. However, there is a gain on all sides. Allowing these students to spend considerable amount of time outside the school, benefits the school, as well. When a student receives an offer from a prestigious school in the UK, their school in China, which is a for-profit, market-oriented institution, can use the child's achievements to boost their academic credentials. In a triangular web of connections between the agency GoAp, the local school and the families, the migration strategies become intertwined with the local education industry, further stimulating the education market. At the same time, these special negotiations become possible by the emergent neoliberal processes, making these connections reciprocal and interdependent.

Apple was “taken out” by her parents from her junior high-school in Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu, neighbouring Shanghai. Before leaving for the UK at the age of 16, she never left

²⁵ The 9-year Compulsory Education, implemented in 1986, referring to schooling at primary and junior secondary grades.
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184879.htm>

mainland China. She came to study at GoAp for preparation for an all-girl Catholic²⁶ high school in England. She never explained in full so I had to rely on my weekly observations to realise what happened. Her parents negotiated with her school to keep her officially in the books while she was attending GoAp's preparation courses for 6 months. This system is not permitted officially and it is up to the school management if they allow such cases, and there is always a high fee the parents pay to arrange it or they use their social connections to negotiate these concessions with the school's management²⁷.

Some schools outside of China also “offer” these services to the students. Emma is now a 19-year old girl, originally from Zhuhai, a town near Macau. She came to GoAp 3 years ago, where her father sent her to prepare for the secondary school entrance exams in the UK. There was another motivation for the family to choose Shanghai: to make new friends in Shanghai, practice her Mandarin and reconnect with her Chinese roots.²⁸

“Shanghai has the best education agencies in China so they can select the best school in the UK for me, and the staff here speaks Chinese. And I had lived in Barcelona for 3 years before so my dad wants me to learn about Chinese culture now, too.” – she said during one of the interviews.

Emma, similarly to other junior high-school students, were allowed to “study in absence” in her high-school. This means that officially she is still registered as a student at the school, in this case

²⁶ Sending children to a religious and/or single-sex school makes parents feel safe. While they are non-believers, they regard religious education highly trustworthy, believing, as some of the parents phrased it, that these schools teach the children discipline and keep them safe from the “unnecessary romantic dramas”.

²⁷ This echoed my earlier experiences in a private Chinese-owned bilingual school: students regularly “went missing” for weeks in order to prepare for TOEFL or IELTS language exams and I was asked by the school to not mark them as absent. As these language exams are required for a successful school admission and bear global standards and operated by a foreign government organization (British Council) or a private organisation, this system shows the global connectedness of state and non-state actors, facilitating the education and migration industry. Despite obligatory education up to 15 years of age, keeping the child officially registered “on paper” in a state-owned or larger international or bilingual school has its advantages, for example for applying to high-schools in the UK who require these documents.

²⁸ A new research on overseas Chinese youth identity and root seeking was carried out at Central European University by Fanni Beck. Quoting Andrea Louie (2000), she draws attention to the way foreign-born ethnic Chinese are perceived by China's state narratives. “PRC officials believe that Chinese loyalty to native place, and therefore to the Chinese motherland/nation, is embodied in overseas Chinese through their racial heritage. Therefore, the image of “Chineseness” is conceived as a racial essence connecting people through their blood to the Chinese nation regardless of which part of the globe they live or were born. [...] A Chinese idiom, *yinshui sīyuan* (when drinking water, remember the source) is often adopted by marketing materials to capture this sense of belonging to ancestry and it is the motto of the first root-seeking camp to the PRC established in 1991 in San Francisco (“In Search of Roots’ Program)” (Beck 2017: 7).

in Barcelona, whereas physically she is based in Shanghai, attending one-on-one tutoring sessions as a one-year intensive preparation for high-school in the UK:

“This way I don’t have to waste time with school subjects I’m not interested in, like PE or art. I can focus on English and science as I want to do a medical degree at a British university later. So, these are the subjects I’ll take my A-level exams in in the UK.”

My colleague at Goap tells about the institutional cooperation the following way:

“Of course the kid’s school only boasts with their students getting in to great school abroad. As if it was only their achievement, you know. They do not reveal these private training schools they recommend along the way.”

There is an interconnectedness of services between the school and the training school. The former provides the official paperwork that the child is legally attending their institution while the training school provides a customized learning experience necessary for admission, arrange the most suitable school for the child’s needs and interests and conduct visa administration for the students, as well.

Conclusion

Elite status manifests in students and parents' personal narratives and the way these families perceive the role and opportunities offered by international education providers, which attract them as clients by the promise of helping their mobility. Through the intersectionality of an elite status and international education, social mobility emerges through social processes. Shanghai's education industry is a draw, attracting capital from all over the country, providing the best education service to these families. In Shanghai, the country's financial centre, wealth concentration and social network formations are observable through motivations for education migration through the services of a private agency as an important actor in the migration industry. Shanghai produces the infrastructure and social network that facilitate mobility and through the formation of these market-oriented educational services, the elite families at the agency can form stronger networks by working for the same goal and going through the same administration procedure. The education agency, which also serves as a bureau arranging visas and other required documents for migration, has emerged as an actor of the recently expanding education industry. Through the agency, by being provided a globally recognized cultural capital (Xiang & Wei: 2009), elite families' economic social and cultural capitals become entangled, transforming into symbolic capital which they observe among each other and use it for elite production and reproduction.

In fact, GoAp, with their unique credentials of student placement at schools abroad and established clientele, creates the ties without which this type of elite education migration would not work. Thus, in the neo-liberal education industry, students are consumers and education becomes a commodity (Luttrell 2020: 57) and since only the top stratum of society is able to afford the expensive services, education migration becomes a class-based consumption (Liu-Farrer 2016).

4.2 Migration strategies – The Globally Connected Elite

This chapter explores the families' migration strategies facilitated by the entangled relationship of the education and migration industry, which are merged through the services and global connections of the private agency, GoAp. As young students are sent abroad in order to broaden their horizons, accompanying parents go, not with the motivation to settle or seek citizenship but to take care of their children, make new connections abroad, seek opportunities for international investment and enjoy a free lifestyle, while both children and parents becoming globally connected by networking through the education agency and the schools abroad.

From the perspective of the families' places of origin, their transnational mobility as processes can be observed. Through the emergence of new actors of education and migration industry, digital communication technology and fast transportation, their transnationalism can be understood in its relation to the phenomenon of globalisation (Vertovec 2004). Being based at various locations across China and in foreign countries such as New Zealand, Italy or Spain, and as they connect globally through their quest for education migration, they already are transnational or preparing for a transnational lifestyle, taking advantage of the social, cultural and economic benefits of both home and receiving countries while being embedded in two or more different societies.

Strategy 1 – “Broadening the Horizons”

One of the main reasons elite families choose GoAp is for the customised service they receive here. In their preparation for the entrance exams and the papers for the visas, the agency serves them in a dual role, both as an education and consultancy firm.

Informal daily observations and informal conversations with colleagues, students and their parents, provided evidence that many of the families have already established or were in the process of establishing connections beyond education means in the UK. New lifestyle activities

emerged, such as mothers paying regular visits to the school while staying at luxury hotels and shopping at high-end fashion stores for weeks, setting up businesses or making direct investments such as purchasing property thus obtaining permanent residence status²⁹.

Since many of the children have a passport from Hong Kong they have an easier access to visa and paperwork. While the parents retain their mainland Chinese citizenship, some of them acquire dual residency, becoming embedded in multiple locations. While the principal income is obtained from China or through flexible, digital business, the parents can enjoy the benefits of being situated both in China and the UK. Many parents thus have the freedom to visit their children on a regular, monthly or bi-monthly basis, on a tourist visa. While in the UK, they enjoy some free time while their husband is taking care of the business and family in China, or they conduct their business in China through digital platforms, often building new business relations in the UK through their newly forming transnational network.

I met Gabby in 2014 when she was preparing her application to a top middle school in the UK at the age of 12. Her chosen school is one of the oldest and most reputable since-sex schools in England, with a long history and prestigious alumni. When Gabby got the offer, both of her parents came to my class and thanked me in person. It was a moment of pride for the family when Gabby's name was carved on the glass board at the entrance area at GoAp, listing all their successful students. That was the first time she left China, as she and her parents told me, with the purpose to "be challenged by a UK-based, elite school and learn about life and culture in the UK."

Her mum always wanted her to work hard and Gabby was the top student in her class at her international school and her new school in England, too. Meanwhile, they believed that her international school in Shanghai and her top boarding school in England can provide her with a

²⁹ For information on the different requirements for business status and residency status, see <http://www.ukimmigration.com/entrepreneur/entrepreneur.htm>

fun and liberal education system, where she can freely explore her full potential, realising what she wants to do in her future career.

Since Gabby always looked for new academic challenges, after 2 years, she transferred to an elite junior high school in the United States, where she found a wider selection of options of top schools to choose from and more academic opportunities to explore, such as science camps or academic competitions. Her mum since then continues her monthly visits to see her daughter and her friends but this time building networks in the US. Due to increased demands for an “American study track”, GoAp has also been expanding their connections to American schools, and also hired a professional American team in Shanghai that prepare students³⁰ for these trajectories.

Strategies 2 - Consumption

One of the strategies for education mobility is doing overseas investments, reflecting on the intertwining relationship between migration and global capitalism. In other words, “globalization or, more specifically, global capitalism, sets the context for transnational migration” (Kim 2009: 677).

While living in a boarding school full time, Gabby was visited in England by her mum on a monthly basis, always on a tourist visa. The family did not purchase property nor applied for permanent residency in the UK as after 2 years, Gabby planned to transfer to a private school in the United States, where her little sister will also start schooling, skipping the stage in the UK. While at school during the day, Gabby met her mum in the afternoons and the evenings while they spent some weekends traveling around and shopping in London. During these trips her mum often stayed for over 2-3 weeks, enjoyed visiting the city and building her social network in

³⁰ Some of the parents I got very close to, asked me privately to meet up outside of GoAp and help prepare them for these trips in the UK and the US. They often received official correspondence from the schools, needed to accompany their children to their entrance exam (where often the interviewer asks questions from the parent, too), some ceremonies, assemblies and teacher-parent meetings, as well. Instead of relying on GoAp, or their children, for translation, they mainly sought to improve their command of English language to improve communication skills. Besides, often I was asked if a small gift of appreciation would be appropriate to give to their teachers abroad and what constituted as polite and natural communication in a formal school environment.

London, looking to expanding her business internationally. Originally, Gabby applied to the school in the UK as she had a Chinese friend at school she knew from Shanghai. Their mothers socialized together during these trips, building their social and business network through their new connections. Since Gabby's mum does not speak English, she once shared with me that feels more comfortable "to mostly stay in a Chinese network", socialising with Chinese friends. Living "the imagined lifestyle of the global elite" (Liu-Farrer 2016: 2), the two businesswomen were able to use their mobility, by their children living in a new country, to establish ties and become more embedded, both structurally and economically, in multiple localities, being simultaneously present in these social fields.

Carol's family's situation is slightly different to Gabby's since her high-level manager mum, working at a private construction firm, fluent in English, had already purchased a property in London before Carol and her older sister were sent to boarding school in the UK. Both of her parents work in Shanghai and run their company in Shanghai while doing business investments in the UK. Meanwhile, the mum spends considerable time in their London apartment, visiting her children regularly in their boarding school, conducting business online.

Regardless of their investment in the UK, neither of the families intend to settle permanently in the host country, instead become invested in both China and the UK, going back and forth regularly. However, the strategies for transnational mobility, migrating without settling, are the same regardless whether the parents gain permanent residency, as in Carol's mum's case or for Gabby's mother who only travelled as a tourist.

Strategy 3 - Going Early

It is common practice for elite families to send their children abroad, as early as the age of 12. One of the parents, usually the mother, travels with the child and stays close to them during the academic terms but only for a short period, as the agency "looks after them", checking in and

mediating messages to parents, who are often busy with business or social life in China.³¹ Even though some of the families obtain permanent residence and own property in the UK, none of them stayed permanently, only visiting the child for certain period of time. As mentioned earlier, many elite private boarding schools are located in rural areas, close to smaller towns or villages, therefore the mothers often stay in a hotel or rent a flat nearby, providing a short break for the child from the school environment. In all the families I observed, it was always the mothers who were the primary care-takers of children, with one exception, Emma, whose father accompanied her to Barcelona as his friend lived there³². Meanwhile, the husbands were back in China, taking care of business and the elderly grandparents.

Behind the families' strategies to send their children abroad at a young age stands the agency's narrative, encouraging the children to start schooling abroad early. Through promotion videos on the agency's website and through WeChat platforms, brochures and in-person consultancy, GoAp recommends that children should apply preferably before the age of 14 to adapt more easily to a new environment and learn English without a foreign accent, facilitating their incorporation in the new social field.

Strategy 4 - Global connectedness – Networks in and out of China

Thomas came to Shanghai from Italy, where he'd lived for the past 4 years. Similar to Emma, his parents wanted him to spend 6 months in Shanghai to reconnect with Chinese culture and build new friendships while preparing for a high-school entrance exam in England.

“When I was 12 years old, my parents, my little brother and I went to Florence, Italy. No one told me I wouldn't come back to Wenzhou! We stayed in Italy and my father set up a textile

³¹ More on the study of children shaping migration trajectories, see Navigating the terrains of transnational education: Children of Chinese 'study mothers' in Singapore by Shirlena Huang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.01.010>.

³² Regarding the gender aspect of wealthy migrants, Liu-Farrer (2016) sheds light on another issue from the male perspective. Businessmen, through the freedom of mobility, enjoy a certain lifestyle, living parallel lives in China and abroad. While having mistresses abroad and living out their masculinity by socialising for business purposes, their families are “removed” from this lifestyle so that the husbands can enjoy the extramarital affairs and alcohol consumption.

company. Now, 4 years later we came back at Chinese New Year to visit my grandparents in the country and my parents told me last minute that I wouldn't be going back to Italy with them. They never told me before! They say I need to learn better Chinese and live in Shanghai for a year to prepare for the high-school application at GoAp.”

When the rest of the family went back to Italy 4 years ago, they enrolled Thomas at the local Chinese division at a bilingual school in Shanghai. He was a full-boarder, while some weekends he was allowed by the school management to travel to Wenzhou to visit his relatives in the town. His parents chose the Chinese study stream for him as this private school did not require Shanghai hukou to enroll, while offering the entire curriculum in Mandarin. Thomas attended the bilingual school full-time, while taking private lessons at GoAp during the evenings and weekends to prepare for his entrance exam in England a year later. Thomas's narrative mirrors the global aspect of connectedness, which has become an essential element of his migration strategies through international education. Thomas's family, originally from Wenzhou, 464.5 km away from Shanghai, by building transnational ties through mobility and future strategies for migration, become embedded both in Italy and various locations in China, while Thomas, as an Italian citizen, is preparing in Shanghai for his studies in the UK. Besides the desire for the transnational experience, there emerges a drive to reconnect with the Chinese roots, building new networks and social capital in Shanghai. The parents want to prevent his acculturation and prepare Thomas for his Shanghai future. This way, for Thomas, broadening the horizons through education migration happened in reverse or as a double dynamic, simultaneously rebuilding ties in China, maintaining ties in Italy and seeking new, global connections in the UK as a form of accumulation of social and cultural capital.

“Moral geography” and its effect in migration strategies

Choosing the education agency and target school overseas, demonstrate a pattern of hierarchy between localities across the globe, symbolising upward mobility in the imaginary scale of international destinations. As Shanghai is perceived on the top of the imaginary ranking, which students from all over China and foreign countries choose as a place for preparation for overseas studies. Brian, a student from Hong Kong, was preparing for UK admission through GoAp in Shanghai while physically located in New Zealand, having classes online and sometimes intensive courses in Shanghai, while Gabby moved from Shanghai to the UK then the US. As Hansen and Thøgersen (2015) argue, through a social imaginary of a global education hierarchy, places, both domestic and international, are ranked according to the education quality they can acquire at various places.

All these processes are connected and facilitated by GoAp, facilitating a global network of families through education mobility. Due to the agency's good reputation among their clientele, the families stay connected to them therefore most of these families hire their services for placement in middle-school, high-school and university. Therefore, during these long trajectories, the agency becomes a key actor in their mobility, in some cases over 6-7 years of a child's education trajectory, further strengthening their ties within the same network.

Conclusion

Empirical findings support the previously outlined theories according to which the main strategies of the elite for education mobility are to broadening the horizons, consumption, sending the child early for optimal adaptation to the new environment and global connectedness.

As GoAp acts as liaison between the families and prestigious private schools in China and the UK, thus elite families are able to access customized education services for their children and plan their migration strategies accordingly. Also, through the processes of social networking, sharing similar goals and information on what local agency to hire and which UK school to

choose, the processes of elite network formation can be observed within this emergent network. The families' local embeddedness and transnationality manifest in the education migration strategies since networks are built in Shanghai while preparing for migration through a local agency. Furthermore, since the families, besides Shanghai, are from all over China, GoAp as a school and agency creates both a national and global network for these families and institutions.

The families often encourage each other to apply to the same school and then socialise between themselves abroad, which supports what Alejandro Portes phrases as “transnational activities would be those initiated and sustained by non- institutional actors, organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders. Many of these activities are informal, that is they take place outside state regulation and control, [representing] goal-oriented initiatives that require coordination across national borders by members of civil society. These activities are undertaken on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the state or other corporate bodies”. (2010: 186).

The education migration strategies echo Glick-Schiller and Çağlar's conceptualization of “incorporation” through “the networks that link migrants to institutions within and across borders of nation-states”. (2009: 179) Since these families become connected in Shanghai, and then also abroad, their “social fields are understood not as spatial metaphors but as systems of social relations composed of networks of networks that may be locally situated, or may extend nationally or transnationally” (ibid).

The migration strategies are also reflected in the families' motivation to not settle permanently in the UK. Although some acquire permanent residency and build a social network in the new locality, the main goal is to adopt a transnational lifestyle, by becoming simultaneously embedded in multiple places across the globe, obtaining flexible options for future mobility.

4.3 Desires for Transnational Mobility Through International Education

This chapter will zoom in on the motivations and imaginaries by the students and their parents regarding their future goals following graduation abroad. The selected ethnographic narratives

will show what families set out to learn and obtain from international education migration, outline rationalities why they do not intend to settle permanently in the UK and what pull factors have emerged in China that encourage their eventual return or continue a transnational lifestyle.

Previous research mostly treats Chinese international students as an unvaried group and “tend to essentialise them, by seeing them as a homogenous group [...] that behaves differently than Western students.” (Soong 2015: 220). My ethnographic findings support YingYi Ma’s (2020) concept, according to which the binary approach of stay or return is not sufficient to understand elite students’ migratory intentions. While in general there has been an increase in Chinese international students’ return to China in the past two decades³³, elite students’ migration strategies have shown a desire to not only return and keep China as their “headquarter”, but also maintain long-term global connections and transnational mobility. Thus, with regards to education migration, elite families have convergent strategies within their group as a feature of class distinction.

The parents’ ultimate motivation is to ultimately keep the children geographically close. With a valuable foreign degree in hand, their children will inherit and continue the family business with the extended international scope and global network. Alternatively, they can use connections, cultural and social capitals acquired abroad, to maintain their social position, and by converting them to symbolic capital will earn them higher social status and facilitate finding prestigious, well-paid employment in the Chinese labour market, preferably in Shanghai.

Choosing overseas education

What do elite families intend for their children to learn and obtain from a foreign degree and experiences from overseas studies? As a top priority, elite parents are seeking social prestige and elite global competence through high-ranking education credentials that would help their children stand out from the increasing number of well-educated students (Xiang & Wei 2009).

³³ http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2020-04/05/content_75895390.htm

Having the financial means to secure places at international schools both in China and in the UK, children are sent abroad as young as 12 years of age. Both the education agency and families believe that going abroad early facilitates the language learning process as children will be able to adopt a native accent in English (Noble 2013).

Also, they can begin their socialisation, and processes of embeddedness, in the Western environment, building connections with local British and other international students in and outside the school circles. As a natural trajectory for students, the middle and high-school studies will be followed by seeking admission to prestigious British or American “brand-name” universities (Nyíri 2010: 35). As a feature of class distinction, elite families want to secure admission to elite Western universities and the chances for successful admission are higher if the child has a high-school diploma from an elite high-school from abroad.

Pursuing a degree from a Western country however, means more than just a diploma. Although international education is an investment for future financial return, elite families’ main aim is personal advancement. Elite parents’ motivation is not prioritized towards financial gain, instead to acquire the high valued credentials of an international degree and learn the Western ways of thinking in a multicultural environment in order to broaden horizons. Many of the students I interviewed shared that they also want “to show that they’ve made it abroad” meaning they can handle the challenges in a new environment by becoming more independent. This includes sharing a room for the first time or learning to communicate with students from other cultures. Eventually, these learned skills will increase symbolic capital in China.

Furthermore, allowing their children to have fun education and flexible options for choosing the subjects to study has become a pattern in elite families’ strategies. *Wan shangceng* (playing at the level of the upper class), mentioned by Liu-Farrer, refers to the “possibility of not taking things too rigidly and seriously, that is, not to be like the ordinary Chinese students, who ‘only know how many points they get from tests.’ [The] children of the rich can opt out of the educational rat race and life can be fun and individuals can grow freely.” (2016: 14) Nonetheless,

as parents regard their children both as “investment and cherished dumplings³⁴”, investing a lot in their education, having high hopes that they can achieve global competence and competitiveness (Hansen & Thøgersen 2015).

Choosing academic subjects to focus on at middle and high-schools is also carefully planned by the families. As part of the “fun education”, many students and parents told me that elite private education allows them to find their passion for their future career. By accumulating international experiences, special skills, social and cultural capitals, they seek to get to the top of the social hierarchy among job-seeking your graduates returning to China and take on managerial and leadership roles. Thus, with a Western degree and symbolic capital, they can stand out in the increasingly competitive job market and social field in China.

Although STEM³⁵ subjects are popular among elite students, as well, their main motivation is gaining social prestige instead of a pragmatic choice to secure high-paid jobs in the future. My ethnographic research supports that elite students, even if they focus on STEM subjects, they seek to accumulate “added value” of education credentials by learning Latin, French, German or Spanish, besides cultivating their English and Chinese skills. These strategies facilitate the accumulation of cultural capital, which will convert to symbolic capital. Investing in the consumption of extra languages and leadership skills aggregate a sign of distinction of the elite status. By learning an extra language or becoming proficient public speakers at debates, they seek to improve their skills in preparation for future positions as company top managers or leaders of other sectors, including politics and law-making.

Furthermore, all the children I was in touch with, enrolled each summer for expensive summer camps abroad, which is another kind of elite consumption. They learnt logic and debate techniques, such as those organized by Oxford, Johns Hopkins and Stanford University. The heavy academic content provides another platform for a Western experience to learn skills that

³⁴ Sending China's Rich Kids to Boarding School - Ep. 4 | The Bling Dynasty | GQ. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7ZIKYCz9PA>

³⁵ What is STEM? <https://www.topuniversities.com/courses/engineering/what-stem>

cannot be taught by books. Also, it is another opportunity for forming global elite networks. Many of these students attended the same summer schools each year, some of them meeting only there since they were from different schools in Shanghai or other cities and countries. Thus, regularly attending summer camps in America, while preparing or already studying in the UK, provided the students with the opportunity not only to improve their language skills and knowledge of Western subjects but also to build new social connections in the US with foreigners and also with other Chinese students. These connections would later give them more opportunities for their future studies as they gradually get familiar with the American education environment and requirements and strengthen ties within their elite circles. Thus, after finishing high-school, they will have more flexible options to choose in which country and university to study.

Push Factors for Return

The following narratives will illustrate the reasons why elite families and their children do not want to settle in a Western country, revealing the different ways of being and belonging in transnational fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004: 1010). While engaging in social relations and practices through the overseas school, through their conscious connection to China, they “belong” to their home country.

Although elite families could afford the investments required for the residence permit³⁶, the main strategy for international education is not emigration but migration without settlement, keeping a flexible, transnational lifestyle. In order to better understand the education migration strategies, I will look at students and their parents’ motivations separately.

As Hannah Song writes, “the decision to stay in the host society, return to the home society, go to a third country, or to settle into another (probably transnational) pattern of mobility, is one of great personal significance. Professional (career progression), societal (culture,

³⁶ On the legal requirements on obtaining a permanent residence card see: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-a-uk-residence-card/permanent-residence-card>

ways of life, level of discrimination) and personal (family) factors combine to influence such decision-making” (Soong 2015: 88). As the children are first sent abroad as minors, they cannot integrate in their new environment outside the school circles. Although the boarding schools offer a temporary home and a western lifestyle, they do not feel they fully belong and often feel like outsiders. Some students are planning to stay in the UK for a couple of years however, in order to gain some work experience. Bureaucracy, though, has become harder to navigate in the last few years and now new graduates are required to find a job with a minimum salary of £20,800 per annum to qualify for a 2-year work permit³⁷.

However, as parents are the investors in their education and initiators of their migration³⁸, they feel they have a strong voice in deciding what happens after graduation. Their families want them to go back to China, which they consider their home base. The children told me that longing for going home was part of their cultural identity. In China, the idea of a family is very strong and “filial duty” (Bregnbæk 2016, Teon 2016) towards the parents and grandparents has been part of their tradition. Thus, although elite children enjoy more freedom throughout their international education, they have less freedom in deciding whether to stay abroad as eventually their parents assert their voices since they are the ones who pay for all the expenses.

The reasons why parents decide not to settle permanently in the UK is a rational choice. Parents shared with me that China offers a home base as their main business is located there and if they all moved to the UK, they would have to start from scratch. Therefore, keeping their elite status is more convenient in China. With the home advantage, being more familiar with this environment and having the accumulated financial and social resources, secures their social position. They also told me that while in the UK at most they could maintain a comfortable lifestyle, in Shanghai, as a highly developed, international city and with their added international experience they can obtain even higher social and business positions.

³⁷ On the legal background and government policies supporting students who want to stay in the UK after graduation, see: <https://www.student.com/articles/how-to-live-and-work-in-the-uk-after-studying>

³⁸ On the power relations between parents and their children, positioning of hierarchies of gender, generation, nationality and parents’ authority, determining their children’s migration, see Annie Kajanus’s 2015 paper on Overthrowing the First Mountain: Chinese Student-Migrants and the Geography of Power. (https://econpapers.repec.org/article/gigchaktu/v_3a44_3ay_3a2015_3ai_3a3_3ap_3a79-102.htm)

Furthermore, due to lack of language skills and cultural differences, after a while parents become bored in the UK and feel more comfortable in China. Even though they could stay and finance their way into a permanent residence status, in many cases facilitated by the children's Hong Kong passport and the parents' business investments in the UK, they decide to remain Chinese citizens and spend most of their time in China. Besides not having English proficiency, the parents also have to take care of the grandparents and their business in China. Therefore, they would rather stay in China and unite the family there again, once the child graduates in a Western university.

One of the mothers shared the following with me, which echoed what I heard from other parents and students, as well.

“When the French Galeries Lafayette opened a store in Shanghai, all the mystery was gone. People want to imagine what it's like in Paris or other things in London or America. Outside the Chinese environment, at home, they are true. The same with schools overseas. Families want to send their kids abroad to get that experience locally. But you know what, once the kids are there and they buy a house close to the school or spend too much time with them abroad, they get bored. There's no e-wallet, Taobao³⁹ or Elema⁴⁰, which they can use in the UK ... not so convenient. They want to come back and enjoy the life in China.”

Thus, studying in a top British school means “seeking the dream”, the mystery of the yet unknown culture and environment but the mother's perspective also reflects the current processes of global capitalism and consumption patterns of the global elite. After the families experience the dream and learn the western ways of lifestyle and education, they return to China,

³⁹ A popular online shopping platform, operated by the Alibaba group.

⁴⁰ One of the most widely used online food delivery services.

so that they can enjoy the convenience and consumption patterns they are accustomed to in this context.

Pull factors for return

As elite families intend to acquire transnational mobility, they can enjoy the benefits at home while staying globally connected. Therefore, the return to China is not permanent since business investments and a secondary home in the UK, will allow them to mobilise their capital globally. Shanghai, as a highly developed global harbor with a similar level of development as Western global cities, will provide them with the benefits of a global city locally, combining development and global connectedness.

For the children, China offers a comfortable home base. As Chan argues, “the younger the migrants, the more they experienced China’s newly gained wealth and prosperity. [T]hese new Chinese migrants have experienced a completely different political regime, as well as different ‘Chinese’ ways of life and culture [which] may have a significant effect on these migrants’ willingness to return. (2018: 212)

Jackie, a 16-year-old boy from Qingdao, is preparing to leave for overseas studies from September, 2021. While he is very excited to go, he is also confident that he will return to China after finishing university.

“Living in Qingdao is a lot more convenient for me. It’s easier for me. I’m Chinese... I know the things here and easier to communicate with Chinese people here...easier to be with them. But after finishing university abroad, I want to go to Shanghai, find a job there. I could never find a job in America. Too hard. We and Americans are so different. My aunt lives in Shanghai now. I can go stay with her.”

Many students, who have already started studying in the UK, shared with me that they feel “very Chinese” and they love Chinese culture. Living abroad, as they say, highlights the

differences between the cultures and make them miss China, which they consider as their home country. They miss their family, their home and the homemade food which they usually had together with the other family members. “I feel more Chinese now” was a recurrent answer when we discussed cultural identities and the ways they were affected by the study abroad experience.

My students also told me that they consider themselves different to most people in China because they have gone through Western style of education even before leaving the country. Still, Emma is confident, through her language skills and experience in getting accustomed to a new cultural environment, that she has the flexibility to decide whether to search for jobs in the UK, in China or elsewhere in Europe in the future. As her case below illustrates, she had extensive experience in a Western country before going to the UK. Whenever we discussed where she imagined her future, she would reply “I’m not tied to one place. Even if I graduate in the UK and stay and work as a doctor in the UK, I will always go back to China. To work or live there again, who knows?”

Emma’s narrative, that she lived abroad since the age of twelve and she imagines the future as being in multiple localities at once, also reflects a desire for a transnational lifestyle. The fact, that her parents sent her first from Zhuhai to Barcelona then from there to Shanghai to prepare for high school application in the UK and practice her Chinese Mandarin at the same time, reflect the family’s strategies to build and maintain ties in multiple localities and not lose connection with China.

During my fieldwork research, it emerged as a pattern that parents pay a lot of attention to their children’s good command of Chinese writing and speaking skills. If they want to return, find a good job and integrate into social life, they must be able to communicate well in Chinese, at the same level of proficiency as a native who was educated in a Chinese public school.

Shanghai, as Jackie and Emma’s biography illustrate, provides a space in China where they can find positions in the top stratum of society using their acquired skills abroad. While

studying abroad, they become successful transnational citizens by regularly travelling back to China, where they maintain and build new social connections. China as home base will be considered as a future option for employment and residence, following graduation.

Conclusion

My empirical findings and recent literature illustrate that elite families have the same goals following university graduation. The migration strategies are decided by the parents, early in the child's age and they converge towards a desire to become hypermobile while securing class reproduction.

For elite families, international education migration does not equal emigration. Instead, it is a strategy for migration without settling. In the case of elite Chinese families, borrowing Liu-Farrer's take on emigration, overseas studies can be seen as a *lifestyle makeover* "in an effort to gain social prestige [and] circumvent competition they witness in China" (2016: 13-16). Studying abroad offers the opportunity for a transnational lifestyle and accumulation of social, cultural and symbolic capitals. As a result, "priorities are changing, leaning towards learning creativity and cross-cultural understanding over exams" (Nyíri 2010: 35). Success is linked to mobility (Nyíri 2010: 2), and by becoming familiar with a Western society and culture, social imaginaries of a modern, they seek better "access to social and cultural citizenship in the developed world" (Fong 2011: 5).

As Aiwa Ong argues, the transnational lifestyle of the families provides families with a "flexibility of citizenship arrangements, for these mobile individuals, has not created 'ungrounded' transnational individuals [...] instead has grounded them to 'the conditions of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space'" (1999: 4). My empirical findings echo Hannah Soong's experiences through which she highlights "their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena [...] are regulated by favouring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. (2015: 6) While creating

dual residency in China and the UK, the families' main income and social networks are located in China while gaining added benefits offered by foreign countries. Being embedded in simultaneous localities, keeping their Chinese citizenship, they eventually return to China, where the fresh graduates will seek employment and residency in China's global cities.

Conclusion

As illustrated through theoretical conceptualisations and empirical findings, the main strategies of the Chinese elite for education mobility are to broadening the horizons, consumption, sending the child early for optimal adaptation to the new environment and global connectedness. As students and families convert economic, cultural and social capital in a transnational social space, value is created in multiple locations. However, the reproduction of the Chinese elite happens upon returning to China, when symbolic and a higher cultural capital is realised through the acquired knowledge, skills and transnational networks which facilitate the gaining of a higher social status.

Future research will aim to explore more at depth how the families' global networks continue to form within their social circles, through the education agency and the British schools where the candidates are placed. Due to the Covid-19 virus outbreak at the beginning of 2020, student mobility across the world has halted, causing Western universities, which had become increasingly dependent on Chinese applicants in the last few decades, to reconsider their methods of education and new ways to attract overseas applicants. Furthermore, as borders have currently shut down, for instance between the US and China, these rapidly shifting political decisions open up space for analysis to explore how education migration strategies will transform and navigate through new state regulations and the working of non-state actors, such as the private agency presented in this research.

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