

A comparative study of Polish and Chinese student
migrants in the UK: motivation, integration and
national identity

Hexuan Zhang

School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)
University College London (UCL)

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Declaration

I, Hexuan Zhang, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis is about international student migrants (ISM). It compares the migration process of international students pursuing degree studies (BA, MA or PhD) abroad, using the case study of student migration to London from Poland and China. The research method includes in-depth interviews and participant observation with Polish and Chinese international students in London. The study adopted a grounded theory approach and data from the research revealed different strands of migration motivations and integration processes.

The first of the empirical chapters investigates motivations to study abroad. The second examines how Polish and Chinese students integrate into university life in London. The third chapter probes into their social integration, using Fox and Miller-Idriss's (2008) concept of everyday nationhood and Berry's (1997) acculturation model as a theoretical framework.

Several important findings are disclosed. First, Polish participants generally behave as 'elite cosmopolitan Europeans', who are rich in mobility capital. Study abroad is a natural outcome of their migrant identity and they find it easy to integrate into multicultural London. Second, Chinese participants generally apply a 'getting-gilded' strategy and tend to stay only temporarily in London and then return home to outshine others with their received cultural capital. This return-home intention hinders their desire for integration and makes them stick to co-national networks. Language barriers constrain their possibility of deeper integration, too, while Polish students are confident about their English skills. Third, students' behaviour is conditioned by their family backgrounds and socialisation, although they also can make choices when abroad - they have agency. However, Chinese students are much more likely than their Polish counterparts to make 'national' choices (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Their national identity is even strengthened, while Polish students generally possess a more cosmopolitan identity. On the integration spectrum, Polish students are more likely to be situated towards the assimilation end, while Chinese students are closer to separation. It is argued that more attention should be paid to the influence of ISMs' agency on their

integration, and universities should explore tailored support to the diverse ISM populations considering their backgrounds and cultures.

Impact Statement

This research will be of interest both inside and outside academia. Actually, I find that academic research in the field of ISM often tends to have an applied character.

First, my research might allow international students to better understand their different integration processes and strategies. This thesis reveals different domains and ways of integration, understanding which could make students more aware of the choices they can make with regard to integration. For example, Chinese students can choose not to live in student halls where their compatriots dominate, but to rent rooms with other people if they want to integrate more deeply. They can also try to use local or international information sources rather than Chinese apps to expand their information sources.

Second, institutions are also informed in my PhD of different needs of different international students. This could help them make more tailored policies rather than treating all international students as a whole. For example, they can assign senior experienced Chinese students to tutor first-year students to overcome the language barriers.

Third, this study provides families, policymakers, employers and other stakeholders in sending countries with indications of future student migration patterns, and enables them to make preparations for the new trends. For instance, it is argued that ISM is becoming more and more popular, and the family plays a key role in shaping their children's mobility patterns and capability. Therefore, to improve the student's competitiveness, the entire family should be motivated to enhance the mobility capital of their children, e.g. to organise more international travels or to invest in English learning as early as possible.

Fourth, since I was already a lecturer in Polish language in China before my PhD studies at UCL and will resume the job after obtaining the degree, the PhD training sessions have definitely improved my research skills and broadened my research interests. I am going to investigate

the student exchange programmes in Poland and try to use this knowledge to help to improve the integration of Chinese students. I will also give lectures about qualitative research methods and encourage more students of humanities programmes, especially pure foreign language programmes, to conduct social scientific research. I hope this can be a turning point for language degree programmes in China.

Acknowledgement

PhD is definitely a very lonely and challenging journey. At the end of it I have become a totally different person. I would like to express my gratitude to the people who accompanied me along this journey and caused this change.

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There are many moments I want to note down, such as the day and night in the student centre and other libraries, kindle reading on the Circle Line, exercise in the gym, 3-pound Meal Deal

at Tesco and croissant at Lidl, the increasingly-expensive coffee, hiking in the suburbs of London, Friday nights at the British Museum, the Sanguosha Online game, some YouTube and Bilibili channels, and of course, various insightful conversations at the Blooms Café.

This journey is not easy, but I made it.

Terms and Abbreviations

Chuzhong: the first stage of secondary school in China, from grades 7 to 9

Gaozhong: the second stage of secondary school in China, from grades 10 to 12

ISM: international student migrants/migration

Liceum: secondary-education school in Poland attended by children aged 15 to 19

Matura: secondary school exit exam in Poland

SIT: social identity theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context and research questions

This research explores and compares the migration processes of international students pursuing their degree studies (BA, MA or PhD) abroad in recent years, using the case study of student migration to London from Poland and China. International Student Migration/Mobility (ISM) has been a key phenomenon around the globe. Data published by UNESCO show that the 21st century has seen a booming growth in numbers of ISM, from about two million in 2000 to over six million in 2019.¹ Both in terms of receiving and sending countries, however, the pattern is dynamic. The USA, the UK and Australia are well ahead of other countries in recruiting ISM, whereas China and India, the top two most populous countries in the world, significantly outnumber other countries in outbound globally mobile students (Choudaha 2017; UNESCO 2021). In the supply-demand relationship of this international education market, the West remains the principal destination and the developing economies are the main student providers.

The UK is positioned in a notable place in the global tertiary education market, as it attracts an increasingly large volume of international students. According to data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency² (HESA 2022), 605,130 non-UK students were enrolled in British higher education institutions in 2020/21, accounting for about 22% of the whole student population in the country and a 77% increase since 2007/08. International students in the UK are forming a significant migrant group.

While international students need the UK, the UK needs international students as well. According to a report co-authored in 2021 by Universities UK International, the Higher

¹ Education: Inbound internationally mobile students by continent of origin. *data.uis.unesco.org*. Retrieved 3 October 2021.

² Where do HE students come from? <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from/> Accessed 10.05.2022

Education Policy Institute and London Economics, international students are making a significant contribution to the British economy.

Looking at the 2018/19 cohort, it finds the benefits of hosting international students significantly outweigh the costs, including their use of public services. The economic benefit of this cohort to the UK is calculated to be £28.8 billion, while the costs are found to be £2.9 billion. The report also highlights that the net economic benefit of £25.9 billion is spread across every part of the UK and the report provides the results for every one of the 650 Westminster constituencies. It highlights that every part of the UK is financially better off – on average by £390 per person – because of international students.¹

However, ISM is not a homogeneous group who constantly flow from one country to another for the sake of education. Their migration patterns are shaped by the international economic and political climate (Cairns 2017; Choudaha 2017); state policies regarding immigration (Gribble and Blackmore 2012; Mavroudi and Warren 2013; Robertson 2013; Lomer 2018); institutional actors such as student recruitment teams and education agents (Collins 2012, 2013; Mosneaga 2015; James-MacEachern and Yun 2017; Beech 2018); family and peers (Waters 2006; Andrejuk 2013; Rahimi and Akgunduz 2017); as well as their own agency (Milewski and Ruszczak-Żbikowska 2008; Chao et al. 2017; Yang, Volet, and Mansfield 2018).

Besides, the complexity of ISM is fuelled by the recent international context, particularly in the major sending and receiving countries, such as the deceleration of China's economic growth, UK's Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as the American president (Choudaha 2017). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 has drastically changed the global migration pattern, including ISM.

All of the contexts and situations above pertaining to ISM require multifaceted analysis and sufficient empirical studies. But before that, the terminological dilemma of applying *migration* or *mobility* in ISM should be clarified. As King and Raghuram (2013) argue, there are strong arguments on both sides - sometimes migration is more relevant, sometimes mobility - and

¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/costs-and-benefits-international-higher>. Retrieved 12 July 2022.

this is why they end up sitting on the fence, adopting the term 'ISM' where the M can refer to migration or mobility. They further point out that the key difference lies in that mobility usually implies a shorter relocation of students and high possibility of return, whereas migration tends to indicate a cross-border move longer than a year with an open-ended final destination. Applying this criterion, I decided to apply the term migration in this thesis because my participants are all degree programme students who were in London for at least one year and often for three or more.

However, this does not indicate that mobility has no significance in this thesis. Instead, it remains helpful to use it in some contexts, as the word 'mobility' has connotations about ease of movement, not just duration of stay abroad. Many ISM scholars favour this term because it spells out the nature of international students and highly skilled mobile people, who possess legal status, secured positions and often also good knowledge of local culture (Luthra and Platt 2016), and seek for advancement, independence and opportunity (Beech 2019). The term 'mobility capital' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002) was coined to indicate the skills, capabilities and predispositions young individuals gain to move and settle easily when living abroad (see section 2.2.4).

In addition, since the 1990s a new research paradigm called the 'mobility turn' has influenced many scholars. According to Urry and colleagues, mobility is becoming an increasingly important social phenomenon which involves mobile combination of both physical and human entities; mobility systems and networks instead of fixed places are significant units of analysis (Urry 2000; Sheller and Urry 2006, 2016). In migration studies, the new mobilities paradigm is helpful in that it 'not only deals with the causes and consequences of migration, focusing on settled migrants (in immigration countries) but also considers short-term movers and circulation generally' (Faist 2013: 1638). This is particular the case for EU citizens crossing borders within the EU.

In EU terminology, the label 'mobile' is given to EU citizens who enjoy freedom of movement within the EU, to distinguish them from the third-country nationals, who are known as 'migrants'. As Faist (2013: 1642) points out, both public debates and academic research seem to distinguish between labour migrants and highly-skilled mobile people, with the former

category negatively perceived as being likely not to integrate, and the latter positively connoted as being without integration problems.

International students seem to resemble highly-skilled movers, since they are very mobile, engaging in circular mobility. They tend to go back to their countries of origin for long holidays and often go travelling while they are abroad. They are sometimes considered 'sojourners' (Cairns 2017), who stay temporarily in a place. However, as Faist critiques, mobility suggests the best for all stakeholders, which downplays the fact that social inequalities worldwide, especially inequalities of opportunity based on citizenship, considerably decide an individual's mobility/immobility chances. Moreover, boundaries exist not only between state borders, but also between other markers such as gender, age and religion (Faist 2013). These can also be relevant for student migrants.

What is more, possessing heightened mobility opportunities does not mean that individuals do not have to integrate. It could be misleading to think that student migrants have no need to integrate. There are important commonalities between them and other types of migrants. White (2022) argues that although highly-skilled professionals, students and lifestyle migrants enjoy a privileged status in that they are not considered migrants by themselves or others, they are still migrants, but perhaps 'migrants light'. They still have integration needs, though fewer than those of many labour migrants. This is the key reason why I consider ISM to be migration rather than mobility in my research.

Literature identifies three major ways of studying ISM: migration studies, education and globalisation of higher education (Madge 2009, cited by King and Raghuram 2013; Wells 2014). Education research mainly investigates pedagogical challenges international students face, whereas globalisation of higher education focuses on institutional and policy impacts on regulating ISM. In this thesis, I position myself as a sociologist of migration whose study of ISM is within the academic discipline of migration studies, rather than education research (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). Therefore, I am interested in using migration theories to help understand why students go to study abroad and in using the integration concept to understand their experiences (see Chapter 3).

To be concrete, this study aims to fill this gap and offer some useful insights regarding policies and other contributing factors likely to attract or deter international student migrants to the UK. Therefore, motivations for migration are a key research topic in this study. Another aim of this thesis is to provide feedback from current international student migrants for those potential British university applicants and prospective first-year students who are lacking actual insights into migration processes. Some literature (Quan, He, and Sloan 2016; Heng 2018) has highlighted the significance of making pre-departure preparation linguistically, culturally and academically. This is considered a key factor for international students' rapid and efficient adaptation. My findings about integration can provide prospective students with information about what to prepare before arrival. In this connection, the integration of ISM is investigated.

Integration, mobility and transnationalism, according to White (2022), form the three major pillars of migranhood. While the former two concepts have been discussed, now we come to the third one. Transnationalism is widely used in ISM literature (Robertson 2013; Kusek 2015; Mok et al. 2018). It goes beyond the 'stay-return' dichotomy and indicates the significance of multiple places, sometimes spurring further mobility for international students (Tan and Hugo 2017). When this term is indeed useful, this thesis investigates the national rather than transnational dimensions of Polish and Chinese international students through the lens of everyday nationhood. This is because: 1) the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 made their transnational practices unusual, if not impossible; and 2) national identity in everyday life seems to be a key variable in understanding my participants' integration behaviours and their location on the integration spectrum (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 7).

What is more, this study also makes a contribution to contemporary migration research by adding insights into the study of temporary migration, a category which student migration is often grouped into. It helps us understand the diverse nature of ISM and the impact of individual agency, family, culture and economy on them, in other words, what factors have influenced their motivation and behaviours in the UK. In short, it gives us insights into how heterogeneous ISMs are and what makes them heterogeneous.

Lastly, though COVID-19 is not the main interest of this thesis (because it broke out in the middle of my PhD studies), this topic was inevitably encountered in my fieldwork. Consequently, a section is designated to discussing its impact on ISM, giving us some perceptions of this unique circumstance.

In response to what is presented above, this study raises the following key research questions and sub-questions:

- What are the migration motivations of Polish and Chinese international students in the UK?
- What is their integration into local surroundings like, including universities and the wider society?
- When Polish and Chinese student migrants go to the same third country, what different outcomes will their difference in cultural backgrounds lead to? To what extent are their mobility outcomes similar or different?
- Are these outcomes related to other factors? If so, what are these? To what extent are they related?

These are the fundamental research questions that underpin my thesis. In the rest of this introductory chapter I will first, in section 1.2, present the rationale behind the selection of the Chinese and Polish cases of student migration. Section 1.3 explains the reason why I chose London as the specific research location in terms of a destination place for student migrants. Section 1.4 summarises the research methods employed during my studies. Finally, Section 1.5 offers an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

1.2 Choice of Chinese and Polish international students

The reason why I chose to compare Chinese and Polish students is first based on the statistics about non-UK students. Recent years have seen a boom in the numbers of Chinese students investing in international education, with the UK being a major receiving country. China has long been the country with the largest overall population of tertiary education students in the UK, and the number is still steadily increasing. On the other hand, in terms of student numbers

in the UK, Poland has always ranked in the top 10 EU countries in the past five years (see Table 1). These characteristics make members of these two national groups to some degree representative of many EU and non-EU groups of overseas students in the UK.

Table 0-1 The top sending countries of international student migrants to the UK in 2020/21

1	China	143820	10	Spain	12290
2	India	84555	11	Germany	12250
3	Nigeria	21305	12	Malaysia	11510
4	United States	19220	13	Poland	10755
5	Hong Kong (China)	16655	14	Ireland	9740
6	Italy	14605	15	Greece	9555
7	France	14090	16	Saudi Arabia	8825
8	Pakistan	12975	17	Portugal	8470
9	Romania	12860	18	Cyprus	8335

Source: HESA, 2022

Second, comparing students from China and Poland allows us to investigate the relevance and influence of several cultural, social, economic and familial factors and actors. For instance, China represents an East Asian country, while Poland stands in Europe. When student migrants from these two countries go to the same third country, what different outcomes will this difference in cultural backgrounds lead to? Are these outcomes related to other factors? If so, what are they? To what extent? Furthermore, is it possible or necessary for both groups to learn from each other? Therefore, it is useful to put them into the same analytical framework in a comparative study, thus possibly broadening or testing the existing migration theories.

Finally, the principle of convenience and some of my own characteristics also contribute to my decision to investigate these two migration cases. As a Chinese student myself in the UK, I could easily get into the research field of other Chinese students and apply qualitative methods. For instance, in the student accommodation I could apply participant observation to gain a basic understanding of my research topic. After making a friendship circle around me based on our country of origin, it was much easier to find adequate volunteers for interviews. Moreover, I could keep fieldwork notes not only about what I observed in daily life, but also about my feelings about myself during my study in the UK. Being both a research subject and object enabled me to think in different ways, thus making the research more

comprehensive. This process could also promote my personal development as I kept reflecting on myself during my study. On the other hand, I majored in Polish Language and Literature, and spent a year in Poland as an exchange student during my BA studies. Later, I worked as a lecturer in Polish language in a Chinese university for more than four years. All of these experiences have equipped me with adequate knowledge of Polish language and culture. This aided me in finding Polish interviewees and conducting interviews in their mother tongue.

In sum, the main reasons why I chose to study ISM specifically from contemporary China and Poland are: 1) the numerical significance of student migrants in the UK from these two countries; 2) the potential to examine or renew the existing migration theories about ISM (based on information about two very different migrant groups) and to offer important feedback for future applicants to British higher education institutions; 3) my own linguistic, social and cultural competencies and resources which assisted me in data collection, interpretation and analysis.

1.3 Choice of London

Statistically speaking, London has a significant number of overseas students. In the academic year of 2017/2018, according to HESA, 111,665 non-UK students were enrolled in 39 higher education institutions in London. That accounts for about 30% of all the foreign students in the UK (377,140 in total) in that year. Data also indicate that 20,215 out of 106,530 Chinese students, and 2,095 out of 7,545 Polish students were studying in higher education institutions in London. The capital of the UK outperforms other regions not only in student numbers, but (according to the rankings) in educational quality as well. The Academic Ranking of World Universities 2019 (Shanghai Ranking) shows that three of the top seven British universities are located in London. They are University College London (3), Imperial College London (4), and King's College London (7). The concentration of top-class education in the city makes it the key destination for international students, including those from China and Poland. Therefore, London is a popular research field for international student migration. Such a decision could also ease the process of seeking research subjects – students from China and Poland.

Further, the large size of this metropolis has enriched its dynamic, thus creating more available research topics than in other towns. For instance, as we shall see in Chapter 7, how Polish and Chinese students 'perform' their nation in demonstrations is examined. These demonstrations mostly take place only in the capital city and therefore no other site can provide such a good opportunity to investigate these events. Besides, London's multicultural environment is second to none in the UK and even in the world (Vertovec 2007; Favell 2008; Kershen 2016). This gives us a good opportunity to examine if and how student migrants integrate into the cultural and racial diversity of the receiving society, especially considering the fact that both Poland and China are considered ethnically homogenous. According to the census data in both countries (2010 in China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/>, and 2011 in Poland, <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/>), 91.51 % of the Chinese population are Han, and 93.8% of surveyed declared Polish ethnicity in Poland.

Overall, I chose London to carry out my research for the following reasons. First, London's prestigious higher education institutions attract a massive influx of overseas students and that has made my data collection more convenient. Second, in London I am able to investigate more different topics thanks to its multicultural environment.

It is worth mentioning that there are different kinds of universities in London, while my research sample was mainly based in elite universities. Connected to this, most participants of my project held a kind of elite status in their home countries. Student experience between elite and other universities in the UK can be very different in some cases (Ainley and Weyers 2008). While I am aware of the fact that student experience at other London institutions may be different from universities such as UCL, LSE, etc., I still chose to study student migrants in these elite institutions. It was first a matter of proportion. Data from HESA show that in 2020/21 10,285 Chinese students studied at UCL, whereas at Kingston University there were only 565. This means these large elite universities may be untypical of others in the UK, but international students, at least Chinese students, are typically more likely to attend such institutions. Another reason was the convenience sampling (see Chapter 4 about sampling). Moreover, as we can see in the empirical chapters, 'elite' is constantly used in this thesis to describe Polish and Chinese students in London. While it has many different meanings, this

study applies this term in the sense that Polish and Chinese students at London universities themselves constitute part of an elite because of studying at elite institutions. In addition, participants were also largely from elite backgrounds (see section 5.3.1 about family background). Chinese participants seem to constitute an economic elite, whereas Poles are by contrast an educational elite.

1.4 Summary of research methods

Qualitative methods were my main research methods. The fieldwork consisted of two parts: participant observation and in-depth interviews. The outbreak of COVID-19 had a strong impact on the process.

Participant observation was applied throughout my entire research process from January 2019, but mainly before the outbreak of the pandemic at the end of 2019. The major site was the UCL student hall where I lived for almost 20 months. Other scenes included student society events, student parties, formal classes and sightseeing trips.

Interviews were the main source of data. I conducted in-depth interviews with 30 Chinese students in Mandarin Chinese from April to September 2020, and with 30 Polish students in Polish from November 2020 and March 2021. For each ethnic group there were 15 men and 15 women. The level of study was also equally distributed - 10 undergraduate students, 10 master's students and 10 PhD students in each group. Recordings of interviews were transcribed and analysed through NVivo, a qualitative research software.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted face-to-face communication, all interviews were carried out online. Participant observation was barely possible after that. More details on the methodology can be found in Chapter 4.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 conceptualises international student migration, presents some important theoretical frameworks in ISM studies and clarifies the standpoint

of this thesis. Chapter 3 introduces an overview of migration literature with specific focus on motivation and integration. It also discusses theories related to national identity and social identity, which are important in this thesis. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of methodology and methods of data collection. Chapters 5-7 provide an analysis of the data that was collected, including motivations, academic integration and social integration. Chapter 8 presents the final concluding thoughts of this whole project. Each chapter will be outlined in more detail below.

Chapter 2 discusses literature on international student migration in general and relevant theoretical frameworks. It opens with the elucidation of research fields of ISM, and points out the sociological, migration-studies standpoint of this thesis. After indicating the context, some useful theories related to ISM are then presented. They reflect the key theoretical strands in ISM scholarship, and are applied in the empirical chapters.

Chapter 3 continues the literature review into migration studies. It starts from a presentation of the most relevant migration theories and approaches, namely neoclassical migration theory, new economics of labour migration, network theories, cumulative causation and migration systems theory. They are followed by empirical findings about the motivation of ISM. Then the chapter elaborates on the concepts of integration, including discussing Berry's acculturation strategies and Ager and Strang's domains of migrant integration. The literature on Polish and Chinese student migrants' academic and social integration is then presented. Finally, identity theories, including national identity, everyday nationhood and social identity theory, are discussed to illustrate the critical analytical framework of this thesis. In the concluding section, comparisons between literature on Chinese and Polish student migration are made, and similarities and differences are found. My interview structure was constructed thanks to this chapter, as it provided the context for the research and enabled me to figure out the research gap.

Chapter 4 presents the general research methodology and the specific methods of data collection. The first section of this chapter shows the rationale for the research design, including the introduction of a comparative approach and qualitative methods. Then it gives specific attention to qualitative interviews, the major data source of this thesis, by

demonstrating the participant recruitment and interview procedure. It is followed by an introduction of the data analysis process, with specific emphasis on the coding process. The next section articulates ethics issues with regard to the entire research and how they were addressed. I finish by examining my positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters which present my research findings. Specifically, this chapter presents and discusses my findings about the students' migration motivations to study in the UK. Five topics are discussed: students as rational individualists, family support and influence, elite migration culture in contemporary Poland and China, migration culture of today's mobile youth, and push factors.

Chapter 6 focuses on how Polish and Chinese students integrate into university life in London. It first demonstrates how Polish and Chinese students compared the education systems in the UK and their home countries. Then it leads onto the subject of different aspects of student life and how participants adapted academically, including their evaluation of the marks they received. Finally, the chapter ends by introducing the functions of student societies and how actively participants were connected to them.

Chapter 7 examines the social integration of Polish and Chinese students by adopting the theory of everyday nationhood. It discusses how participants talk, choose, perform and consume the nation, and links their behaviours to the integration spectrum, using the concept of integration as developed by John Berry. How participants felt they had changed as individuals, and the racial discrimination they faced are also discussed as indicators of their integration.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis first by presenting a summary of empirical findings. Subsequently, the next section demonstrates some general empirical findings pertaining specifically to Polish and Chinese students respectively. Analysis shows that the Polish students in my study largely possess a cosmopolitan identity and rich mobility capital, whereas Chinese students generally apply the getting-gilded strategy and aim to return home after graduation. Gender difference and the impact of COVID-19 on their migration processes are then discussed. After summarising the empirical contribution, the chapter continues by

arguing the theoretical contribution of this study – its combining of a framework designed for the majority population ('everyday nationalism') with a more standard approach to migrant integration (Berry). At the end, it outlines the thesis' limitations and avenues of future research.

Chapter 2 Conceptualising international student migration

2.1 Introduction and research fields of ISM studies

Ten years have passed since King and Raghuram (2013: 127) claimed that ‘the study of international student migration/mobility (ISM) is a relatively neglected field in migration research’. ISM research in this decade has been steadily growing and flourishing. Developments have been made in both empirical and theoretical aspects. Hence it is necessary to clarify the current literature about ISM and categorise its varying strands.

International Student Migration/Mobility (ISM) has been a burgeoning phenomenon in the past two decades, when its drastic growth worldwide is more than apparent (King and Raghuram 2013; Shields 2013; Gumus, Gok, and Esen 2020). In these dynamic migratory flows, the USA, the UK and Australia remain the most popular destination countries, followed by Germany, France, Japan, Canada and New Zealand (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007), whereas Asian countries such as China, India, Korea and Malaysia provide the majority of outbound ISMs (King and Raghuram 2013; Gumus, Gok, and Esen 2020). Besides space-specific figures, a temporal pattern is also noticed. Choudaha (2017) observes three waves of ISM during 1999-2020. The first one, triggered by the 2001 terrorist attack and subsequent on entry to the USA, drove people away from the world’s central ISM destination country. The second was characterised by the universities’ enlargement of ISM enrolment due to their economic troubles brought by the 2008-09 global financial crisis. The third wave was shaped by China’s economic deceleration, the UK’s Brexit and the USA’s presidential election of Donald Trump. Ghosh and Jing (2020) add a fourth wave by including the impact of COVID-19 on ISM since 2020, which is driving a significant number of international students towards Asia and the Middle East.

Aligning with the significant rise in ISM numbers, the volume and complexity of academic research on ISM also thrives. Gumus, Gok, and Esen (2020)’s review, which examines 2,064

journal publications about ISM in the Web of Science database, allows us to have an initial understanding of what the current ISM scholarship is like.

First, in terms of literature volume, they find that there has been a dramatic increase since 2005, namely, 202 publications during 2005-2009, 477 during 2010-2014, and 1056 during 2015-2018, indicating a growing interest in this topic. Journals which publish these articles are from a broad range of fields, including international education, foreign language, intercultural relations, counselling and psychology. Authors' specialised fields also vary, ranging from education, geography, sociology to economy.

However, in terms of geographic and authorship distribution, the pattern seems highly stratified. Literature output by researchers in three Western countries, the USA, the UK and Australia, significantly outnumbers other countries. The analysis of author productivity and author networks also reveals that ISM scholarship is strongly based in Western English-speaking countries (though the English bias of Web of Science data set is acknowledged by the authors). This pattern parallels with the contemporary worldwide ISM flows, which suggests that the most research-active countries in ISM are also countries that receive the most ISMs (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007).

What is more, the research focus of existing ISM literature is also categorised by Gumus, Gok, and Esen. They find that the primary concern relates to students' (often long-term degree students) adjustment in relation to emotional, academic and sociocultural shifts. Other substantial research focus includes language learning/pedagogy (often short-term students) and internationalisation of higher education. Lastly, they suggest that sociological and geographical perspectives have seen an increasing popularity in ISM research, with specific attention on identities, intercultural competence and migration experiences.

Gumus, Gok, and Esen's work gives us insights into the booming interest and West-centric authorship of today's global ISM research, as well as the diversity of related disciplines. The last point is perhaps the key reason why the current ISM studies include such a great variety of research fields, topics, orientation, agenda and theoretical frameworks. Some scholars try to distinguish key themes amongst these debates. Madge et al. (2009, cited by King and

Raghuram 2013: 128), for example, group the standpoints of studying ISM roughly into three strands: migration studies, globalisation of higher education and pedagogical challenges. Viewing ISM from the perspective of migration and education is supported by Wells, who claims that 'ISM is studied across several academic fields and... is concentrated in the following areas: Migration Studies, Education, Sociology of HE' (2014: 21), and:

...now ISM is also studied from the point of view of Education, Sociology, Psychology, Network research and even Tourism. Since each field has its own ontological and epistemological traditions, the diversity of research approaches results in a variety of findings. Analyses and comparisons of these findings stimulate an on-going dialogue in the research community (Wells 2014: 23).

This on-going dialogue refers to varieties of research interests and growing attention from various disciplines, which results in multiple ways of interpreting and analysing ISM. Migration studies, as reviewed above, is a common perspective in ISM research. This thesis, following this popular trend, adopts a sociological, migration-studies based approach.

However, the complexity of ISM needs to be understood from a broader range of literature sources. The remainder of this chapter continues by analysing literature regarding ISM theories. Section 2.2 introduces a few useful theoretical frameworks commonly used in literature of ISM and youth mobilities. International students are generally young people so their motivations and experiences overlap with those of other young migrating individuals and have to be understood in that context. The review has a particular focus on the EU and China, which allows us to understand some general patterns of contemporary Polish and Chinese student migrants. At the end, Section 2.3 summarises this chapter about ISM and indicates the standpoint of this thesis.

2.2 Review of theoretical frameworks in ISM studies

The previous section shows that ISM studies cover a wide range of disciplines and research fields. The main areas are migration studies and education. This thesis focuses on the former one and therefore I will introduce some popular theoretical frameworks and concepts of ISM

and youth mobilities research from the perspective of migration studies, whereas literature pertaining to education will be discussed with regard to academic integration in Chapter 3.

The selection of particular literature should first be justified. This section begins with temporality, liquid migration and 'intentional unpredictability'. For some international students, the concept of time changes during their sojourn abroad when comparing with local and immobile peers. Their lived experience of time, such as during COVID-19, impacts their integration experiences. Some other students, especially in the context of EU's 2004 enlargement, refuse the rigid time frame and live a fluid, 'liquid' life, keeping their options open for the future. The ways Polish and Chinese students perceive and live time should be investigated.

Leading on from the discussion of time, I discuss the life course approach and youth transition. The life course theory further elucidates the flexible instead of linear nature of human lives in modern society, and gives us some useful conceptual frameworks to analyse the behaviour of Polish and Chinese students. Youth transition is the particular period they undergo in their life course. How their transition influences and is influenced by mobilities presents an interesting topic.

When choosing to study abroad, the significance of particular places must be noticed. On occasion, the decisive factor in ISMs' decision-making process is the attraction of the city, country or region. Such trends create a core-periphery direction of flows not only amongst labour migrants but also student migrants. Many of them, including Polish and Chinese student migrants, are attracted by the lifestyle of the receiving society.

Lastly, mobility capital is discussed. It is a very useful concept because: 1) it was put forward in the context of EU student migrants, so is relevant to Polish ISM (since my interviewees had enrolled when Brexit was not yet completed); and 2) it helps explain the features of today's mobile/immobile students, especially their integration experiences. It could be important when comparing Polish and Chinese students.

2.2.1 Temporality, liquid migration and 'intentional unpredictability'

The temporal dimension of migration has been increasingly highlighted in migration scholarship. Time/temporality is not only viewed as the quantitative and objective clock time (Xu 2021; Wang 2022), but also as social construct and experience (Xu and Yang 2019), or 'as the lived experience of time that is socio-culturally situated and dynamic' (Wang 2022: 2). It incorporates both social time, the general temporal norms in the life course (Wang and Collins 2020), and space time, which can be lived towards multiple directions (Xu and Yang 2019).

The connection of migration and time/temporality is made primarily, if not the first, by Cwerner (2001), who put forth eight approaches of times concerning migrants. They may confront *strange*, *heteronomous* and *asynchronous* times when they just arrive and try to adjust to new places, and suffered from 'displacement, uprooting, and the rupture of daily routines' (Cwerner 2001: 19). Later, *remembered*, *collage* and *liminal* times will come with identity crisis when migrants begin to have more contact with the receiving society. In the long term, migrants may meet *diasporic* and *nomadic* times when migration becomes part of their lives. This three-stage approach to encountered times illustrates the changing nature of times in the lived experience of migrants, which is also supported by Wang and Collins (2020). They challenge the conventional sequential understanding of time as linear and moving according to a past-present-future timeline. Instead, social agents respond to the changing circumstances with their agency and constantly reconfigure their plans and goals.

However, for international students, their response to diverse temporalities is not necessarily plain sailing. Some may face severe contrasts between their lived and imagined times at university, and between the lived experiences of their own and other local or immobile students (Folke 2018). Heteronomous factors, such as COVID-19, can also regulate the temporal experience of students, making times a form of shared public experience, and suspended, sticky and precarious for students (Wang 2022).

One way young migrants live with regard to temporalities has been named 'liquid migration', a term coined to explain the dynamic and fast-changing flows after the EU's eastern enlargements (Engbersen and Snel 2013). The term originates with Bauman's *Liquid*

Modernity (Bauman 2000), which argues that fluid flexibility has replaced solidity in modern life. Engbersen and Snel conceptualised six key elements of liquid migration: a) Most migrants tend to follow a circular or onward migration pattern rather than settle permanently, but some may prefer to stay longer and pursue upward socio-economic mobility. b) Labour migration is dominant but student migration also characterises liquid migration. c) Migration is usually legal due to the rights of EU membership. d) Liquid migration flows are often sudden and spontaneous. e) Many liquid migrants are young and single people postponing marriage and children, reflecting the rise of individualisation in decision-making and the drop of family influence in European societies. f) Borrowing a term from Eade, Drinkwater, and Garapich (2006), Engbersen and Snel suggest that migrants are likely to adopt a strategy of ‘intentional unpredictability’. More plainly put, this refers to a deliberate stance of keeping options open.

The elements mentioned above are crucial for my research, as they apply to youth migration from central and eastern European countries after the 2004 EU enlargement. Many of them describe Polish youth, my precise research objects. Liquid migrants abandon the traditional understanding of time as a linear process, but explore themselves in a flexible temporal manner.

However, generalising this pattern to all EU youth migration has also been criticised. White (2010) argues that many young migrants are influenced by push and pull factors such as unemployment and low wages in sending countries, and new opportunities in receiving countries, especially access to social networks. Not everyone, however, enjoys access to these, and some of them are constrained by the migration culture, for example, regarding gender roles. Botterill (2011: 66) points out that ‘the material inequalities of de-skilling, “brain waste” and precarious work are just some examples of the uncertain transitions of both migration and return.’ For many young people, de-rooting from one place may lead to a backwards step in another.

To be concrete, ISMs’ predicaments with temporalities are often attributed to structural constraints, such as family backgrounds, schooling, social class and work experience (Wang and Collins 2020). Time is perceived as a kind of aspirational cultural capital whose possession is class-stratified amongst international students (Xu 2021). The structural and social

inequalities can become salient after encountering mobility, triggering what is called 'temporality of identity awakening' (Xu and Yang 2019).

In general, temporality in ISM studies is usually seen as class-based and mediated by human agency when dealing with structural constraints. However, this simplistic generalisation seems to assume that class is the only variable, and fails to elucidate the concrete constraints faced by different nationalities. Cultural and historical contexts, I believe, should also be looked into together with class to add understandings of temporalities amongst ISM. These contexts are also highlighted in the life course theory.

2.2.2 Life course approach and youth transition

Defined as 'an age-graded sequence of socially defined roles and events that are enacted over historical time and place' (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003: 15), the life course theory has been favoured by sociologists, psychologists, and many other migration scholars. Its acknowledgement as being preferable to a life cycle approach amongst social scientists indicates a shift from understanding human lives as rigid, linear, and irreversible to fluid, flexible and de-standardised (McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020). The life cycle model assumes that life carries on strictly with the stages of birth, childhood, adolescence, nest-leaving, marriage, work, giving birth and retirement (Findlay et al. 2015), but the life course orientation adds several refinements along with the changing nature of the contemporary society (Bailey 2009), such as 'solo living, postponement of partnership and childbearing, rising divorce rates, non-traditional family structures, living apart together, greater participation in higher education, later retirement ages and the geographic dissociation between work and the workplace' (McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020: 201).

The crucial contribution to life course theory is made by Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003), who put forth five paradigmatic principles to give contexts and a framework to study individual lives, namely *lifespan*, *human agency*, *time and place*, *timing* and *linked lives*. While the significance of these principles is hotly discussed (Bailey 2009; Worth 2009; Findlay et al. 2015), their connection with mobility and migration studies also draws increasing attention.

The extended *lifespan* leads to the prolongation of life course and new mobility paradigms such as lifestyle migration and retirement migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020). The lifelong unceasing human development, emphasised by Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003), has also blurred the rigidly defined constituent life stages and brought about a 'fluid life course' (Findlay et al. 2015: 396). An example of this fluidity is the 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2000, cited in King 2018: 7), indicating the moves back and forth between provisional residences of young people and their parental home. In addition, attention is also paid to the impact of mobility/immobility on the enduring human wellbeing in their lifespan (Botterill 2011; Wang 2022).

The emphasis on *human agency*, usually resting on the structure-agency model in sociology studies, underscores the contribution of migrants' own motivation and planning to their migratory trajectories (Findlay et al. 2012). Their life course is no longer institutionally organised pathway, but personal construct in response to social structures (Xu 2021; Wang 2022). However, the strength of human agency should not be overstated as migrants can still be constrained by the imbalanced structural opportunities (Bailey 2009; White 2010; McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020). It is therefore instructive to investigate and compare the constraints faced by Polish and Chinese students, and how they utilise their agency, to understand the diversity of structure-agency model within the ISM body.

Life course is also considered to be embedded in *time and place* both historically and geographically (Findlay et al. 2015). Individual life course and mobility are significantly affected by historical times and places. Different age cohorts, for example, may go through different historical contexts, and thereby creating tensions within generations about understandings of life course. Meanwhile, the same age cohorts may go through different life courses based on their locations (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003; Choudaha 2017). These contexts may interweave with socio-economic structural effects in different geographical scales, and together shape the mobility pattern of migrants (McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020). The occurrence of some key historical events in this study, such as COVID-19 and anti-governmental protests, as well as their parents' experiences, gives us a good opportunity to examine their impact on the life course and integration of ISM.

The principle of *timing*, highlighting the specific time and sequence of life events, gives mobility a temporal dimension in understanding its occurrence. The age when migration take place can significantly influence a person's subsequent life course, and migration can be significantly influenced by the changing understanding of social timing, such as when to get married, birth or retired and their sequences (Bailey 2009; Findlay et al. 2015). It is also argued that the expected timing of mobility, such as nest-leaving, may vary in concrete societal and cultural contexts (McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020), which can be significant in understanding the different behaviours of Polish and Chinese students, who, as we shall see, leave home for education in different ages.

Lastly, *linked lives* play pivotal roles in the interdependent nature of life courses within a household and shared relationships, such as family, partnership, kinship and friendship. Migration decisions can be made and negotiated within these relationships according to maturity, gender, and class divisions (Findlay et al. 2015). Members living within these relationships sometimes need to 'synchronise' their life courses to reach a compromise on migration (Bailey 2009). While existing literature of ISM largely studies the impact of family in terms of their backgrounds and social class, relationships are downplayed and therefore need more investigation in ISMs' motivation to study abroad.

In the entire life course, youth transition is the particular interest of this thesis. Its links with mobility are discussed by King (2018), including a trend towards social individualisation which draws young people away from strong framing structures; youth-to-adult transition linked to marriage and parenthood delayed from a person's 20s to their 30s; and the impact of geopolitical and economic events on the process of youth mobility and transition. Worth (2009) added to the youth transition theory with her understanding of youth as a 'process of becoming' and 'flexible openness to future pathways'. King defines the prolongation of youthful appearances, lifestyles and self-perceptions among migrants as a form of delayed 'unbecoming' or postponement of the youth-to-adult transition.

Although the aforementioned discussions of youth transition take place in the European context, some concepts can also be used in other contexts. For instance, Xu and Yang (2019) show how some Chinese students try to pursue an individualised way of life and get rid of

constraints by means of mobility. However, overall there seems to be a lack of generalisation from Western youth transition literature into other, for example Asian contexts. Whether or not life of Chinese students is becoming fluid and flexible will be studied. How Polish and Chinese students perceive their transitions during their sojourn in the UK is a significant topic of my research project.

2.2.3 Place, the core-periphery model and lifestyle migration

The significance of place has been highlighted in a growing body of ISM literature (Collins 2014; Beech 2018). The choice of specific cities or regions by students is usually linked to desirable lifestyles, potential job markets and various social networks. Prazeres et al. (2017) demonstrate that urban features such as life quality sometimes can outweigh university prestige in international students' decision-making process. Studying in capital cities is emphasised as a form of symbolic capital and the compensation of being rejected by outstanding universities situated in smaller cities. The diversity of the big cities is actually one of their main attractions. The diversified social network students form or encounter in these big monoethnic cities is conducive to their formation of cosmopolitan identity. The authors conclude that students in favour of certain cities usually aim for living or working in these desirable places rather than career development in terms of study abroad motivation.

The comparison between cities amongst ISM is also noted by Beech (2019), who analyses the significance of city in the motivation of international students from universities based in Aberdeen, Belfast and Nottingham. She finds that students in Aberdeen and Belfast highly related their choice of university to the cities, whereas students in Nottingham focused on London over their own city. Their images (or 'geographical imaginations') of the cities were largely shaped by media, social networks and previous experience. According to Andrejuk (2013), London in particular is favoured by lots of Polish students for its academic fame as well as multinational metropolitan environment. However, opinions about life in London vary. On the positive side, London is a big city whose functions and dynamics offer endless possibilities; on the other, the fast pace of life produces uncommon levels of stress for Andrejuk's interviewees.

Besides London, Seoul is another major capital which also receives scholarly attention in this strand of research. Collins (2014) examines how students themselves give meanings into the significance of place, configuring Seoul as ideal for education and future career development. It is important to note that international students not only learn on campus but also in the city, appreciating Seoul for its vibe, history and thriving transnational business.

In this thesis, the significance of London is mentioned by some participants, which backs up Prazeres et al. (2017), who highlight the attraction of the city over the university for international students. Others enjoy the lifestyles of this global city (Favell 2008). What London means for student migrants will be examined in this thesis.

Other than specific locations, the flow directions are also of scholarly interest. The core-periphery framework, according to King, arose due to the uneven economic development caused by the history of immigration (Seers, Schaffer, and Kiljunen 1979, cited in King 2018: 3). In the European context, countries which are more economically advanced, and usually also socially and politically dominant, locate together at the centre. Meanwhile, other less developed and more dependent countries surround the core countries, and thus form a ring as periphery. There have been constant periphery-to-core migratory flows. According to advocates of this approach, this is because of the enduring power of the process of uneven economic and political development.

There is also a core-periphery student migratory pattern in the international higher education system, in accordance with the core-periphery model. Structural forces, such as economic and political situations, have a notable impact on educational institutions, as well as student migratory decisions (Beech 2019). In the EU, students generally move from geographically eastern countries to western countries, and hardly ever the reverse way (Horváth 2008; Grabowska 2013; Bryła 2015).

A significant reason for them to move to particular places is the attraction of a better way of life there, i.e. lifestyle migration. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) define it as the action of affluent individuals of all ages moving to new places in search of the work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints. In the European youth mobility context, lifestyle could

be the attractiveness of exciting European metropolises, featured in Favell (2008)'s book *Eurostars and Eurocities*. In the context of student migration, lifestyle refers to the pursuit of atmosphere and cultural attractions of European cities famous for their student lifestyle. According to King (2018: 9), 'Particularly for those studies which focus on London, this European and global city is seen as a place where a highly desirable young-adult lifestyle can be experienced at a particular life-stage of being young, single, individualistic, ambitious, and open to new challenges.' So this 'urban lifestyle becomes a trip or rite of passage to adulthood'. Young migrants mainly emphasise openness, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, cultural attractions, and the possibilities for them to realise their potential.

London has become the main destination city for many young migrants all over the globe. Vertovec (2007) coined the term 'super-diversity' to describe the level of complexity which Britain has experienced since the early 1990s. There is a growing diversity in country of origin, migration channel, legal status, human capital, access to employment, locality, transnationalism, and responses by locals. Vertovec's initial research was based on the formation of large African-Caribbean and South Asian communities in the UK. In turn, Favell (2008) claimed that 'London has become the key stage in the life-course trajectories of a vast number of European citizens. Its long history of immigration and asylum is second to none, something only deepened by the distinctively postcolonial multiculturalism that has developed in the post-war period.' Kershen (2016) further elaborates upon this idea of the super-diversity of London by adding 'an extensive range of employable skills, of different religions and the variation of sects' within them, and an array of languages and dialects spoken, plus 'gender and the span of migrant ages'. This multiculturalism has attracted numerous young migrants, many of them students.

Admittedly, London is attractive in many ways for international students, but it seems from the literature that multiculturalism is the foremost, if not the only, feature appreciated by international students, and has been automatically and universally appreciated by them. It is taken for granted that they make friends from all over the world and enjoy the multicultural/cosmopolitan capital of the UK. But this assumption should be treated with scepticism. How different international students perceive London and their attitudes towards multiculturalism will be closely examined in this thesis.

2.2.4 Mobility capital and neoliberalism

Mobility capital is a term heavily cited in educational mobility studies. It was first put forward by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) in her study of EU students, where she defines mobility capital as ‘a subcomponent of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2002: 51).

The author then introduces four constituent parts of mobility capital. The first is family and personal history, indicating students of mixed origin, or those whose family often welcome foreigners, live in borderlands, or have relatives living abroad. The second is previous mobility experience, usually meaning attending language courses in their teenage years or holiday travel history with family. The third is first adaptation experience as initiation, which implies the adaptation skills gained through prior internal or international migration experience. The fourth is personal features of students, including curiosity, sociability and preference for difference.

This form of capital can be interpreted in two related ways. One is ‘what makes them mobile’. The four elements of mobility capital explain why one young individual is more mobile than another, with specific focus on the family background and preceding mobility experience. Thus, it provides a useful concept in studying the motivation for student mobility. For instance, Brooks and Waters (2010) argue that mobility capital is significantly reproduced in the networks of family and friends, which generate an internalised disposition for travelling and lead to the decision to study abroad. Wiers-Jenssen (2011) indicates that compared to non-mobile students, mobile students are usually from higher-status social backgrounds, and own more mobility capital. Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021) contend that students with mobility capital are more likely to be motivated to study abroad in pursuit of an international career, and they are also more aware of the quality and prestige of overseas institutions due to earlier mobility experience. Cairns (2021) suggests that mobility capital encompasses expertise derived from parents and from one’s own overseas sojourns, such as specific knowledge and adaptation tips in given destination countries.

The other way of looking at mobility capital is to enquire ‘what transferable skills they gain after these sojourns’. Hu and Cairns (2017) add additional aspects of mobility capital, namely, gaining new lifestyles, values and predispositions. They study the return Chinese students from Norway and highlight how these elements of mobility capital assist their career advancement in the Chinese job market. This strand concentrates on the individual rather than familial aspect of mobility capital.

The concept of mobility capital is insightful in that it incorporates elements of many key migration theories discussed in Chapter 3, including human capital theory, the new economics of labour migration theory, network theories and cumulative causation. To be precise, as is discussed above, mobility capital concerns the expected returns of human capital – the career development (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Hu and Cairns 2017; Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen 2021); the impact of family and friends in migration decisions (Brooks and Waters 2010; Wiers-Jenssen 2011); and the migration culture (which Murphy-Lejeune terms the ‘travel bug’). This illustrates that the 21st-century student mobility is a phenomenon involving many aspects of migration studies, and the mobility capital theory manages to combine these diverse features. It provides a useful concept for understanding student mobility.

Nonetheless, Murphy-Lejeune’s conceptualisation of mobility capital has also been critiqued. Brooks and Waters, for example, maintain that ‘that the way it is defined by Murphy-Lejeune downplays both its socially reproductive effect and its interactions with other forms of capital’ (Brooks and Waters 2010: 154) and suggest viewing mobility capital and other Bourdieusian forms of capital alike. Carlson (2013) reckons that mobility capital alone cannot automatically lead to the decision to study abroad, and other factors such as the students’ social embeddedness also play some part.

Despite the aforementioned complements to the concept of mobility capital, I argue that these conceptualisations are still incomplete because they neglect the (changing) national identity of mobile students. Previous mobility experiences not only bring them a ‘travel bug’, but also blur their national identity, at least for some of these mobile students. Having been travelling since childhood, they sojourn here and there and gradually accept cosmopolitanism. Consequently, they do not identify themselves as nationals of certain countries, but global

citizens, who naturally and freely carry on international travels. I will define this disposition as 'migrant identity', which includes not only rich mobility capital, but also a cosmopolitan view of the world, a preference for multiculturalism and a distaste for homogeneity. Study abroad, therefore, is a natural outcome of this migrant identity. This concept can amplify the notion of mobility capital, adding the discussion of the identity formation and transformation of mobile students.

The context of the emergence of mobility capital, neoliberalism, should also be mentioned. Murphy-Lejeune studies the student mobility within the EU, which, as King (2018) theorises, benefits from the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services of EU membership. This economic approach firmly rests on the neoclassical economics and rational-choice movement of workers. The European Union, as a supranational institution, plays an important role in these migration movements, not only of labour, but of educational migrants as well. One of the most typical examples is the EU-sponsored Erasmus programme of student exchanges starting in the late 1980s. Based on this programme, highly-educated students and researchers gradually accumulated in the university cities and major capitals across Europe in the 1990s and 2000s. Some scholars called them 'the new strangers' or 'Eurostars' (Favell 2008).

Neoliberalism also has an impact on Chinese international students, but in a different way. As Xu (2022) suggests, neoliberalism prevails in western universities where public funding has been reduced and ISM plays a key role in financing higher education institutions. The inflow of Chinese students is appreciated for their economic contribution in terms of tuition fees, accommodation fees and other purchases. In addition, they are also considered as valuable human capital, and therefore are welcome and even attracted by China and receiving countries. Moreover, students themselves are portrayed in Xu's review as rational, calculating individualists, who actively navigate their migratory routes, adjust to sociocultural conditions in the local environment, and aim for the social upward mobility.

It can be expected that Polish students, who are (or were) mobile within the EU context, possess mobility capital, while Chinese students' situation remains unclear. This thesis will investigate the possession of mobility capital in the two groups.

2.3 Conclusion and the standpoint of this study

This chapter examines the key features of contemporary ISM research and some key theories and critical literature reviews on ISM in Europe and China. It presents some major disciplines, terms, theoretical frameworks and popular trends with regard to ISM studies. Also, it allows us to perceive the study of European student mobility and Chinese ISM in a comparative framework, thus gaining some insights and indicating some research gaps.

First of all, it can be seen that ISM studies are centred within migration studies and education, and the major involved disciplines are sociology, geography and education. This thesis applies the sociological perspective through the lens of migration studies. Therefore, temporalities, life course, significance of place and mobility capital are examined. Moreover, literature on youth mobilities is highly relevant to ISM and is simultaneously discussed, including the phenomena of liquid migration, youth transition, lifestyle migration and neoliberal migration. All of these concepts are useful in this thesis.

When the discussion clarifies the various research fields and important theories in ISM studies, this thesis has its standpoint from a sociological perspective. It aims to probe into the motivation and integration process of Polish and Chinese student migrants in London. Positioning itself in migration studies, this study will review migration theories with regard to motivation and integration in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 Migration literature review: motivations, integration and identity

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of theories and literature about migration, and their links to ISM. Section 3.2 introduces the major migration theories and points out their relationship with motivation for ISM to migrate. It also presents the empirical findings of motivation in ISM literature, with main focus on Polish and Chinese international students.

Section 3.3 discusses the process of integration. It begins with the concept of integration of immigrants and integration as a two-way process, then discusses Berry's acculturation model. Section 3.3.2 indicates different domains of integration suggested by Ager and Strang. It is followed by section 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 summarising key strands of literature about academic and social integration of Polish and Chinese student migrants. The sections narrow the research focus, both ethnically and geographically, to present detail about these two particular groups.

The third part, section 3.4, introduces some identity theories, including concepts of national identity; the 'everyday nationhood' approach; and social identity theory. Their relationship with integration is also discussed. Finally, section 3.5 offers a brief discussion of theories and literature presented in this chapter.

3.2 Motivations for migration

3.2.1 Migration theories

Migration theories began to be developed in the nineteenth century. One of the earliest and most famous theories is Ravenstein's 'Laws of Migration' (1885) based on empirical data. It was a collection of empirical regularities rather than a complete migration theory. Later, especially in the twentieth century, the research field of migration gradually became

multifaceted, and produced different levels of analysis from macro to micro (Massey et al. 1993; Kurekova 2011). In this section, I will briefly introduce some key migration theories which are relevant to international student migration.

3.2.1.1 Neoclassical migration theory: macro and micro framework

The macro-level version of this theory is the earliest and best-known framework developed to explain labour migration, which was seen as a result of geographical differences in the supply and demand for labour. As discussed by Massey et al. (1993: 433), this theory, developed in the works of Lewis (1954), Ranis and Fei (1961), Todaro (1969), and Harris and Todaro (1970), indicates that international migration is caused by the wage differential between countries and labour markets, and the bulk of labour migration moves from capital-poor/labour force-rich countries to capital-rich/labour force-poor countries, while capital moves in the opposite direction. Labour migration will stop when wage equalisation occurs. What is more, high-skilled workers migrate from capital-rich to capital-poor countries to reap higher returns on their skills, which makes a distinct pattern of migration opposite to that of unskilled workers. Labour markets are the main mechanisms that influence international migration, while other markets have little impact. Therefore, governments can regulate migration through labour market policies.

The neoclassical migration theory can be transferred to the micro-level model of individual choice and has been termed the human capital approach, which is quite relevant to student migration. First introduced by Sjaastad (1962), then furthered by Todaro (1969), Harris and Todaro (1970), human capital theory indicates that individual actors move after doing a rational cost-benefit calculation, when the values of expected returns to individual human capital (probability of employment and expected earnings) are bigger in the receiving than in the home country (Danzer and Dietz 2008: 5). In this context, international migration is perceived as an investment in human capital. According to this theory, the probability of a person migrating is affected by wage differentials and individual features which determine employment and wages, as well as social conditions which lower the costs of migration. Bauer and Zimmermann (1999: 15) add that the likelihood of migration drops with age and rises with educational level. Migration is going to occur until expected earnings have been

equalised internationally. This model predicts that young and educated people migrate in the first phase.

Related to the neoclassical theory is the push-pull framework formulated first on an individual level by Lee (1966). In this approach, relational positive and negative factors in sending and receiving countries push and pull people towards (non)migration. Bauer and Zimmermann (1999) apply this model to emphasise the economic context of the flow of workers. However, as De Haas (2010) indicates, because this framework is barely a theory, but a mirror-imaged set of factors affecting migration, it has been criticised for its inability to determine dominant factors and distinguish the exact causal mechanisms.

While the macro-level of neoclassical migration theory has been often dismissed as dated, the micro-level still sheds light on ISM studies. Study abroad can be a decision after a rational cost-benefit calculation, when the desire for human capital outweighs the costs. Push-pull factors may also apply when there are gaps in perceived quality between domestic and overseas education.

3.2.1.2 New Economics of Labour Migration

The new economics of labour migration theory, challenging some assumptions of the neoclassical migration theories, views migration as a decision made collectively by families or households to maximise income and employment opportunities and to minimise risks (Stark and Bloom 1985). Instead of a whole family, only one or a few pioneer members set off, and send back remittances for the stayers (Taylor 1999). International migration may occur alongside increases in local employment and production, and does not necessarily stop when wage differentials have gone because revenue from migration may verify the benefits of such an act and help overcome the constraints of migration (Massey et al. 1993: 439).

As discussed by Massey et al. (1993: 438), Stark also introduces in this theory the notion of relative deprivation: migration can alter income distribution within a community and thus spur more migration from it. In this context, income includes both absolute and relative

income. The latter might refer to social status, with comparison to a reference group such as the local community, village, town, etc.

New economics of labour migration may give us insights into the decision-making process of ISM, especially when studying abroad is often a decision of the whole family, and successful return will spur other members to follow pace.

What has been presented above are mainly about why people migrate and their decision-making process. The concepts discussed in the next section introduce another important theme – the perpetuation of migration. There are a few theories grouped within this domain, but they are not mutually exclusive.

3.2.1.3 Network theories

As discussed by Hugo (1981), this theory focuses on the interpersonal ties among migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas in terms of kinship, friendship and shared community origin. Such networks ease the international movement because they lower the costs and risks of migration, as the pioneer migrants have established reliable channels, thus making migration a self-sustaining process. This theory helps to explain why migratory flow continues when wage differentials or recruitment policies have vanished. The institutionalisation of networks will perpetuate migration and makes it independent of the factors that initially triggers it. Migrant networks become a form of location-specific social capital that people draw upon to gain access to foreign resources. Therefore, social capital is the third factor affecting people's migration capability and motivation, besides financial and human capital.

A concept related to network theory is 'migration industry' (some scholars use the term 'institutional theory'), which includes a wide range of people and institutions who have an interest in migration or make profits by organizing migratory movements. Such people might be 'travel agents, labour recruiters, brokers, interpreters, housing agents, immigration lawyers, human smugglers, and even counterfeiters who falsify official identification documents and passports' (Castles 2004). Banking institutions have been actively involved in

this industry, providing special transfer facilities or loans for migrants. Agents and brokers play a key role in some migratory process, as few migrants would manage to migrate without their information or contacts. Migrant networks and the existence of a 'migration industry' combined together have made migration difficult to control for governments (Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014).

In terms of international student migration, the role of networks and agents could be pivotal in the decision-making process. Alumni recommendation and institutional advertisement are significant information sources for potential student migrants when choosing destinations (Collins 2012). Educational agreements between states create a pathway for student migration to be perpetuated. Overseas-study service agencies offer professional advice and largely simplify the application process for applicants. Nevertheless, these services make it difficult for the academics to assess the real capability of their applicants as they help their customers write many required documents. However, because it is so convenient, many applicants persist in using agencies, although discouraged by many higher education institutions.

3.2.1.4 Cumulative causation

This theory, put forth by Myrdal (1957) and further developed by Massey et al. (1993), argues that migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, and usually facilitates the following migratory process. Networks expand, a culture of migration emerges, and sometimes it means staying home is considered as a failure (Arango 2000). In response to human capital theory which has been mentioned before, relatively well-educated, skilled, productive, and highly motivated people are drawn away from sending societies and accumulate in receiving societies. Such a pattern then reinforces the economic growth in destination areas and worsens the depletion in sending areas, thereby enhancing the conditions for migration. This has been particularly true in the case of student migration. Some parts of the country, or the middle class in some countries, possess a culture of sending children to study abroad. According to Massey, improving educational levels in sending areas

is likely to reinforce cumulative migration, as it increases the potential returns to migration and spurs future migration.

3.2.1.5 Migration systems theory

Pioneered by Mabogunje (1970), this theory focuses on geographical distribution. It is argued that within social, cultural, economic and institutional exchanges between countries, one form of exchange tends to engender other forms of exchange, in both directions (De Haas 2009). Migration results from previous links between sending and receiving countries, such as colonisation, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties. There are a set of dispersed core receiving countries, and a set of overlapping sending nations. Social, economic and political changes are all possible to cause countries to enter or exit a system. This system includes many state-led student exchange programmes in the twentieth century, such as the student exchanges in the communist bloc, or agreements between western countries (like the USA) and Asian countries.

The formation and maintenance of this West-centric system is analysed and critiqued by many ISM scholars. Beech (2019: 122) suggests the reason why it was created:

The reasons for these preferences are likely a result of the hegemony of an Anglo-American higher education experience and an academic imperialism which continues to exist today. These discourses are reinforced by media and advertising, which create a dominant “West is Best” attitude amongst international students in terms of their higher education and their economic prospects.

Under such circumstances, the UK seems to remain invincible in this global competition. It is highly likely that the global higher education hierarchy will retain and enlarge with the passage of time (Findlay et al. 2012), though perhaps fluctuates in volume of ISM numbers (Choudaha 2017). The consistent direction of migratory flows reproduces and reinforces the global inequalities, and international students need to know that they play some part in it (Xu 2021).

3.2.2 Motivation of ISM

The motivation for studying abroad has been a typical research subject for scholars focusing on ISM. Abundant literature of Polish and Chinese student migration introduces their motivations for choosing foreign universities or colleges. Interestingly, some overlaps can be observed between these two literatures.

First of all, the seminal article of Findlay et al. (2012) highlights the pursuit of a 'world-class' education for ISM. Acknowledging institutional prestige as social construction, the authors pinpoint that the widening global university differentiation has attracted most elite international students, and thereby strengthening the higher education hierarchy worldwide. But the measuring of this 'world-class' education can be different. Rankings or elite lists such as the Ivy League or Russel Group, are clearly the most important variable for many students to evaluate the quality of universities (Findlay et al. 2012; Beech 2019). However, they are not universally used by all student migrants. Some highlight their preference for the education in specific receiving countries, for their advanced education system (Ye 2018), long history and tradition (Beech 2019), and the fame of a country (Rahimi and Akgunduz (2017), although the fame might be constructed and reinforced by advertisements and media (James-MacEachern and Yun (2017), Beech 2019). The significance of place has been reviewed in section 2.2.3 and hence is not repeated here.

Besides institutional prestige, selecting particular courses can also matter for international students. Tourism and hospitality programme in the UK, for example, is treasured by Polish students for the sake of UK's remarkable reputation in education and its benefits of being a member of the EU. Candidates have high expectations for the course, see a promising financial future, and are encouraged by friends and family (Rahimi and Akgunduz (2017).

Other instrumental factors such as affordability and supply and demand in ISMs' home countries are also at play. Universities with lower tuition fees and more scholarships are favoured by rational individual students (Wu and Myhill 2017). Places with less living costs are also under consideration (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007; Beech 2019). In addition, push and pull factors should not be ignored. Polish and Chinese students migrate to countries with a

good reputation for tertiary education, which their home countries lack. Andrejuk (2013) highlights the disappointment with education in Poland as the push factor for many Polish students to migrate. Similarly, Chao et al. (2017) indicate that Chinese students seek a prestigious international education and want to stay away from the Chinese system of learning.

The most significant instrumental factor, however, is perhaps the assistance of overseas education to the future career prospects, because 'international student migration was seen to be about symbolic capital. One of the uses of this symbolic capital was to represent international study as a distinguishing identity marker' (Findlay et al. 2012: 128) which adds useful credentials in their career trajectories (Huang 2013). It is found that students with foreign credentials are much more likely than those with domestic credentials to be employed in large Chinese cities (Zhai and Moskal 2022). Outside mainland China, Li and Bray (2007) show that Chinese students in Macau and Hong Kong regard the two cities as stepping-stones for their global development after graduation. Besides career development, overseas education is also believed to ease or change the current career path of student migrants (Ye 2018).

Other than the symbolic capital, the possession of good English skills is highly valued as well (Beech 2019). Polish students in Rahimi and Akgunduz (2017)'s sample choose degree programmes in the UK in favour of the chance to enhance their English skills. Counsell (2011) demonstrates that Chinese students migrated to the UK in pursuit of a better-quality higher education and to develop their language skills. As British degrees are more valued than Chinese degrees in the Chinese job market, many preferred to live and work abroad for a few years.

Nevertheless, we should not assume that international students are a group of ruthless benefit-and-cost calculators who know only about box-ticking. In addition to aforementioned practical concerns, their motivations also include desirable lifestyle and experiences. Young people's desire for new life experiences prevail in the case of both Polish and Chinese ISM. Milewski and Ruszczak-Żbikowska (2008) show that Polish students in Ireland and the UK attribute their migration decision to curiosity about the world, possibilities to promote their

language competence, and willingness to gain new experiences. Yang, Volet, and Mansfield (2018) also find that Chinese doctoral students in Australian universities prioritise the need for self-development and fruitful life experiences when speaking about their motivations. Ye (2018) interprets Chinese PhD students' migration motivations as being connected to various individual lifestyle choices and life planning. Some preferred to see the world, while others wanted the challenge of studying in a completely new and foreign environment.

At last, previous mobility experience can also motivate students to move internationally. Andrejuk (2013) argue that Polish students' migration decisions benefit from their parents' mobility strategy and their own previous migration experiences. The majority of Polish students in her sample in London came from intelligentsia families where one or both parents had study abroad experience. The parents thus knew the benefits this decision would have in terms of both education and life, and started to prepare for it when their children were teenagers. The students' previous migration experiences were also relevant, such as attendance at foreign secondary schools, student exchange programmes at other European colleges, and completion of previous degree studies abroad. Such experiences provided them with substantial adaptation ability and intercultural competence. She also studied Polish economic migrants who joined British universities as students. She argues that these students, usually those with the widest social networks among Polish economic migrants after the year 2004, invest in education in order to advance from their subordinate sector of the job market. They are often graduates of humanities degrees in Polish universities, whose diploma is not well valued by the British employers, and thus they have to obtain a British degree to compete in the local job market. According to Andrejuk, Polish students in London also take various paid jobs during their studies. Some may occupy typical low-paid migrant jobs with limited promotion possibilities, while others may have access to top class jobs, usually internship opportunities offered only to university students, which they use to bolster their CVs. Nevertheless, the reality is much more dynamic. Students do not merely follow this one-way track, but elastically find employment and get employed in primary and secondary sectors of the labour market, with goals varying from purely earning money to building career paths.

To conclude, these sources suggest that Polish and Chinese students shared very similar motivations for migrating to the UK, such as the search for good quality education, the

improvement of English skills and encouraging career prospects. A stark contrast between these two are that the Chinese ISM put more focus on their home job market, while Polish students kept their minds open to different possibilities and were thus more flexible.

3.3 Integration

Apart from migration motivation, the issue of integration has also been heatedly discussed in migration studies. Integration models vary in different countries despite structural similarities. National integration policies have been highly politicised and, as Anghel (2012: 321) argues, 'implicitly combine (a) a vision of the nation based on a certain political philosophy and (b) policies and practices related to migrants' integration'.

The concept of integration is much contested. Favell (1998: 3) sees integration as 'progressive-minded, tolerant and inclusive approaches to dealing with ethnic minorities'. He traces the term back to the Chicago School which applied the concept of integration to ethnicity studies. According to this school of thought, integration is a process through which people pass to assimilation. The receiving society also plays an important role in this process, partly because it can have a negative influence on the migrants if they experience intolerance and xenophobia. It may also play active roles in integrating immigrants by offering them equal rights and engagement opportunities. This interaction is termed 'migration as a two-way process' and agreed to be important by many researchers (Castles et al. 2002; Carrera and Atger 2011). It was a key element in a press release by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union in the year of 2004. Eleven common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the EU were presented, the first one being that 'Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States' (Council of European Union 2004: 16). They further explained that integration is not a static outcome, but a long-term process which involves both immigrants and the members of the receiving societies. On the one hand, immigrants should adapt to their new country of residence. On the other hand, the receiving society should also create necessary opportunities for the immigrants' full economic, social, cultural, and political participation. Klarenbeek (2019) groups the different understandings of two-way integration into three categories: a) Receiving societies are affected by the integration of immigrants; b) receiving

societies can influence the integration of immigrants; and c) receiving societies and immigrants integrate with each other.

Integration can be different for different kinds of migrant. For student migration, for instance, integration can be 'processes involving students' effective communication and interaction with a broad range of groups and individuals in the receiving country, both on campus and in the wider community' (Thogersen and Wu 2016: 4). For refugees, however, some scholars consider integration as 'a process that begins with arrival and ends when refugees are in an equal position to the majority' (Phillimore and Goodson 2008). Berry (1997) perceives integration as one possible acculturation strategy adopted by migrants. I will briefly introduce his concept below.

3.3.1 Berry: acculturation strategies

Adopting a social psychology perspective, Berry puts forward four possible acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation. Assimilation occurs when migrants are not interested in maintaining their own cultural identity, but seek daily interaction with other cultures instead. Separation is defined as a process when individuals value their own original culture and try not to interact with others. Integration happens when migrants are willing to maintain their cultural identity and interact with other groups at the same time. Marginalisation comes when people have little contact with others and little desire to maintain their own cultural identity. Berry emphasises that integration can only be fully and freely achieved when mutual accommodation is possible in the receiving society. That requires migrants to adopt the basic values of the larger society, and national institutions to prepare to meet the needs of all groups living in the plural society.

Berry's model is important in my research in that it provides a conceptual framework for understanding the integration of ISM. It helps us to imagine an integration spectrum, with assimilation being at one end and separation located at the other. Polish and Chinese students' integration was tested according to this acculturation model to help understand their general positions along the integration spectrum. However, a more specific research framework was

needed to produce concrete interview questions to examine different aspects of their integration. We need to elaborate different domains of migrant integration.

3.3.2 Ager and Strang: different domains of migrant integration

Ager and Strang (2008) highlight four different domains of migrant integration, which is conducive to identifying particular areas which interviewees feel they are becoming/have become integrated, or not. The first domain is 'markers and means' of integration, namely employment, housing, education and health. Achievement in these areas are seen as markers of integration, and they also serve as means to facilitate integration. The second domain is citizenship and rights. The authors consider this part as the foundation of integration, because they are crucial in understanding the principles and practice of integration in given societies. The notions of nationhood in a country shape the concept of integration, and articulating the rights of migrants defines the foundation of integration policy. The third domain is the social connections, which consist of social bonds, social bridges and social links. They play fundamental roles in driving the process of integration at the local level. Social bonds (with family and migrants with similar ethnic, national or religious background) enable migrants to have shared cultural practices and health benefits. Social bridges (with other communities) bring about a sense of harmony and participation in the receiving societies. The feeling of friendliness and being recognised leads to positive judgements of life quality by migrants, while deeper involvement with local people suggests long-term benefits to an integrated community. Social links (with the structures of the state) mean connections between individuals and government services they need, which is a major task in supporting integration. The fourth domain, as defined by the authors, is facilitators of integration. They include two aspects: language and cultural knowledge, as well as safety and stability. Only with these can migrants remove the barriers to social interaction, economic integration and full participation. Also, broader cultural knowledge possessed by migrants positively links to the achievement of integration. As part of the two-way process, the receiving society's knowledge of the culture of migrants is helpful, too. Safety, pointed out by the authors, is the prerequisite for migrants to feel at home and integrated. Frequent relocation of migrants may undermine the sense of community, thus the stability of members supports communities to integrate.

The findings of this article are very important in my research, as these indicators of integration helped me to shape my understanding and interview questions about students' integration, especially with regard to social connections and integration facilitators. For example, I incorporated questions pertaining to ISMs' housing, friendship circles, language proficiency and feeling of safety into the interview guide after reading this article.

I have reviewed some integration theories above, but an empirical literature review of Polish and Chinese student migrants' integration is also necessary, to gain a broader understanding of previous research findings. Thogersen and Wu (2016: 4) define student integration as 'processes involving students' effective communication and interaction with a broad range of groups and individuals in the receiving country, both on campus and in the wider community.' This definition has outlined two key domains: academic and social integration. We begin with reviewing academic integration.

3.3.3 Academic integration of Polish and Chinese ISM

Academic challenges have been one of the key topics in ISM studies (Wells 2014; Gumus, Gok, and Esen 2020). Some argue that academic integration can have a more significant impact on satisfaction compared to social integration (Merola, Coelen, and Hofman 2019). Due to the varying education systems, teaching methods and languages, conventions, cultural and social norms in different countries and regions, many international students may suffer from language barriers, knowledge gaps, pedagogical differences, and cultural differences (Li 2017), and have to spend some time getting used to the new systems and requirements.

The foremost challenge refers to pedagogical differences. Li (2019) presents a few challenges for Chinese students in Germany and Finland, such as getting used to the learning requirements in receiving institutions, and a pedagogical approach and curriculum design different from their home country. The author argues that traditional Chinese learning techniques, including reciting and memorizing knowledge, are instrumental for Chinese students in coping with these challenges. However, in some cases traditional thinking in home countries seems to be in contrast to the situation. Moskal (2016) shows that Polish pupils and

parents may misunderstand the way the UK educational system works, thus considering the local system to be 'easier' than its Polish counterpart. Tian and Lowe (2013) argue that the feedback system in the UK was ineffective because the new self-evaluation criteria for academic achievement goes against what they were used to in China and presents a threat to their self-esteem. Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) claim that the desire to adjust to American culture creates a dilemma for Chinese students, as they may feel they are becoming less 'Chinese' when trying to escape from the stereotyping of American domestic students for often being reticent and isolated from other ethnic groups. But some other students, suggested by Heng (2018b), do well in shifting their attitudes and behaviour over time in response to challenges such as finding a balance between work and play, understanding new classroom expectations and sociocultural contexts, thinking like a 'Westerner', and learning new language skills and communication styles.

Another key problem for ISM is the language barrier. Kapela (2014) points out that Polish students abroad suffering from loneliness are often characterised by poor foreign language proficiency, and the further they are from Poland and Polish culture, the worse the situation is. Moskal (2016) shows that Polish pupils and parents in Scotland suffer from language barriers. Sometimes language stands out as the key problem making pupils feel rejected by their local peers, and sometimes their other skills and potentials are underestimated by teachers. Their parents may have trouble communicating with schools due to the language barrier. Yu and Moskal (2019) demonstrate that Chinese ISMs in the UK are suffering from language barriers, limited knowledge of the UK educational system and limited (to co-nationals only) friendship circles as a result of the Chinese-dominant ISM population.

With regard to co-national network, there seem to be contrasting views in academic integration literature. Mikal, Yang, and Lewis (2015) demonstrate that online media are a valuable information resource for Chinese students in the USA, but also set up a space confined to co-nationals, thereby discouraging social and academic integration. (Li and Pitkanen 2018), however, show that co-national networks and transnational ties are influential facilitators for students' academic and social integration. Zhou, Topping, and Jindal-Snape (2011) also suggest that Chinese students who come to the UK in groups will adapt more efficiently and effectively to the fresh learning environment than those who come

individually, as they can support and help each other. Nevertheless, this could lead to an unrecognised negative result, in that their British tutors may not be fully aware of what their real problems are.

Cultural difference is another influential factor for ISM in academics. Gu and Maley (2008) highlight how Confucian convention leads to respect for teachers and high learner motivation among Chinese students. Wang (2012) puts emphasis on the positive influence of group work on Chinese students in the UK. He argues that this process of intercultural learning is able to develop their communication skills, modes of thinking and perceiving, and that the effect will be maximised in a supportive environment with encouragement from tutors and interaction with other cultures. Wang, Harding, and Mai (2012) indicate that Chinese students in the UK changed different extents with regard to ideology, discourse and conventions about 'losing face' through face-to-face discussion with students from other cultural backgrounds during group assignments. They argue that is 'the first step in the students' life towards becoming independent, creative, open-minded, culturally competent and confident' (Wang, Harding, and Mai 2012: 637).

Some literature discusses the process of ISMs' academic integration. Quan, He, and Sloan (2016) put forward a four-phase model about the transition and adaptation of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK, which is as follows: 1) overconfidence before departure (pre-arrival); 2) stress of academic conventions (role of observer); 3) engagement and adaptation (role of fighter); 4) gaining academic competence (role of competitor). Pre-departure preparation for the new learning system is considered as a key factor for the rapid and efficient adaptation. Ye (2018) depicts the students' personal development and transformation experiences, and divides them into four themes, which are: cultural awareness and heightened reflexivity; independence; authenticity; perceived self-development and transformation. She argues that in this process, many Chinese PhD students have developed skills of self-reflexivity and self-exploration, and started to integrate into the local culture.

Andrejuk (2013), as well as Łuczak (2017), highlight the significance of university student societies for Polish students to establish contact with each other. Polish student societies are

very active in many cases, and they can have high levels of membership. Andrejuk (2013) discussed three kinds of activities organised by these societies: 1) integration events such as Christmas parties and Facebook group meetups; 2) meeting with famous Poles working in London, usually offering internship opportunities; 3) Polish culture promotion events. From these events, Polish students are able to build networks in addition to their academic studies, all of which could be helpful in their career development. It is interesting to see that there is a lack of research on Chinese students' participation in student societies, which is worth studying.

Academic achievement is also under constant discussion. Iannelli and Huang (2014) demonstrate that Chinese students on undergraduate degree programmes constantly registered poorer academic achievement than other international students. They provide two possible explanations: 1) the rise of Chinese ISM in numbers has resulted in increasing diversity in students' skills and ambition in the British higher education system; 2) under the Chinese educational system, students care less about degree classifications, since they will all get the same bachelor degree as long as they score 60+ and pass the exams. In addition, good grades achieved abroad are not simply transferable into the Chinese education system. Crawford and Wang (2015a) studied the impact of placements in the third academic year on academic performance and found that the higher the academic achievements of Chinese students prior to the third year, the more inclined they were to undertake placements. Also, the possibility of obtaining good degrees was seven times higher for Chinese students who undertook placements when compared to those who did not. In another study, Crawford and Wang (2015b) claim that Chinese ISM in the UK have a huge drop in academic performance from the first year to the second, and the gaps between them and UK students expand as time goes by. Polish students, however, do not seem to have such troubles. Andrejuk (2013) also shows what Polish students particularly appreciated about the British higher education system. The first is the remarkable infrastructural facilities which offer students abundant sources of information, computer programmes and research tools. The second is the function of its education system, in particular the development of students' logical abilities, critical thinking, and creative exercises, instead of passively remembering large quantities of information. Another benefit, beyond education, is Polish students' access to the dynamic European job market.

We can see that both Polish and Chinese students need to adapt to new environments when they arrive in the UK, but the problems of Chinese ISM have attracted much more scientific attention than their Polish peers. This is perhaps because scholars consider Polish students under the European education system should not have problems adapting to the English academic system, while the Chinese students, coming from a distinct academic background, need to somehow get used to a new educational environment. Moreover, in order to attract more Chinese students as an enormous financial resource, universities would like to help them succeed in the UK, and there is funding for relevant research.

However, we should not downplay academic challenges faced by Polish students. They are much fewer than Chinese ISM in the UK, and therefore perhaps receive relatively less research focus. Many empirical findings can be tested between Polish and Chinese student migrants, such as the function of co-national network and student societies, and the impact of a collective national identity on academic integration.

3.3.4 Social integration of Polish and Chinese ISM

Language and cultural knowledge are considered the key facilitator of integration in Ager and Strang's (2008) integration domains, so is it important for ISM, because 'language is an important instrument of integration' (Glorius and Friedrich 2006: 174). Some Polish students in Leipzig prefer to speak Polish rather than German due to their limited German language skills (Glorius and Friedrich 2006). Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, however, have to speak English more often than local students in social circumstances in order to be better included into the university community (Gardner and Lau 2019).

Cultural integration is also highlighted in many ISM studies as gains from migration. International mobility creates new spaces for students to move away from their familiar environment and to observe the diverse world. In the case of Poland, as shown by Zygierewicz (2014), students with overseas experience, compared to their peers in the homeland, tend to have a few strengths, such as having gained new experience, knowing another language, understanding another culture, becoming more tolerant and open to other cultures,

developing independence, building firm friendships and improving employability, etc. This argument is later confirmed by a study conducted by Bryła (2015). The author claims that the Polish Erasmus participants listed the benefits as such: having a more European identity, enhancing their intercultural understanding, making international friends, becoming more confident, independent, mobile, and improving their foreign language skills. This accords with the findings of Mitchell (2012), discussed earlier in this review, that in general Erasmus participants do gain an enhanced sense of European identity. The achievements of the Erasmus Programme are also highlighted by Botas and Huisman (2013), but from the perspective of the Erasmus organisers. The programme's coordinators, administrators and officers in Polish higher education institutions and ministries were interviewed and they claimed similar benefits: the experience of taking part in the Erasmus Programme can facilitate students' academic performance, social, cultural and linguistic capital, which backs up the arguments about ISM cultural capital made in Findlay et al. (2012) and Waters (2006), already discussed in this review.

Similar findings are presented in the case of Chinese international students. Mok et al. (2018) demonstrate that Chinese international students value their study experiences in that they gain hard knowledge, soft skills and cross-cultural comprehension. They also believe such experiences can facilitate their future career growth, which is in line with Zygierevicz (2014)'s findings that Polish students highlight improving employability thanks to overseas study experience. With regard to national identity, unlike their Polish peers who feel more European (Bryła 2015), Chinese students seem to feel more 'Chinese' after staying abroad for a certain period of time. This is argued by Maeder-Qian (2018), who found that the majority of Chinese interviewees in her sample felt they had strengthened their principal Chinese identity regardless of the various extents of interculturality within their experiences. Their cultural identity reconstruction, according to the author, is affected by the combination of their perceived cultural differences, the observed attitudes of the receiving society, and their multilingual competences which derive from their family background when growing up. This identity contrast between Polish and Chinese students needs our major attention.

By and large, from the literature we can find students from both countries highlight their improved understanding of, and being more open to different cultures, as a result of

immersion in a new environment. Improving employability is also a key element shared by both nationalities in the context of student migration experience, which helps their career development nationally or internationally. However, Polish students highly value the gaining of confidence and foreign language competence, while the Chinese students appreciate the gaining of knowledge in class. This is probably because confidence and language competence are linked to each other, thus mutually helping each other to develop, in the case of Polish students, while the Chinese students suffer from language problems more frequently, and are better at other types of academic achievement, so they focus more on formal knowledge gained in class.

Cultural knowledge of the receiving society also refers to the local values. After staying abroad for some time, some students, especially women students, have changed their attitudes towards gender roles. They shift their conservative attitudes towards a more open approach. Siara (2013) carried out interviews with 30 Polish women in the UK, and indicated that among these interviewees, students were most often fluent in English and able to socialise with local people, thereby having access to the British gender culture. They found that British women had stronger positions and more choice with regard to gender roles in the UK than in Poland. Women in the UK were seen to possess more freedom when deciding their lives, whereas their Polish counterparts were immersed in specific gender expectations in the relatively conservative Poland. The author commented that Polish women favoured what they saw of gender roles in the UK more than Polish men.

For their part, Chinese students in the UK are going through challenges to their beliefs, identity and ideology. Li (2012) perceives the wider social contact with local volunteer groups, which mainly consisted of Christians in this study, as an effective method to enrich Chinese ISMs' cultural and linguistic experiences, but their values, religious beliefs and identities would be affected as well. The author categorises the students, according to their responses, into believers, doubters, empathizers and commentators. Wang, Harding, and Mai (2012) indicate that Chinese students in the UK changed different extents with regard to ideology, discourse and conventions about 'losing face' through face-to-face discussion with students from other cultural backgrounds during group assignments. They argue that is 'the first step in the students' life towards becoming independent, creative, open-minded, culturally

competent and confident' (Wang, Harding, and Mai 2012: 637). Wilson (2016) tracks the political views of Chinese overseas students in Scotland over time and finds out that there is little change within them, even when they return to China.

The discussion suggests that both Polish and Chinese students undergo a shift in outlooks after migration to the UK. The multicultural environment triggers a change in the way students perceive themselves. According to this literature, Chinese students are influenced on a more fundamental level, experiencing changes to value and beliefs, while the main impact for Polish students is that they tend to become more liberal and less conservative.

Ager and Strang (2008) also emphasise the social connections of migrants, which are examined in ISM literature as well. Integration into the local community of the student's own nationality is discussed in the literature, but Polish and Chinese students show a different preference. Since the UK attracted large numbers of economic migrants from Poland after 2004, Polish students have more potential chances to meet Polish labour migrants in that country. However, as indicated by Łuczak (2017), students' attitudes towards Polish workers vary widely, ranging from those who distance themselves from all other Poles, to those who distance themselves from economic migrants and connect only to certain groups of Polish migrants, and those who meet compatriots naturally, without distinguishing their migration purposes. The reluctance to get in touch with other Poles results from 1) a desire to prove independence and individualisation; 2) lack of necessity due to the temporality of stay and constant communication with friends and relatives in Poland; and 3) a wish to make local and other international friends. Łuczak asserts that Polish students and migrant workers are from two different social worlds, and do not understand each other. Kusek (2015)'s findings back this claim. He focuses on members of Polish elites in London, some of whom are students, with global aspirations. The author maintains that in order to match global elite standard, sometimes they deliberately highlight that they personally represent the opposite of the stereotype of Polish labour migrants to the UK, which results in divides within the Polish migrant population.

Andrejuk conducted a few key studies on this topic. She finds that Polish students, compared to Polish migrant workers, possess better language skills, and thus feel more empowered to

mingle with people from different backgrounds (Andrejuk 2011b). She continues by arguing that Polish students on a one-year master's programme are more inclined to have frequent and deeper communication with labour migrants in the UK than long-term students due to common accommodation, the same circle of close friends, etc. (Andrejuk 2011b). Andrejuk (2013) also claims that there is a gap between Polish students and economic migrants in London, as educational migrants possess much higher cultural competence and professional qualifications, thus contributing to the alienation of Polish students from Polish workers. She suggests that two reasons for this growing separation of students from other migrants are: 1) the growing size of the diaspora and the clearer stratification within its structure; 2) the higher competence of students, enabling them to form wider contacts beyond their own ethnic group.

On the other hand, due to the dispersal of the Chinese diaspora around the world, Chinatowns can be found in many big cities all over the globe. This has raised researchers' curiosity about connections between Chinese migrant communities and Chinese international students. Wu (2016) examines the social networking and local participation of Chinese students in Nottingham and concludes that thanks to the rise of Chinese student numbers, local Chinese communities around the city have grown both in quantity and diversity. There are links among students' employment experience, plans for future career, presence in local migrant communities and social networking. Su (2013) demonstrates that doing voluntary service in local communities or part-time jobs in Chinese restaurants helps them to familiarise themselves with employment in a multicultural environment and get ready to work in the UK after graduation. Similar findings are presented in the Australian context, where Gao (2016) explores the Chinese ISMs' interaction with local Chinese communities and show their endeavours to enter the local job market.

Based on the evidence above we can see that both Polish and Chinese students in the UK have contact with local migrants of the same country of origin. Polish students have to define their attitudes towards labour migrants from Poland, and their attitudes to them are varied. They aim for an international career and therefore have little interest in contacting co-national labour migrants. On the other hand, literature suggests the relationships between Chinese students and local Chinese communities are reciprocal in the sense that they mutually helping

each other. In these cases, the increase of students helped nearby local communities to prosper, and the communities in turn offered work opportunities for students to develop their abilities.

Their attitudes are linked to their future plans. Łuczak (2016) explores Polish educational mobility in the UK and concludes that for Polish students, educational mobility is a turning point in their lives as they go through a shift in the way they see themselves, which makes them decide to stay mobile, settle down abroad or return home. However, the decision about mobility is only temporary. Andrejuk (2013) investigates the students' strategies after graduation and categorises them into a European strategy and a national strategy. In her study, a European strategy was applied by most of the Polish students, who tended to continue the migration process and search for jobs in the UK or other European countries. These people usually possessed a cosmopolitan orientation. Many of them were from dual-national or dual-linguistic families, had been brought up not only in Poland but also in other (often European) countries, and were willing to experience different cultures, traditions and languages. They are labelled by the author 'European natives'. The national strategy, on the other hand, was found among a relatively smaller group of Polish students, who still focused on their home country and planned to return as soon as they graduated or after working in the receiving country for a few years. These students often had strong family ties or had partners waiting for them in Poland, and thus following intensive courses in London, usually in one-year master's programmes, they soon returned to Poland. This group is labelled 'educational tourists'.

Ye (2018), on the other hand, describes the Chinese doctoral students' imagined future trajectories. Her findings suggested that many of them wished to return to China and find a job in Chinese academia. Some planned to start their own business with knowledge and capital they gained in the UK. There were small numbers of students who were not sure about the future but struggling in their current studies or to make their decisions about the future. In conclusion, Ye (2018: 221) argued that 'most of them are self-determined and future-oriented agents whose imagined future trajectory is shaped by the goal of self-realisation'.

In addition, information sources are discussed in literature as a variable of ISMs' integration. In terms of national media use, Glorius and Friedrich (2006) show that among Polish migrants in Germany, students favour local German media and entertainment programmes more than other kinds of migrant. Pang (2018) discusses how Chinese students in Germany utilise WeChat, a prominent Chinese smartphone application, for communication, to improve their bridging and bonding ties, and to maintain stocks of social capital, as well as enhancing their well-being. We can see a contrast of using local/national media between Polish and Chinese students, and I will investigate this trend in this thesis.

3.4 Identity theories

I have argued that the application of Berry's acculturation strategies is a helpful tool of analysis. However, his term 'cultural identity' is problematic for my research. Participants in my sample used the term 'national identity' rather than 'cultural identity'. Literature suggests that in some circumstances the two terms can be used interchangeably (see below). So, given that it is a term actually used by my participants, 'national identity' is the phrase I will be using in preference to Berry's 'cultural identity' or the common sociological/anthropological term 'ethnic identity' (which was also not used by the interviewees). To operationalise national identity in this study, Fox and Miller-Idriss' (2008) theory of 'everyday nationhood' provides a critical analytical framework. What is more, social identity theory is essential in understanding the function of identity, including national identity. I am going to review these terms below.

3.4.1 National identity

Nation, nationalism and national identity are debated topics amongst social scientists. A variety of scholars have written about the emergence of nations historically. For instance, in a critical review on nation-states and national identity, Penrose and Mole (2008) outline three approaches about nation formation: (1) primordialist/perennialist, (2) ethno-symbolist and (3) modernist/instrumentalist. Primordialists consider nations as natural phenomena which stand for centuries, whereas perennialists see them as social and historical phenomena. But both of them perceive the continuation of nations through history. Ethno-symbolists highlight

the significance of ethnic groups' pre-modern legacy for nation formation, as well as modernity's impact on transforming the earlier social and ethnic development. Modernists/instrumentalists view the modern industrial society as the producer of nationalism, as the standardised state education mobilises all of its citizens by instilling into them an idea that they belong to a single community.

Nationalism is also discussed by many scholars. Gellner, for example, claims that 'nationalism is a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond' (1983: 3). He puts key emphasis on culture in the definition of nationalism, stating that in-group membership indicates all members are of the same culture, or, the same nation. This definition (suggesting the overlap between cultural and national) helps validate my replacement of the term 'cultural identity' with 'national identity'. Smith's (1991: 73) definition of nationalism is 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential "nation"'. Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) reveal the distinctions between patriotism and nationalism. They define patriotism as a positive identification with one's nation and a will to see it develop. Nationalism, however, is understood as a strong desire to see one's country prevail above others, sometimes at any cost. Mummendey, Klink, and Brown (2001) incorporate social identity theory (see the review below) to the discussion of nationalism/patriotism, and maintain that nationalism naturally indicates belittlement of an out-group, whereas patriotism demonstrates a positive in-group evaluation independent of intergroup differentiation. In addition, Schatz, Staub, and Lavine (1999) distinguish between blind patriotism and constructive patriotism. The term 'blind patriotism', understood literally, depicts an unconditional admiration to the nation and refusal to accept any different opinion. 'Constructive patriotism' is described as an inclination to keep the balance between the desire for the nation's prosperity and the maintenance of fundamental human rights.

However, 'despite everything written about nations and nationalism, national identity is the underdeveloped offspring of these muscular parents' (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015: 9). It is generally considered to be a social construct (Smith 1991; Kunovich 2009). Penrose and Mole (2008: 9) interpret national identity as 'the identity that is born of the category "nation" and supported by personal identification with a specific nation'. They further develop two ways

of understanding national identity. One is the constituent part of nationhood, e.g. language and collective memory. The other is the shared identification with national symbols which the vast majority has internalised. Anthony D. Smith gives us a much more comprehensive definition as 'a shared historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (Smith 1991: 14). That is to say, national identity functions as a mechanism to fulfil people's need to belong and to offer people collective faith, all of which are beyond what people themselves can produce. However, McCrone and Bechhofer (2015) question Smith by asking whether people can have active input into national identity, as opposed to simply taking what is on offer passively, and if they can have an input, to what extent. Smith's top-down approach is challenged. This is how the obverse approach of 'everyday nationhood' came about.

3.4.2 Fox and Miller-Idriss: everyday nationhood

Fox and Miller-Idriss coined the term 'everyday nationhood' and called upon researchers to analyse nationalism 'from below'. They argue that 'the nation is not simply the product of macro-structural forces; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities' (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 537). Four aspects are identified to present ordinary people's production and reproduction of the nation, namely talking, choosing, performing and consuming the nation. Their points are particularly relevant to my research, hence I am going to articulate them below.

When 'talking the nation', Fox and Miller-Idriss argue that ordinary people do not necessarily follow elite discourses in everyday conversations, but have their own interpretation of the nation. Also, the choice of language/dialect/accent clarifies nationhood. In my research, language choices of students will be an important topic as my literature review indicates the uses of different languages have different impacts on integration and national identity (Glorius and Friedrich 2006; Henderson 2009; Gardner and Lau 2019).

When options are categorised in national terms, national identity sometimes become salient when people make these choices. Fox and Miller-Idriss illustrate that the preference for choosing particular partners or friends could pertain to their nationalities. Social circle is a key

research topic in my study, as it appears from existing literature that Chinese students seem to have tight contact with co-nationals, while Polish students do not necessarily prefer their compatriots when making friends (Andrejuk 2011b; Kusek 2015; Wu 2016; Maeder-Qian 2018). In terms of 'choosing the nation', it may explain why Chinese and Polish international students end up with different national identities. I will also amplify this theme by adding the action of choosing accommodation.

Fox and Miller-Idriss also highlight the significance of national symbols, rituals and commemorations for ordinary people, for they make collective national attachments possible. While I have found little evidence in the literature about how Chinese or Polish students 'perform' their nation - which might be a research gap - they do have the chance to perform the nation, according to my participant observation, for instance in the national student societies, or during certain stages of demonstrations. This theme is analysed in the empirical chapters.

Finally, as Fox and Miller-Idriss show, the commodification of the nation offers ordinary people national products to consume, yet to consume non-national products in nationally distinct ways could also reinforce a national view. In practice, Chinese restaurants and supermarkets could be seen very often in London, while Polish ones are fewer in number and largely scattered in Polish migrant communities. In this case, we may reasonably assume that discrepancies in access to national products may lead to a different extent to the construction of national identity. Polish and Chinese students utilise very different media (Glorius and Friedrich 2006; Mikal, Yang, and Lewis 2015; Pang 2018), hence how their national identity is impacted by media is also an interesting topic.

It is the everyday social interaction with regard to nationhood that I am interested in, and the 'ordinary people' in my case are Chinese and Polish students. Fox and Miller-Idriss were writing about majority populations, while I am doing something original by applying their framework to migrants. The idea of 'everyday nationhood' provides me with a research framework to operationalise national identity within Berry's acculturation model, and finally to analyse the integration of Polish and Chinese ISM. But before that, the functions of identity

and some relevant literature should be discussed to help explain why Polish and Chinese students identify with their nations (or not).

3.4.3 Social identity theory

Identity has long been a research focus in various fields of social studies. A key approach for sociologists is the social identity theory (SIT) developed by Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1986). According to SIT, 'social identity is that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership' (Tajfel 1978: 63). When people are incorporated into that social group, they tend to perceive their in group as positively distinct through inter group comparisons, and thereby promoting their positive self-esteem.

Afterwards, a number of scholars has put more focus on SIT and enriched it by linking more functions of identity to improving self-esteem. Reid and Hogg (2005) test the relationship between improving self-esteem and uncertainty reduction, the two functions of social identity. They find that when uncertainty is high, people are driven by the need to reduce uncertainty, thereby identifying with any group, regardless of that group's status. When uncertainty is low, people are motivated by self-enhancement so that they identify more strongly with high-status groups. On the other hand, when under high rather than low uncertainty, low-status group members identify more strongly with their group, but high-status group members show no preference. Vignoles et al. (2006) add continuity into the identity motives people want to maintain other than self-esteem. They point out that people prefer a sense of continuity in identity across time and context, and may construct life stories to find constancy. Instead of identity's content, Huddy (2001) puts focus on how strongly people feel their identity. He argues that for different people, identity may have different meanings, intensity and stability under different circumstances.

The literature above provides me with many insights and helps inform my framework of analysis for studying Polish and Chinese students' integration in the context of everyday nationhood. First, I will examine the situations when they find their nations positively distinct and how these situations impact on their integration, especially the situation of COVID-19 (e.g.

how they assess their home countries). Second, when facing uncertainty in a new environment, for example language barriers, cultural difference or loneliness, I will explore whether Polish and Chinese students show different attitudes and identify preferably with their nation or not (e.g. how they make friends in London). Third, I will investigate their identity continuity – how Polish and Chinese students perceive their changes after residing in the UK (e.g. whether they feel more ‘Polish’/‘Chinese’ or not). Finally, I will try to find their location on the spectrum of national identity strength (e.g. whether there is a tendency for the majority of interviewees to show strong attachment to home countries). More relevant details will be discussed in the empirical chapters.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has first presented a literature review about theories connected to migration. The major content focuses on two aspects: 1) migrant motivation and 2) integration. In the first part some crucial migration theories were introduced, including neoclassical migration theory, new economics of labour migration, network theories, cumulative causation and migration industry theory. Many of them are related to international student migration and therefore very important in my research. New economics of labour migration highlights the role of family in the decision-making process, so this theory helps us to understand how a whole family, especially parents, decide to send their children to study abroad. Study abroad might become a symbol of social status in a community, and triggers more people to follow this pathway in order not to fall behind. A culture of migration emerges, and this refers to a similar theory – that of cumulative causation. The middle-class families in Poland and China invest in foreign education for their children due to the spread of this culture. Once the first students arrive (and return), they become pioneer migrants and provide personal information about migration to friends, relatives and fellows, thereby forming a migration network amongst acquaintances. People with access to this network may obtain more useful information and resources which ease their way to migrate. Profit-driven institutions such as travel agencies, overseas-study service agencies and foreign housing agencies take part in this process and create a broader network – a migration industry. These phenomena are analysed by network theories.

All of the above had significant impact on the formation of my interview schedule. The roles that families play in the decision-making process to migrate were explored. I also tested the relationship between study abroad and social status of the family in the home countries. Networks that students utilised were a major focus of my interviews as well. Which networks, how and to what extent they use them were crucial research questions. Answers to these questions helped me to understand the migration motivations of Polish and Chinese international students in the UK, and shaped the content of the chapter about migration motivations.

The second part of this chapter discussed the concept of integration and the literature about how Polish and Chinese student migrants integrate. Berry's acculturation strategies, as well as different domains of integration were underlined when discussing the integration concept. Berry's model is useful in analysing my interview results. Which strategy participants applied was examined in the research.

The domains of integration, as defined by Ager and Strang, were also explored in my study. While Ager and Strang define domains of integration based on research about refugees, my project is about students, and thus has little connection with citizenship. In terms of 'markers and means', I asked questions in my interviews about the situation regarding their accommodation and living experiences, as well as their academic integration experiences. In terms of 'social connections', students' social bonds were analysed. Finally, language and cultural knowledge, as well as safety and stability were explored. For international student migrants, to understand English and British culture stands out as central in their integration process. I have investigated how Chinese and Polish students possess this knowledge and its impact on their integration. In the context of COVID-19, which triggers discrimination, students' feeling about safety and its influence on integration were examined. As many students join a one-year master's programme, they were perceived as temporary migrants and were supposed to return after graduation. How this affects their integration is a question which needed to be answered in my study.

The comparative approach is central to my project. An overview of the literature shows a reasonable number of studies on Polish and Chinese migration, but also presents a gap in

comparing these two different ethnic groups against the same western background. Various theories and case studies were conducted mainly in country-specific contexts. Therefore, it is helpful to make this comparison to test if one theory or phenomenon fits another so that we can generalise, or discover whether there is a certain uniqueness in different cases.

Identity theories were then introduced to incorporate Berry's acculturation strategies into the conceptual framework for this study. I have discussed national identity, everyday nationhood and social identity theory. Together with Berry's acculturation strategies, they form the main analytical framework of my empirical chapters about integration. To better understand its structure, I drew the diagram below. Together, they shaped the main concepts used in this thesis.

Diagram 1

	Berry (1996) Acculturation strategies	Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) Everyday nationhood	Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1986) and others Social identity theory
What the theory is about	According to how much migrants are attached to their original cultural identity and interact with other cultures, there are four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, marginalisation and separation.	Ordinary people also produce and reproduce the nation in their everyday activities, including talking, choosing, performing and consuming the nation.	People identify themselves with a social group, perceive their in group as positively distinct, promote their positive self-esteem, reduce uncertainty, and maintain continuity. Identity may vary in meanings, intensity and stability under different circumstances.
Why they are relevant to my research	It links integration to cultural/national identity, which allows me to find a starting point to examine the extent of students' integration.	Fox and Miller-Idriss demonstrate which aspects may impact the formation of national identity in the daily context.	SIT shows the functions national identity may perform, which may tell us whether or not students want to identify with their nations.
How I apply these theories	I investigate how much Polish and Chinese students maintain	I analyse the data according to the framework provided	I examine under which circumstances students exhibit their

	<p>their national identity and how much they interact with other cultures to locate their positions within Berry's model.</p>	<p>by Fox and Miller-Idriss: talking, choosing, performing and consuming the nation.</p>	<p>national identity saliently and why, and additionally, how strongly they display national identity.</p>
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Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the methodology adopted in this study and the rationale for methods used to investigate the migration process of Polish and Chinese students in London. There are six main sections. Section 4.2 justifies the major research approaches in my research design, including the comparative approach and qualitative methods (participant observation and in-depth interviews). Section 4.3 describes the course of finding interviewees and their selection. It is followed by section 4.4, an outline of the data collection process. I explain how interviews and participant observation were carried out. Section 4.5 demonstrates how the data stemming from interviews were analysed. It validates the choice of NVivo as the analytical programme and explains how I coded the interview transcripts. Section 4.6 relates to ethical concerns in this research and how they were handled. Section 4.7 presents my positionality and reflexivity on this entire project. Finally, section 4.8 summarises the chapter.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 The comparative approach

Comparison is an underlying doctrine in science and an essential part of quotidian life (Caramani 2009; Ragin 2014). Some scholars argue that study and analysis in social science is impossible without a comparative structure (Swanson 1971; Van der Veer 2016). Comparison can be used to collect information, examine different propositions and produce pragmatic expertise (Morlino 2018). Its significance lies in explanation instead of evaluating difference (Ritchie et al. 2014). It makes the world understandable for it indicates causal relationships and investigates the interplay between differing determinants by segmenting social reality into particular subdivisions (Caramani 2009).

This thesis benefits from being comparative because instead of describing single cases, it places the two ethnic groups into the same framework, thereby avoiding a country-specific

perspective, which is popular in ISM literature. Similarities found in such a framework can provide stronger evidence to some generalisations of ISM literature, whereas differences can help elucidate the heterogeneity within ISM, explain the causes and possibly predict their future. In general, it can offer more fruitful and insightful findings.

This study has chosen Chinese and Polish students in London as research subjects, so the comparative approach is central to this project. I do not intend to measure the precise difference between Chinese and Polish students, but to understand their migration process and their similarities and discrepancies during this process. The aim of this project is to investigate whether the findings and phenomena discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 are unique in or similar across both groups, and therefore potentially general among 21st-century international student migrants, and the causes for these similarities and discrepancies. Therefore, the comparative approach is optimal for this research.

When coming to practice, an interview guide was designed and applied to all interviewees. Both Polish and Chinese participants were asked the same sets of questions. The major comparative reference is their migration motives, academic and social integration experiences (see section 4.4.2 and Appendix 3).

When writing up, this thesis tries to compare the two groups as much as possible, hence it is not organised to present all the findings of one ethnic group and then the other. Instead, it always tries to compare the findings of both groups by themes, and shows the similarities and differences of the same topic clearly. However, obviously there is no neat division of similarities and differences in every single theme. In some cases similarities prevail, while sometimes contrasts dominate. To be concrete, in the empirical chapters differences and contrasts are always indicated by 'vs' in the titles or subtitles, with Polish cases first and Chinese cases second (except section 6.2.1 where 'vs' is between Poland/China and the UK). The rest sections usually present similarities. The summaries are illustrated in the concluding sections and chapter. In this way, we can examine what is perhaps universal for international students, and what is the uniqueness within them.

4.2.2 Qualitative methods: participant observation and in-depth interviews

Observation as a research method has always been central in the history of qualitative research (Mulhall 2003; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Today in social science, as opposed to anthropological research, it is often applied but rarely as the only or key data collection method (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010; Ritchie et al. 2014). However, this approach remains important as it allows data to come out in a natural setting (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013). This is significant for qualitative researchers because 'one of the hallmarks of qualitative approaches is that they involve investigation within a natural rather than controlled setting' (Savin-Baden and Major 2013: 391). Furthermore, participant observation improves the quality of data gathered from fieldwork as well as their subsequent interpretation, and stimulates the production of new research questions and premises (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010).

There are three beneficial ways to use observation. They are observation for familiarisation, observation in a multi-method design and observation as a central method (Ritchie et al. 2014: 249-53). My approach to applying observation is comprised of the first two ways. Also, Gold (1958, cited by (Flick 2014: 309) outlined the variation of observation according to the researcher's presence in it, namely complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. In practice I played the roles of participant as observer and observer as participant. Participant observation differs from non-participant in that 'you observe from a member's perspective, but also influence what you observe due to your participation' (Flick 2014: 312). This method is crucial in my research because by naturally participating and observing the daily life of student migrants, I had better access to relevant processes and practices that I am interested in, and was able to minimise the influence of controlled settings – like interviews – on my research subjects. How it was carried out will be discussed in section 4.4.3.

In-depth interviews are undoubtedly a core qualitative research method in social scientific research (Weiss 1995; Savin-Baden and Major 2013; Magnusson and Marecek 2015; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The method is powerful in generating description and interpretation of people's social worlds (Ritchie et al. 2014), offers both depth and detail of a general essence and reveals dynamic processes of connections (Edwards and Holland 2013). From the

participants' perspective, interview-based research locates them at the core of the study, enabling them to speak out in their own words and dig deeper into their own adventures (Gerson and Damaske 2020).

In order to explore Chinese and Polish students' migration processes and its patterns, in-depth interviews were necessary and ideal for my research design. They form the main body of my data source. The mechanics of interview design and execution will be discussed in the following sections.

4.3 Interviewee recruitment and selection

COVID-19 severely influenced the application of my research methods. The UK government announced the lockdown in March 2020 and UCL also announced the social-distancing rule requiring all face-to-face interviews to switch online. I began my participant recruitment in April 2020 and hence all my interviews were carried out online.

4.3.1 Recruitment techniques

The recruitment of Chinese interviewees began from my accommodation. There were many Chinese students in my student hall and we met very often in the canteen, kitchen and corridor. We had talked about my research in our daily conversations and many of them already knew they would like to participate when I began recruiting interviewees. We had known each other very well so the whole process took place naturally and easily. Nine interviewees were from this circle. Because it was a UCL student hall, all of these interviewees were UCL students.

Another important source was social media. I tried many ways to expand my social circle to approach interviewees from diverse backgrounds, and social media turned out to be an effective way. For instance, on Facebook there are friend recommendations showing people whom the user may be interested in. I added them and invited them to take part in my research. Eight interviewees were from this route.

I also went to some social events organised by Chinese students, such as hot pot parties, where I made many new Chinese friends. When introducing myself I mentioned my research topic, which made it easier afterwards when I invited them to take part in my research. Six interviewees were from this source.

Then came the snowball sampling. After the interviews, some participants were inspired by my research topic and encouraged their friends to participate. Besides, I found it hard to approach male undergraduate participants because none of the ways described above gave me access to any such undergraduates. Therefore I asked a female undergraduate interviewee, CFU2, to help me with the recruitment. With her assistance I managed to find four participants. Altogether, five interviewees were from snowball sampling.

One of the final two participants was my cousin, who studied at LSE. The other one was from a migration research group which I was also in. Together, they formed the sample of my Chinese interviewees.

Polish participants were recruited in a very different way. In London they were not as plentiful as Chinese students and I only knew three of them from meeting on various occasions. However, they were all somehow reluctant to take part in the interviews. Social media did not work well, either. Although I knew a number of Polish students from Facebook, LinkedIn or other platforms, they were not quick to respond to me. I tried this way for a few weeks but still could not make a breakthrough. That meant it was impossible to find a starting point for snowball sampling. Because of COVID-19, Polish societies in all universities ceased to organise offline meetings. It was thus very difficult to get to know new Polish friends in reality, not to mention to interview them.

Later when I reflected on this initial failure to secure Polish interviewees, I attributed it to two factors. The first pertained to my personal capability. As an amateur in qualitative research, I did not realise how important it was to establish early networks with research subjects. It became too late when the fieldwork was about to begin. In addition, perhaps my communication skills also need improvement. I was not skilful and patient enough to earn the trust of potential interviewees. I was too shy to follow up if Polish students did not respond.

The second factor was linked to the difficulty in practice. Approaching participants online was the sole way at that time. Respondents may question the motivation, reliability and confidentiality of the research when the researcher comes all of a sudden from nowhere, even though I had tried my best to prove I was a professional. Besides, for some people a personal account on social media is a private place for contact with close friends. It may seem too instrumental to use this channel to reach research participants and people may feel disturbed. It was also hard to persuade others to spend their time talking about their own life casually if the interviewer was a stranger from a faraway culture.

The breakthrough came when I started to recruit participants by email. The UCL email address list shows the full names of the entire UCL student population. Since I can distinguish Polish names by their spelling, I attempted to send a few recruitment emails directly to Polish students, and it worked very well. Soon I realised this formal way to approach Polish students was very efficient and it hugely saved the time and energy of both myself and Polish students. About 20% of all addressees accepted the interview. Eventually I managed to find 15 UCL interviewees in this way.

I always bore in mind that I should have interviewees from various universities. In the meantime I kept searching the websites of other London universities to seek Polish students' profiles and their email addresses. 14 other interviewees turned up in this way.

Only one participant was from snowball sampling. For the specific demographic data of the entire Polish and Chinese sample, please see Appendix 1 and 2.

4.3.2 Recruitment criteria and selection

Since this is a comparative study, it needs 'a more structured approach to data collection so that similar issues are explored in similar ways across the sample' (Ritchie et al. 2014: 178). Therefore, in practice I consciously controlled the sample recruitment to ensure an equal number of students by gender and level of degree in both groups. My plan was to conduct 60 in-depth semi-structured interviews, 30 with Chinese and 30 with Polish students.

Participants were identified by their citizenship. All Chinese participants were holding Tier 4 Student Visas, whereas none of Polish participants needed visas, because they enrolled before the UK left the EU. Both groups consisted of 15 men and 15 women. For each ethnic group there were 10 undergraduate students, 10 master's students and 10 PhD students. Interviewees were in the middle of their degree studies (BA, MA or PhD) in universities based in London. Exchange students, graduates and post-docs were therefore not included.

The reason why I include all three levels of study, namely undergraduate, master's and PhD students in my sample need to be justified here. Despite the heterogeneity within the ISM body in terms of different levels of study (Iannelli and Huang 2014; Ye 2018), the mainstream literature either seems to pay little attention to this variable, or puts their dominant focus on undergraduate and master's level (Xu 2022). However, according to my observation from previous acquaintance with different students, the economic backgrounds of Chinese students in my sample show a 'stepped slope' pattern in terms of levels of study, which to a great extent shapes and influences their motivation and integration abroad (see details in section 5.3.1). Besides, from the point of view of migration studies, both migration motives and integration experiences could be expected to be different for these three different types of student migrants. Hence, investigating their behaviour according to different levels of study is conducive to understanding the heterogeneity within ISM.

How I carried out the recruitment was discussed in the last section. In the process I had always been trying to meet the criteria and meanwhile keep a certain amount of flexibility. Some interviewees, who were representative but not 100% in accordance with my recruitment criteria, were included. For instance, PMU4 was studying for his master's degree at the University of Cambridge when the interview was conducted, but he had just graduated from King's College London with a bachelor's degree two months before the interview. His memory of London was fresh and insightful so I still counted him as an undergraduate participant.

Nonetheless, several participants were dropped, for different reasons. For example, one Polish participant barely spoke Polish, so that she could not even understand some of my interview questions, because she migrated to the UK at the age of three. A Chinese interviewee did not treat the interview seriously and he answered each question in just one

or two words. Another Chinese interviewee responded to my call three months after my fieldwork was completed.

When recruiting and selecting interviewees, I tried my best to make sure they met the criteria and were representative. However, due to convenience sampling the vast majority of my research participants were based in elite London universities, such as UCL, LSE, etc. Studying at these institutions made them part of an elite. Furthermore, participants largely seem to come from elite backgrounds. As we can see in section 5.3.1, parents of the Chinese students, especially undergraduates, constitute an economic elite, whereas Polish students usually attended prestigious schools and hence possess elite educational backgrounds. They seem to constitute different kinds of elite, when the Chinese students have more economic capital and the Poles more cultural capital. These are the general hallmarks of my research participants.

4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Interview timeline, methods and transcription

All interviews were conducted online in the participants' mother tongue, which means in Mandarin Chinese for Chinese participants, and in Polish for Polish participants. On some occasions interviewees and I were not in the same time zone. For their convenience I had to interview at some unusual (for me) time such as at midnight, but it was not a serious problem. Most participants were willing to have video interviews, whereas only a few chose audio interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded on my mobile phone or iPad, and then transcribed verbatim in the original languages. I translated quotations in the thesis into English once I had chosen them.

In order to keep a coherent sense of the research sample and not to muddle up impressions of the two groups, I decided to finish interviewing all the Chinese participants first, and then interview the Polish students. To begin interviews with my co-nationals would help me find easier access to and grasp more rapidly the structure of the whole research.

My formal interviews with Chinese students were carried out from April to September 2020. In the 30-person sample, 16 interviewees had returned to China due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although their studies were not yet completed. 27 interviews were conducted by video-chat and three were audio-chat. The most common platform we used for interviews was WeChat, the most popular instant messaging tool in China. Several interviews took place on Microsoft Teams.

I transcribed my pilot interview (see the next section) and found it very time-consuming. I realised that it would be too huge a burden of work if I did not begin transcribing until finishing all the interviews. As a result, I tried to transcribe soon after each interview. Sometimes an interview was so long that it took days, even weeks to transcribe. The final version of the Chinese transcripts amounted to 400 printed pages (SimSun font, size 10.5, and 1.5 lines spacing).

Formal interviews with Polish students were conducted between November 2020 and March 2021. Two out of 30 participants preferred an audio-interview, while the rest chose video calls. Various platforms were used for interviews including Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams. The transcribing process was similar to the Chinese sample. I tried to transcribe as soon as an interview was done. But it took a much longer time than with the Chinese sample to transcribe and tidy up because Polish was not my mother tongue. In the end, I decided to turn to Polish native speakers for assistance. A friend of mine agreed to help and he was responsible for transcribing 10 interviews. By May 2021 all transcription was finished. The transcripts constituted 360 A4 pages (Times New Roman, size 10.5, 1.5 lines spacing).

4.4.2 Interview guide and process

The interviews were planned to be semi-structured with pre-designed, open-ended questions. An interview guide was thus made to lead the conversation. It was written in English first and then translated into Chinese and Polish. To test its design and translation, I did pilot interviews respectively with a Chinese and a Polish friend of mine. The Chinese interviewee was a PhD student in the USA, while the Polish one was a master's student in China. I found them helpful because they revealed certain potential problems with the guide. For instance, the Chinese

respondent seemed uncomfortable about questions on the study abroad agency. Later when my first interviewee showed the same reluctance, I decided to remove this question in my research. It also turned out that some questions were repeated or ambiguous and I needed to delete or rephrase them.

When it came to practice, my formal interview usually began with greetings from the interviewer and a brief introduction to the researcher, the project and the interview content. I always asked for their oral consent again, though they had already known it when they accepted my interview invitation. Usually after obtaining the affirmative answers we entered straight upon interview questions, but on occasion we went into a chat. For Chinese students it was usually because we had not met or heard from each other for some time so we wanted to update our information. For Polish interviewees it was usually because they were surprised that I could speak Polish and they wanted to know more about the story. These chats were essential in creating a relaxed environment and warming them up, as well as gaining their trust if I was a stranger to them.

When the recording was started, I usually initiated the discussion by asking for their demographic information such as age, educational background, sponsors for studies, parental occupations, length of stay in the UK, etc. All this information would be anonymised in the dissertation (see section 4.5 about ethical issues).

The subsequent conversation usually revolved around four topics: 1) motivation to study in the UK; 2) plans after graduation; 3) their perceptions of changes in their own outlook and behaviour after migrating to the UK; 4) integration. There were several questions designed for each topic, but participants were encouraged to talk freely about their thoughts. The interview guide was simply a draft directing topics in the conversation rather than stringent rules to thoroughly follow. In practice, some questions were dropped from some interviews because of the nature of that particular conversation. Follow-up questions were added when interviewees mentioned any interesting points or their comments were not totally understood by the interviewer. The sequence and focus of questions being asked also varied in different interviews.

I always reminded myself to be patient, responsive and encouraging in the conversation. If an interviewee seemed hesitant or uncomfortable about certain issues, I would switch to another topic. If they brought up an interesting subject, I would embolden them to speak out. It turned out that some participants were rather talkative, while some others needed more encouragement. Therefore lengths of interviews varied significantly. In the Chinese sample they ranged from 35 to 92 minutes. Polish students talked more briefly in general, with 28 minutes being the minimum and 70 minutes the maximum.

4.4.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was applied throughout my whole research process. I received UCL ethics permission for this part of the research on April 24th 2019. In order to have a deeper and first-hand understanding of the real situations of students, I needed to familiarise myself with Chinese and Polish students on the spot in addition to reviewing literature about them. That made observation necessary in the early stage of my research. From January 2019 to May 2020, I chose to live in student accommodation, where almost all residents were international students. Chinese students represented the largest ethnic group of all. For instance, 15 of 20 residents on my floor were Chinese nationals. We met often in the corridor and kitchen, or on the stairs, so everyone made each other's acquaintance very soon. Also, as our student hall was catered, we had a dining hall and almost everyone in the hall went for breakfast and dinner at a given time. This created an unorganised social space and period, which made natural participant observation possible every day. Several Polish students were housed in a non-catered student hall nearby. I contacted some of them through online media such as a WhatsApp group and managed to talk with a few Polish students in the hall. I told students from both countries about my research and almost everyone was eager to become my interviewee and shared their opinions. In this situation I was mainly a 'participant as observer' as I was a member of the student community and had told them about my research.

Furthermore, I applied participant observation to other events such as student society events, student parties, formal classes and sightseeing trips. Mostly I was observer as participant in these occasions as I attended them purposively and irregularly. I kept notes about my observations and their functions will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.4 Research notes and supplementary data

The interview is not the only data source in my research. I have been keeping notes in a notebook (paper version) since I arrived in the UK. At the beginning I planned to record notes from my classes. After attending PhD training courses about qualitative research methods, I started to keep everything related to my research in the notebook. Later it gradually became a container of all my thoughts because I realised that, as an international student myself, my own experience and how my views changed over time were significant in understanding international student migration, my own research topic. I also kept my fieldwork diary in this notebook during my fieldwork consisting of participant observation and interviews.

I did not categorise my notes when writing them down, but after reading through the whole notebook I distinguished three major themes within them.

The first is about my feelings and mental condition. I recorded things like how lonely I felt during my studies, how difficult I found integration, how I felt my work was disrupted by emergencies, how I compared myself with my peers who already started working, how I encouraged myself, my identity crisis, etc. This theme is not necessarily related to my research, but is more about my life in the UK. It has documented the journey of self-discovery through my whole PhD research, and how a person was changed and shaped by doctoral studies. Therefore, notes in this category meant a lot to me, though they were hardly quoted in my dissertation.

The second pertains to my reflection about the research, including how shocked I was by certain interviews, how frustrated I felt after seminars in my first year, how I found research communities inspiring, suggestions offered by other PhD students, my impressions of the sample, technical problems in interviews such as lack of patience and deficiency in language skills, etc. This theme played an important part in my empirical chapters for its supplement to interview quotations. It had enriched the chapters by the researcher's own experience.

The last but not the least is my participant observation notes. I marked what I considered interesting in daily conversations with Polish and Chinese students. Sometimes it could be a description of a unique person, sometimes it could be highlights of an exceptional dialogue, sometimes it could be complex feelings when talking to Chinese students from different countries and regions. They revealed my impressions at the time and some interesting points on which I should focus later in my interviews. What is more, I also recorded some inspiring phenomena, which then played key roles in my empirical chapters such as the seat distribution in the dining hall presented in Section 7.3.2.

Other than these fieldwork notes, another sort of supplementary data was the interview memo. I printed an interview guide for each interview, where I wrote down some notes during the interview as well as my reflections after the interview. These memos assisted me in organising my thoughts, marking crucial insights and summarising beneficial experience. With previous memos I understood what to beware of in subsequent interviews.

4.5 Interview data analysis

4.5.1 The use of NVivo

It is common today for scientific researchers to use computer programmes to assist qualitative data analysis, for they improve consistency and efficiency when handling a large volume of data (Ritchie et al. 2014). For a doctoral programme with 60 interviews to analyse, it will be much too time-consuming to conduct this manually. Using software could help me organise and document data analysis, order, search and filter information systematically.

After comparing a few options, I decided to use NVivo for my PhD project. First of all, it is one of the most popular types of qualitative data analysis software in the world. It has been used and recommended by many of my peer colleagues and other scientific researchers. I have read their reports and found them explicit and helpful. Second, its access is also convenient as UCL has purchased NVivo12 in its software database. I can have access to this computer programme on both my laptop and any UCL computer, which makes data transfer easier within different facilities.

Although the access to NVivo was not a problem, the training course for it was too popular for me to be able to register at UCL as well as other London universities. After staying on the waiting list for a few months I determined to teach myself using Internet resources. I browsed through several NVivo tutorials on bilibili (a Chinese video-sharing website) and eventually found one made by Zhang Ran, an associate professor from Peking University, the most favourable. It was a package consisting of a videotaped training course she taught. There were six sessions lasting for over 10 hours altogether, indicating different steps in use. I spent about a week watching the tutorial and meanwhile made a preliminary analysis of my interview data. It enabled me to get familiar with the software as well as the data before coding them.

4.5.2 Coding and analysis

The process of building grounded theory comprises open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Chen 2000). Open coding is dedicated to breaking the raw data into discrete labelled codes. Axial coding aims to seek connections between different codes and condense them into categories. In the end, selective coding attempts to determine one or several core categories that seize the essence of the research.

I followed this process when coding my transcripts from interviews. When open coding was initiated, I read the transcripts very slowly and carefully, divided the material into small distinct components and gave them provisional labels. After the first few transcripts were coded, the process gradually went more quickly. More general patterns were found and recurring labels emerged. Initial codes were enriched, merged, renamed or abandoned.

Axial coding began to take place as open coding went along. When more and more codes were determined, I identified some connections between these codes. These connections hooked different codes together and formed a series of categories. In the computer programme, these categories were segregated into themes, and corresponding codes were labelled as subthemes. Some unique codes failed to be categorised and were left alone for further analysis if needed.

Open coding and axial coding were an ongoing, interrelated process requiring constant reflection and adjustment of the researcher. Because I coded all Chinese transcripts first, the categories and codes were already set when I began coding Polish transcripts. Of course data stemming from Polish participants could not perfectly fit in categories tailored for their Chinese peers. Thus I launched an independent project in NVivo for coding Polish transcripts. I did not simply copy codes that emerged from Chinese data, nor did I start from scratch. Instead, I referred to the framework established by Chinese codes with regard to the uniqueness of Polish data. A crucial focus for me in this process was that I needed to continually examine, compare and balance themes and subthemes between Polish and Chinese transcripts. When the Polish transcripts were completely coded, the original project of coding Chinese transcripts was also revised for the convenience of subsequent comparisons.

At last came the selective coding. Three major themes came out and shaped the three empirical chapters with reference to Polish and Chinese students' motivation to study in the UK, academic integration and social integration. Some categories with too little data to be robust were removed.

4.6 Ethical issues

My application for ethical approval was a sad story. At first I followed the normal procedure to apply for interviews, but the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly became worse and UCL Research Ethics Committee decided to ban all contact fieldwork and move it online. However, after uploading edited application forms for online interviews, I did not receive any response for a few months. I sent an email to encourage them to respond and heard from the reviewers a month later. It was an unusually busy period for UCL Research Ethics Committee at that time because many applications were to be revised and the pandemic had spurred copious new research as well. That was why it took about a month for them to reply my revisions every time. In the end, I obtained the approval six months after my initial application.

In practice I sought to minimise any ethical issues at stake. The first ethical issue is the confidentiality of the participants' information. My fieldwork diary is kept very carefully in my

personal belongings. I deleted the recordings as soon as transcription was done. Transcripts are stored on the UCL network and my password-protected laptop

Participants were all anonymised in the transcripts. It turned out that gender and level of degree were significant variables in certain parts of my thesis. As a result, I invented a special code for naming interviewees. Three capital letters were employed to indicate respectively the nationality, gender and level of degree programme of the interviewee. A number (1 to 5) at the end indicates the interviewee’s place in the sequence of interviews.

Table 0-1 Code for naming interviewees

Nationality	Gender	Level of degree	Serial number
Polish	Male	Undergraduate	1
			2
Chinese	Female	Master’s	3
			4
		PhD	5

For instance, PMU1 means Polish male undergraduate interviewee No.1, and CFP2 signifies Chinese female PhD student No.2. This naming system is safe, clear and efficient.

The Polish transcriber was instructed to keep the confidentiality, too. I ensured that he deleted all recordings and transcripts after the work was done, and he will not share any information about the research with others.

Other information that may reveal the identities of participants was also obscured, especially their previous educational background. The universities they graduated from were presented as university A/B/C. Their location was replaced by regions such as northern England. All efforts were made to strengthen participants’ confidentiality.

The second ethical issue is about getting consent. I sent every interviewee the information sheet and consent form when they accepted the interview. At the beginning of each interview I always double-checked that they fully understood the ethical concerns and asked for their oral consent again. All interviews were carried out successfully and no one requested withdrawal.

The third issue is the balance between finding out detailed information on the research topics and respecting the informants' wish for privacy. Some particular matters, though they might be interesting and even seem of crucial importance, were sensitive in the culture of the interviewees. The deeper the interviewer probed, the more insights were revealed, but meanwhile the more likely it became that participants might feel uncomfortable or irritated. I had to find the equilibrium during the interview in varied ways.

In the Chinese case, it could be awkward to ask about their romantic relations with foreigners. Some conservative people in mainland China consider it a disgrace and interviewees might be afraid that I would judge them. To avoid the unnecessary mistrust or embarrassment, I tried not to ask straightforwardly in the interview, but switched the way I enquired such as 'whom do you usually hang out with?' Another troublesome question is political views. As explained in section 7.4, the authoritarian regime gives little space for discussion about politics, but political outlook can be a compelling indicator of their integration and change after arrival in the UK. I investigated the issue very cautiously first through observation. In the daily talk if I found someone willing to talk about politics, I would invite the person to join in my project. If a participant actively talked about his political views, I would encourage him to articulate his points to make the material detailed.

In the Polish case, the main ethical dilemma was associated with the forced migration. Some participants claimed that they came to the UK in response to the homogeneous society in Poland due to homosexuality or interracial marriage. I should have perhaps dug deeper into the matter to gain a fuller understanding of their motivation and how it shaped their integration. But I quitted because interviewees blurred the detail and did not seem completely natural in this setting. I did not want to remind them of any unpleasant memories.

4.7 Positionality and reflexivity

During the entire process of my PhD studies, I have been constantly reflecting on my positionality and power relations within the research. As a Chinese international student myself, I was an insider when researching and living, talking and socialising with my co-

national students. But when exploring Polish students I became an outsider to some extent, since we possessed the same identity as international students, but different nationalities. This shifting positionality in reality has influenced the research in different ways.

In the Chinese sample, the power relation was particularly salient when conducting interviews with students from different levels of degree programme. It seemed that many PhD participants soon reached tacit understanding with me because the researcher and researched usually shared similar experience. Also thanks to their age and educational experience they were more able than undergraduate participants to generate coherent points of view and well-organised thoughts. By contrast, undergraduate interviewees were more prudent and reticent not only because of age and experience but also possibly due to their perceived power relations with me. They viewed me as an experienced knowledgeable student and our talk sometimes was like the senior conversing with the junior from their perspective. Master's students were situated somewhere between these two extremes.

This situation needed to be taken into account. I always remembered not to take interviewees' understandings for granted, especially as Chinese culture belongs to those high-context cultures where, according to Hall (1959), more information is conveyed indirectly with nonverbal communication in particular contexts. This may lead to problems in research when people think they mutually understand each other but actually interpret the situation differently. As a result, when I realised participants had left any circumstances unspoken (because they thought I had understood them without explanation), I would follow up and ask them to elucidate their thoughts.

On the other hand, I am also wary of my own verdict on participants. I had been a lecturer in China for over four years before doing my PhD and had been used to the teacher-student relationship, especially with undergraduates. It was actually my job to mark them. When it came to interviews, sometimes I unwittingly made judgments about their ability for self-expression and authenticity. This tendency seemed trivial at the beginning, but soon when writing interview memos I realised it could profoundly influence the interview result. Being inwardly judgmental may severely impact the researcher's motivation for further questions and comprehensive understanding of participants, making the interview shrivelled, with little

productive data. It was opportune that I was aware soon after the first few interviews and carried out the rest of the fieldwork with great care. During interviews I kept reminding myself to be rational and judicious and positioned myself amongst 'them'.

In the Polish sample, my positionality was different. Since I recruited participants via emails, and all 30 interviewees were strangers to me before the interviews, our relationship was purely researcher and researched during fieldwork. The situation surely had some strengths. First, it made the fieldwork process highly efficient. In most cases we confirmed the agenda, turned on the camera and came straight to interview questions. Data were obtained smoothly and aptly. They were spared the feeling of being 'utilised' if they thought I made friends with them for the sake of interview. Second, limited association with interviewees allowed me to analyse the data more 'objectively', perhaps with less personal interpretation.

However, this temporary relationship could also jeopardise the acquisition of robust and insightful opinions due to lack of long-term, in-depth mutual interaction. On some rare occasions interviews seemed a mere formality just because the interviewees somehow happened to accept it. No matter how hard I tried, it was onerous to earn their trust within such a short time. In addition, mere focus on the text and disregard for the context may result in the superficiality of data analysis and failure to discover the actual causation behind appearance. To avoid this and get myself immersed in the context, I kept discussing the issue with Polish people whenever I could. Lots of insights beyond interviews were obtained via my Polish friends and professor.

A key point which should not be neglected was the impact of interview languages. Mandarin Chinese is my mother tongue, as well as that of all the Chinese interviewees. Hence communication and squeezing ideas from it was barely a problem. Although I have been learning and teaching Polish language for over a decade, it has never reached the level of native speakers. This inevitably caused an (unintentional) omission of interesting points at times and a struggle for reaching stronger appreciation of their views. We could see this from the length of recordings: Polish interviewees generally talked for 10 minutes less than their Chinese peers. This is a defect to which I have to confess.

This is a comparative study. Both groups must be put into a framework to make comparisons valid and effective. In the course of research I did my best to balance the attention I paid to both groups, namely, not to overemphasise the Chinese sample on one hand, and not to put Polish and Chinese students into identical classifications for the sake of comparison on the other. I was fully aware that each group of students and each member of them had their own characteristics and experience. My job in this study was to probe into what they were like and to figure out the similarities and discrepancies between them from data I got, rather than to sort them into neat categories.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter clarified the methodology chosen for this research and its execution during fieldwork. Further mentioned were the data analysis procedure and how I dealt with ethical issues which might trigger concerns. My positionality and reflexivity on the research was also introduced. The qualitative nature of this study enabled me to understand the underpinning of the migratory processes of Polish and Chinese students in London.

However, it was a great shame that I was not able to administer face-to-face interviews due to the pandemic. The online format surely limited the volume of information conveyed during interviews. Furthermore, although I had made every effort to reach a comprehensive and diversified sample in my research, it could not reflect every detail of the Polish and Chinese student population in London. Overall, I do not view my research design as perfect. However, it turned out to be appropriate to gain persuasive research findings about international student migration, considering particularly the impediment of COVID-19.

Next, Chapters 5-7 present the findings pertaining to participants' migratory motivations, academic integration and social integration.

Chapter 5 Motivation

5.1 Introduction

Motivation is a key interest of migration scholars. That is why it constitutes the topic of the first of the three empirical chapters in my PhD. A large part of the literature review presented in Ch.2 and Ch.3 demonstrates how previous researchers discuss migration motivations. The two chapters demonstrate some interesting overlaps of migration motivations between Polish and Chinese students, including the search for good quality education, brighter career prospects, new life experiences and a less expensive education than in some other places, as well as acting out expectations present in local migration cultures and leaving behind a domestic education system perceived as unsatisfactory. All these types of motivation were considered within my interview guide and they constitute the major content of this chapter.

Chapter 5 investigates the motivations for Polish and Chinese students studying in London. By analysing answers to the interview question ‘Why did you choose to study in London?’, several main themes were revealed, which are discussed in sequence. These refer to social, economic, cultural, historical, educational, and political factors as seen from individual, family and national perspectives.

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins with the rational calculation of costs and benefits in the decision-making process of Polish and Chinese international students. As presented in the chapter, university rankings, career orientations and affordability are the key elements in their calculations. Then section 5.3 discusses the impact of students’ family backgrounds and members on their migratory decisions. Relevant factors include their family’s social class, previous mobility experience and the opinions of other family members. Section 5.4 demonstrates the migration culture amongst Polish and Chinese elites. Family, the migrants themselves and their peers are the three major players in this elite migration culture. Section 5.5 shifts the focus of the migration culture from the expectations of elites to those of more general mobile youth in Poland and China, looking at the transition to

adulthood and lifestyle migration. Finally, section 5.6 highlights several push factors in contemporary Poland and China that – in the eyes of students – ‘force’ young people to leave for universities based in London.

5.2 Rational individualists

The classic human capital approach is the theory most often applied to international student migration. Abundant literature points out that student migrants go abroad to obtain high expected returns from education and hopes for a better positioning in the job market (Li and Bray 2007; Counsell 2011; Huang 2013; Rahimi and Akgunduz 2017). My findings support this point. Both Chinese and Polish students in my sample are rational individualists. They decide to migrate internationally and study outside their home countries after a rational calculation of the costs and benefits. They are convinced that their decision to study abroad will bring about higher returns in human capital if they choose to study abroad. Why do they end up in British universities but not in equally reputable universities elsewhere? How do they manifest a cost-benefit approach? What enters into their calculations? What exactly are the costs and benefits? This section will discuss these matters from my interview sample of Chinese and Polish students.

5.2.1 Rankings taken for granted: core-periphery flows vs ‘getting gilded’

International student migrants are first of all students. They choose to study abroad so they become migrants. Therefore, it is unsurprising that their migration motivations firstly and largely refer to their studies. Existing literature suggests that international students are chiefly driven by the prestige of institutions (Collins 2012; Cebolla-Boado, Hu, and Soysal 2018). This is confirmed by my findings. When looking for ideal destinations, both Chinese and Polish students highly valued the degree programmes in UK universities. Many of them outlined the fact that many British universities top the global rankings and their strong reputation as primary reasons why they came to the UK for higher education.

The UK has a long history and lots of prestigious universities. Their education is very famous. This is why I chose to come here.

——CFM2

At that time I got to know about the Institute of Education at UCL. I heard it was quite famous, and ranked No. 1 in the world.
——CFP4

Other students referred to British universities as being among the ‘best’:

It was mainly because UCL is one of the best universities in the world, and SSEES is maybe the most specialised faculty in East European Studies anywhere in Europe.
——PFM3

In many cases, ranking seemed to be uncritically associated with high quality:

If you look at for example Shanghai Ranking of World Universities, there are so many British universities, aren't there? Amongst the first 50 you have Oxford, Cambridge, then you have UCL then Warwick. There are just so many British Universities on the list... The first factor that I come here is that the quality of education seems good. There are prestigious universities here in the UK. And it seems to me that this is the main reason why people come here.
——PFM1

It seems that reputation plays the central role in choosing destination universities for my participants, and ranking is the most significant indicator of reputation. CFP4, for example, reckoned UCL as famous because the institute ranked No.1 in the world. Some other students, such as CFM2 and PFM1, did not point out rankings directly, but described UK higher education as of good quality. It seems to them that reputation, ranking and good quality are equivalent and together they function as determinants in the decision-making process. Rankings and reputation in many ways provide students with direct reference points to judge the universities they go to/want to go to. Higher rankings and longstanding reputation are attractive attributes for them, and give them a feeling that ‘this must be a place worth going’. Both Chinese and Polish students took rankings for granted and expected to increase their human capital by means of such world-class institutions.

This is largely in accordance with Beech's (2019) findings about motivations for ISM to choose British universities, when rankings of the university play the central role, with the fame of UK education as a subsidiary factor. Polish and Chinese students also largely reflect UK students in Findlay et al. 's (2012) study, who are fully aware of the global university hierarchy and

actively pursue the ‘world-class’ education abroad. In this sense, we can say that international students, including those from Poland and China, are largely rational calculating individualists who benefit from the global neoliberal education market (King 2018; Xu 2022).

In the meantime, push-pull factors play a role here. While ‘good’ British universities function as pull factors, domestic education systems push students to leave their home countries. They disappoint students for not providing enough challenges. Many interviewees are ambitious young people, and they realised that studying abroad would be a better way to fully reach their potential.

In the last term of my last year of undergrad in China, I decided to do a master’s degree as many of my schoolmates did so. I felt like there were no challenge [if I continue my studies] in my university, and [studies in] the USA took too long, so I chose the UK.

—CFM4

My research team during my master’s studies in China was a good example. I felt like when I was there, I just repeated what my supervisor or senior students told me to do. If I continued my PhD studies there, there would be no change at all for the next few years. My training and work would be exactly the same as my master’s studies. So I want to change a little bit, and see how others do their research, and what the outside world is like.

—CFP3

Polish students made similar comments.

For me it was that I felt academic studies in Poland would not be enough for me. I just wanted to try something more difficult, because I always had good marks in class. It just seemed to me that studies at Polish universities would be too easy and too boring for me.

—PFU1

I spent a year in Warsaw at X University after *matura* (school leaving exams). It was a great time, but I wanted to have bigger challenges. I didn’t feel that my potential was fully realised there and therefore I switched to Y in Switzerland and did my undergrad there.

—PMM5

We can see that both Chinese and Polish students questioned the quality of education systems in their home country. However, Chinese students were more likely to be bored at universities in China having been there for a period of time, as such complaints came from postgraduate students only (although undergraduates complained about other aspects, like

high pressure to work hard in Chinese *gaozhong*, which will be discussed in a later part of this chapter). Polish students seemed to regard Polish universities, compared with British ones, as being of relatively low quality. This has confirmed Andrejuk's (2013) findings about the disappointment of Polish students with their home universities. My participants made such claims with reference to rankings, friends' opinions, or their own experience:

First of all [regarding] the quality of university: the [British] universities are world-class. They are in the first 50s or 100s in the world rankings, while the Polish ones are in the 500s.

—PFU1

When I compare my friends' experience in Polish universities, then the quality of teaching and studies in the UK seems perhaps much better.

—PMU3

From my experience, I don't think universities in Poland are very good... I prefer to do PhD research abroad due to the quality of the university, funding, and more opportunities for student exchanges as a PhD student. I can spend six months or three months in another university abroad. That is also great.

—PMM2

PFU1 is correct according to the Shanghai Ranking. In the 2020 version of this world-recognised university ranking, there are 7 British universities in the top 50, whereas only 2 Polish ones are in the top 500 (see Table 3 below). In terms of global university rankings, the UK locates at the centre while Poland stays in the periphery. Therefore, a core-periphery framework (King 2018) could be applied here to Polish student migrants.

While this theoretical framework about migration distinguishes core and periphery in terms of economic, social and political powers, I argue that educational migrants could also follow this pattern. The uneven historic economic development could lead to uneven development of education systems. Ambitious and qualified students constantly flow from peripheral to core educational centres around the globe, which largely coincide with global economic powers (Shields 2013). In this framework, it is a rational choice for Polish students to go to the UK from Poland for educational purposes.

This educational core-periphery model also reflects the migration systems theory, which suggests the stability of migration systems with frequent exchange of capitals between major receiving countries and sending countries. The free movement rights of EU citizens allow

students to move within its borders with few obstacles. However, scholars find that there has been a constant flow of students from new EU member states such as Poland and Romania to western Europe, but little the reverse way (Horváth 2008; Grabowska 2013; Bryła 2015). A migration system has emerged within European higher education institutions, where the UK locates at the core and Poland is the major sending country. The migration systems theory also suggests that the transformation of political and economic conditions may lead to the dropout of some countries from the system. The impact of Brexit on Polish students, though not the topic of this thesis, certainly supports the theory.

However, this core-periphery approach seems unfit to explain the behaviour of Chinese students in my interview sample. No one amongst my Chinese interviewees regarded their migratory action as a leap from a low to a high level of education. This is supported by the global rankings of Chinese universities. Table 3 indicates that, although generally behind British universities, Chinese universities still seem competitive, especially compared to Polish ones.

Table 0-1 The top British, Chinese and Polish universities according to the Shanghai University Ranking 2020

British universities	Global ranking	Chinese universities	Global ranking	Polish universities	Global ranking
University of Cambridge	3	Tsinghua University	29	University of Warsaw	301-400
University of Oxford	9	Peking University	49	Jagiellonian University	401-500
University College London	16	Zhejiang University	58		
Imperial College London	25	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	63		
The University of Manchester	36	University of Science and Technology of China	73		
The University of Edinburgh	42	Fudan University	100		
King's College London	47				
University of Bristol	64				

Instead of a periphery-to-core pattern like their Polish peers, Chinese students apply in their calculations a ‘dujin’ strategy, which means to improve their resume and prove their abilities.

‘Dujin’ in the Chinese language literally means to become gilded. It is a neutral term usually used to describe people who have been abroad to study or work, and these experiences are like gold leaf wrapped around them, thus making them (seemingly) outshine others who do not have such opportunities. To outshine others, the rankings of the university they attend are located at the heart of this strategy. This is the key element to prove their uniqueness and superiority. For some Chinese students, rankings seem so important that they even determined which country they went to:

I had applied to 14 universities in the USA and got 3 offers in the end. They ranked between 30-50 amongst American universities. If I went to the USA, these universities were famous locally in America, but if I want to go back to China to work, employers in China value global rankings more highly. British universities, which I got offers from, ranked higher than what I got in the USA. That is why I am here.

—CMU5

Take the education programme as an example. If I apply to both the USA and the UK, probably the British offers I got will have higher rankings. Relatively speaking, getting offers from G5 in the UK is less difficult than from Ivy League in the USA.

—CFM1

This ranking-pursuit strategy is something I have encountered in my daily life. As a Chinese student myself, I know that when friends, relatives or acquaintances know a person is studying abroad, the very first question they will ask is often ‘What is the ranking of your university?’ They usually have no idea about foreign universities, so ranking is the only ‘objective’ reference they could turn to. Within such an atmosphere, ‘world-class education becomes less as a means to an end and more as a [symbolic] object of desire in itself’ (Hansen and Thøgersen 2015: 6, cited by Cebolla-Boado, Hu and Soysal, 2018: 368). By entering top-ranking universities, Chinese students aim to get gilded. CMM5’s statement is representative of this:

During *gaozhong*, I had decided to study abroad for my master’s degree. The first thing is to go abroad. I have to admit that going abroad to get gilded is a very important reason. When you are back, you will outshine others in some aspects.

—CMM5

It must be clarified that this ‘getting gilded’ strategy works mostly, and maybe only, when graduates return to China. As CMM5 said, you outshine others when you are back. The gold only shines amongst compatriots. That means that, for these Chinese students, it is a rational strategy to get gilded abroad and receive an entrance ticket at a higher level in the domestic job market. But why would they return for their careers?

5.2.2 Career orientation: expected escalator to the world vs to home

Educational background is a vital indicator of one’s capabilities, especially in the job market. It is generally believed that employers prefer graduates from more famous universities. This is where their motivation for migration is linked to career expectations. One of the major benefits of studying abroad is its assistance in future career development (Zygierewicz 2014; Mok et al. 2018).

What is discussed above echoes Fielding’s (1992, cited in King et al. 2018: 285) concept of an escalator region. London, as suggested by Fielding, functions as an escalator region that attracts young educated people. These people accomplish upward social-economic mobility by the escalator, and then step off from it and leave for places where their economic and human capital could pay off more. Their migratory actions are associated with employment and career progress (Li and Bray 2007; Huang 2013).

Although the concept of escalator region is mainly used with regard to graduates, I argue that it could also be well applied to student migrants. My interview transcripts show that both Chinese and Polish students are confident that with degrees from prestigious British universities, they could become more competitive and distinguish themselves in the job market. On the one hand, they assumed that employers appreciated graduates with an overseas educational background. On the other hand, they thought that British universities could arm them with adequate knowledge and experience, thus making them more successful in their careers.

Of course a foreign PhD degree makes it easier to find a job in academia or other areas in China.

—CMP3

Overseas studies definitely provide more possibilities than graduating in Poland. In Polish universities it is practically impossible to apply for postgraduate studies abroad. Getting jobs abroad is very difficult, and employers highly value those who have overseas education degrees. So it is definitely promising.

—PMU3

In my interview sample, both Chinese and Polish students expected that the escalator, education in London, could take them up to an auspicious start in their careers. However, there were contrasting views in the two ethnically different student groups as to where to start their careers. As is shown above, Polish students largely favoured access to an international career, whereas Chinese students, with their gilded status, seemed to target preferably the domestic job market.

This outcome seems to relate to different expectations about job markets in their home countries. China, as a fast-growing, global economic power, offers ample opportunities for various job-seekers (Zhai and Moskal 2022). The potential in the home country seems attractive to Chinese students. Together with the ‘getting gilded’ strategy, they expect the escalator in London to take them to a promising career start in China. According to my observations, they were very confident in this belief. Polish students, however, did not seem to plan to return to the Polish job market when they migrated (although this does not mean they would not do so in the future). Studying in London seemed to function as an entry to an international professional world (Andrejuk 2013), or as a ticket to become one of Favell’s (2008) ‘Eurostars’, who gather in, or move between, key European cities. The words of PFP2 are a perfect example:

‘Why did you choose studies in London?’ Career prospects. A very good law sector here to develop my career. It is a very developed hub, professional hub. This is not even about income, just about career development possibilities. An international climate, international prospects.

—PFP2

The significance of London is highlighted by PFP2. It is a piece of evidence that students choose their destination place for the sake of future development or settlement (Findlay et al. 2012), and experiences in a specific city outweighs university reputation (Prazeres et al. 2017). The chance of studying in a global city like London adds to the cultural capital of

students (Collins 2014). Their preference for London is rather practical, as this city symbolises a bright career future.

Blackmore, Gribble, and Rahimi (2017) suggest international students who aim to stay and work after graduation produce and convert Bourdieu's various forms of capital by following the explicit as well as subtle rules in the local job market. Such is the case for Polish participants in my sample, who value the cultural, social and symbolic capital gained in the UK.

International students are ambitious young people with concrete plans for their future. They did not come to the UK on a sudden impulse. For people like those quoted above, they clearly knew what they wanted to do in the future before they arrived in the UK. They attended British universities in order to obtain the skills, training and qualifications they needed in their future. They took it for granted their development would be better provided by universities with higher global rankings and reputation (Beech 2019). All of the above account for the benefits of selecting an overseas university for Chinese and Polish students. 'Higher ranking = better future' is the outcome of their rational calculation. Meanwhile, to fully utilise their human capital, Chinese students tend to return to China, while Polish students pursue international careers.

It is necessary to note that these are simply findings from my interview sample. This cannot be generalised to all Chinese and Polish international students. In reality, many Chinese graduates manage to find jobs in London and start their career in this metropolitan city, while some Polish students get employed in Poland after graduation, usually (as I gathered from conversations with Poles) in large companies in Warsaw.

5.2.3 Affordability

London is one of the most expensive cities in the world, not only its living costs but also because tuition fees at UK universities are so large that they are a burden for most people. Expense is a key factor determining students' destination countries (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007; Wu and Myhill 2017). How do Chinese and Polish students take this issue into account?

In my interview sample, it is interesting that both Chinese and Polish students rationally make the decision after comparing the costs in London with other parts of the world, especially the USA. The UK offers a shorter length of study than most other countries: usually, undergraduate studies last for three years and master's studies last for only one year. In the USA they take four years and two years respectively. The costs of an entire degree programme are therefore much higher.

I got an offer from a good university in the USA called Columbia University. But its tuition fees equal to the cost of two master's degrees in the UK. So I decided to come to UCL. UCL's fees were acceptable.

—CMM4

It was because of the financial aspect. I could choose from New York University or King's College London. I knew that one year at NYU costs more than the whole degree programme at King's College.

—PMU4

I also have American citizenship, so I could be in the USA. But the fees are much more than in the UK. The degree at LSE costs me 14,000 GBP and in the USA it would be 70,000 USD. That is a huge difference for me, as I pay by myself.

—PMM2

My data from interviews show that length of study seems to be an important determinant in some cases. This difference influences students' decisions in two separate ways. First, the UK becomes financially more attractive than the USA, as shown in the quotations above. Second, some postgraduate students cannot afford undergraduate studies in the UK, so they went to universities in home/other countries for their bachelor's degree, and realise their British dream in their postgraduate degrees. The quotations below illustrate this point.

At the beginning I didn't apply to universities other than Amsterdam, because England seemed definitely too expensive for me at that time. Amsterdam seemed like a very good option and fees were much much cheaper. Annual tuition fees cost 2,000 euros, so it was much less than at UCL.

—PFM5

When I was still in *gaozhong*, my father wanted me to go abroad for my undergraduate degree, but at that time I felt my English was not good enough, I wasn't mature enough, and financially not good enough, so there would be too much pressure. So I decided to go abroad for the master's degree, then the financial pressure would be less.

—CMM3

It is worth noting that during my interviews Brexit had not yet happened, meaning Polish students still paid their tuition fees as EU students, much less than other international students, like those from China. This also means Polish students had access to student loans under the EU policy, and therefore required less financial support from their families than Chinese students. This is clear from the table below:

Table 0-2 Sponsor of Chinese and Polish students in my sample

Sponsor	Chinese students	Polish students
Parents	22	7
Self	1	3
Scholarship	5	7
Parents+self	1	0
Parents+scholarship	1	0
Student loans+parents	/	6
Student loans+self	/	2
Student loans	/	5
Total	30	30

From Table 4 we can see that Chinese students in my sample hugely depend on their parents' financial support, while Polish students have more diverse funding sources. More differences about family will be presented in the next section – family influence on motivation.

5.3 Family support and influence

The last section ended by raising the matter of affordability, which is directly linked to the students' family background. Researchers on international student migration who favour Bourdieu's cultural capital theory have analysed strategies used by middle-class families to secure or reinforce their cultural capital and class reproduction (Waters 2006; Findlay et al. 2012). Classic migration theories, such as new economics of labour migration and network theories, also shed light on the role of the family members in the decision-making process. This section focuses on how families are involved, if at all, when Polish and Chinese students decide to study abroad. To clarify mechanisms used by Polish and Chinese families, we need to look at their social background first.

5.3.1 Family background

There is no consensus about the social background of international student migrants in literature. In some studies they are from the middle class in their home countries (Sage, Evandrou, and Falkingham 2013), while in others their socio-economic backgrounds are very diverse, and also differ according to countries of origin (Cairns 2017). Migration scholars usually utilise parental occupations to infer students’ social class. Table 5 shows the jobs of parents of Polish and Chinese interviewees in my sample.

Table 0-3 Parental occupations of Polish students in my interview sample¹

Occupations	Number
teacher	12
doctor	7
manager	6
businessman	5
housewife	5
lawyer	4
engineer	3
property developer	3
IT	2
civil servant	2
architect, builder, economist, judge, musician, nurse, priest, reporter, writer	1 each
Total	58

From this table we could see that the most popular job amongst parents is a teacher, which is in line with Andrejuk’s (2013) findings. In her research sample of Polish students in London, interestingly, the majority of students were from intellectual families in Poland as well. This similarity between the two studies does not seem like a coincidence. As PMM5 claimed, education is highlighted in Polish culture. It could be inferred that intellectual families, compared with parents from other backgrounds, are more likely to understand the significance of education and invest in their children’s schooling. They encourage their offspring to study abroad, since they value education outside Poland, as suggested in 5.2.1.

In regard to social class, it seems that parents of Polish interviewees in my sample are generally from the middle class. The only professions which seemingly do not belong to the middle class were builder and (according to some definitions) nurse, and these were parents

¹ I interviewed 30 Polish students, but two of them gave information about the job of only one parent due to divorce or death. Therefore, the total number of jobs is not 60, but 58.

of the same person, who did full-time jobs for two years to pay for his master’s degree. All other Polish interviewees, however, were from families with higher social status. PMU4 made an insightful claim:

Polish [students in London] to a large extent are people from Warsaw, whom I knew either before or after we moved to London. They are from superior liceums, maybe not from the wealthiest, but let’s say from the upper middle class and higher.
 ——PMU4

PMU4 himself is one of those students he described – graduating from an exceptional liceum in Warsaw, with parents working in the financial sector. In addition, a professor from Poland pointed out the same thing in a casual conversation with me. She said that her impression was that Polish students in London were usually from rich families from major Polish cities.

From what is presented above, we could safely conclude that, in my sample, Polish students in London were generally from middle-class families. The significance of this feature will be discussed later. Now let us turn our focus to Chinese students’ backgrounds.

Table 0-4 Parental occupations of Chinese students in my interview sample¹

Occupations	Number
civil servant	13
manager	8
teacher	7
businessman	6
farmer	6
doctor	5
officer	3
accountant	2
bank clerk	2
diplomat	2
engineer	2
economist, editor	1 each
Total	58

There are over 100,000 Chinese students in the UK (HESA, 2017/18). It is unrealistic that my 30-person sample could represent the whole Chinese international student population. However, it does provide us with an insight into some interesting nuances. First, the most

¹ I interviewed 30 Chinese students, but one of them was unwilling to give information about their parents’ jobs. Therefore, the total number of jobs is not 60, but 58.

popular job among the Chinese parents is a civil servant. This, obviously, is because of the communist ideology and the large state sector in China, where civil servants have a higher social status. Overseas education requires much more expense than domestic schooling, and civil servants in China have more resources and possibilities than other people to send their children to foreign universities. Second, we can see six farmers in the table. This social group is considered to belong to the 'lower' class in China, and all of these six farmers were parents of PhD students in the sample. Close scrutiny reveals a stepped slope pattern of social background at different levels of degree amongst Chinese international students.

To be precise, in my sample as well as according to my daily observation, Chinese PhD students were from varied social backgrounds, from low to high-income families. They could study in the UK regardless of the cost, because they usually had scholarships. Master's students, who outnumbered students at other levels of degree programme, were usually from new middle-class families in China. They generally graduated from top-level universities in China, and their parents could afford the one-year expenses in the UK to get their children gilded. Undergraduate students, however, were definitely from the richest families. This is not only because their parents need to afford at least three-year expenses in the UK for a bachelor's degree, but also because usually they must attend international schools to apply to foreign universities. These schools cost at least 20 times more than state *gaozhong* in China. Proportionately only a very small elite could afford such a huge amount of money.

Put another way, Chinese master's students include those who have graduated from both British and Chinese universities, while Chinese PhD students include people who obtained their bachelor's and master's degree both in the UK (richer), both in China (relatively poorer), and bachelor in China plus master's in the UK (in the middle). We can say the higher the level of the degree for which students are enrolled, the more diverse their family backgrounds are.

This stepped slope pattern is particularly important in the following section of my project. It can help us understand the various strategies applied by different Chinese students, and also how it comes about that sometimes Chinese and Polish students are similar, sometimes not.

5.3.2 Family mobility: experienced migrants vs pioneer migrants

Existing literature suggests that previous mobility experience could spur students to study abroad (Carlson 2013; Frandberg 2014). In addition, they could be encouraged by their experience not only of their own mobility, but also of their parents' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Andrejuk 2013). These findings link motivation to study abroad to family influence. To have experience of migration before higher education, a teenager must obtain financial support and consent, sometimes guidance or company as well, from families. This experience could include sightseeing, visiting relatives and attending short courses. Such cases can be found amongst both Polish and Chinese students in my sample:

I began visiting London when my sister started to study there 10 years ago. Because she lived there, I went there every three or four months... So I knew London very well before coming to university.

—PMU5

I went to Belgium after the first year of *gaozhong* in China, because my parents were diplomats and went there to work... I attended an international school founded by English people, so I came to the UK in the end.

—CMU1

For PMU5 and CMU1, their overseas travel experiences provided them with impressions and information about what the outside world was like, which eased their decision making about studying abroad. This could not be done without the support of their families, especially when these students were still school pupils.

Furthermore, the case of PMU5 and CMU1 can be examined from a more macro perspective. They are examples of family mobilities, which impacted students' opportunities to study abroad. In general, Polish and Chinese students' families presented different mobility patterns in my sample. Many Polish families had strong ties with foreign countries. Some Polish students were born and/or brought up abroad for a few years. Some have relatives abroad so they could visit them, as PMU5 did. From a family perspective: some Polish students' family members were already migrants, and this meant students had experienced migration before entering universities in London. This had a direct impact on their decisions to study abroad:

I lived abroad when I was young, in the Czech Republic... from two to six years old. It was the time when one's personality is formed. It was because of my parents' work... It was natural for me to live abroad, where I felt good. Probably for this reason I chose to study abroad.

—PMU1

I definitely wanted to experience something other than living in Poland, because I lived abroad before and I lived only six years in Poland ... I spent seven years in Shanghai in China... Because my dad was fascinated by ancient China and studied sinology for a year there, and then had business with Chinese people and had to go there.

—PFU2

These findings reflect Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) concept of mobility capital in many ways. Experience during childhood can affect people's outlooks in many different ways. For those who have already lived abroad since childhood, it is no longer a barrier or an impossible idea to move, travel, live, holiday or study abroad. On the contrary, they even positively pursue such experiences and feelings, for exotic adventures always appeal to them and empower them to be 'on the road'. It can be seen that Polish students possess various types of mobility capital, such as overseas contacts, previous mobility experience, adaptation experience and curiosity about the world. This richness in mobility capital empowers them to study abroad.

Nevertheless, this is not the case for Chinese students. CMU1's experience is unique: no other Chinese interviewee in my sample mentioned that their parents were international migrants. The vast majority of Chinese international students in my sample are pioneer migrants in their families, compared to their Polish peers. Their parents have little international sojourn experience, and they are usually the first generation in the family to travel abroad.

This phenomenon could possibly be explained by the recent history of both countries. Poland has a long history of emigration. With the collapse of communism in 1989 and the entry into the European Union in 2004, the country has witnessed a growing international migration trend. A visa-free policy, cheap flights and the short distance to Western countries are all motivators triggering migration for both individuals and families. For instance, PMU5 has been able to visit his sister in London spontaneously for the last 10 years. PMU1's parents could work in nearby countries like the Czech Republic almost as easily as working in nearby Polish cities. It has generally been easy for Polish people to migrate internationally for the last three decades.

China developed along a different trajectory in the past thirty years (Yao 1999; Cheng 2009; Tang and Li 2014). The communist regime has formed a relatively closed environment in the country. Although the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s boosted the Chinese economy on a large scale, it mainly strengthened the domestic rather than international market. A growing middle class started to emerge in China, and within it are today's international students' parents. They seldom have experience of international mobility due to lack of opportunities (out-migration regulations and visa policies are complex), necessity (they could obtain wealth inside China), and connections abroad (longstanding restrictions on travel had limited most international ties, especially with the West). But they have enough wealth to invest in their children to secure their position in society, as suggested by Bourdieu. Of course, there are families who have foreign contacts, or manage to live or work abroad, but they are greatly outnumbered by the middle-class families from mainland China.

The impact of historical times and places on ISMs' life course (Choudaha 2017; McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020) can be captured here. What is notable is that they come into play via shaping their parents' mobility patterns and opportunities. Polish parents were more mobile than their Chinese counterparts due to different historical and geographical contexts. It suggests that the life course of the same age cohort may be shaped by socio-economic contexts in separate places, which can have long-term effects on the life course of their later generations. It is therefore argued that the principle of times and places in life course theory should be examined not only within individuals, but also across generations.

In comparison, Polish students possessed more mobility capital and benefited more than Chinese students from parents' experience of mobility, while Chinese students relied more than Polish students on parents' financial support. The latter point will be further evidenced in the next section.

5.3.3 Linked lives: following partners vs following parents

In the sample I found an interesting contrast between Polish and Chinese students in terms of family influence. A few Polish students stated that they followed their partners to London,

while no Chinese students mentioned that. However, Chinese students seemed to be influenced by their parents to a larger extent than Polish students.

Family reunion is an important theme in the migration literature, but is not often associated with student migration. Some research focuses on how mothers perceive themselves when accompanying their children studying abroad (Kempny-Mazur 2017; Qiu 2019), and some literature reveals students' strategies to reunite with their partners in their home country after graduation (Andrejuk 2013). But little is written about how students reunite with or follow their partners. In my sample, however, six out of thirty Polish participants attributed their migration decisions to their partners. This is not a small proportion, and includes reunions or joint moves:

I lived in Holland, and knew my boyfriend who lived in the UK at that time. We began trying to think of a way I could move to the UK... He's British.

—PFM1

Definitely my girlfriend, because she also studies at LSE. She studied with me in Leiden [for MA] and in Warsaw [for BA]. Together we made the decision to do a master's again in London.

—PMM2

For PFM1, choosing to study in the UK was because she found a boyfriend who lived in the UK. Attending a UK university was a means for her to be with her partner. It was a decision jointly made by this couple. Similarly, PMM2 and his girlfriend made a decision to study together in London. They had safely been through three different degrees in three different countries. These cases reflect the concept of 'linked lives' discussed in the life course literature (Findlay et al. 2015), which suggests mobility is relational, linking lives across time and space. Rather than following a linear life cycle, PFM1 navigated her way to London from Holland to join a degree programme for the sake of her boyfriend. Their lives were linked through migration and the choice of destination, in other words, which one of this couple moved to another one's location, was determined together via their negotiation. PMM2 and his girlfriend had been through similar negotiations, at least three times. Their relationship has shaped their life course trajectory, linking their lives together in the continuous migration process over time and space. In these cases, mobility takes place within the relationship network, which connects Polish students and their partners in their life course.

Yet no Chinese students in my sample demonstrated that their partners were involved. Various factors made it hard for relationships to stimulate migration. First of all, relationships in teenage years are strongly discouraged in Chinese mainstream culture. Parents and teachers place the higher education entrance exam as the priority, and relationships are perceived as an enemy of study. People subconsciously consider relationships as a 'taboo', and are unlikely to share information about it in public. This may be why no Chinese interviewee mentioned the influence of their partners, even though there might have been some.

In addition, the distance from the UK to China is much farther than to Poland or other European countries. Hence, costs, cultural differences, future prospects and personal interests are more complicated for Chinese students than for Polish students. According to new economics of labour migration, decisions are made by a household to minimise risks and maximise income. When calculating benefits and costs, it is difficult for a Chinese couple to move together to the UK, as it requires a common interest, future plans and most importantly, common economic background, since studying in the UK costs a large amount of money. As is discussed in the affordability section, Chinese students have to rely heavily on financial support from their families, so they may not make decisions solely from their own perspective. Polish students, however, have had access to student loans so that they were less dependent on their families.

The financial dependence on families seems to influence not only relationships, but also gives Chinese parents the right and responsibility to take part in the whole decision-making process, which is not often seen in Polish cases:

My parents let me work after obtaining a bachelor's degree, but during my work I realised I still had a lot of to learn, so I wanted to study abroad. But I failed to reach a compromise with my parents, so I postponed it for a year... However, I really like learning and registered on various courses in Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou. They felt like I would spend almost the same amount of their money either in or outside China, so it would be better to study abroad. Finally they conceded.

—CFM2

Some parents influenced the choice of a certain university:

They did have an impact. Personally I value the quality of programme, but my parents value ranking very much. It is about face. They checked LSE and knew it ranked No. 2 in the world in social science, and they could boast about it. My mum really valued this.

—CMM5

Under the influence of Confucianism (Gu and Maley 2008), Chinese people strongly emphasise the significance of filial duties. Elders are responsible for looking after younger people, while the latter have a duty to follow the elders, and take care of them when they grow old. Such beliefs create a tight bond between Chinese students and their parents. Students receive more financial support from parents, and also need to deal with their parents' requirements.

Polish students, however, are more likely to present their independence and autonomy. No one in the interviews actively talked about the role of their parents in their migration decisions. Most of them straightforwardly answered 'no' when being asked whether their parents had an impact on their decisions. This contrast gives us new insights into evaluating the linked-lives approach. When acknowledging the significance of power relations in household discussions (Findlay et al. 2015), this approach does not indicate clearly the cultural difference between different households. Power relations may differ within different cultures, such as between (the Chinese) Confucianism and (the Polish) individualism, even when the age, gender or class positions are the same in these cultures. I argue that cultural difference in determining power relations should be taken into account when considering linked lives within households. It can help us figure out the key determinant in the decision-making process with regard to linked lives.

Nevertheless, we should not assume that there is an automatic cultural connection between Chinese and Confucianism, or between Polish and individualism. Culture not only shapes power relations, but is shaped by class as well, especially when the entire family is involved (Xu 2021). It can be seen from my sample that the younger the student is, the more their parents were involved in the decision-making process. Particularly for undergraduate

students, it was often their parents' idea to attend international schools and then study abroad. This is a separate theme I will discuss below, which refers to both Polish and Chinese students – the elite migration culture.

5.4 Elite migration culture in contemporary Poland and China

Unlike traditional labour migrants, who seek higher wages and generally come from low-income families, plenty of student migrants in London are located at the opposite end of the economic spectrum, especially undergraduate students. They are from elite families in their home countries, and studying abroad demonstrates their elite nature. In a nutshell, there is an emerging migration culture amongst elites in Poland and China. In some interviews it seemed that both parents and students shared positive attitudes towards international migration; in other cases, as discussed below, it was the students who had to convince their parents to let them study abroad.

Since section 5.4 and 5.5 both deal with migration culture, it will be helpful to clarify this concept first. Migration culture has various definitions and meanings in the literature. For instance, in the theoretical framework of cumulative causation, Massey et al. (1993) use the term in their quantitative research to explain how changing values and cultural understandings facilitate the migratory process, in a community where migration becomes normal. Some other researchers adopt an anthropological approach more focused on understanding the local cultural context. Elrick (2008) understands migration cultures as the emerging cultures in sending societies brought or triggered by migration, including the changing values, norms and social adjustment to the absence of many key community members. Horváth clarifies the context of migration cultures amongst Romanian rural youth as 'an indeterminate context in which the uncertainties of a prolonged transition to adulthood can be negotiated' (Horváth 2008: 783). White (2011: 61) for example defines migration cultures as 'conventions about why and how people should migrate, which people should migrate and where they should go.' While these studies are insightful in elucidating the concrete context of migration cultures, they mainly focus on rural migrants. This section examines the migration cultures and contexts amongst a given category in Poland and China

– a particular social elite, as discussed in the earlier section about parental occupations found in my sample.

5.4.1 Family plans and preparations

While the last section discussed family influence during and around the time of the migratory action, this part of the thesis explores what families do to prepare for their children's departure abroad. It has been established that making pre-departure preparations is of great advantage for international students in terms of adapting to the language, culture and academic environment in receiving countries (Quan, He, and Sloan 2016; Heng 2018a). The literature suggests that it will lead to efficient and fast integration. According to my findings, however, I argue that comprehensive preparation or similar activities could stimulate not only integration of student migrants, but also their motivation to study abroad.

In reality, many elite families from Poland and China play active roles in planning their offspring's life, something which can happen long before students migrate. They do not necessarily have concrete plans for migration in later years, but special schemes for the sake of self-development and self-realisation. Study abroad seems like a natural part of this scheme.

The primary form of preparation is to learn English. It is commonly assumed that the earlier the study of a foreign language begins, the easier it is to master. But it requires not only awareness but also investment. Elite families in Poland and China have them both. Students in my sample mentioned that they had private lessons or extra courses in English at a very young age, or attended English-language primary schools.

Maybe because I had many extra English classes [from primary school onwards], and that is where I learned about British culture, which I found interesting... My mum encouraged me to go to English classes, she decided I would... For me it was all the same and I did not really understand how it would influence me and how important it would.

— PFP1

I went to a British primary school in Warsaw for 8 years when I was very young... Because my parents thought that language was the most important thing. They wanted me to master the language so that it wouldn't be a problem for me later.

—PMU5

CMU2, who arrived in the UK from Beijing at the age of 14, offered details about how much harder elite children were expected to work:

My mum had me learn English when I was 5 years old... At the age of 8 I went on a very good English course. We had a very intensive calendar – about 14 hours per week... We undertook lots of reciting to get a feel for the language. Now I can still remember all of the dialogue in the film *Lion King*... They created an environment where we had to speak English... I attended the course for 4 years and my English was not a problem, then I came to the UK a year later.

—CMU2

To attend such courses for a few years certainly demands lots of money, as well as long-term plans. This requires parental input. Parents in elite families regard English as a crucial skill today, and therefore they train their children from when they are young. As a result, their children are more likely to master a foreign language, and naturally more likely to migrate abroad.

Wang (2020) maintains that in China, far fewer pupils in rural areas than in urban areas regard learning English as important. My own observation supports this claim. People from low-income families have neither the consciousness of its usefulness nor sufficient wealth to learn foreign languages. Particularly in economically underdeveloped regions, residents often disregard the significance of foreign languages and fail to treat them seriously. I still remember when my cousin was some ten years old, he told me that he did not like learning English because 'I am Chinese and I speak Chinese'. He grew up in a small town in the inner part of mainland China, where the quality of English teaching is not satisfactory. The poorly-skilled English teachers further discouraged children's interest in English. To promote English skills, children in these areas have to travel to big cities like Beijing to attend extra English courses there. As a result, I observed that Chinese students who took foreign language programmes in universities were mostly from major cities in each province, especially from the coastal economically-advanced regions of China. Consequently, students from these places are more likely to belong to a subsection of society with a marked migration culture. This reflects the cumulative causation theory, where migration cultures emerge and spur

ongoing migration. Also it is a good evidence of Massey et al.'s (1993) claim that higher education backgrounds facilitates cumulative migration. Economic and educational inequalities reproduce through migration (Xu 2021).

In addition, to actually experience the outside world is also important. Elite families plan international trips to expose their children to diverse cultures and civilisations, broaden their horizons and imagination. In the end, children may have greater possibilities and fewer barriers to migrate abroad:

I am from a family which travels a lot. My parents and I have visited practically the whole of Europe... I'd been to London twice before university, so I knew a bit about what it was like.

—PMP4

I went on a tour with my mum to Israel in 2015. In the end I incidentally checked which school could be available for me in Israel. I saw this international school, I applied, I was accepted... If I hadn't been admitted, probably I would still be in education in China. Yep, that was a coincidence.

—CMU5

It is not common for Polish families to visit the whole of Europe, nor for Chinese families to visit Israel. This is likely to be the result of the family interest in travelling internationally, and they must be able to afford it. Through these international journeys, children of elite families become different from others in that they have experienced different cultures and lifestyles, thereby potentially becoming more tolerant and curious about the world, while those who grow up in a relatively homogeneous society have less opportunity to find out about what the outside world is like. What is more, the latter are more easily influenced by media which often report negative international news. Hence, people without prior migration experience are less likely to start an overseas education.

Studying abroad might not be the direct reason for these elite families to arrange English courses or international travel, but it is the very natural outcome of them. Following these family plans and preparations, children begin to develop elite characteristics themselves. These characteristics manifest themselves when they grow up, and finally end up in British universities.

5.4.2 Early independence and migrant identity

From my interviews, it seemed that elite students themselves make an appraisal of the value of studying abroad at a very early age. In late adolescence, they become more and more independent, and want to make their own decisions. In my sample it is not rare to see that interviewees tried to persuade their parents to let them study abroad or attend international schools.

I went to an international school, so basically I decided to study abroad after finishing my *chuzhong*. I made my own decision to go to the international school... My parents didn't have a strong impact. It was mainly me who tried to persuade them.

—CMU3

It was a joint decision. I told my mum that I didn't like it here and wanted to go abroad. We thought about this together. I checked the school websites by myself. 'You mean you checked English school websites by yourself at the age of 14?' Yes.

—CMU2

For some Polish students, they obtained scholarships in British private schools:

I attended a national scholarship competition in Poland, where every year about a dozen people received scholarships to different private schools in England. I was always interested in going abroad and seeing something interesting [so I entered the competition and won the scholarship]... My parents didn't treat it seriously until the final recruitment stage. At the beginning they thought it was just a game.

—PMU2

What distinguishes these elite students from others is that they consciously take actions to make their own way abroad in their adolescence. While ordinary children follow a normal path of education without the concept of other possibilities, pupils like CMU2 are already searching for information about schools on the other side of the planet. Their independence grows much earlier than others, which enables them to make decisions that most ordinary people never think about. In some cases, their own interest in studying abroad is set up earlier than their parents, as shown by CMU3, who directly chose his destination. That is to say, an elite migration culture sometimes characterises only the younger members of the elite family, with regard to studying abroad.

In addition, findings of this thesis also indicate a temporal dimension of these elite families' behaviours. Xu has clearly demonstrated that 'time is rendered a much sought-after resource (i.e. capital), the possession and use of which are differentiated by class privilege' (Xu 2021: 9). Section 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 show these elite families in my sample clearly utilised their time in a different way from ordinary families. They spent lots of time on extra English tuition and international travel, and gain more mobility capital than other young people in the same time. Besides, individual students tried to grasp the chance to study abroad at a very early age, indicating the 'temporality of identity awakening' (Xu and Yang 2019), while ordinary children often have no clue about such opportunities. Time, therefore, is class-differentiated for ISMs, which leads to different mobility potential and directions.

Interestingly, some Polish students in my sample also presented a lack of awareness of about the timing of their study abroad decision. They also made the decision by themselves, but could not name a clear moment, event, or turning point which determined their plan to leave their home countries. Rather, it seemed like a seed which was sown very early in their minds, and gradually grew:

I don't know at which moment...Maybe at the end of primary school?... I never thought of studying in Poland. Really... I just wanted to leave. I always felt an inner need to move away from Poland.

—PMU1

It seems to me that it was ever since I found out the meaning of the word 'border' (smile). I always knew I wanted to leave. I remember that when I was very young I posted on a social media website that I wanted to live abroad. So it was maybe when I was 8 years old that I made the decision.

—PMM1

This internal desire to move out of Poland must have an underlying cause, which is absent amongst Chinese students. When I dug deeper into the data, I found an overt connection between such demand and previous migration experience. To be clear, those who are unclear about the moment when they made the migration decision, are usually people with migration experience when they were children. PMU1 lived in the Czech Republic from 2 to 6 years old. PMM1 had relatives in Holland, so he had visited there from a young age, and went there for his undergraduate studies. Their experience left them with a vague incentive to migrate again sooner or later, and they finally realised this by studying abroad. This, again, backs up the

analysis in 5.4.1 about the impact of previous experience. In other words, previous migration experiences might impact children's migration decisions in different ways, but among my sample they always had a positive influence on it and triggered migration later on.

The finding also reflects what is presented in 5.3.2 about family mobility, and explains why no Chinese student followed this pattern. Many Polish families are rich in migration experience, so their children do not necessarily need a reason to migrate – it is simply natural to them. This migrant identity will be discussed more fully in the concluding chapter. Chinese students, however, do not often have this legacy due to their families' scarce migration experience. Their motivation to study abroad does not come from prior migration experience, but from what they are experiencing in their home country, especially with their peers in school. Again, findings in section 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 has confirmed that Polish students are much richer than Chinese students in mobility capital.

5.4.3 Peer influence and competition

In addition to their family's and the students' own internal motivation, we can add their peers'. Due to cumulative causation theories, previous migratory action could change the social circumstances that spur the subsequent migratory process and help create a culture of migration. Network theory and alumni networks are highlighted in a range of literature (Collins 2013; James-MacEachern and Yun 2017). In the case of Polish and Chinese students, classmates, alumni and relatives of their own age could behave as facilitators in this migration culture.

I'd wanted to come to the UK since *gaozhong*... I have a cousin who is 10 years older than me. He studied in Australia and changed a lot after studying abroad. My parents thought this was great.

—CMM2

There was a joint scholarship programme run by the Chinese and Singapore governments... In the last year of my *chuzhong*, an older schoolfriend who attended this programme came back and shared his experience. I felt he was so unique and unlike other graduates from schools in China. I became interested in the programme, I applied for it and got it. So I went to Singapore.

—CFU3

It seems that for many students, peers could have a stronger impact on them than parents. When answering ‘did your parents or friends have an influence on your decision to study abroad?’, many interviewees simply mentioned that their parents were supportive, and highlighted the atmosphere in their schools. As pupils, they spent most of their time with classmates, so their peers could be more influential in some cases. The below quotations are indicative:

There are few international schools in Poland, and there at least half of the class would study abroad. The process is like, one decides to apply abroad, all decide to apply.

——PFU5

I just had such a thought [to study abroad] in mind during *gaozhong* but didn’t take it seriously. I think a key factor is peer influence. If I had a few friends who wanted to study abroad, maybe I would just leave with them. But every one focused on the higher education entrance exam in China, so you wouldn’t think seriously.

——CMM5

Obviously, the type of school is significant in deciding students’ final destination. Attending international schools automatically opens a pathway to foreign universities, while state schools are more likely to have graduates studying in universities in their home countries. Thus, this elite migration culture manifests itself by sending children to international schools, which are small in number. According to data from the official website of the International Baccalaureate (IB)¹, in 2021 there were 216 schools in China and 61 schools in Poland offering IB courses. As ‘there are few international schools in Poland’ (according to interviewee PFU5) and China as well, these schools are all in big cities – in my sample Polish students from international schools in Poland were based in Warsaw, Cracow, Wroclaw or Poznan, whereas similar Chinese students were from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou or Chengdu. These are among the biggest cities in their home countries. Their location overlaps with where superior foreign language programmes are provided in Poland and China, as is discussed in 5.4.1.

There are also negative impacts of peers. Many Chinese students are involved in fierce peer competition and study abroad is a means to win this competition (Cebolla-Boado, Hu and Soysal 2018). This phenomenon is directly linked to what is discussed in 5.2.1 about university rankings. If a student fails to enter a ‘good’ university in China and cannot accept going to a

¹ Find an IB World School <https://www.ibo.org/>. Accessed 20.11.2021

university with a lower ranking than their peers, they turn to foreign universities with a higher global ranking, to dwarf their peers in the future:

I was a seeded physics contestant in my *gaozhong*. My class didn't follow ordinary curriculums but prepared for national contests. You win the first prize and you get admitted by Tsinghua or Peking University. But I failed... In an environment like our class, pupils, parents and even teachers would compare the university you go to... I thought that since everyone else went to good universities, I must go to one with a higher global ranking, higher than theirs.

—CMP1

I felt like if I failed to enter University E (an average university in China), which I did, the starting point of my future career or even my life would be lower than my classmates who went to University A, B, C, and D (the best universities in China). I was not reconciled to this. I thought if I was a loser in the domestic education system, I could change to another one to obtain more competitiveness with graduates from University A, B, C, and D in the future.

—CFM3

Both CMP1 and CFM3 ended up in British universities for their undergraduate studies. Their decisions were largely shaped by their failure in peer competition in China. When the fact was inconsistent with their elite identity, they needed to find a way to compensate for their psychological loss. So 'from a possible, optional or desirable practice, migration can turn into a crucial and necessary social act, that is quasi-compulsory for certain social categories' (Horváth 2008: 773). Studying abroad functioned as a Plan B to keep elite students in line with their peers, and offered them credits in future competition.

Similar to the 'getting gilded' strategy, studying abroad as Plan B is also based on the anticipation of return. Hence, Polish students, most of whom are interested in international job markets, are not necessarily concerned with competition from peers. As a result, they do not have to engage in fierce domestic competition like Chinese students do. Instead, they can concentrate on themselves and pursue a preferable lifestyle in London.

In sum, the concept of elite migration culture in this thesis reveals another way of understanding migration cultures. Previous studies mainly put their unit of analysis on the community level (Elrick 2008; Horváth 2008), demonstrating its operation in certain regions. Elite migration culture in my research mainly pertains to middle-class households in big cities,

and therefore not communities. It should be understood in three ways. The first is how the family behave to prepare for children's migration, e.g. arranging language courses and international travels. The second, which is mainly applied by Polish participants, is how individuals grow a migrant identity at an early age as a result of sufficient migration history. The third is concerned mainly with Chinese participants, revealing a strong influence of their peers. Sometimes migration becomes a means to secure their positions in the competition with peers. These three ways are not totally independent. The latter two are more or less linked to the first one. Elite migration culture is therefore how people behave or respond to the social settings in terms of migration.

5.5 Migration culture of today's mobile youth

In today's fast paced life, and with their fluid mobility, more and more young people are starting to treat migration as a pathway to various unknown possibilities (Milewski and Ruszczak-Żbikowska 2008; Yang, Volet, and Mansfield 2018). People in their adolescence or 20s are in the most daring period of their lives and there are certain migratory features unique to youth. Scholars have defined it as a process of becoming (Worth 2009; Tran 2016). In my sample, we can see some students perceive migration as a means leading them to what they want to become or experience. Such a belief is becoming increasingly popular amongst young people in both Poland and China. What does this youth migration culture consist of? Do Polish and Chinese students possess similar or different strategies when they migrate? This section aims to demonstrate how students talk about their migration decision as due to being young and adventurous.

5.5.1 Transition migrants: the road to independence

The transition from youth to adulthood is an important life phase for everyone. It is a period when a person begins to take shape. When transition meets with geographic mobility, it could lead to a trend towards social individualisation, postponed marriage and parenthood. Geopolitical and economic events may also have an impact on the transition process (King 2018). Today within the altering nature of family bonds, a new individualised migration pattern has emerged (Engbersen 2012), as people migrate for their own sake.

Getting higher education occurs exactly around the transition period. At this very age, young people want to gain independence, have some experience and are getting to know themselves. International migration provides them with a great opportunity to leave the environment and structure they are familiar with. It seems that transition is the motivation for migration for some students, who mentioned that they chose to go abroad in favour of independence:

I went to day school all the time. I wanted to try living alone, so I chose to study abroad. I was looking forward to seeing what it is like when I take care of myself.

—CFU4

I was 18 years old when I left Poland. At the age of 18 everyone wants just to leave home, go abroad and live by themselves.

—PMP2

CFU4 was an only child raised by her parents for 18 years in Shanghai. She never needed to worry about daily errands as her parents did everything for her. Shanghai, the largest city in China, gave her ample resources to grow up. She could have lived a pleasant life with nothing to worry about in China, but the passage to adulthood motivated her to examine what she could do without care from her parents, so she moved to the other side of the world and started to live on her own. CFU4's move echoed what McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay (2020) suggest about the changed meaning of youthful adulthood in life courses, which facilitates geographic mobility. Life course is no longer a static combination of linear stages, but a fluid process mediating by ISMs' own agency.

The one-child policy, which lasted for three decades, had outcomes for the family patterns in contemporary China. The only child obtains all the resources as well as expectation of the entire family. He or she may grow up 'happily' without competition or sacrifice within the family, but is also unconsciously more dependent on parents, as they take parents' assistance for granted. When they want to shed this dependence, their youthful nature plays a critical role. Around the age of 18, when they are at the border of adulthood, students from both countries, like CFU2 and PMP2, displayed a strong will to achieving independence. After being under the protection of their parents for so many years, they finally had an opportunity to test themselves and live on their own. Migration at this moment functions as a path towards

independence or at least, as Krzaklewska (2019) suggests, 'an experience of semi-independence'.

Clearly, we need to bear in mind that this path towards independence is class-based (Xu 2021). Only a few students, those from families of privileged status, can afford such chances, making their life courses distinct as a result of their international mobility (Findlay et al. 2015). Meanwhile, students from economically less privileged families have less, even no such chances.

Transition to adulthood could also be the outcome of migration. This is also evidence that becoming mature is a process that occurs before, during and after migration, and I will discuss this further in Chapter 7.

5.5.2 Lifestyle migrants: the significance of London

When people migrate in search of a desirable way of life, they become lifestyle migrants. The expression is often understood to denote rich people migrating for a better quality of life, life-work balance and to escape from preceding constraints (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). Young migrants, particularly student migrants, are also largely interested in lifestyles (Ye 2018). They are attracted to culturally exciting global metropolises. London has a long tradition of immigration, and under the European free movement framework, the UK capital became increasingly fascinating to young continental Europeans before Brexit (Andrejuk 2013). Its cultural and economic resources are second to none, so 'London has become the key stage in the life-course trajectories of a vast number of European citizens' (Favell 2008: 30-31).

Many of my interviewees noted that they chose London as the destination city on purpose. An appealing young-adult lifestyle seemed to drive them to this enormous metropolis (King 2018). They arrived with either a vague idea of their London dream, or concrete expectations about their opportunities, or pursuit of freedoms which their home countries failed to offer. From the interviews, I identified several main attractions.

First is the 'vibe' of London. This is the English word PMU1 used in our conversation in Polish. Even the word 'London' can sound like a symbol of endless possibilities and thrilling challenges, so simply hearing it means people are inspired and envision what they could achieve in the city. Before they arrived, both Polish and Chinese students had some hazy but positive ideas about London, as a place where one can become whatever one wants and with diverse entertainment opportunities.

I just wanted to live in a big city like London. I always liked the 'vibe' of London... I was also admitted by universities in Rotterdam and Tilburg. But they are small cities and I don't like their 'vibe'. That was why I chose London.
——PMU1

PMU1's imagination of London depicted a favourable image, which is not visualised but rather appealing. For him, the prestige of the institution seemed less significant than what the city can offer, which backs up Prazeres et al. (2017)'s finding that urban features can be the more decisive factor for ISM. The quality of life and elements beyond academic study matter the most in this case.

London's metropolitan lifestyle was especially favoured by students who already had study abroad experience, but in small towns. As we can see in the previous section, students with study abroad experience at a younger age were usually from elite families in big cities, and were probably used to the metropolitan lifestyle in their home countries. In the interviews, they could not help complaining about the boredom and inconvenience they faced during their previous studies. Coming to London seemed like a necessary upgrade for them in their non-academic life.

According to my observation, it is very common amongst Chinese students to call foreign smaller cities 'small towns' or even 'villages'. As the country with the largest population in the world, China has about one hundred cities with a population of over one million. Against this background, only a few of the largest megalopolises are considered 'big cities' in China. A city with 2 million people is thought to be a 'small town'. Only a small number of capital cities in the West could reach this 'big city' standard, including London, meaning in London students can achieve the familiar city lifestyle they are used to:

I don't want to return to the village, because X (a city in western England, where she had her undergraduate studies) is a small town, and I don't want to do my PhD in a small town. It must be a big city, as there will be more career opportunities and entertainment.

—CFP5

While PMU5 compared London with Rotterdam and Tilburg, CFP5 compared it with the English city X. For her, London's attraction far outweighed X, where she had her undergraduate programme. This seems especially the case given that the study sites in England are often overshadowed by London in the imagination of my interviewees, while in Beech (2014)'s study international students in Nottingham also belittle their own city over London. In this comparative framework of different cities (Prazeres et al. 2017), students distinguish the unique features of the city they choose and highlight its spirits (Beech 2019). The significance of place becomes salient when choosing destination universities.

The next reason is more practical and already mentioned by CFP5 – more career opportunities, including placement chances, alumni networks and more job offers. This is a very important advantage that London offers for ambitious young adults. As a global professional hub for culture and finance, London is an ideal place for graduates to start their careers, and for students to earn placement experience to get gilded (Su 2013; Wu 2016). Study experience, as well as placement and work experience in London, are highly valued by employers all over the world. No second city could offer such functions. CMP1 gave a valuable insight into this:

I realised universities in big cities like London have access to much more resources than small cities. For instance, when I did my undergrad at University Y (in northern England), the programmes or coursework were only virtual projects. But when I am at UCL, in similar courses we had projects authorised by big international companies... These resources exist only in top universities, or universities in big cities.

—CMP1

The choice of CMP1's destination university was directly linked to the importance of London. Compared to Y, London offers a wider range of opportunities for students to practice their projects and find employment in big companies. Its identity as a hub for technology, finance and science in the UK and even in the world interacts with university prestige and career development, strengthening the power and attraction of London. Similar to Seoul in Collins'

(2014) study, the learning experience in London and the support from large international companies are crucial contributors to the image of a city as a desirable destination for higher education.

The final type of response relates to distaste for the atmosphere or lifestyles in their home countries. Some students mentioned that they did not appreciate certain situations in their home countries and thus emigrated. Reasons mentioned included the homogeneity of society, negative political or societal situations, or unpleasant working and living environments. In comparison, they regarded London as a more liberal and tolerant place and its diversity made them more comfortable than where they were from. They migrated in order to leave the oppressive environment in their home countries and to find freedom:

I felt that I might be a little better here. It is about different world views and politics. Poland is very conservative so I definitely prefer the more liberal culture in the UK.

—PFP4

I was a member of admin staff in a Chinese college. I really dislike the working mode there. I spent too much time on communication and relationships between people... You need to first have a good relationship with others to get things done.

—CFP4

PFP4 was constrained by the conservative atmosphere in Poland, and CFP4 by the complex relationship in her Chinese workplace. London, which provides a liberal lifestyle, relieved them of previous pressures and offered a more desirable environment. As Prazeres et al. (2017) suggest, these lifestyle-pursuing students aim for the chance to stay in a specific comfortable place (such as London) rather than being focused only on career development. It is the particular liberal vibe of the city that attracts them to study there.

There are various categories of lifestyle migrants amongst Polish and Chinese students, but they are all attracted by the opportunities that London offers them, thus they flow there in great numbers. The influx of migrants from different backgrounds reinforces the diversity of London. In this way, cumulative causation emerges and a youth migration culture is strengthened. However, this does not mean that students from different places come with identical attitudes.

5.5.3 Attitudes: experimental vs strategic

Mobility is becoming more and more common among today's youth. In my sample both Chinese and Polish students were attracted by London's diverse lifestyle, but they presented different attitudes when they arrived. Some Chinese students expressed the view that they came to London simply for the experience itself. After obtaining degrees they would soon return to China. This is especially true in the cases of one-year-master's students.

I study for my master's degree only for the experience abroad. For me it is just an adventure, an experience in my life.

—CFM1

I come to the UK mainly for the master's degree. Oh and I want to experience as well... Then I will return to Shenzhen or Guangzhou, maybe Shanghai.

—CMM4

These Chinese students were strategic in their decisions to study in the UK. The overseas experience was the most important motivator for them. It could be a reward for long-term hard work within the Chinese education system, or a result of the 'getting gilded' strategy, or a dream from when they were very young. Whichever the case, 'it is just an adventure' in their life and in the end they will always return. They knew it before departure. They reflect Andrejuk (2013)'s definition of 'educational tourists', who perceive their overseas education as an adventure and tend to return home after this journey.

In contrast, Polish interviewees never showed such an explicit return-home propensity. Rather, they talked about migration as an experiment, with open options. Eade, Drinkwater, and Garapich (2006) termed it 'intentional unpredictability', a concept which is heavily quoted by migration scholars. The term is used to describe migrants without specific ambitions or plans pertaining to the future. Instead of sending back remittances or settling down permanently in receiving countries, they keep options open. Such is the case amongst many of my Polish interviewees. They depicted their arrival to London as part of an ongoing process, and that there is no clear-cut indicator of when or where this process was going to end.

It was important for me to have connections with other countries than with only Holland and Poland. It always seemed to me that higher education is a good way to have such connections.

—PMM1

I definitely wanted to know more than Poland. Because I lived abroad earlier, and then 6 years in Poland. Later I wanted to go somewhere else to see other different countries.

—PFU2

For students like PMM1 and PFU2, studying abroad is just a way for them to experience different countries. Although both highlighted experience, Polish and Chinese students have different subtexts. Chinese students, at least in my sample, wanted to gain experience, and return home with such experiences. But Polish students were always ‘during’ the experience. After dwelling in the UK, there might be another experience elsewhere. That is to say, relatively speaking, Polish students were more experimental in terms of migration culture, whilst Chinese students were more strategic in their motivations for studying abroad.

However, the term ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen and Snel 2013) needs to be re-examined in the context of this thesis. Some strategies and attitudes of Polish participants did fit in with this notion, such as impermanent stay and an individualised orientation, but some others did not conform to this type. The Polish interviewees had mostly arrived before Brexit and were able to benefit from freedom of movement, but UK’s dropout from the EU made them less capable of being ‘liquid’. In addition, though Polish participants were more experimental compared to Chinese peers, their moves were not as ‘sudden and spontaneous’ as Engbersen and Snel suggest. As we can see in this chapter many of them had made good preparations and aimed for international careers before studying abroad. Usually, their decisions were made as a result of rational calculations rather than out of spontaneity (Beech 2019). Student migration is not necessarily liquid, but can be constrained by institutional factors, as White (2010) observed.

What is more, we can see different temporalities in relation to study abroad between Polish and Chinese students. This period of time in the UK seems to serve different functions for them. For Polish students, such as PFU2, it is a stepping-stone for subsequent mobility. Study in the UK is part of an on-going mobility process, during which they keep their minds open and accumulate cultural and social capital in order to settle down or keep moving (Findlay et al. 2012). Polish students are experiencing the ‘nomadic times’ termed by Cwerner (2001), when they live highly individualised lives beyond the frame of nation-state. For Chinese

students, however, this period seems like an anomaly in their planned life, and ‘just an adventure’, as CFM1 suggests. This supports Wang and Collins’ (2020) findings that the linear life course is no longer suitable for international students, and that they refuse to follow the temporal norms in the home country, but seek for new adventure outside China in their youthful days.

However, this adventure is planned to happen within this specific life stage, after which they will return to the ‘normal’ life course. Thus, the nomadic times for Poles and the temporality of planned adventure for the Chinese young people can be distinguished as aspects of the lives of students from my sample.

Close scrutiny reveals a few clues as to the reason for this difference. First, as seen in the previous analysis in 5.3.2., Polish students have more prior migration experience, therefore are more likely to possess a migration identity. Migration is common in their life, and studying abroad is just part of their migration experience. That means these Polish students were already migratory before studying in the UK, or in other words, studying abroad is the outcome of their migration identity. For most Chinese students, however, their scarce migration experience meant they did not have such a nature. For many, it was the first time that they had stayed away from home for such a long time. It would be too risky to keep their options open. Hence, they should be careful and less experimental.

Another reason is the geographic distance. Many Polish students highlighted the short distance from the UK to Poland as a key motive for them to choose a university in London. Cheap flights, the short travel time and the visa-free policy (before Brexit) make it much easier to fly back and forth between Poland and the UK.

Distance is important. I could always buy a flight from London to Warsaw anytime with a few dozen pounds.

——PMU3

It is close to home here, close to Poland. A flight, two hours and you are home.

——PMM2

However, in China, a flight of two hours will only take you from Beijing to Shanghai. It takes 12-24 hours to fly from Beijing to London. The cheapest one-way ticket costs around £500. In addition, there is the complicated and expensive process of applying for a visa. Such differences would certainly have an impact on the attitudes of Polish and Chinese students. With lower costs and risks, it is easier for Polish students to experience foreign (European) countries. Time and money spent on international journeys within Europe are like domestic journeys within China. That also means that for Chinese students, it will be a bigger challenge to study in the UK than for Polish students. It would be unwise to migrate thousands of miles without specific goals and they think strategically to make sure their investment pays off in the future.

At the end of this section, we could conclude that although migration culture exists amongst both Polish and Chinese students, its meaning is different for the two groups. Both of these groups are mobile, ambitious and curious about the world. Migration is a means to obtain independence and their favoured lifestyles. But many Polish students, with a strategy of intentional unpredictability, migrated with exploratory attitudes. Studying abroad was not an end, but part of a longstanding migratory process. Chinese students, given the 'getting gilded' strategy, usually have plans to return home even before departure. Study abroad is an experience they want to earn, and with it they will have more credentials for their future.

However, there is another kind of student migrant. They do not leave their home countries with open options, nor with specific goals, and in fact they might have no options.

5.6 Push factors

Push factors of migration are revealed in different studies. Some people could feel compelled to emigrate by pessimistic assessments of the job market in their location of origin (White 2010), family reasons in their home countries (Milewski and Ruszczak-Żbikowska 2008; Kirkegaard and Nat-George 2016), or shortage of high quality education (Andrejuk 2013). Therefore, students can also be pushed to migrate. In my sample, some interviewees confessed that they were initially driven by some push factors, connected to their beliefs, social values, the education system, ways of thinking and family-connected reasons. What

exactly were the structural forces that drove Polish and Chinese students away from home? Why did they pick London as their destination? This section presents how students depicted their sense of being forced to leave. We can see that Polish and Chinese students were driven by different challenges, as they faced different social pressures in their home countries.

5.6.1 Polish students: restraints of homogeneity

You know Polish culture is very Catholic and Christian, very White culture. Anything which is not White and Christian is bad.

— —PFM2

This is how a Polish student described Polish culture in her interview with me. She is not the only one who made such comments in my sample. In contrast to the super-diversity in London, Polish society is largely racially and religiously homogeneous. According to data from Statistics Poland, Catholics made up 93.7% of Poland's population in 2017. Christian beliefs and values are usually taken for granted in most parts of Polish society. To escape this socially conservative climate, for example because of their sexual orientation, some students chose to study abroad, like PFM4:

Compared to Poland, I live better in England... I am in a homosexual relationship, which in Poland is not very accepted and at the moment it is a problem. That is why I don't see my future there, but more here.

— —PFM4

Race is another problem. According to a 2011 survey, 93.8% of residents declared Polish ethnicity in Poland. The mainstream Polish society is indeed White. Any other skin colours seem conspicuous. PFU4 had children with a British man of African origin. She had to move from Poland to London with her partner to give their children a more friendly environment to grow up in:

I moved here to be with my current partner... London is more open, and my children are mixed-race. In Poland it is not as accepted as here. So probably a reason is also about them.

— —PFU4

As a matter of fact, quite a few interviewees talked about their distaste for the homogeneity of Polish society, and the fascination with London's diversity and multiculturalism, including diverse races, ethnicities, languages, cultures and religions. Universities sometimes can function as meaningful shelters helping students to negotiate their pasts, presents and futures (Ploner 2017). For Polish students, who had trouble in their home society, the liberal environment in the UK gave them a harbour to live a more comfortable life.

5.6.2 Chinese students: pressure from the domestic education system

Abundant literature suggests that Chinese students choose international education in order to steer clear of the brutal competition in the domestic education system, especially the higher education entrance exam (Chao et al. 2017, Cebolla-Boado, Hu and Soysal 2018). Indeed, over 10 million Chinese *gaozhong* students take part in this national exam each year, and only about 10% to 20% of them are able to enrol in first-level Chinese universities, depending on the participants' geographic origin. Such a huge competition influences the nature of the Chinese education system to a large extent, making it exam-driven and stressful. For most people, the very aim of the first 18 years of their life is just preparing for this exam. When people have a choice, study abroad seems an ideal means to escape from this stressful and monotonous process. Many of my Chinese interviewees mentioned that they chose international schools as domestic education had tormented them:

Mainly because I don't like exam-oriented education. I was in the advanced class in *chuzhong*, and I was terribly tortured. Endless homework every day, so I really dislike this education method, so I wanted to try abroad.

—CMU3

It seems the Chinese education system bothers not only children but also their parents:

We had night classes ever since *chuzhong*, so I arrived home at about 9pm every day. My parents prepared me some food, and helped me with my homework until midnight... and then got up at around 6am to make breakfast. Both they and I felt very exhausted.

—CFP5

CFP5's experience is widespread amongst Chinese middle school students. It is common in China for the whole family to prioritise the higher education entrance exam and do whatever they can to secure a good result. Both parents and children are under great pressure. Some who cannot stand the pressure, but have enough resources, choose international education. They do not necessarily want to leave China at first, but the stressful environment pushes them to migrate.

This section is an example of how the push-pull model operates. Since the two countries possess different structural constraints, their students need to deal with different problems. Some Polish students were not able to bear the mainstream ideas within their society, for instance regarding religion and race. They selected London to find a more tolerant environment. Chinese students, on the other hand, took up the chance of studying abroad to escape the tough competition within the domestic education system. Escaping this seemed like a relief for both children and parents.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter reported on what Polish and Chinese students said about their reasons to study in London. The motivations of Polish and Chinese participants fit well within some of the migration theories introduced in Ch.2, such as the neoclassical migration theory (human capital enhancement), the new economics of labour migration theory (rational calculation of gain and cost, family involvement), network theories and cumulative causation (migration culture), as well as King's (2018) theorisation of youth mobility (transition migration and lifestyle migration). The findings can be grouped under five main headings.

First of all, both Polish and Chinese students in my sample were rational individualists, who balanced the costs and benefits of migrating abroad when making the decision. Benefits refer to the improvement in human capital and career prospects deriving from what they consider as world-class education in London, and lower costs compared to other destination countries, also taking into account length of study.

The second theme pertains to family involvement. In my sample, parents of Polish students were mostly in professional occupations, while their Chinese peers presented a 'stepped slope' pattern regarding their social background: undergraduates tended to come from the richest households, master's students from the new middle class, and PhDs from diverse family backgrounds. In addition, Polish families possessed richer migration experience than Chinese ones, providing their children with an incentive to migrate, while Chinese students relied more heavily than Polish students on the financial backing of their family, which resulted in a stronger parental intervention in the whole decision-making process. In comparison, Polish students were apparently impacted by their partners to a larger extent than Chinese students.

The third theme is concerned with the meso level and focuses on the elite migration culture in Poland and China today. It is found that elite families in both countries took care with the pre-departure preparation for their children, and students also actively looked for opportunities to study abroad when they were very young. Both countries include some students influenced by peers with migration experience or motives, who were usually educated in expensive international schools located in big Polish or Chinese cities. Some Chinese students chose to study abroad to compensate for their 'defeat' by their peers in the Chinese education system.

The fourth theme applies to a wider, generational migration culture amongst today's youth in Poland and China. Studying abroad has become a possible route for migrants to escape from longstanding parental care and to obtain independence. For lifestyle migrants, London was attractive for its metropolitan atmosphere, myriad of entertainment options, career opportunities and escape from unpleasant lifestyles in home countries. But within this youth migration culture, Polish students seemed to be more experimental, keeping open their options, while Chinese students were more likely to specify that they would return to China after obtaining study abroad experience.

The fifth theme is push factors. Some Polish and Chinese students were driven by push factors in their home countries, namely the restraints imposed by conservative societal values in

Poland, and pressure from the education system in China. Meanwhile, the tolerance and freedoms in London functioned as pull factors.

It is worth clarifying some significant similarities and differences in motivations between Polish and Chinese students in my sample. The major similarity between the two ethnic groups lies in the fact that both Polish and Chinese students highlighted the good quality of British universities and expected an improvement in their human capital. Elites in both countries shared an analogous migration culture as well; the family-designed preparation activities before departure, the elite students' desire for international education which was awakened very early, and other elite peers served as positive models. In addition, by studying in London, young people in both countries pursued a route to independence and their favoured lifestyles.

On the other hand, there are differences between the two groups connected to their families. Many Polish interviewees in my sample were from mobile professional families in Poland. The prior migration experience gave them a migration identity and furthered their subsequent decisions to study abroad. However, the historical circumstances made international travel inaccessible for the entire generation of Chinese students' parents in their youth. What they could offer to their children was wealth rather than experience. Without the preferential fees for students from the EU, the financial support from parents was the decisive determinant for most Chinese students, as the cost of studying in the UK was far beyond what a student could afford on their own. Therefore, Chinese parents were engaged in many aspects of the decision-making process. Chinese students also need to maximise the economic investment of their family, so they usually applied a 'getting gilded' strategy, meaning to obtain study abroad experience and fully utilise it in the optimistic domestic job market. In comparison, the Polish job market was not so appealing to Polish students in London, who largely favoured international careers. Many of them perceived studying in London as part of an ongoing migration process and kept their options open. Access to student loans, cheap and fast transportation between Poland and the UK, as well as the visa free policy all fuelled their exploratory strategy. None of them felt pressure from the domestic education system, like their Chinese peers did.

Chapter 6 Integration into university life

6.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter explores the migration motivations of Polish and Chinese students, this chapter shifts the focus to their integration. This topic is located at the core of migration studies, but is mostly perceived as social integration in today's migration scholarship (Favell 1998; Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore and Goodson 2008; Klarenbeek 2019). However, studies of ISM have a separate vital strand of research interest – academic integration, which is equally as important as social integration (Thogersen and Wu 2016) and is the major focus of this chapter.

To understand how international students fit into a new education system, we need to know how they perceive the difference between 'old' and 'new' systems. After discussing this, I investigate how they make adjustments, and whether they are content with their adjustments. Further, the literature suggests that student societies could also contribute to ISM integration (Guiffrida 2003; Andrejuk 2013), so I added questions about these societies to my interview guide. The findings reveal some salient differences between Polish and Chinese students in regard to their ambitions for academic performance and their activeness in student societies.

The chapter is organised into three main sections. Section 6.2 presents how Polish and Chinese interviewees perceived the education systems in their home countries and the UK. The following section, 6.3, introduces the topic of how students talk about their academic integration, including what and how they need to adapt. Their self-evaluations of their integration and academic performance are indicators of their academic integration. Finally, section 6.4 discusses Polish and Chinese students' engagement in student societies, and how student societies assist in their integration into university life.

6.2 Comparison between the education systems in home countries and the UK

International students come from education systems which vary in different countries with regard to terminology, educational content, overarching aims, teaching methods, standards, assessment, interpersonal relationships, organisational forms, funding and resources. Therefore, how students from such diverse backgrounds fit into the education system in receiving societies has attracted much research attention. Researchers have studied, for example, how students and universities make adjustments to changing migration policy (Gribble and Blackmore 2012; Beech 2018); how social networks assist in integration (Collins 2012, 2013; Gao 2016; Li and Pitkanen 2018)(Collins 2012, 2013, Gao 2016, Li and Pitkanen 2018); how universities support students with troubled pasts (Ploner 2017); and how students adapt to new academic requirements (Mikal, Yang, and Lewis 2015; Li 2017, 2019).

In this section I explore how Polish and Chinese students compared the education systems in their home countries and the UK, and how they made adjustments in British universities after migrating. It is worth noting that the 'education system' here refers to a general picture rather than a specific stage, such as higher education or primary education. I aim to explain how international students perceive education systems from a national point of view.

6.2.1 Similar evaluations

I still remember that during my PhD [application] interview I got a question about what I want to do in the future. My answer was that I would like to change the Polish education system.

—PMP4

The British and Chinese education systems couldn't be more different. One is too good and the other is too bad.

—CFM5

PMP4 and CFM5 expressed strong emotion when talking about education systems in their home countries compared to the UK. Many students had much to say about this topic in the interviews, regardless of their countries of origin or levels of degree programme. Some interviewees spoke for 20 minutes without a break. It seemed like this subject had sparked their interest and they finally had a chance to present their thoughts. As insiders they had been through education in different countries, which enabled them to offer first-hand

experience and reflections. As migrants they, or at least many of them, moved abroad in search of a 'better' education, which means they must have made comparisons between different education systems. How they perceive education systems in sending and receiving countries is the major theme in this section.

Their comparisons covered a wide range of aspects. Their attitudes also varied. The majority negatively assessed the education system in their home countries compared to the UK. This is reasonable: they chose to study abroad because they believed overseas education to be better. In many ways this attitude reflects what is presented in the last chapter about migration motivation, more precisely, the fact that British education was considered as being of higher quality. On the other hand, some did not seem too concerned about the quality of education, only about rankings or 'getting gilded'. How do they actually perceive British education? How exactly do they define the problems in their domestic education systems? I discovered three areas of complaint common to Polish and Chinese students.

6.2.2.1 Teacher-centred vs student-centred

First of all, both Polish and Chinese students complained about the rigid hierarchy of teachers over students. They described how many Polish or Chinese teachers were often in a dominant position and how they always made their final decisions without caring too much about the opinions of students. Consider the case of PFP1.

It seems to me that we were brought up to have lots of respect for the teachers and to an extent that if a teacher did something not fair, it was hard to tell him that something was wrong. It was just impossible. Sometimes some of these teachers, especially if they were already senior people in high positions, if they said so, then it must be so and that was it.

—PFP1

The power relations in Poland certainly impeded the mutual communication between PFP1 and teachers. Teaching staff seem to have dominant power, which secures their privileged position and distances them from students.

In contrast, according to the interviewees, in the British education system teachers seem more concerned about students, and the distance between teachers and students seem more blurred.

I think in England students have better contact with their professors...We could always turn to a professor for help if you have any problem. In Poland there is a bigger distance between professors and students. That is definitely a big difference.

—PMM4

If we talk about writing emails to, for example professors, what shocked me was that it does not begin with 'Dear Mr Professor', but 'Dear Jimmy', or 'Dear Anthony'. So there is much less distance between academics, professors and students. All of these are much more natural, which is absent in Poland.

—PFP3

Chinese students also manifested the different roles of teachers between China and the UK. They pointed out directly that in China classes are organised in a teacher-centred way, while in the UK students have to do more on their own.

I feel like [in China] it is often the teachers who are leading the learning process. They are like in a central position that you just need to mechanically follow them and you can achieve what you want. Teachers are in the centre. They are very important, aren't they?

—CFP1

The teachers [in China] help students step by step to arrange all the learning schedules, including the process and methods. But in the UK the teachers would let you deepen your understanding of the knowledge by yourself after class, and it depends more on your own ability rather than the arrangement of teachers.

—CFU5

This confirms Gu and Maley (2008)'s claims about how Confucian convention impacts the teacher-student relationship. What Polish and Chinese students asserted above clearly indicates the difference between the teacher-centred and student-centred approach. Bremner (2021) demonstrates six respects of student-centred education: active participation, adapting to needs, autonomy, relevant skills, power sharing and formative assessment. Many of these elements can be found in participants' comments on the British education system.

For instance, PMM4 said he can always turn to a professor for assistance, which reflects ‘adapting to needs’. CFU5 pointed out the extra efforts students need to make after class in the UK, indicating an ‘autonomy’ and ‘active participation’ perspective. The student-centred approach was praised by many participants, but not everyone can get used to it. We may see later in section 6.3.3 about how people find it hard to fit in this new approach.

The teacher-centred orientation has other meanings in the context of China, as in Chinese universities, very often the administration members, who are also considered teachers but do not necessarily teach lessons, possess more power than the teaching staff. These people may have an even larger distance from students, something which was elucidated by CMP3.

For example, when Covid-19 began to spread here, the first thing [PhD] people think about is funding. Our Chinese Scholarship Council definitely wouldn’t extend our funding, and here basically local British or other EU funding could all be extended. I think in China they wouldn’t care too much about this. Administration occupies the major part. Those administrators, who have little contact with students, are probably more powerful.

——CMP3

CMP3 raised an important characteristic of the Chinese education system – administration dominates the sector. This has not only created a power hierarchy within people in this system, but also made it very bureaucratic. Both Polish and Chinese students mentioned this in interviews. In fact these two topics, power hierarchy and bureaucracy, have many overlaps which I now turn to.

6.2.2.2 Bureaucracy vs well-organised

Parallel with the power hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship is the bureaucracy in the higher education system. Students complained about the poor attitude and low efficiency in their domestic education systems, and provided positive comments on the equivalent sectors in the UK.

I was very surprised that...I don't know if you understand what the university secretariat is like in Poland. When you must go there for a signature or some documents, the ladies there are always unpleasant to you. The person you need always suddenly becomes unavailable and we could solve nothing. When I was used to this and then came to universities in England, I went to the secretariat, took a number like in the post office, sat there for exactly one minute, and the lady there astonished me by apologizing that I must wait so long and asked what she could do for me, etc. I was in such a shock. What is going on here? It was such a culture shock. How could a student be treated so nicely? In Poland I was used to the fact that students are treated like dirt.

—PFM2

I feel like here in every stage you could find someone who is in charge. You go to ask him, or you write an email to him, then you get the answer. If you have any trouble in China, you find teacher A, he said I am not in charge, you need to go to someone else. Then you find teacher B, then C. You probably look around and no one is in charge. No one will give you the answer. It is like they are playing a game of football [passing duties to each other].

—CFP3

CMP3 provided a clearer expression of the bureaucratic dominance in Chinese universities:

In China the sense of authority is more noticeable. You could feel that someone must be the officials, as they and their news will appear constantly on different occasions. It is hard for me to imagine that you don't know who the principal is, or who the secretary is in the university. But here it seems that people are managing themselves. Basically you don't know who the officials are... They probably don't care about what the students are doing, or they don't think from the students' position.

—CMP3

The two opinions above could be attributed to a single cause – an uneven power hierarchy between staff members and students. In both Poland and China, teachers play the leading role in everyday interactions. It is widely believed that teachers must be respected and must be right. Students should follow orders rather than challenge them. To enhance this impression of authority, staff members sometimes distance themselves deliberately from the students to strengthen their superior positions in this relationship. For instance, PFU3 claimed that Polish teachers do not treat students like individuals, but a group of students, who need to be put together for some time and then sent off.

Conversely, the interpersonal relationship seems more even in the British education system. Teachers and students can talk to each other on a more equal footing. This not only reduces

the gap between them, but also eases the process of handling administrative issues. It seems the education system is more efficient in the UK than in the other two countries.

Whether this phenomenon results from the (previous) communist regime, Confucian beliefs or other cultural, historical or societal reasons remains unclear. It is beyond the purpose of this research to disentangle this causation. However, it is evident that many students feel better in the British education system, where they believe they are treated more nicely and fairly.

Possibly this contrast also links to the ranking of universities they attended. Some students, as discussed in section 5.4.3, were not able to access the desired university in their home country, and they were disappointed with the general education systems at home. But they could buy their entry into the 'elite' British university and experience the 'fairer' education. That is perhaps why these participants highlight such contrasts in education systems between the UK and their home countries.

6.2.2.3 Out of date vs up to date

In addition to interpersonal relationships, the content of teaching was mentioned by many interviewees. Andrejuk (2013) mentions that Polish students prefer the UK education system to the Polish one due to its assistance in shaping logical abilities and critical thinking of students. It seems that some Polish and Chinese students in my sample believed the British education system and methods are more up to date change according to current trends, whereas education systems in their own countries are seen as static or dated.

Here the teaching methods are much better...You have a reading list of three or four articles and you must read them, then come to class to discuss. It is not like in Poland that you come to class where the professors have taught exactly the same thing for 20 years. Learning from the notes is enough there. It is a true story: I used to learn from notes taken by people in the year of 2005 and I got a 5.0, because the notes were identical to what the professor said now. It was terrible.

—PMM2

In business programmes there is a module called Business Analysis. Apparently it has become a popular trend. I know that some universities in the USA and the UK have offered it for a few years, then a top Chinese university imitated them. It seems to me

that academia in our country is responsive rather than innovative. Relatively speaking, the British academic system is innovative in offering pioneer programmes.

—CFM5

PMM2's statement reminds me of my own experience where I was asked to read a Chinese textbook about teaching methods. In the textbook, a critique of a college teacher's misconduct was that he was using a pager in class. The reality is, pagers were only popular in the 1990s in China. That means this textbook was made at least 30 years ago, and is still in the market. It seems that in certain parts of both Polish and Chinese education systems, teaching content and methods are unlikely to change, or are changing very slowly, even when they are already out of date.

Above are what Polish and Chinese students both complained about in the education systems in their home countries. But this does not mean that nothing good could be found there. Some interviewees stated that the quality of school education in their home country was better than in the UK.

6.2.2.4 Better school education at home

Although they were in the minority, there were nonetheless several students in my sample who spoke positively about the education systems in Poland or China. They usually emphasised that the school education at home had offered them better basic knowledge than the British system could do.

In my view, the [quality of the Polish] education system up to the age of 19 is much higher than in England. What we learn in primary or secondary schools, they don't learn here at all. So the general knowledge in Poland is much higher, because we learn everything... everyone must learn every subject... so until liceum it seems to me that the education system is much better.

—PFM3

In Poland there is a very high level of teaching. It is theoretical, but very high. And I think we are better educated than the British... although we always complain that we have to learn theories, etc., but it is very good because it trains our mind and we have the ability of exercising 'common sense' (said in English), which the British often lack... I met many people, and unfortunately in my experience at least 80% of the British do not have that common sense, and it sometimes hinders their work.

—PFP2

Whilst Polish students highlighted the mastery of general knowledge, Chinese students accentuated the mastery of scientific subjects:

[Chinese] domestic education provided a solid foundation in science subjects for students. When I was in Singapore [for my *gaozhong*], I felt the science subjects were very easy.
——CFU3

It is widely accepted that Chinese students are generally good at mathematics. Some British secondary schools even tried to introduce Chinese teaching methods to their class in recent years. During the interviews, many Chinese students in scientific subjects said they were proud of what they could do in class in the UK. It seems that for these Polish and Chinese students, comparing themselves with British or other students underlined the strength of education systems in their home countries, therefore strengthening their national identity. The belief that ‘education in my country is better than in yours’ to some extent enhances their acknowledgement of advantages in their home countries, which would not be visible to them if they had not studied abroad. How this perception impacts their integration process will be discussed later.

6.2.2 Differences: too many theories, too little money vs too many people, too much pressure

Polish and Chinese students also differed in the comparisons they drew between UK education and that in their home country. Many Polish interviewees pointed out that their education system put too much focus on rote learning and teaching theories. In comparison, the British education system seemed to prepare students well for the job market.

In England they attach much more importance to making students employable, to help them get a job. So it seems to me to be career-oriented, something which is less developed in Poland. It means in Poland students often learn lots of theories and do lots of things theoretically related to their own subject. But no one teaches them what it is like in practice at work, and no one teaches them how to do a job interview.
——PMU2

If I compare liceum in Poland and the British system then the British system focuses much less on rote learning. [In the UK] I’m not required to remember everything I am told. In Poland they give you certain information and expect students or pupils to remember it, and then to write it down in the exam. In England I have the impression

that they try more to show you the knowledge in a way that you can use later on. They have more examples while in Poland there are more theories.

—PMU5

PMU4 gave a possible explanation for this phenomenon, which seems convincing. He blamed it on ‘the communist legacy’:

It is more old-fashioned thinking, maybe more characterised by Russian culture, the legacy of communism, when there were not many tools available, but maths could be learned from books, using paper and pencil. So they apply a more theoretical approach, which probably provides a good understanding of the material and is very demanding, but unnecessarily difficult and unnecessarily demanding.

—PMU4

Another important issue students talked about was the ill-funded education system in Poland. ‘Full-time studies (in Polish language) at public higher education institutions (HEIs) are free of charge for Polish students,¹ while UK universities charge high tuition fees, a matter which has been discussed above in the ‘affordability’ section. Students perceived different financial outcomes for the education systems in the two countries:

Here there is more money, so England has probably more financial resources than universities in Poland. That surely has a huge influence... Well, studies here in Poland are free, right? So it is different.

—PMP3

A few interviewees blamed the Polish authorities for not investing enough money in education:

[In Poland] They don’t have much incentive to perfect the education system because it is public. They don’t have much money. They don’t have to compete for students with other universities, because the students just always come. But here you must be a super university to attract students, and money. They struggle to be really on a high level. This is absent in Poland.

—PFM2

I think there is more money put into higher education here, so universities have more resources and possibilities. There is much money put into universities, and somebody cares about this. I did not have this impression in Warsaw... When it comes to education in Poland, it is not well funded. It is not treated so seriously as here. It is definitely not the priority for the government. They don’t invest in education in Poland,

¹ Tuition fees <https://study.gov.pl/tuition-fees>. Accessed 28.07.2022

and the results are that [Polish universities] are just worse... [in Poland] we don't pay for university so it seems like this.

—PMU4

While the Polish education system is perhaps suffering from the historical legacy of the communist regime, as suggested by PMU4, and insufficient investment from the government, the Chinese education system is facing different problems. In the section on forced migration in the previous chapter I showed that the high pressure in schools in China drove many students abroad. That impression came mainly from answers about their motivation to migrate. When asked specifically about their opinions concerning the Chinese education system, interviewees went into detail about its exam-oriented nature. While Polish students complained about the excessive focus on teaching the theories, Chinese students criticised the undue focus on passing exams, the most crucial of which is surely the higher education entrance exam.

It is exam-oriented education. It focuses too much on marks. Why do I study educational psychology? Because I realise that children's personal development is deficient in China. The teachers care only about your marks.

—CMU3

I don't think that I didn't like studying when I was a child. I was a good little girl and listened to my family. So my academic performance was good before *gaozhong*... I just feel like you can't use up your energy too early. I was squeezed during my *gaozhong* [to prepare for the higher education entrance exam]... I was so tired in those three years that I felt I had used up my energy for learning for my entire life. Since then I have turned from a person who liked studying and thinking to a person who disliked, hated and rejected studying.

—CFM3

The main reason why academic performance is so valued in China is that the higher education entrance exam is the only standard for admission to most Chinese universities. As a result, preparing for this annual 3-day exam is of the utmost importance for all the pupils before university. CMU2, who has been in the UK since the age of fourteen, indicated the different significance of academic performance in the Chinese and British education systems:

I suppose in China they value academic performance too much. In the UK academic performance occupies less than one third [of evaluating a person]. Sports, especially in private schools, are very important. If you write a personal statement to a British university, if you say you are a head of house, or a head of certain sports, it is a very

high achievement, but this is negligible in China. It seems to me that in China you must be good at academic work first then people will look at your other aspects. But in the UK academic studies are not so important.

—CMU2

There is definitely no perfect system in the world. It seems to me that when talking about the problems of the education systems at home, both Polish and Chinese interviewees would rationalise the situation by offering explanations, partially because they believed that these explanations were true, partially because they need to protect their self-esteem. While Polish students blamed history and government, Chinese students ascribed the case to the huge population and limited per capita resources in China.

In my view, there is very huge attention paid to filtering people in the Chinese education system before university. But I agree that China is so large a country that it has no alternative but to be so selective. It is hard to say that this is not good for China. If we followed the British model, maybe everyone would achieve high marks, because Chinese people are good at exams.

—CMU4

I believe that first of all it is the issue of resources. In terms of [educational] resource distribution, the UK has more per capita. In China there are many [educational] resources, but there are more people, so per capita resource is very limited. Under such circumstances, in order to select the most necessary talents for the country, it is crucial to eliminate the rest from the system when they are of school age. I am not saying the Chinese system is bad, maybe it fits with the conditions of China. What fits is good.

—CFM5

In sum, Polish students in my sample were dissatisfied with the content and methods of the Polish education system, praising the more practical British system. Chinese students, however, complained about the high pressure in the Chinese education system. If both preferred the British education system, did they integrate well? What kind of problems did they have in this process of transferring from one system of education to another?

6.3 Academic integration

In the last section I discussed how students compared the education systems at home and in the UK. There is perceived to be a vast difference between them, but are these differences exactly what these students need to adapt to? If we look at them carefully, we may see that

many of these differences are part of a one-off culture shock. It does not take much time or effort to get over them. For instance, it is easy to adapt to an academic atmosphere where one is treated much better than before. One interviewee said the following:

It wasn't that difficult [to adapt to the UK system]. I think it is much more difficult to adapt from the English system to the Polish one than the reverse. In the English [system] we have less to learn by heart, a little more to use imagination. When I was very young I went to a British primary school in Warsaw, then went to Polish schools for a few years. That was a bigger shock than now.

—PMU5

Nevertheless, it is unfair to say that all of the international students adapt to the UK education systems quickly and smoothly. Polish and Chinese students needed to adapt to the organisational forms of classes and exams in British universities. They also applied different methods to adapt to the new system. The outcomes of their academic integration significantly vary, as will be discussed below.

6.3.1 What to adapt

Six months after I began my PhD studies, I wrote the following in my research memo:

Now I realise that there are three areas of adaptation I have had to make so far. First, to get used to living in the UK; second, to get used to the academic environment entirely in English [which I have never experienced before]; third, to get used to the identity of a PhD student [as I had been a professional for over six years].

While the first layer mainly refers to the cultural and societal aspect, the second and the third apply to the academic integration. The English language was a big problem for me at that time, as it was hard to understand the local accents. I was not familiar with academic English in class either. Each seminar was a nightmare for me, as I saw others talking fluently and confidently, but could not say a word myself. Meanwhile, being a student meant I need to learn to write properly in academic English and join the discussion in class. I was bewildered for the first few months. The transcripts of interviews with Polish and Chinese students echo my own reflections above.

6.3.1.1 *Double disadvantage: language barriers plus unfamiliar educational tasks*

Proficiency in the native language has been proven to be a vital skill for migrants to integrate (Ager and Strang 2008; White 2011; Lu and Wu 2017). As it is, language skills are important for international students (Kapela 2014; Yu and Moskal 2019). Unlike labour migrants who do not necessarily need to speak the native language, international students must utilise it to carry out their studies – their primary reason for migrating abroad (Gardner and Lau 2019). Lack of language ability can lead to separation, in Berry’s sense (Glorius and Friedrich 2006), poor academic performance and tensions amongst students (Henderson 2009). In my sample, many Polish and Chinese students considered integration to the English-speaking environment as their priority:

At the beginning when I left [Polish] liceum, what I need to adapt to the most was perhaps the language. I mean I had to think about something difficult like maths and physics, and at the same time understand all the [English] terminology they use, which I had never heard before.

—PMU2

First of all the language must be adapted. Although you might not have trouble with reading or writing, what you have learned [in China] was some basic communication. When you are in the UK, the language is very localised. What you have learned and what they use here are different, so the communication was very difficult, plus some accents... I felt like in another world in the first month here... Listening is extremely difficult, especially in the seminars when the local British were making presentations.

—CMP2

The language problem seems to dominate the troubles students had. In addition, they could have problems in adapting to the unfamiliar educational activities, like writing essays and group discussions. Sometimes problems with the English language and the new activities could intertwine, thus creating a double disadvantage in terms of academic integration.

For most international students with integration problems, language skill is often the biggest challenge. Other than listening, they may have difficulties in speaking, reading and writing in English as well. Taking speaking as an example, a few Polish interviewees said that they were embarrassed by their Polish accent, while Chinese students said they suffered from ‘dumb English’:

When I arrived here, I felt like I spoke English very well... the worst thing for me is that I realised later I might have a little accent. I mean I never thought about this before, but actually a few people told me that I don't sound like a local. The fact that I speak with an accent began to disturb me. I began to stress out a little when speaking.

—PFU3

The biggest problem is the language. I wasn't bad at English in China, but the English I learned there was 'dumb English' [focusing on written exams rather than oral English]. So I could barely speak, which definitely made me afraid when I first came to school here.

—CMU1

Literature suggests that both Polish and Chinese students suffer from language barriers and limited understandings of the UK educational system (Moskal 2016; Yu and Moskal 2019). I discovered that when students had difficulties adapting to new educational activities and tasks, this could interweave with language problems and create a double disadvantage, which further interfered with academic integration. For instance, CFP5 suggest that some Chinese students, who were both diffident about their English and unfamiliar with the form of tutorials in British university, dared not to speak out their concerns:

I feel like English skills are very important... I have some Chinese postgraduate friends who are abroad for the first time. [Due to insufficient English skills] they need a longer time to adapt. They may confine themselves to a limited circle and dare not step out. When encountering problems, they don't dare to speak to their supervisors, and they need me to be the middleman.

—CFP5

In terms of academic writing, there may be a double disadvantage, too. On one hand, written exams are more popular than essays as forms of assessment in both Poland and China. Upon their arrival in the UK, writing essays rather than written exams is new to students. Meanwhile, choosing the correct vocabulary rather than colloquial English is also demanding.

In the first year it was really difficult to know how to write them with a good structure. It even wasn't about the content, just about the structure, and how to choose concrete themes to express what I wanted to say, to include all that was the most important, and to analyse critically.

—PMM4

It is fine to have change your mind about how to express your thoughts in daily conversation... but if you want to express something in your profession, it may require very precise formulation. You can't alter the vocabulary by replacing what you don't know with what you know... I don't have problems with English in class and in everyday

life. But academic writing is another issue. You always feel your writing needs a lot of modification.

—CFP1

6.3.1.2 Active individual learning

Apart from language issues, another common problem both Polish and Chinese articulated in the interviews was adapting to the individual learning approach in British universities. They were surprised that teachers did not give clear clues about what to expect in class or exams, and students had to manage their own learning. The phrase ‘by yourself’ appears in almost every transcript:

At the beginning it was hard for me to adapt, because in Poland the teacher always says for example tomorrow we will learn from this page to that page, and all the pupils know what to learn. But here the teacher doesn’t tell you. Here the teacher runs the lecture and lessons, then is the deadline of exam and thesis. In the meantime you have to organise your own studies. You have to create notes by yourself, create reading lists by yourself, read and find out the most important information. At the beginning it was hard for me to know what to learn, as it wasn’t made clear like in Poland.

—PFP5

There are many differences, the first of which is that the teacher wouldn’t tell you in the class about the key points in the final exam. I didn’t have exams during my master’s studies here. All our work was in the form of assignments. I feel like you are required to read a lot, to figure out a lot by yourself... You need to know how to manage your own studies and dig into your own research topic.

—CFP1

No one is dictating to you at universities [here in the UK]. The *gaozhong* arranged everything for you and urged you [to work] every day. Universities require self-management, managing your studies, your schedule, whether you are capable of finding resources by yourself, etc.

—CMM2

This theme directly echoes the previous section about differences in education systems in Poland, China and the UK. According to interviewees, teachers in both Poland and China occupy the leading role in the learning process. Pupils or students are required to follow their teachers’ lead, and their personal ideas are disregarded, or even discouraged. Students are expected to remember all the knowledge taught in class and put it into exams, and there are no other requirements. They become passive rather than active learners. However, activeness is necessary in the UK system. Teachers are no longer the boss, and students must take the lead in their learning. This bothered many international students from Poland and

China, which confirms the difficulty of encountering pedagogic challenges, as discussed in scholarly literature (Moskal 2016; Li 2019a).

6.3.2 How to adapt

6.3.2.1 *Extra effort*

Despite many difficulties in learning, both Polish and Chinese students showed their tenacity and willpower. Their primary goal in coming to the UK was to study, and, as also suggested by other authors, they make every effort to adapt to the new environment and requirements (Gu and Maley 2008; Andrejuk 2013). Usually this starts by working harder, or longer. PFP4, an ambitious Polish student, stayed up late at night with a dictionary to overcome the language barrier:

At the beginning it was hard for me during my first two months. But I wanted to make the best use of my opportunity, and for two months I just sat literally for nights on end and read and finished assignments. I just told myself that this girl from Poland could manage by herself. So I didn't have big problems [later on].
—PFP4

Many students mentioned that they did extra work to become familiar with the teaching content, for example to preview topics or to find support online. This is good evidence of how they adapt to active individual learning. Students realised that they must rely on themselves:

I felt like I didn't quite understand the class in the first term... In China I don't have to preview, but here I need to preview their slides and see what will be in the next class.
—CMP4
Although the teacher also teaches, you mainly need to learn yourself. Sometimes you find that the teacher doesn't tell you how to do certain exercises, so I use YouTube to check some knowledge points, and they can all be found there. It is a good approach.
—CMU1

I could not agree more with CMU1. The Internet has become an increasingly important resource pool for academic learning, especially for Generation Y and Z, who were born in the era of the Internet. As a student myself, I turned to YouTube for help as well when I need to teach myself how to use Nvivo. It was very efficient and visually convenient. In addition, it is worth noting that we seldom search video websites when studying in China. This is mostly

because teachers have made things clear and usually ask students to follow suit. That is to say that turning for help online is a learning method developed by international students to overcome language barriers and facilitate academic integration.

6.3.2.2 Active enquiry

Other than individual learning, interviewees also realised that they must take advantage of educational resources offered by universities. They must be responsible for themselves and play active roles in their own academic education. Instead of passively waiting for orders or instructions given by the teachers, students should actively approach them for advice. This is another practice of doing 'by yourself':

If you don't ask the teachers, probably you won't have any interaction with them during your entire studies... you could find them in their office hour at a given time, or write emails. This approach is not as straightforward as at *gaozhong*. At first I wasn't very used to this approach. I was sluggish. But later I realised that if you don't actively enquire from the teachers, you are wasting educational resources... This requires more autonomy and activeness compared to *gaozhong*.

—CMU4

Plenty of interviewees talked about how they actively endeavour to fit into the new education system in the UK. Their agency in academic integration plays a key role (Heng 2018b), and with the passage of time they learned to know the expectations of the new system.

According to the concept of integration as a two-way process, British universities should also contribute to the integration of their students. In the next section we ascertain whether this is working.

6.3.2.3 Support from departments and from compatriots

Integration as a two-way process has been widely acknowledged in migration scholarship (Castles et al. 2002; Ager and Strang 2008; Carrera and Atger 2011). I have already discussed how student migrants made every attempt to adapt to the British higher education system. Now let us examine the reverse – what universities do to accommodate international students.

There are various approaches taken by universities to facilitate the academic integration of international students (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, and Williams 2014; Young 2014; Thogersen and Wu 2016). Some may prove to be effective (Wang 2012), some may not (Tian and Lowe 2013). In reality, London universities offer a wide range of activities to help new students adapt to their new environment. Both Polish and Chinese interviewees mentioned that the events or courses organised by their departments were beneficial:

At the beginning there was a compulsory course I had to go to... Two people from my faculty talked about their experience in the first year. It was there I got to know how they managed to deal with new situations and how they adapted.

—PFU2

They have a mentor here at UCL, which means that the senior PhDs contact with new students one to one and help them with integrating into the academic environment and life in London.

—CMP2

Similar activities interviewees named include Freshers' Week, tutorial groups, campus tours, International Orientation Day, clubbing and welcome balls. They favoured these activities because, although most of them came to London without any friends, they managed to have the first impression of London's multiculturalism and make acquaintance with other students through these events:

I feel great, especially that many people were from different countries. I felt that although we are all different, we have in common that many of us are not from the UK. Even those from the UK are people open to foreigners and want to know other cultures.

—PFU1

We had a concert at our student hall... I really felt the multiculturalism there. Someone played classical, someone jazz, someone comedy. You heard different languages, and you felt that cultures from all corners of the world poured over you.

—CFU2

Multiculturalism seems to be the keyword in this context. For many international students, they go far away from home alone and reasonably worry that they would not integrate. But when they find out that many other people are in the same situation and people are all welcoming, they feel comfortable and relaxed. Institutional activities are crucial in offering these opportunities.

However, apart from multiculturalism, indigenous culture is also significant. According to the transcripts, socialising with compatriots is favoured by interviewees from both countries. It is suggested that networks amongst co-nationals could assist the progress of academic integration (Zhou, Topping, and Jindal-Snape 2011; Li and Pitkanen 2018). Some Chinese interviewees in my sample had adopted this method. They were keen on riding on the coat tails of other Chinese students:

I am inclined to collaborative learning. I try to find a top [Chinese] student. I will note the problems I have, and ask him later. Otherwise there will be more and more problems.
——CFU4

Polish students also claimed that they felt more relaxed with their compatriots on campus:

I joined the group for students on my degree programme and the group of Poles studying in London... I felt the best at the meetings of Poles. There was definitely more sense of freedom because all of them spoke my native language. There was similar culture.
——PFU3

After all, asking a co-national for help is much more straightforward. It circumvents the language barrier and expedites efficiency. Students can obtain much more useful information in a short conversation with compatriots than with other people. However, it could also limit their friendship circle to their compatriots (Mikal, Yang, and Lewis 2015). More details of the functions of compatriots will be discussed in the section on student societies.

6.3.3 Academic integration spectrum: assimilation vs separation

Although international students 'were positive, open and resilient, and capable of overcoming various challenges they faced' (Ye 2018: 181), it does not mean that Polish and Chinese students are capable of overcoming every challenge they face. My transcripts show that their integration varies in terms of extent, willingness and attitudes. No significant difference is shown between nationalities. Rather than comparing from a national perspective, therefore, it is more appropriate to measure their integration on a spectrum, from people almost

without any trouble at one end, to those struggling for a long time at the other. In the middle are the various interim stages of academic integration. Consequently, Berry's (1997) acculturation model is conducive to analysing students' adjustment to university. In his article Berry provides a diagram, putting the four acculturation strategies in a circle and indicating a continuum along which migrants integrate to varying degrees vis-à-vis the alternative strategies of assimilation and separation (Berry 1997: 10). Therefore, we can adapt the model as constituting a spectrum of academic integration, with one end being assimilation and the other separation.

6.3.3.1 Assimilation: no problem integrating

We start from the most positive side – students with the fewest headaches integrating. This group of students are characterised by having experienced part of the British education system or something similar before migrating to the UK. It could be participating in international schools or programmes, or obtaining a previous degree from a British institution. Usually these students are undertaking/have undertaken undergraduate studies in the UK or other foreign countries, and their academic integration begins at the *liceum* or *gaozhong*.

I don't need to adapt to anything, because what was taught in IB [International Baccalaureate] was very useful at LSE. I don't need to learn how to write essays, right? I already knew how to do it.

—PMU1

During *gaozhong* we used textbooks originally from the UK. Perhaps from then on I gradually changed my mind [to adapt to the UK system]. Also there were foreign teachers teaching us. So *gaozhong* was a period of gradual transition.

—CFU5

I don't need to adapt [to the UK system] here. The adaptation happened in *gaozhong*. You gradually learned it during *gaozhong*. I think that perhaps some people need to adapt because they had their undergrad in China, but I didn't. I studied for my BA in the UK.

—CFP2

Some Chinese postgraduate students, who obtained their bachelor degrees in China, attributed their current integration success to previous experiences in exchange programmes:

Because I took an exchange programme in New Zealand in my third year of university in China, I adapt quite well now.

—CMM3

The undergraduate programme I was in had a one-year exchange in Glasgow... It does have an impact [on my integration]. I could basically adapt in that year. At least I understood the teaching mode in British universities here, so it wouldn't be a problem when I came back again.

—CMM5

It seems that previous experience facilitates not only decisions to migrate but also academic acculturation. In my sample, students who claimed that they did not have many difficulties in adapting to the British universities usually had some experience of overseas education before. They rapidly assimilated into the UK system.

In Berry's definition of assimilation strategies, migrants accept the cultural identity of the receiving society and do not seek to keep their own. In the case of academic integration, participants in my sample who had no problem integrating largely paralleled with this definition. They have become familiar with the British education system without strong attachment to the way of teaching or learning in their home countries. Usually these people are characterised by having experienced the overseas education system, be it on international school courses or exchange programmes.

6.3.3.2 Separation: no way of integrating

At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, there are people deeply suffering from integration problems. As is shown in the section above, British universities call for active individual learning, whereas theories and exams have dominated their experiences of Polish and Chinese education. Some interviewees thus claimed that they were too used to traditional educational modes in their home countries, and found it hard to adapt to the UK system. Compared to people at the positive end of the spectrum, who usually answered this question in a few sentences, interviewees at the negative end usually went into detail and had a long list of complaints.

Although it is my second year, it is still very difficult for me. Sometimes I feel that I am really left alone. What to do, what to read, what to find, it is really difficult. Because the Internet is a bottomless pit. You can find millions of pieces of information there...

I really miss the old-fashioned lectures where lecturers just teach you. I really miss it, because I was mostly taught in these classes. You have a base to build more or less what you must build. Here I have the impression that we pay lots of money for studies but to do everything by ourselves. It was a little disappointing when I began my studies here.

—PFU4

I think perhaps I am still not fully adapted. You will find that people around you, who had their master's or undergrad here, have adapted a lot. But I was adapting for the entire first year of my PhD studies. It is very hard for me to shift [to another education system]. I used to hate being demanded to answer questions by others, but you will find that this is your learning mode since childhood. It could not be changed all of a sudden. Perhaps what you hate the most is what you are familiar with the most. You have to explore what you need to do [here]. Here the supervisors won't tell you what to do exactly. They only give you suggestions.

—CFP4

It seems that students favouring education in their home countries are usually seniors with little experience of overseas education. PFU4, a 28-year-old undergraduate, did not come to the UK for educational purposes in the first place, but to follow her partner and so her children could grow up in the UK. When she finally settled down and decided to undertake the degree programme, she found it hard to adapt to the British university, for 1) she had been away from academia for a while and it is often harder to learn something new than at a younger age, and; 2) she has children to care about so could not totally engage in her studies. CFP4, aged 34, had similar troubles. She worked in a non-English environment in China for a few years before coming to the UK and is now struggling for financial resources. They do not have previous experience to refer to and have to deal with an extra load beyond their studies. The extra work is time-consuming for them and stifles their interaction with academic colleagues. Their financial problems and caring distractions made them less efficient and energetic in their studies.

A few Chinese master's students, who took their undergraduate studies in China, demonstrated that they became perplexed when moving from an intensive and demanding study schedule to a loose system that requires active engagement. They were accustomed to being pushed by the teachers, so they lost their way without clear guidance.

I think I am still more used to exam-oriented education. In the UK I feel like their education mode is like, you need to have real motivation, have something you really like, then you will study seriously. Compared to China, education in the UK is looser

and requires active engagement. In China they stimulate you with exams and marks. I feel like if I lose those stimulations from exams and marks, I am not very adapted to the UK education.

—CFM4

I think my undergraduate education [in China] is very substantial. In terms of both quantity and quality, it is far better than my current education [in the UK]... During my undergrad we had at least 30 hours of lessons per week, plus some homework and discussions, generally over 40 hours a week. Now it is much less, the content is very small... I feel like I have learned nothing after a whole term. I suspect that they want us to learn a way of thinking, or to encourage our own thinking. But in reality in such a short time I think the effect will be limited.

—CMM3

It should be clarified that master's students from China are not a homogenous group. A small proportion of them receive their BA in the UK, while the majority have their undergraduate studies in China. The former group usually attend international schools before university, hence have less academic trouble when coming to the UK, not to mention during their master's programme. The latter group, however, usually spend their entire pre-postgraduate studies in China. The linear study experience gives them a solid mode of thinking and learning, which is quite different from the student-centred approach in the UK. This echoes the discussion in section 6.2.1 about evaluating different education systems. Therefore, we should understand the different educational backgrounds of Chinese master's students. More attention should be paid to those with Chinese bachelor degrees.

In sum, students with less trouble in academic integration have usually joined international schools, studied international programmes, or taken part in international exchange programmes before migrating to the UK. Such experiences offer them basic knowledge about what British education is like, thereby smoothing their integration process. Meanwhile, students dissatisfied with their integration are usually short of prior experience, older, and busy with problems outside academia. They are too used to traditional educational forms in their home countries and find it hard to shift to a new system. Therefore, these people fit into the separation model in Berry's sense, indicating migrants who favour their own culture and do not acknowledge the culture in the receiving society.

6.3.3.3 Process: 'learning by doing'

Aside from these two extremes, the vast majority of interviewees did not clearly define their location in the integration spectrum, but described their integration process in a general way. For many students, it was hard to tell whether they have succeeded in integration at the very moment of our interviews, as academic integration is an ongoing process, which lasts for months or even years. One of the interviewees called this process 'learning by doing':

I think it is just an issue of 'learning by doing'. I learned by doing various tasks and it became better every year. In the third year of undergrad I didn't have problems at all. Research was very natural for me.

—PMM4

After the first, second, third exam I knew more or less what would be required, what I have to learn, what notes I must take, how much I must read. But it was a method of trial and error at the beginning.

—PFP5

Apparently, this is a process that requires trial and error. Some may be content with the outcome, some may not.

I spent more time every week reading articles or books before class. It was difficult at the beginning. Generally I am very satisfied now, as these are my interests.

—PMM2

I think I was adapting during my whole undergrad... I found that you can only adapt partially within three to six months, perhaps the academic part. But to adapt to life here, I think it takes two or three years.

—CMP1

I just learn more by myself, finish more assignments, join more seminar groups, and talk more with other friends... in such a loose education system, I learn relatively slowly. It [what is taught in class] doesn't help a lot with my passing exams here. I still need to rely on myself to learn more in the library, to write essays, reports or pass my final exams.

—CFU1

The end point of academic integration – when they feel they have no problem with it – varies significantly from person to person. Some interviewees spent two or three months, while others needed a few years. Some of the interviewees spoke confidently about themselves, the others did not. This is further evidence that students are located at different points on the integration spectrum. Their locations also change due to the continuous adaptation process (Quan, He, and Sloan 2016). But no matter where they are on the spectrum, there is an 'objective' symbol of their integration – their marks.

6.3.4 Satisfaction with marks: the outcome of integration

There is little research about Polish students' academic attainment, as is shown in the literature review chapter. There are a few pieces about Chinese students, but their achievement is mainly measured by marks or grades (Iannelli and Huang 2014; Crawford and Wang 2015a, 2015b). There is little evidence about Polish and Chinese students' satisfaction with their academic achievement. As a result, in the interviews I asked them how they viewed their academic performance. There seemed to be some differences according to the level of degree programme interviewees were undertaking. Let us start from the undergraduate students.

6.3.4.1 Undergraduate: very satisfied vs just so-so

The self-evaluation of academic performance by Polish undergraduate students is surprisingly similar. Except for one person mentioned above who had integration problems, all the other nine undergraduates answered 'very good' or 'I am satisfied'. Some provided evidence of their marks, some claimed that they felt very confident although they had not yet received any marks.

I can say immodestly that I am satisfied. I got good marks in Polish matura, I got a first class degree at KCL, I am studying at Cambridge.¹ When it comes to academic marks I am an ambitious person and I want to get high marks.

—PMU4

Several interviewees demonstrated that although they had good marks, they gradually put more focus on other areas and realised that academic performance is not everything.

At first I cared about it, and I had good marks. But I don't care solely about marks now and they are not essential for me... for me being perfect in everything is not important... but I am satisfied with myself.

—PMU1

For Chinese undergraduates, interestingly, answers were highly uniform as well. But instead of 'very good', the vast majority responded with 'just so-so':

¹ By the time PMU4 was interviewed, he had just started his master's studies at the University of Cambridge. I still categorised him as an undergraduate at King's College London.

My academic performance is just so-so, medium maybe. The marks are okay, but not very good... I feel fine with my first year. It could be better later, but I am content with it now.

—CFU1

It is just so-so. The first year for me was like to practise how to live with myself. (You mean your marks are so-so, but you don't worry about it too much?) Yes, exactly.

—CMU3

This is a compelling difference. It seems that both Polish and Chinese interviewees were feeling good about their academic performance, but the Poles felt good because they had good marks, whereas Chinese students felt good because they did not worry too much about marks.

The literature may give us some hints as to why this may be. Crawford and Wang (2015b) suggest that Chinese students generally obtained lower marks than UK students, and the gap expanded through the years. Iannelli and Huang (2014) draw the same conclusion, and offer two explanations: 1) the growing population of Chinese students means there is more disparity in their academic capability and aspirations; and 2) Chinese students mainly care about whether they pass or not, as the Chinese education system disregards degree classifications. It therefore seems Chinese undergraduate students are less ambitious than Polish students in academic performance.

6.3.4.2 Master's: excellence as a habit vs willingness to be mediocre

The views of Polish master's students were basically identical to their undergraduate compatriots. They evaluated their academic performance highly.

I think it is good. In Holland I finished my MA with what is called in Britain 2:1, so quite good. At the moment I am satisfied, considering the fact that the best people in the world study at LSE, UCL, KCL or Imperial College... I am satisfied with my marks for where I am, who I study and compete with.

—PMM2

I am very satisfied with my marks. Because during my BA I got a first, possibly the highest marks. And this week in my MA I also got a distinction, very high. I worked a lot, and I am satisfied.

—PMM4

All the Polish master's interviewees spoke positively about their academic performance. They not only provided solid evidence – their marks – but also talked about it confidently. It seems that this positive self-evaluation is consistent from their undergraduate period to their master's, as is shown by PMM2 and PMM4. For them, excellence was not a one-off act, but a habit.

This was not the case for Chinese master's students. On the contrary, many of my interviewees confessed that they did not rank amongst the top students in academic performance, but they were still satisfied. It seems they are consistent with their undergraduate compatriots, and even less ambitious, in terms of academic performance.

My classmates got A with their essays and I got only B, but somehow I am still very satisfied, because I didn't devote too much time to it... so I am fine with B... I guess I value my personal development more than my marks.

—CFM1

I identify myself with 'xueza' [literally learning slacker, a cyberspeak indicating those who are poor in academic performance, usually with a sense of self-deprecation] instead of 'xueba' [literally learning tyrant, opposite to 'xueza']. When measuring by marks, I am not near the top. When measuring my class engagement, I occasionally contribute... I am satisfied, because I am not very demanding of myself.

—CFM5

It seems that in my sample, Polish students are generally more ambitious and demanding in their academic performance, whereas Chinese students cared less about it. CMM3 provided a convincing explanation:

The first reason is the [lack of] internal motivation. My learning initiative has always been declining. Possibly because my *gaozhong* and undergraduate programme were too stressful and burdensome, so later the initiative gradually disappeared. Also possibly because I have been studying the same subject all the time and there are no new ideas. The second reason is the [lack of] external stimulation. On one hand I am short of supervision. My supervisor and classmates wouldn't urge me to work. It doesn't matter how many points I got, A or B for essays. No one cares. On the other hand, I feel like my current marks are enough for future jobs or to apply for a PhD. It is not necessary to get A for every module. I feel like B is enough.

—CMM3

Iannelli and Huang (2014) also point out that grades in foreign universities may not be directly transferred to the Chinese education system. If we consider this together with the 'getting

gilded' strategy, it is not difficult to understand this phenomenon: most Chinese students aim at the domestic job market, where employers appreciate the ranking of universities students have graduated from (because it is evident) rather than their grades (because they are untransferable). So why bother struggling for marks? Meanwhile, as presented in chapter 5 and the quotation from CMM3 above, Chinese students suffer from great pressure at an early point in their studies, which stifles their continuous learning initiative. They are also used to the dictatorship of teachers, and once this disappears, they feel helpless and purposeless.

6.3.4.5 PhD students: diverse and unique

The satisfaction of PhD interviewees with their academic performance is highly varied. It seems their satisfaction mainly depends on which stage of their research process they were at when being interviewed rather than on their nationalities or other factors. There are people who were satisfied, ambivalent, and discontented with their research amongst both Polish and Chinese interviewees. PhD interviewees who positively assessed themselves were usually in a phase of achievement. They had either completed fieldwork, got certain results from experiments, published papers, or nearly finished their dissertations. Interviewees who were unsure about themselves were usually in the middle of their research, but without clear landmarks of achievement.

I always have problems with my PhD because I don't see the effects of my research, yet... the project is very laborious and the effects do not come week by week, but month by month, and even season by season. From time to time I have to tell myself that this is a huge project.

—PMP4

I don't know. I feel chaotic. Generally speaking it should be good. But you don't have any marks or specific results, because you have barriers in each phase. You couldn't say it is smooth, or it is inauspicious, either. I can't tell. I suppose it is not bad.

—CFP2

People who were unhappy about their current research process found themselves in the opposite situations to their more positive peers. They had either failed to publish any paper, found their studies pointless, or were disrupted by COVID-19. CMP2's case is an extreme example.

My mood is very complicated. My supervisor moved his lab from Germany to here. It took 3 months and you couldn't do experiments at all. After that the new lab was short of reagents and apparatus. When you finally bought them all, the coronavirus [and lockdown] came. So I am very dissatisfied with my research.

—CMP2

In my view it is inappropriate to measure the academic integration of PhD students merely by their academic performance. They do not have exams or coursework like undergraduate or master's students, who obtain clear marks. Markers for PhDs are publications, attendance at conferences, and their final dissertations. However, it is hasty to conclude that students without publications (yet) integrate worse than those with publications. Some interviewees undertook their undergraduate, master's and PhD education in the same university, and now have trouble with their research. This is obviously not because they fail to integrate academically, but because of their research phase. A PhD is an ongoing learning process, sometimes lacking clear landmarks. The outcome of integration requires a more comprehensive and tailored measurement.

6.4 Student societies

Some research has shown that student societies could play an important role in promoting students' integration (Guiffrida 2003). This is particularly salient in the case of Polish international students (Andrejuk 2013; Łuczak 2017). According to Andrejuk, Polish student societies are very active in many cases, with high levels of membership. Such organisations function as an assemblage of co-nationals scattered over different programmes, departments and universities. They create good opportunities for international students to integrate locally into academic and non-academic environments.

A curious phenomenon is that the linkage between Chinese students and student societies is barely discussed in the literature. This situation affected the design of my interview guide in that I specifically asked interviewees to express their feelings about student societies in British universities. As a result, this section aims to present the findings on this theme, namely, to test the role of student societies for Polish students, and whether this applies to Chinese students.

6.4.1 Positive impacts

Student societies are groups consisting of people sharing common interests, which are usually outside the formal curriculum. They offer a space for like-minded people to come together and enjoy their joint passion or curiosity regarding something. It is also a natural way for students, especially new students, to make new friends and try something unfamiliar to them. This is significant for newly-arrived international students, for they are both lacking in friends and eager to build up some new hobbies, as is shown in the transcripts.

6.4.1.1 Knowing more people

A crucial benefit of student societies, which interviewees mentioned, was that they managed to make new friends there. Both Polish and Chinese students stated that they had built firm friendships, which eventually helped them integrate into university life.

Very good. I got to know a mass of amazing people, who I have contact with until now. Some of them are my best friends. So very very good.

—PFP2

I think that the student society was a good way to help me integrate. Because in the societies there are not only first-years, but senior students as well. You could ask them questions about many things [beyond the society itself]... actually I got lots of advice from them.

—CMU2

Peer assistance seems to be more efficient than formal institutional guidance. The function of friends will be discussed in detail in the social integration chapter.

For some students who have a heavy burden in their studies and limited friendship circles, student societies also offer them a good chance to step out of academic work and get to know new people, hence are appreciated by both Polish and Chinese students.

It makes my life a little more interesting, as it is something happening beyond my academic work. It is the main opportunity to get to know new people, especially when I spend time mainly with myself and do not have time to meet new people. This is my main chance.

—PFP4

I think that this society is fairly good. You could make lots of friends, and besides you should not study all the time, but expand your lifestyles and interests. It [the student society] is a good way.

—CFU4

6.4.1.2 Developing own interests

Another benefit student societies have is that they enable students to discover and practise doing activities which really interest them. Many interviewees spoke positively about how activities in societies that offered them interesting experiences, for instance voluntary service in museums, visits to foreign embassies in London, cycling around the city, and attendance at a summit of lawyers in the UK. They appreciated the chance created for them by the societies. CFM3, for example, highly valued the experience she had in a student society:

I wanted to change from an introverted person to an extroverted one, so I joined the public speaking association. I wasn't good at speaking English, but I was in it. I pushed myself a little bit to speak out in public, and the leaders [of the society] also gave me many chances. I even became the head of the society in the second year, which was amazing. It was rare to have a Chinese head of society abroad, so I was very happy.

—CFM3

In the process of exploring personal interests, some were not content with only participating.

A Polish student even created a society and ran it well:

During my BA, I created by myself a society for women who want to learn coding... I knew what I wanted to achieve. It was interesting that there were always different perspectives and experiences, and opportunities to get to know new people. I could contribute to the development of other people.

—PFM2

Students like CFM3 and PFM2 managed to take advantage of student societies. They either found out or practised their real interests by taking part in or organizing activities in which they were interested. Such activities undoubtedly facilitated their integration, as they offered colourful experiences for those students new to UK university life.

6.4.2 Dissatisfaction

However, not everyone was satisfied with student societies in my sample and there were complaints as well. Some interviewees claimed that they were disappointed after signing up or attending the first few events. In the interviews they expressed their dissatisfaction and pointed out the problems.

6.4.2.1 Disorganised societies

The first problem seems to be management chaos. There are various societies on campus. Some of them are well-organised, some are not. Interviewees confessed that their experience largely depended on whether the organisers were responsible and motivated. Sometimes they enquired or registered but received no reply at all, which was frustrating.

I have signed up for a few societies but few were working, I suppose... I didn't receive any mail, absolutely not even once... I didn't feel like these societies were active.

—PFM4

I subscribed to the choir, but its recruitment information was very chaotic. I sent them an email to ask about the details, and no one replied... I didn't feel well so I didn't attend.

—CFM1

Another problem is the access to information. Several interviewees complained that they usually had to actively search for events through certain channels and approach the organisers themselves rather than the other way round.

Well the problem is I signed up for a few, but I wasn't active in any of them. Because I must say that they do not try much to promote their events. I had the feeling that I must research a lot or chase information about the future events and meetings by myself.

—PMM5

Communication is troublesome, as mostly you get the information about these societies by Facebook. But to find them is also troublesome. I don't like communicating remotely.

—CMU4

There are a variety of student societies in universities, and they are mostly self-run. Therefore, their operational status largely depends on their leading figures. If the students are lucky enough, they could find a well-organised body regularly arranging and eagerly promoting their events. If they are not, then they will probably end up indifferent to further society

events. This attitude could hinder their integration and the enlargement of their friendship circle.

6.4.2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on student societies

The COVID-19 pandemic in the UK began to spread in March 2020 and lockdown was announced on March 23rd. This worldwide pandemic severely influenced normal university life, including student societies. All offline activities were cancelled, and in-person meetings were regulated to a minimum. This unusual situation made it impossible for students to experience society activities as normal.

Many classes were online. This is negative because there is no integration... I feel that they are worse than normal.

—PMU5

I think due to the pandemic, societies are worse because they can't organise joint events that much, they can't meet, they can't have conferences, and that is not good.

—PMM2

I want to form a band [through the music society], but due to the pandemic, I don't think many students will come. So it is very difficult.

—CMU5

The most significant impact was that 'there is no integration', as face-to-face meetings were restricted. Many students laughingly stated that they were attending a 'Zoom/Teams university'. Online meetings conveyed much less information than personal contact, and lessened students' willingness to participate. Consequently, the function of 'knowing more people' was severely hampered by the pandemic. Further problems caused by COVID-19 will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.4.3 Different levels of engagement in student societies

Although student societies can play constructive roles in facilitating students' integration, the willingness to join in with their activities varies from person to person. Interviewees differ in their interests, personal characteristics, academic stress, and how they spend their spare time. Hence, their engagement in student societies varies a great deal. However, it seems that the differences are somewhat related to their degree level in my sample.

6.4.3.1 PhD students: minor interest

In my sample, both Polish and Chinese PhD students failed to show a strong interest in student societies. Usually they just answered ‘no’ and ‘I don’t have enough time’. It seems that they perceived societies as completely irrelevant to their studies. Moreover, some PhD interviewees reckoned that student societies are for ‘young’ people only:

First I think the societies are targeting undergrads. They are not for us [PhD students]. I feel out of place. They had recruitment but there were all undergrads.
—CFP1

Still, a handful of male PhD students did take part in some leisure activities, such as snooker, cycling, or choir. But no female PhDs in my sample took any part. CFP5 provided a possible explanation:

I have no appetite for societies at all during my PhD studies. If I want to relax, I am inclined to hang out at exhibitions or go for picnics with friends rather than student societies. Because I think it may become a burden as you need to fulfil some obligations, constantly get to know new people. It is tiring.
—CFP5

6.4.3.2 Master’s students: not active vs no interest

There is a salient difference between Polish and Chinese master’s students in my sample regarding their level of engagement in student societies. Polish master’s students resembled their PhD compatriots in that some males joined in with a few leisure activities, such as frisbee, football or student radio, while females were usually not engaged in any activities.

However, unlike PhD students who usually possessed no interest in student societies, many Polish master’s students actively joined the membership, but were inactive in the events. Quite a few interviewees claimed that they had registered for a few societies, but none of the societies earnestly organised activities. They blamed this on the poor organisation of societies, which has been discussed in the previous section. It seems that Polish master’s students had some expectations of student societies, but the reality did not fulfil them.

Meanwhile, Chinese master's students showed a very extreme picture – only one person in ten claimed that they had attended a society event, and the rest all answered no. The reason that most provided for not attending was that they were too busy with their studies. But if this is true, how come the Polish master's students were not busy with their studies? Does it indicate that Chinese master's students academically integrate more slowly than Poles? Or perhaps there are other reasons?

In my opinion, academic stress may not be the main reason. It is more likely to be a matter of priority. For Chinese master's students, most of whom completed their BA in China, almost everything is new to them in the UK. They have a lot to see, to understand and to adapt to. Amongst all the novelties, a student society is not necessarily the most attractive one. Besides, Chinese students are more likely to socialise with compatriots (something which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter), so the function of 'knowing more people' is not necessary for them. The student society is not an indispensable part of their university life. This is contrary to the case of undergraduate students.

6.4.3.3 Undergraduate students: highly active

All of the undergraduate interviewees in my sample stated that they had joined student societies. Most of them had registered for more than one. It seems that undergraduate students are generally involved in student societies. Their membership covers a wide range of interests, and they usually spoke positively about their experience, which has been outlined in the last section.

I joined the Spanish society... It is definitely a good way to get to know other people and practise my Spanish. I can learn directly not from textbooks, but go there and start talking Spanish. It is a very good way to practise.

—PFU2

I have joined the hiking society... I mean no wonder British people like hiking, the views are so beautiful. I start to like it because of the society. In China I thought walking around was boring, and the views were all artificial and too commercialised... but in the UK everything is untouched by human hand.

—CFU2

For undergraduate interviewees, student societies seem to be an efficient way to help them integrate. The two major functions – getting to know more people and developing their own interests – perfectly fit for them, as they have both the need and desire to integrate into their new university's life. Academic studies and student societies seem to be the two major pillars of their student careers.

6.4.3.4 Attitudes towards Polish/Chinese student societies

Andrejuk (2013) suggests that many Polish students in the UK are registered in a Polish society in their universities. This statement is confirmed by my empirical data – 8 out of 30 Polish students claimed that they had joined the Polish society and its events. Considering the impact of COVID-19, this is a high proportion. Meanwhile, 10 of 30 Chinese interviews were involved in Chinese student organisations and relevant activities.

It seems that students from both countries join societies specifically related to their home countries. The benefit is obvious: socializing with compatriots is easier as there are no language and culture barriers. Potentially it also gives a sense of belonging when students are far away from home.

I like the aspect of 'Polish', because Poles meet with each other, talk and cooperate. It is definitely a big advantage.

—PMM2

I feel relaxed with activities organised by our Chinese people. We share the same language. I feel comfortable among them.

—CFP3

Nevertheless, a society geared specifically towards certain countries could set some limits as well. Several interviewees complained that the society was exclusive to compatriots only, which prevented them from getting to know people from other backgrounds. It seems that Polish/Chinese student societies manage to circumvent one language barrier, but at the same time create another.

I think it is restricted to new people, because all people there speak Polish... that is a barrier.

—PMU1

It was a little worse than I imagined. I mainly knew other Chinese people at the event... The foreigners hardly talked to us. This may be a result of the language barrier. Our English is not good enough.

—CMM5

Other than finding a sense of belonging, building up social networks is another important function of these societies, especially for career-oriented students. Andrejuk (2013) demonstrated that Polish students establish networks through activities organised by the Polish society, and these networks could be crucial in their later career advancement. My findings are again in line with hers. Some Polish societies, according to interviewees, are actually Polish business societies, which often organise conferences with successful Polish businessmen in the UK. Hence, the leading figures in these societies and what they do are usually related to business. In the Chinese case, societies include the Chinese Entrepreneurship Society, and the Chinese Student and Scholar Association, etc. They play similar roles in facilitating networks amongst like-minded people. We could say that both Polish and Chinese student societies assist in integration and the pursuit of future careers.

Personally, I have joined a few Chinese research associations in the UK and managed to establish networks. Such networks not only help me in my daily life in the UK, but are also beneficial when I am back in China. Together we go sightseeing, discuss our research, attend seminars, hang out for drinks and encourage each other. I could not imagine my PhD career without these networks. Thus I consider them really essential.

6.5 Conclusion

Chapter 6 investigated how Polish and Chinese students integrate into university life in London. First of all, it looked at how they compared education systems in their home countries and the UK. The findings suggest that interviewees in both countries mostly made negative comments about the system in their home countries. Major problems included a teacher-centred and bureaucratic system and dated teaching content. Some interviewees praised their indigenous school education for the solid knowledge foundation it provided.

When in the UK, students experience many areas where they need to adapt. English language seems to be a common problem, along with new teaching and assessment methods in the UK, such as active enquiry and writing essays. Sometimes these combined together with the language barrier to create a mutually reinforcing disadvantage.

To overcome these challenges, interviewees applied various methods, including making extra efforts after class. Support from departments and from compatriots were also highlighted in the transcripts. Support from departments, evidence of integration as a two-way process, consisted of miscellaneous institutional activities. These activities were vital in introducing new students to university life and to multiculturalism in London. Support from compatriots circumvented the language barrier and meant that communication was more tailored and efficient.

Individual Polish and Chinese students are situated at different points along an integration spectrum. At one end are people without problems integrating. They were usually undertaking or had undertaken undergraduate studies or exchange programmes abroad. At the other end are people who found it hard to integrate. Usually they did not have prior study abroad experience and were accustomed to traditional education methods in their home countries; sometimes they were burdened by responsibilities outside academia. The majority of interviewees are situated between the extremes. They often could not clearly define their degree of academic integration, but described it as an ongoing process, requiring trial and error.

If we examine their degree of integration by taking into account their marks, Polish students were better integrated than their Chinese counterparts. Among both undergraduate and master's students, Polish interviewees displayed ambition and reported gaining good results, whereas Chinese interviewees were mostly satisfied with being mediocre in academic performance. Among PhD students, there were no differences between nationalities; different self-assessments depended on the different phases of the students' research projects.

Lastly, student societies were shown to be instrumental in facilitating international students' integration. They managed to help new students make more friends and develop their own interests, although their poor management and the COVID-19 limited their benefits. In terms of different levels of degree, it seems that postgraduate students were much less active in student societies than undergraduate students, especially Chinese master's students. Nevertheless, many interviewees from both countries favoured Polish/Chinese student societies, which offered them a relaxing environment and valuable social networks. Meanwhile, some students also worried that these societies limited them to a circle of compatriots only, thereby stifling integration.

Chapter 7 Social integration

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 is about acculturation, adopting Berry's (1997) understanding of 'integration' as a type of acculturation where the migrant identifies both with the culture and identity of the sending country and with the culture and identity of the receiving country. Berry personally conceptualises his theory as acculturation strategies, but it has been interpreted in some research circles differently, including using the terms acculturation orientations, attitudes, preferences, modes, and a more vivid term - the 'Berry boxes' (Ward 2008). However, it is too simplistic to put migrants into four boxes to define their acculturation status. Even Berry himself would not agree with that. He put the four strategies into a circle, indicating a continuum instead of four rigidly divided parts (Berry 1997: 10).

This thesis recognises this fluid possibility of acculturation orientations and considers integration not as a point exactly halfway between assimilation and separation, but a spectrum or continuum extending between those states. By doing so, we can examine the positions of Polish and Chinese students along this spectrum to understand their integration status.

In my sample, the interviewees seemed to think in terms of 'national identity', so this is the phrase I will be using in preference to Berry's 'heritage culture and identity' or the common sociological/anthropological term 'ethnic identity'.

Since they came to the UK the students' sense of national identity has been evolving to some extent, as reflected in and to some extent because of their various everyday practices. Everyday nationhood, as proposed in Fox and Idriss-Miller's (2008) article, offers a useful framework for analysing these practices and this framework forms the main structure for this chapter.

While the concepts of acculturation, national identity and everyday nationhood have been discussed in Ch.2, this chapter is organised according to the four domains of everyday nationhood. Section 7.2 is about 'talking the nation'. It examines what and when interviews talk about their countries. Section 7.3 discusses 'choosing the nation', including how interviewees choose their social networks and accommodation with regard to nationality. Section 7.4 investigates 'performing the nation' in the context of students' demonstrations in London. Section 7.5 presents 'consuming the nation' by analysing interviewees' use of media and interaction with local communities. After that, the following section 7.6 introduces how students talk about their perceptions of how they themselves changed in the UK in terms of their personality and national identity. Finally, section 7.7 discusses racial discrimination encountered by Polish and Chinese students.

7.2 Talking the nation

Fox and Idriss-Miller examined 'talking the nation' in two ways: talking 'about' and 'with' the nation. The first refers to how ordinary people express their understandings of the nation, while the second deals with circumstances under which nation becomes a salient topic, and the choice of language during communication. This section follows their structure and explores these two ways of talking the nation amongst Polish and Chinese students.

7.2.1 Talking about the nation: assimilation vs separation

In Ch.5 I have shown that some Polish students felt 'forced' to leave Poland due to their distaste for the homogeneity of Polish society. This section returns to the same theme with more details. Polish students in my sample usually referred to Poland as a conservative homogeneous state with less social tolerance than the UK. When answering the question of how Poland differed from the UK, most of them immediately came up with the notion of 'cultural diversity'.

The homogeneity and the cultural structure. The UK is a country with multiculturalism. There is much more diversity. In Poland, however, everything is very uniform. Another difference is tolerance in the UK. In Poland we have big problems with homophobia, xenophobia and all kinds of prejudice and discrimination towards minorities.

—PMP4

Definitely the cultural diversity. In the UK there are many cultures, and in Poland there is only one and only Poles. And the mentality related to this. In the UK people are all open to new things, but in Poland it seems to me that people are a little afraid and cautious, and don't want to step outside their comfort zone.

—PFU1

Multicultural vs homogeneous society seems to be the key difference between the UK and Poland according to the majority of Polish interviewees. It could be clearly noticed that they generally preferred the situation in the UK over in Poland. It seems that to them the UK means open-mindedness, and Poland means exclusion. How is this attitude linked to their identity and integration?

Literature suggests that Polish students in London would try not to fit in the stereotype of Poles, but behave in accordance with the 'global elite standard' (Kusek 2015). This tendency, which is also found in my research, may lead to a decay of their Polish national identity. They dislike the 'Polish' homogeneity, and favour the 'British' cultural diversity. Meanwhile, their preference for the multicultural environment in London strengthens their propensity for integration.

In general, Polish students seem to display elements of the assimilation strategy within Berry's menu of acculturation strategies. According to them, they tried to discard a homogenous conservative 'Polish' perspective, stay away from retrograde governance, and apply a multicultural cosmopolitan perspective.

However, we need to know that multiculturalism is perhaps not a general feature nationwide in the UK. Beech (2019) demonstrate that international students in Aberdeen and Belfast strongly associate their choices with the local urban history and tradition, whereas their counterparts in Nottingham put their major interest in London. The UK capital often overshadow other cities in England in many international students' minds, representing a whole image of the UK. We can see from my transcripts that participants often considered their experience in London as 'a UK thing', and some others highlighted their specific choice of London (see in section 5.5.2 about lifestyle migrants). It therefore become questionable

that whether students move and integrate into London or the UK or both, and what the difference is.

We need to remember that what Polish students integrated into is the multicultural London rather than the uniform monoethnic British society which is still assumed to exist in some people's imagination. While for many Polish participants the multicultural London seemed to equal the UK, some Chinese students knew about the difference, even the contrast between London and the UK. CMM3 assumed that London is the least British city in the UK, without many local UK citizens. CMU4 made similar comments:

London is a very unique place with multiethnicity. It is the least UK place in the UK. You can approach people from many different nations and countries in this big city. I made many new friends, and gained deeper understandings of different cultures and thoughts.
—CMU4

Both CMM3 and CMU4 had an impression about what real UK city is like, and found London unlike that model. Students are aware that integration into the multicultural London is different from places outside London. The meaning of integrating into a highly cosmopolitan space like London will be further discussed in the following sections.

Unlike Polish interviewees, who largely expressed their favourable feelings towards the UK, Chinese interviewees had various different attitudes. A large number declared that they became more patriotic in the UK, as they found that overseas was not as good as they had imagined.

We might be xenophiles before, considering everything abroad as better. But when I am here, I feel more patriotic. I feel like China is actually quite good, and the foreign cultures are not that good. They have many troubles as well.
—CFM2

Before going abroad I had more or less an impression that the foreign moon is rounder [foreign things are better]. But after arrival I realised that it was not the case... Foreign things are not necessarily better.
—CMM2

Many of my interviewees tended to focus on the development and progress of China, and how they found the advancement of the West illusory. Their findings, with their own eyes and experience, reinforce their sense of Chinese national identity. When they find the West in reality could not fit in their previous imagination, they lose the motive to integrate.

Some Chinese students talked about what they preferred in the UK, too. Relevant opinions include better living conditions for students, more information sources and most importantly – people: more equal, independent, tolerant and kind. Some interviewees referred to the difference between (Western) individualism and (Chinese) collectivism.

However, these strengths did not seem to have a significant impact on their integration. Amongst interviewees who made these comments, some have already started their career in China, while some have little social interaction because they have to work in the laboratory all the time. Most Chinese students, as we shall see in the next section, have few foreign friends. Among Berry's acculturation strategies, Chinese students are more likely to display elements of the Separation strategy.

7.2.2 Talking with the nation

Other than 'what' is the nation, Fox and Idriss-Miller also stress 'when' is the nation – in which contexts the nation is articulated. In my research, both Polish and Chinese students named some important events which had impacts on their national identity. However, these impacts were in reverse directions for the two groups.

7.2.2.1 Attitudes towards national government: distaste vs admiration

Many interviewees mentioned the current political situation in Poland. Usually they did not want to talk much about it, simply by saying 'you know what is happening in Poland (wiesz co się dzieje w Polsce)', but their negative feelings were more than salient:

I surely have to mention politics, right? I know no country is perfect, but what is happening in Poland is terribly medieval (laugh), considering that it is still theoretically a European country.

—PFU5

The current political situation in Poland does not encourage me to return, because I am a great opponent of the current Polish government.

—PFP2

Many Polish students in a variety of ways expressed their views unfavourable to the current Polish government. This thread runs through various topics in the transcripts, including motivations, plans for the future, and their integration. When talking about the current government, Polish international students seem more likely to possess a critical mind concerning negative aspects of the Polish authorities.

With regard to the perceptions of government, Chinese interviewees displayed viewpoints contrasting to those of their Polish peers. They usually admired the Chinese governmental system and highlighted its achievements, especially in the campaign against COVID-19. In the two representative examples quoted below, CFM3 complained about her UK experience with detailed descriptions and strong favourable emotions towards China, while CMM3 directly pointed out that his national identity was intensified.

You can see the difference in the reactions towards COVID-19. It is the difference between socialism and capitalism... when facing the collective catastrophe of humankind, only we, the socialist regime, could react with unity and discipline. But the West did not... the individual is No.1, human rights and freedoms of individuals are above all the collective interests.

—CFM3

During COVID-19 I have realised that in China the capacity to deal with the pandemic and the outcome are much better than in the Western countries. In the circumstances my national identity is growing stronger.

—CMM3

It is worth noting that under the regime of the party-state system, Chinese people tend to identify the communist government with the Chinese state. Hence, their national identity and political identity are indivisible. Any antagonism towards the communist government will be considered as aversion towards China. That is to say, when they praise the Chinese government, their national identity has been strengthened.

Last but not least, it would be incorrect to conclude that Chinese students generally praise their own country. When reading the transcripts, my impression was that my compatriots

were answering very prudently, avoiding value judgments. Possibly this was because they tried to be 'objective', but a more probable cause was that they were cautious with their compatriots – people are not sure about the outcome if they say anything 'wrong'. The Polish students were not afraid of this, since their relationship with me is too distant, and the research is highly unlikely to impact them in the future. This encourages them to speak more openly. Taking these factors into consideration, I would not like to appear to overstate Chinese students' positivity.

Considering the social identity theory (SIT), however, we can find a clear difference between Polish and Chinese interviewees when talking the nation. Chinese students in general seemed to find their home country distinct in a positive sense, whereas Polish students felt quite the opposite. The strength of their national identity was also different. Chinese students were much more likely than Polish students to identify with their nation.

7.2.2.2 Use of language: more English vs more Chinese

In addition to the circumstances when people talk about the nation, the language they apply in the talk is also significant (Glorius and Friedrich 2006; Gardner and Lau 2019). How often do Polish and Chinese students speak English and their mother tongues in everyday life?

The findings are astonishingly symmetrical. The vast majority of Polish students claimed that they spoke much more English than their native Polish, whereas Chinese students were quite the opposite – they used Chinese much more than English.

I really seldom speak Polish. Only when I talk with friends or family, but that is really not so much... I think 70-80% in English and the rest in Polish.

—PFP1

Definitely [I speak] Chinese more often. On campus I speak more English, but in accommodation more Chinese, because we have many Chinese colleagues in the student hall. We play in the common room every day... I think maybe 70% Chinese and 30% English.

—CMU3

Typically a Polish interviewee asserted that he or she spoke 20%-30% Polish in London, the rest of the time speaking English, like PFP1. A few were extreme in that they claimed to use

Polish in less than 10% of all circumstances. Only four interviewees were exceptions. Three of them said 50-50 and one said 60% Polish. Their living conditions were highly similar: they lived with other Poles, and some have Polish partners. Naturally they speak Polish often in their daily life.

A typical Chinese interviewee spoke 70% Chinese and 30% English in London, like CMU3. There were four exceptions as well, and their profiles were also similar. They went abroad very early (two before *gaozhong* and two during undergraduate programmes) and had many foreign friends. In their daily life in London they are not always surrounded by other Chinese students. However, most interviewees were like CMP4:

I speak Chinese more often. There are so many Chinese students here, classmates or roommates, all Chinese. They occupy perhaps 80% of my friendship circle... I spend most of the time with them.

—CMP4

Accommodation and friendship circles are clearly important factors. They affect many aspects of national identity and will be further discussed in the next section. Here we focus on the use of language and its impact on integration. From the above we could see that due to different population densities of co-national students in London, Polish and Chinese students speak their mother tongues with very different frequency. This creates different conditions for integration. Again, this suggests Poles are closer to the assimilation end of the integration continuum and Chinese students are nearer to separation.

Besides frequency, is proficiency also influential? Is it related to frequency? In Ch.6 I have shown that English proficiency was considered the biggest problem by both Polish and Chinese students. How is it related to social integration?

Transcripts reveal very different self-assessment of English skills between Polish and Chinese students. Polish students are usually highly confident about their mastery of English.

I think that [my English] is at a good level now. It is already like my mother tongue... since I have been speaking English practically every day in different situations with

different people for at least 4 years, I am totally convinced that it is almost as good as my Polish.

—PMM4

I feel absolutely comfortable [with my English]. It is like when I am talking to you now [in Polish], I don't feel more comfortable than when I am speaking English.

—PFM4

A small number of Polish interviewees admitted that their English was good, but could be better. The most common trouble seems to be the accent, as has been discussed in Ch.6. Also, the symbol of good mastery of English for Poles is often having no Polish accent.

By contrast, most Chinese interviewees people confessed that they were not very confident about their abilities in English. This deficiency leads to constraints in communication with others.

The mastery of English has significantly influenced my life in the UK. Basically I almost have no trouble with my studies, but when communicating with other local students, I find it difficult when they speak too fast or with slang... it has a negative impact on social communication, sometimes you dare not start a conversation.

—CMU4

My English needs to be improved... there is no problem in daily life, like going to dinner or shopping. That is simple. But when you want to discuss something deep, like human rights issues, you will feel limited by your English skills.

—CMP2

Other than language ability, CMU2 offers another key factor influencing communication: culture.

I have been here since I was 14 years old, and I speak English every day. Compared with students who go abroad after their undergraduate programmes, I am more familiar with the UK culture, like how they start a conversation, and how to talk in their culture... you may have good English skills but still not able to talk with others. It is not because of the language, but the culture.

—CMU2

In comparison, Polish students generally think highly of their English skills and speak English more frequently. Chinese students are less confident about their language proficiency and speak much less English than Polish students. Also, the cultural distance between China and the UK seems larger than between Poland and the UK, which toughens integration for Chinese

students. The impact of English skills on social integration could be seen clearly by the two contrasting quotations.

I know English at the level that I could comfortably live in the UK and communicate here. I work in this language. I have established friendships with people who speak English.

—PMP5

I am not very confident about my English... it makes me unwilling to step outside my comfort zone to talk to many foreign friends, and less active in class.

—CFM4

Not all Chinese interviewees suffered from language problems. A small proportion of them thought highly of their English skills, and they were parallel with the people who frequently speak English in London. There seems to be a positive relationship between English proficiency and length of stay abroad, or perhaps more precisely, previous migration experience.

It is reasonable to suppose that people with more international migration experience are more likely to handle the foreign language and dare to talk to others. As Ch.5 already demonstrates, Polish students usually have more previous migration experience than Chinese peers. CMU2 is after all a rare case amongst Chinese students. Consequently, in terms of integration, the mastery of English is more advantageous to Polish students than Chinese students.

7.3 Choosing the nation: diverse vs co-national background

As is shown in the previous section, social networks and accommodation are important indicators of integration. This section will explore how Polish and Chinese students choose their friends and residence in London, and their impact on integration.

Fox and Miller-Idriss divide 'choosing the nation' into two categories: making national choices and making choices national. The first one refers to the case that people choose the nation when their options are designated by institutions in national terms, such as attending national minority schools or not. The latter one applies to situations where people make choices for

non-national reasons, but their choices subsequently play a role in shaping their sense of nationhood, e.g. someone makes a friend for non-national reasons, but then the nationality of that friend becomes important in various ways. As we shall see, both categories exist in my research, and sometimes they overlap.

In addition, students enjoy different degrees of agency when choosing the nation. Some of them, with more capital, are freer than others to choose their friends and accommodation.

7.3.1 Social networks

Ager and Strang (2008) consider social connections as an important indicator of migrant integration. They use the term social bonds, social bridges and social links to mark respectively the connections between migrants and members of similar (religious, national or ethnic) backgrounds; connections with other local communities; and with state services. Network theorists prefer the phrase bonding ties to represent migrants' connections with friends and family members, and bridging ties to indicate their connections with socially heterogeneous less close people (Pang 2018). Migrants' strong/weak ties are also studied to demonstrate the frequency, strength and closeness of their social contacts with other people (Granovetter 1973). Amongst so many terms, Ryan (2016: 952) points out that while 'there is often an implied overlap between tie strength (strong or weak), content (intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic) and direction (bonding or bridging)', she 'seeks to challenge the simplistic dichotomy between strong, intra-ethnic, bonding ties versus weak, inter-ethnic, bridging ties'. Her argument is supported by some empirical studies, indicating that among many migrant groups, co-national background does not automatically imply strong bonding ties, and can even be the source of restraints and exploitation (Düvell 2004; Li 2013).

Weak ties are better for bridging because they enable a person to approach a wider range of people and a larger volume of information sources, thereby promoting access to better job opportunities and stimulating social cohesion (Blokland and Noordhoff 2008, cited by Morosanu 2013: 2161). Ager and Strang (2008: 178-180) suggest that social bonds are beneficial to integration, since the shared cultural practices make migrants feel settled. They also point out that perceptions of friendly attitudes on the part of strangers (social bridges)

could offer them a sense of security and safety, thus facilitating integration. However, some scholars disagree that bonding ties are good for integration. Strong co-national ties may lead to marginalisation or separation instead of integration in the receiving society (Berry 1997; Yuan 2017). Furthermore, ties to non-co-ethnics (weak ties) are not necessarily helpful for some aspects of integration. For instance, Moroşanu (2013) illustrates that migrants' bridging ties with non-natives could hardly change their shared disadvantages with regard to social mobility.

In this section I aim to explore how students nationally (or not) choose their social networks in the UK. Ryan's sorting of ties provides an insightful analytical framework. I will investigate the tie strength, content and direction of Polish and Chinese students, and their impact on their integration. Let us begin with the Poles.

7.3.1.1 Polish students: international network

As presented by Ryan above, it is generally believed that amongst co-nationals there are strong bonding ties, and weak bridging ties with other nationals. In some cases this is true for Polish interviewees. A few interviewees acknowledged that they received assistance from co-national friends, partners and family members in the early days, including dealing with administrative issues, finding accommodations, suggesting life tips and relieving homesickness. Particularly, Polish undergraduate students seem to have more strong connections with co-nationals than Polish postgraduates.

There are people from my liceum, Poles. I keep in contact with five of them. There are people from my student hall. I mostly stick together with three British girls and a Canadian boy. These are my closest people here.
—PFU3

This phenomenon could be explained by the following facts: 1) Polish undergraduate students are usually from international schools. Many of their schoolmates enrolled in UK universities as well, so their daily contact is maintained. However, most postgraduates' life paths diverge from those of their undergraduate friends. Such is also the case for Chinese undergraduates.

2) Unlike the postgraduates, the Polish undergraduate students I interviewed, as is shown in Ch.6, are highly active in the Polish Society. There they have access to abundant co-nationals.

However, the majority of interviewees had highly international bonding ties. Generally, the social networks of a Polish interviewee consist of 20%-30% co-nationals, the rest being British or from third countries. Some are more extreme in that they claimed to have only one or two Polish friends.

I have one close friend from Poland, but also many foreigners from my programme, from China, from Denmark, etc.

—PFP5

Let's say I have friends from England, Italy, Germany, Australia, Scotland. My closest friendship circle in London contains 8 people.

—PFM5

Such are the demographics of bonding ties for Polish interviewees: most of them are schoolmates and flatmates. International friends dominate the circle, with British people in varying proportions. Polish students, as has already been mentioned many times, usually possess excellent language skills and ample migration experience, which empower them to adapt themselves without assistance from co-nationals in the early days and to form bonding ties beyond national boundaries. Nationality is not necessarily a significant factor in making friends.

I have friends from different cultures. It is about our personalities, whether we are open-minded and able to understand, appreciate and tolerate others. For me it is part of my life that people around me live differently but we always have some interests in common.

—PFP2

On the other hand, bridging ties are to some extent hard to identify for students, as this concept pertains to socially heterogeneous people, whereas students mostly make acquaintance only with their peers: other students. However, some bridging ties could still be identified, especially for those with working experience in the UK. They might have workmates or clients from various backgrounds. PFM1 had a group of friends in a consulting company she worked for, and another group of locals through her British boyfriend. Sometimes interviewees could build weak bridging ties with co-nationals as well. PFP2

demonstrated that she enjoyed talking with Polish hairdressers in Polish about Poland, but the contacts were very limited.

The Polish Society is vital in establishing co-national bridging ties. Actually one of the most critical functions of the Polish Society is networking. The major information in the social media of Polish societies in London universities is often about successful Polish businessmen in the UK. However, this does not necessarily lead to a preference for making more co-national friends. First, although Polish societies have a high membership, it does not mean that most members are interested in the business sector. Few of my Polish interviewees claimed that they had participated in business activities organised by the Polish societies. Some of them even stated that the Society was too commercial that they did not want to join; second, since most Polish students aim at an international career, as is shown in Ch.5, the role of those successful compatriots invited by the Polish societies is usually to introduce how to enter the global job market rather than how to form a Polish company. In other words, the elite network Polish students want to build or enter does not consist of only Poles.

I don't have much contact with other Poles. The Polish Society has organised many conferences about Poles in the UK. I was there a few times and even was a volunteer once. But it wasn't that often. In the UK I spend more time with foreigners than Poles.
—PMU2

Even such limited contacts with co-nationals were very rare. Most Polish interviewees, as Andrejek (2013), Kusek (2015) and Łuczak (2017) suggest, identified themselves as members of a cosmopolitan community in London and refused to take co-national bonds for granted.

I don't have the necessity [to meet other Poles]. I think people doing such things just don't feel they belong here and miss home. I definitely feel I am part of the society here. I have friends, I don't feel lonely, so I don't feel the necessity.
—PFP4

PFP4 is representative amongst Polish interviewees. They might have few strong ties with other Poles, but more with people from the UK and other countries. They do not necessarily choose their social networks through nationality. Polish identity is not salient in my sample. Rather, they seem to be well assimilated into the local cosmopolitan world by socialising with

people from a wide range of national backgrounds, which backs up Prazeres et al. (2017)'s findings that diverse social networks facilitate cosmopolitan identity amongst student mobility. It provides further evidence about Polish students' integration into the multicultural London.

7.3.1.2 Chinese students: co-national network

Although a small proportion of Chinese interviewees – paralleling with the anomalies discussed above in the section on 'talking the nation' – claimed to have more international friends than co-nationals, the vast majority stated that ties with compatriots were dominant among their bonding ties. Almost all are schoolmates or flatmates.

At the core of my friendship circle stand mainly Chinese... in the midrange are my supervisor and my classmates. 80% of this range are local British. In the outer circle are all kinds of people.

—CFP5

Surprisingly, even their bridging ties are mostly with compatriots as well. CFP4 found several part-time jobs through Chinese agents and acquaintances. CFP5 and CMP1 knew the owners of some Chinese supermarkets and restaurants, because they went there very often. Some students managed to form weak ties with foreigners, but found these hard to maintain. CFM1 complained that she could only talk to foreigners occasionally in the class. CMM4 said that his contacts with foreigners ended up with Instagram friends only. Although they wanted to establish friendships with foreigners, they were not able to. It seems the way people socialise with each other is a key barrier to forming friendships.

I used to want to hang out with foreign friends, but I really don't like going to the pub. We used to go to the pub after class, drink something and talk. It was embarrassing. I know I should go, but I don't really like it.

—CFP4

My participant observation supports this argument. Chinese students usually regard the 'British' way of socialising as going to the pub and talking casually, occasions on which they find it hard to fit in. Instead, they prefer dining together at home or in restaurants – usually

Chinese restaurants. Eating is particularly important in Chinese culture to maintain friendships. CFP2 offered the explanation:

The reason why I have more Chinese friends sounds a little amusing – eating... You couldn't maintain the friendship because you couldn't eat together [as people like different food]. It is not that people don't understand each other. It is that people couldn't feel comfortable with each other.

——CFP2

The significance of food will be further discussed in the section of 'consuming the nation'. Here we focus on the way people socialise with and entertain others. According to my observation and my interviews, Chinese students in London play board games, sing karaoke, go shopping and tour together. They could do almost everything in the 'Chinese' way, or we could say they simply copy the way they live in China to the UK. Naturally they make national choices because it is much more convenient and comfortable. Their national identity is maintained automatically in the circumstances.

In addition to the way people socialise, CFU2 provided another perspective about choosing national/international friends:

I think I will definitely return to China, so I want to prepare for my career... I feel that Chinese undergrads in the UK are from very good family backgrounds. Making friends with them will give me lots of benefits in finding good jobs, and even a good partner. Those foreigners, especially the British students, come with student loans or grants. What they could offer me is deficient. I don't want to stay in the UK, so I don't need to make foreign friends.

——CFU2

This approach may sound utilitarian, but is particularly true for many Chinese students. In Ch.5 I have demonstrated that the getting-gilded strategy is popular amongst Chinese students, most of whom are expected to return to China. To form an elite network and to maintain its membership could maximise the benefit of this strategy. Making foreign friends, or integration as a whole, is therefore a matter of indifference to them.

However, it would be false to conclude that co-ethnic ties are necessarily bonding and strong. Some Chinese students claimed that they found it hard to integrate into other co-national

groups. Sometimes it is because these groups had existed for a long time so that they excluded potential new members, even though these were compatriots as well. In such circumstances, some students ended up with weak ties such as with classmates only. Sometimes barriers arose because the Chinese culture is diversified in itself so that people from different parts of China experienced problems in getting along well with each other.

Friends (from China) I made here at LSE are not as intimate as friends I made before. We are just classmates... I had been worried about this for a while... finally I concluded that there is no friendship amongst postgraduate students.

—CFM3

I wasn't very adapted to socialising with people from the north of China... I tried very hard to integrate into a group of students from there, but I found that between us there was a transparent screen, which excluded me. They liked doing things in groups, but I couldn't do everything together with them... I am not familiar with their established friendship protocol.

—CFP2

The 'established friendship protocol' which troubles CFP2 is acted out not only on campus, but in residences as well. In the next section we will see how the collective action of Chinese students shapes their choices of nationhood.

7.3.2 Accommodation

Many interviewees mentioned that flatmates are a vital pool of friends. Literature also highlights the significance of housing for migrants' integration (Castles 2004, Ager and Strang 2008, Kusek 2015). How do Polish and Chinese students choose their accommodation in London? What is its influence on integration? How do they interact with their neighbourhood?

At the beginning we should clarify that the UK universities have the policy that they guarantee a place for a year in university student halls for international students who study in the UK for the first time. So usually the first-year students will choose to live in student halls, but they must move out when the one-year contract ends. Private student halls do not have such limits, thereby attracting students at all levels of degree programme.

However, only about one-third of Polish interviewees – 9 out of 30 – chose to stay in student halls, most of them being first-year undergraduates. Others preferred to rent rooms in various parts of London. Most people lived close to their campuses – within 20 minutes by public transport. But some interviewees lived very far away, including regions like Enfield, Greenford, Hounslow, Acton and Ravenstone. All these places are located 10-20 kilometres from the city centre and their campuses. Other than the cheaper rent, a key reason why they resided far away is that some of these regions contain Polish communities, where other co-national friends already live, or where they were recommended to live by Polish estate agents.

The vast majority of Polish interviewees seem to live a more independent life. They usually confessed that they did not know their neighbours and had little contact with them. This is what usually happens when you rent rooms with people you do not know:

Honestly speaking I don't know my neighbours. I had contact with them only when we had problems with the house. But this also means that nothing wrong happened among us, so I am fine with this situation.

—PMM4

I really don't know my neighbours. But I probably like it that here nobody is interested in anything (laugh).

—PMP3

They usually favoured the way that people lived on their own, even when living with compatriots in Polish communities:

I live with Poles... We are like, everyone minds their own business and life. We are friends but we are independent. We don't stay together every day.

—PFP5

The Chinese profiles are very different. All of them lived within 20 minutes of the university by public transport. Many went to universities on foot. 21 out of 30 people in my sample lived in student halls. The situation is perhaps because: 1) I began recruiting interviewees from the student hall for postgraduates I was living in, and the snowball sampling for undergraduates also happened in another student hall; and 2) Chinese students are used to living in student dormitories on campus all the time in China, so renting rooms independently is a challenge for many people. Also, that is why they like living very close to campus.

I think the student hall is safer than renting rooms because there could be anyone out there. Besides, the process is not that complicated. I heard that the landlord or agents would find all manner of excuses not to return your deposit. The student hall is more convenient, where you could get to know students from different universities and countries.

—CMP4

Living in student halls also means that people have more contact with other residents, as CMP4 expected. But do they really make friends from different countries?

My participant observation to some extent disproves it. From January 2019 to March 2020 I was living in a UCL student hall, where the main residents were postgraduate international students. Very few British students lived there. It was catered, so during the opening hours – 7:45 to 9 am and 5 to 7 pm – people would go to the dining hall, take food, find a seat and eat with others. In April 2019 I obtained ethics approval to do participant observation there. Gradually I realised the seat distribution was a noticeable phenomenon (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Seat distribution in a catered student hall

<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>
<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXO</u>
XXOO	OXXO	OXXO	OOOO	OXXO
OXXO	OXXX	OXXO	OXXO	OXXO
<u>XXO</u> <u>O</u>	OXXO	XXOX	OXXO	OXXO
XOOX	XXXX	XXOX	XOOO	XOOX
XOOX	XXXX	XXOO	XXXO	OOXO
<u>OOOX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XOOO</u>
<u>OOOO</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>XXXX</u>	<u>OOOO</u>

X = occupied seat
O = empty seat

Bold = Chinese students Underline = Indian students

Wave underline = other international students

This is a rough draft of seat distribution in the dining hall on an average day. People could choose their seats freely. It turns out that the nationality of their chosen eating partners was significant. The whole seating zone is divided into three areas: Indian students, Chinese students and other international students.

Indian students sat next to each other on one side of the hall. They always went there and nobody 'betrayed' this solidarity by sitting somewhere else with others. Although they did not join the others, they welcomed others to join them, regardless of their nationalities. I sometimes went there as well, as they were kind and open-minded. They had formed solidarity beyond their ethnic identity, religious beliefs, gender and age. Their national identity is what united them together. Here Indian students do not include those UK-born nationals, who were considered British students and did not live in this hall.

Other international students, about twice the number of Indian students, generally sat on the opposite side of the hall. Their race, nationalities, gender, age all varied. They always sat side by side, even without knowing each other, but somehow they could always carry on a conversation. The only Polish student in this hall belonged to this group. There were sporadic Chinese students here as well. I tried to approach this area a few times but finally gave up because it was really hard to join their conversation. I did not understand the context of their topics and was soon marginalised. Very few Chinese students managed to integrate into this group. If they did, it was usually because they had partners in it.

Between the two groups were vast numbers of Chinese students, who sat in small sub-groups with empty seats between each group. The way they were grouped was related to both gender and the floors they lived on. Men tended to sit together, and so did women. If they were mixed, it was usually because they lived on the same floor so they knew each other. Such floor-oriented groups were larger than gender-oriented groups. Once a sub-group was formed, it was hard to step out of it. Few people could switch within different sub-groups. Unlike Indian and other international students, who spoke English all the time, Chinese students invariably talked in Chinese.

Nationality is the decisive factor in such seat distribution. Students chose their seats according to where they were from. Chinese and Indians, the largest two national groups amongst international students, sat with their co-nationals, whereas people from other countries, usually with few compatriots, preferred to sit together regardless of any difference.

Constantly speaking English in such an international environment naturally weakens the national identity. People have to talk about things they commonly or mutually understand instead of what happens in a single home country. It leads to a cosmopolitan view and international understanding. The nation becomes no longer salient. Such is the case for Polish students.

However, it is hard for Chinese students to become members of this group because 1) their language ability is poor and cultures are different, something which has been discussed in the section of 'talking the nation', and 2) it is much easier to approach and talk to co-nationals.

Many interviewees contended that they found it hard and embarrassing to follow the 'British' social manner. Personally, I feel like I have to force myself to talk to students in that area if I must integrate into them, and even if I force myself the result is not necessarily satisfying. As Maeder-Qian (2018) suggests, in this communication process Chinese students realise that they are not 'them' (foreign students) so that the road towards cosmopolitanism is cut off, and the national identity is strengthened.

On the other hand, it seems that for the students I observed, speaking to other Chinese students is much more comfortable. They could speak Chinese so that they would not worry their ideas might be misunderstood. They could talk about things others generally understand without thinking so hard about finding a common topic. There are just so many Chinese students that it is natural to approach co-nationals. In the sense of 'choosing the nation', this is in accordance with Fox and Idriss-Miller's 'making choices national': they choose Chinese people because they are there. Below are two representative quotes from interviewees living in the same student hall with me.

I feel very good [about this hall]. Neighbours are kind, and there are many Chinese people, which makes life easier... I feel a little tired if I have to speak English all the time in daily life. It is easier to talk to Chinese students.

—CMM1

I think the neighbours have a more positive impact on me. The main residents of the hall are Chinese. You can basically speak Chinese all the time here, which is good. It is like in the daytime you are in London, and at night you are back to a small Chinatown. Besides, you feel safer and not alone when people are speaking the same language with you during COVID-19. Also, we have similar eating habits, so we could share food in the kitchen.

—CFM1

In the case of this student hall, there is a crossover of making national choices and making choices national. If seats are somehow distributed in a national way, then picking a seat, like it or not, becomes a national choice. Usually this means selecting a Chinese circle for Chinese students and an international circle for Polish students. If most residents in the hall are Chinese students, then doing things in a 'Chinese' way, such as speaking Chinese and sharing Chinese food, is straightforward and simple. However, for Polish students, there is no 'Polish' option to choose from.

A hidden thread could be missed here. The vast majority of residents in this hall are Chinese. They speak Chinese and always stick together. These make them a huge and exclusive group in the student hall. They could not join other groups in the dining hall, and vice versa. Polish students, for example, could find it hard to jump in among Chinese students. If they do, they will soon feel marginalised, too. As a result, they automatically join the group of 'other international students'. In this case, Polish students are somehow 'forced' by Chinese students to integrate into a non-national group.

If in the student hall nations are perhaps passively chosen, what about renting rooms? How do interviewees choose their flatmates?

Findings are significantly different between Polish and Chinese students. Most Polish interviewees, apart from some who lived in Polish communities, did not specifically seek Polish flatmates. People they lived with were usually from a broad range of countries. However, seven of nine Chinese tenants lived with other Chinese people. It seems that when they could actively choose, Chinese students are much more likely than Polish students to choose co-national flatmates.

The reason Chinese students provided is identical: living with foreigners is perhaps troublesome. They preferred to live with people they knew, or who were at least culturally similar. This is confirmed by Chinese students living in student halls, many of whom complained that foreigners were less considerate and that they often partied until late. Also, as is shown before, it is the first time for many Chinese students to go abroad. According to social identity theory, people identify with a group to reduce uncertainty. In this case it is reasonable for them to turn to compatriots to reduce uncertainty and insecurity. For many Polish students with ample migration experience, it is not necessary to stay with other Poles to overcome the unknown.

The behaviour of Polish and Chinese students indicates the significance of timing in the life course theory (Findlay et al. 2015). The timing of the first trip abroad varied between Polish and Chinese participants. It is usually the first time for Chinese students to leave their home

country when coming to the UK for the degree programmes, but it is not the case for Poles. While literature mainly puts focus on the timing of residential independence (McCollum, Keenan, and Findlay 2020), I argue that for ISM, the timing of leaving home for education also need more attention. Early nest-leaving can ease the subsequent adaptation process (Murphy-Lejeune 2002), and shape their life courses. The timing of the start of overseas studies has a strong impact on ISMs' social integration.

Choosing friends and choosing accommodation share the same logic to a great extent. In terms of agency, they both largely depend on the capital students own. Polish students, generally with better language ability and migration experience, are freer than Chinese students to make choices other than in nationally defined terms. Chinese students, instead, are more likely to stick with co-nationals, as they probably could not deal with troubles alone.

In my student hall, those foreigners like to party every weekend until 2 or 3 am. It is too noisy to fall asleep. (Have you tried to sort it out?) No, because I don't think it will be fixed. The hall has sent emails indicating the silence time, but when the time comes no staff appears and stops them.

—CFU4

The kids next door knocked on the door and called us 'virus'. I ran out and quarrelled with them... my (Chinese) roommates were timid and stayed behind me. It was always me to argue.

—CFM3

For many Chinese students like CFU4 and roommates of CFM3, they could not/dare not handle troubles with foreigners. Staying with compatriots is therefore a safe and natural choice. Meanwhile, it blocks the possibility and willingness to communicate deeply with the non-Chinese world. Their identification with the nation is strengthened, which reflects the notion of social identity theory.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. As CFM1 and CFM3 suggest, Chinese students feel safer when staying together with co-nationals during the pandemic. I received a few requests from other Chinese students about renting rooms together to 'help each other in the pandemic'. Many students expressed strong mistrust towards foreigners in their anti-epidemic measures, considering them as a threat to health. Polish students, however, do not perceive the pandemic from a national view.

Chinese friends around me paid great attention to COVID, as well as Italians. But others seem to be very casual. They don't wear masks anyway, and make jokes about it, which is definitely impossible at my home. How dare you make jokes about something like COVID? You will surely be reproached.

—CFP3

It is a pity that my university friends are returning to their countries now. I had very close friends. One is from France and now stays in Paris, probably wouldn't return to London. Another is from Saudi Arabia and has returned home for some time.

—PFM4

Polish and Chinese students showed different attitudes towards friends from other countries during COVID. Chinese students would like to gather around and keep a distance from other nationals, whereas Polish students did not express a salient national preference. Such discrepancy influenced their choices about social networks and accommodation. This is an example of Xu's (2021) suggestion that Chinese international students are portrayed as a racialised subject.

In all of the circumstances above, the intensity of national identity for Polish and Chinese students diverges from one another. Polish becomes more 'international', whereas Chinese becomes more 'Chinese'.

7.4 Performing the nation: support the liberal values vs the 'Chinese' values

Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008: 545) argue that 'nationhood is also given symbolic meaning in the ritual performances of everyday (and not-so-everyday) life', including the display of national symbols, rituals and commemorations. Such occasions may generate collective national attachments of ordinary people. In a global metropolis like London, national symbols and rituals of both Poland and China could be found in everyday life. Polish churches attract plenty of their migrant followers, where they could pray in Polish. The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum exhibits thousands of objects relevant to Polish armed forces during World War II. Jan Matejko's famous painting Copernicus temporarily displayed in the National Gallery revealed the artistic as well as scientific glory of Poland. Meanwhile, the Chinese galleries in the British Museum interest numerous visitors from not only China but also around the globe.

The world also sees various traditional performances in Chinatown and other Chinese communities during the Chinese New Year.

But how are they related to integration? In Berry's (1997) acculturation model, he defines integration as both maintaining migrants' cultural identity of origin and interacting with other groups in the larger social networks. That is to say, integration could only be present when nationhood and the receiving society are both involved. To examine integration in this context, we need to explore whether or not people adopt some aspects of the majority culture when performing the nation.

Sports competitions, as suggested by Fox and Miller-Idriss, is a key topic in 'performing the nation', but was barely mentioned in my interviews. It was because my fieldwork mostly took place during COVID-19, when most international sports games were cancelled or postponed. In other aspects, PMM3 mentioned that he went to Polish church in London with his parents. CFP4 managed to find a few part-time jobs through some Chinese community organisations. But they are infrequent cases in my sample. Polish and Chinese student societies 'perform' their nations, and are discussed in Ch.6. For this section, the most relevant theme to emerge from my transcripts is that of demonstrations.

Studies of performing national identity offer us many insights into how public ritualised events impact the cognition of nationalism and its reproduction. For instance, Zuev and Virchow (2014) state that incompatible groups may grasp the opportunity of national public events to compete with each other and claim their ownership of national symbols and belongings. They provide as an example the case of Muslims and Hindus in India. Kong and Yeoh (1997) demonstrate that the state could construct the notion of nation and national identity and foster a sense of esteem with the assistance of rituals. They analyse parades during the National Independence Day celebrations in Singapore between 1965 and 1994 and find out that these rituals managed to generate admiration and fascination amongst citizens. As we can see in the discussion below, similar admiration could be found amongst Chinese students in London, who largely accepted the patriotism created by the Chinese government. Their Polish peers, however, took part in the demonstrations defending a liberal Polishness against the current Polish authorities.

7.4.1 Demonstrations: whether or not to endorse the governmental views of home countries

During my PhD studies there happened to be demonstrations organised respectively by Polish and Chinese people in London. Throughout the second half of 2019, there had constantly been pro-democracy demonstrations (often participated in by Hong Kong citizens) and pro-government demonstrations (often attended by mainland Chinese people) in central London, usually around Trafalgar Square and Tower Bridge. Pro-democracy protestors called for the independence of Hong Kong's legal system after its government put forward extradition proposals allowing some suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial, while pro-government rallies supported the police and condemned violence on Hong Kong streets. A year later, in October and November 2020, thousands of Poles gathered outside the Polish Embassy in London to protest against the Polish Supreme Court's decision to disallow the abortion of malformed fetuses, which means a near-total ban on abortion in Poland.

Demonstrators waved national flags, sang national anthems and chanted slogans. These were typical performances of the nation. In this process, I find out that both Polish and Chinese students managed to build an image of their nations, although the images might be different.

Since the Polish protest was about abortion, the main participants were Polish women. My interviewees believed that many female Polish students in London were opposed to the new law. Some had personally joined the action. The rest talked about it together, worrying about the worsening domestic political climate.

There were protests about women's rights in Poland outside the Polish embassy. I was there three times and I also protested.

— PFM2

Recently there were protests against what the Polish government is doing. People met outside the embassy. I kept an eye on the process, and my Polish friend was also actively involved so we sometimes talked about what was happening.

— PFP1

As is shown in the section about 'talking the nation', Polish interviewees were often critical of the current authorities in Poland. Regarding the protests, they further expressed their profound distrust and antipathy towards Poland's right-wing government. In fact, none of the

Polish students in my sample expressed their support for Poland's government. It is evident that they mostly preferred the way the British government treated different people and opinions than the Polish government. It seems that both male and female students were concerned about the political situation, especially when they compared Poland and the UK.

We have a big problem that in Poland there is stronger polarisation... in the UK they have a different value system regarding human rights and rights of all kinds of minorities... in Poland we couldn't discuss this... Diversification and polarisation are more and more salient and heated.

—PMP4

Xenophobia in Poland is widespread and it discourages anyone to come and live here. I am aware that there are such problems in the UK as well, but their government does not encourage hatred and the environment is totally different.

—PFU5

What matters here is that 'performing the nation' for these Polish protestors is an act which is not nationally exclusive. The Polish demonstrators protested for women's rights and against the narrow interpretation of Polish nationhood offered by the government. They feel that one can be Polish and a feminist. That is to say, they had a particular liberal concept of Polishness which is at odds with the Polish official version and in line with the British pro-multicultural version. It reflects Siara's (2013) findings that Polish migrants begin to adopt the liberal values in the UK after migration. Also, according to Berry's model, this is good evidence of integration that they both maintain their cultural identity while affirming some mainstream values of the receiving society. Integrating into multiculturalism also indicates accepting its values and acting according to them.

Chinese interviewees, however, showed very different attitudes towards demonstrations about their nation. Unlike their Polish peers, they seldom discussed the issue with co-nationals or Hong Kong students. Many mentioned that they tried to avoid it because otherwise their friendship would end. In some daily conversations in the student hall, it seems that my co-national students always dodged this topic when I raised it. This is mainly because politics in China is a highly sensitive issue so that supporting the ruling party is a tacit understanding. People are unsure about the outcome if they say or even hear anything wrong. This is very different from how British or Polish students perceive politics.

Nevertheless, although not wishing to talk about it, some students actively joined the pro-government protests and directly confronted pro-democracy protestors in Trafalgar Square. They sang the Chinese national anthem, chanted slogans, waved placards, shot videos and put them onto social media, where they received tremendous response from China, both ordinary internet users and the official government accounts.

There is no clear evidence that Chinese interviewees have changed their ways of thinking about politics after sojourning in the UK. In fact, some had become more 'patriotic'.

After arrival my national identity has been strengthened. Through comparison I realise more strongly that I am a Chinese... for instance during the National Day military parade my feeling was deeper than before. Before I might only think that the army is powerful. Now I may think that these is our army, not that of other countries. I have a stronger sense of identity.

—CMM3

Our political culture is a lot different from the White students, so there is always a feeling of alienation. Although you may want to get rid of this identity, you have to be patriotic because this is your label.

—CMM5

CMM3 and CMM5 displayed divergent attitudes towards patriotism. CMM3 felt a sense of pride and identity when watching the National Day military parade, a typical circumstance of performing the nation. CMM5 felt he 'had to' become patriotic when he was labelled Chinese. It seems that the appearance in itself is a kind of performing the nation for Chinese students. This difference in appearance and the identity ascribed to them by others alienated Chinese students from non-Chinese peers.

In the circumstances it is not difficult to understand why Chinese students, when 'performing the nation' and encountering protests about Hong Kong issues, either refused to be involved or lined up with mainstream national patriotism. The vast majority of my interviewees did not show a positive connection with the UK or other groups in this matter. This finding has confirmed Wilson's (2016) suggestion that overseas education experience hardly changes political views of Chinese students – they do not become dissidents. Rather, some become stronger supporters of the government.

A protest can simultaneously be a nation-building ritual for both Polish and Chinese students, but the products are distinct from one another. Polish protestors tried to defend a liberal Polishness rejected by the Polish government, whereas Chinese demonstrators wanted to reinforce the mainstream patriotism encouraged by the Chinese government. In the context of integration, it seems that Polish interviewees endorsed or were influenced by some of the major British values, which failed to attract Chinese interviewees.

With specific regard to values, it should be noted that value-related migration is presented in the Polish sample, but not in the Chinese one. Some Polish participants tried to escape from or protest against the homogeneous values in Poland, which resulted in their decision to migrate to the UK. No Chinese participants, however, discussed value-related factors in their decisions. Of course some Chinese students began to appreciate the multiculturalism and individualism which they experienced in London, but this is more like the outcome rather than the motivation of their migration. Chinese students are not rich in mobility capital, and locate much further than Poles from the UK, therefore do not have the chance to really experience the UK values until they arrive in London. Certainly this experience has enriched their mobility capital in terms of values and lifestyles (Hu and Cairns 2017), but in my sample it is unclear that this is what they actively look for before migrating.

In addition, the importance of temporality on participants' experience needs more discussion here. Those events took place in Poland and China/Hong Kong when these Polish and Chinese students were abroad, giving them the chance to experience the protests. Their social practice and integration were shaped by 'historical times' (Cwerner 2001), or 'institutional times', which 'establish a public sphere to provide support structures of shared memories and expectations' (Wang and Collins 2020: 578). It is this specific temporality that makes them examine their national identity in terms of performing the nation.

7.5 Consuming the nation: cosmopolitan vs national products

Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) highlight the function of consumption in intensifying shared identity in quotidian social life. They argue that when the products consumed are regarded in national terms, the shared identity may become national identity. It is not unusual to find

national products in foreign countries today, when growing globalisation and the development of modern transportation have made it much easier for people, goods and capitals to flow across borders (Vertovec 2004). Products which seemed exotic to British people, including those from Poland and China, are no longer luxuries hard to access. Instead, they can be purchased in many ordinary shops in London. The internet has gone a step further: it eliminates the limitations of physical location and makes information accessible almost everywhere in the world. This section explores how Polish and Chinese students negotiate their national identity in their daily consumption and the impact of this on their integration. Two major themes emerge in the transcripts: media use and communication with local migrant communities. We start from the media, or in other words, information sources.

7.5.1 Media

7.5.1.1 Polish: mainly English sources

Polish interviewees in my sample seem to rely mainly on English media sources. The most popular media outlet was the BBC. A few others were also mentioned, such as the Guardian, New York Times, the Economist and Reuters. Polish media were also named, although not as often as English ones, including *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *TVN24*, *Onet* and *Rzeczpospolita*. PMP3 is representative.

The BBC is probably the main information source, then it will be the Washington Post and Reuters. I also read *Gazeta Wyborcza*, as I have a subscription to it, and *Onet*... The majority is in English, maybe 90%.
—PMP3

PFU2 and PFU4 provided an explanation for the phenomenon. They said that because they started to live in the UK, they became more interested in what happened there than in Poland. They seemed to consider themselves as residents rather than sojourners. What is more, ten out of 30 interviewees claimed that they had information sources only from English media. They did not give concrete reasons, but it could be seen from the context that they were more concerned with the world instead of what is solely happening in Poland. Also, this is surely related to their English skills, as discussed before. They are more open to read English-language news if there is no language barrier.

A few interviewees asserted that they looked at Polish media for news about Poland, and English media for news about the world. PMU5 said that he was interested in the world but in Poland there were no interesting reports. PMU2 thought that English news about the world was often first-hand and thus more reliable than Polish sources. PFP5 was the only interviewee who consumed Polish media more often than English, as she had Polish TV at home and she liked watching it.

Social media were also essential for Polish students. They referred to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Reddit as information sources. They used WhatsApp, Messenger or Skype as communication tools. This topic will be discussed further in the section below on Chinese students.

Overall, Polish interviewees usually mentioned English media first. Some would add Polish sources when being asked whether they followed only English media. They seemed to be more interested in news about the UK and the world than solely about Poland. This is another indicator of integrating into multiculturalism – the will to have various information sources other than from a single national perspective.

7.5.1.2 Chinese: mainly Chinese sources

The Chinese students' behaviour seems to be the complete reverse. Most interviewees prioritised Chinese information sources. Social media seem to play the pivotal role here, to the extent that almost every interviewee talked about WeChat and/or Weibo. Other favoured apps included *toutiao*, *bilibili* and *zhihu*. WeChat, a Chinese multi-purpose instant messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent, has over one billion monthly active users. Its functions include those of WhatsApp, Instagram, PayPal and blog. Weibo, a Chinese version of Twitter, is a microblogging website developed by Sina with over 400 million monthly active users.

WeChat is all-purpose. First you could talk to compatriots [using it], and WeChat has posts as well, so you could know things about countries abroad (the UK) from WeChat, too.

—CMM5

[My main information source is] Social media like Weibo. I consider Weibo as a combination of news channel, gossip channel and search engine. Another one is WeChat posts. Basically these two.

—CMP1

In contrast to the Polish sample, nine out of 30 Chinese interviewees did not claim that they had English information sources. They mainly followed WeChat and Weibo, which explain the world, including the UK, from a 'Chinese' perspective. Some interviewees, like CFM4, may even not care about the UK news at all. This phenomenon may result from two factors: 1) Chinese students socialise mainly with other Chinese students, as is confirmed in the section above, so people naturally apply those platforms commonly-used amongst Chinese people; and 2) for Chinese students, there is a clear distinction between social media targeted at compatriots and foreigners. Usually they used WeChat and Weibo with Chinese students, and those 'foreign' apps, like Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram, with foreign students. When they do not possess many foreign friends, they do not have to use them.

WeChat and Weibo are used mainly by Chinese students, where I look at their posts and blog articles. My university classmates are mainly from abroad, so we definitely use Instagram more often.

—CFU4

The distinction of using different social media with compatriots and foreigners creates an unseen gap between Chinese students and other nationals. Reading news about the UK from a Chinese platform has the same effect. Chinese students are more likely to perceive the world from a dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' in terms of nationality. As they socialise more often with compatriots, they are more inclined to support the Chinese perspective. However, this is not the case for Polish students. They did not mention any app largely used by Poles only. Nor did they check news about the UK from *Gazeta Wyborcza*. They utilise 'Western' apps together with other nationals, and thereby avoiding a Polish-or-not dichotomy. It is consequently easier for them to integrate into the international information world and accept mainstream Western views.

Of course, not every Chinese student favoured Chinese information sources only. A few interviewees confessed that they felt articles about the UK produced by Chinese media too

exaggerated and they stopped reading them, especially when they were related to COVID-19. Other interviewees also followed some English media, including the BBC, the Guardian and New York Times, despite their infrequent use. Even so, these media were sometimes criticised. CFP2 said that although she constantly watched the BBC, she and her friends often complained about the BBC's biased reports. Language skills seem to be another key factor hampering their inclination to follow English media:

I check *toutiao* for most news. I do not necessarily want to know news about abroad. If it wasn't for my internship which required a summary of international news once a week, I would never actively surf the international news website. It was like doing reading for me. I hate it.

—CFM3

Generally speaking, Chinese interviewees mostly favoured Chinese information sources. They seemed to identify the world from the 'Chinese' angle, although a small proportion of them tried to escape from this dichotomy. The findings support existing literature about ISM's usage of media, which suggests Polish students are more likely to use local media (Glorius and Friedrich 2006), whereas Chinese students favour Chinese media (Pang 2018).

If the ways Polish and Chinese students consume media are so contrasting, what accounts for the difference? Clearly, language confidence plays a role in the first place. It has been discussed repeatedly that in my sample Polish students possess higher English skills than Chinese students. They can absorb information in English with little trouble, whereas for Chinese students such as CFM3, checking news from English platforms was like a painful reading task. However, this cannot fully explain how Polish students tend to gain information through English sources rather than in their mother language. Something behind capabilities should be taken into consideration.

The Polish-British commonality and the European identity should be brought up and account for the case. These Polish students and their British counterparts not only share the same communication platforms and information sources, but also the same western culture, at least in the sense of multiculturalism. This cultural community provides them with the foundation for frequent, unhindered everyday communication, which again strengthens the

unity of this community. The cosmopolitan identity of Polish students is displayed, reinforced and reproduced in their media consumption. What is more, this process smooths the way of their integration into the multicultural London, which is famous as a global city (Andrejuk 2013). With the same information sources, people talk about the same news, laugh at the same meme, delight or sorrow about the same event, and generally become part of this community, part of London.

But this is not the case for Chinese students. Without such a cultural commonality with Britain, Chinese students grow up in a different environment, and this has caused various difficulties in their integration in both academic and social aspects. Their identification with China and Chinese nationals is so firmly constructed that it is difficult for them to switch to a cosmopolitan view all of a sudden. In a country blocked from the outside world in terms of information and ideology, the mindset of Chinese students is shaped solidly in their home education periods. Also, in such circumstances it is natural for them to understand the world using Chinese sources and communicate with others using Chinese apps. Everything is organised in a logical 'Chinese' way, with the nationalist and antiforeign propaganda, and people usually take them for granted. The strong Chinese national identity and larger cultural distance make it difficult, or sometimes a matter of indifference for Chinese students to integrate into the multicultural London. They are separated from it.

7.5.2 Interaction with local migrant communities

Literature suggests that instead of making friends with local non-students, international students are more likely to make friends with local and other international students (Bryła 2015; Łuczak 2017). Insofar as they interact with local communities it tends to be as consumers (Gao 2016; Wu 2016). The transcripts of my research also confirmed that neither group of students seem to interact much socially with non-student local nationals. When they did, they were usually consumers of their national products. When being asked about their visits to Polish/Chinese shops and restaurants, the two groups showed a difference in frequency of visits. Most Polish interviewees claimed that they did not often or specifically visit Polish shops or restaurants. The reasons seem clear: there were none nearby and common Polish products could be bought in normal British shops.

Not very often, but it was mainly because there weren't that many Polish shops or restaurants near the place I lived in London... I had to travel through all of London to find them.

—PMU2

I don't feel the necessity. I think that Polish products I want could be bought in Tesco or Sainsbury's. So I don't think I need to travel far to buy more.

—PMM1

Both statements could be confirmed by my daily observation. If we search 'Polish shop' or 'Polish restaurant' on Google maps, the number is only in single digits in Zones 1 and 2 in central London. There are a few in other zones, for example Tottenham or Acton, which, as PMU2 complained, are located at different ends of the city. Lower density surely results in rarer visits.

Meanwhile, easy access to Polish products in Tesco's or Sainsbury's does not automatically lead to large consumption of them. PMU4 and PFU3 suggested that they did not buy them specifically even when they were available.

There is a very good Polish restaurant in London, where I organised my birthday party a few times for my friends to show them Polish culture. But that is not the place I will go to alone.

—PMU4

There are interviewees located on the two extreme ends of the spectrum, both small in numbers. Three interviewees stated that they did not visit Polish shops or restaurants at all, because they were not fans of Polish cuisine or culture. Some others expressed great interest in visiting Polish shops or restaurants with frequency ranging from every day to every other week. These people usually resided in Polish communities in London with many Polish options nearby.

I go to Polish shops every day because I like Polish products. To Polish restaurants also often... this is a very Polish district. Many Poles live here, so there are many Polish shops and restaurants. You can even choose between them because there are so many.

—PFP5

In comparison, the Chinese case is contrasting. Only four interviewees maintained that they did not frequently consume Chinese products, because the local shops were enough. The rest all claimed that they often visited Chinese shops or restaurants with frequency ranging from every day to once a week. Compared to Polish shops and restaurants, Chinese ones could be seen much more often in all parts of London, with Chinatown being the most intensive area. If we check Google maps, Chinese restaurants could be always reached within 20 minutes walking distance in the city centre of London. Their high density hugely increases the likelihood of their consumption.

What is more, unlike Polish products in Tesco, most Chinese products could only be found in Chinese shops. Many interviewees claimed that they had a 'Chinese' stomach, so that they must go to Chinese supermarkets to buy the ingredients, snacks and seasonings they wanted. Eating Chinese food sometimes seems a compensation for the poor daily meals they had to suffer.

Although I went abroad when I was 14, I still have a Chinese stomach. I am not used to UK food. I would go to Chinese shops to buy ingredients, which were absent in local shops, to improve my diet.

—CMU2

When you are tired of the foreign dishes [because she lives in a catered student hall], like spaghetti or something, you will feel so pleased to eat a Chinese meal.

—CFU1

Sometimes this choice of Chinese food refers to economic concerns. Since London is an expensive city, one must make sure to spend every penny carefully. If the food is expensive anyway, why not spend on something you are familiar with and know you will like for sure?

My parents came to visit me once and we dined in a grand Western restaurant here. They all thought the food was terrible and blamed me for wasting money. After that we all dined in Chinese restaurants.

—CFM3

After all, the process of consuming national products has a key function for Chinese students – socialising with friends. In China, it is common for friends to hang out in a restaurant and enjoy time together (whereas in Britain it is common to the pub). Since Chinese students

usually have Chinese friends, as discussed in 'choosing the nation', it is therefore natural for Chinese students to constantly go to Chinese restaurants and shops together.

I always go to Chinatown with Chinese friends. We are familiar with each other. We have hot pots together, chat about whatever we want, and it is so relaxing.

—CFP5

I go to the Chinese supermarket with my (Chinese) neighbour. I won't feel alone with someone else on the road, and we could talk about what happened recently.

—CFU4

In my sample, Chinese students are more likely than Polish students to consume their national products, and they consume together with their compatriots. In this process, the gap between Chinese and foreign products and conventions is unavoidably highlighted. Polish interviewees, however, did not present a universal strong preference for national products.

Contextualising this phenomenon within social identity theory, we can see that the national identity of Chinese students continued to be strong and remained coherent after migration when they 'consumed' the nation, whereas for Polish students food was not salient in this respect. Again, their integration paths diverge.

7.6 Change

Students experience many changes after sojourning abroad. From the transcripts I managed to find two areas in which they felt they had changed; these areas were important to both Polish and Chinese students. The first relates to personality: they felt they had become more independent, confident and open-minded. The second relates to changes in national identity.

7.6.1 Independent, confident and open minded

Many interviewees claimed that they had become more independent after coming to the UK. When in their home countries, they usually lived in the shelter of the family home or in institutions, which solved many problems for them. In the UK, they had to learn how to manage on their own.

It was necessary for me to come here and grow up. In Poland I just lived with my parents comfortably, because everything is nearby and I was definitely a baby at home. When I am abroad I had to soon grow up and learn everything.

—PFM2

After living abroad I had to become more independent, because nobody is around me watching and judging if I am doing everything right or not... In London it is the first time in my life that I feel if I don't plan for my future and what I want to achieve then no one will do that for me.

—PMM1

I had become more independent in my life. In China we have canteens and dormitories on campus, so everything is well prepared. Here you have to find or apply by yourself, or cook for yourself, because you are here alone.

—CMP4

Becoming independent is a natural outcome when people migrate internationally, particularly if it is the first time for young people. When being away from home and the familiar environment, students are usually 'forced' to grow up and start to care for themselves. Usually this change is accompanied by, or leads to another change – getting more confident (Wang, Harding, and Mai 2012; Bryła 2015).

At LSE my opinions were often respected and it made me feel more competent to defend and explain them to other people. That is something I didn't experience before coming to London.

—PMM1

I become much more confident and outgoing. In China parents and teachers tended to discourage me... I feel when I am abroad, people allow diversity and always praise and encourage me. This has really improved my confidence and makes me completely another person.

—CFM3

Both Polish and Chinese interviewees highlighted the encouraging atmosphere in the UK, which gave them a sense of respect and confidence. This change also reflects the discussion in Ch.6, where I discussed the fact that both Polish and Chinese interviewees maintained that teachers in their home countries were more domineering, whereas teachers in the UK were kinder to students.

When independence could perhaps be perceived more easily and evidently from an early stage of their stay abroad, confidence could only be gained as part of a longer process. A few postgraduate students at the end of their studies, like PFM5 and CMP5, said that the degrees

they obtained made them confident about their future in the job markets. Study experience in the UK arms them with both qualifications and determination.

Yet another change in personalities is that of becoming more open-minded. Ethnically speaking, both Poland and China are homogeneous countries, with Poles and Han people being the dominant majority. People share similar mainstream cultures and values and tend to take them for granted. However, after encountering the diversity in London, many of them realise the limit of their previous experience and become more unbiased and tolerant.

You definitely know Polish culture. It is a very Catholic Christian and white culture. Everything that is not white and Christian is bad. I was brought up in this belief. When you are here with people with different skin colours, with different religions and generally it is not a bad thing. I think it opened my eyes that people live in different ways from how I live in Poland, and that is fine.

—PFM2

I realised the world is much bigger than we could imagine. We used to live in China with only Chinese, with black hair and yellow skin. Here I meet with different races and accept different ideas... which are very different from how we Chinese think. I realise that people vary a lot and do not apply our own values to others.

—CMM4

As we already know from Ch.5, many Polish students choose to study in the UK to escape from the uniformity of the Polish culture. Sojourning abroad seems to fulfil their dreams. However, we also need to be aware of the fact that students who feel they understand the world more objectively as a result of living abroad have different opinions about what this means.

I feel the necessity of developing the Polish economy and technology, which have really fallen behind. I say it frankly and brutally, because people who never leave Poland would never say that frankly and brutally. I am still a patriot, even stronger. I still think Polish culture is unique and we could be proud for many reasons, but definitely for our economy and technology. We must make every effort in these fields.

—PMP1

Study abroad is a process of disenchantment. You will always think that the West is stronger than China if you do not go abroad. But when you are really here, you will realise which part of them is really better, which not. You might be more objective about issues regarding China and the West.

—CMM3

7.6.2 Cosmopolitan – stuck in the middle – nationalism

When many students become open-minded and tolerant, some step even further. They possess adequate qualifications which make them capable of living in different parts of the world. They feel less tied to a given place, but more like a global citizen. They become more cosmopolitan.

I have a more international perspective on life and the world. I don't feel pretty much attached to a single place. I know since I have good English skills I can find a job anywhere where English is the main language. I am happy to know new people and cultures.

—PMU4

Many things have changed here, like your life plan, view on life, where you want to settle down, etc. When I was in China, I had certain plans about where to work and settle down. But now I am not sure, maybe the UK, maybe China, Italy or Russia. Everywhere is possible. I recheck the relationship between me and the world, between me and myself.

—CFP1

However, this cosmopolitan view is not always pleasant for interviewees, especially when they still care about contacts with people in their home countries. When they travel across borders, they may feel alienated in one or both societies, or stuck in the middle.

Wherever I am, I am always defined as someone from another place. In the UK they think I am from Poland, because I speak with a little accent so it seems I am different, not totally different, but not local. Now in Poland they think I am from the UK. Let's say I am fifty fifty. The other half is always around.

—PMM3

After all I was born in China... Perhaps I have integrated into the UK culture, but it is not my own culture after all. There is always a difference between home and elsewhere... no matter how well you integrate, you still feel different when your flight to China lands. When you hear people speaking Chinese passing through customs, it is a feeling of coming home.

—CMU2

If we put national identity on a spectrum, at one end is cosmopolitanism, at the other is nationalism. PMP1, who talked about the urgency of developing the Polish economy, was one of the rare cases in my Polish sample who mentioned patriotism/nationalism. Chinese students, however, talked about this much more often. Their patriotism – the discovery that

China actually seems better than foreign countries in many ways – has been amply discussed in the section about ‘talking the nation’.

It could be seen that for interviewees in my sample, their national identity locates at different points on the spectrum, although it seems that Polish students are more likely to stick at the cosmopolitan end, while Chinese peers more towards the national end. The reasons for these changes – Polish students became ‘less Polish’ and Chinese students ‘more Chinese’ – were discussed in the early part of this chapter.

7.7 Racial discrimination: rare vs often

Race is not the major topic of this dissertation, not even this section. I did not ask specifically about racial issues in my interviews. The topic came up naturally and in this way it could better indicate the extent to which interviewees faced this problem. Here I mainly focus on how interviewees described the discrimination they encountered in the UK, how they felt about such experiences, and the impacts on their integration.

According to interviewees, they were identified and discriminated against because they looked Polish/Chinese. As a result, it is not surprising that Polish students reported much fewer cases than Chinese students, because they were hard to distinguish from British people by appearance.

In 2016 when I went to Cambridge for my interview, a guy gave me a leaflet with ‘Polish vermin go home’ on it. But I don’t think he knew I was a Pole.
—PMM1

Around the Brexit referendum in 2016, there was a boom in hate crime cases against East European migrants in the UK, especially Poles. PMM1 was the only interviewee who mentioned this event. This is partly because few current students had been through the matter five years ago, partially because they could hardly be identified from their appearance, which made them less vulnerable to the racists.

How did Polish students feel when they were confronted with discrimination? Ager and Strang (2008) argue that cordiality displayed by local communities is highly valued and conducive to migrants' integration. On the contrary, any hostility could threaten efficacious integration.

I feel that I was treated worse as a Pole. I am a Pole, an immigrant who comes to work. Brexit is because of me. I met this many times that, ah, I am a Pole, English people are the best, had an empire, governed the world and things like that.
——PMM2

PMM2's case is representative of such a situation. He claimed that he had almost no favourable impression of the UK and UK people, and that after graduation he would soon move to some other country. His experience had negatively impacted his integration and future plans. However, some students changed their impressions.

(Local) people don't like women from Central and East Europe that much. They think you are not educated, or you come here to be a cleaner. Later when I knew more people, they realised I spoke English well, I am well-educated and have a good job, etc... now all is fine.
——PFM1

PFM1 seems to have integrated well, and she managed to escape the stereotype of Poles that they are ill-educated cleaners by assimilating into the local community. She had only one Polish friend in London and hardly communicated with other Poles. That is to say, she did not display her Polish identity and became localised, hence avoiding bias. By contrast, PMM2, who refused to hide his Polish identity, felt alienated under the circumstances.

However, the three cases of discrimination just described are the only ones in my Polish sample. Most Polish interviewees did not focus on this topic. It seems the majority did not suffer from this trouble. However, in the Chinese sample, it becomes salient. 13 out of 30 interviewees claimed that they had encountered discriminatory or hostile behaviour, including robbery, fraud, unfriendly questions, staring, and verbal and physical abuse.

When we, a group of Chinese students, were drinking in a pub, some drunkards came and shouted something like you should be ashamed of your nation, or you are a communist, etc.
——CMP3

At the beginning of term there are fraudsters near the student hall who try to deceive students, specifically Chinese students. I feel they always stay around where there are many Chinese students.

—CMP4

Since the interviews took place during COVID-19, many cases directly pertain to the pandemic.

When we were walking on the street in Camden Town, someone spat at my friend and called him 'coronavirus'.

—CMM4

During the pandemic, I was gazed at in an unfriendly way when wearing a mask... My friend with a mask used to be abused and beaten up by homeless people.

—CFU5

Compared to Polish students, Chinese students are significantly different from local White British people in appearance. This has made them easily identifiable and more vulnerable in unusual circumstances. Therefore, they are more likely than Polish students to confront racial discrimination in everyday life, as they 'perform' China simply by their appearance, whereas Polish students could be disguised within the majority local White population. Especially during the COVID-19 period, racial discrimination against Chinese students and the potential for it led to a reluctance among them for deeper contact with local communities. It was impossible to hide their Chinese identity, so the only way to avoid unpleasantness was to keep a distance. Their integration was undoubtedly hampered. Therefore, Chinese students are more likely to be positioned in the racialised contexts (Xu 2022).

7.8 Conclusion

Chapter 7 analysed the social integration of Polish and Chinese students using Berry's acculturation model and Fox and Idriss-Miller's everyday nationhood as analytical frameworks. It was found that the extent of interviewees' integration could be conceptualised as lying along a spectrum, with most Polish interviewees placed nearer the assimilation end and most Chinese interviewees nearer to separation.

When talking the nation, it seemed most Polish interviewees focused on the difference between a multicultural UK and homogeneous Poland, and they preferred the former. Many

Chinese interviewees, however, highlighted how they found China more advanced than the West. In addition, Polish interviewees claimed to speak English much more often than Polish, whereas Chinese students spoke much more Chinese than English. This was perhaps due to their different population densities in London, as well as their different language skills. Polish interviewees seemed to be much more confident than Chinese interviewees about their English proficiency.

When choosing the nation, Polish and Chinese interviewees were again contrasting. In terms of social networks, Polish interviewees mainly had more international friends and acquaintances, rather than co-nationals: this was the case for both their bonding and bridging ties. However, compatriots dominated both bonding and bridging ties amongst Chinese interviewees. Situations were almost identical when choosing roommates. Chinese interviewees were much more likely than Polish interviewees to live with compatriots.

When performing the nation, Polish interviewees seemed to adopt the major British values and they took part in demonstrations defending a liberal vision of Polishness against the current Polish authorities. Chinese interviewees, however, did not seem to change their political views. They mainly supported the pro-government demonstrations against the pro-democracy Hong Kong protestors.

When consuming the nation, in terms of media use, Polish interviewees preferred English media and information sources whereas Chinese interviewees preferred Chinese sources. In addition, Polish students did not seem to go to Polish shops and restaurants as often as Chinese interviewees because many Polish products can be bought in Tesco and Chinese people preferred to socialise with each other in Chinese restaurants.

When talking about how they felt they had changed after coming to the UK, many Polish and Chinese students similarly claimed that they had become independent, confident and open minded. In addition, some (mostly Poles) felt they had become more cosmopolitan, whereas some (mostly Chinese) had a sense of becoming more patriotic and with an enhanced sense of Chinese national identity.

The chapter also included discussion of some discrimination faced by Polish and Chinese students in London. Chinese students were more likely than Polish peers to suffer this problem due to their clearly different appearance. COVID-19 made it worse and definitely hampered the integration of Chinese students.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis draws conclusions concerning the entire research project. Since this is a comparative study, I aimed to compare Polish and Chinese students in every aspect as much as possible when writing up the thesis. This is also how the three empirical chapters were organised. Each of them focuses on one particular theme pertaining to both groups, rather than a detailed description of first one ethnic group and then the other. Section 8.2 presents a summary of the empirical findings in the three chapters in the same sequence of motivation, academic integration and social integration, and at the end groups all the similarities and differences. I do not make any comment because the conclusion section of each empirical chapter has already provided a full discussion of these phenomena.

However, each national group displayed some unique and largely coherent features throughout the whole study. It therefore seemed worthwhile to provide separate analyses of both ethnic groups in order to understand more fully the hallmarks of Polish and Chinese ISM populations in London. Sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2 aim to fulfil this task. They argue that most Polish students in the sample could be labelled 'elite cosmopolitan Europeans', who integrated rather easily into multicultural London, as they possess a migrant identity and rich mobility capital. Their ample migration experience made it natural for them to choose an overseas education and they quickly adapted to the local environment. Chinese students, however, largely applied the 'getting-gilded strategy' and almost always focused on returning home to outshine others with the cultural capital they gained in London. The strategy makes them indifferent to integration and means they tend to stick with co-nationals, thus leading to a situation closer to 'separation' on Berry's integration continuum.

The next section, 8.3.3, presents a few additional empirical findings which fill current research gaps in Polish and Chinese ISM studies. Section 8.3.4 considers another overarching theme -- gender dimensions of this research project. Section 8.3.5 summarises the impact of COVID-

19 on the integration of Polish and Chinese students. Together, all the sections above form the empirical contribution of this research to ISM studies. Subsequently, Section 8.4 shows the theoretical contribution of this thesis by explaining how the acculturation strategy and everyday nationhood approaches were combined and applied. At the end, Section 8.5 acknowledges the research's limitations and suggests areas for future study.

8.2 Summary of empirical findings

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 show my empirical findings. They focus respectively on the motivations for migration, academic integration and social integration of Polish and Chinese international students in London. I will summarise them below in the sequence in which they appear in the thesis, and highlight the similarities and differences between the two groups.

8.2.1 Motivations for migration

There are five themes in relation to the findings about motivations of Polish and Chinese students in my sample. The first is rational individualists. Both Polish and Chinese students highlighted London universities' top rankings and associated them with good quality. Both groups indicated the matter of affordability. Some made choices between universities in the USA and the UK, and ended up in the UK, partly because length of study was shorter so costs in total were less. Some pursued their British dream in master's studies because they cannot afford fees for the bachelor's degree. In terms of difference, however, Some Polish interviewees regarded Polish universities as being of relatively low quality, presenting a core-periphery migration model and the orientation towards the global job market, whereas Chinese interviewees applied the getting-gilded strategy. Studying at global top-ranking universities can wrap them with gold leaf and make them outshine others when they are back in the Chinese domestic job market.

The second theme is family support and influence, where Polish and Chinese participants diverged. Polish interviewees were generally from the professional middle class, with the major parental occupations being teachers and doctors. Chinese participants, however, presented a 'stepped slope' pattern in their social backgrounds. Undergraduates were from

the richest families, master's from the new middle class, and PhD from varied backgrounds. Civil servant was the most common parental occupation. Many Polish students and their parents were experienced migrants. Some students were born or grew up abroad for several years, while most Chinese students were pioneer migrants in their family. Some Polish interviewees made a joint decision with their partners to study in the UK together. Some Chinese interviewees' parents played some parts in the decision to study in the UK.

The third is elite migration culture. Many families from both countries had made long-term plans and investment in their children's English education since childhood. Some travelled internationally to broaden their children's horizons. Students themselves were aware they wanted to study abroad and prepared for it at a very early age, while ordinary children had no concept of studying abroad. But compared with Chinese peers who were not rich in migration experience, Polish students possessed a migrant identity because ample previous migration experience made it natural for them to migrate again. Peer influence had an impact on both groups, when peers and alumni who studied or were studying abroad facilitated some students to follow. But compared with Polish peers, some Chinese students failed in the fierce domestic peer competition and treated study abroad as a means to keep their competitiveness.

The fourth theme is migration culture of today's mobile youth. For both groups, they chose to go abroad in pursuit of independence from family, and were attracted by London for its metropolitan vibe, diversified entertainment and career opportunities; some contrasted lifestyles in their home countries. But for Polish students, their attitudes were experimental, which meant they applied 'intentional unpredictability' and kept their options open for their future. Chinese students were more strategic, who pursued the overseas experience and tended to return home after obtaining it.

The last theme is push factors in home countries. Some Polish students migrated to escape constraints of homogeneous Polish society, such as discrimination towards non-heteronormative or mixed-race relationships. For Chinese students, some migrated to escape pressure from the domestic education system.

8.2.2 Academic integration

Findings in this topic reveal more similarities than differences, indicating academic challenges are perhaps a universal problem for ISM. When comparing between the education systems in home countries and the UK, both Polish and Chinese interviewees complained that the education systems in their home countries were teacher-centred, too bureaucratic, out of date compared to the UK system. However, the school education at home was better than in the UK. In terms of difference, Polish interviewees complained that the Polish education system focused too much on teaching theories and had insufficient financial support, whereas their Chinese counterparts blamed the stressful exam-oriented education and ascribed it to the huge population and limited per capita resources in China.

When integrating into a new education environment in the UK, Students from both countries needed to adapt to the English language environment. Sometimes they were not familiar with UK teaching methods and this generated a double disadvantage, on top of language barriers. Some students were used to passive rather than active individual learning, which was required in the UK. To overcome these difficulties, students made extra efforts and turned to institutional support and co-national assistance. In general, all students in my sample, regardless of their nationality, were located at different places on an integration spectrum, with small numbers near both ends ('no problem integrating' and 'no prospect of integrating'). The majority were in the middle, sometimes claiming to be 'learning by doing'. People with less trouble integrating usually benefited from previous experience, and those finding it hard were usually older students without such experience. Individuals' location on the spectrum may change over time.

When looking at the outcome of integration, their satisfaction with marks, Polish and Chinese participants diverged again. For the level of undergraduate and master's, Polish participants claimed to have good marks. They spoke confidently and are satisfied, whereas Chinese students claimed to be mediocre in their marks and they were satisfied with that, too. Master's students seemed to be even less ambitious than undergraduates. PhD students' academic achievement cannot be indicators of their integration.

At last, the function of student societies was also examined. Students from both countries claimed that student societies helped them to know more people and develop their own interests, but some societies were disorganised, and due to COVID-19, offline meetings were restricted and societies failed to function normally. Many joined Polish/Chinese student societies, found a sense of belonging and built up useful social networks there. Some complained that co-national societies constrained them from knowing other people. In terms of different levels of study, PhD students had minor interest in student societies, whereas undergraduates were highly active. But for master's level, many Polish students joined the membership but found the societies inactive, whereas most Chinese students were not interested at all.

8.2.3 Social integration

This chapter examines participants' social integration according to the concept of everyday nationhood put forth by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), including talking, choosing, performing and consuming the nation. Findings show salient contrasts in almost every theme between Polish and Chinese participants, indicating their diverged orientation of social integration.

When talking the nation, many Polish interviewees expressed their distaste for 'Polish' homogeneity, and favoured the 'British' cultural diversity. They spoke negatively about the current Polish government, tended to be cosmopolitan and applied the assimilation (into diversity) strategy. But for Chinese students, many spoke positively about the current Chinese government, especially in the campaign against COVID-19. They realised the development and progress of China, and found the advancement of the West illusory. They tended to be more aware of their national identity and applied the separation strategy.

With regard to the use of languages, a typical Polish interviewee spoke 70% English and 30% Polish in London. They were usually highly confident about their English skills, a confidence which enabled them to talk freely with other people. In contrast, a typical Chinese interviewee spoke 70% Chinese and 30% English in London. They were less confident about their English skills, which limited their motivation to speak to other people. The cultural distance between

China and the UK seemed larger than between Poland and the UK, which toughened integration for Chinese students.

When choosing the nation, it is found that the social networks of a Polish interviewee generally consisted of 20%-30% of co-nationals, and the rest were British or from third countries. They did not necessarily choose their social networks by nationality. However, co-nationals dominated the social network of a Chinese interviewee. They preferred the 'Chinese' way of socialising such as dining in restaurants, than the 'British' way of going to the pub. Some claimed that it was more useful to make networks with Chinese people because they would eventually return to China.

With regard to housing, about one-third of Polish interviewees lived in student halls. Others rent rooms in different parts of London and live an independent life. Meanwhile, about two-thirds of Chinese interviewees lived in student halls. All lived close to the campus. My participant observation in a UCL student hall revealed that Polish students chose to sit with other international students in the dining hall. There were only two Polish students in that hall. But Chinese students usually chose to sit with compatriots in the dining hall, because there were so many Chinese students, and talking and socialising with them was more comfortable. When renting rooms, Polish students had flatmates from different countries. Most did not specifically choose co-national flatmates. But Chinese students usually chose co-national flatmates to reduce uncertainty and avoid troubles with foreigners. COVID-19 had made them stick more closely with co-nationals.

When performing the nation, there were demonstrations in London respectively concerning both countries. For Poles it was about Poland's abortion law. Students joined or talked about the protests and expressed their antipathy towards the Polish government. They demonstrated a particular liberal concept of Polishness which was at odds with the Polish official version and in line with the British pro-multicultural version. For Chinese students, it was about Hong Kong. Students either refused to be involved or supported the Chinese government in the protests. They lined up with mainstream Chinese national patriotism and did not connect with the British values.

When consuming the nation, I first investigated their media consumption. It is found that Polish interviewees relied mainly on English-language media sources such as the BBC, the Guardian, New York Times, the Economist and Reuters. and global social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger or Skype. Chinese interviewees, however, relied mainly on Chinese media sources such as WeChat, Weibo, toutiao, bilibili and zhihu. They seemed to identify the world from the 'Chinese' angle.

In terms of interaction with local migrant communities, Polish participants did not visit Polish shops or restaurants often because there were not that many. They did not necessarily consume national products often even when they were available in UK supermarkets. But Chinese students visited Chinese shops or restaurants very often because there were many of them and they often consumed these national products with co-nationals.

When talking about their change after migrating to London, participants of both groups claimed to be more independent, confident and open minded. But in the spectrum of national identity, Polish interviewees were more likely to be at the 'cosmopolitanism' end, whereas Chinese counterparts were more likely to be at the 'nationalism' end.

In terms of racial discrimination, only three Polish interviewees reported discrimination and/or stereotypes about Poles, whereas 13 Chinese participants reported discrimination cases including robbery, fraud, unfriendly questions, staring, verbal and physical abuse. COVID-19 made it worse because Chinese students were more easily identified than Poles from appearance.

8.2.4 A brief summary of similarities and differences between the two groups

8.2.4.1 Similarities

In terms of motivations for migration, Polish and Chinese students were both rational individualists, who valued the top ranking and good quality of London's universities. They also considered the matter of affordability. Some families from both countries made long-term plan for their children, for instance invest in English education and international travel since

childhood. Participants themselves had the intention to study abroad at a very early age, and were inspired by co-national peers who tried to or had already studied abroad. Students from both groups claimed to pursue independence from family, and were attracted by London's metropolitan vibe, diversified entertainment and career opportunities.

In terms of academic integration, both Polish and Chinese interviewees blamed the education systems in their home countries for being teacher-centred, bureaucratic and out of date compared to the UK system. However, both praised the school education at home. They needed to adapt to the English environment, new teaching methods and requirement of active learning in the UK. Both groups made extra efforts, turned to institutional support and co-national assistance to overcome these difficulties. Regardless of nationality, participants were situated at different spots on the integration spectrum, with small numbers near both ends and the majority in the middle. Students at the 'positive' (assimilation) end usually had experienced some overseas education, while those at the 'negative' (separation) end were usually older students without such experience. Students from both countries valued student societies, which helped them to know more people and develop their own interests, but some societies were disorganised, and due to COVID-19, offline meetings were restricted and societies failed to function normally. Co-national societies allowed them to form useful social networks, but perhaps preclude them from knowing other people.

In terms of social integration, Polish and Chinese participants did not show salient similarities. They were indeed very different groups, which proves that ISM is a heterogenous body.

8.2.4.2 Differences

In terms of motivations for migration, some Polish students considered Polish universities as low quality and targeted the global job market, whereas many Chinese participants hoped the education experience in the UK could make them get 'gilded' and have more advantage in the Chinese domestic job market. Most Polish participants were from middle class families, who were experienced migrants. Some made decisions to study in the UK with their partners. Chinese participants' social backgrounds differed according to levels of study. Undergraduates were from the richest families, master's from the new middle class and PhD

from varied backgrounds. They were mostly pioneer migrants in their families. Some parents play some part in their migration decisions. Polish participants possessed much more mobility capital than their Chinese peers and showed a migrant identity which naturally led to the decision to study abroad. Chinese interviewees faced stronger competition than Polish participants in their home country and chose to study abroad to maintain competitiveness with their compatriots. Polish participants generally adopted a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability' and possess experimental attitudes, whereas Chinese participants were more strategic and tended to return home after obtaining overseas experience. Some Polish students migrated to keep away from homogeneity in the Polish society, while some Chinese students wanted to stay away from the stressful domestic education system.

In terms of academic integration, Polish participants complained that the Polish education system taught too many theories and had too little financial support, whereas their Chinese counterparts blamed the stressful exam-oriented education and ascribed it to the huge population and limited per capita resources in China. At the undergraduate and master's level, Polish participants claimed to have good marks and spoke confidently, whereas Chinese participants were satisfied with their mediocre marks.

In terms of social integration, Polish and Chinese participants seem to be different in almost every aspect, and therefore their differences can be seen directly from section 8.2.3.

8.3 Empirical contribution to ISM studies

8.3.1 Polish students: mobility capital and elite cosmopolitan identity

This thesis contributes to literature about the importance of mobility capital, a term put forward by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) in her study of EU student mobility, indicating students' enhanced ability resulting from abundant living abroad experience. Four major elements of mobility capital are outlined: 'family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as an initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer' (Murphy-Lejeune

2002: 52). The author also defines students in her sample as a migratory elite, who benefit largely from mobility capital, actively take part in projects concerning student mobility according to their own will instead of their family's, and are aware earlier than their sedentary peers that study abroad experience can bring them human capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2002: 73).

Today's Polish international students in my sample seem to fit well with Murphy-Lejeune's description of elite migrant students some 20 years ago. But I add the migrant identity into this mobility capital, as discussed below. Participants generally display the features of 'elite cosmopolitan Europeans' who integrate rather easily into London universities and London life. It seems, as discussed in section 5.3.1, that my participants are mainly from privileged social strata in Poland and they are confident and optimistic about their life and choices in London. These hallmarks can be found in their continuous life trajectory – in their past, present and future. A critical finding regarding my Polish sample is that participants usually have previous migration experience before studying in London. Some were born or brought up abroad for several years. Some often visit their relatives residing overseas. Some travel a lot with their parents across the world. They benefit from family mobility and have been mobile internationally since childhood. This helps us understand how migration motivation and integration of Polish students were shaped.

8.3.1.1 Motivation: migrant identity

Brooks and Waters (2010) examine mobility capital in the UK student context and highlight its interplay with other forms of capital, such as economic, social and cultural, identified by Bourdieu (1986). Carlson (2013) examines mobility capital in the case of German ISM and pinpoints the significance of previous mobility experience on their decisions to start overseas education. Frandberg (2014) studies Swedish youth mobility and demonstrates temporary sojourning abroad experience may generate new social ties and therefore causing constant travels back and forth. My study has put Polish ISM under the research focus and confirms that richness in international migration experiences brings Polish students sufficient mobility capital. They are benefited by it and are freer than others, for example most Chinese students, to make attempts to study abroad. Previous migration experience has left many influences

on Polish students. A key part of this is that they possess a migrant identity, which naturally leads them to the decision to study abroad. This identity should be understood in three ways. One is the influence of family background, another is their consciousness of being people experiencing certain push factors, and the last one is their ideas about career prospects.

Most Polish interviewees in my research are from highly educated and apparently quite wealthy families. They also attended prestigious schools and therefore possessed elite educational backgrounds. This origin has determined many aspects of their life, including lifestyle, world view and life choices. These elements combined have shaped their motivation to study in London. We can see that these elite Polish families usually have various ties with locations abroad. Several students had parents living or working outside Poland for many years, so that they were born and went to school abroad with their parents, who – unlike many Polish migrants -- earn good salaries rather than doing manual jobs. Some had close relatives living permanently in foreign countries and they paid visits to them regularly. A few families had the custom to travel from time to time in European countries. Many of my interviewees were brought up in such an atmosphere, so that they became used to moving internationally and their life was therefore not bonded physically with their home country. It is natural for them to sojourn here and there; some even never thought about settling down in Poland. This pattern is a perfect example of Favell's (2008) 'Eurostars', who gather in Europe's major cities and enjoy a youthful mobile lifestyle. It was under such circumstances that they decided to study abroad, and they already possessed the features of global citizens before coming to the UK. A key indicator is that some interviewees were not aware of the exact moment when they decided to study abroad, as it occurred to them naturally and unconsciously.

When the Polish students in my sample are rich in migration experience, their horizons are broadened as they have witnessed the diversity of the world. They had become more open-minded, tolerant and cosmopolitan, therefore feeling constrained back in Poland, where they feel an oppressive atmosphere. The homogeneity in Poland turns into a push factor, which drives Polish students away from their home country. Many interviewees depict Poland and Polish culture as White, Catholic, static and exclusive. Some students leave Poland because they are not accepted by the mainstream society in Poland, for example being in non-

heteronormative or mixed-race relationships. Some students express their preference for multiculturalism compared with a single dominant social norm as in Poland. Their overseas experience offers them the opportunity to experience the diversified outside world, and they start to appreciate it and would not return to their society of origin. This preference becomes part of their migrant identity.

The final indicator is how they view their future career. Motivation and future plans are usually highly correlated to each other. People migrate with concrete plans for their future, and migration functions as a pathway or promotor to realise that future. In the case of Polish ISM, studying in London may serve as an escalator to the promising start of an international career. They speak highly of skills and qualifications offered by London universities and resources offered by London, which may empower them to achieve a high level on the global job market. To some extent, this is an entrance ticket to the global elite class.

While Murphy-Lejeune's mobility capital has discussed the impact of family background and history, my study adds new elements to it: the preference for diversity and distaste for homogeneity, and a desire for an international career. Together they form a migrant identity, which is a hallmark of Polish ISM in my sample. It is therefore evidenced that after Poland entered the EU in 2004, Polish students acquired the characteristics of student travellers of the pre-2004 member states, as studied by Murphy-Lejeune some 20 years ago.

Next, I go further to argue that previous migration experience can have an impact on not only motivation but also integration of international students.

8.3.1.2 Integration: plain sailing

It may be exaggerated to maintain that Polish students integrate without a problem, but indeed they seem to integrate easily into universities as well as daily life in London. Evidence supporting this claim can be found in areas of both academic and social integration. Their abilities and experience allow them to overcome many barriers to integration in different aspects.

Andrejek (2011b, 2013), Kusek (2015) and Łuczak (2017) highlight the cultural competency and professional qualifications of Polish students in the UK. These abilities distinguish them from Polish labour migrants and enable them to socialise with diverse populations and integrate deeper into the local communities. My research supports their findings. Their skills, especially English skills, help them successfully integrate. They are good at English because the elite identity of their family and their own make them aware of the significance of English very early. Some parents of participants send their children to English schools or training courses in Poland at a very young age. Some students grew up abroad in the English/bilingual schooling context so English becomes their everyday language. Again, previous migration experience plays key roles in promoting their English skills.

As a result, it is not surprising to see that most Polish students claim to have no difficulty in integrating into London university life. Usually they already have studied in English or international education systems before, which fit in the UK system. They are already familiar with the educational methods so that they do not need to integrate because their integration finished at an earlier stage. None of my Polish interviewees has reported language problems. This reflects Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) arguments about the importance of mobility capital and focus on previous experience of mobility and adaptation, which certainly helps to smooth the integration process.

It seems that Polish students in my sample are a confident, ambitious, and skilful body who are satisfied with their academic achievement. This can be further evidenced by their marks. The Polish students usually claim to be excellent in study performance and are content with what they have achieved (whereas the Chinese students claim to be 'just so-so', although they are also content with that). Impressively, they uniformly speak of themselves in a proud, confident and positive way. It seems the Polish students perform a self-demanding elite image, and they are used to this and are likely to carry it with them in their later careers. My finding also fills the lacuna of very little being written regarding Polish ISMs' academic attainment in social scientific research. It helps to give a fuller understanding of today's Polish ISM.

In terms of social integration, their elite cosmopolitan identity is even more salient. Many interviewees express their preference for British multiculturalism and distaste for Polish

homogeneity. This contrast functions not only as a push-pull factor in their migration motivation, but also as an encouraging factor to their integration. This attitude enhances their inclination to integrate locally and makes them less likely to be separated from mainstream society, like their Chinese peers.

The frequency of English use is also significant. Almost all interviewees claim to speak English much more than Polish in London, and they are usually confident about their English, which is in contrast with Moskal's (2016) findings about the language problem faced by Polish student migrants in Scotland. Frequency and proficiency of English skills together make their Polish identity less salient, and they are more likely and more capable of integrating into local communities.

Friendship circle composition is another vital indicator of integration. In my sample, Polish students usually have 20%-30% co-national friends, and the rest are British or international students. Further, many of them perceive themselves to be members of London's cosmopolitan world, and therefore refuse to make friends according to nationality. In other words, they do not identify themselves as Poles in the first place, but global citizens. Their English skills and previous migration experience allow them to quickly make friends beyond national borders.

Choosing accommodation shares the same logic with choosing friends. Polish interviewees do not necessarily live with their compatriots. They usually choose to rent rooms and live an independent life, even when living in Polish communities in London. Their English skills and previous migration experience make them freer to make choices beyond nationalities. That is to say, they do not have to gather together with other Poles to reduce risks and uncertainty, because they are capable of doing so on their own.

Media consumption is also a barometer of national identity. Polish participants largely rely on English-language information sources, including the BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times. They seem to be more interested in the UK and the world rather than Poland exclusively, and they are reading news as a global citizen rather than a Pole. Of course, their English skills also give them the resources to do so. Besides, they use all kinds of popular global

social media including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, with which they can build direct contact with most of the world, ignoring the language and national barriers.

Finally, Polish students in my sample do not seem to consume Polish products very often in London. First of all, Polish shops and restaurants are not densely located in central London, which makes it difficult for some Polish nationals to reach them. When some common Polish products are available in local shops like Tesco, Polish students do not necessarily purchase them. They do not present a strong inclination to consume Polish products.

In sum, we can see that Polish students are more likely to possess elite cosmopolitan views and less likely to identify themselves as Poles. This tendency can be seen in many parts of their academic and social integration process. They are freer than Chinese students to make choices. In other words, their options cover a larger range than those of Chinese students. I argue that we should underline the significance of Polish ISMs' agency, especially when comparing with Chinese students.

However, we should not conclude that all Polish students bear this migrant identity. In other words, not every Polish student comes from the privileged social class, especially those who have experienced forced migration. For instance, PFU4 came to London to join her partner because their mixed-race marriage was not widely accepted in Poland. Her migration decision did not result from her previous migration experience, but push factors in her home country. She had never been mobile or cosmopolitan before arrival, and there is no signal that she possessed a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability' (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007). Instead, she seemed to be stuck in her undergraduate studies as she was not used to the UK educational methods and had children for whom to care. Although the major body of Polish ISM in my sample presented an elite cosmopolitan identity, there are still people suffering from integration problems.

Furthermore, some Polish interviewees presented strong nationalist concern about Poland, displaying an opposite worldview to cosmopolitanism. These people usually expressed their critical views about certain areas in Poland with a thought of how to promote improvements. For example, PMP1 emphasised the urgency of developing the Polish economy and

technology, and highlighted he was a patriot. PMP4 described how he would like to change the geography programme in the Polish educational system so that it was more similar to what he experienced in the UK. When many of their compatriots paid attention to the UK or world news, expressing distaste for political turmoil and social homogeneity in Poland, these students concentrated on how to make their home country a better place.

In the meantime, the taking place of Brexit during my PhD studies (but after my fieldwork) surely had a strong impact on Polish ISM. Without preferential policies for EU students, such as cheaper tuition fees and the visa-free policy, UK universities are likely to lose their charm to a great extent for Polish students. How the Polish ISM process looks like after Brexit remains an interesting research topic.

8.3.2 Chinese students: getting-gilded strategy and Chinese identity

This thesis makes a contribution to existing studies of Chinese ISM by putting forward the term 'getting-gilded strategy'. This is a crucial thread which runs throughout their motivation and integration experiences. Many Chinese interviewees in my sample saw themselves as temporary migrants, whose attention was always partly focused on returning home after graduation. Consequently, their national identity has always been maintained. This helps explain their behaviour and integration experiences, as discussed in all three empirical chapters.

Getting-gilded ('dujin' in Chinese pinyin) strategy indicates people choosing to study or work abroad for a period of time and then return home. Their overseas experiences are like their being wrapped in gold leaf, making them outshine people without such practices. There are two essential elements to this strategy. One is that students choose to stay abroad temporarily. They are aware of what they want from migratory moves and what they value is this overseas experience. The other is that they always return home. To maximise the benefits of this strategy they must go back to China in order to outshine others with their experiences. Jointly these two elements have influenced Chinese ISMs' migration motivation and integration to a large extent.

8.3.2.1 Impact on motivation

‘Getting-gilded strategy’, the term I came up with, gives clearer explanations than existing literature about Chinese ISMs’ motivation. Actually the name of the strategy explains the motivation itself. To be precise, there are three aspects of motivation pertaining to the getting-gilded strategy.

The first one refers to career orientation. There is a direct causal relationship between decisions to study abroad and future career prospects. Existing literature does talk about how students consider study abroad experience as a means to support their career development. They describe it as an entry to the local job market (Gao 2016), or as a stepping-stone to the global career path (Li and Bray 2007). Most research highlights the access to the job market of receiving countries rather than sending countries of ISM (Counsell 2011; Su 2013; Wu 2016,). Some studies do focus on returning students (Huang 2013; Mok et al. 2018; Zhai and Moskal 2022), but they fail to demonstrate that Chinese students have already been targeting the domestic job market before migrating. My research shows that these students choose to study abroad because foreign qualifications are highly valued by employers in China, a point also made by Counsell (2011). That is to say their decision to obtain an overseas education is very pragmatic, and they have always been aiming at the Chinese domestic job market, even before their arrival in the UK.

If career development in China is the priority to these Chinese students, many things can therefore be understood, for example why the ranking of universities is of utmost importance to them. In China, due to the size of the population, higher education is very selective. After a few rounds of school entrance examinations (*chuzhong*, *gaozhong* and university), the entire generational cohort is allocated to different tiers of institutions. The ranking of universities is used to indicate the competency of a person. Because there are such a large quantity of people, ranking becomes an efficient and ‘objective’ indicator for many people, including employers. Owing to the fierce competition in the Chinese job market, students seek degrees from a university with higher global rankings in order to get gilded and earn credits before starting their career. For instance, CMU5 said he ended up in a British university

instead of an American one because the UK university he went to ranked higher than any American university by which he was accepted.

The second respect relates to family and peer influence. Existing studies mention family and peer influence usually by stating that decisions are made jointly or supported by the family, or are encouraged by alumni or experienced peers (Waters 2006; Collins 2012; James-MacEachern and Yun 2017). Such findings neglect the pressure exerted by family or peers. I argue that getting-gilded strategy can be a response to this pressure. The core of this strategy is to outshine others, and what shines is the ranking. The idea that ranking marks a person is so popular in China that not only employers but also students themselves and their family members take it very seriously. As a result, students defeated in peer competition in the Chinese domestic education system, for example failing to enter top-level Chinese universities where their classmates go to, turn to British universities with higher global rankings to prove their capability. They do not want to lose this peer competition, nor do they want to be perceived as inferior to others. Overseas education becomes an alternative for them to keep on track with their peers. The gold they receive from the study abroad experience functions as a compensation for their psychological loss and the capital for their competition in their future careers.

In the meantime, parents of students also play a role. My research shows that compared to Polish students, Chinese students rely much more on financial support from their parents. Hence, they have to take their parents' opinions into account. Chinese parents usually have no study abroad experience, so the only indicator they can know about a foreign university is the ranking. To brag amongst their peers and to make sure their financial investment pay back, it is natural for Chinese parents to urge their children to apply to universities with higher rankings.

The third respect is the attitude of Chinese students towards their migratory acts. They are aware that they come to the UK for the sake of getting gilded. Their stay in the UK is an adventure and their motivation to study in the UK is to obtain experience of sojourning abroad, whereas their future still lies in China. Compared to Polish students, who usually possess a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability', Chinese students are more strategically targeted.

My findings confirm the conclusions of other scholars that students migrate internationally for the sake of gaining new experiences (Yang, Volet, and Mansfield 2018; Ye 2018), and I go further by arguing that for some Chinese students, gaining new experiences is mostly only a by-product of studying abroad, although in a few cases it seemed more as if studying abroad was primarily motivated by the desire to gain new experiences. They set up a limited period in a certain life phase to experience the world, and then return home to start their 'normal' life. Their Chinese identity does not fade away or shift, and sometimes even strengthens, because their minds always focus on home. It makes them indifferent to the local multiculturalism.

Furthermore, my findings about Chinese ISMs' motivation to study in London in many ways reflect Waters' (2006) research on cultural capital of Hong Kong ISM to Canada. She argues that going to a Canadian university is a decision made by the entire family. This move promotes their social reproduction in that it brings the students cultural capital in the form of a rare Western university degree, while in some cases saving a few 'losers' in the Hong Kong education system. Middle-class families understand Canadian credentials are more valuable than the local ones and they migrate strategically to obtain this cultural capital. In the meantime, alumni networks create crucial social capital, securing their privileged status in Hong Kong job market. My research adds evidence to the emphasis on cultural capital of East Asian middle-class families: today's Chinese ISM to the UK is almost a replication of Hong Kong's ISM to Canada in the 2000s. Middle-class families invest in their children's overseas education strategically to obtain cultural capital enabling them to outshine other stayers when they return. However, today's Chinese ISM is on a much larger scale than Hong Kong's ISM population some 20 years ago.

8.3.2.2 Impact on integration

A key contribution of this thesis to current ISM scholarship is that the getting-gilded strategy impacts not only students' migration motivation, as discussed in the last section, but also their integration. Current ISM scholarship attributes Chinese students' integration problems to language barriers (Li 2017; Yu and Moskal 2019), cultural distance (Gu and Maley 2008; Spencer-Oatey et al. 2017) or unfamiliarity with the new education system (Li 2017, 2019a;

Yu and Moskal 2019). While my empirical study has confirmed more or less all these points, I suggest that the students' lack of interest in integration is an underrated factor. The getting-gilded strategy makes Chinese students less inspired to integrate. In my sample, both academic and social integration of Chinese students are influenced by this strategy.

In terms of academic integration, it explains why Chinese students do not display concern about their marks that much. Students applying this strategy always keep their eyes on the domestic job market. However, grades achieved in foreign universities are usually untransferable to the Chinese education system. People in China, including employers, usually utilise the ranking of universities rather than marks to evaluate the capability of a person. Hence, Chinese students in the UK are demotivated to improve their academic achievements. Once they are accepted by the UK university, they are already gilded. As long as they can safely graduate, marks are of no significance. This finding gives important qualitative support to existing quantitative-dominant research about Chinese ISMs' academic attainment (Iannelli and Huang 2014; Crawford and Wang 2015b) and makes it more evident that motivation plays a large part in directing Chinese ISMs' academic integration.

The strategy also has a strong influence on social integration, particularly on the social networks of Chinese students. Existing literature shows varying attitudes towards co-national networks for Chinese ISM. Some claim that socialising solely with compatriots constrains their integration and makes them separated from mainstream society (Mikal, Yang, and Lewis 2015; Yu and Moskal 2019). Some focus on the positive aspect, stating that co-national Chinese students can make integration more effective and efficient (Zhou, Topping, and Jindal-Snape 2011; Li and Pitkanen 2018), and may promote their well-being (Pang 2018). My research, however, escapes from the dichotomy of good or bad sides of co-national networks. Instead, it points out the indifference of integration for Chinese students as a result of the getting-gilded strategy. They form an elite social network amongst co-national ISM in order to distinguish themselves from those without overseas experience when they are back in China. This network is instrumental in that it not only manifests their elite identity which makes them outshine the others, but also establishes an exclusive nexus within which people can mutually help each other in their careers. This is in line with Waters' (2006) findings about the function of Hong Kong ISMs' network. Therefore, to maintain the membership of this network for

Chinese students is much more instrumental than socialising with locals or other foreigners. During this process their Chinese identity has been constantly emphasised or put forward, which shapes their behaviour in London and subsequent future decisions.

If we focus on the general picture, we may see that the getting-gilded strategy has an impact almost everywhere in their integration. Under the circumstances, the aim of Chinese students has already been partly achieved as soon as they received the offer from the top UK universities – they are already gilded. Afterwards, they come to the UK to have an adventure and then return with this experience. In other words, they are temporary migrants whose minds are focused on China above all. This makes them less desirous to integrate deeply into the local communities and more likely to operate the separation model. They are, in the way Andrejuk (2013) vividly describes, ‘educational tourists’.

In particular, during their entire sojourn in London, the national identity of Chinese students is highlighted or strengthened in many circumstances. When witnessing the West in ‘reality’ or in the campaign against COVID-19, many expressed their favourable attitudes towards China and the Chinese government. They showed their pride and praised the achievements of their home country, which also led to their strong support of the mainstream official opinions in the demonstrations related to Hong Kong. All of these experiences contribute to a strengthening Chinese identity. What is more, their limited knowledge of local language and culture, the huge population of Chinese ISM, and the fear of COVID-19 and discrimination all restrained them to a co-national network. Besides, their overwhelming consumption of Chinese media as information sources, and their preference for Chinese products (and the easy access to them) also made their Chinese identity salient, which made them separated from the local multicultural society.

Nevertheless, although the getting-gilded strategy is pervasive in my Chinese student sample, exceptions can still be found. Similar to the Polish cases, anomalies usually existed in the sense that some students underwent a kind of forced migration. Some interviewees were eliminated through fierce competition in China and found their way out of the situation by going abroad. While some walked this path for the sake of getting gilded and continuing their competition with compatriots, some did not. They were simply not adjusted to the intensive

peer rivalry in China, and preferred the dynamic and encouraging atmosphere in the UK. Their future is not necessarily linked back to China.

Usually these were cases of people who had already been abroad for their secondary education. It is important to mention the case of CMU2, who arrived in the UK at the age of fourteen. He showed many unique features which were quite different from 'typical' Chinese ISM in my sample. He spoke English as well as his Mandarin Chinese, had more local than co-national friends, and integrated effectively into the UK. It was he who offered me lots of insights into the problems faced by Chinese students. CFP5 went to Australia for *gaozhong* and the UK for higher education. She also integrated well and managed to mentor a few Chinese master's students. Both CMU2 and CFP5 went abroad at a younger age due to the dislike for the pressure in the Chinese secondary education. Their motivation was never pragmatic and to outshine their peers. They simply enjoy the relaxed and cheerful environment abroad. Hence, unlike their compatriots who were usually separated from the mainstream society, their integration went deeper. This is perhaps because they were immersed in a non-Chinese environment in their teenage years and learned how to negotiate with local people and culture. With the development of the Chinese economy and the view of Chinese families, the age of Chinese ISM is getting younger and younger. People like CMU2 and CFP5 are likely to be more frequently encountered in the future.

8.3.3 Some other research lacunae filled by this study

Existing literature does not investigate Polish students' academic achievement, and within the research on Chinese students' academic attainment, there is scarce analysis in terms of different levels of degree (see section 3.3.3 and 3.4.2). My research has filled this gap by comparing Polish and Chinese students on different levels of degree programme, and pointing out the differences between them. It was found that Polish undergraduate and master's interviewees are generally more ambitious and demanding in academic performance than their Chinese peers. They claimed to have high marks and they talked about this confidently and positively. Chinese students, however, were willing to be mediocre in academic performance and were content with being 'just so-so'. Master's students seemed even less ambitious than undergraduates. The possible reasons include: 1) Chinese students were

under such intensive pressure in the previous period of education that their energy and motivation were exhausted earlier; 2) they were used to being pushed and disciplined by teachers in China and became aimless once this pressure disappeared in the UK; 3) grades in foreign educational systems are untransferable into China, and people only care about university rankings. I also argue that PhD students' academic integration cannot be evaluated by their marks and needs tailored measurement.

Another finding with regard to different levels of degree pertains to student societies. In existing literature, Chinese ISMs' participation in student societies is understudied, whereas on the Polish side, there is no investigation according to different levels of degree (see section 3.4.2). Again, my research has filled this gap. It finds no significant difference between the two ethnic groups, but considerable differences in regard to levels of degree programme. Both Polish and Chinese undergraduate interviewees were highly active in student societies, whereas PhD students were highly inactive. Few Chinese master's students claimed to join a society, while Polish master's interviewees registered a few memberships but did not attend many activities. The reason why student societies fail to attract Chinese master's students perhaps lies in that they have a lot to see and adapt to in a short time (usually only one year), and student societies were not amongst the most attractive.

From what is presented above, we may see that students' behaviour is very much conditioned by their family backgrounds and socialisation, but that in some cases they also can make choices when they are abroad. It seems that structure plays a key role in shaping their motivation and integration, but they also have agency.

However, sometimes they are not completely free agents. For instance, I have already argued that Chinese students do not find it worthwhile to make big attempts to socialise with English-speakers due to the getting-gilded strategy, but there is also the secondary factor of the language barrier. It discourages them from approaching non-Chinese people. As a result, they have to stick to the co-national network, both in making friends and finding accommodation in my sample, to reduce uncertainty. For the same reason they prefer to use Chinese media sources rather than English. Polish interviewees are freer in this regard to make choices beyond nationality because they possess adequate English-language skills. This is significant

in view of the fact that a lot of the ISM literature seems to be about the role of the state, universities and other institutions in creating structures which, while they are abroad, help determine the integration experiences of international students (Andrejuk 2011a, 2013; Botas and Huisman 2013; Han et al. 2013; Tian and Lowe 2013; Gao 2016; Heng 2017; Rahimi and Akgunduz 2017). My research reminds us of the necessity to draw attention to the influence of ISMs' agency on their integration.

8.3.4 Gender difference

Some differences with regard to gender are found in my research. The only common gender difference between Polish and Chinese participants concerns the engagement in student societies of postgraduate students. It seems that both Polish and Chinese female master's and PhD students were not interested in student society events, whereas a handful of male postgraduate participants in both Polish and Chinese samples joined some leisure events organised by student societies. However, it is impossible to make a general claim about this gender difference because the pandemic has severely restricted student society activities so that only a handful of men participated.

In the Polish sample, the 'forced migration' consisted of female rather than male students. The two cases were both women, who were in either a non-heteronormative (PFM4) or mixed-race relationship (PFU4). Those who complained about the homogeneity in Poland were mostly female participants, too. Similar descriptions include 'conservative (PFU1, PMU1, PFM4, PFP3, PFP4, PMP3)', 'homogeneous (PFP4, PMP4)', 'hermetic (PFP4, PMP3)', 'indoctrination (PFU5)', 'uniform (PFU1, PMU3)', 'constrained (PFP2, PMU1, PMM4)', 'difficult (PFP2)', 'the same (PMP3)', 'indigenous (PFM3)', 'withdrawn (PFU1, PFU2, PFM2, PFM3, PMU2, PMP4)'. Statistically speaking, these adjectives were expressed 15 times by 9 female participants, and 10 times by 5 male participants. Although this is not a significant contrast and is shown only in a 30-person sample, it is still a piece of evidence that female Polish interviewees complained about the restraints they felt in Poland more often than males.

Another indication is the demonstration against the new abortion law. Although it refers to the core interest of Polish women so naturally more female rather than male students were

involved, it is still a good proof indicating the specific problem with regard to gender in Poland. Generally speaking, Polish female interviewees were more likely than male interviewees to feel constrained in Poland and feel liberated in London. Sometimes it is an important reason for them to choose overseas education, whereas in some cases it shows they feel satisfied about their integration.

In the Chinese sample, however, apart from what I have discussed about student societies, gender difference is not salient, at least not from the evidence gathered in my interviews. The forced migration experience – running away from the pressure in the Chinese education system - pertains to both male and female participants without clear difference between them. Both my impression of interviews and close scrutiny of transcripts did not reveal explicit gender difference.

However, I shall not conclude that male and female Chinese students have identical ISM experience. Some potential gender differences are observed, but not included for various reasons in this research. First of all, as is mentioned in section 4.6, romantic relationships may present a gender difference, but the topic was discarded because it can be sensitive and makes interviewees uncomfortable. Some traditionalists consider it a disgrace when Chinese women are in relationships with foreign men. Female participants might be afraid that their words might be judged by others. Perhaps my gender as a man also created a distance and they would feel freer to speak to a woman researcher about this issue. However, my observation can act as subsidiary evidence. In my friendship circle, there are a couple of Chinese women students who have foreign but not necessarily British boyfriends. However, no Chinese male student claims or seem to have foreign girlfriends. Meanwhile the Polish sample seems similar. A few female Polish interviewees have foreign, usually local boyfriends/husbands, and no male participants claim to have foreign partners. Literature also suggests that Polish women marry foreigners more often than Polish men marry foreign women (Brzozowska 2017). It seems that Polish and Chinese female students are more likely to have foreign partners than male students. This surely has a positive impact on their integration because local partners can introduce local friends, cultures and there are more chances to speak English. Literature also suggests that bi-national relationships may facilitate

migrants' integration (Brzozowska 2017; Gierczyk and Dobosz 2022). Hence, in this aspect female students may be in a more advantageous position.

What is more, literature suggests that gender difference prevails in the Chinese domestic job market. Female international student returnees are in underprivileged job positions and announce lower occupational contentment than male (Zhai, Moskal, and Read 2021). Their career advancement is constrained by structural forces such as the strains of family life and social conventions (Moskal 2020). Although this phenomenon is confirmed by my daily conversations with some women students, it is not a central research focus of this thesis and hence is barely discussed in the interviews. The link between female students' disadvantaged employment positions in China and their study abroad motivation is not evident in the interviews. Perhaps their disadvantage is what they feel after they return rather than what spurs them to come to London. However, from my experience more Chinese women are likely to stay and work in the UK than men, although the total number is very small. The vast majority of Chinese students choose to return to China, and COVID-19 has intensified this trend during my fieldwork because they think China is the safest place under the pandemic. How the stay-strategy impacts ISMs' integration and whether or not female international graduates are more advantaged than males in the UK job market remains an area for future study.

8.3.5 The impact of COVID-19

My research has revealed that COVID-19 significantly influenced students' life in London with regard to both academic and social integration. These influences are presented in separate places in this thesis. I present a summary in this section.

In terms of academic integration, COVID-19 had the most significant impact on the student societies. Due to official regulations all offline activities were cancelled, and in-person meetings were regulated to a minimum. This unusual situation made it impossible for students to experience society activities as normal. Both Polish and Chinese students complained about the bad experience of online student societies and the near disappearance of societies' events. Considering that one of the major functions of a student society, as it

emerged in the interviews, is getting to know more people, this situation has surely impaired the enlargement of students' social circles. It was difficult for them to make new friends through student societies in this period, and it made their university life less fruitful.

In terms of social integration, the pandemic had a much stronger impact on Chinese than Polish participants. Polish interviewees generally grumbled that it was hard to meet other people, or their friends had gone home and they were left alone. Chinese interviewees, however, perceived COVID-19 from a national point of view and commented adopting a very 'Chinese' perspective.

First, some Chinese participants strongly praised the Chinese government about their efforts in the campaign against COVID-19 and criticised the deeds of Western governments and people. Considering that they identified the Chinese government with the nation, their feeling of identification with both grew simultaneously, and their Chinese national identity was strengthened from the outset of the pandemic.

Second, COVID-19 had a direct impact on the social circles of Chinese students. Because they considered foreigners as unsafe under the pandemic, they preferred to stick to co-nationals and keep a distance from foreigners. They favoured co-national roommates when choosing accommodation, too. This orientation amongst Chinese students furthered the exclusion of other nationals and made the co-national networks tighter, strengthening the tendency towards the separation model of acculturation.

Third, many Chinese students reported racial discrimination in London with regard to COVID-19, such as being called 'virus' or beaten up by homeless people when wearing masks. They were vulnerable because they were easy to be identified from their appearance. To avoid the trouble, they naturally choose to keep a distance from local communities and stay closer with co-nationals. These experiences have undermined their integration.

8.4 Theoretical contribution to migration studies

The theoretical contribution of this thesis mainly locates in Ch.7, about social integration. I apply the concept of everyday nationhood in an unusual way, and link it to Berry's acculturation strategies to analyse the social integration of Polish and Chinese international students. This is a new analytical framework I contribute to migration studies.

As is reviewed in Ch.2, Berry's acculturation strategies provide a useful means to investigate migrants' integration. One strategy is assimilation, where migrants have little interest in preserving their cultural identity and actively seek interactions with other cultures. The opposite strategy is separation, where migrants cling strongly to their original cultural identity and avoid contacts with other cultures. Between these extremes lie different degrees of integration. This framework indicates that integration is not a single point, but a spectrum. However, the 'cultural' identity in Berry's conceptualisation needed to be re-interpreted in my study. When scrutinising the transcripts, I realised that interviewees tended to think in terms of national identity rather than cultural identity when describing their experiences. Therefore, I aimed to examine participants' national identity to explore their integration. Fox and Miller-Idriss' everyday nationhood particularly fits with this aim, as it provides a framework to examine different aspects of Polish and Chinese students' national identity in their everyday lives. This is how Berry's model and Fox and Miller-Idriss' concept link to each other.

What is more, a new contribution of this thesis is that when Fox and Miller-Idriss use everyday nationhood to study the majority population in a society, I apply it to the minority, i.e. migrants. My research has shown that everyday nationhood is a helpful concept to study how and under which circumstances migrants identify with their nation and with the receiving society, thereby indicating their integration.

To be concrete, the section on talking the nation explores 1) how migrants talk about their nation, usually indicating a comparison between the sending and receiving country, and sometimes in specific contexts such as COVID-19; and 2) how often and how well migrants speak their mother tongue and the language used in the receiving society. Their preferences with regard to the sending or receiving country, the mastery and the frequency of speaking the local language are informative indicators of migrants' integration.

Choosing the nation may include whether or not and to what extent migrants choose co-national social networks and roommates in the receiving society. The more often they stick to their compatriots, the more likely they are to adopt the separation model in Berry's concept. However, scarce contact with co-nationals does not necessarily lead to integration, but perhaps assimilation, if migrants favour the local culture and meanwhile insignificantly identify with their nation. Moreover, migrants' (lack of) agency when making choices also needs to be taken into account. Language proficiency and exposure to co-nationals also influence their choices. Migrants do not necessarily make their choices freely.

Performing the nation in this study involves demonstrations. Migrants may take part in demonstrations related to their national concerns and express their inclinations with or against the mainstream and governmental views of their sending countries. When the core values of the receiving society are at odds with the sending society, some migrants may voice opinions in demonstrations which accord with the mainstream values of the receiving society; some may defend the values of their sending society and refuse to be 'brainwashed'. This is another key indicator of their integration, suggesting how much they accept the local core values.

Consuming the nation covers both national media and national product consumption. Media function as a window through which migrants perceive the world. A strong inclination to use national media to receive information reveals the consistency of opinions before and after migration, and also indicates an exclusion of other views, including the receiving society's. The preference for visiting national shops and restaurants also reveals the nature of their integration. The more migrants consume national products, the more they realise their identification with the nation, the more likely they are to keep away from the local consumption culture.

Besides these concrete manifestations, I need to indicate that although Fox and Miller-Idriss gave many examples demonstrating different aspects of everyday nationhood, migration researchers applying this framework must choose some other types of performance specifically focusing on migrants instead of majority populations.

For instance, I investigated what percentage of their time interviewees spent speaking English and their mother tongue. The question was chosen because I noticed through participant observation that some Chinese students barely spoke English during their entire sojourn in the UK, whereas some others were used to speaking English that they even came up with English expressions naturally when speaking Chinese. It was hypothesised that the more migrants speak the local language, the better they integrate. Enquiry has later confirmed this hypothesis, showing that Polish students integrated more deeply into the UK society than Chinese participants. Furthermore, I also explored how migrants perceived the UK and their home countries, which Fox and Miller-Idriss naturally did not mention. The comparison and preference claimed by migrants can also reveal their integration. When migrants largely speak in favour of the cultures, values and views of their home countries, they are less likely to integrate well into the receiving society. In short, other than what was exemplified by Fox and Miller-Idriss, we ought to seek the interplays between sending and receiving societies within everyday nationhood to study the integration of migrants.

Overall, everyday nationhood is a useful framework to test the integration of migrants. It provides explicit variables to examine different aspects of migrants' integration. Consequently, we may combine this different information about their practices to identify where they stand in general on the integration spectrum.

In addition, an important point I need to make is that assimilation in this thesis indicates assimilation into multicultural London society instead of some imaginary monoethnic British culture. Many interviewees claimed that London is the least British city in Britain. They said so because they imagined before arrival that the UK was full of Anglo-Saxon people, but indeed in London they encountered many 'non-British' people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. When Polish participants talked about their experience, they usually highlighted the role of cultural diversity and their positive attitude towards it. When they assimilated into this group, they became part of the cultural diversity, not part of the Anglo-Saxon culture. This is to say, acculturation should have a broader meaning, which includes identifying the nature of given locality instead of assuming that the whole receiving society share a uniform prevailing culture. Also, it demonstrates that migrants can still feel assimilated without

becoming part of the local national culture. We ought to pay attention to the nature of the concrete destination place to identify their integration rather than using a standardised measurement.

However, a question needs to be answered: if most Polish students are supposed to have a cosmopolitan identity and assimilated, how come this thesis considers cosmopolitan identity as a type of assimilation (rather than marginalisation) when applying the framework of Berry's acculturation strategies? In other words, where should we locate cosmopolitan identity in Berry's theory?

Berry does not discuss cosmopolitanism in his theoretical model, but Geurts et al. (2022) provide an insightful answer. They study Turkish migrants in Holland and identify two different kinds of cosmopolitanism: 1) world citizens who belong to no specific country, and 2) world citizens who belong everywhere. People of the first type usually feel it is unnecessary or are reluctant to be attached to a certain nation, or feel excluded by the Dutch society. The second type, however, largely possess a national belonging to Holland. They remain flexible about living anywhere, including Holland. They feel embedded wherever they live rather than rootless everywhere.

According to the study by Geurts et al., it seems that cosmopolitan identity can be located at either the separation end or the assimilation end of the integration spectrum. However, in my case Polish students with a cosmopolitan worldview surely belong to the second type in Geurts et al.'s research. Participants did not describe their sense of belonging in a negative way, but largely manifested an attitude of 'intentional unpredictability' and labelled London as a favourable destination. This kind of cosmopolitanism well fits with the vibe of multicultural London. Polish students assimilated and constituted part of this multiculturalism themselves. Hence, I consider cosmopolitan identity as a type of assimilation in this thesis.

8.5 Limitations and future research directions

This study has some limitations to confess. First, the 30-person sample size for each ethnic group is not capable of capturing every interesting point and feature of these populations.

The diversity and variety within them always require further investigation. For instance, although I have identified most Polish interviewees as elite cosmopolitan Europeans, Andrejuk's 'educational tourists' surely need to be taken into consideration. The reasons why they are not salient in my sample are perhaps 1) Polish students' attitudes have changed in generation compared to people in 2013, the time when Andrejuk published her study; 2) the limitation of my sampling made me unable to reach these 'educational tourists'. It will be interesting to test Polish ISMs' transformation in different generations, and to investigate contemporary Polish 'educational tourists' in future research. In the Chinese analysis, although I have distinguished some differences amongst different levels of degree programme, a more sufficient and thematic analysis is still needed. Since I have indicated that students' behaviour is significantly conditioned by their family backgrounds, and Chinese students on different levels of degree programme are from different family backgrounds, it is necessary to conduct more specific research focusing on the interplays between levels of degree programme and family backgrounds.

Second, several interesting topics were not sufficiently discussed in this thesis. The foremost regret is the lack of discussion of romantic relationships, an omission which has been explained in Section 8.3.4. Following this insight, it could be helpful to examine gender difference in ISMs' integration, considering that female students are perhaps more likely than male students to be assisted by bi-national relationships in their integration, whereas many ISM studies argue that female student migrants are in disadvantaged positions compared to males (Siara 2013; Moskal 2020; Zhai, Moskal and Read 2021). In addition, ISMs' nationalism and conflicts this creates within each group are also notable. This study has discussed demonstrations participated in by both ethnic groups and demonstrated the general attitudes found within the sample. However, there must be conflicting views within each group, particularly the Chinese ISM. There has been heated debate within Chinese ISM themselves over the emerging and enlarging 'xiaofenhong' population (literally 'little pink', indicating those young ultranationalists who endorse everything about China and Chinese government and abuse everyone who is not in line with them). A clear separation can be seen amongst Chinese ISM according to whether or not one advocates 'xiaofenhong'. There is a strong need to probe into this body, e.g. the interplays between 'xiaofenhong' and haters of them within

the Chinese ISM, how study abroad experiences influence and shape their attitudes towards nationalism.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably influenced my research. My interview guide was made before its outbreak in the UK. When I began my fieldwork with Chinese interviewees one month after the lockdown was announced, they still had fresh memories of the normal days. But when I began my interviews with Polish students, it was already six months after the outbreak. Some participants began their studies during the pandemic. As a result, sometimes it became difficult to compare the two ethnic groups in the same setting, because they were indeed in different settings. We may say participants in my sample, especially the Polish sample (many were enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year), had a very exceptional experience compared to students enrolled before and after them. This does make my research unique, but also makes generalisation difficult. I can neither concentrate on their 'normal' experience, nor precisely on the pandemic. Therefore, future ISM studies specifically focused on the pandemic and without the impact of it are both needed.

Finally, this study depicts participants' thoughts exactly at the time when they were interviewed, but people may change over time. My research diary has recorded my change through the entire PhD studies, and I am sure many students have been through this process. That is to say, it is insufficient to study ISM only at some certain point and longitudinal studies are required. For example, what is the difference between the arrival and the graduation of an individual ISM? Furthermore, has the 'getting-gilded' strategy finally paid off? Where will the cosmopolitan Polish ISM finally end up? All of these are essential future research directions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 List of Polish Interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	University	Programme	Previous institution	Length of stay ¹ (year)	Sponsor	Parents' Job
PFU1	20	KCL	Social Science and Humanities	<i>Liceum</i> Cracow	1-2	Parents	Manager, judge
PFU2	20	LSE	Science	International school Poznan	1	Student loans, parents	CEO, housewife
PFU3	19	UCL	Science	<i>Liceum</i> Warsaw	1	Student loans, parents	Lawyer, housewife
PFU4	28	UCL	Science	BA Poland	3+	Only student loans	Doctor
PFU5	20	UCL	Science	International school Katowice	1-2	Parents	CEO, housewife
PFM1	32	UCL	Science	BA Poland	1-2	Self	Builder, nurse
PFM2	26	UCL	Science	BA UK	3+	Student loans, parents	Property developer, housewife
PFM3	25	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA UK	3+	Only student loans	Businessman, teacher
PFM4	26	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA Poland	3+	Student loans, parents, self	Writer, musician
PFM5	25	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA Holland	1-2	Self	Lawyer, economist
PFP1	29	QM	Science	BA Poland MA Sweden	3+	Scholarship UK	IT, housewife
PFP2	26	Westminster	Social Science and Humanities	BA Poland MA USA	3+	Student finance	Businessman, doctor
PFP3	29	IC	Science	BA Poland MA UK	3+	Scholarship UK	Businessman, teacher
PFP4	23	UCL	Science	BA MA UK	3+	Student loans, parents, self	Engineer, teacher
PFP5	23	QM	Science	BA MA UK	3+	Only student loans	Engineer, teacher

¹ Here 1 includes less than 1 year.

PMU1	19	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	International school Warsaw	1-2	Parents	Businessman, manager
PMU2	20	UCL	Science	Secondary school UK	3+	Student loans, parents	Doctor, teacher
PMU3	20	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	<i>Liceum</i> Warsaw	1	Student loans, parents	Both teachers
PMU4	23	KCL	Science	<i>Liceum</i> Warsaw	3+	Parents	It, manager
PMU5	19	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	<i>Liceum</i> Warsaw	1	Student loans, parents	Lawyer, doctor
PMM1	23	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	BA Holland	1-2	Parents	Public servant, property developer
PMM2	24	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	BA Poland MA Holland	1-2	Self	Property developer, architect
PMM3	23	UCL	Science	Secondary school UK	3+	Student finance	Both teachers
PMM4	23	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA UK	3+	Parents	Manager, teacher
PMM5	25	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA Switzerland	1	Parents	Doctor, public servant
PMP1	28	IC	Science	BA MA Poland	3+	Scholarship UK	Lawyer, doctor
PMP2	27	IC	Science	BA UK	3+	Scholarship UK	Engineer, teacher
PMP3	36	IC	Science	BA Poland	3+	Scholarship UK	Doctor
PMP4	23	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA UK	3+	Scholarship UK	Businessman, reporter
PMP5	30	IC	Science	BA MA Poland	3+	Scholarship UK	Priest, teacher

Appendix 2 List of Chinese Interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	University	Programme	Previous institution	Length of stay (year)	Sponsor	Parents' Job
CFU1	19	UCL	Science	International school Shanghai	1	Parents	Public servant, manager
CFU2	20	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	International school Shanghai	1	Parents	Businessman, doctor
CFU3	21	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	Singapore	1	Parents	Both public servants
CFU4	21	Cass	Social Science and Humanities	<i>Gaozhong</i> Shanghai	3+	Parents	Both public servants
CFU5	20	UCL	Science	International school Guangzhou	1-2	Parents	/
CFM1	26	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA China	1	Parents	Engineer, teacher
CFM2	25	Caplan	Social Science and Humanities	BA China	1	Parents	Officers
CFM3	23	LSE	Science	BA UK	3+	Parents	Businessman, manager
CFM4	23	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA China	1	Parents	Businessman, officer
CFM5	23	KCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA China	1	Parents	Engineer, doctor
CFP1	25	UCL	Science	BA China, MA UCL	3+	Parents	Doctor, teacher
CFP2	26	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	<i>Gaozhong</i> Guangzhou BA Leeds, MA LSE	3+	Parents	Both public servants
CFP3	27	QM	Science	BA MA China	1	Scholarship China	Peasants
CFP4	34	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA China	3+	Self	Peasants
CFP5	25	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA UK	3+	Scholarship UK	Businessman, doctor
CMU1	20	UCL	Science	International school Brussel	1	Parents	Diplomats
CMU2	19	UCL	Science	Secondary school UK	3+	Parents	Doctor, accountant
CMU3	20	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	International school Beijing	1	Parents	Bank, businessman
CMU4	20	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	International school Shanghai	1	Parents	Both managers
CMU5	21	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	International school Israel	1-2	Parents	Economist, editor
CMM1	26	UCL	Science	BA China	1	Parents	Managers

CMM2	22	UCL	Science	BA UK	3+	Parents	Both public servants
CMM3	23	UCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA China	1	Parents, self	Bank, accountant
CMM4	23	UCL	Science	BA China	1	Parents	Managers
CMM5	24	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	BA China	1	Parents, scholarship UK	Both public servants
CMP1	27	UCL	Science	BA MA UK	3+	Parents	Teacher, businessman
CMP2	29	UCL	Science	BA MA China	1	Scholarship China, UK	Peasants
CMP3	26	KCL	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA China	1-2	Scholarship China	Teachers
CMP4	25	UCL	Science	BA China MA UK	3+	Parents	Teachers
CMP5	27	LSE	Social Science and Humanities	BA MA China	3+	Scholarship China	Both public servants

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

The interview guide was designated originally in English, and then translated into Polish and Chinese.

Appendix 3.1 English version

These are not fixed questions. The wording might be altered slightly from case to case, and the order of questions could vary from interviewee to interviewee.

I General questions:

How old are you?

What family background do you have (parents' jobs, education level)?

What is your university, degree programme, level of study?

Which schools did you study in before your current degree study?

How many years have you lived in the UK?

Who paid for your studies in the UK?

II Motivations:

How did you reach your decision to study in the UK? Did you decide alone?

Why did you choose the UK and your university in preference to other countries and universities?

III Future plans:

What do you plan to do after graduation? Why?

What impact does study abroad experience have on your decision?

IV Main changes:

What kind of changes do you have in your life and ways of thinking/views of the world after coming here? What kind of person have you become after coming here? What caused the changes? How positively do you regard these changes?

How important do you think this migration experience is to your life?

What do you think about your academic performance?

What do you think about the education system here and in your home country? How did you adjust, when they are different?

Have you changed your mind about British people and lifestyles?

Were you surprised by the ethnic diversity in London?

V Integration:

Do you like your life here in London? What is it that you like? What do you dislike?

Which are the most important differences between the UK and Poland/China for you?

Is there anything you miss about your home country? Do you often return home?

What are your main information sources here? What kind of social media do you often use?

What do you think about your English language? What impact does it have on your life? When do you often speak English and when your mother tongue?

Have you used health services in the UK, or you prefer return to your home country for treatment?

Do you think you need to know more about the UK and make more friends?

Did you attend any events helping you integrate? Organised by whom and what did you feel?

What kind of friendship circle here do you have (ethnic/profession)? How did you make these friends?

Where do you live in London? How do you feel about your neighbours and surroundings? Did they help you or disappoint you in any way?

What student societies have you joined? What do you think about them?

Do you go to Chinese/Polish migrant communities often? Did they help you in any way?

Appendix 3.2 Polish version

I Pytania ogólne:

Ile masz lat?

Na jakim uniwersytecie i na jakim kierunku studiujesz? Na którym roku obecnie jesteś?

Do jakich szkół uczęszczałeś/aś przed rozpoczęciem obecnych studiów?

Ile lat mieszkasz w Wielkiej Brytanii?

Kto opłaca Twoje studia w Wielkiej Brytanii?

II Motywacja:

Co zdecydowało o decyzji, aby podjąć studia w Wielkiej Brytanii? Czy samemu/sama ją podjąłeś?

Dlaczego wybrałeś/aś Wielką Brytanię i swój uniwersytet a nie inny kraj i uniwersytet?

III Plany na przyszłość:

Co planujesz zrobić po ukończeniu studiów? Dlaczego?

Co Twoi rodzice myślą o Twojej decyzji? Czym się oni zajmują zawodowo?

Jaki wpływ na Twoją decyzję ma doświadczenie studiowania za granicą?

IV Główne zmiany:

Czy czujesz, że przybycie do Wielkiej Brytanii na studia zmieniło Cię jako osobę? Co spowodowało zmiany? Jak pozytywnie oceniasz te zmiany?

Jak myślisz, jak ważne jest doświadczenie związane z migracją w Twoim życiu?

Co sądzisz o swoich wynikach w nauce?

Co sądzisz o systemie edukacji tutaj i w Twoim kraju? Jak się dostosowałeś, jeśli się one różnią?

Czy zmieniłeś zdanie na temat Brytyjczyków i ich stylu życia?

Czy zaskoczyła Cię różnorodność etniczna w Londynie?

V Integracja:

Czy lubisz swoje życie w Londynie? Co lubisz, a czego nie?

Jakie dla Ciebie są największe różnice między Wielką Brytanią a Polską?

Czy jest coś, za czym tęsknisz ze swojego kraju? Czy często wracasz do domu?

Z jakich głównych źródeł informacji korzystasz tutaj? Z jakich mediów społecznościowych często korzystasz?

Co sądzisz o swoim języku angielskim? Jaki to ma wpływ na twoje życie? Kiedy często mówisz po angielsku, a kiedy w Twoim języku ojczystym?

Czy uważasz, że potrzebujesz dowiedzieć się więcej na temat Wielkiej Brytanii i poznać więcej znajomych?

Czy uczestniczyłeś/aś w wydarzeniach mających na celu pomóc Ci w integracji? Jeśli tak, to przez kogo były one organizowane i jak się czułeś/aś podczas nich?

Jaki jest Twój krąg znajomych? (etniczny / zawodowy) Jak poznałeś tych przyjaciół?

Gdzie mieszkasz w Londynie? Co sądzisz o swoich sąsiadach i otoczeniu? Czy pomogli Ci oni albo rozczarowali w jakikolwiek sposób?

Do jakich stowarzyszeń studenckich dołączyłeś/aś? Co o nich sądzisz?

Czy często odwiedzasz polskie społeczności imigrantów? Czy pomogli Ci w jakikolwiek sposób?

Appendix 3.3 Chinese version

受访人_____访谈时间_____受访者所在地点_____.

受访人年龄_____学校专业学位_____来英前学校专业_____.

来英时长_____是否家里出钱_____家庭背景父母工作_____.

你是怎样决定来英国读书的呢？（做决定过程、心理过程）

你为什么选择了英国选择了你现在的学校，而不是其它国家或者英国其它学校呢？

来了之后你觉得自己变成了一个怎样的人呢？什么导致了变化？你觉得这些变化有多积极？

你对中国和英国的教育系统有什么看法？你是怎样适应之间的区别的？

你怎样看待自己的学业表现呢？

你认为自己的英语能力怎样？你的语言能力对自己的学习和生活有什么影响？你什么时候说英语，什么时候说中文？哪个频率高一点？

你在这边的朋友圈是怎样的？你是怎样认识他们的？你对这样的朋友圈是否感到满意？

你认识大陆以外的中国学生吗？你跟他们熟吗？能否举例说说你们是怎么交往的？

你对伦敦的民族多样性和多元文化有什么看法？

你怎样看待英国人和他们的生活方式呢？

你有参加过任何帮助你融入的活动吗？谁组织的，你感觉如何？

你参加了什么学生社团吗？你对他们感觉如何？

对你来说，中国和英国之间最重要的区别是什么？

你喜欢自己在伦敦的生活吗？喜欢什么又不喜欢什么呢？

你在伦敦住在哪里？你是怎样找到这个住所的？你对住所的邻居和周围环境感觉如何？他们对你有帮助还是有影响呢？你们的日常交流如何？

你经常去中国超市、中餐馆等中国人开的店吗？为什么想去呢？他们对你有任何帮助吗？

有什么中国的东西是你在这边很想念的吗？你回国吗？因为什么原因回去呢？

你在这边的最主要信息来源是什么媒体？你通常使用什么社交媒体？在什么情况下使用？

能描述一下你毕业后的计划吗？做出这个决定的过程的？

你父母对你的决定支持吗？他们是什么工作？

你认为这个留学经历对你的人生有什么影响吗？

在这边你是否在哪些观念思维上发生了变化呢？

Appendix 4 Call for Polish interviewees

Dear [name],

I am Hexuan, a Chinese PhD candidate based in UCL. I can speak Polish, as I majored in Polonistyka during my undergraduate studies. It made me fancy Poland and Polish people. That is why my PhD dissertation is about comparing Chinese and Polish student migration in London. This is a big and interesting project, and now I am in the middle of the empirical research - looking for volunteers for my online interviews!

I have searched Polish names in PhD student list on your university website and finally reach you. I know it could be a bit disturbing, but your participation is of great significance! Let me briefly introduce the interview.

1. The interview will be conducted between you and me in Polish and lasts for 40-60 minutes. We could use Zoom, Skype, Teams, Google meet, WhatsApp, WeChat or whatever platform you like. It could be a video- or audio-interview, whichever you want, although video-chat is preferred.
2. We will talk about your migration motivation, integration and future plan, etc. in the interview.
3. Your personal information will be completely anonymous in my research. You can withdraw from the database any time you want.
4. There is no requirement or limit for your participation. You are welcome to join as long as you are a Polish student studying in a university based in London. Don't be afraid if you think you are not enough 'typically Polish'. We don't aim for that. Every case is important.

You can see more details from the attached information sheet. If you are interested, please contact me directly from here. We may then arrange the schedule.

Your passion is appreciated! That will definitely help improve friendship and understanding between China and Poland!

All the best,

Hexuan