When expectations meet reality: Exploring Chinese
tertiary graduates' post-study transitional experience and
migratory outcomes in New Zealand

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Liping Xu

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Abstract

International students' post-academic mobility in the host country is an under-researched area. The purpose of this study is to explore Chinese tertiary graduates' pre-arrival expectations and their transitional experience from students to permanent residents in New Zealand. The study assesses the challenges and barriers facing Chinese graduates during the transitional stage and their associated strategies and tactics to tackle those problems.

Drawing on the data from 25 semi-structured interviews, the study finds that Chinese graduates' expectations shifted and evolved during the process of seeking employment and adapting to the workplace culture in the host country. Participants securing employment through different effective strategies and tactics had successfully adapted to the workplace culture. However, there was a discrepancy between their expectations and experience manifested in insufficient pre-arrival information about the host country, visa constraints, recruiters' bias and stereotypes, and exploitation by co-national employers. Meanwhile, despite experiencing more difficulties during the post-study transition, female Chinese graduates demonstrated high adaptability to local workplaces which allowed them to integrate into New Zealand's workplace culture swiftly. The unmet expectations pushed some graduates to either return to their home country or migrate to a different country.

These results provide valuable insights into the study of international students' post-study mobility by analysing their migrants' perspectives, expectations and personal experience in the host country. In addition, the study makes recommendations for stakeholders in the education industry on how to collaborate on improving international graduates' post-academic experience.

Keywords: Chinese tertiary graduates, expectations, post-study mobility, employment seeking, two-step migration

To Sandy, Tom, and Jerry:

for accompanying me on this incredible journey

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study occurred at a time when the onset of the global pandemic COVID-19 started affecting the pattern of international students' mobility, especially their post-academic transition in the host country. As the largest source of international students for New Zealand, the number of Chinese students studying in New Zealand tertiary institutions had dramatically plunged since 2019 (Education New Zealand, 2022). Meanwhile, the recent changes to immigration settings in New Zealand since 2022 also had implications for current and future international students who wanted to stay after their study. With these changes happening, it became increasingly important for the Government and tertiary institutions in New Zealand to understand Chinese students' characteristics, decision-making process, expectations, and challenges facing them in the host country in order to attract and retain those talents.

The current research explores the relationship between Chinese students' expectations when embarking on their overseas study journey and their unexpected transitional experience in New Zealand. This chapter proceeds to outline the research setting in four sections. Section 1.2 introduces the background information for the current study, including the global trend of students' movement, the history and recent development of New Zealand's international education industry, international students' perception of New Zealand as an ideal host destination, the country's policy-setting around study, work, immigration, and in particular, statistics pertaining to Chinese students' mobility both worldwide and in New Zealand. Section 1.3 explains the rationale of the current study and identifies the research gap, followed by the research questions presented in Section 1.4. This chapter concludes by showing the structure of the thesis in Section 1.5.

1.2 The research backgrounds

With knowledge and technology driving productivity in today's globalised economy, many governments invested vastly in higher education to acquire more skilled talents to be competitive (Chiswick, 2005; Oliinyk et al., 2021). Under this trend, the internationalisation of higher education developed substantially. As a result, managing the international student movement became a primary focus of many receiving countries. This section establishes the context for the current research through statistics on international students' mobility both globally and within key destination and source countries.

1.2.1 The global trend of students' movement

On a global scale, the international student movement had been expanding consistently in the past 20 years. According to the UNESCO dataset, in 2019, 6.1 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study, a 7% increase compared to 2018 and more than twice the number in 2007. Meanwhile, the number of international and foreign tertiary students grew on average by 5.5% per year between 1998 and 2019. The largest flow of international students was from developing countries. In 2019, 67% of all international students in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) area came from developing countries (OECD iLibrary, 2021). Among them, 3% were from low-income countries (LICs) like Burundi and Mali; 26% were from lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) like India, and the Philippines, and 38% were from upper-middle-income countries (UMICs) like China, Brazil and Thailand (OECD iLibrary, 2021; The World Bank, n.d.).

There was an apparent gender difference in international students' degree-seeking and fields of study. According to the OECD (2020a), women were about as likely as men to travel abroad for a bachelor's or master's degree on average across

OECD countries. However, women were less likely to enrol in a doctoral programme. At the doctoral level, the share of women accounted for 43% of all mobile students. Meanwhile, although women outnumbered men among entrants and graduates from tertiary education, they were less likely than men to enrol abroad in the fields of information technology, engineering, manufacturing and construction (29% of international students enrolled are women). Women students were more likely to study abroad in the fields of arts and humanities (the share of female students is 62% among all international students worldwide) and health and welfare (63%) (OECD iLibrary, 2021). Being dominated by male students, the study fields of IT, engineering, manufacturing and construction encompassed a diverse range of subjects including software development, chemical engineering, mechanics, architecture, construction and civil engineering. Those fields thus offered multiple job opportunities compared with areas like humanities and arts which were predominately represented by female students (OECD, 2020b).

Since 2020, many higher education institutions around the world closed down in response to the widespread COVID-19 pandemic. The trend had potentially affected more than 3.9 million international and foreign students studying in OECD countries (OECD iLibrary, 2021). As of March 2020, 150 countries closed schools and educational institutions nationwide, impacting over 80% of the world's student population (Sahu, 2020). The imposed lockdown in many countries also affected international students' perceptions about the value of their degrees and their host country's capacity to look out for their safety and well-being. In addition, students had to decide whether to return home (funding permitting) with limited information on when they might return or remain in their host country with restricted employment and education opportunities while sorting out their visa status. These challenges and problems had dire consequences on the international students' movement in the coming years (OECD, 2021).

Native-English-speaking countries had been the most attractive student destinations for a long time. In particular, the USA, UK, Australia and Canada had

long attracted significant numbers of international students and were therefore commonly regarded as traditional host countries (OECD, 2012). In 2019, these four countries received almost 40% of all internationally mobile students. The United States was the top destination country for international students. Among the 6.1 million international students in 2019, 976,853 were enrolled in different levels of education programmes in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom accounting for 489,019 international students, Australia for 458,279 and Canada for 279,168 (UNESCO, 2021).

Comparatively, New Zealand was a small player in the market for international students, accounting for less than 1% of international students globally in 2019 (OECD iLibrary, 2021). Similar to its larger and more popular neighbour Australia, New Zealand had a big international student population. In 2016, international students represented 20% of its overall tertiary students although this decreased to 13% in 2020 due to the impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, 2021b). The main source countries for New Zealand were China, India, Australia, USA and South Korea (UNESCO, 2019). More details of New Zealand's international education sector will be introduced in Section 1.2.

Asia was the largest source region for international students, with 3.7 million international students (61% overall) enrolled worldwide at all education levels in 2019 (OECD iLibrary, 2021). Chinese and Indian students were by far the largest groups most likely to study abroad. In 2019, the number of international students from these two countries was also increasing at a much faster rate (+7% and +10% respectively over one year). In particular, China sent more than 1 million students to study abroad, followed by India with 461,792 outgoing students. Despite China and India still being the dominant source countries for the global education market, there were some emerging players (OECD, 2019). For example, Nepal's outbound student mobility rate increased more than double from 9.1% in 2015 to 22.8% in 2021. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan was predicted to become an "influential market in coming years" with its outbound student number growing from just under 80,000 to over

100,000 by 2025 (British Universities' International Liaison Association, 2021). All these figures suggest that market diversification will greatly impact the higher education landscape and the international students' movement trend.

However, the distinction between destination and source countries was blurry (ICEF Monitor, 2015), with many countries in Asia that were once traditional importers of higher education (like Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and more recently China) increasingly becoming exporters (Studyportals & British Council, 2021). Many such countries introduced national policies and marketing initiatives including provisions of scholarships and the establishment of education hubs to attract inbound international students. The international students' movement that was once unidirectional from developing (the sending) countries to developed (the receiving) countries was now more of a mutual exchange (brain circulation), with both developing and developed countries simultaneously acting as source and host countries (Arora, 2019).

1.2.2 International education industry of New Zealand

International education was one of the key contributors to New Zealand's economic development as a knowledge nation (Education New Zealand, October 2018). This subsection introduces the history and recent development of New Zealand's international education, one of the country's key export industries, and the associated in-country international student numbers during different stages. It also presents the most recent international enrolment status resulting from the global pandemic of COVID-19 since 2020.

1.2.2.1   The Colombo Plan

New Zealand's engagement in international education had a history of more than 70 years since the launch of the Colombo Plan in 1951 (Smith & Rae, 2006). The plan was initially focused on sending experts, instructors and advisors to train the local personnel, but later changed to bringing students into the country (Chiou,

2017). The Plan initially consisted of seven member states—Australia, Canada, India, Pakistan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom—and was later extended to 28 members including non-Commonwealth countries and countries belonging to regional groupings such as ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations). The Colombo Plan was generally recognised as the educational aid programme which brought Asian students to study in the host country (Tarling, 2004). Under the agreement, tuition fees of the Colombo Plan students were paid in full or substantially subsidised in the forms of scholarship or fellowship terms agreed between the sending and receiving countries (Collins, 2006). Those education aids were intended to equip students with the skills and knowledge that could assist the economic, social and educational development in their home countries. According to Tarling (2004), the sponsored students needed to return home upon completion of their studies to make a positive contribution to the local society. Therefore, only a small number of the international students benefitting from the Colombo Plan were able to settle in the host countries like New Zealand permanently. Upon completion of their studies, some international students migrated to the host countries through other migration streams like family reunions or marrying the local residents (Tarling, 2004). During the first 10 years, the Colombo Plan brought about 900 students to New Zealand, notably to study engineering, agriculture, health, technical, and general education. Others studied at universities in arts and science courses (McLintock, 2009).

1.2.2.2 Marketisation of education

The provision of subsidised education to overseas students was later noticed as an unnecessary financial burden by most host countries. Especially when overseas students were prepared to pay for it, education, like many other commodities, could be traded in exchange for revenue generation (Ahern, 2009). As a result, the concept of "commercialising educational services" had become widespread throughout the world. Many countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand started the process of marketisation of the education industry (Martens &

Starke, 2008). The New Zealand Education Act 1989 was enacted, allowing educational institutions to charge international students education fees which they considered appropriate (Tarling, 2004). This shift transformed international education from a taxpayer-subsidized social activity to a market-driven profitable industry (Naidoo, 2007). Since then, New Zealand began recruiting international students from key source markets in the world. By charging international students studying fees which were generally three to five times higher than that of domestic students (Collier, 2021), international education became one of the main export industries for New Zealand.

In 2003, international education contributed 2 billion dollars to the local economy (Education New Zealand, 2003). After more than a decade's development, the economic value of international education reached 5.23 billion dollars in 2019, a 6% increase from $4.94 billion in 2018, making it the country's fifth largest export industry (Education New Zealand, 2020). Moreover, the New Zealand Government took an active role in fostering the export education sector. The measures included funding some marketing strategies to recruit students worldwide and the launch of the Code of Practice on pastoral care (Ministry of Education, 2001) to improve international students' study and life experience in the country. The Code set out the standard and regulations to ensure the recruitment of international students was done ethically and responsibly, the information supplied to students was comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date, and the particular needs of international students were recognised (Immigration New Zealand, 2016). In 2021, the New Zealand Government released a new Code of Practice for the pastoral care of tertiary and international learners. Covering both domestic and international tertiary students, the new code developed a system of support for the wellbeing and safety of domestic tertiary and international learners, through one set of clear rules and expectations for providers (Tertiary Education Commission, July 2021).

1.2.2.3 Recent developments

New Zealand education providers experienced a rapid rise in their international student enrolments from 2000 to 2003, which was driven primarily by the interests of Chinese students (Ministry of Education, 2009). As one of the first Western countries to permit open access to student visas by Chinese nationals, New Zealand's international education industry market share rose from 0.4% in 2000, to 1.7% in 2010, then dropped down to 1% in 2019 among the main English-speaking destination countries (see Figure 1.1).

The enrolment trends in New Zealand's international education had fluctuated in recent decades. From a peak of 122,625 in 2003, the number of international fee-paying students plummeted to 89,535 in 2008 due to a phenomenal decrease in the number of students from China. There was a subsequent 9% recovery to 97,880 enrolments in 2010, benefiting from the marginal growth of student numbers in the Private Training Establishments (PTE) institutions, particularly English language schools (Ministry of Education, 2011). However, in 2012 a sharp 6% decrease in international student enrolments was recorded (See Table 1.1), which was partially due to the consequences of the Christchurch earthquake in 2011 and the rising value of the New Zealand dollar (Ministry of Education, 2013). There was a further decline in international student numbers to 89,140 in 2013 when some private institutions collapsed, causing a 10% decline in the PTE group (ICEF Monitor, 2013). Later on, the New Zealand government launched a range of marketing strategies to successfully enhance the awareness of the New Zealand brand in key education markets (O'Malley, 2018). Consequently, the international enrolment numbers bounced back in the following years reaching a peak of 131,609 in 2016 and were then stabilised at 115,713 in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic settled in (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.1

Market Share of Number of Foreign Students in Tertiary Education (2000, 2010 and 2019)
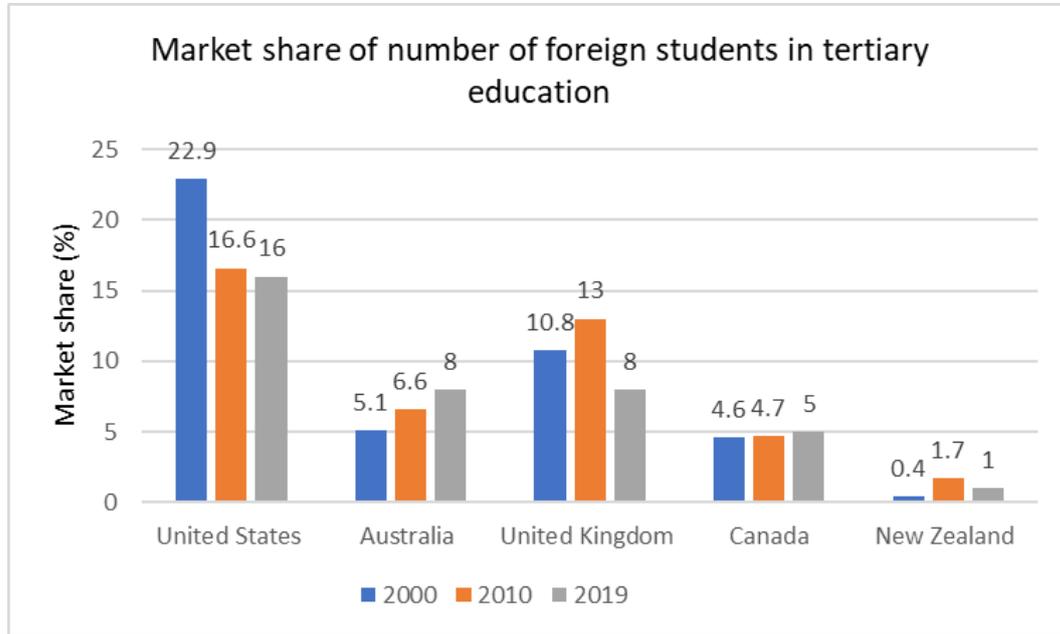
Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education (2013); OECD iLibrary (2021)

Figure 1.2

Total International Student Enrolments 2013 To 2020
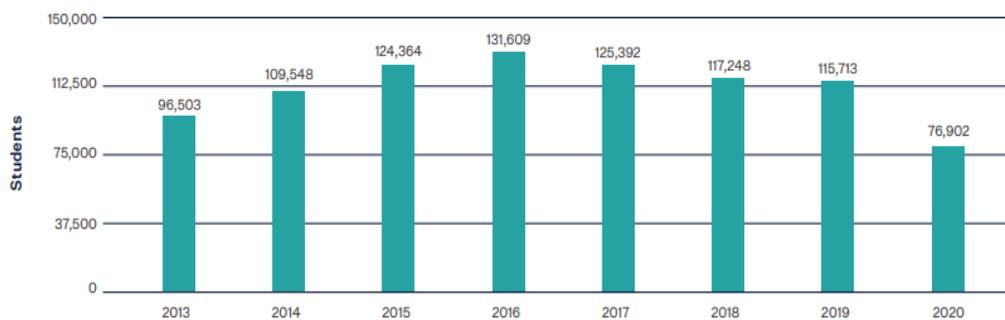
Source: Education New Zealand (November 2021)

Table 1.1

Number Of International Fee-Paying Students 2003-2021

Provider type	2003	2008	2010	2012	2013	2016	2019	2021
Schools (Primary & Secondary)	20,935	15,660	16,065	15,450	15,750	19,200	23,575	6,385
Tertiary education organisations (Government-funded)								
Universities	24,950	18,940	19,030	18,355	18,660	21,310	28,150	14,440
Polytechnics	13,190	10,470	11,570	12,150	11,715	19,390	18,090	7,170
Private training establishments	10,805	8,320	10,700	11,690	11,270	16,420	10,070	5,810
Non-government funded tertiary providers								
Private training establishments	50,065	33,885	37,690	30,505	28,105	45,765	30,135	3,880
Subsidiary providers	4,415	2,875	3,465	4,090	4,330	4,105	1,380	160
Totals	122,625	89,535	97,880	91,595	89,140	131,609	115,770	37,620

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education (2022)

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 changed the landscape of the global education industry, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces impacted 94% of the world's student population (United Nations, 2022). As a result, New Zealand's international education sector came to a halt in early 2020 (Education New Zealand, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education (August 2022), the number of international students decreased by 11% between 2019 and 2020 with the border closed, and then declined by a further 25% between 2020 and 2021. This resulted in the number of international students declining by around a third (a decrease of 17,890 students) between 2019 and 2021 (See Figure 1.3). With the pandemic situation continuing the international students' enrolment number further fell to a historical low of 37,620 in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2022), and its associated revenue was down to around $3 billion (Education New Zealand, 2022).

Figure 1.3

International Student Enrolments by Provider Group (2013-2021)
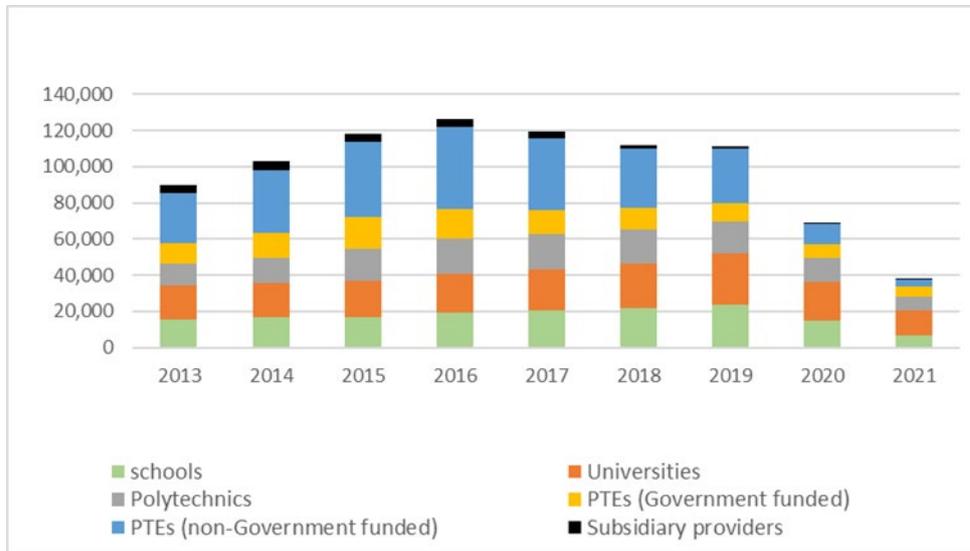
 Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education (2021a), Ministry of Education (August 2022)

1.2.3 New Zealand as an ideal destination for education and migration

International students' perceptions of New Zealand as an ideal destination country have evolved in recent decades. The following section presents key factors influencing international students' decision-making process and some recent changes in their perceptions.

1.2.3.1   Key determinants

Education New Zealand's (2021) survey indicated that during the period of 2019 to 2021, most international students chose New Zealand as their first choice destination when considering overseas study. In the previous research commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that 62% of the students said New Zealand was their first choice as a study destination. The most

important factors in selecting New Zealand were cited as the English-speaking environment, safety, the international recognition of New Zealand qualifications, the quality of education and cost. Moderately important were factors including the "Kiwi experience," i.e., natural beauty and scenery, New Zealand lifestyle and culture, travel and adventure (p.7). The rate surged to 82% in 2021, with more than eight in ten students who were studying or had recently been studying with a New Zealand education provider reporting that New Zealand was their first choice of country for international study (Education New Zealand, 2021).

The economic element was the next important aspect when deciding to come to New Zealand, because the affordability and cost of studying abroad had always been important considerations for international students looking to study in the main English-speaking countries (Education New Zealand, August 2022; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Compared to other popular destinations, New Zealand was considered a "good value for money" due to the low value of the New Zealand dollar in the early 2000s (Chiou, 2017). A survey on Australian and New Zealand international students found the most notable change in decision-making factors for prospective students between 2020 and 2022 was the growth in the importance of affordability, with 62% of respondents in 2022 placing it in their top five considerations compared to 48% in 2020 (QS, 2022). This reflected the economic challenges resulting from the pandemic, with some prospective students no longer having the same level of financial security they once did.

There were several other social, cultural and political factors influencing international students' decision to choose New Zealand as their studying and living destination (Education New Zealand, 2021). Verbik and Lasanowski's (2007) research found that for students from Asia and the South Pacific, New Zealand was particularly appealing because of the general perception that it was politically stable, and a safe place to study. According to Martens and Starke (2008), there was a combination of factors attracting international students to choose New Zealand, such as its image as a clean, green, and safe country that also offered comparatively

inexpensive high-quality education. Those reassuring images helped New Zealand position itself as an attractive study destination for many overseas students and their parents (Morrish & Lee, 2011).

Some other key drivers of international students deciding to come to New Zealand included its relaxed academic entry requirements compared with other destination countries like the UK, the U.S.A and Australia (Ward & Masgoret, 2004), the relative ease in acquiring a student visa, immigration opportunities, making new friends, learning about a different culture (Ho et al., 2007), enjoying the social aspects of the country that included safety, lifestyle, and the economic viability like scholarships to offset some of the study costs (Morrish & Lee, 2011). Meanwhile, migration opportunities, especially the pathway to obtaining permanent residency in New Zealand upon completion of the study, were also important factors motivating international students to study in New Zealand (Wilkinson et al., 2010).

1.2.3.2   The recent shift of focus

There were some recent changes in students' perceptions when choosing New Zealand as their study destination. The most prominent ones were career and employment opportunities. Education New Zealand's (2021) survey result showed that "the right to work in New Zealand once their studies are complete" (p. 38) became the most important aspect when deciding to come to New Zealand. Inclusion (meaning opportunities to live in a society that is welcoming and inclusive) was ranked as the second most important reason. Meanwhile, other factors like New Zealand's reputation as a safe country and its pleasant natural environment remained the same. The survey results indicated that while New Zealand continued to be viewed as an attractive study destination, there was a shift of focus from cultural consideration (experiencing western lifestyle) to the practical components (employment, jobs, and policy setting) under international students' considerations.

Moreover, the possibility of permanently settling down in New Zealand had been increasingly considered by international students. The previous study by Ward

and Masgoret (2004) revealed that 53% of students surveyed planned to remain in New Zealand upon completion of their study, with 42% of them anticipating applying for New Zealand residency. This ratio substantially increased to 66% in the survey by Education New Zealand (2021). The survey found 66% of international students at different stages of their study said the pathway to a New Zealand Resident Visa was an important part of their future plan. According to Akbari and MacDonald (2014), international graduates were young, with advanced English language skills, and fully recognised qualifications. They had locally relevant professional training and a high degree of acculturation. Those qualities were frequently cited as important calibres for immigrants settling down in the host countries. The trend of more international students seeking to settle down permanently has implications for New Zealand's education-related immigration policy, which will be presented in the following section.

1.2.4 New Zealand's policy setting

This section introduces the development of policies linking study, work and migration in New Zealand, with the purpose of examining how those policies interweaved with each other and caused an impact on international students' trajectory in New Zealand. It delves into the details of in- and after-study work rights, the two-step migration pathway of study to work and work to residence, and the skill migration stream that most international students followed when pursuing their migratory goals.

1.2.4.1   Work rights for international students

The right to work during and after study played an important role when international students decided where to embark on their study journey (Education New Zealand, 2021). Globally, New Zealand was one of the few study destinations that gave international students access to work during and after study (Chiou, 2014). According to Immigration New Zealand, students studying certain programmes were

allowed to work part-time for up to 20 hours a week and full-time during public holidays. Meanwhile, international students were given a one to three years of Post Study Work Visa[1] if they completed an acceptable qualification in New Zealand (Immigration New Zealand, 2022b). Under this visa, international graduates were allowed to work for any employer in most industries[2]. Those in- and post-study work rights were interrelated and influenced the international students' mobility flow and patterns. A survey by Universities New Zealand (2021) indicated that the policy granting international students work rights while studying increased the likelihood of them remaining to work in New Zealand after graduating because working in their study-related fields enabled international students to gain some work experience in the local labour market and earn extra points when applying for their permanent residence after the completion of their study (Wilkinson et al., 2010). In addition, students studying NZQA level 9 or 10 qualifications, or level 7 or 8 qualifications that were included on the Long-Term Skill Shortage List[3] can bring their spouses to New Zealand with adequate work rights (Immigration New Zealand, 2018). This was particularly appealing to mature students who wanted to be with their immediate family while studying overseas. As a result, those benefits covered by the study-related work policies played a major role in attracting international students to New Zealand since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Wilkinson et al., 2010).

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[1] Post-Study Work Visas are issued to international students who have completed courses of study at approved providers and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) levels. Prior to November 2018, post-study work visas were issued for 12 months as "job search visas" with no restrictions on occupation, employer or region of employment or for two years as "employer-assisted" when applicants had employment in an area related to their field of study. Since November 2018, all post-study work visas are issued without any restrictions on the region or occupation of employment and no employer assistance is required. Post-study work visas are now issued for one, two or three years depending on the region and the course of study that has been completed. Visa holders can also sponsor their partners and children for the duration of their visa.

[2] International students cannot provide commercial sexual services or operate or invest in a business that does so.

[3] The Long-Term Skill Shortage List (LTSSL) is a list of skilled occupations that are in sustained shortage all over New Zealand. If their occupation falls in the category, applicants can claim bonus points when applying for the New Zealand permanent residence.

1.2.4.2 New Zealand's two-step migration pathway

As one of the second-tier "evolving destinations" of immigrant-receiving countries, New Zealand developed direct pathways for international students to become migrants (Robertson, 2013, p. 15). In 2002, significant policy changes were introduced impacting principal immigration streams in New Zealand including skilled migration. With bonus points being offered to applicants who had skills in specified fields, had a job offer outside Auckland and, more importantly, held a New Zealand qualification, the two-step migration began to take shape (Butcher, 2004).

Under the pathway framework, international students, as potential immigrants came first on temporary visas to study and then sought to move to permanent status after securing a job offer in their field of education (Gregory, 2015). The two-step migration pathway gave former international students realisable potential to be selected as skilled migrants (Chiou, 2017). According to the historical record, one in five international students had successfully transitioned to residents through this pathway in the past (Department of Labour, 2010). Since 2005, the pathway to New Zealand residence, under the policy link between international education and skilled migration, became a normal practice for many international students when pursuing residency after completion of their tertiary study in New Zealand (Chiou, 2014).

Since then, international students' transition from study to work and work to permanent residence had been greatly facilitated under this two-step pathway. Moreover, the significant contributor to success in obtaining New Zealand residency was "prior presence" in New Zealand (Simon-Kumar, 2015, p. 1183). Those prior presences can be in various forms, ranging from a New Zealand qualification, previous work experience, or most importantly, a valid local job offer in the field of their tertiary qualification (Bedford, 2006). Therefore, some international students became cautious when choosing their study programme in an attempt to gain relevant points when applying for their residency in New Zealand.

The chronological diagram (see Figure 1.4) summarises the history and key changes in New Zealand's two-step migration policies since 1991 when the bridging of education and migration began to take shape. Since then, those study, work and migration policies had undergone several overhauls and was adjusted on a frequent basis. Every change in the policies announced by the New Zealand government had a profound impact on international students' post-academic transition in New Zealand (Chiou, 2014).

Figure 1.4

New Zealand's Two-Step Migration Policies (1991-2021)

Year	
1991	• A *points system* was introduced to quantify the selection criteria for skilled migration applicants, based on their individual characteristics such as age, education, business, profession, and assets.
2002	• The *work-to-residence* **policy** was introduced in New Zealand. • *Two-step migration* began to form as the key pathway from temporary status to permanent residence.
2003	• The **SMC** (Skill Migrant Category) programme was implemented. • A job offer or current skilled employment *is not necessary* to obtain residency. • International students have potential to secure *140 points* to qualify for permanent residency.
2008	• Policy changes removed migration incentives away from *shorter-term and lower level qualifications*, and to raise the threshold fo*r* recognised *New Zealand qualifications*.
2013	• *Part-time work rights* were given to international students enrolled in certain programmes • *Graduate Work Experience visa* allowed former international students to obtain practical work experience suitable to their course or qualification.
2018	• *Major changes* to post-study work rights for international students were implemented: • 1. *Remove* the employer-assisted post-study work visas at all levels; • 2. Provide a **one to** *three-year post-study open work visa* for degree Level 7 or above qualifications.
2021	A new *one-off* residence visa was announced in 2021 benefiting some post-study work visa holders, if they: • have been in New Zealand on 29 September 2021, and • be on an eligible visa on 29 September 2021

Source adapted from: Immigration New Zealand (2018, 2022), Ministry of Business (2016), Stevens (2013), Bedford et al. (2010)

1.2.4.3   The Skill Migrant Category (SMC) programme

The SMC[4] programme introduced in 2003 was an integral part of the two-step migration pathway that most international students followed when applying for residency in New Zealand (Chiou, 2014). The aim of the programme was to select potential migrants through a points system which consisted of a two-stage "by invitation" process and a "pass mark" mechanism (p. 73). The introduction of a "by invitation" process shifted the skilled migration programme from the passive acceptance of residence applications to the active selection of skilled migrants (Bedford et al., 2010, p. 2). And the pass mark system ensured potential migrants' permanent residency was granted on a selected basis. According to Immigration New Zealand (2009), under the SMC stream, the first step to initiating the process was for applicants to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). Applicants needed to be qualified above a pre-set level of points to enter a selection pool. The selection began with applicants achieving the highest points since they would apparently had the most to offer New Zealand economically and socially (Beaglehole, 2013). Although the selection system allowed more flexibility when it came to transitioning to the residence from temporary permits of work or study (Bedford et al., 2010), Facchini and Lodigiani (2014) argued that due to more emphasis being placed on applicants' occupational background, the New Zealand immigration system had evolved into a model where entry was granted on the basis of very short-term labour market considerations. There was little attention paid to the long-term consequences of immigration policy.

Education and skilled employment were the two most important factors leading to the success of student migrants' New Zealand residency applications (Chiou, 2014). Under the scoring system of the SMC programme, the New Zealand

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[4] The Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) programme is the way skilled migrants qualify to gain Permanent Residence (PR) in New Zealand. It is a points system based on factors such as age, work experience, education qualifications, and an offer of skilled employment. Applicants must also be aged 55 or under, and meet English language, health, and character requirements.

study experience benefited international students by being awarded a number of bonus points[5] when applying for New Zealand residency. Applicants could earn 10 to 15 extra points from their previous qualifications gained in New Zealand. Similarly, applicants with a job offer of skilled employment in New Zealand or relevant skilled work experience gained in New Zealand[6] were given more points (Immigration New Zealand, 2022a). However, since the introduction of the SMC points system, its thresholds in different aspects had been constantly raised. In 2016, under the New Zealand government's intent to reduce the total number of people who would be awarded residency, the automatic selection threshold for residence under the SMC stream was raised from 140 to 160 points and a new formal English language test was introduced (KPMG, 2016, October). In 2021, the median wage that an SMC residency applicant needed to earn increased from $25.5 to $27 per hour — an abrupt increase of 5.8% within one year compared to a normal 2-2.5% annual increase (Pathwaysnz, 2020). Those changes not only impacted applicants in "lower skilled" roles from which most international graduates started their employment (Universities New Zealand, 2021) but also made it difficult for employers to support student migrants' temporary work visa applications on a more frequent basis. In addition, depending on the role offered and the work visa category, employers would have to regularly re-advertise the role to show that there was no suitable New Zealand replacement for those positions (KPMG, 2016, October). As a result, the constant changes in SMC requirements became a large hurdle for international students pursuing migration in New Zealand.

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[5] Former students are eligible for various bonus points if they have completed full-time study of a required length and obtained a recognised New Zealand qualification, ranging from 10-15 points.

[6] Various bonus points are also available to applicants if the relevant working experience was 1) in New Zealand; 2) in an identified future growth area; or 3) in an area of absolute skills shortage.

1.2.5 Chinese international students

This section provides an overview of Chinese students' mobility data in New Zealand and worldwide. Through the statistics it is concluded that, although they are the largest group of international students worldwide, Chinese students' transition to the host labour market and their settlement experience in the host country do not match their expectations. The information serves as a practical ground for more in-depth discussions in the following chapters of the current research.

1.2.5.1　　Chinese students worldwide

China was the number one source country of international students in many countries. Heng (2018) stated that students from China formed the largest proportion of international students worldwide and were the top source for institutions in traditional destinations like the USA, the UK and Australia. According to Huang (2003), since 1993, after the Chinese government encouraged the education sector to engage more with western schools to acquire knowledge to support the country's national growth goals, the number of Chinese students studying abroad had steadily increased. In 2019, among the 6.1 million international students all over the world, 703,500 or 11% of the total foreign student population were from mainland China (UNESCO, 2019).

Despite many Chinese students intending to enter the host labour market upon completion of studies in foreign countries, there was a decreasing trend for them to stay longer in the host countries. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education (2021), since the start of the 1978 reforms and opening-up policies, the total number of Chinese students who had studied abroad was over 6.5 million. The return rate of overseas Chinese students reached above 86% in 2019 compared to 78% in previous years (China Daily, 2019, January 15; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2021). This means only less than one-fourth of Chinese students managed to stay in the host countries after their overseas studies, whilst the majority of them returned home.

1.2.5.2   Chinese students in New Zealand

In New Zealand, the largest source of international students studying in the tertiary sector was China. Taking 2019 as an example, among the 87,195 international students approved to study in tertiary institutions in New Zealand, 25,745 of them were from China. This accounted for 29% of all international tertiary students enrolled to study in New Zealand (Immigration New Zealand, 2019). It was found that Chinese students came to study in New Zealand with high expectations of obtaining educational qualifications, seeking job employment and permanent residence (Chiou, 2014). However, in general, they lacked confidence in their future in New Zealand, especially the employment outlook after graduation from their studies and the possibility of obtaining permanent residence (Ho et al., 2007).

Most Chinese graduates left New Zealand after their studies. According to the Ministry of Business (2018), statistics on the 2011/12 cohort of full-fee paying international students on their visa pathways showed that 60% of Chinese students were transitioned to a work visa at the end of their final student visa. Five years later, only 36% of them had obtained a resident visa and 62% had left New Zealand (p. 36). According to Education New Zealand (2021), the transition rates from student visa to work visa and resident visa of Chinese students were lower than their Indian student counterparts. The implication was that Chinese graduates had more difficulties transitioning to both work and residency in New Zealand. Meanwhile, Chinese students tended to have a less positive perception of whether their New Zealand qualification could lead to full-time work in their area of study. Once obtaining employment in New Zealand, they expressed dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement opportunities and disappointment with a poor work-life balance (Dyer & Lu, 2010). These findings indicated that although the majority of Chinese students expected their educational experiences could effectively contribute to their employment and migration outcomes in the host country, their actual encounter differed greatly.

1.3 Rationale of the study

The researcher's prior study and work experiences in New Zealand as an international tertiary graduate provided a unique grounding for the current study. In 2014, the researcher came to New Zealand from China to study a master's degree programme at Massey University in Wellington. Upon graduation, she began job-searching under the one-year open work visa. Throughout the journey, the researcher encountered challenges and obstacles when seeking employment, adapting to the workplace culture and pursuing residency. Some challenges she faced included employer bias, deskilling, exploitation, and gender discrimination. After starting her job as an international student advisor in a tertiary institution in New Zealand, the researcher had frequent interactions with Chinese students who came to New Zealand for tertiary study, and some had been through similar challenges as the researcher. Her experience put the researcher in a favourable position to reflect on her previous journey when counselling the students and guiding them through the study-to-work journey. It also motivated her to delve deeper into the problems encountered by Chinese graduates in their transition to New Zealand. The same cultural background and life experiences helped the researcher to better understand the research participants because the stories and responses shared by them are in many cases "deeply personal and largely similar to each other" (Butcher, 2002, p. 9). This perspective of an "insider", not an "outsider", made the research more persuasive.

1.4 Research questions

There was a significant amount of study surrounding the investigation, from the receiving countries' perspective, of how the flows of skills and knowledge of talents impacted the social and economic status of both sides (Goss & Lindquist, 1995). Substantial research was undertaken to investigate international students' motivations for studying overseas, the potential for migration after completing their studies and their rights and aspirations for citizenship (Robertson, 2013). In the New

Zealand context, many studies were focused on aspects like policy critiques including the shift from the Colombo Plan to a market approach (Tarling, 2004), the often-contradictory connections between international education and immigration policy (Butcher, 2004), and the governmental initiatives that have been used to manage the export education industry (Lewis, 2004, 2005). Meanwhile, areas like the experience of international students during their stay in New Zealand (Butcher & McGrath, 2004; Collins, 2004; Joseph, 2016), their re-entry challenges to the origin countries (Butcher et al., 2008), and some critical issues around the provision of pastoral care for international students (Lewis, 2005; Sawir et al., 2009) were also identified.

However, there was no existing in-depth research exploring the connection between student migrants' previous expectations of their post-study movement and their experience in the host country, especially in the context of Chinese tertiary graduates' post-study movement in New Zealand. Little was yet known about Chinese graduates' pathways into, and contributions to, the New Zealand workforce (Ho et al., 2007) and society as a whole. Although there was much hearsay and heated media disclosure of Chinese (graduate) students' being disadvantaged at their post-study transition stage in New Zealand (nzhougarden, 2018, October 13 ; Skykiwi, 2017, August 28), their experiences in the labour market, workplace and wider community were under-explored.

This study fills in the research gap by exploring the expectations and experience of Chinese tertiary graduates' post-study transition in New Zealand from the student migrants' perspective. Drawing on data from 25 semi-structured interviews, the study investigated Chinese graduates' motivations and expectations before they embarked on their study journey and the experience in New Zealand. The ultimate purpose of this study is to find out what challenges and difficulties Chinese graduates faced when they searched for employment, adapted to the workplace and pursued migratory status in the host country. Thus, the overarching research questions for this research project are:

RQ1:   *What were the expectations of Chinese tertiary graduates on gaining employment and residency before coming to New Zealand and to what extent were they met or unmet?*

RQ2:   *What were the challenges impacting their transition from education to employment in New Zealand and how did they tackle these challenges?*

RQ3:   *What was their post-study migration plan and how did it evolve?*

1.5 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides the situational contexts and outlines the needs for and significance of the study, the rationale of the study, and the research questions.

Chapter 2 reviews the previous scholarly work pertaining to international education and migration and the theoretical framework. The chapter first reviews international students' motivations and expectations for mobility and migration, challenges faced by student migrants, their associated strategies, the staying or returning determinants, and the female graduates' unique adaptation approaches. It then presents the theoretical frameworks from three aspects: motivational and expectancy-value theories, social network and strength of weak ties theories, and structuration theory.

Chapter 3 presents the research design of this study. It explains and justifies why the qualitative research method is most suitable for the current study and how the participants were selected for the research. The chapter discusses the research data collection procedure and data analysis process. The validity of the study and ethical issues are also outlined in the chapter.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. It summarises six themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews: (1) Chinese students' decision-making process, (2) expectations to employment and migration, (3) employment-seeking challenges, (4) workplace communication barriers, (5) gender differences, and (6) determinants of staying or returning. This chapter then delves deeper into those themes and locates 17 subthemes relating to their expectations, employment, and workplace adaptation.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature. Through the lens of motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, the research result indicates that Chinese students chose New Zealand as their destination country based

on the belief that studying and working in this country would contribute to their future success in both employment and migration. Due to the unrealistic expectations resulting from misinformation about the host country, the evolving status of their life course, and the unstable policy settings around student migrants, some Chinese graduates found their post-study transition experiences were vastly different from what they expected. This chapter also discusses Chinese graduates' employment-seeking challenges and workplace communication hurdles through the lenses of strong and weak ties in the social network theory and structuration theory. Based on the push-pull and its reverse models, this chapter explains Chinese graduates' staying or returning determinants and the growing trend of migrating to a third country. Lastly, based on the analytical framework of social systems (like the extra familial obligations and expectations from parents), the disadvantages facing Chinese female graduates and their coping strategies are also discussed.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by outlining the major findings of the study. The implications of the current research are also presented in the chapter with regard to key stakeholders. The research limitations and future research directions are discussed at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines both global and New Zealand-based literature pertaining to international education and migration. Scholarly literature on the following aspects is reviewed: migrants' decision-making process, international students' evolving motivations and expectations on migration, the education-migration nexus, obstacles around student migrants' post-study movement, tactics and strategies that were employed to tackle those challenges, factors impacting student migrants' decision on either staying or returning, and female student migrants' unique expectations and experience. Earlier studies in the education and migration fields provided the necessary context to understand the positioning of the current study.

The review of the literature indicated that distinct from general migrants, international student migrants had different motivations and expectations when embarking on their overseas study journey. Their focuses were mainly on education and migration. However, the lack of proper understanding of actual prospects in the host country, misleading information received prior to departure and over-reliance on their close social network had resulted in the discrepancy between their expectations and the post-academic transition in the host labour market. In addition, student migrants had experienced similar challenges as other migrants, like communication barriers, deskilling, exploitation, bias and discrimination. Those who were able to implement strategies and specific tactics, developed employability attributes, and managed to secure a successful outcome in pursuing a desired trajectory in the host country.

The chapter then outlines the theoretical framework for the current study. An integrated framework consisting of motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, social network theory and strength of weak ties theory, and structuration theory was applied to explain the dynamic process of student migrants' post-academic transition in the host country. In particular, the expectancy-value theory facilitated the understanding of key catalysts that drove student migrants, as a special group of migrants deciding to stay in the host country. The strength of weak ties theory was a useful lens to examine the process of how student migrants mobilised the resources

in their social network when searching for jobs. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory helped to explain student migrants' situation and strategies when adapting to the host environment.

2.1 Motivation and expectations

Migrants were motivated to move to a new country due to complex and multifaceted reasons (Gillespie et al., 2021). Migrants' motivations were not limited to the influence of macro social and political factors but were also deeply connected to their personal and psychological needs. Moreover, student migrants, as a special group of labour migrants, had different motivations to move to another country. Their decision-making process is explored further in this section. To further the understanding of migrants' expectations of their host countries, it is necessary to distinguish the intrinsic factors of their motivations to migrate in the first place because migrants' motivations ultimately inform their expectations of their personal migration trajectory.

2.1.1 Migrants' complex motivations to move

Previous migration studies focused on the complex social, economic, political and cultural factors impacting migrants' decision to move (Agbola & Acupan, 2010; Boneva et al., 1997; Haug, 2008; Renaud et al., 2011). Pedersen et al.'s (2008) study of migration into the European Union found that cultural and historic ties were strongly linked to destination choice. When potential migrants considered destination countries, one of the first criteria they use was cultural similarity (Tabor et al., 2015). For example, Australians seeking to move to larger economies chose destination countries such as the UK and the USA. In this way, migrants can integrate quicker and better into the host society. There was a social fabric within which the migration decision-making process was embedded. Salerno's (2016) study on migrants' decision-making in a frontier landscape suggested that social ties and social networks drove both immobilities and anticipated migration. Meanwhile, the political settings in sending and receiving countries were also an important structural factor in

migration decisions (Joly, 2000). In their research on the Romanian migrants in Spain and Spanish migrants in Norway, Bygnes and Flipo (2017) found a common emphasis that political dissatisfaction greatly influenced the participants' decision to migrate.

The economic migration theory suggested that reasons for international moves were mainly financially related (Boyle, 2009). From the neoclassical macro-level perspective, migration was a part of economic development (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Massey (2012) further elaborated that maximisation of lifetime earnings inspired international migration. For instance, individuals considered the wages they can expect to earn locally and compared them to what they anticipate earning at various destinations, both domestic and international. After the comparison, some would go to the locations that offered the highest lifetime returns for their labour. As a result, there were aggregate labour flows from low-wage to high-wage areas. Therefore, immigrants aspired to permanent settlement and would continue departing until wage differentials effectively disappeared. However, there was ample evidence to show that migrants also chose to leave their country of origin due to other non-economic reasons (Carr et al., 2005). These sets of cultural, social, and political factors were not the only catalysts for migrants to uproot their original lives completely.

There were also personal and familial attributes perpetuating through their decision-making process. Although migration decisions were often made by household members together and for the wellbeing of the family as a whole, it was also argued that households often did not migrate together, but rather sent one or more household members off as migrants (Mincer, 1978). Once their migration status was secured, the rest of the family would follow and reunite with those members who arrived earlier in the host country (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). The strategy thus helped to maximise the chance of success in their migration outcomes. This migration pattern was explored by Stark and Bloom's (1985) New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) model at meso-level. According to Faist (2000), migration theories were classified into micro, meso and macro levels. Micro-level theories focused on individual migration decisions, whereas macro-level theories looked at aggregate migration trends and analysed these trends with macro-level explanations. The meso-level was in between the micro and macro levels, e.g., at the household or community

level and explained both causes and perpetuation of migration (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). In comparison to the microeconomic scheme, that stipulated individual rational actors determining to migrate due to a cost-benefit calculation on expectation towards a positive net return, the NELM model indicated that migration decisions were not just made by isolated individual actors, but by larger units of related people, typically families or households, in which people acted collectively not only to maximise expected incomes but also to minimise risks and to loosen constraints associated with a variety of market failures (Massey et al., 1993).

2.1.2 *International students' evolving motivation and expectation*

Similar to general migrants, international student migrants had equally complex mobility motivations but their intentions to move were more straightforward. In general, international student migrants were primarily driven by the possibilities of upward mobility facilitated by their overseas qualifications (Robertson et al., 2018). In comparison to other migrants who migrated for a myriad of reasons, international student migrants' focus and reasons were mainly on education and the rewards associated with it (Findlay et al., 2012). According to Beech (2018), international students' motivation to move and study overseas was to have the ability to differentiate themselves from their peer competitors in the labour market and to increase the likelihood of economic returns on education. As Brooks and Waters (2011) explained, international education was a symbol "embodying various cosmopolitan traits" (p. 59) that afforded membership in the new transnational migrant class. Overseas education provided the opportunity in which international social and cultural capital was readily transferable to economic capital (Beech, 2018).

Although the initial intention to study overseas was academic and learning-oriented, previous literature showed that students who chose to study abroad were also motivated by the benefits that accompany an overseas degree, such as employment, lifestyle, and permanent status in the host country (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; King & Sondhi, 2016). Some existing research also linked motivations to study abroad with the desire for social and cultural capital accumulation, the end goal of which was the reproduction of existing socio-economic

status and further upward social mobility (King & Sondhi, 2016). Working while studying, shifting to employment upon graduation, and looking for employment abroad in order to earn a better salary were key reasons for how mobility takes place for international students (Raghuram, 2013).

Findlay et al. (2012) also observed that simply by being "different" international students saw themselves as achieving "distinction" through mobility. By choosing to go a "step further" than their peers – both geographically and symbolically - these students viewed their degree abroad as a differentiation from their stay-at-home peers (p. 129). However, some other scholars argued that it is not just social distinction that drove international students' mobility, but also a "life-course" difference whereby a past self was compared to a present and future self" that motivated them to move (Prazeres, 2018, p. 8). In some international students' minds, studying abroad was less an attempt to improve one's status in society, but rather an opportunity to test or discover oneself in unfamiliar surroundings (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). By analysing a group of physicians' emigration intentions, Dohlman et al. (2019) found that factors related to self-actualisation, such as the desire for professional development through learning and training opportunities were also major drivers of studying abroad decisions.

For some other international students, the primary intention was to gain residency or citizenship status in the host country and education was deemed as the best way to achieve this goal (Dentakos et al., 2017). However, the decision to migrate was a complex process that may change over time. Although they were categorised as temporary migrants when embarking on overseas study, due to the prior determination of pursuing a permanent residency, this group of international students was also considered permanent migrants in process, as opposed to typical, temporary migrants (Kim, 2001). When considering core benefits, students were not "buying degrees" through their studies; they were buying the benefits that a degree can provide (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003, p. 319). Among those beneficiary factors, employment prospect ranked high within international students' initial expectations.

The 2014 International Student Barometer (ISB) survey showed that being employable was a critical driver for both current and prospective international

students. The ability to make a smooth transition to work upon graduation was what international students expected most from their choice of overseas study experience at a certain Higher Education Institution (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). A recent online survey about international students' experience in New Zealand also reported that the right to work in New Zealand once their studies completed was rated as the most important decision-making factor among the survey respondents, with nearly four in five (78%) rating it as very or extremely important (Education New Zealand, 2021). Those survey results indicated that international students generally expected a positive employment outcome as a return on investment from their foreign education experience. However, the matching of international students' expectations with their actual employment outcomes was still far apart and needed to be improved. A recent survey by Education New Zealand (2021) showed that finding job opportunities related to their study area was not easy for many international students, with nearly 30% of the respondents rating their experience of gaining employment as poor.

Despite the popular narrative of student migrants' decision to migrate being solely based on their education pathway, another view was that international students decided to migrate under their familial obligations, instead of being individual actors who determined and dictated the migration decision (Chen, 2017). According to Kwak (2013), education migration was a socially and politically-driven aspect of and pathway to labour migration. Education migration had two distinct pathways: "immigration for education" and "education for immigration" (Robertson, 2013). In the former scenario, immigration was conceptualised in relation to household strategies of capital accumulation (Huang & Yeoh, 2011; Waters, 2005). Upwardly mobile families arranged the immigration of the entire household or particular family members to migrate, for children to access Western education. Students usually had the intention to return to their country of origin once the education goal was achieved (Robertson, 2013). While education for immigration was often framed in terms of individuals' strategies and narratives (Baas, 2012), under which, usually young and single students arrived alone in the host country to undertake education with permanent residency as their major motivation. However, this categorisation of student migrants ignored the fact that in the "education for migration" context, some adult student-migrants who arrived and studied individually in order to gain

residency or work permits also had family strategies behind them (Robertson, 2013). In her research, it was found that some post-graduate level students were normally accompanied by their spouses and children when seeking to study overseas. Their family members also had influence over those students' migration journey. Meanwhile, throughout their migration journey, some young international students' statuses were evolving, which also caused the changes of their migration patterns within these two paradigms (Robertson, 2013, p. 23)

International student migrants had the same complex decision-making process as general migrants did. There were some earlier quantitative studies focused on identifying factors considered by students when making their decisions (Baruch et al., 2007; Findlay, 2011), and measuring the outcomes of students' decisions to migrate after their academic studies (Lu & Hou, 2015). Those factors mainly stemmed from the macro-level like educational, economic, geographic and inclusion elements. Some qualitative research contributed to this area of study by exploring the interplay of micro-level factors when students made decisions about migration (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Geddie, 2013). Although there was some consensus that migration decisions of international students were made over time and may unfold as a process (Alberts & Hazen, 2005), very little was known about students' experiences of going through this process and the meaning they assigned to it (Farivar et al., 2019). Those areas including how international students were engaged in the meaning-making process through their social interactions in the host country, and how they continuously assessed the situations to determine their own interpretations of the circumstances and form their actions were under-researched (Netierman et al., 2021).

At present, there is no agreement in the literature about how and when students started making decisions about immigration (Netierman et al., 2021). Lu et al. (2009) found international students' original goal of obtaining permanent residency prior to relocating largely predicted their intention to stay. Other scholars indicated that students' feelings changed and they may alter their original intentions quite often (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Farivar et al., 2019). In most cases, students' decisions were made on an ongoing basis. During their study journey, students constantly assessed and reassessed their migration options and adjust them on a realistic basis (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Meanwhile, other contextual factors (like job opportunities, family obligations and host countries' immigration policy settings) all

interacted and led to the constant adjustment of international students' migration expectations (Netierman et al., 2021).

2.1.3 *Chinese students' motivations, aspirations, and experiences*

Chinese international students' motivations, aspirations, and experiences in relation to transitioning from study to employment and residence in the host country has been well explored in previous literature. Yan (2019) found that Chinese international students were driven by several motivations when considering studying overseas. First and foremost, they aimed to acquire an international educational experience that would expand their horizons and expose them to diverse cultures and perspectives. They believed that studying abroad would nurture a global mindset and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills, both of which held value in the worldwide job market. Another motivation identified in Yan's (2019) research was the desire to enhance their employability. Chinese students believed that studying in a foreign country would provide them better career opportunities upon graduation. They aimed to secure high-paying jobs and positions with multinational companies by taking advantage of the international exposure and education they gained from overseas studies (Yan, 2019).

Zhou (2023) discovered similar motivations and aspirations from Chinese international students in the United States. These students were attracted to the high-quality education offered by American universities and sought international experiences and self-improvement through their academic studies. In their research, Cowley and Hyams-Ssekasi (2018) revealed that job prospects and career opportunities were major aspirations for Chinese students studying in the UK. They hoped to obtain a competitive advantage in the global job market through well-paying jobs and positions that matched their educational qualifications and aspirations.

Chinese international students' decision to study abroad was also closely linked with a dynamic interplay of push and pull factors (Zhai et al., 2019). Push factors were defined as the elements that compelled them to seek educational opportunities overseas. Pull factors, on the other hand were attributes of the destination country or institution that attracted Chinese students (Chen, 2016). Some common pull factors influencing Chinese students' mobility were academic excellence, culture exposure, employment and income in host country, reputation and quality of host institution, and pathways to immigration (Zhai et al., 2019). Key push factors encompassed the highly competitive nature of Chinese education system, the lack of foreign language and intercultural training, impact from parents, and personal interest in international academic mobility (Liu, 2021). When push factors compelled Chinese student to leave their homeland, pull factors enticed them toward foreign countries. The push-pull factors were at the core of the decisions that Chinese students made regarding their international education. Those factors also influenced Chinese students' choice of destination, the nature of their educational experience, and the impact on their future careers.

Overall, these studies highlighted that Chinese international students were motivated by a combination of factors, such as acquiring international experiences, enhancing employability, gaining advanced knowledge and skills, and utilising what they acquired during their studies to excel in their chosen occupation fields (Yang et al., 2018). These motivations significantly influenced their subsequent trajectory in the host countries.

While Chinese international students were drawn to study abroad for its numerous benefits, they often faced a range of challenges and barriers as they managed the transition process from study to employment and residence in the host country (Tang, 2022). Khanal and Gaulee (2019) explored the pre-departure and post-study challenges faced by international students including those from China. According to them, language barriers were identified as a significant hurdle, particularly in terms of academic performance and job searches. Many students

struggled to communicate effectively in English, impacting their class participation, assignments qualities, and interactions with professors and peers. Additionally, this language barrier hindered their employment seeking efforts and limited their career progression in the host country (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019).

Cultural difference was another substantial challenge. As Liu (2023) discovered, adapting to a new cultural context, norms, and social practices was often overwhelming for Chinese students. This affected their ability to build meaningful relationships and engage in networking activities, which were critical for Chinese students' career development. The unfamiliarity with local customs and practices sometimes led to misunderstandings or unease in host country's social situations (Liu, 2023). In their study investigating the employment-seeking experiences of foreign graduates in Japan and Germany, Liu-Farrer and Shire (2021) discovered that a lack of local work experience posed a significant barrier to the integration of Chinese students into the host labour markets. Numerous job positions required local work experience, which was often lacking among Chinese students. This dearth of experience adversely affected their capacity to secure quality employment, internships, or even part-time jobs related to their fields of study, ultimately impeding their career prospects upon graduation (Liu-Farrer & Shire, 2021).

Discrimination and biases were also highlighted as challenges. Some Chinese students reported facing discrimination or prejudice based on their nationality or ethnicity, which affected their confidence and sense of belonging in their host country (Coffey et al., 2021). This discrimination could sometimes extend to the host job market, where employers might favour local candidates over international students due to concerns about issues such as language proficiency or cultural fit (Tubergen, 2014). In general, those studies underscored the challenges that Chinese international students often faced when transitioning to employment and residency in the host country. Language barriers, cultural differences, lack of local work experience, and discrimination hindered their integration into the job market and host society (Tang, 2022).

To address the challenges they encountered, Chinese international students deployed various coping strategies and sought support systems at their post-study transition. Jackson et al.'s (2019) research showed that international students utilised a variety of techniques to successfully overcome language and cultural barriers in the host country. These strategies consisted of psychological methods such as meditation and rest, physical coping approaches including exercise and enjoying familiar cuisine, problem-solving endeavours involving behavioural and cognitive efforts to make changes, seeking social support, and looking for entertainment. Yang et al. (2021) identified some support resources such as mentorship programmes, career counselling, and professional network that Chinese students in the United States deployed to navigate the transition process.

2.2 The education-migration nexus

In some immigrant receiving countries, migration through education provided a direct pathway for international students who aimed at staying after completion of their studies (Chiou, 2017). Although international education was previously positioned as a temporary sojourn with the main purpose and motivation being educational, research showed that studying overseas was a form of labour migration (Robertson, 2013). The term education-migration nexus clearly explained the relationship between international education and skilled migration (Robertson, 2011). According to Findlay et al. (2012), for students who wanted to develop their future careers outside of their home countries, globalisation and the increased chance of mobility provided them with those opportunities. Flynn and Arthur (2013) pointed out that in most economically developed societies, a declining birth rate and an ageing population created opportunities for young, skilled workers to fill vacated positions. By filling such vacancies, international students increased a country's pool of highly skilled workers, thereby supporting economic development. As a result, the migration paradigms were constantly shifting in many key migrant receiving countries. Those prototypes ranged from permanent settlement streams like family

reunions, to the attraction of temporary migrant labour forces including student migrants, with the purpose of addressing the skill shortage problems in the national economy (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Among those streams, the education-migration prototype stood out because international graduates of host universities were often believed to fit the neoliberal model of the "desirable worker" or even "designer migrant" (Hawthorne, 2008; Robertson, 2013, p. 21). They were young, proficient in the local language, having attained a locally recognised qualification, and were socially and culturally adjusted to the host country due to their period of residence as students (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Therefore, in the desire to obtain highly skilled and locally trained foreign labour, a number of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK developed education-migration pathways to allow former students to transition into the host country's labour market after graduation as skilled migrants (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012; Robertson, 2013).

Much empirical research was carried out exploring the relationship between international higher education and skilled migration. Following those studies, this section focuses on six aspects centring around the education-migration nexus. Those themes are:

a) Categorisation of international students' mobility types,

b) International students' mobility (ISM) as a subset of skilled migration,

c) International student migrants' status and contribution,

d) Institutional factors around student migration,

e) Key stakeholders' role in the education-migration industry,

f) Labour market conditions of student migrants.

2.2.1 Categorisation of international students' mobility types

When examining the relationship between international education and migration, it is important to understand international students' mobility modalities. The pursuit of overseas education, in either shorter or longer time frames and with the ultimate intentions of staying or returning, not only brought profound impacts on

international students' life trajectory but also had different implications surrounding the migration prototypes in the host country.

Credit mobility and degree mobility were the two terms most used to distinguish the movement of students who aspired to study oversea in either short- or long-term timeframes and whether their study was for the entire duration of a course or not (Cairns, 2017; King & Raghuram, 2013). Students who were temporarily studying overseas to gain academic credits within the framework of a tertiary education programme were defined as credit mobile students (Weisser, 2016). On the other hand, degree mobile students were those who study to complete the whole qualification and graduate in the country of destination (Teichler et al., 2011). Specifically, degree mobile students were enrolled as regular students of a programme taught in the country of destination (UNESCO-UIS et al., 2018). It is worth noticing that, except for studying for a longer-term, degree mobile students were more likely to stay in the host country after graduation and therefore transit into the labour market and later become permanent residents (OECD, 2019). Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) explained that apart from participating in academic study, degree mobile students were also involved in other activities while studying, such as work placements, internships or traineeships. Those activities equipped them with the necessary skills and prepared them for entering the workforce in the host country. According to King and Raghuram (2013), although credit and degree mobilities were primarily developed within the framework of European programmes like Erasmus+[7] and CEEPUS[8], they were useful in examining international students' mobility patterns, which was an integral part of the education-migration nexus in the global context. Given degree-mobile students' likelihood of staying after completion of the study (Cairns, 2017), the current study was focused on exploring their trajectory in the host country.

According to international students' future plans, migration and mobility were the other two widely used concepts to distinguish students who either intending to stay in the host country or return to the home country (Findlay et al., 2012; King

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[7] Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe.

[8] CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies) is an exchange academic programme in the fields of education and research which involves 15 Central-European countries.

& Raghuram, 2013). The term mobility indicated movements with a high probability of return. Conversely, longer-period moves, normally lasting for three or four years, with the possibility of immigration, were defined as migration (King & Raghuram, 2013). The key difference between these two groups lies in international students' goals after studying. Those who intended to stay in the host country after completion of their studies were categorised as student migrants. More importantly, student migrants were defined as those who studied outside their country of birth or citizenship for a period of 12 months or more, then later transited into the host country's labour market as qualified skilled migrants after graduation (Geddie, 2013; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). When researching students' movement, these two terms of mobility and migration were always inseparable. Recent research by Cairns (2021) indicated that what students acquired from their "antecedent mobility" in the education journey (like the knowledge and experience they learnt while studying) also contributed to the development of their longer-term migration trajectory (p. 18). Therefore, international students could become migrants through their previous mobile experience of studying.

2.2.2 International student mobility as a subset of skilled migration

International Student Mobility (ISM) sits at a nexus between education and migration under policies intersecting with labour market needs and demands (Robertson 2013). According to King and Sondhi (2018), ISM was a subset group of highly skilled migration. From a macro-economic perspective, the host country's motivation to attract foreign students was articulated through the country's strategy for improving the supply of highly qualified human capital in their domestic labour markets. From the human capital perspective of the individual, ISM can be seen as a career-enhancing investment by international students – a rational strategy in order to compete better in the domestic labour market of the origin country following return "home" (King & Sondhi, 2018, p. 179). It could also be viewed as the first step towards a high-income international career, perhaps in a global corporation, or as part

of a life plan project of emigration and international career movement (Findlay et al., 2017). There were arguments about whether student migrants were actually "skilled" because, in most cases, students had not been able to demonstrate their abilities in the labour market (King & Sondhi, 2018). Therefore, training and educating international students within the host country were increasingly important as student migrants were a source of workers available to national labour markets and were cheaper (plus easier) to recruit than importing labour trained elsewhere (Ziguras & Law, 2006).

2.2.3 International student migrants' status and contribution

Although international student mobility (ISM) was primarily concerned with international students coming into a foreign country for education purposes, it was a dynamic process where an individual student's agency was simultaneously constrained and enabled by external factors such as policy, family ties, and labour market opportunities (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). Under the ISM framework, student migrants were therefore considered as a special group of general migrants. They were also involved in work and family, just like other migrants (Piper, 2009). However, student migrants' identity was diverse along the evolving trajectory of their mobility. Geddie (2013) mentioned that student migrants were defined as complex individuals who were entangled in a wide set of social relations. Recognising the multiple identities of international students and understanding the stretch of knowledge production alongside their mobility were both central to the study of student migration (Raghuram, 2013). To summarise, student migrants were complex subjects. They were much more than just students whose only function was studying in higher education. Student migrants were simultaneously family members, citizens of a particular country, workers, and perhaps also refugees or asylum seekers (King & Raghuram, 2013, p. 133). Therefore, student migrants' mobility always entangled both social and educational considerations.

The decision to migrate for either career or migration purposes could start as early as when the students planned to study abroad. The study by Tran and Nyland (2011) revealed that among the four variants centring around migration and skills accumulation, the first category included students who were motivated to undertake international education with dual objectives to secure migration and acquire the skills associated with their chosen occupation. The second group of students regarded migration as a "second chance opportunity" (p.17). The third group saw migration as the sole ultimate objective of overseas study and the fourth group just lost their intention to migrate that they initially had. However, student migrants' motivation sometimes evolved "in resonance with developments in different domains of their lives" (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013, p. 190) and was disrupted by the personal circumstances encountered during their studies. There was a complex relation between so-called life plans and the mobilities that merged over the life course (Collins & Shubin, 2015), which eventually impacted student migrants' previously-set employment and migratory objectives.

Scholars had placed student mobilities within an economic framework, positing that mobile students were both consumers of export education and a potential resource for the labour force and economy of the destination country (Gilmartin et al., 2016). Aside from paying high tuition fees for their studying and providing the host country with skilled labour, international students also used their social, linguistic and cultural competencies as intermediaries to facilitate the business activities between their host and home countries (Liu-Farrer, 2009a). In the same vein, a research by Saxenian (2007) found that after completing their study in the US, former international students from Israel, Taiwan, Mainland China, and India first stayed to work. Later on, they brought knowledge and capital from the Silicon Valley back to their home countries and helped build high-tech industries in these places. A recent report by the OECD (2020a) also indicated that once returning home after their studies, internationally mobile students contributed to knowledge absorption, technology upgrading and capacity building in their home country. Through helping

to maintain strong links with nationals at home, mobile students gained tacit knowledge that was often shared through direct personal interactions and can enable their home country to integrate into global knowledge networks.

The same report by the OECD also pointed out that for host countries, international students were an important source of income and had a substantial impact on their economic and innovation systems. Besides paying higher tuition fees than domestic students, international students also contributed to the local economy through their living expenses. In the longer run, highly educated mobile students were likely to integrate into domestic labour markets, contributing to innovation and economic performance in host countries (OECD, 2020a). According to Altbach (2004), it was a widely accepted notion that some students who studied abroad would subsequently settle there. Many international students eventually became skilled permanent immigrants by applying for a work visa after the completion of their degrees. Some would apply for the permanent residency in the host country through the skilled migration scheme (Alberts, 2007). By promoting this study-migration pathway, some host governments were able to secure an educated labour force, which was considered a critical asset for the economic prosperity of the host countries (Hawthorne, 2008).

However, the portrayal of international education as a significant channel of labour migration did not capture the diversity of international students or recognise their contributions to the global economy (Liu-Farrer, 2009a). The boundaries between student migrants and other migrants became blurry. According to Raghuram (2013), international students can engage in both waged labour and familial ties while studying in the host country. They could be eligible for other migration streams and therefore able to turn their status from temporary to permanent in the host country. Findlay et al. (2012) concluded that students did not just move across the border to pursue advanced studies. They were also actively engaged in geographical, cultural and social mobility as part of a way of life, through activities like travelling, working

and holidaying either alone or with their families. As a result, student migrants' statuses and experiences were evolving alongside their study journey.

2.2.4 Institutional factors around student migration

It became clear that international education formed part of a strategy for international students to migrate to the destination country (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). Under the influence of education-migration policies and collective facilitation by host governments, international students were increasingly attracted by and encouraged to follow the education-migration pathway. The provision of post-study work rights was a key cornerstone to bridging this pathway (Robertson, 2013). However, designing work rights policies that benefited both international students and the education industry, while ensuring those policies work for the economy and satisfy host labour market needs was a delicate and complex task (Civinini, 2018). Under such pressures, host countries' policies toward international students reflected the paradox of treating international students as desired yet unwanted sources of migrants (Baas, 2019). Those policies were frequently beset by contradictions of intent. In the UK, international education and its related policies were uncertain and contradictory (Beauvallet, 2014; Lomer, 2018). When acknowledging the contributions of "genuine students" by marketing its export education worldwide, the government also made changes to cut the number of student visas to the UK (May, 2010). The decision to reduce immigration to "tens of thousands" impacted international students, who were also categorised as migrants (Lomer, 2018). Similarly, policies in Japan grappled with the contradictory goals of opening up to the international community while asserting and maintaining Japanese uniqueness and tradition (Burgess et al., 2010). In Australia, tight regulations to clamp down on irregular practices and decoupling education outcomes from access to permanent residency status had been put in place since 2010 (Civinini, 2018). According to Chiou (2014), those strict rules made it more difficult for international students to be eligible for seeking migration through the education pathway, despite the host countries actively seeking to recruit more international students from their source countries. In addition, when examining host governments' political stance toward

international students' migration trends, it is worth noticing that the migration process was of a long-term nature, while the policy cycle was essentially short-term and often determined by the length of electoral periods (Castles, 2004).

2.2.5 Key stakeholders' role in the education-migration industry

Education agents played a pivotal role in the education-migration industry. According to Collins (2012), through the provision of information and the arrangement of travel and work opportunities, education agents were actually organising or even shaping international migration. They can influence international students' decisions on choosing host countries, host institutions and study programmes, as well as shaping their education and migration trajectories. As Cranston et al. (2018) stated, the increasing flows of international students and the movement of skilled migrants induced a new "industry" in which the selection, attraction, and screening of potential student-migrants were carried out by a growing "ensemble" of actors who brokered students' migration trajectories. Similar to labour market brokers that channeled the labour migration decision and movement, universities' recruitment teams, international education agents and other institutions selling education opportunities overseas, such as the British Council in a UK context and Education New Zealand (ENZ), the education promotion agency for New Zealand, played major roles within this industry (Beech, 2018). Among those actors, as a key intermediary between students seeking study abroad opportunities and tertiary institutions looking to increase their enrolment numbers, education agents were the main player (Collins, 2012). Some historical surveys revealed the importance of the agent model in international students' recruitment. For example, the report by the Observatory for Borderless Higher Education survey showed that 38-53% of international student commencements were linked to an overseas agent (OBHE, 2014), and as many as 80% of applications were supported by agents in certain Australian universities (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). In New Zealand, 58% of overseas students were recruited through an education agent in 2017 (Crace, 2019).

However, the attractiveness of using agents to promote international education had been compromised by some problems like unethical behaviours involving falsified applications and visa documents or misinforming and misleading students (Galbraith & Brabner, 2013; Huang et al., 2016). Nikula and Kivistö (2018) identified that informational asymmetries and goal conflicts were the two most common issues with education agents. Goal conflicts related to different desires and interests between agents and higher education institutions or students. Due to its profit-oriented nature, agents could have divergent interests from education providers and students. Therefore, they did not want to carry out the work in the way that they were required to (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). Moreover, the existence of information asymmetries — meaning that agents possessed more or better information than students about programme offerings, work opportunities and migration pathways in the host country — placed the professional agent in a more powerful position than the information-seeking students (Bergh et al., 2019; Sharma, 1997). As a result, most of the agents guided them in a way that might not be in the best interests of international students (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018).

Meanwhile, when admitting international students, tertiary education institutions were themselves the often-ignored brokers in the student migration flows (Brunner, 2017). International education became a migration industry because it was a de facto channel for labour migration (Liu-Farrer, 2009b) and a potential means for immigration (Baas, 2006; Robertson, 2013). The economic benefits that international students brought to receiving countries were clearly documented (Farago, 2018). According to Cantwell (2019), international students provided a source of direct (payment of tuition fees) and indirect (growth in enrolments) funding for national education systems. They also made economic contributions to domestic demand; increased economic and trade gains; and were a source of future workers for knowledge-intensive sectors. Universities were critical actors within the ensembles of the education-migration nexus, serving as one of the primary attractors of students in the first instance, and the formal sponsor for students' residence in the host country throughout their studies (Baas, 2019). In her research on tracing the immigration selection design targeting international students in British Columbia in Canada, Brunner (2017) found that higher education institutions saw the prospect of

immigration as a positive recruitment tool for students and some institutions had changed their stance from helping international students' career preparation and transition to supporting and advocating for students' immigration goals. As Baas (2006) pointed out, it became an unavoidable topic on what future migration pathway the study programmes offered by universities could lead to when education institutions were trying to promote those programmes among international students. As a result, the message delivered by the universities' recruitment team and their stance towards the migration pathway also had substantial influence on the export education industry (Beech, 2018).

2.2.6 Labour market conditions of student migrants

International students' labour market transition and their employment outcomes in the host country were key components of the education-migration nexus. Depending on host countries' specific policies, some international students chose to work during their studies and sought to stay as full-time workers in the host labour market after their graduation. Previous research on graduates' labour market conditions suggested that compared to their locally-born counterparts, international students faced more disadvantages in areas like job searching, workplace integration, and career progression (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012; Pham et al., 2019).

The labor market conditions for student migrants were inadequate due to a range of factors. Firstly, some international students had difficulties in developing soft skills (like teamwork, creative thinking, interpersonal and communication skills), which became barriers preventing them from accessing job opportunities (Blackmore et al., 2017). The lack of communication competencies at work had been reported as international graduates' most common limitations (Pham et al., 2018). Some graduates did not understand work colleagues' and supervisors' instructions in the workplace and had "heavy" accents and limited terminologies (Barton et al., 2017). Secondly, they had limited social networks (including connections with local communities and professional bodies) and lacked an understanding of the local

workplace. As Tholen (2015) summarised that international students were not "socialised" to meet the requirements of the labour market, and therefore did not have "the same feel for the game" in the work environment (p. 778). Similarly, international students had less access to industry contacts who can help them to secure post-study employment. Lack of knowledge about the unwritten rules and particular codes of behaviours and norms of the workplace prevented them from integrating properly into the host labour market (Bauder, 2003).

Some scholars argued that how employers perceived and treated international graduates also contributed to their adverse employment outcomes. Research by Scott et al. (2015) found that employers were reluctant to hire international graduates due to the foreseeable risks and extra costs that might occur. Those burdens included the possibility of delayed or refused working visas, sponsorship costs, sudden rule changes, and the initial challenge of understanding overly complicated immigration eligibility requirements (Bowcott, 2019; Green & Hogarth, 2017). A three-year study on international students' transition to employment in the Australian workplace found that some employers were hesitant to provide work placement opportunities to international students because they felt there was a limited return on investment when international students were unlikely to stay in Australia after graduation (Gribble et al., 2015).

2.3 A gendered approach

Due to the gendered demand structure of immigration settings and gender-specific social systems in the host country (Piper, 2005), female skilled migrants generally faced more barriers in the host society. According to Piper (2005), those barriers included lower labour force participation, inferior occupations and jobs, poor working conditions, and low earnings. As a special group of skilled migrants, female international graduates confronted different challenges (Moskal, 2020). This section reviews relevant literature on the gendered migration trend, female graduates'

expectations and experience, gendered barriers in the host labour market and the positive employment outcomes due to their unique adaptation approach.

2.3.1 The gendered trend of global migration

Skilled migration was heterogeneous in its gender divisions, occupations and conditions of work (Iredale, 2005). There was a gender imbalance in the migration field. In particular, male migrants normally predominated the sectors of Science, Engineering, and Information Technology (OECD, 2020a). Conversely, highly qualified immigrant women were over-represented in the fields of education, medicine, the arts and humanities (Badkar et al., 2007; Šūpule, 2020). The gendered demand structure of the immigration settings amongst most immigrant-receiving countries could possibly explain the dominance of a certain sex in specific migration streams. Take Germany as an example 88% of the Green Card permits in 2000 were taken up by men (OECD, 2002). The vast majority were male scientists from Eastern Europe, although there was almost the same number of women in the similar profession there. This phenomenon indicated that gender imbalance did not necessarily pre-exist in the sending countries. Over the last decades, the gender balance of international migration flows had improved considerably. Especially in most developing regions, females were increasingly migrating independently, not just as dependents or family members (Russell, 2014). However, recent statistics showed that there was a declining trend in female migrants' mobility. According to the data from the United Nations (2020), the share of female migrants had decreased from 49.4% in 2000 to 48.1% in 2020, whereas the proportion of male migrants grew from 50.6% in 2000 to 51.9% in 2020. In addition, there were more males than females among migrants of working age (107.2 million versus 99.3 million). Differences by gender among migrant workers were more obvious: there were 83.7 million male migrant workers versus 66.6 million female migrant workers worldwide (United Nations, 2020). This pattern was in response to a number of factors, including gender-selective demand for foreign labour, economic development focus, and subsequent changes in gender relations in countries of origin and countries of destination (Badkar et al., 2007).

2.3.2 Gendered expectations and experience

Existing literature about the gendered aspirations of international students' post-study migration could be explored within Risman's (2004) analytical framework of social systems, which was comprised of individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions. The individual level was about the construction and socialisation of gendered selves; the interactional level lay in daily interactions with and expectations from other individuals; and the institutional level was the regulation of gender ideologies and performances in society, economy, and other systems. Risman's framework helped to explain gender differences and inequality among international student migrants' mobility.

Under this framework, previous research at the individual level examined how significantly gender impacted students' stay-or-leave aspirations after finishing a degree in foreign countries. In her case study on Asian international students in the UK, Moskal (2020) found male graduates usually required a high salary due to masculine responsibilities highlighted in Chinese society, such as being financially independent and able to afford a house. By contrast, women planned their mobility pathways more promoting their social and marital status. Research by Lu et al. (2009) on international students' intentions to stay in Canada after their study found that determining factors for male students included considerations of human capital, social networks, and occupational success; whilst the more affective factors for female students were family conditions, parents' expectation, and feelings of belonging and support.

Research at the interactional level affirmed a graduate's mobility decision was not only tied to individual aspirations but also related to their interpersonal relationship. The study by Geddie (2013) on international science and engineering graduates in Toronto and London pointed out that women respondents were more inclined to compromise on their partner's career development and tolerate their own sacrifice of career prospects in their post-study transition. However, women were not always the ones to give in. Focusing on the gendered negotiations and arrangements of mobile couples, Schaer et al. (2017) argued that the one with a less clear plan conformed to the main mover's career-driven mobility pathways regardless of gender.

At the institutional level, contextual factors and social norms like the sense of freedom in a country's social environment or students' feelings arguably influenced different genders' mobility decisions and experiences. Hazen and Alberts's (2006) survey of international students in American universities found that more than one in ten respondents, especially women, perceived the restrictive cultural practices in the home country disincentivised them to return. Those restrictions were more often brought up by female informants and were gender-specific (for instance, limitation on employment opportunities for women). By investigating Kazakhstan students who had returned home after studying in the UK, Holloway et al. (2012) found that because of the gendered discrimination in the home labour market advantaging male's position and shortages of ability to secure a job, women had limited their career choices to native multinational corporations in the home country. This finding was in line with the study by Moskal (2020), which concluded that upon completion of overseas study, Asian male graduates seemed to enjoy more freedom in developing their professional careers, whereas females more often faced greater challenges to career development, curtailed by family pressures and social conventions.

2.3.3 Disadvantages of female migrants

Although some factors that led to deskilling of migrants were common to both men and women, it was found that compared to their male counterparts, migrant women faced a particularly higher level of deskilling in their career progression journey (Kofman, 2012). High-skilled migration policies in most popular immigrant-receiving countries were designed to give preference to skills in sectors like upper-level management, engineering, IT, and physical research (Rubin et al., 2008), which were predominantly occupied by men. On the contrary, migrant women were more likely to be employed in the education and medical sectors where the transfer of skills could be problematic (Aggergaard-Larsen et al., 2005). Therefore, it was more common for women migrants to perform jobs that were below their actual expertise and skill levels. In particular, Cuban's (2013) study acknowledged that many highly educated women (including practising doctors and medical professionals in their home countries) were working within the lower-level employment sector such as domestic and care work in host countries like UK and Canada. This situation could

be explained as the "feminisation of migration" – the growth of the feminised service industry selecting out women from specific regions, nationalities and social classes to meet the demand of receiving countries. However, although migrant women contributed to the modernisation of the host nations, there were very few resources for their own personal progress, due to the general barriers skilled migrant women faced in making career progression that was commensurate with their qualifications (Kofman, 2012).

For migrant women, their labour force participation was often hindered not just by gender discrimination (e.g., the assumption that women will work until they marry or have children), but was also subject to other systemic stereotypes (Castles et al., 2014). According to Purkayastha (2005), migrant women were found to commonly contend with disadvantages in the political, domestic and professional domains. Those disadvantages were accumulative, meaning discrimination against them at one level (e.g., prior qualifications and experiences) led to the next level of discriminatory assumptions like gendered responsibility of homemaking. Accordingly, female migrants had more difficulties entering the host labour market compared to both native-born women and migrant men. They suffered from the labour-market double disadvantage and unfair treatment in the job market, compared with both local women and foreign men (Cuban, 2013; Khitarishvili, 2013). Most women migrants were fighting double battles: first, they need to migrate and integrate as foreign-born people in the host country, then to overcome the gender bias in the labour market as well as in other areas of social, political and economic life (Rubin et al., 2008). Moreover, when facing economic recession, due to the restricted immigration settings in many destination countries, highly skilled female migrants were normally the first to be fired and therefore the first to forcefully enter illegal work (Arslan, 2014).

As Grigoleit-Richter (2017) pointed out, migrant women experienced various hindrances and barriers in regard to their daily work performance and career advancement in the host country. For example, the "laddish culture" existing in the masculine workplaces of some western societies like the UK caused female migrants to feel left out of the social aspects of their jobs (Bates & Holt, 2021, p. 8). Although it was not a direct part of the work, the informal networking and socialising activities shared among men were usually not accessible to women, especially women

migrants who were not brought up in a similar culture and environment. Purkayastha (2005) noted that some other gender-specific blockages that skilled migrant women encounter included loss of networks, devalued credentials, occupational segregation, discrimination, glass ceilings, and challenges of balancing work and housework. Those barriers greatly hindered female migrants' career progression (Maddrell et al., 2016; Mahtani, 2004).

2.3.4 Female migrants' employment outcome

Although there were various hurdles facing skilled female migrants in the host labour market, it was also found that once they secured employment, female migrants tended to integrate well into the workplace and made greater career progression (Colakoglu et al., 2018). Multiple factors contributed to their success. Research by Sang et al. (2013) on female migrant professors in British academia found that female academics displayed greater levels of agency, connectedness, and entrepreneurial quality compared with their male counterparts, to mobilise their varied resources and achieve better career progression. Although the dual social identities of being female and migrant were normally considered disadvantages, these two forms of "otherness" sometimes opened up more possibilities for the female professors to transcend some of the embedded assumptions of gender and ethnic privilege at work. As a result, their patterns of career development were unhindered by the "native stereotypes of gender and masculine norms of ethnicity" (p. 161).

In addition, the membership of a marginalised group could also be a source of strength for female migrants and provided them with a good platform for solidarity and a source of pride (Minow, 1997; Sang et al., 2013). As an example, a study by Grigoleit-Richter (2017) shared that by developing a strong local attachment and sense of belonging that fostered their social integration and counteracted their experienced discrimination in the workplace, skilled migrant women developed strategies that helped them not only navigate the masculine work environment, but also foster their career advancement. Colakoglu et al.'s (2018) research on the career strategies and experiences of highly skilled female immigrants in the USA also found that after an intense period of actively pursuing career opportunities through formal

and informal channels, most female migrants landed their first meaningful career opportunities from a powerful Turkish connection or through other important, influential cultural contacts they had or had gained access to. Those success stories confirmed what Bourdieu (1984) asserted that compared with the male-dominated "economic ladder" of achieving higher income and greater career achievement, the "cultural ladder" of establishing a support network and gaining cultural understanding through community work, which was more female-friendly and benefited women migrants more substantially in the process of their career advancement.

2.4 Determining factors of stay or return

Based on the push-pull framework and its development, the following subsections examine factors causing student migrants' stay or return decisions. Except for the key pull/positive and push/negative forces in the host and home countries, there are other subfactors at economic, psychological and situational levels contributing to student migrants' choices on either staying or returning. Beyond the stay/return binary, there are also possibilities for them to migrate to a third country.

2.4.1 The push and pull factors for emigrating

There were positive and negative factors at both the origin and destination pushing people out of their home country and simultaneously pulling them towards the host country. When first introduced by Lee (1966), the push-pull framework looked at both the supply and demand sides of migration. In this concept, migration was seen as a product of separate and unrelated forces in the society of origin and the society of settlement (Schiller et al., 1998). The process was hindered by intervening forces like migration policy and laws and was affected by personal factors, e.g., how migrants perceived the factors. This framework was barely a theory. It was more of a grouping of factors affecting migration, without considering the exact causal mechanisms (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Within the framework, various factors such as individual and household characteristics, and social and economic development in

the home country, were identified as pull factors. Unfavourable immigration policies and economic recessions in host countries were normally termed as push factors (Wang et al., 2015).

McMahon (1992) used the push-pull framework to explain international students' mobility patterns. The global trend of international student flows was explored by a combination of push and pull factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). For example, some students were pushed to choose study overseas by the negative forces in their home countries such as a lack of access to higher education, unfavourable social conditions, political circumstances or other restrictions at home (Altbach, 2004). According to Bodycott (2009), some key pull factors included the immigration prospects to the host country, the social and/or educational linked to the family or friends living or studying in the destination country, the economic capacity of the home country relative to that of the host country, and the level of financial support provided to international students by the host country.

Although McMahon's (1992) research was based in the USA as a host country, the push-pull framework had been further developed in later empirical studies about international students' mobility choices. Chiou (2014) pointed out that proactive policies, such as giving overseas students access to the labour market and the possibility of obtaining permanent residence, had also been recognised as important pull factors for overseas students in choosing a particular host country. Pyvis and Chapman (2007) further elaborated that push factors were not only associated with negative forces like adverse social conditions and political circumstances, lack of access to the preferred education institutions in their home countries. There were also positive sides like academic achievement, economic reward, social and cultural advantages in the host countries attracting student migrants to stay.

Li and Bray (2007) further extended the one-way push-pull framework into a two-way paradigm by proposing a reverse push-pull model. It consisted of factors like positive forces in home countries and negative forces in host countries. Those pull/positive factors in the home country like "desire to stay with family, improved awareness of the relevance of domestic education, and increasing internationalisation of domestic institutions" encourage students to stay at home. On the contrary, some

push/negative factors in host countries like "increasing fees and the living costs, restrictive policies on foreign students, uncertainties in visa approvals, tightening of immigration policies, and discrimination against students from particular countries" discouraged international students from remaining there (p. 795). The ramifications of the push and pull model provide a solid ground to examine the interplay of different factors resulting in international students' decisions for staying or returning.

2.4.2 The push and pull factors for returning

The push-pull model was also a useful lens for examining return migration. In a systematic literature review on return migration intentions, Mohamed and Abdul-Talib (2020) summarised the three groups of subfactors—economic, psychological and situational levels—for return motivation. Economic push factors mainly included the lack of opportunity and employment and difficulty in using skills (Potter & Phillips, 2006). Psychological reasons like patriotism (Riddle et al., 2010; Weidenbaum & Hughes, 1996) and family reunion were essential push factors of the diaspora homeland return (Andreeva et al., 2009; King et al., 2011). Situational push motivations were triggered by the surrounding environment such as the challenges immigrants experience in the host country like marginalisation and discrimination, failure to fit in the host country, and difficulties of being a minority (Koopmans, 2016; Phillips & Potter, 2009). Similarly, economic pull factors were considered as economic opportunities in the homeland that attract entrepreneurs and business-oriented diaspora, and higher demand for educated and skilled individuals in the country of origin (Dana, 1996). Psychological pull factors included the emotional links between immigrants and the homeland that pull them to return (Christou, 2006; Reynolds, 2007; Wessendorf, 2007). The situational changes that occurred in the home country like political development and improved governance were recognised as situational pull factors, often motivating immigrants to return home (Pogonyi, 2014; Valatheeswaran & Rajan, 2011). Mohamed and Abdul-Talib's study (2020)

filled the research gap in the previous push-pull framework by adding the situational elements. However, it did not explore other motivational factors such as personal characteristics and the home country's diaspora engagement policies, which both played essential roles in migrants' return decision.

Student migrants' return decisions could be intrinsically related to their labour market behaviour. Bijwaard and Wang (2016) asserted that economic decisions related to the labour market were usually made in conjunction with return migration decisions. In particular, the return decision was determined by adverse labour market events such as underemployment or the occurrence of an unemployment spell. The study by Singh (2020) on Chinese international students' repatriation showed that unsuitable employment opportunities, meaning jobs that were not equivalent to Chinese graduates' qualifications such as working at a restaurant or doing cleaning work, pushed some to repatriate home. As a result, some student migrants went back to their home country seeking better career advancement as the gap of employment opportunities narrowed in the host countries (Jiang, 2022; Kumar et al., 2014).

2.4.3 Other factors impacting staying or returning

Change in student migrants' life course such as possible family formation in the host country is also an important determinant for their stay or return decision. For instance, marriage while studying in the host country would have a large impact on further migration decisions. Bijwaard and Wang's (2016) research showed that students who found a partner in the Netherlands were much less inclined to leave. It was further elaborated that marrying a native would make the student more likely to stay in the host country, but the couple might also move to the country of origin of the foreign student. Marrying another foreign student was more likely to induce outmigration to either country of origin. The presence of children also impacted the likelihood of return migration in a mixed approach. A study by Lindstrom and Saucedo (2007) showed that migrants were more likely to return to their home country after the occurrence of the first born child/children. On the contrary, Dustmann's (2003) research revealed a negative association between the presence of

children and return migration regardless of the number of children they had. Except for their marital and family statuses, other internal factors such as family background, academic characteristics, cultural perceptions, and motivations all needed to be taken into consideration when examining the forces that shape a student migrant's stay or return decisions (Li & Bray, 2007).

2.4.4 Beyond the stay-return binary

Previous research on international student mobility and migration placed an overemphasis on the stay/return paradigm, with attempts to model the flows of student-migrants and their post-study decision-making. According to Brotherhood (2020), the problem with such a focus on stay/return modelling was that it did not capture the complexity of factors that affected the education-migration nexus, nor the presence of third-country mobility options for international students. In essence, those "external assumptions" claiming that student-migrants were primarily concerned with the choices of whether or not to stay in the host country failed to recognise the "internal realities" of post-study trajectories (Wu & Wilkes, 2017, p. 125). Therefore, scholars like Findlay et al. (2012) argued that ISM (international student mobility) was one part of "the wider life-course aspirations of students" (p. 118), and Geddie (2013) called for exploring the relationship between spatial mobility and educational choice beyond the over simplicity of stay-or-return perspectives. Meanwhile, using a life-course framework that conceived the post-study trajectory as a process rather than an individual event (Carlson, 2013) allowed researchers to better consider the lifetime mobility aspirations of international students without being constrained by immediate post-study concerns (Tan & Hugo, 2017). Lastly, more research was required to gain a comprehensive understanding of student migrants' reasons for return, their characteristics of return (permanent, temporary, circular), and the different types of students' return experiences according to gender, the discipline of study, and the countries where they studied (Riaño & Piguet, 2016).

2.5 Challenges and strategies

Previous research surrounding international student migration explored areas of challenges and barriers facing student migrants during their post-study transition in the host country. Those obstacles included: cultural and communication barriers (Pham, 2021a; Ugwu & Trache, 2017), difficulty in searching for jobs relevant to their education qualifications (Riaño & Piguet, 2016), negative perception from the public and media discourse portraying international students as strategic opportunists who exploited the education-migration system (Baas, 2006; Nyland et al., 2009; Tran & Vu, 2016), and precariousness and uncertainty for student migrants due to ever-changing immigration policies and settings (Robertson, 2013). This section presents research on the problematic areas in four aspects, namely (1) language and communication barriers, (2) bias and discrimination at work, (3) vulnerable status, and (4) deskilling and exploitation. The purpose is to find the interconnectedness of those impediments and explore how they interacted to influence student migrants' proper transition in the host country. It also reviews the literature on how student migrants employed various strategies and tactics to tackle the problems when facing those challenges.

2.5.1 Language and communication barriers

International students' English skills had been a topic of concern and debate for several decades (Mahmud et al., 2014). Their language problems resulted in barriers when seeking employment in the host labour market. According to Butcher et al. (2015), English language proficiency was the primary skill for gaining employment in New Zealand. Employers in all fields looked for graduates who were proficient English speakers and were comfortable in diverse environments to openly share their ideas. Pham's (2021b) study revealed that some international graduates from Australian universities expressed reluctance and anxiety when applying for

positions that required frequent and direct verbal communication with local people and some students even lost employment opportunities after interacting with potential employers due to their deficient language abilities. Communication skills for employability outcomes encompassed a wide range of competencies, including linguistic or grammatical, discourse, actional, sociocultural, and strategic skills. International graduates' limitation in expected communication competencies included unfamiliarity with what Puwar (2001) called "subtle codes" (i.e., norms, values, behaviours, and identities) in the workplace. Therefore, they were unable to use the "legitimate language", meaning the social capacity to use the language adequately in a determinate situation (Cederberg, 2015, p. 41), or speak in a normal and acceptable manner in a particular social context.

Although those communication problems were expected to be resolved through the completion of their tertiary study, many of these previous challenges at their pre- and post-departure stages continued to linger throughout student migrants' whole post-study journey (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). The study by Ugwu and Trache (2017) found some doctoral students continued to face a variety of difficulties in the workplace, such as experiencing English language difficulties, adapting to a new culture, and confronting similar adjustment barriers even after graduation. The finding indicated that international students' aspiration to improve their professional ability through foreign education was not realisable (Chen, 2014, February 3). Meanwhile, as Pham (2021b) pointed out the predominant skills-based approach, which emphasised the enhancement of communication competencies through English tests, additional language support services, and embedding language within the disciplinary study, was inadequate to prepare international graduates for employability. Those prolonged communications, cultural and social barriers hindered international students from properly transitioning to the host labour market and impacted their subsequent employment outcomes.

2.5.2 Bias and discrimination

There had been a widespread stereotype portraying international students as mere "migration hunters"—they lacked commitment, diligence and genuine aspirations to learn and develop professionally (Tran & Vu, 2016). Instead,

international students' main objective was to obtain a permanent residence status through their tertiary education in the host country (Baas, 2006). In the same vein, Kell and Vogl (2008) found that there were conservative sources about international students posing threats to domestic labour markets and eroding or evading the legitimate processes of immigration. Specifically, their student status was used as a "cover" for what was seen as illegal work and eventually permanent residency. This view had been causing an adverse impact on international students' studying and employment experiences. Robertson (2013) further elaborated on two polarised opinions toward student migrants. On the one hand, they had been described as savvy, professional and elite "designer migrants", due to their familiarity with the host country's culture and locally obtained qualifications (Hawthorne, 2012). On the other, they were cast as suspect and exploited "back-door migrants" who either exploited their education for disingenuous purposes or became victims of an unscrupulous industry that "rob them of their education nest eggs" (Robertson, 2013, p. 6).

Those negative perceptions were contrary to the research by Cao and Tran (2015), which found that although the prospect of immigration was part of some international students' long-term plan, it did not seem to be their immediate purpose for undertaking overseas studies. Instead, they wished to obtain internationally recognised education and work experience for a future career in any part of the world. In addition, attaining permanent residency was not necessarily behind every student's pursuit of international education. According to Tran and Vu (2016), some international students had a bona fide desire to return and work in their home country. However, the bias and stereotype against student migrants resulted in potential employers' reluctance to hire international graduates due to the concern that their ultimate intention was to use employment as a stepping stone for migration (Tran et al., 2020).

2.5.3 Vulnerability

According to Goldring and Landolt (2011), the complex "institutional and geographic pathways" in the host country left migrants vulnerable to increasingly long periods of time in which they must navigate insecure migratory legal status (Beauvallet,

2014; p. 327). For international students with migration intentions to the host country upon completion of their studies, they must pass through the "staggered migration" process which is characterized by multiple "gates" of membership to enter the nation-state (Hammar, 1990, p. 5). As Robertson (2013) found, depending on the host country's policy settings, student migrants arrived first on student visas and often remained on temporary work visas for varying periods after graduation. Later on, they would need to fulfil several criteria, such as securing a skilled job offer matching their academic qualification, to be successful in the residency application.

Nevertheless, this student-migration pathway was subject to rapid policy change in the host countries (Hawthorne, 2011), which often put student migrants' life in limbo. According to Robertson and Runganaikaloo (2014), the staggered entrance into the nation-state meant that student migrants had to endure extended periods in various states of insecurity. They were socially insecure due to being far from their families and thus lacked access to social support and legally insecure because they might be deported due to the constraint of their temporary visa conditions (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 212). Furthermore, as Robertson (2013) found, although student migrants had more resources to craft mobility to their advantage than unskilled labour migrants or irregular migrants, student migrants did not have the flexibility and status of elite transnational knowledge workers due to their temporary status. As a result, they faced both opportunity and marginalisation and their migration journeys tended to be a "complex negotiation of capital accumulation, aspiration and survival" (Robertson, 2013, p. 83).

Meanwhile, underpayment, poor working conditions and harassment happened to student-workers but all went largely unreported because of fears of having their visas revoked by non-compliance with work limitations (Nyland et al., 2009). In addition, students-as-workers were often engaged in casual work due to their limited visa conditions, thus becoming more visible as a segment of the labour force. There was evidence that an increasing number of student migrants worked for "cash in hand" in order to exceed the maximum amount of work hours allowed on their student visas (Robertson, 2013). Therefore, the vulnerability and exploitation

of international students working in this context became apparent. In his study on Indian international graduates, Joseph (2016) also found the cases of exploitation more likely occurred to those students who completed courses in business management and cookery and were employed by co-ethnic employers. The study-work-community linkages that "maximise student employment opportunities also increase possibilities of exploitation" (Joseph, 2016, p. 183).

2.5.4 De-skilling and exploitation

The deskilling situation meaning people working in areas well below their professional discipline and qualifications was commonly experienced by student migrants (Tran et al., 2022). According to Ager and Strang (2008), many international graduates were seen to struggle finding jobs that matched their skills and educational backgrounds, thus ending up working in areas well below their qualifications, even though they might have been highly qualified professionals with tertiary education. This was mainly because student migrants lacked perceived advanced language skills, local professional networks and familiarity with local job-seeking practices and processes, as well as other factors like employer discrimination (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). In addition, some student migrants' inability to integrate into the labour market was frequently cited in the media as evidence of their deficiency as migrant workers (Robertson, 2011, 2013). It has, therefore, caused the public backlash against student migrants as undesirable subjects and the education-migration system as being exploitative (Robertson, 2013). In essence, student-migrants were "middling transnationals", meaning they were driven by desires to be flexible and to become mobile knowledge workers, but they did not always have the resources to achieve these goals. Various financial and visa constraints often forced them into a labour market position that did not reflect their qualifications, experiences or aspirations (Yeoh et al., 2003).

A survey by Tran et al. (2019) indicated a pipeline of low-skilled workers came from the temporary graduate visa pool as a result of the rapidity of temporary

graduatification[9] because more than half of the international graduates could not get employment in their field of study. They concluded that there was a risk of deskilling, precarity, financial stress and vulnerability of temporary graduate visa holders who could be exploited and continued to be because they needed work experience and did not want to compromise their career goals or migration outcomes. In the New Zealand context, some mainstream Chinese media (like Skykiwi and Chinese NZ Herald) often disclosed the high anxiety and frustration experienced by Chinese student migrants during their post-study transition in New Zealand. Their negative encounters included difficulties in finding employment that matched their qualifications (Wilkinson et al., 2010), experiences with workplace bullying and exploitation on the way to acquiring permanent residency (Civinini, 2018; Skykiwi, 2017, August 28), and frustration from waiting a long time to settle in the host country (Stevens, 2013).

When entering the host labour markets, international students can be subject to discrimination and prejudices by potential employers (Alho, 2020). As an example, the visible "social markers" of the so-called "identifying features" such as foreign-sounding names or appearances were interpreted by prospective employers as reduced performance and/or deficient competencies, resulting in disadvantaged situations encountered by international graduates in their career-entry phase (Verwiebe et al., 2016). The study by Lee and Zhou (2017) indicated that when applying for the same job, the two applicants, one native-born and one foreign-born, appeared equally eligible, employers preferred to recruit native-born applicants. Moreover, the organisational rules excluding international graduates from the initial screening process reflected the embedded biases in the recruitment process (Tuttle & Chang Hwan, 2019). A study by Liebkind et al. (2016) showed that recruitment discrimination, which was defined as the reduced likelihood of being offered a job or job interview following applications to an advertised vacancy when the applicant's membership in a negatively stereotyped group was revealed (Stone & Wright, 2013),

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[9] It refers to the phenomenon that international graduates being granted temporary graduate visas to remain in the destination country and acquire work experience.

was commonly experienced among their research respondents. In the experiment by Liebkind et al. (2016), international graduates from a low-status ethnic minority group had significantly lower chances of being selected for a vacant position when paired with an applicant from the majority group (e.g., Finnish). As a result, discrimination against student migrants placed them in a disadvantaged position when searching for jobs (Li, 2020).

2.5.5 Tactics and strategies adopted by student migrants

As summarised from the above literature, it is clear that uncertainty, insecurity, and precarity were inherent for international students in the education-migration nexus. To overcome these, student migrants adopted overall strategies and a variety of "micro-tactics" to increase their chances of success in pursuing a desirable trajectory (Roberts, 2019). Based on a large-scale survey of temporary graduate visa holders, Tran et al. (2019) provided a list of "micro-tactics" described by their participants in Australia (p.42). Some of them are listed below:

1. Explicitly and proactively explaining their work rights to prospective employers.

2. Being persistent and demonstrating to employers their willingness to work and their interest in the job.

3. Targeting small businesses and their own universities when initially searching for jobs.

4. Vigorously applying for jobs and being willing to accept entry-level jobs/lower pay.

5. Reskilling.

6. Networking and strategically using networks.

7. Developing local connections and increasing local cultural and social understandings.

This list of tactics illustrated both the complexity of student migrants' experiences and the various needs to adapt to the different situations they encountered.

It also indicated the harsh reality in the host workplace that student migrants faced when navigating the education-migration nexus. In particular, the need to be proactive and persistent in negotiations with potential employers, including the explanation of work rights and eligibility requirements, reflected the fact that employers may be ill-versed and reluctant to engage in hiring international graduates (Green & Hogarth, 2017). Diversifying the job search, including moving outside one's area of study to "survival" level jobs and taking "reservation wages", was not just an unfortunate reality of the post-study environment, but an explicit tactical decision on the part of student-migrants (Fotovatian, 2015). Critically, social networks in both the native and migrant communities represented an important resource, helping student migrants in social, emotional and economic integration to the destination country (Baas, 2017). Most of all, this diversity of tactics placed importance on the creativity and adaptability of individual student-migrants who recognised and chose the correct tactics to navigate the specific challenges of their changing context (Moskal, 2020).

Despite the many challenges and impediments during the pursuit of career and migration, some student migrants managed to develop individual agency which was defined as proactiveness, initiative, assertiveness, persistence (Betz & Hackett, 1987), and coping strategies. In their qualitative research on student migrants living in Australia, Robertson and Runganaikaloo (2014) found that participants were often strategic in the type of courses they chose to study and were prepared to make changes in response to alteration of the government's priority occupations lists. According to the research result, student migrants were able to exercise strategic agency when dealing with governmental processes, finding ways around bureaucratic or legal hurdles on the migration pursuit process. The most common strategy in dealing with the uncertainty was coming to a level of acceptance about their precariousness; such as considering how to best use the waiting period and devising plans if their migratory outcomes were not achieved (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). To summarise, despite their vulnerable status, student migrants often strived

to strategise and find ways to cope with the challenges, as their desires for mobility, flexibility and capital interact with the desires of reaching their goals (Moskal, 2020).

It was also widely acknowledged that the employability attribute which consisted of various important skills and competencies normally extended beyond the discipline-specific scope (Jackson, 2014). According to Gribble et al. (2017), employability referred to an individual's ability to obtain jobs suitable as per their educational level. Tomlinson (2017) developed an integrated framework to conceptualise graduate students' employability. Based on that, graduates' employability consisted of a variety of interactive forms of capital, including human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2017).

When facing various challenges in the host labour market, some student migrants managed to develop key forms of capital, exert employability attributes, and successfully manoeuvred their post-academic transition in the host labour market (Pham et al., 2019). Some examples included attaining excellent technical knowledge (as human capital), establishing relationships with "significant others" (in the form of social capital), developing culturally valued knowledge, dispositions and insights (cultural capital), and building up resilience (psychological capital). By interlinking these capitals and exercising agency, which was defined as proactiveness, initiative, assertiveness, and persistence in career pursuits (Betz & Hackett, 1987), student migrants were able to make use of their strengths and hide weaknesses while seeking career progression. In their study about international graduates' career development, Pham and Saito (2019) found that graduates who knew how to interplay hard knowledge and soft skills obtained in both host and home countries achieved significant success in their careers. Moreover, how international graduates positioned themselves within their social networks could also determine their employment opportunities and outcomes. Those possessing real passions in their identity capital are more likely to gain both employment and permanent residence (Pham et al., 2019). Recent research by Education New Zealand (2019) also indicated that soft skills (like

critical thinking and creative problem solving) helped to enhance international graduates' employability.

2.6 Theoretical frameworks

The current research was carried out within the paradigms of international education and migration. As discussed in previous sections, student migrants are a special group of general migrants. Therefore, their motivations, expectations and experiences could be explored within the migration prototype. In the international migration field, many fragmented theories had been developed and were divided by various disciplinary boundaries. Those theories did not exclude each other but shared some commonalities. In the current study, an integrated framework consisting of motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, social network theory and strength of weak ties theory, and structuration theory was established to explore the interconnectedness between student migrants' expectations and their experience during their post-study transition in the host country.

2.6.1 Motivational theory and expectancy-value theory

To understand why migrants are motivated to migrate in the first place, it is necessary to examine their personal and psychological processes to find out how migrants reach their decision to move. During the long and tedious pre-departure period, the migration decision-making process comprised a series of motivators, rather than a once-and-done choice (De Jong et al., 1999). There was not enough research investigating from an individual's perspective, to explore how migrants shifted from wanting to move internationally to actually doing so (Tabor et al., 2015). By situating student migrants' intentions to migrate within the prototype of motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, this research contributed to the understanding of how student migrants come up with migration decisions.

2.6.1.1 Motivational theory

Sell and DeJong (1978) developed a motivational theory of migrants' decision-making by integrating a comprehensive analysis procedure structured by the

four variables of availability, motive, expectancy, and incentive. According to Sell and DeJong, the concept of availability represented whether or not the change in behaviour under analysis was cognitively and/or physically possible. Motive referred to the personal and/or situational strength of the goal toward which the decision process was directed. Expectancy referred to a decision maker's subjective evaluation of the likelihood of goal attainment. Incentives represented an array of goal-associated factors which variously encouraged or discouraged the change in behaviour under consideration. By linking those concepts of the decision-making process, the theory contributed to an understanding of the migration decision process at the individual and household levels of analysis.

The motivational theory allowed scholars and researchers to understand the finer decision-making process whereby migrants went from wanting to move to actually moving based on their motives and motivations (Sell & DeJong, 1978). During the dynamic process, some internal psychological factors like inner needs, wants and goals generated tension within an individual's mind and body (Payne, 2010). These inner needs and tensions were termed as motives. They then led to actions designed to release this tension, thereby satisfying these intrinsic needs, wants and goals (Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015). In the migration context, immigrants moved to a new country to achieve their motives: the strong desire to improve their lives, the urge to leave home countries whose governments they could not abide, and the willingness to work in another country where individuals can live in freedom and dignity (Sher, 2010).

Among many factors that explained people's behaviour, a motive was a starting point that activated the decision-making process (Crompton & McKay, 1997). Conversely, motivations were the results of participatory interactions of the person acting on the internal forces or motives (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). According to Gnoth (1997), although people's initial motives for reaching a certain goal may have been the same, the resulting motivation may be quite different. Therefore, distinguishing between motives and motivation allowed categorisation of the internal needs or

forces (motives) of an individual while acknowledging the subsequent expression of these forces (motivations) by individuals. As Sell and DeJong (1978) explained, a typical example was that even people who never migrate would have the motives to move under certain circumstances like dissatisfaction with their current situation. However, only those who had the motivation to make changes would take post factum actions like migration.

2.6.1.2 Expectancy-value theory

Another useful framework to decode the motivation of migrants to migrate in relation to motivational theory is expectancy-value theory. It proposed that individual's expectancies and values directly influenced their performance and task choices. According to Eccles-Parsons et al. (1983), when individual's expectancies and values stayed more positive, they can better cope with change and uncertainty, therefore achieved better outcomes. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) further proposed four types of value: intrinsic value (the inner enjoyment a person gains from performing the task), attainment value (the importance of success in undertaking a specific task), utility value (the usefulness of achieving a goal or completing a task), and cost. There were four sub-components in cost: task effort cost (how much time and effort were put into the task), outside effort cost (how much time and effort were spent on tasks other than the task of interest), loss of valued alternatives (the loss of other options due to conducting the task), and emotional cost (emotions such as stress, worry and anxiety caused by engaging in the task). Expectancy-value theory was also recognised as a task-specific motivational model (Wigfield et al., 2016) because individuals may have completely distinct perceptions of expectancy, values and cost for different tasks. Therefore, although it was initially applied in areas of education and education psychology, the theory had also been used in the migration studies to examine how migrants balanced their existing motivations with their expectations of migration, thus contributing to their migration trajectory (Haberkorn, 1983).

In the migration context, the expectancy-value theory explained that migration was seen as instrumental behaviour. The decision-making process was based on a "cognitive calculus" of costs and benefits that involved a subjective, anticipatory weighting of the factors in attaining certain goals (De Jong et al., 1983). Although potential migrants' strength of migration intentions depended on a multiplication of the values of migration outcomes and expectations that migration would lead to these outcomes (Crawford, 1973), these values did not necessarily need to be economic. Other factors like security or self-fulfilment, social status, social mobility, residential satisfaction (a better place to live), family or friendship networks, and lifestyle preferences were also important to potential migrants (Hagen-Zanker, 2008; King et al., 2008). Therefore, migrants were not purely economic actors responding to the economic benefits of overseas opportunities. They were social actors whose motivations for migration were wrought by both social and structural elements (Rahman, 2017). This echoed the earlier development of motivational theory, which asserted that migration was part of the economic and social changes inherent in the modernisation process (Zelinsky, 1971), and a result of resolving structural tensions (power questions) and social tensions (prestige questions) (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1981). However, while decisions to study or work overseas were often based on expectations and promises of better jobs, opportunities, economic gains, and eventually a better future, due to migrants' insufficient capacity to meet their expectations which were constrained by conditions available to them in countries of destination, such expectations may not always be realised (Ullah, 2010). Interviews of professionals who came to Canada as economic immigrants between 1996 and 2006 revealed that many of the participants described their prior migration expectations as being "unmet" in Canada. The challenges they described included: finding a fit in Canada's economy, managing their expectations for initial employment, work-search difficulties due to lacking a professional network; and retraining (Chen & Davies, 2020).

As illustrated under motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, migrants' decision-making process was a fluid process whereby many factors interplayed. In their research on skilled migrants' decision-making and destination selection process, Tabor et al. (2015) found that migrants' decisions were made in three distinct parts:

- whether (entailing intrapersonal and social factors),
- where (considering elements including language, safety and job opportunities), and
- when to migrate (spanning months or years, depending on negotiation between family members).

During this process, although the catalyst related to the events that brought the decision from an amorphous desire to leave into actions of making that desire a reality, the event itself would not happen if the person were not already considering a move (Tabor et al., 2015). The catalyst interacted with an existing situation to motivate an individual from a state of considering moving into acting on their desire.

Hagen-Zanker (2008) maintained that the migration decision entailed weighing up different factors and the interplay of those elements. Complementary to macro-level circumstances and meso-level factors, analysing the micro determinants of migration, especially student migrants' motivations and expectancies, created a clearer picture of why international students made the decision to migrate in the first place and was useful for exploring their subsequent migration experience (Netierman et al., 2021).

2.6.2 Social network theory and strength of weak tie theory

The role of social linkages and especially migrant networks is crucial for understanding the migration flows, volumes, and patterns. According to a longstanding view, social networks provided channels for the migration process itself. For migrants, social networks were crucial for finding jobs and accommodation, circulating goods and services, as well as providing psychological support and

continuous social and economic information (Vertovec, 2002). Boyd (1989) explained the role of the network in migration was:

> Network connects migrants across time and space. Once begun, migration flows often become self-sustaining, reflecting the establishment of networks of information, assistance and obligations which develop between migrants in the host society and friends and relatives in the sending area. These networks link populations in origin and receiving countries and ensure that movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional or permanent. (p. 641)

2.6.2.1 Social network theory and key concepts

According to Scott (1991), there were three lines of research contributing to social network theory's early development: the sociometric analysis tradition, which relied on graph theory methods from mathematics; the interpersonal relations tradition, which focused on the formation of cliques among a group of individuals; and an anthropology tradition that explored the structure of community relations in less developed societies (Liu et al., 2017). Among those developments, the sociometric view of social networks was elaborated, emphasising structural properties, such as the relative location of individual nodes in the network (Liu et al., 2017). By considering the particular position of a node in a social network, researchers were able to convert social relationships into sociometric distance, thereby mapping these relationships in a social space (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the interpersonal relationship tradition, Moolenaar et al. (2012) elaborated that the most distinguishing feature of social network theory was its two-fold focus on both the individual actors and the social relationships connecting them. Understanding questions such as who knew whom, which organisations collaborated, or which actors shared common group membership could reveal the underlying social structures that were important in the exchange of resources in communities and in explaining a variety of social phenomena.

The three key concepts of social network theory were centrality, cohesion, and structural equivalence (Liu et al., 2017). Network cohesion measured the degree of interconnections among a group of nodes. Structural equivalence indicated two or more network positions that shared a similar pattern of connections with the rest of the network. Centrality was related to group efficiency in problem-solving, perception of leadership and the personal satisfaction of participants. Freeman (1978) proposed three distinct measures to indicate structural centrality: degree, closeness, and betweenness. Among them, betweenness centrality measured the frequency at which an individual node lay on the shortest path connecting other nodes in the network. Individuals high in betweenness centrality were more likely to serve as a bridge in the network. Bridging ties were social connections that linked two otherwise unconnected network clusters. In other words, bridging ties provided the only path between two disconnected clusters. Freeman's (1978) definition resonated with what Granovetter (1973) stated, "a bridge between A and B provides the only route along which information or influence can flow from any contact of A to any contact of B, and, consequently, from anyone connected indirectly to A to anyone connected indirectly to B" (p. 1364).

2.6.2.2 The strength of weak ties theory

An important lens to examine how migrants establish and utilise their social network was the strength of ties in their social network, which was composed of different personal and organisational connections (Poros, 2001). According to Granovetter (1973), an individual's social network consisted of multiple, multiplex social ties of varying strength. The strength of a tie was a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterised the tie. Granovetter (2003) classified the frequency of personal contact into three levels:

- often—people interacting at least twice a week;
- occasionally—more than once a year but less than twice a week and

- rarely—once a year or less (p. 118).

Strong ties were generally defined as "relatives, friends and acquaintances who were seen at least three times per week as well as relatives who lived in the same household of the respondent, regardless of how frequently they were seen". Others would be considered weak ties (Bridges & Villemez, 1986, p. 581). To be more specific, weak ties referred to the group of acquaintances who were less likely to be socially involved with one another (Granovetter, 1973). Despite the frequency of contact, the strength of social ties was also measured by a combination of other factors, such as structural variables (defined as a function of social homogeneity, shared affiliation, and overlap of social circles), emotional support variables (recognition of entities to produce intrinsic emotions, which stressed more on cognition of the other), and social distance variables (the difference in socioeconomic status, education level, political affiliation, and race and gender) (Luarn & Chiu, 2015). In short, the duration of interaction, the amount of effort individuals invested in a relationship, the extent to which the social ties provided reciprocal utility (e.g., social support), and the level of intimacy exchanged in a relationship all contributed to the strength of ties in an individual's social network (Liu et al., 2017). Based on these criteria, strong ties tended to bond similar people to each other, and these similar people tended to cluster together in a way that they were all mutually connected (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009; Granovetter, 1973). Conversely, weak ties which were generally termed as social relations requiring little investment, connected mostly individual's acquaintances or other loosely connected actors, as opposed to kin or close friends (Liu et al., 2017).

2.6.2.3 Weak ties in immigrants' network

Although most immigrants' networks were largely based on family and ethnic ties, which constituted a form of social capital that they can rely on to improve their economic and social statuses (Portes, 1995), it was usually weak ties (cross-ethnic rather than co-ethnic groups) that served as bridges between those interpersonal

networks (Sanders et al., 2002). According to Rademacher and Wang (2014), weak ties were believed to connect heterogeneous individuals to valuable resources unavailable within the densely knit, exclusionary structure of one's close ties.

Granovetter (1973) stated that weak ties could better channel exceptional social mobility opportunities, such as job chances, to those in contact with others, because weak-tie bridges provided people with "access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circles" (Granovetter, 1982, p. 221). On the other hand, making use of weak ties could reduce the over-reliance on a dense, strong network that was largely made up of family members and co-ethnics, limiting the network's "reach" and causing potential issues like exploitation (Ryan, 2016, p. 951). Therefore, although strong ties provided valuable financial and emotional support to facilitate migrants' initial entry into the host country (Popivanov & Kovacheva, 2019), building up a peripheral network outside of their kinship and close friends' circles was equally important to migrants. Through establishing a diverse social network, migrants not only gained substantial benefits like constructing notions of belonging, getting accustomed to and integrated with the new social context (Conradson & Latham, 2005), but also avoided "the experience of exploitation at the hands of co-ethnic employers" (Joseph, 2016, p. 184).

2.6.3 Structuration theory

Giddens' (1984) structuration theory was "an approach to social theory concerned with the intersection between knowledgeable and capable social agents and the wider social systems and structures in which they were implicated" (Gregory, 1995, p. 2). The conception of human agents as "knowledgeable" and "enabled" implied that those agents were capable of putting their structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways (Sewell, 1992, p. 4).

Through examining the recursive relationship between knowledgeable and capable human beings and the wider social structures and systems, structuration

theory was particularly useful in understanding the process of international migration. It allowed migration scholars to break out of the limitation of either seeing migrants as independent actors on a voluntary basis or as passive agents whose actions were merely determined by structural mechanisms. There were six core concepts in Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, which were: structure, agency, the duality of structure, institutions, dialectic control and time-space relations. Those concepts are explained in the following sub-sections.

2.6.3.1 Structure

According to Giddens (1984), structures were rules and resources which both enabled and constrained the actions of human agents as they were drawn up in their everyday lives. To be more specific, rules were "procedures of action, aspects of praxis" (p. 21) which included codes of communication and norms of behaviour. Sewell (1992) used the term schema rather than rules to elaborate on the means through which agents acted in society, as pathways of behaviour (McGarry, 2016).

Those rules and resources were not observable social structures, meaning they did not exist in a physical sense. Instead, they emerged as instances of social action and impressions of past activity (Jones, 2007). Therefore, structures were virtual in nature, existing as memory traces that informed the practices of knowledgeable agents (McGarry, 2016). Different from the social system, which comprised "discernibly similar social practices that are reproduced across time and space through the actions of human individuals" (p. 25), structures underlined the patterns that constituted systems and were not directly observable (McPhee et al., 2014).

2.6.3.2 Agency

Although structures guided individual actors' behaviour in contexts of co-presence, they were potentially alterable by agents in social interactions (Busco, 2009). According to Giddens (1984), agent referred to the individual actor who was guided in their social interactions by structures. To be an agent was to be able to

"deploy a range of causal power to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (p. 14). Agents, according to Giddens, were also able to explain (rationalise) the grounds of their actions if asked, even if they might not be aware of the consequences of them.

Agency was human action, especially the intention and capability of individuals to conduct, create, produce and reproduce structures through enacting rules and resources. Sewell (1992) elaborated that agency emerged when an actor possessed an understanding of schemas, enabling them to apply their knowledge in a new situation. Agency also arose from the actor's control of resources, which meant the capacity to reinterpret or mobilise an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. Bakewell (2010) further explained that agency meant the capacity for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires.

2.6.3.3 Duality of structure

The duality of structure was the foundation of structuration theory. It related to the fundamentally recursive character of social life and expressed the mutual dependence on structure and agency (Wolfel, 2005). Giddens (1984) believed that human actors' activities shaped, and were shaped by, the structure(s) of the institution. There was a dual relationship between them. That is to say, human actions both produced and were mediated by the structure (Scott et al., 1998). According to Wolfel (2005), structure both influenced and was influenced by social change. Societies had certain laws and resources that influenced social change. Meanwhile, these rules and resources can be modified through the process of "restructuring society" (Wolfel, 2005, p. 11). The duality of structure ensured the structure was not slavishly replicated but was reproduced. It only had existence insofar as it was "instantiated" in social practice (Giddens, 1984, p. 377). Structure was the result of the messy interaction of social actors struggling, negotiating and at times guessing in order to further their interests (Bakewell, 2010).

However, Giddens' notion of the "duality of structure" had been challenged for many years. Archer (1995) argued that this duality effectively conflated structure and agency. Analytically, duality disengaged, continued, or transformed in the reproduction of social systems. Because of the dynamic interplay of the two constituent elements, "structuration" did not denote fixity, durability, or even a point reached in development (p. 227). According to Vandenberghe (2005), Giddens' ontology of practices explicitly disclaimed the emergence of a relatively autonomous system possessing causal powers, which were irreducible prior to the actions of individuals and groups.

2.6.3.4 Institutions

Giddens (1984) identified four types of societal institutions: symbolic orders/modes of discourse; political institutions; economic institutions and law/modes of sanction. Social institutions were groups of practices of routine actions that were used by agents to influence societal change (Cohen, 1989). It was found that agents utilised each class of these institutions in an effort to influence the structuration of society. Furthermore, institutions differed from resources in the way that they were employed more routinely and were more deeply ingrained in society than resources (Wolfel, 2005).

Goss and Lindquist (1995) pointed out that as individuals acted and interacted, they drew upon the institutional modalities and ultimately reproduced the structure of society. They further developed at the meso-level the concept of the migrant institution, a complex articulation of individuals, associations, and organisations which extended the social action of and interaction between agents and agencies across time and space.

2.6.3.5 The dialectic of control

The term "dialectic of control" was used by Giddens (1984) to describe the relations of domination-subordination, which were reciprocal and "the most seemingly 'powerless' individuals can mobilise resources whereby they carved out

"spaces of control" (p. 197). According to Goss and Lindquist (1995), even the most marginalised populations can mobilise resources and rules in order to influence the actions of the more powerful. That meant power was available to all individual actors. All they needed to understand was what their power source was and how to use it. In other words, all individuals had the ability to influence societal change. Some scholars believed that human beings were able to control the environmental surroundings and their life circumstances because they had dispositions such as a belief in the capacity to exert influence over life (Hitlin & Elder Jr, 2007), self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), sense of control (Ross & Mirowsky, 2002), decision-making and self-determination (Schlosser, 2015). Individuals with these attributes can visualise the desired future states and then break down these goals into a hierarchically structured system of achievable sub-goals (Bandura, 2001). When put into migration studies, this explained the phenomenon that when individuals lost their ability to influence society, they ceased to be agents and may see movement to another society as the only opportunity for regaining their status as agents (Wolfel, 2005).

2.6.3.6 Time-space relations

According to Giddens (1984), all social interactions were both contextual and spatial — meaning they were situated in time and space and yet stretching across time-space distances. By stressing that space had to do with the contextuality of social interaction, Giddens (1984) made it clear that space became relevant as place-relatedness in action, not only as a geographical place but also as a locale, referring to the settings in which the routine activities of different individuals intersected. In other words, space was a place defined not in materiality terms but in social terms (Löw, 2008).

Gatrell and LaFary (2009) further elaborated that the processes of structuration were not static. Instead, they occurred at both multiple spatial scales and various points in time and therefore acted on one another through the regular

interaction of individuals, as well as institutions. To summarise, all structures existed in the context of time-space and were in a constant process of evolution and flux. Structures and agency reconstituted each other over a long stretch of time while allowing for the "pre-existence" of structural conditions that human actors negotiated as they pursued their everyday lives here and now (McGarry, 2016, p. 2972).

2.6.3.7 Structuration theory in migration

Recognised as a richly grounded theory, structuration theory had been applied to examine aspects of international migration (Bakewell, 2010). Giddens' (1984) work explicitly addressed the structure-agency duality and the dialectic relationships between agency and structure. It was particularly useful for a unified conceptualisation of international labour migration (Goss & Lindquist, 1995; Xiang, 2001). The scholars believed that knowledgeable agents, in this case potential migrants, employed their understanding of the rules of interaction to gain access to the allocative resource (the social and political power over other people) and authoritative resource (powers of wealth and property). That meant individuals were capable of controlling material resources and had control over other people, within the migrant institution, in order to obtain overseas employment (McGarry, 2016).

Morawska (2001) highlighted that the structuration model imbued migrant actors with cultural schemas and resources that channelled their efforts to accumulate capital into specific activities in the migration process. By doing so, migrants were able to integrate these coping strategies into a sequence of reciprocal, structure-agency causation. In the same vein, Conway (2007) illustrated how informal and unconscious influences such as "home" networks, social and cultural factors played as significant a role as codified structural "forces" in shaping and conditioning the choices and trajectories of migrants (p. 424).

According to Bakewell (2010), while most of the migration research was drawing inspiration from structuration theory as a way of reconciling structure and agency, a few studies focused on the methodological challenges of taking account of

structure and agency simultaneously. For example, in their study of migration and identity, Findlay and Li (1999) employed mixed methods of large-scale questionnaire surveys as well as qualitative data in teasing out the relationship between structure and agency in migration research. These methods enabled the researchers to analyse international migration as a process that was shaped both by international migration legislation (macro-level) and by potential migrants' decision making (micro-level) relating to their interpretations of their identities at "home" or in the "other" place (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1698).

2.6.4 Summary of theories

Based on above existing theories in migration studies, an integrated framework of theories was developed to underpin the current research, which focused on examining Chinese tertiary graduates' expectations and post-study experience in New Zealand. Each set of the selected theories, namely motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, social network theory and strength of weak ties theory, and structuration theory, played a distinct role in exploring the predetermined research questions.

Situating within the motivational theory constructs, expectancy-value theory was an important lens to investigate key motives and expectations of Chinese students initially choosing to come to New Zealand. Coupled with macro-and meso-level determinants, these two theories helped to decode the weighing factors of Chinese students' migration intentions and expectations at the micro-level that impacted their decision-making process. The current study presented details of how Chinese students' motivation was influenced by two key factors: their beliefs about the likelihood of success through studying abroad and the subjective value they placed on achieving a particular goal (value). Meanwhile, the expectancy-value theory was instrumental for analysing the catalysts that interacted with existing situations, motivated Chinese students to take actions of relocating. It also allowed

for comparison of the convergence or difference between the pre-departure expectations and experiences by Chinese students in New Zealand.

Chinese students' employment-seeking experience was an integral part of their post-study journey in New Zealand. A number of studies found that social network played a pivotal role in providing employment opportunities and facilitating international students' transition from temporary to permanent settlers (Blackmore et al., 2017; Han et al., 2022; Joseph, 2016). In particular, the strength of ties in their social network, consisting of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services (Granovetter, 1973), was essential for student migrants to establish and utilise social connections in the host country when finding employment. Alho (2020) found that being able to use the viable jobs search strategies (including making use of weak ties in the social network) was crucial for international students who by default were in a disadvantaged position in comparison to the native job seekers. In light of social network theory and Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties theory, the current research was designed to explore how Chinese students leveraged various strengths of ties within their social networks to secure favorable employment-seeking outcomes in New Zealand.

International graduates often faced additional challenges in the host workplace, including limited opportunities for career development and a lack of support from the organisation in their efforts to adjust to the host culture (Han et al., 2022). Formal and information norms, rules and principles in the host workplace determined the acceptance of individuals' behaviours and actions (Halperin & Backhouse, 2007). Giddens' (1984) structuration theory was adopted in the current research to investigate the adaptation process of Chinese students in the host workplace. By employing key concepts such as structure, agency, duality of structure and dialectic of control, this theory provided a conceptual scheme for understanding the dynamic relationship between Chinese students' activities and the rules and regulations as structuring of systems in the host organisation. It also helped to

examine when Chinese students endeavored to integrate with the host workplace culture, how organisational structures enabled and constrained their behaviours.

In summary, by considering these epistemological and ontological stances, the researcher acknowledged the philosophical underpinnings that shaped the current research. These positions also guided the selection of research methods, data collection techniques, and data analysis strategies, ensuring a coherent and consistent alignment between the philosophical stance and the objectives of current research.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology and explains why the study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the transitional experience of Chinese graduates in New Zealand. Based on the nature of research questions identified earlier, semi-structured in-depth interviews were the main data collection method of the current study. This chapter begins with the theoretical consideration of a qualitative method (Section 3.1). The rationale for the research design is discussed in Section 3.2, followed by an explanation of the data collection procedure in Section 3.3. The interview data analysis process is presented in Section 3.4. Ethical considerations are also discussed in this chapter in Section 3.5.

3.1 Qualitative method

The qualitative research method was adopted in the current study. This method dealt with detailed descriptions and rounded understandings that were based on, or offer an interpretation of, the perspectives of the respondents in the social setting (Ritchie, 2003). A major advantage of a qualitative method was to give participants opportunities to share their own stories, describe what they experienced and/or being listened to without judgment (Opsal et al., 2016). This method could help researchers to understand more context-independent, particularistic phenomena and holistic experiences lived by individuals, generating rich information for a deeper

understanding of human experience (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative research was also an effective method for understanding respondents' beliefs, attitudes, and values. These attributes were psychological characteristics that resided solely within individuals' minds and cannot be directly observed or accessed through other means (Frey et al., 2000).

In addition, epistemological and ontological stances were considered in the current research to frame the theoretical framework. According to Cleland (2017), ontology was defined as the assumptions about the nature of reality, whereas epistemology was considered as the assumptions about the nature of knowledge that informed the work researchers did. Epistemologically, a constructivist stance acknowledging the subjective nature of knowledge construction in student migration field was adopted. This stance allowed the research to recognise that knowledge was actively created and interpreted by student migrants based on their unique experiences and perspectives. Ontologically, a social constructionist perspective was embraced. This viewpoint regarded post-study movement among student migrants as a socially constructed reality emerging from interactions and shared meanings among research participants. Examined through the ontological perspective, Chinese graduates' experiences in the host country were perceived as not fixed, objective entities. Instead, they were shaped by social and cultural contexts within which Chinese graduates resided. By explicitly stating these epistemological and ontological positions, the researcher acknowledged philosophical underpinnings that shaped the research approach. These positions guided the selection of research methods, data collection and analysis strategies, ensuring a coherent and consistent alignment between the philosophical stance and the study's objective.

During data collection stage, one-on-one interviews were conducted to gain insights into the unique experiences, opinions, and motivations of each individual participant. According to Punch (2013), interviews can be distinguished by the degree to which they are structured. There were three broad categories of a continuum of interview methods, namely unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Among them, semi-structured interviews were characterised by open-ended questions and the use of an interview guide (or topic guide/list) in which the broad areas of interest, sometimes including sub-questions, were defined (Busetto et al., 2020). In the current research, those pre-

defined topics in the semi-structured interview guide were derived from literature and previous research on student migrants' motivations and expectations, host labour market's recruitment practice, workplace culture and the skilled migration pathways in New Zealand. The interview list was prepared at the start of pilot study and was updated and improved when the researcher accumulated more knowledge about those fields.

Thematic analysis technique was employed to categorise data and establish key understandings of the connection between international education, employment and migration. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis was a useful way of identifying what is common in a topic talked or written most among a certain group of people and how to make sense of those commonalities. Based on this technique, the design of semi-structured interviews incorporated both close-ended and open-ended questions. This approach enabled research participants to provide more comprehensive insights into their experiences during the transition stage while settling in the host workplace and seeking migration status. By establishing rapport with the research participants and creating an atmosphere where the participants could reflect on their experience in New Zealand, the researcher was able to investigate more into those sensitive topics like the disadvantages and prejudice against student migrants and their feelings when going through those situations.

In conclusion, qualitative method offered a holistic and nuanced approach to understanding experiences, behaviors of Chinese graduates and meanings in the context of their post-study transition in New Zealand. By embracing the subjectivity and complexity of those experiences, this method also enabled the researcher to explore more in depth the research questions that were presented in section 1.4.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Pilot study

This research began with a pilot study based on questions used in the interview guide (See Appendix A). According to Yin (2009), the purpose of a pilot

study was to verify whether the proposed procedures and the question items were viable, to help the researcher to refine the collection plans in terms of the content of the data and the procedures to be followed. Other advantages of conducting a pilot study were that it can indicate areas where the main research project could fail, where research protocols might not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments might be inappropriate or too complicated (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

The pilot study (N=5) was designed and based on a list of topics exploring three key aspects of the research questions, which are 1) motivations and expectations; 2) employment seeking and workplace communication; 3) migratory endeavours and outcomes. From November 2019 to January 2020, five Chinese tertiary graduates from the researcher's personal network volunteered to participate in the pilot study. Based on the initial result, the following changes were made to the subsequent main research:

1. Language: The pilot interviews were conducted in English. It was based on the assumption that all participants had studied in New Zealand tertiary institutions where English was the medium of instruction and that most participants used English in their daily communication. However, the results from the pilot study indicated that some participants were not confident using English, which was their second language, to articulate their situation in-depth. As a result, they voluntarily requested to explain their viewpoints in Mandarin. This caused the problem of discrepancy between two languages used in the interviews when analysing the data. Based on the situation, the language in the main research was changed to Mandarin. Since both the researcher and the participants were from the same cultural and language backgrounds, it was easier and more comfortable for participants to express what they wanted to say and to articulate their ideas more clearly.

2. Data transcription: The interview data from the pilot study was transcribed by a voice recognition software called "iFlytek"[10] (in English). Despite the

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[10] iFlytek, styled as iFLYTEK, is a Chinese information technology company established in 1999. Its product ranges from voice recognition software and voice-based internet/mobile products that cover education, communication, music and intelligent toys industries.

high accuracy, this step was cancelled after the interview language was changed to Mandarin in the main research. Instead, the data was recorded through digital platforms and was manually transcribed.

3. Interview questions: After the pilot study, more open-ended questions were added in conjunction with the closed-ended questions. For example, when a participant answered "no" to the question of "Have you ever been through any difficulties when accessing the first job in New Zealand?", the next question of "What were the factors contributing to your success in finding this job?" was raised. Streamlining the interview questions enabled the researcher to establish more clues from the participants' answers.

3.2.2 Sampling

The current research focused on Chinese-born student migrants who had gained tertiary qualifications from New Zealand institutions and were working (or used to work) or were seeking permanent residence in New Zealand when the research commenced. There was no specific age request for the participants, but preference was given to those who had graduated within recent five years (from 2015 to 2020) so that the study results could better reflect the latest situation and the trend in the education and migration fields. According to Yin (2009), applying participant selection criteria helps to develop a homogeneous sample that enhances the ability to discover phenomena embedded in the material. More specifically, the following demographic criteria applied to the participants who:

- came to New Zealand as a Chinese international student.
- attained at least one New Zealand tertiary qualification.
- gained post-graduation paid employment in New Zealand.
- had acquired or were in the process of seeking permanent residency in New Zealand.

Access to the sample group was initially gained through the researcher's personal network, then increased by the snow-ball sampling technique. From the end

of 2019 to early 2020, an advertisement flyer (see Appendix B) was posted on the researcher's personal social media account. It had successfully attracted the initial five participants who volunteered to attend the pilot study. Those research participants who participated the interviews were encouraged to introduce other individuals through their personal network who might be interested to be part of the research project. As a result, more Chinese graduates who met the demographic criteria contacted the researcher and expressed their interest to attend the interviews. Among them, 20 graduates were selected for the main research.

The key advantage of this snow-ball sampling technique was that the researcher can locate individuals who had the desired characteristics and used that person's social networks to recruit similar subjects. As the sample built up, more valid data was gathered to be used for research (Heckathorn, 2011). This sampling method used a few cases to help encourage other cases to take part in the study, thereby increasing the sample size (Taherdoost, 2016). In the current study, this method was particularly useful to solve the problem of recruiting more interviewees as the pandemic situation worsened when the main research began. With the help of the existing research participants, future research participants were recruited until a sufficient sample had been reached (Naderifar et al., 2017). The current research participants' demographic information was summarised and presented in Table 3.1 (in pages 87-89). More details about their qualifications and gender distribution were listed in Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

Figure 3.1

Research Participants' Qualification Distribution
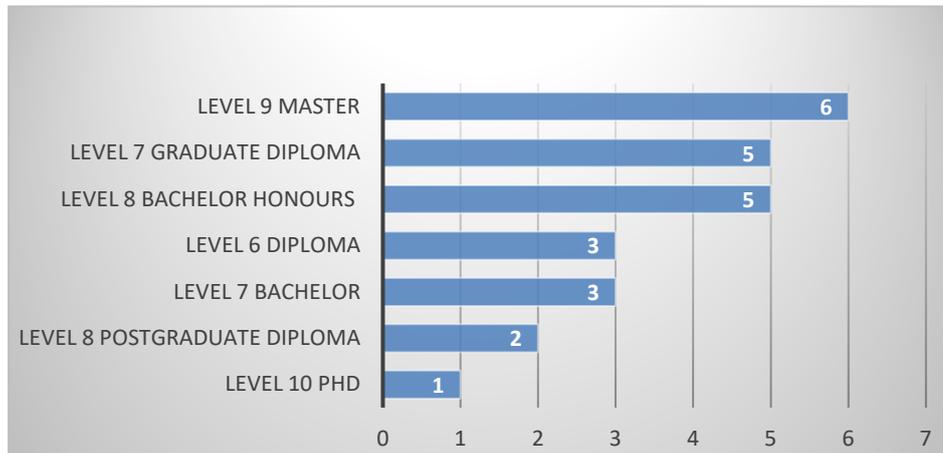
Figure 3.2

Research Participants' Gender Ratio
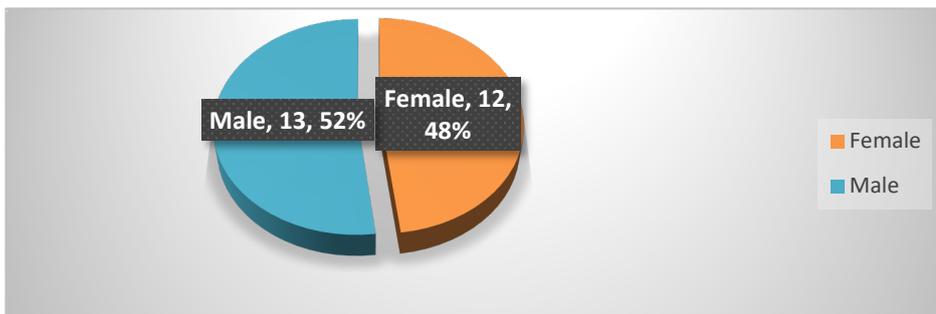
3.3 Data collection

As mentioned earlier, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were employed in the current study. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), one-on-one interviews were useful to classify complex attitude patterns and understand the interpretations that people attributed to their motivation to act. Semi-structured interviews consisted of several key questions that helped to define the areas to be explored, but also allowed the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or

response in more detail (Gill et al., 2008). By asking the list of pre-defined questions and some probing follow-up questions, researchers were able to gather specific details and more complete answers (Frey et al., 2000).

Gill et al. (2008) suggested that when doing qualitative interviews, it was usually best to start with questions that participants can answer easily and then proceed to more difficult or sensitive topics. By doing so, it can help to put participants at ease, build up confidence and rapport and often generate rich data that subsequently develops the interview further. The current study adopted this strategy by collecting Chinese graduates' demographic details in the first part of the interview, followed by relatively easy questions asking about their motivations and expectations when coming to New Zealand. The interviewer then delved deeper into hard questions such as job searching and migration pursuits that most respondents felt challenging. Owing to the rapport already being built up, most research participants were willing to openly share their encounters and feelings.

Successful interviewing also required meticulous planning and careful consideration about the location of interviews. It was important for participants to feel safe, comfortable, and at ease during interviews (Elmir et al., 2011). The interviewing environment should be private and free from interruptions, particularly when discussing sensitive issues. Interviews should be conducted at a place and time that were selected by the participant (Doody & Noonan, 2013). When the data collection process of the pilot study took place at the end of 2019, face-to-face interviews were planned and organised. The venues were chosen by the participants in either their homes or a quiet place like public libraries where the participants felt comfortable. However, with the onset of COVID-19, the New Zealand government announced that the entire country was going into self-isolation in March 2020 (Unite against COVID-19, June, 2022). Under the alert level system introduced to manage the pandemic outbreak, there was limited mobility for people living in New Zealand. In addition, participants recruited through the snow-ball technique were scattered in different cities in New Zealand. As a result, in-person interviewing was no longer

feasible. Instead, virtual meetings through video-conferencing communication tools like Zoom, WeChat, and Microsoft Teams [11] became the viable option for data collection.

According to Gray et al. (2020), while video conferencing was developed to facilitate long-distance or international communication, enhance collaborations and reduce travel costs for business, these same features can be extended to qualitative research interviews and yield positive results. Some advantages of using video conferencing tools included more open and expressive participants, accessibility to research participants, time-saving conveniences, secured data generation and storage, personal safety, and cost-effectiveness (Gray et al., 2020). However, there were some disadvantages of using online platforms in qualitative research. Cater (2011) stated that although video conferencing software allowed the participant and interviewer to hear and see each other, they did not occupy the same physical space. It also caused problems like missed opportunities for the researcher to observe the participant's physical space and to body language and emotional cues. In addition, creating and maintaining rapport with participants may look different in video conferencing interviews compared with face-to-face interviews. Participants who were more reserved with their answers might affect rapport building (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Moreover, technical difficulties and distractions or lack of privacy were some other drawbacks of using online software for qualitative research (Gray et al., 2020).

The above situation had been considered in the current research. When the researcher started conducting online interviews to collect research data, the following measures were taken to minimise the disadvantages:

1) Exchanged ways of contact with research participants and set up casual talks prior to formal interviews to build rapport.

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[11] Microsoft Teams is a proprietary business communication platform developed by Microsoft. Teams primarily competes with the similar service Slack, offering workspace chat and videoconferencing, file storage, and application integration.

2) Reminded participants to check their internet connectivity and ensure they would be in a quiet, private place for at least 60 minutes to talk online.

3) Tested the audio and video effects of the video conferencing tools ahead of interviews and resolved any possible technical problems.

4) Set up a backup plan of using phone calls in case of technical breakdowns.

From early 2020 to the middle of 2021, 20 one-on-one interviews for the main research were conducted through the digital platforms of Zoom, WeChat, or Teams. Although there were a few technical breakdowns in some interviews, owing to the above preparation, all online interviews were completed as initially scheduled and were of high audio and video qualities. The recorded data was stored on the researcher's Microsoft OneDrive [12] account, which could be accessed anywhere, from any device and has backup features.

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[12] Microsoft OneDrive is a file hosting service operated by Microsoft. It enables registered users to share and synchronise their files. OneDrive also works as the storage backend of the web version of Microsoft Office.

Table 3.1

Demographic Information of Research Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Highest Qualification (NZQA level)	Occupation	New Zealand Residency status	Residing location	Years in NZ
May	Female	Bachelor (Level 7)	Service Desk Analyst	Yes	Wellington	13
Martin	Male	Bachelor Honours (Level 8)	Research Analyst	No	Wellington	3
Rebecca	Female	Bachelor (Level 7)	Graduate Designer	No	Wellington	8
Linda	Female	Bachelor Honours (Level 8)	Graduate Designer	No	Wellington	6
Tom	Male	Bachelor Honours (Level 8)	Consulting Engineer	No	Auckland	10
John	Male	Bachelor Honours (Level 8)	Engineer	No	Auckland	7
Robert	Male	Bachelor Honours (Level 8)	Research Officer	Yes	Palmerston North	5
Jane	Female	Bachelor (Level 7)	Travel Consultant	No	Wellington	6
Dan	Male	Graduate Diploma (Level 7)	Store Manager	No	Wellington	1
Ben	Male	Graduate Diploma (Level 7)	Team leader	No	Wellington	4
Doris	Female	Graduate Diploma (Level 7)	CAD-Revit	No	Christchurch	2
Cindy	Female	Graduate Diploma (Level 7)	Plumber	No	Wellington	2

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Highest Qualification (NZQA level)	Occupation	New Zealand Residency status	Residing location	Years in NZ
Jordan	Male	Graduate Diploma (Level 7)	Data Engineer	No	Wellington	2
York	Male	Master (Level 9)	Junior graphic designer	No	Wellington	2
Diane	Female	Master (Level 9)	Media Editor	No	Auckland	5
Emily	Female	Master (Level 9)	Account Manager in a Tourism Company	Yes	Wellington	9
Bobby	Male	Master (Level 9)	Consultant Data Engineer	Yes	Auckland	8
Lane	Male	Diploma (Level 6)	Chef	No	Wellington	3
Beryl	Female	Diploma (Level 6)	QS Intern	No	Wellington	2
Jason	Male	Diploma (Level 6)	Junior QS	No	Auckland	5
Bill	Male	PhD (Level 10)	Post-doctoral research fellow	No	Wellington	7
Justin	Male	Postgraduate (Level 8)	Flight Planner	Yes	Auckland	5
Alice	Female	Postgraduate (Level 8)	Sales Agent	No	Wellington	3

3.4 Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis process is closely linked with the actual data. According to Thorne (2000), important elements of the analytic processes that influence the research data include: the theoretical lens from which the researcher approaches the phenomenon, the strategies that the researcher uses to collect or construct data, and the understandings that the researcher has about what might count as relevant or important data in answering the research question. The following section explains how the formation of research questions associates with the data analysis procedure in the current research.

The qualitative data analysis process was closely linked with the actual data. According to Thorne (2000), important elements of the analytic processes that influenced the research data included: the theoretical lens from which the researcher approached the phenomenon, the strategies that the researcher used to collect or construct data, and the understandings that the researcher had about what might count as relevant or important data in answering the research question. The remainder of this section explains steps of data analysis process and how the formation of research questions associates with the data analysis procedure in the current research.

During the process of research data analysis, a combined technique of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was employed. According to Boyatzis (1998), a deductive method was a top-down approach where the researcher applied a set of concepts, ideas, or topics to the data for coding and interpretation. Conversely, an inductive method was a bottom-up approach driven by the content of the data itself. In the inductive process, codes and themes were allowed to emerge from the data. The inductive method ensured the researcher's analysis closely aligned with the data's content. In the current research, the process began with a set of initial codes rooted in existing theories (deductive method). At the same time, new themes emerged from the ongoing interviews as they progressed (inductive method). This technique

complemented the research questions by integrating the principles of social phenomenology into the process of deductive thematic analysis and inductive coding. Steps of data analysis process were outlined as below:

- The qualitative data (interview transcripts) was imported into NVivo and organised into appropriate folders within the NVivo project.

- A deductive approach started. As a set of initial codes based on existing theories and literature, those codes were designed to reflect predetermined themes or concepts, such as expectations (met or unmet), employment seeking, and workplace communication.

- Subsequently, the inductive process was initiated. The data was read and coded segment by segment, leading to the emergence of new codes and themes, such as trend of migrating to a third country and gender differences. Those newly identified findings were summarised and established as nodes within NVivo.

- A comparison between the inductive and the deductive codes was made, covering analysis on overlaps, similarities, or discrepancies between those codes. NVivo's features such as linking or grouping functions were used to connect similar codes and identify relationships between them.

- Through a continuous process of reviewing and refining the coding structure, adjustments such as merging, renaming, or deleting codes when necessary were made. This step ensured coherence and clarity in the analysis. When the coding structure was well established, NVivo's queries and visualisation features were used to explore and analyse the themes presenting in the data.

- The above steps were repeated, enabling the researcher to fine-tune the codes, delve into themes, and adapt the analysis result as needed.

Formation of research questions was intertwined with the data analysis procedure. RQ1 explored the first-order meanings in the study through open-coding phase of analysis. In the current research, this question was to examine factors

influencing Chinese student migrants' decision-making process. Data collected on the participants' initial decisions to move helped to construct the symbolic links that tie them to the second-order concept (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As an example, when high numbers of participants mentioned factors of "career prospect" or "immigration opportunities" as the key drivers for their initial move, it could justify the validity of education and migration nexus, which was the basic ground for the current study. The design of RQ2 was to test the second-order concepts of the study, the strong and weak ties in the social network (Granovetter, 2003) and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). The strength of ties in social network theory was useful to identify how Chinese student migrants utilised their social linkages to access employment. The concept of duality of structure in structuration theory was about how human actors' activities shaped and were shaped by the structure(s) of the institution. By revealing how Chinese graduates adapted to the host organisation and how the host organisation influenced and was influenced by their behaviours, research participants' experience during the post-study phase were better categorised and filtered for the next stage of analysis. RQ3 invoked the overarching theme of the study, that is, how did Chinese graduates' migration trend evolve along their post-study transition journey. This data increased the value and significance of the current study's findings by examining the practicability of the two-step migration pathway from participants' personal experience.

As mentioned earlier, all one-on-one interviews were recorded on video conferencing platforms. The recorded data was either manually transcribed (when conducted in Mandarin) or transcribed by the transcription software "iFlytek (when conducted in English). The transcribed data were translated into English by the researcher (when conducted in Mandarin). An independent person who is a native speaker of Mandarin was invited for a spot check to ensure the accuracy of the translation. As summarised before, the data analysis involved three stages: exploring the data, coding the data, and generating categories and themes (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

At the first stage, each interview recording was thoroughly listened to before it was transcribed, translated, and imported into NVivo. During the second stage, the transcripts were divided into small units according to keywords, such as phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. A series of descriptive theme nodes (e.g., decision-making, expectations, employment, and workplace communication) was set up and stored in NVivo. Table 3.2 showed the grouping of those theme nodes. During this process, the coded words were organised into groups of similar meanings and were identified as themes accordingly. In the next stage of data categorisation, a "mind map" was developed to arrange the nodes in a sensible hierarchy. The map (See Figure 3.3) enabled the researcher to identify the central idea and to access the most shared viewpoints from each participant, then to turn them into statements for further discussion. In this stage, the following five broad categories of data were identified:

1. Divergent expectations on employment and migration.
2. Challenges when accessing employment in New Zealand.
3. Barriers in workplace communication.
4. Gender difference in the transitional experience.
5. Stay, return or migration to a third country consideration.

In summary, the data analysis process entailed systematic examination and categorisation of collected data. This process consisted of identifying patterns, themes, and insights emerging from the interviews, presenting a clearer picture of the research topic.

Figure 3. 3

The Mind Map

Expectations

Met

Study to work

Unmet

Work to residence

Return or depart

Employment

Workplace communication

NZ residency

Social network

Exploitations

Challenges (language/culture)

Underemployment

Formal/informal ways

Gendered barriers

Tactics/strategies

Lengthy process

Stringent policies

Covid's impact
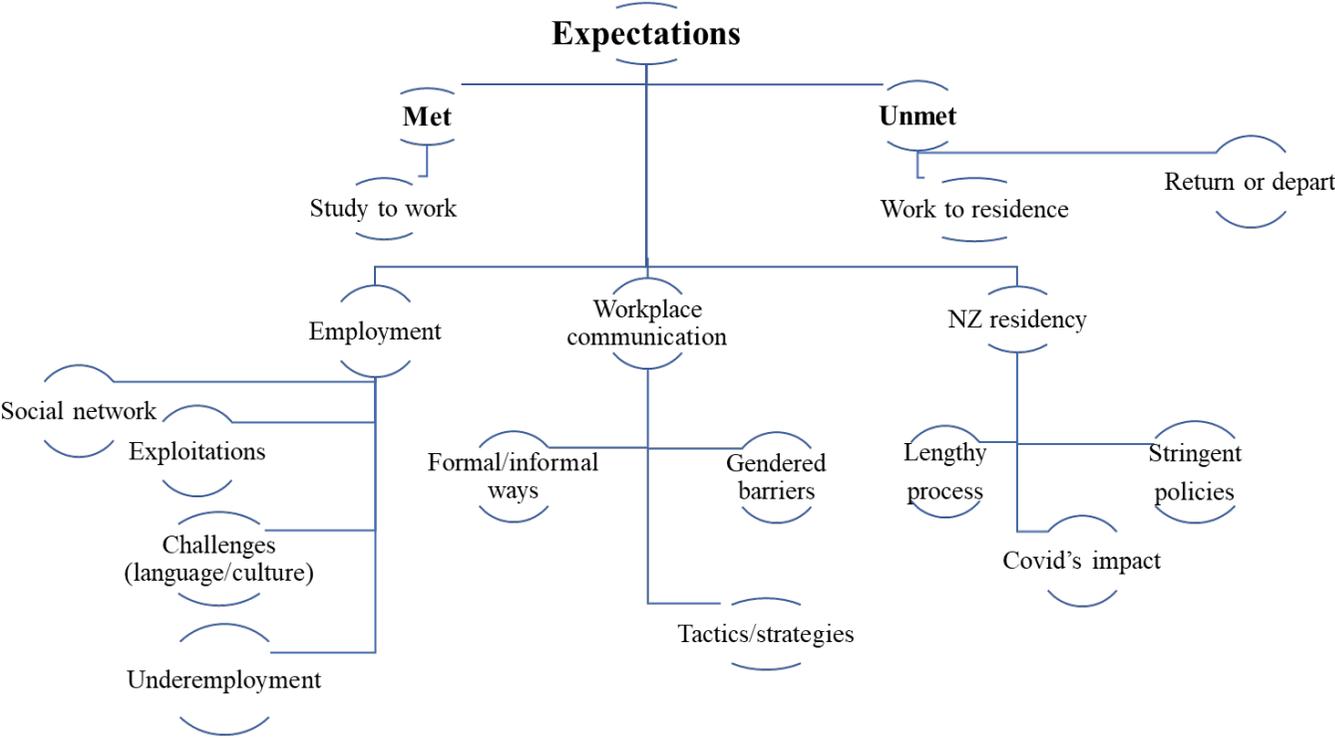
Table 3.2

Theme Nodes in NVivo

Decision making	Expectations	Employment	Workplace communication	Migratory status	Gendered barriers
Affordable fees	Met (Study-to-Work journey)	Networks	Formal language	Lengthy process	More challenges
Better future	Unmet (Work-to Residence journey)	Exploitation (visible and invisible)	Colloquial terms	Uncertain policies	Masculine culture
Relaxed academic entries	Disinformation	Useful tools (CV/training/ referrals)	Relationship building	Return to home country	Limited job choices
Clean and green environment	Readjusted expectations	Challenges (bias/deskilling)	Changeable dynamics	Go to the 3rd country	Double disadvantages

3.5 Ethical considerations

The current research adopted a qualitative research method which had some degree of risks being inevitably involved. According to Ritchie (2003), any study topic can raise sensitive issues for people, uncover painful experiences and lead people to disclose information that they have rarely (or never) shared before. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) mentioned that challenges in conducting qualitative research included rapport development, use of researcher self-disclosure, untold stories, feelings of guilt, vulnerability, leaving the research relationship and researcher exhaustion.

While the issue of research ethics was important, it was possible to find solutions to problems if research could be undertaken sensitively (Flick, 2009). One of the preventive measures, suggested by Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000), was that researchers should undertake a risk assessment for themselves as well as their participants. In the current research, due to the involvement of former international students as research participants, who were considered a vulnerable group (Massey University, 2017), ethics approval was obtained from the Massey University Ethics Committee before the commencement of the research. In accordance with the ethical guidelines by the Committee, all participants were provided with an Information Sheet (see Appendix C). The Information Sheet contained informative details about the aims of the research project, participants' selection criteria, and their rights. In addition, to minimise the risk of harm, a voluntary consent request (see Appendix D) was sent to participants before they agreed to take part in the research. In the consent form, it stated that involvement in the current study was voluntary, and participants had the option to opt out of the interviews at any time if they were not feeling comfortable.

At the start of each interview, all participants were given an opportunity to ask questions or clarify any issues or doubts that they might have about the research.

Based on the information provided, participants were also given sufficient time to consider whether to attend this study or not. They could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable before or during the interviews. For face-to-face interviews, the venue settings were chosen by the participants with regard to safety, privacy and convenience. For online interviews, participants were informed that a quiet and private place with good internet connection was required. Once the consent form was signed and submitted by the participants, it showed that they were giving agreement for the information to be used for the research purpose. Besides these, the researcher endeavoured to be as objective as possible by considering the participants' situation and always thinking from their perspectives during the data collection and analysis processes. When publishing the research data, all participants' names and personal information shall remain anonymous to protect their privacy.

In addition, to guarantee participants' confidentiality, the following measures were taken when collecting and analysing the interview data:

- All data was digitally recorded.
- The researcher was the only person who could access the recorded interview data.
- All the materials related to the interviews were stored safely during the study and would be destroyed after the submission of this dissertation.
- All information provided by the participants was used to fulfil the current study only.
- When analysing the data, interpretations were grounded in the data instead of by personal judgements.
- All interview data collected from the 25 participants was transcribed solely by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results of the current research on Chinese tertiary graduates' expectations and their experience at the post-academic transition stage in New Zealand. It presents findings from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted from November 2019 to May 2021. Based on initial codes from the interview data, a thematic table (see Table 4.1 in Appendix E) was developed to organise the themes. Emerging from those interviews centred around the three research questions stated earlier, the research reveals six themes with seventeen subthemes. They are categorised and presented in four sections.

Section 4.1 explores key factors impacting Chinese students' choice of New Zealand as their studying and living destination. Section 4.2 examines their different expectations towards employment and migration, and the evolution of those expectations during Chinese students' post-study transition. It also presents their met and unmet expectations. Section 4.3 delves deeper into their employment-seeking journey. It reports the advantages and drawbacks of Chinese students' close social network when searching for jobs, the breakdown between their study programmes and the real world of work, other challenges like visa constraints, prejudicial perceptions by prospective employers, visible and invisible exploitations, and their under-employment situation. Section 4.4 identifies the challenges and barriers facing Chinese graduates in the New Zealand workplace and their coping tactics and strategies. Section 4.5 makes comparison on different expectations and transitional experiences between male and female graduates. It particularly investigates gender-specific barriers facing female graduates and their unique approaches to overcoming those obstacles. Section 4.6 outlines the trend of more Chinese graduates' considering either to return home or go to a third country and their reasons behind this trend.

4.1 Decision-making process

To examine Chinese students' expectations and experience in their post-study transition, the interviews started with investigating key factors in their decision-making process The interview data showed that although individual participants' reasons for choosing New Zealand as their destination country varied, there were three main determinants: education opportunity, immigration prospect, and western lifestyle. Each of these factors resulted in different expectations of their journey in New Zealand.

4.1.1 Education purpose

Most Chinese graduates reported they had made their own choices based on many factors, such as host countries, institutions, academic subjects and programmes, lifestyles, and opinions of the families, relatives, and peers. Among those elements, it was found that gaining a well-recognised foreign qualification was their primary goal. For instance, Tom and Jane, who both came to New Zealand as secondary school students, said when planning to study overseas, their main focus at that time was on education, although they had a vague expectation on migration after studies.

> Before I started my study, my mum told me that my task was to study and did not worry about the future. It would be nice if I can gain New Zealand residency after completing study and getting a job. However, there's always an alternate for me if I fail (to secure the residency). (Jane, bachelor graduate)

Similar to Jane, Tom said that when he came to New Zealand at the age of 16, he aimed at achieving good scores at high school and going to an esteemed university in New Zealand. He explained, "It cost my family a lot (of money) to send me overseas. The only return we both expected was a good (tertiary) qualification from a well-recognised university".

When asked about whether New Zealand was their first choice, the majority of the answers was no. Twenty (out of 25) said they had initially considered other

popular immigrant-receiving countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia when planning their study journey. After comparing various prospects among those countries, they eventually turned to New Zealand. The key determinant was the perceived advantages of New Zealand's education, such as its English legacy, internationally recognised qualifications, the less strict academic entry requirement, and cost-effectiveness of studying programmes. For example, Ben chose to study in New Zealand because the institution he applied to offered an internal English test. It was attractive to him since he failed the official IELTS tests in China and was not confident to pass it in a short time. He said, "It was much easier for me to come (to New Zealand) first and study English here. I felt less pressured by attending the internal English test. So, I managed to pass it with the required mark". For Beryl, her decision was based on some combined factors around education,

> Among those popular English-speaking countries for my overseas study destination, New Zealand became my final choice because I had a limited budget. The offer of place I received from a New Zealand institution provided a lower tuition fee compared with those of other countries like Australia, Britain, and Canada. Moreover, the qualification from universities in New Zealand is also widely recognised in the world. (Beryl, New Zealand Diploma graduate)

4.1.2 Immigration project

The second most important reason for Chinese students to choose New Zealand was its immigration outlook, especially the possibility of gaining residency through the study-to-work pathway. Twenty-one participants admitted their decision-making process was either directly or indirectly related to the migration purpose. For example, Tom, a bachelor's graduate, said that he considered the flexibility of travelling between home and foreign countries without the restriction of a visa as "something really cool and nice to have". Another participant, Grace made it more straight forward:

> The possibility of settling in New Zealand after graduation is definitely a key factor for my decision-making. I knew that studying is a bridging stone to gain permanent residence. Although I had no social connections like friends

or family members in New Zealand, I made the decision after understanding the future migration pathway from a few persons.

Justin, a postgraduate diploma graduate, decided to come to New Zealand with his immediate family to study and work, in a collaborative way. He said:

Before deciding to study overseas, I already had 10 years of working experience in a state-owned enterprise in China. Under the desire of a change in both work and life, and through discussion with my wife, we agreed that I came first to study and found a job afterwards. Then my family would follow. However, we changed our plan later. While I was studying, my wife also applied to study a qualification in New Zealand. That way, we could have a backup plan if my initial plan failed. This proved to be the right decision because my wife managed to secure a job before I did. She then successfully obtained the residency for the whole family.

According to those who had considered the migration prospect, except for the flexibility of its study to work and work to residence pathways, the main advantage of New Zealand's Permanent Resident Visa was also a key appealing factor. As Bobby explained:

I believe gaining a New Zealand residency is the motive for most international students coming to New Zealand. For me, there's no exception. Through my research, I found that it's easier to get New Zealand residency through the study to migration pathway than many other western countries. Especially, New Zealand's Permanent Resident Visa which has no time limit on travel conditions is the most favourable one among those countries. (Bobby, master graduate)

4.1.3 A western lifestyle

As mentioned by most participants, other factors contributing to New Zealand's attraction as an ideal studying and living destination included its reputation on social stability, natural beauty, work-life balance, and cultural inclusiveness. According to Cindy:

Basically, its lifestyle attracts me most. Compared to (what's like) in China, the work pressure in NZ is lower. In addition, the income gained through a decent job is quite fair. Although I'm only earning the minimum wage in NZ, it's still higher than the normal income I used to get in China. As a bonus, I have more free time after work and could do things that I'm fond of. Other than that, the beautiful natural environment and plenty of multicultural events all year round also attract me to stay on. (Cindy, Graduate diploma graduate)

When Tom and his parents made decision on his study destination country, security was their top consideration. He said, "I was going to a foreign country for the first time in my life, my family definitely wanted to ensure that I would be in a safe country. Therefore, New Zealand was the best choice among those we considered". For Linda, the primary reason to come to New Zealand was its diverse culture. "I heard that more than a quarter of its population was born outside of New Zealand. So, I believed I can settle well in such a muti-cultural and inclusive society." Doris' decision was made upon a mixture of considerations:

My husband and I first visited New Zealand a few years ago for our honeymoon. We fell in love with its beautiful scenery and friendly people here. After returning, we kept thinking about the possibility of migrating (to New Zealand). At that time, I was having some bottlenecks in my career. I really wanted to make a change in my life. The study to migration pathway was ideal because the studying cost was quite affordable (compared to other countries). Moreover, the clean air and natural beauty in New Zealand were appealing to us. We wanted our future child to live in an environment like here. With all these (factors) adding up, we finally decided our migration plan through (me) studying a qualification first then finding a skilled job and gaining the residency afterwards. (Doris, Graduate diploma graduate)

To summarise from the above findings, when initially planning to study overseas, Chinese students and their family made thorough considerations. Great importance was placed on the educational, migratory, and cultural aspects. Those factors interacted and impacted on their post-study transition in the host country.

4.2 Expectations

This section examines Chinese graduates' prior expectations of their post-study transition before embarking on their study journey in New Zealand. There are three key findings as below:

1. Chinese students had different expectations to employment and migration.
2. Their expectations evolved with the change of their life status.
3. They were generally satisfied with the study-to-work journey while disappointed about the work-to-residence part.

4.2.1 Employment and migration

One prominent theme emerging from the interviews was the various expectations towards employment and migration associated with Chinese students' education plan. Most participants reported they did some research, more or less, on both prospects before embarking on their learning journey in New Zealand. Their initial expectations before coming to New Zealand were rooted from educational, cultural, and migratory purposes. The overwhelming majority of the participants said they expected a smooth transition from education to migration in New Zealand through the two-step route of study-to-work and work-to-residence. Bobby said:

> When I started planning my overseas study, New Zealand's immigration policy was quite relaxing for international students. At that time, if you graduated with a tertiary degree and got a job afterwards, there were no specific requirements for either the job or salary standards for SMC application. Therefore, I believed it (the study to migration pathway) was the easiest route for me. Of course, the situation changed abruptly when I graduated, it's no longer that easy.

Under the strong desire to secure a positive migratory outcome, some Chinese graduates altered their study plan to accommodate the ever-changing immigration settings in New Zealand. May, a bachelor graduate was previously given an offer to study horticulture at a New Zealand institution. After consulting with people around her, May changed her study programme to Information Technology. She believed the new programme would give her a better chance of success when applying for New

Zealand residency, because "It (Information Technology) was on the Long-Term Skill Shortage List of occupation issued by Immigration New Zealand, which would give me more bonus points when applying for the residency." Similarly, Ben said:

> Although my main motive back then was to gain a foreign qualification and experience a different lifestyle in an English-speaking country. Considering the plan to stay after graduating, I did apply to change my major (of study) from Business to Hospitality Management. So that I could get a job quicker, since New Zealand is always in need of Hospitality workers. (Ben, Graduate diploma graduate)

Although migration is one of their top considerations when deciding to study overseas, most Chinese students in the current study admitted they had over-expectation of employment and inadequate knowledge of the employment-seeking practice, recruitment rules, and workplace culture in New Zealand. Six participants (Grace, Alice, Cindy, Jordan, Robert, and Diane) said they took it for granted that success in completing tertiary education would lead to positive employment outcomes. They neglected other factors which all played some parts in their post-study transition. For example, Grace didn't realise her overseas working experience was not recognised in the New Zealand's labour market. As a result, in the eyes of local employers, she was "the same as those fresh graduates who did not have any working experiences at all". Another participant pointed out:

> When deciding to come to New Zealand, I mainly aimed at pursuing further study and taking a break from my 10 years' work in China. To be frank, I thought there wouldn't be a problem for me to find a quality job through my New Zealand qualification. Naturally, I would be eligible to apply for the residency. But regarding what kind of job that I would do (after studying), I had absolutely no idea at that time. (Alice, Postgraduate Diploma graduate)

The above cases indicated that although education is their primary goal when seeking to study in New Zealand, Chinese students had various expectations towards migration and employment. Although anticipated a smooth transition from education to migration, they generally underestimated the challenges of seeking employment, which became a key obstacle for their migration pursuit.

4.2.2 Evolving expectations

An interesting finding emerging from the interviews was that some Chinese graduates reported they had no expectations of either employment or migration at the beginning of their study journey. Both Bobby and John stressed that they came to New Zealand in order to "experience a different culture" and "gain a foreign qualification", hoping these would add value to their future career progression or further study when returning to China.

However, a group of participants said they had changed their minds from returning home to settling down in New Zealand due to the development of their life status. For example, one said:

> Initially, I planned to go back to China for my career development after completing the study programme. The situation has changed because my girlfriend who was also an international student from China, wanted to stay in New Zealand. So, we tried searching for jobs after graduation and I was lucky to get one that matched my qualification. Now, the plan is (for me) to start applying for the New Zealand residency through my skilled employment. (York, Graduate Diploma graduate)

This change of expectations was common among young participants: those who came for secondary education first (normally under the age of 18), then moved on to tertiary study in New Zealand. Most of them met the immigration threshold by successfully securing quality employment after graduation with a tertiary degree. Although the key drivers of their overseas study were primarily for cultural or educational purposes, their expectations evolved along the study journey. Ultimately, they developed a clear intention of permanently settling down in New Zealand. As Jane shared:

> I was around 16 when first came to New Zealand. Neither I nor my parents had a clear idea of career or migration prospects. We both knew it was going to take a long time (for me) to get these sorted. At that time the main goal was for me to study and acquire a well-recognised qualification. But since I had been here for 7 years and got a job after graduating from university, it became natural for me to consider the next step of applying for the New Zealand residency. (Jane, bachelor Graduate)

Some other participants indicated that they had readily foreseen the challenges at the post-study stage before starting their education journey. As a result, their expectations were adjusted on a more realistic basis during their movement in New Zealand. Ten of them said they had to reframe their expectations on both employment and migration, due to the complex job market situation and stringent immigration policies. Jason, a New Zealand Diploma Graduate who was working in a construction company when the interviews took place, said:

> I know there was a gap between the residency requirement on education and my level six diploma qualification. I had to change my expectations from meeting the target in one go to achieving them step by step. I therefore made up my mind to pursue a higher level of study after gaining a few years' work experience from this job. So that I could meet the required thresholds for both qualification and employment while applying for my residence.

Similar to Jason, Cindy also adjusted her expectations and the associated plan when searching for jobs:

> Before I came, everyone told me that it's easy to find a job in New Zealand because of my background on engineering (Mechatronics). So, I had high expectation on this. I thought I could get a job easily after completing my study on the similar subject. However, only when I started looking for jobs, I realised the one-year qualification attained in New Zealand was not sufficient for international students to secure a (decent) job. I had to face the reality and looked for jobs like plumber or gasfitter which had lower entry requirement (to the labour market). I'm hoping that after (gaining) a few years' experience, I would be able to look into other job opportunities (matching my qualifications) then be eligible to apply for my residency.

4.2.3 Met and unmet expectations

When asked if their prior expectations have been met, the participants' responses were dichotomous. Firstly, regardless of their current employment and migratory status, more than half (13 out of 25) of them provided positive feedback in general. As revealed from the interview data, their most satisfactory area fell into the first half (study-to-work) of the journey. Among those who said their expectations

were mostly met, they described their New Zealand experience as being "worthy" and "rewarding" (Martin, Jason, and Robert). Most participants were confident that studying and working overseas were both valuable experiences in their life and would surely contribute to their future success. Jason said when rating his satisfaction, he would give it 10 points (out of 10) for his journey. "Despite uncertainties ahead, I have achieved what I aimed for. So, there's nothing (for me) to complain about." On the other hand, Linda, a bachelor graduate classified her expectations into two parts of "primary" (referring to study-to-work) & "secondary" (work-to-residence) ones. She said:

> I enjoyed my learning journey very much. I chose the right subject that I was truly interested in and got all the supportive resources I needed while studying. Meanwhile, my expectation of employment was also met. I am now working in a local enterprise with a job that matches both my personal interests and qualification. Although the (job-seeking) process is a bit bumpy, I'm happy with where I am at now. In terms of the secondary goal there're still a lot of uncertainties ahead. Because of that, I haven't been able to start applying for the residency. So, I'm unsure of what the future will hold for me.

There was a widely held viewpoint among the Chinese graduates that what they experienced during the latter half of their post-study journey (work-to-residence) was vastly different from their expectations. "Unexpected", "challenging", and "desperate" are the most used words when asked to describe their encounters of job searching, career progression, and migration seeking in New Zealand. For example, Grace, a master's graduate said she did not expect the level of difficulty to get into the workplace in New Zealand would be so high. Although being shortlisted for a few positions, she eventually failed to secure any of the jobs she had applied for. She described the reality she experienced as contrasting to what she expected and learned from the sources of information before. John also shared his feeling of distress by saying "I only noticed the large gap between what I had been told about the labour market prospect and migration opportunities and the cruel reality when searching for jobs and preparing to apply for my residency in New Zealand." According to Alice, she had lost hope about the prospect of settling down permanently as a result of the turbulent immigration setting in New Zealand.

From the interview data, it became clear that the root cause of the discrepancy between their expectations and experience was how Chinese students collected information about the employment outlook and migration prospects of New Zealand. For instance, twenty-two participants said they used an education agent when planning overseas study. Although the main purpose was to seek agents' help in the visa application process, they hoped the agents could offer professional advice about choosing institutions and majors, providing information on future career prospects, and guiding their migration pathway. Nevertheless, most of them stated that the agents did not paint a realistic picture of the situation in New Zealand. Exaggerating study programmes' prospects and understating the challenges around employment and migration are the two common issues. According to Grace,

> My agent told me it (the recommended programme) was a good bridging stone for my future. Once completing the study, I could easily find a job that matched this qualification and would be immediately qualified for the SMC selection criteria. I realised it was not the case after being turned down many times by those companies that I applied for when searching for jobs.

Another common source of information was gained through online channels like websites, social media, and blogs. Nearly all participants reported that they started looking for details such as its social, cultural, and economic conditions in New Zealand once it was decided as their studying destination. However, the popular media sites they had access to were limited to Chinese digital platforms like Baidu[13], Zhihu[14], and WeChat[15]. While other top global websites like Google, YouTube, and Facebook were not accessible in China. Some Chinese graduates noticed the contrast between the information collected through these channels and the real situation they experienced upon arrival. Dan, a Graduate diploma graduate stated: "Basically what had been posted on those sites were all fake news. The description about the future by studying those promoted programmes sounded too good to be true." However, he

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[13] Baidu is the most popular search engine in China. It offers several services to locate information, products and services using Chinese-language search terms.

[14] Zhihu is a website used in China where questions are created, answered, edited, and organized by the community of its users.

[15] WeChat is a multi-purpose social media, messaging and payment app developed in China. It is the largest social media platform in the country and one of the top 10 social networks in the world.

also admitted that there was no better way for him to cross-check this since "most of the mainstream websites provided similar information."

Some Chinese graduates sought advice from friends or family members who had a connection with people in New Zealand. They said opinions from those people were more reliable, because "they had a neutral stand to the real situation in New Zealand and they were less profit-driven when providing suggestions". Nevertheless, some described the information received from this channel as "fragmented" or "shallow" (Grace, York, and Beryl). A typical example of this issue was:

> People around me kept saying that it's hard to get a job by completing my master's degree. They suggested I turn to some practical qualifications like early childhood education which were on Long Term Skill Shortage List (LTSSL). But in terms of how that would impact my future career, they couldn't give any constructive advice. (Anna, master graduate)

In brief, Chinese students chose New Zealand as their studying and living destination because of a combination of factors including its well-recognised qualifications, the affordable tuition fees, employment opportunities, and relatively flexible immigration policy. Gaining the New Zealand residency was one of the key determinants when most Chinese students started planning their overseas studies. Although most of them were satisfied with the study journey in New Zealand, they did not have sufficient knowledge about its labour market rules and the employment-seeking practice. The insufficient information about those prospects in the host country collected from limited channels had, to some extent, resulted in a discrepancy between their expectations and experience during the post-study transition in New Zealand.

4.3 Employment-seeking journey

This section examines Chinese graduates' employment-seeking process in New Zealand. The findings are presented in the following sub-sections. Each presents a specific aspect of the opportunities or challenges facing the research participants when they searched for jobs.

4.3.1 Social networks' role in employment seeking

Firstly, there were a few success stories about finding employment emerging from the interviews. As reported by most participants (16 out of 25), they received information about the first job from people in their close network, like friends, acquaintances, classmates, teachers, and even family members who worked in the same organisation. For instance, Justin's first job was introduced by his wife who accompanied him to study in New Zealand:

> It was just like a bonus. At that time, I felt so desperate looking for jobs after graduation from my studies. I couldn't get one until the opportunity in my wife's company turned up. As an insider, my wife told me all necessary information and tips to on how to apply (for the job). I managed to get it without too many difficulties.

Alice also shared a similar story of getting her first formal employment through her close social network. She said, "My flat mate noticed a vacancy of a position in her organisation. She thought I would be an ideal candidate. Through her recommendation, I was given an opportunity for a formal interview. I passed it (the interview) and got the offer". According to Jane, her alumna whom she established contact with from a networking event introduced her to a volunteering opportunity. It was from there she started her first employment in New Zealand.

On the other hand, some Chinese graduates in the current study proactively searched for and seized job opportunities outside of their academic life. They did so through a wide range of extra-curriculum activities like attending on-campus career expos, building online professional profiles (e.g., LinkedIn [16]), and establishing connections with potential employers through online and offline interactions. Linda shared:

> I got my first full-time paid job through a website called Student Job Search. The online platform was owned and operated by a group of students. I set up a profile there together with my CV and art portfolio. It was noticed by my current employer when they had a vacancy matching my background. After

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[16] LinkedIn is a business and employment-oriented online service that operates via websites and mobile apps.

being invited for several interviews, I finally got the position in this company that has high reputation in the industry. (Linda, bachelor graduate)

The success story of another graduate, Jordan, an IT graduate student was inspiring. He managed to attract recruiters' attention by actively engaging with online IT platforms and providing professional suggestions and technical solutions. He said:

I started browsing various online forums like "Meetup[17]" when I was about to graduate. It's a great platform to network with professionals of different backgrounds. I joined the subgroup of software engineering and often provided technical solutions if someone asked questions that I have knowledge of. I did this for free. It also cost me time and a lot of effort. But it was through this way, I attracted the attention of the recruiters and was approached for a vacancy in a decent IT company that was not advertised externally.

Those graduates' success in securing employment showed that most Chinese graduates utilised their close social connections consisting of family members, friends, and co-national acquaintances to receive job information in the host country. However, it was those people in their peripheral social network that enabled them access to better quality jobs. More specifically, connections established from industrial bodies, professional forums, career expos or through their extra-curricular activities while studying, like volunteering experience and alumni connection benefited them in seeking high-end jobs in New Zealand.

4.3.2 Disconnection between studying and working

Regardless of the various education credentials gained in New Zealand, more than half of the Chinese graduates expressed discontent with the lack of connection between work opportunities and their study programmes, although they agreed that some practical components were embedded in the teaching curriculums. May, a bachelor graduate, explained:

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[17] Meetup is a service used to organise online groups that host in-person and virtual events for people with similar interests.

I was thrilled to know there was an internship project from the course outline when enrolled in this (IT) programme. But I was just disappointed to find out later that the course was designed for students who were able to find an organisation by themselves and carry out the project. This was practically impossible for me as a newcomer to the country since I didn't have any access to those places.

Jordan, an IT graduate student, said he was surprised to find a gap between what he learned from the study programme and what the labour market actually required. He said:

The knowledge taught on the class was quite outdated and insufficient. The tutor tried to touch on every aspect of the information and communications technology area, like data science, IT infrastructure, cyber security and mobile app development… which is nearly impossible for a 10-month course. By the end, I felt like taking a crash course without in-depth knowledge to support me to find a job.

Similar to Jordan, Rebecca, a bachelor graduate in Creative Technology, also mentioned that she chose her major of study based on the expectation that the qualification could lend her to an ideal job in the industry. However, she found that only having an outstanding academic performance was not sufficient when searching for jobs. She said her mind went blank when asked by the recruiter about her view on a latest commercial event in the industry. "It was completely outside of the textbook and we (students) didn't have a chance to find this out in class."

Fifteen participants reported that they were not able to attend some work-integrated-learning programmes like practicum, apprenticeships, or job placements, which would be beneficial for them to build real-world experiences but were somehow only available for New Zealand domestic students. As a result, "An important link between studying and working was missing" (Grace, John, Justin and Dan). Tom explained:

I chose to study the Bachelor of Engineering in the institution because of the apprenticeship delivery model in this degree. It offered students employment opportunities by working on engineering projects. I wished I could participate in any of those as it was so crucial to gain practical skills in the real workplace. It would also help (me) to relieve some financial burdens while studying. But

my tutor told us that international students were not allowed to attend this due to visa reasons. I thought we were treated unfairly and deprived of such an important chance. (Tom, bachelor graduate)

Most participants in this study mentioned that they were invited to attend some government-funded programmes on employment-seeking skills and workplace culture in New Zealand. While acknowledging the benefits, like improving CV writing and interview skills and learning appropriate business etiquette, a number of them also pointed out the impracticality of those programmes. For example, both Cindy and Beryl mentioned that although those workshops helped to equip them with knowledge for job-hunting, there were no solid chances of meeting the employers and putting what they had learned into practice. York commented that:

I have got my CV polished, and my interview skills improved. But overall, the knowledge was too general, and the workshops were more like networking events. I could not find any real job opportunities from there. The only thing I learned was that in New Zealand, most job vacancies were advertised from internal networks. However, I did not get many useful advice on how to access those networks.

Moreover, it was found during the interviews that although those programmes were organised by different bodies, they were highly repetitive. More than half of the participants said they could not tell the differences between those events. Some mentioned that after attending several rounds, they found those workshops were basically about the "same tactics and information shared by different people". (Anna and Beryl) As a result, they gave up attending them anymore.

4.3.3 Difficulties of entering the labour market

On average, every participant in the research applied for 10 more jobs during the initial three months after graduation. Many of them did not even get any chances of interviews. As described, the process of entering the labour market was "frustrating and stressful" (Bobby, Anna, York, Dan and Justin). Challenges facing them included the scarce response to vast job applications, failure on "cold calling" initiatives, and decline due to the lack of local work experience.

Bobby, Anna and Jane recalled that they had sent at least 50 application emails in a month after graduation but received very minimum response. "Most of the time, what I received (from the company) was a decline email, something like 'Due to a number of strong candidates applying for the position, after much deliberation, your application is no longer under consideration." (Anna, a master graduate). Despite feeling depressed about the result, Chinese graduates in this study had little chance to explore the exact reasons of why they were declined at the first instance. Two participants, Cindy and Beryl, took a different approach. After spending a few months' time in futile wait, they decided to do the "cold calling" to companies that had vacancies matching their background. One said:

> After browsing several construction companies websites, I looked up a few that have posted job vacancies. I was quite confident to get an interview, because some positions were intended for graduates and I met all criteria. So, I "knocked on the doors" of those companies and handed in my CV to the reception desk, hoping to talk to the HR person directly. However, most of the time I was told to wait for further notice but never heard from them. I then realised that this was not the right approach (of getting a job). (Beryl, diploma graduate).

Some Chinese graduates believed that companies were not genuinely looking for what was explicitly advertised on the website. "I heard that some companies only recruit candidates through insiders' referrals. The job advertisement put on the external website was just to go through the legitimate process. If I had known this before, I would not waste time applying for so many jobs online." (Ben, a Graduate Diploma graduate in Business) Moreover, amongst the 25 participants, 20 of them reported their encounters of being declined by the recruiters due to the lack of New Zealand work experience, although some of them had overseas employment history with hard-earned New Zealand qualifications. Justin, who was an air traffic controller in China, started the first job as a tourist guide because his work experience was not recognised in New Zealand. Similarly, Anna shared that,

I've tried to apply for many jobs in my New Zealand qualification area (creative technology) but all of them were declined. I didn't realise having relevant local work experience was so important when looking for a job in New Zealand. What's worst was that my work experience acquired in China was not validated by the employers. Feeling pressured and anxious, I had to compromise and accept my current job as the Sales Assistant in a Real Estate company, which was neither related to my area of study nor of my interest at all. It's more like a steppingstone and the only thing that I can do at this moment.

4.3.4 Visa constraints

Another noticeable sub-theme that emerged from the interviews about Chinese graduates' employment seeking was the difficulty in securing quality jobs due to restrictions on their student or work visas. Except for Bill, who received his job offer during his PhD study, all other participants mentioned one key obstacle they faced when looking for jobs after graduation was the limited length of time and stringent conditions on their post-study visas. The constraint was especially harsh for those who were tertiary graduates before November 2018. According to Immigration New Zealand's policy back then, international graduates were only eligible for a one-year Post Study Work Visa (open)[18], allowing them to work for any employer of any occupation. Once used up, the next available option for them to stay on was to apply for the employer-assisted work visa, under the condition that they had an offer of a full-time job in the same area of their qualification. (Immigration New Zealand, 2022b)

When asked about the most unforgettable moment of accessing the first jobs, May described the job-seeking process as extremely "daunting" and "time-consuming". She said most of the positions matching her qualification normally required 2-3 years of working experience from the local industry, which was

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[18] Since November 2018, the Post Study Work Visa (open) has been replaced by a new post-study work visa that lets international graduates to work for any employer in New Zealand for 1, 2 or 3 years, depending on the length and levels of their previous study programmes.

impossible for her as an international graduate on a visa with only one-year in length. Needless to say, her prior overseas work was not recognised by local employers. As a result, she could not secure an employment offer even after being shortlisted for a few positions. Bobby also shared his frustration on finding jobs due to time and visa constraints:

> After graduation, it took me around 7-8 months to find the first full-time paid job. Before that, I did not have any income and mainly relied on my parents' support for a living. I was very stressed at that time, sleepless day and night, knowing that if I didn't get it (employment) sorted before my one-year post study work visa was used up, I would need to pack up and return to China. This literally meant all my previous efforts would go in vain.

As disclosed in section 4.1, prospect of immigration was among many Chinese graduates' initial expectations before coming to New Zealand. Some participants had considered in-depth the migration pathway when choosing their study programmes. Some even altered their study plan to ensure they would be in a more favourable position when applying for New Zealand residency. For example, May and Ben chose to study tertiary qualifications which would lead them to occupations that were on the Long-Term Skill Shortage List (LTSSL). They hoped by studying those programmes, more points could be awarded on the SMC immigration stream, and they would have a better chance of success in residency application. However, due to the turbulent immigration policy setting, the Chinese graduates did not always succeed in achieving this goal. One participant reflected on his challenging journey:

> I chose Engineering as my study major, hoping that after graduation in four years, the job opportunity would be good, and I could get my residency sorted once securing a relevant job. It was still the case until three months before I graduated, Immigration New Zealand suddenly raised the SMC points from 140 to 160. Under the new regulation, I am no longer qualified to apply for residency straight away. Instead, I need to work under another work visa for at least 2 years to accumulate (SMC) points. But who knows what the (immigration) future will be and what more changes are coming? (Tom, bachelor graduate)

In brief, finding skilled jobs was often challenging for international graduates due to their temporary visa status in the host country. The research participants in this study were also confronted by the fast-changing immigration setting in New Zealand which increased the difficulty of their transition from study to work and work to residence journey.

4.3.5 Unfair judgement by prospective employers

Apart from the restrictive conditions on their post-study visas, another key obstacle confronting most Chinese graduates when searching for jobs was the unfair judgement from the prospective employers. For example, through "cold calling" to some companies, Cindy and Beryl had chances to speak with some organisations' HR person. Through the conversation, they discovered that their previous academic qualifications and work experience acquired in China were considered as "irrelevant" or "of little value" in the recruiters' eyes. Similarly, Dan also said the career advisors from the work-connect programmes suggested he not talk too much about his overseas work experience, to avoid "a negative perception from prospective employers."

Grace expressed her distress after being declined by many different companies. She was told the reasons being that she was "either unqualified due to lack of management experience for managerial-level jobs or overqualified for entry-level positions". She said she found those comments contradictory and believed they were just excuses by recruiters to justify their rejection. Furthermore, another participant mentioned:

> No matter how well we presented ourselves (in front of the prospective employers), we were already pre-judged as being "unfit" for most of the jobs. The reasons given by them for declining my applications could vary, but ultimately, they all referred to one thing: (my status as an) international student. (Justin, postgraduate diploma graduate)

A number of them (Grace, Robert, Anna, Rebecca, Cindy, Linda, Doris and Justin) commented that as international graduates, they were perceived as a risk by New Zealand employers because of the complicated visa application process that the organisation was obliged to go through if recruiting them. As an example,

My classmate who was a local resident and I joined this company at the same time as graduate interns and we were doing the same job. However, a few months later, my classmate was offered the position permanently while I remained the same (temporary) status. When I asked the supervisor why, the answer was straightforward. He said, "As a small company, we couldn't afford to go through the process of hiring an international student. It is just too much hassle." (Doris, a graduate diploma graduate)

Similar to Doris, some Chinese graduates in the current study failed to have their employment statuses turned from temporary to permanent ones (e.g., from part-time to full-time, internship to permanent positions) due to the stringent visa application procedure. The process normally involved various steps undertaken by different parties, which were beyond international students' control. Robert, a bachelor graduate remarked that:

After working several months in my internship job at a manufactory, the employer abruptly discontinued my employment. They said they couldn't continue (hiring me) until I had a proper work visa, although I was on my student visa that allowed me to work full-time during the summer holiday. However, the process of getting the open work visa was quite lengthy, and I could not get this sorted within their required timeframe. When I completed the whole process and came back to the employer, they said they had already hired someone else.

As most of the Chinese graduates reported, they were perceived as a risk by the current or prospective employers in New Zealand. Many of the them suffered from these biased recruiting practices – being excluded from chances of getting proper jobs in the local labour market.

4.3.6 Exploitation in various forms

Another commonly reported challenge facing Chinese graduates while seeking employment was the exploitation by co-national employers in various forms.

The most common forms of exploitation were unpaid volunteering work and internship programmes. Due to the fact that those jobs were normally marketed under the terms of "offering help for free" or "gaining some work experience in the area of study", some students did not realise the exploitative nature until they were trapped in the adverse situation for some time. As an example, Linda, a graduate designer, shared that although she had been offered some internship opportunities after graduation, most of them were unpaid. She accepted one job under the internship offer but only found that after the three-month probation, she was still stuck in the employment with no pay. In the same vein, John, a bachelor's graduate, described his job-seeking process as "horrible" and "hard" for a fresh international graduate. He said most of the (internship) work he had been offered was unpaid.

It is worth noticing that when asked about the employers' roles in their post-study transition, some graduates used the word *guanzhao* (Chinese term, meaning looking after) to describe the relationship between them. For instance, Lane, who worked as a chef in a restaurant, recalled the hard time when he struggled to get a job in the hospitality sector after graduation. He said it was through the *guanzhao* by the employer, he managed to secure this job and worked there for nearly 4 years. Although he had to compensate his employer as a return, (like working extra hours but without being paid for over-work), he was still grateful for his employer's help. He said without the *guanzhao* from his employer, he would not have been able to secure the work visa and apply for his residency later.

Despite the above unnoticeable exploitation, there were other types of obvious exploitation disclosed by the Chinese graduates, such as wage theft (unpaid overtime work), excessive working hours, unreasonable workloads, and unequal employment terms. As an example, Alice found her employment contract's terms and conditions were different from that of her non-migrant colleagues, although they were doing the same job. She said when they were both working as sales agents, she was commission-based and her colleague was paid regular salary. "Without being paid on salary basis made me feel stressful and unsafe because if on a bad day, I can't generate any sales, I don't have any income. But my colleague who has (guaranteed) income doesn't have such problem." Anna recollected her experience of being exploited:

I used to work in a restaurant. It was a terrible experience. I was recruited and paid as a front of house staff mainly responsible for cleaning table, taking orders and serving food. But I was also required to do kitchen jobs like cooking and washing dishes. Sometimes my job was timed unreasonably. For example, I needed to make a dish within 10 mins. Otherwise, my wage would be cut. I had to quit it as I could not stand this situation anymore.

Emily said when working for a Chinese employer in her previous job, she was required to perform multiple duties ranging from packing goods in the factory, managing stocks in the warehouse, bookkeeping, to performing sales. Most of the time, she worked fifty hours a week but was only paid a normal forty-hour wage[19]. Consequently, she became both physically ill and mentally distressed due to the excessive work. On the other hand, some Chinese graduates were requested to fill the salary gap between their underpaid wage and the standard set by Immigration, to be qualified for residency application. Ben mentioned in the interview that he heard about what had happened to his friends when they tried to apply for the New Zealand residency through their co-national Chinese employers. He said:

My friends were told to "purchase" a full-time (job) offer from Chinese employers only to meet the immigration criteria, so that they could submit their residency application. But what would be coming next was not guaranteed by the employer at all.

As disclosed by the above participants, all those visible and invisible forms of exploitation resulted in their vulnerable and insecure status in the post-study transition. Some were even reported to develop mental health issues due to the pressure from their experience of exploitation.

4.3.7 Deskilling and underemployment

More than half of the participants (16 out of 25) shared their stories of accepting jobs that did not match either their qualifications acquired in New Zealand or previous overseas working experience. This happened both during their study

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[19] Under New Zealand employment law, the maximum number of hours to be worked by the employee is no more than 40 hours per week (not including overtime) unless the employer and employee agree otherwise.

when they were doing part-time jobs and after graduation when they started to work on a full-time basis. Eight reported working in the hospitality sector like restaurants, cafes, and fast-food shops as front-of-house staff or kitchen hands. Five said they used to work as couriers or delivery drivers, two as massagers and one as a cleaner.

Those Chinese graduates mentioned that the reasons for taking those non-skilled occupations were the immediate need to earn an income and the low entry requirement of the jobs. For instance, Anna said after settling in New Zealand, she realised the daily cost was much higher than she could afford. So, it became imperative for her to get a source of income to cover some expenses. She started working as a waitress in a restaurant simply because "this job did not require any specific skills or qualification". Nevertheless, they also admitted that there were certainly some benefits from those lower-level jobs. The most obvious one was the chance to improve their language skills.

> I worked (part-time) as a cashier in a Fish & Chip shop in the first year of my master's study. It was quite hard for me at the beginning as I didn't even know how to talk to local people properly. By picking up phone calls and taking the customers' orders, I started to understand the kiwi accent and have more confidence in talking to them. (York, a master graduate)

The initial motives for Chinese graduates to carry out those non-skilled jobs were to relieve their financial burden and gain some hands-on knowledge through interacting with local people. However, some found themselves being trapped in the low-pay, low-skill employment for a long time. Ben said he started working as a part-time cleaner while studying. He had continued with this job for the entire post-study stage because "There're no other jobs that I could find." Diane, who had been working as a massager for nearly two years since graduating, reflected that:

> I was told that as an international graduate, you would need to grasp every career opportunity even those basic or entry level jobs. However, to be a massager has nothing to do with my qualification or career plan. I did this just for income. But I knew it was a complete waste of time to continue like this. (Diane, a master's graduate)

Some Chinese graduates (Emily, Grace, Ben, Lane, Beryl, and Cindy) said they were psychologically prepared for the scarcity of jobs that could match their tertiary qualifications acquired in New Zealand. Although they were willing to accept

occupations with low or little value, the uncertainty around the future prospects of performing those jobs impeded them from properly transitioning from education to the workforce.

4.4 Adaptation in the workplace

This section reviews how Chinese graduates adapted to the workplace environment after successfully securing their post-study paid employment in New Zealand. It finds that similar to other migrant workers, Chinese graduates were also confronted with challenges and obstacles like language barriers, communication breakdowns, and the lack of understanding of the workplace culture. With a positive attitude and personalised strategies and creative tactics, some participants successfully settled in organisations and made career progression. The major findings in this area are summarised and presented in the following subsections.

4.4.1 Language barrier

After entering the workplace, more than half of the participants (14 out of 25) found it hard to adapt to the mainstream culture in organisations in New Zealand, especially where the workplace was dominated by people of European origin. The first obstacle was language. As disclosed in the interviews, the language barrier facing Chinese graduates were either the difficulty in understanding workplace colloquialisms or their strange accents not being understood by their colleagues. Justin, who had a qualification in Aviation Management explained the reason why he could not get the job in his field of study as an air traffic controller. He said, in the aviation industry, people tend to speak very fast and use a lot of colloquialisms. "If your first language is not English, it would be hard for you to keep pace with your workmates. So, you're basically excluded from this job at the beginning." Jordan, an IT graduate expressed the frustration of his Chinese accent not being understood by his colleagues in daily conversation. He said, "I'm sure I used right words, but because of the problem of mispronunciation, like the wrong stress or tones, people just couldn't relate what I said. It's very embarrassing."

Martin, a bachelor's graduate, who worked as Research Analyst in a construction company mentioned that:

> The most challenging part of my daily work is still language. Although I had a (NZQA) Level 8 qualification and an IELTS score of 7.0, which was considered a proficient English level, I still couldn't communicate well with my manager. He's from Europe and has a very strong Hungarian accent. My Chinese accent is also quite obvious. It's hard for us to understand each other. Most of the time, we had to repeat what we said before. I felt anxious and embarrassing. This (language barrier) problem caused a lot of issues in our daily work.

Similar to Martin, Beryl also shared her experience of communication breakdown due to her inability to understand the colloquial language that was used in her workplace. She said,

> When I joined the construction company as a QS (Quantity Surveyor). I hardly understood my work mates in our daily conversation mostly because of the slangs and special terms they used to communicate at work. For example, one day, an engineer mentioned the "green" concrete" in the recent project. I asked why it was green but was embarrassing to find out that it actually meant the concrete which was recently poured.

The above participants' encounters suggested that when entering the host workplace, Chinese graduates had the recognised tertiary qualification and required English proficiency which were helpful for formal business communication. However, they still faced the challenge of understanding "legitimate language" like colloquial terms and cultural shorthand that were commonly used in the local workplace. The dearth of that knowledge often limited their interactions and exchange of ideas with their colleagues.

4.4.2 Workplace culture

Almost all participants said they were worried about having a shallow understanding of the working environment in New Zealand. Some put a closer lens on the communication issues when trying to explore the reasons behind them. They found that most breakdowns were not only due to their language deficiency, but also

resulting from their misunderstanding of the workplace culture. For instance, Dan, who was a store manager in the retail shop, shared his story:

> When I first started this job (as a store manager), the biggest challenge was not about how to communicate with the customer. Instead, it was more about how to manage the staff. I found it strange that sometimes in the morning my colleagues would all disappear for a while. I was quite annoyed because it was the busiest moment in the store. I took it to my manager and reported that they were lazy. But I was told that they went out for morning tea, and it was part of the workplace culture in New Zealand.

Diane looked back on the challenges after starting her job in a media company. She said, "When I came up with some design idea and wanted to test the market response, there're always a lengthy approval process and a lot of paperwork that I need to firstly go through." In her mind, this highly structured environment with process-oriented culture was "inefficient and time consuming". It therefore reduced the organisation's productivity. Conversely, Jane described the culture of her company as "unstructured and independent". Although she enjoyed the flexibility at work, she at times felt lost because of "not knowing what exactly the rules are and whom to seek help from when I am in need." Alice, who was a sales representative in an IT company, viewed her experience of adapting to the workplace culture from a different perspective:

> I was the only Asian in my organisation. Most of my teammates were of the European origins. They shared the same culture and lifestyle. For example, they liked to hang out for a drink after the work in a day. But I was not much into drinking and couldn't really join their conversations, which were mainly about sports, music, or movies that I was not familiar with. However, they also talked about job-related matters in a relaxing way. If I didn't join them, I would lose some sources of those information.

Linda recollected the challenging time when she tried to adapt to the workplace culture at the beginning of her first job. She said, "In those days, I was

always blanky. Although I knew how to communicate properly with my colleagues at work, I just couldn't relate their small talks, like jokes or what they're making fun of." As a result, she found it hard to join the clique of her colleagues and felt "being excluded from their conversation all the time". In the same vein, Doris, who worked in an Engineering company, said when collaborating with other people in the team, she could only "see and feel the visible and surface layer of how her team members communicated with each other, but couldn't understand why they chose to act in a particular way, or why they collaborated better with one person over another." Those cases indicated that lack of insight into the western-centric cultural spaces which were dominantly shaping their organisation culture impeded Chinese graduates' proper integration into the workplace.

4.4.3 Tactics and strategies

The findings indicated that it was easy to tackle language barrier when certain problem-solving tactics and strategies were employed by the Chinese graduates. Some of those tactics were basic but useful. For instance, when facing frustration at work due to her limited language ability, Linda managed to find a solution in a self-taught way. She said:

> I searched on YouTube[20] to find out how western people communicate in daily life and at workplace. Some online streamers were professional career coaches and they shared some very useful tips. I put some (tactics) in practice and they worked fine. I now feel less stressed at joining my colleagues' conversation.

Jordan said he would turn to the non-verbal communication when there was a blockage in his daily conversation with his team members. He said, "If my

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[20] YouTube is a popular online video-sharing platform. It offers a wide variety of user-generated and corporate media videos.

colleagues didn't understand what I tried to say, I would use the body language to help (make myself understood). Although it sounds funny, it works!"

When facing workplace culture obstacles, actively sharing their suggestions, ideas, and agile participation in team-building events in the organisation were mentioned by many participants as effective ways of adapting to the workplace. According to Diane, "As long as my viewpoints had a solid ground and I was not afraid to express myself in front of my colleagues, regardless how strange my accent sounds, people were always keen to listen and give me their feedback." Moreover, activities such as team retreats, weekend getaways, and after-work games helped them to better adapt. It was widely shared among the Chinese graduates that those events provided opportunities for both networking, language, and culture learning. One of them pointed out:

> We have regular socialising get-togethers after work, like playing bowling or having a drink on Friday afternoons. It's a very good chance for us to talk casually. From there, I found it easier to get myself understood by communicating with colleagues in an informal way. (Martin, bachelor's graduate)

In addition, some participants showed their way of adapting to a new organisation culture by watching what other people did in the workplace and following the successful examples. May, who worked as the service desk analyst in an IT company, said she received complaints from her internal customers because she had to decline their requests which were out of her capacity. She noticed that similar situations happened to her team members, but the result was more positive when a different reply like "I will see what I can do for you" was provided. May said when she did it in the similar way, her colleagues were generally happy to accept that the task was out of her work scope and allowed her some time to seek for a solution. By doing so, she noticed the unfriendly attitudes from her internal customers was changed. Jason managed to shift his team members' unfriendly perception towards him in a different way. He said:

I am not good at drinking (alcohol) and could not attend the social get-togethers like going to the bar after work. It therefore caused some misunderstanding by my colleagues. Some said I was unsociable and arrogant. I thought I could do it in a different way but had the same result (of building up the vibe with my colleagues). So, I started inviting them for having "bubble tea" together. Initially they didn't like it and were quite resistant. But after having a few tastes, they were obsessed to it. From then on, I grabbed the chance to have chats with them in the similar relaxing way like going to a bar.

Jason's case evidenced that a fine balance was achieved through adopting the cultural identity of the host organisation and maintaining his own cultural traits. By doing so, he was able to establish rapport and win the acceptance and friendship of their colleagues. Some other participants in the current study demonstrated their ability to tackle communication barriers in the workplace through soft skills like creative problem-solving, team collaboration, and leadership. For example, drawing or visualising their ideas at work was reported as a good solution to break the communication barriers. Robert said:

In our discussion, I would try to make my thoughts more vivid like drawing a picture or using some charts and diagrams to reflect it. I found my ideas were normally accepted because they appeared more logical and convincing when came with those graphs. (Robert, bachelor graduate)

By adopting those sought-after skills, some Chinese graduates in the current study were able to make better career progression. As the interviews revealed, some participants managed to reach their career objectives by segregating them into long- and short-term goals and achieving them by stages. Some were promoted to better positions as recognition of their positive performance at work. For instance, after showing his creative problem-solving skills and leadership at work, Jordan was promoted to an IT team leader position and received a pay rise. He reckoned that he was "one step closer to his target of becoming an IT manager". York was assigned an

important project to work on with some key players in the creative industry through his continuous team collaboration. He described the new assignment as "a big encouragement and recognition" to his endeavours.

However, it is worth noticing that although Chinese graduates made great efforts to adapt to the organisation culture, they were unable to bring about substantial impacts or changes to their workplace dynamics. Linda said after overcoming the communication barriers, she found her colleagues were nicer to her and easier to talk with. But she also admitted the office cliques were still in her organisation and it was still hard for her to join those groups for small talks. Without bothering too much now, she also agreed that it (the workplace culture) was something that she could not change.

4.4.4 A positive mindset

A commonly expressed viewpoint among most research participants was that showing resilience and having a positive attitude are both helpful in overcoming obstacles and achieving success in the workplace. For instance, after being through many hurdles during her post-study transition, including exploitation and deprivation of dignity at work, Emily finally secured a job in the organisation with the culture that she was genuinely appreciative of. Under this employment, she also obtained the New Zealand residence. She believed that despite the downsides of her post-study journey, she had no doubt about her initial determination of choosing to come to New Zealand. She said:

> During those tough days, there was little hope for my future. Even my parents didn't understand me or support my decision to stay in New Zealand. It was the positive mindset I had developed and the kindness of people around me that empowered me to stay on and make career progress, and eventually settle down here.

Likewise, Doris, who passed her probation in the first job and had her internship contract turned into a permanent job offer with a wage increase, commented that she could not advance in her career without having a positive mindset. Despite being told by the company there was uncertainty about the prospect of her internship job and her employment might not be able to continue, she still tried to "persevere against the odds" and improved herself by learning from every opportunity from her work mates. The optimism and her ability to frame challenges as opportunities to grow and learn had eventually led her to the deserved career outcome. Ben, who started his first job as a shop assistant and was recently promoted to a team leader, said:

> I am always not afraid to take on new challenges. And you know, no matter what level of jobs you do, there are always new problems (emerging). As a an assistant, I learned the products' knowledge by self-teaching and improved my English through communicating with customers. Now as a store manager, I need to show leadership skill on how to manage my staff. From the recent one-on-one review with my boss, I was told that my ability to solve new problems at each stage of work earned me the promotion.

In brief, having a positive attitude, resilience and flexibility in taking on new tasks are important personal traits that helped the Chinese graduates in the current study to successfully adapt to the host workplace and make career progressions.

4.5 Gender gap

By coincidence, the overall female-to-male ratio of the participants in this study was close, with 13 male and 12 female graduates among the total twenty-five participants. Due to the same selection criteria, the distributions of both genders' educational attainment and length of years staying in New Zealand were similar. Their trajectory, from pre-departure decision-making, job-seeking, and career progression to the migratory outcomes was, however, vastly different.

When asked whether their expectations towards both employment and migration were met or not, a greater number of male graduates (9 out of 13) provided positive feedback. They said although the process was different from what had been previously planned, they were generally happy with the result. The other three male graduates said they were unsure whether their objectives were being achieved or not when the interviews took place, leaving only one participant who provided a negative response. On the contrary, female participants responded differently when answering this question. The interview result showed that in general female graduates had lower satisfaction with what they had achieved against their expectations. Two-thirds of them (8 out of 12) said they were either disappointed with, or unable to comment on their status in relation to their expectations. As an example, Jane said:

> I can only say that half of my expectations were met. I'm happy with the first half of my journey, which is the study-to-work part. But in terms of seeking residency which was a key driver for me to come to New Zealand, I feel hopeless at the moment. Especially under the current situation, a lot of changes are happening every day, which makes me feel anxious and doubtful about my future in New Zealand.

The similar sentiments of "disappointment" and "desperation" were expressed by a number of female graduates (Anna, Diane, Grace, and May), which were not commonly found among male graduates. Moreover, some female graduates in the current study reflected on their anxiety rooted in their gender role. According to Diane and Anna, domestic responsibilities like how to balance work and home lives and childcare had direct impact on their post-study mobility choice. Doris said she had to compromise her career growth when it conflicted with her parenting obligation.

> I had to decline a job with better prospects and good pay because the workplace was really too far from where we lived. My family had settled down quite well in the community and my daughter just went to a primary school. We spent a lot of efforts to make it (the smooth transition) happen, I

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felt anxious if I choose this job as it means that I need to sacrifice the time on commuting (between home and work) which could be spent on looking after my daughter.

Conversely, when facing the similar situation, Jordan, a male graduate, did not seem to be bothered by the familial duties when making career choices. He said:

My current job is in a rural town, which is about 2.5 hours' drive from my place. There's no childcare facility nearby, so we agreed that my wife would change her job from full-time to part-time. So that she could focus more on looking after my son and the housework, while I can concentrate on the job. Since then, I started (this job) by commuting between work and where I lived for nearly a year now and it works well.

In terms of job seeking and career development, it was found that female graduates were confronted with more difficulties in reaching their goals compared to male graduates. Despite the similar challenges of finding appropriate jobs upon graduation, the mismatch of skills and qualifications with their current paid employment was more commonly found among the female group. The majority of female graduates (9 out of 12) said they were performing jobs that did not fall into their area of study, while only one third of male graduates reported so. In addition, some female graduates' trajectories were influenced by gender-specific expectations from their families. Beryl's story was typical:

I applied for many jobs after completion of study, but most of my applications were declined. Although knowing that it was not abnormal, I still felt anxious under the pressure by my parents and relatives in China. In their mind, as a girl, it's too risky of staying unemployed in a foreign county. They tried to persuade me to go home for better future through marriage or family support. But my younger brother, who's also studying in another country was never told to come back although it also took him a long time to search for jobs after study. As a result, I accepted a sales assistant work in a retail shop which was

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neither my area of study nor my personal interest at all. I did it just to convince my parents that I was not jobless, and I can support myself.

On the contrary, only Bobby mentioned the similar pressure when searching jobs after completion of study in New Zealand. Most male graduates said they were flexible when making career choices. Ben's parents were supportive of him when he could not find a job and decided to start a franchise business although they knew Ben would not be able to obtain the residency through doing this business. He said, "It doesn't really matter. My parents were quite open about my choice. If by the end I failed (the business), I can close it and go back home. For me, it (the overseas studying) is still a valuable experience." Beryl and Ben's different encounters showed that female graduates in the current study faced greater challenges in job-seeking and career development, coupled by family pressures and social conventions, whereas male graduates seemed to enjoy more freedom in developing their professional careers.

Both genders of participants in this study claimed that they had encountered prejudicial treatment in the workplace. However, female graduates reported that gendered discrimination was a more significant hurdle than their migrant status. This became more obvious when they were doing jobs in male-dominated fields, like IT, construction, and engineering. Cindy, who worked in the construction company as a plumber since graduation, said she had been through severe competition with local job seekers to get this job. Although she got on well with her colleagues, there were occasions that she felt discriminated against at work.

Whenever I was sent off to do some job by myself, my customer always asked me like "wow, a girl plumber! Are you sure you can finish this by yourself?" Some even phoned my boss and said "I don't want to waste my time. Can you just send me a guy instead?" I felt very depressed experiencing all these because you know, I got my qualification and proper training on (how to do) this job. People simply judged (my ability) by my gender, which is unfair.

Moreover, a few female graduates disclosed that they had experienced some offensive behaviour–either verbal or physical–from their male colleagues in the workplace. Those offenses such as dirty jokes, teasing, and deliberate pranks and physical harassment were described as "really tough and unpleasant". (Alice, Beryl and Dianne) Anna said her encounter was "ugly and unacceptable":

> I worked for a fine-dining restaurant as an intern in the last year of my study. At the front of house, it was well set up and elegantly presented. However, the back of kitchen was totally different. I mean, not the condition, but (it's more about) people's behaviour. Some of my male colleagues were quite rude and sometimes made me feel uncomfortable. One day, when I walked in there as usual, the chef just put his arm on my shoulder and snickered that 'Oh look, here comes my favourite girl." I had to shake his hand off and told him that I don't like this (behaviour).

When asked about their reaction or coping strategies, most of the female graduates who had the offensive encounters said they would rather let it go quietly or expect indirect intervention from their employers like mediating or private talks. The main reason was that they did not want the incidents to escalate and hamper their future visa or residency applications. Anna, whose situation did not improve even after the employer intervened and gave a verbal warning to the offender, had eventually resigned from her job.

Despite those gender-specific challenges, female participants in the current research were found to adapt to the workplace and society in a unique way. Compared to their male peers, they spent more efforts exploring and understanding the culture and norms in the wider community of the host country. As a return, the experience gained from outside of the workplace equipped them with better knowledge when adapting to the labour market. Six female graduates mentioned that through volunteering work in community organisations like churches, retirement villages, and early childhood centres, they understood more in-depth the host country's culture. For example, in her volunteering job as a community consultant for an early

childhood centre, May helped some Chinese families with toddlers to play games and activities. Although the experience did not contribute directly to her job seeking, she managed to build up some knowledge and understanding of the mainstream culture in New Zealand, such as sports, food and outdoor lifestyles. She acknowledged the cultural insights learned from this (volunteering) work helped her to think from a different perspective on why local people think or do things differently. Therefore, instead of asking odd questions on things she was not familiar with, May expressed her doubts by making suggestions at work, which proved to be a more welcomed approach. Alice also mentioned that by offering help in a Church to organise free meals for people in need, she not only improved her verbal English but also developed a sense of local attachment with the community. Similarly, Emily's experience of volunteering in a retirement home enabled her to establish social support network. She said,

> Although I'm taking care of the elderlies in this work, in turn they (the elder people) also looked after me. They shared with me some historical stories about the local community and gave me good advice as on where to seek help when I was in difficulties. It's from this work, I began to feel that I'm part of this country.

4.6 Trends of returning and moving on

From the interview results, a trend emerged among Chinese graduates, with some either planning to return home or considering moving to a third country upon completing their studies in New Zealand. The decision was resulting from the uncertainties around employment and immigration prospects in New Zealand, which were exacerbated under the global pandemic situation, pushing some Chinese graduates to choose to depart New Zealand. By contrast, the booming economy and increasing career opportunities in China and better immigration prospects in other immigrant-receiving countries prompted some to re-consider or even give up their migration plan in New Zealand. A small group of students stated that they had never

considered settling down in New Zealand permanently when embarking on their overseas study journey.

Although all research participants were residing in New Zealand when the interviews took place, a certain proportion of them (5 out of 25) had explicitly expressed the desire to return home. For example, Emily, who had a stable job and already obtained New Zealand residency said that she would resign from her current job and return home for career development and reunion with her parents in China. She said she felt the limited chance to advance her career in New Zealand and the loneliness of being isolated from her parents for almost eight years since the start of her study journey. Therefore, she had made up her mind that in the near future, she would return.

In contrast to Emily, some participants claimed that they lost hope when New Zealand closed its border for non-resident and non-citizen's entry in March 2020 under the COVID situation. Particularly when the interviews took place, Immigration New Zealand (2020) announced the temporary suspension of some visa programmes, including the selection of EOI for the Skilled Migrant Category Resident Visa. This caused a huge impact on some international graduates' immigration plans such as settling down in New Zealand permanently or reuniting with their family members who resided offshore. As a result, five participants (Emily, Doris, Tom, Martin and Bobby) mentioned that they started to consider moving to a third country like Australia or Canada, which had better migration outlooks. For example, Grace said:

> I have to change my plan because I can't reunite with my husband due to the suspension of the immigration process (and border closure). I think it (the current immigration policy) is very unfair for international students. There is no future pathway for us. I feel quite disappointed about this (Labour) Government. I'm now applying to move to a third country, like Canada.

Like deciding to migrate, making decisions to return or go to the third country was also an evolving process for most Chinese graduates. One graduate said despite the determination to stay on after studying, she saw the probability of gaining the

New Zealand residency was quickly fading due to the increasingly raised immigration threshold and the tightened policy. She said:

> Under the current immigration policy, it becomes so difficult for me to meet the criteria for SMC. Looks like my (initial) goal is too far away. So, I think I might give up and go back home eventually. (Jane, bachelor graduate)

On the other hand, the fast-developing economy and ample career opportunities in China had allured some Chinese graduates to return. Among the 25 interviewees, five of them explicitly indicated their decision to go back to China. A typical reason shared by Rebecca was:

> Through my contact with some friends working in the same (designing) industry in China, I realised the gap between the two countries. China is far more advanced in terms of technology development and job prospects. Although the pay varies depending on the actual levels of job, the opportunities are still quite attractive. I think I will take the chance and go back for career development. (Rebecca, bachelor graduate)

Another three participants (Bill, Ben, and Martin) remarked that they had no intention of applying for New Zealand residency at the very beginning. Although some had successfully attained the tertiary qualifications and secured a quality job, which are both essential to meet the criteria of the Skill Migrant Category for New Zealand residency, their decision to eventually return home remained unchanged. In particular, Bill, a PhD graduate student, who was working in an educational institution in New Zealand, said his plan was to return home for academia after completing his research and acquiring some work experience in New Zealand. He had set the time to return when his study journey began and did not intend to make any changes no matter how the situation evolved in New Zealand. Ben also mentioned that regardless of his current stable employment and income he was determined to return. He said the valuable experience he acquired in New Zealand would certainly help him to make further career progression once returning to the environment that he was familiar with.

4.7 Summary of the chapter

The findings of the current study showed that Chinese students chose to come to New Zealand for their tertiary study primarily because of education opportunity, immigration prospects, and western lifestyle. After making comparisons with other popular immigrant-receiving countries, Chinese students chose New Zealand as their destination for studying, working, and living. There were other contributing factors to their decision-making, including New Zealand's natural environment, safety and cultural inclusiveness. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that Chinese students' decision was made upon rational and thorough consideration.

Despite their clear expectations of migration, Chinese graduates generally lacked knowledge about the employment outlook in New Zealand, especially the hidden rules of the recruitment process and workplace culture. During the transition from education to employment, Chinese students' expectations evolved with other changes in their life status. The insufficient information they collected from limited channels before the commencement of their study journey caused most unmet expectations. All the above-mentioned factors resulted in the discrepancy between their expectations and experience.

Similar to other migrants, Chinese graduates faced challenges during the employment-seeking journey. Although their close social networks comprising of friends, acquaintances, and family members enabled them quicker access to the labour market in the host country, those networks were like a "double-edged sword" bringing up the problem of exploitation by the co-national employers. Some had gained practical job-seeking skills from employment-readiness workshops organised by different government agencies. However, there was a lack of substantial job opportunities and duplicates of those programmes. Some expressed their dissatisfaction about the disconnection between their study programme and the real world of work. Meanwhile, the unavailability of work-integrated learning

programmes which were part of the curriculum of their study but not accessible to international students also caused obstacles for them when searching for jobs.

The lengthy immigration process and constraints on their post-study visas were the two most reported issues which hindered Chinese graduates from accessing decent jobs or caused the discontinuation of their existing employment. Some participants in the current study experienced unfair prejudgement when looking for employment, due to their international education credentials and career history not being recognised by local employers. Moreover, exploitation occurred in various forms during their post-study transition. Apart from unpaid volunteering work or internships, wage theft, excessive working hours, and unreasonable workloads were also commonly experienced. Some were found to be trapped into the mutual exploitation by paying employers in the hope to gain residency and settle down in New Zealand permanently.

After being through the hurdles of employment seeking and entering the workplace in New Zealand, Chinese graduates still faced challenges of language barriers and insufficient understanding of workplace culture. To better settle in the organisation, they employed various tactics to decode the hidden rules in the organisation. Some successfully adapted to the workplace through active participation in organisation-based activities, self-learning, and team-building events. Some others won the respect of their colleagues by adopting the cultural identity of the host organisation and upholding their own cultural traits. Those who made career advancement and settled well in the workplace believed it was essential to be flexible, resilient and keeping a positive mindset.

The research results also found that, in general, Chinese female graduates had lower satisfaction with what they achieved against their expectations. They were facing more difficulties in accessing jobs and making professional advancement. Compared with their male counterparts, the Chinese female graduates were more prone to discrimination and bias at work due to their gender identity, especially in those male-dominated industries. However, the Chinese female graduates were found

to adapt in the workplace and the host society in a unique way, owing to the cultural insights gained through community-based volunteering work.

Lastly, the uncertainty around the employment and migration prospects in New Zealand, in comparison with the fast-developing economy and ample career opportunities in China, pushed more Chinese graduates to return home. On the other hand, better migration outlooks in other immigrant-receiving countries allured some to depart. New Zealand's tightened immigration policy under the global pandemic outbreaks since 2020 catalysed these two trends, although a small group of participants did not have the intention to stay from the beginning of their study journey.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Based on the aforementioned research findings, this chapter discusses Chinese tertiary graduates' pre-arrival expectations and their post-study experiences when seeking to work and reside in New Zealand. By examining their study-to-work and work-to-residence journey, this chapter identifies the root causes of those unmet expectations as a result of the interplay of different factors, ranging from limited channels of information, insufficient knowledge of the local job market, disconnection between education and employment, to over-reliance on their co-national network. Despite challenges such as difficulties of entering the workplace, negative perceptions from prospective employers, visa constraints, and exploitation during their job-seeking process, some Chinese graduates managed to settle well in the workplace and made career progression. They had effectively implemented tactics such as self-taught learning, following successful examples, and creative problem-solving. However, the turbulent immigration settings in New Zealand, catalysed by the global pandemic situation, had pushed more Chinese graduates to consider either returning home or migrating to a third country. On the other hand, in spite of different obstacles faced by Chinese female graduates due to their gender and migrant's identities, they adapted to the host organisation and society in a unique way, mainly through their active involvement in community-based volunteering work.

Pursuant to Chinese graduates' lived experience in New Zealand, this chapter answers the research questions by discussing the motivation and expectations of Chinese students deciding to settle in New Zealand and the interplay of those factors impacting on their post-study transition experience in New Zealand. The chapter is organised as below.

Through the lens of motivational theory and expectancy-value theory, section 5.1 focuses on the determining factors, motives, and expectations of Chinese students choosing New Zealand as their destination country and the actual situations they experienced during the post-study transition phase. Based on social network theory and strength of weak ties theory, section 5.2 discloses how Chinese graduates sought

employment in New Zealand when confronting the challenges. In line with the relationship between human capital and graduates' employability, section 5.3 explains how Chinese graduates overcame the challenges they faced when adapting to the New Zealand workplace after successfully securing quality employment. Section 5.4 highlights the trend of Chinese graduates choosing to return home or migrate to another country due to the push and pull factors from both their home and host countries. Section 5.5 discusses how Chinese female graduates adopted various culture-related strategies to navigate their post-study transition in New Zealand.

5.1 Motivations and expectations

The research findings showed most participants' initial expectations before coming to New Zealand were based on a combination of cultural, educational, and migratory considerations. There were three key motives that drove the Chinese students to choose New Zealand as their studying destination:

- Gaining a foreign qualification,
- Obtaining the New Zealand residency,
- Experiencing a western lifestyle.

These motives identified from the current research were similar to what previous literature found that the opportunity to obtain a higher qualification in an English-speaking environment; the desire to improve international competence; and migration pathways are primary motivating factors for international education (Gareth, 2005; Gu et al., 2010; Wu, 2014). Those motivators were commonly found among the majority (11) of Chinese students interviewed, who came to study in New Zealand with high expectations of cultural and migratory returns from their education journey.

Driven by the motives of gaining a better future in a foreign country, Chinese graduates took actions to mobilise their resources and initiate the study journey. Throughout the journey, they made efforts to achieve their educational, cultural and migratory goals. The dynamic process of Chinese graduates translating their intrinsic

needs into actions aligned with the assertions of motivational theory. It highlighted the finer decision-making process through which migrants progressed from the desire to move to actually moving was driven by the interactive interplay of various motives (Sell & DeJong, 1978).

There were a variety of constructs of motivational theories explaining how individuals' motivation influences people's choice, persistence, and performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Eccles-Parsons et al. (1983) developed the expectancy-value theory and asserted that people's performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do in the activity and the extent to which they value the activity. Putting this into the context of migration, Hagen-Zanker (2008) further explained that potential migrants' strength of migration intentions depended on a multiplication of the values of migration outcomes and expectations that migration would lead to these outcomes. In line with those previous findings, the current study found overall positive feedback from Chinese graduates on the study-to-work part of their transition journey. Despite some obstacles and challenges while seeking employment and trying to adapt in the workplace, Chinese graduates were, in general, satisfied with what they had achieved in both tertiary education and career progression. The Chinese graduates' decision to choose New Zealand as their destination country was made upon the belief that studying and working in this country were a valuable experience in their life and would contribute to their future success, whether they could stay or not after graduation.

Under the strong desire to stay in the host country after studying, the Chinese graduates adopted some practical strategies, like altering their study plan and collaborating with their family members on the migration process, to cater to the ever-changing immigration environment in New Zealand. They expected those strategies could ensure them a smooth transition from education to employment and eventually lead to a positive migration outcome. Through their continuous efforts, some Chinese graduates had reached their goals of settling well in the workplace and attaining the New Zealand residency. Their experience of successfully adapting to

the organisation and making noticeable career advancement also demonstrated that showing resilience and having a positive mindset helped Chinese graduates to overcome challenges in the transitional stage.

Although migration was one of the Chinese students' top considerations, other factors like New Zealand's reputation for social stability, natural beauty, work-life balance, and cultural diversity all played some part when they eventually chose New Zealand as their study and living destination. This finding echoed De Jong's (2000) study that migration was seen as instrumental behaviour, and decision-making was based on a "cognitive calculus" of costs and benefits, and on a subjective, anticipatory weighting of the factors in attaining certain goals. The current research also argued that Chinese students' decision-making was not limited to considerations of costs and benefits of achieving their initially set goals in education and migration. Instead, the research result complemented what Hagen-Zanker (2008) stated that when people planned to migrate, other elements like security (inner peace by escaping away from fierce competitions in the home country) or self-fulfilment (living the life and doing the job that they are genuinely fond of) were also important for student migrants' decisions.

The Chinese graduates' expectations on obtaining residency through education were constantly evolving over the course of their lived experience in the host country. Tran and Vu (2016) refuted in their research the stereotypical assumption that the only motive for international students studying overseas was gaining a pathway to permanent residency. Similarly, the current study resonated that education was not the dominant pathway for obtaining residency or the sole reason for students to migrate. As the findings indicated, the course of the Chinese students' life was fluid and everchanging, influenced by other factors like education advancement, relationship building, and career progression. Student migrants' donned evolving identities that were open to changes in the host country, such as being family members, citizens of the host country, workers and so on (King & Raghuram, 2013). Consequently, Chinese student migrants' motivations also

changed alongside their life journey in New Zealand. Once achieving the primary goal of attaining foreign academic qualifications, Chinese graduates were presented with other targets to pursue, like getting a quality job or seeking the right to permanently reside in the host country.

The Chinese graduates' migration decisions and patterns were also strongly tied to their familial obligations and connections, such as following their parents' opinions, making decisions with their immediate family members, and collaborating on the migration process. The specific moving patterns illustrated that the individual migratory journey of a Chinese student migrant was often intertwined with their respective household connections. This finding could be explored with the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) model in which an individual migrant's move was closely linked with the family decision. According to Massey et al. (1993), the family as a whole only migrated if their net gain was positive. For example, if one partner found a (better) job at the destination, the rest of the family would migrate when gains of one family member internalised the losses of the other family member. However, different from the NELM model, the current study found that despite the uncertainty of the future prospects in the host country, owing to confidence in reaching their goals through joint efforts, student migrants' households sometimes did move together, instead of sending one or more members off as migrants first. The strategy thus helped to maximise the chance of success in their migration outcome.

Regardless of strong motivations and high expectations for their post-study journey, the Chinese graduates found their experiences of job hunting, workplace adaptation, and migration seeking in New Zealand were unexpected, challenging, and sometimes hopeless. This situation was consistent with what Ullah (2010) addressed that although migration decisions were generally made with expectations and prospects of better jobs and a better future, migrants often failed to bring these hopes to fruition. It was found that insufficient knowledge and misinformation about the host country prior to departure caused the unmet expectations. Students counting on the information given by their close connection who lived in the same host country

were better informed, although the information was at times fragmented and incomplete. Conversely, information received from channels such as the media and education agents were the most misleading, which contributed to the overall unmet expectations among the research participants. There was a similar sentiment in Ullah's (2010) research, which revealed that migrants who received information from friends and relatives were better informed than those who had been deceived by agents and brokers.

The finding on the Chinese graduates' unmet expectations due to misleading information from limited channels also supported what Ullah (2010) stated that at the decision-making stage, migrants decided to move mainly based on realities in their home country, because the attractive factors in the host country were covertly active or unknown. Accordingly, due to the unrealistic expectations resulting from insufficient knowledge or misinformation about the host country, the discrepancy between what had motivated Chinese students to move and the reality of they experienced in the host countries inevitably occurred.

However, the Chinese graduates were not passive agents who just accepted and embraced their unmet expectations. They actively readjusted their expectations and prepared themselves to better integrate into their host country. Some scholars shared the same sentiments in their studies. According to Scheibelhofer (2018), once migrants had already lived in the host country, they often revised their expectations to accommodate changing circumstances. Burton-Jeangros et al. (2021) further elaborated that people who migrated put their ambitions for a better life into practice once the decision to leave their home country was made. However, migrants' capacity to meet their expectations would be constrained by conditions available to them in their countries of destination. The Chinese graduates in the current study took action to adjust their expectations to both work and migration, establish new social connections, and familiarise themselves with the local labour market. By revising their expectations and making adjustments, the Chinese graduates managed to

manoeuvre through the complex job market situation and the stringent immigration setting in New Zealand, so as to eventually reach their pre-set goals.

The turbulent and ever-changing immigration setting in New Zealand also caused a direct impact on international students' post-study transition. The current research found that stringent conditions and limited lengths of time imposed on their visas hindered the Chinese graduates from further advancing their career progression and settlement journey in New Zealand. This was another key factor resulting in their unmet expectations. Some previous research identified the reciprocity of political economy (perceived advantages associated with the attainment of permanent residency) and policy culture (public perceptions towards immigrants) as the reasons why international students chose to settle down in a particular country (Considine, 2005; Hawthorne, 2008; Yang, 2007). In addition, the political setting in host countries was an important factor impacting potential migrants' decisions to move. Elements such as migration laws and the right to legally cross the border directly influenced migration flows (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). In the New Zealand context, the government agencies (e.g., Immigration New Zealand), political parties, and professional bodies (industries that were in skill shortages) collaborated to set rules to control the volume and types of migrants they would like to receive. Influenced by those immigration rules and policies, potential migrants including Chinese graduates in the current study had to make changes on their migration plan which best suited their situation to achieve their migratory objectives.

5.2 Hurdles of employment-seeking

The study suggests that Chinese graduates generally lacked an adequate understanding of the labour market and employment prospects in New Zealand. Apart from the insufficient job-seeking knowledge, they did not possess good insights into the hidden recruitment rules and cultural constitution of the workplace. This finding confirms Pham et al.'s (2019) study that entry into the host workplace

required international graduates to have levels of acceptance and capacity to decode these hidden rules. According to Blackmore et al. (2017), international students were excluded from the field of employment due to their cultural dispositions, lack of experience in the field, and inability to acquire or act on particular strategic knowledge or rules of the game in host countries. Due to the dearth of insight and knowledge on entering the workplace, some Chinese graduates in the current study were turned down by prospective employers. They had to accept the low-skill, low-level jobs which did not match either their qualifications acquired in New Zealand or previous work experience. As a result, the deskilling encounter was commonly found among the research participants.

Moreover, while seeking employment in New Zealand, the Chinese graduates were reported as not being the right fit for the organisation. They were perceived as either overqualified or underqualified for most jobs they applied for. This phenomenon indicates student migrants are often left out of the local employment market despite their locally recognised qualifications. A recent report by Education New Zealand (2019) found that nearly 50% employers in New Zealand considered local work experience "important" or "very important" when recruiting migrant staff. However, as newcomers to the host labour market, international graduates lacked chances to accumulate relevant local experiences during their education journey. It thus became a huge barrier for them to find employment after completion of their study. As reported in 4.3.3, although some graduates brought relevant work experience from their home country, their previous employment history was still considered to be irrelevant by local employers. This result confirms North's (2007) finding that most employers did not provide migrants with the opportunity to join the New Zealand workforce simply based on their previous (overseas) work experience. This problem, according to Bauder (2003), was due to the hidden rules that gave priorities to non-migrants with local experience and excluded international graduates. It also suggested that screening (meaning employers judged applicants' individual characteristics based on beliefs about characteristics of the social groups they

belonged to, instead of individual merits) played an important part when employers made hiring decisions on international graduates (Petzold, 2021). This effect was evident among Chinese graduates in the current study because their previous work experiences acquired in their home country were less known or acknowledged by New Zealand employers, although some of those experiences obtained in China were relevant to jobs they applied for in New Zealand.

The strength of an individual's social network is an important lens to explain and examine student migrants' patterns to find jobs. The current study result shows that Chinese graduates normally received their first jobs' information from their close social networks, comprised of their co-national friends, classmates, teachers, or even family members, who had some "insider knowledge" about the recruiting organisations. This finding is in agreement with Massey et al.'s (1993) research that strong ties played an important part in helping migrants integrate into a new society. Their study also showed that having friends and relatives (strong ties) with migratory experience greatly improved migrants' efficiency and effectiveness in finding jobs and securing higher wages. Moreover, Chinese graduates in the current study, like other migrants, lacked sufficient information and access to the local job market in New Zealand, where 70% of vacancies were filled through the hidden job market, meaning jobs were filled through networks instead of through advertising (Careers.govt.nz, 2020). As a result, the Chinese graduates tended to turn to their co-national networks for potential job opportunities. This was because the co-national networks (strong ties) were more effective in matching migrants to jobs, especially when information about job opportunities was highly valued and not readily accessible (Bian & Ang, 1997).

However, strong ties in Chinese students' social networks can be seen as a double-edged sword. Although those strong ties facilitated the Chinese graduates' access to the host labour market, they brought about some risks. As noted from the interviews, "Guanzhao" (look after) was the keyword when most participants stated the employers' roles in their work visa and residency applications. It implied the

subordinate relationship of international graduates to employers due to their vulnerable status. The current study indicated that some Chinese graduates' co-national employers tended to take advantage of the situation when graduates were seeking employment, as they relied overly on the close connection in their social network. Furthermore, some participants' hidden deals of compensating their co-national employers in order to meet the immigration criteria on visa or residency indicated that mutual exploitation existed among student migrants and employers. Some Chinese graduates were voluntarily exploited by their co-national employers. This finding resonates with what Joseph (2016) disclosed in his research that given the expectations for permanent residence, their temporary visa status, and acute competition in the labour market, international graduates would turn to their co-ethnic networks for employment opportunities. Nevertheless, over reliance on the close networks exacerbated student migrants' dependence and vulnerable status and caused the problem of exploitation.

Through examining the success of some Chinese graduates in securing more sustainable and better-quality jobs, this study shows that some Chinese graduates effectively deployed resources beyond their own social circles through the combination of both weak and strong ties. Under the reciprocity of those "combined" ties in their social network, they managed to reach out for more and better job opportunities. This finding further confirms Giulietti et al.'s (2018) study result that when complementing the strong ties which mainly focused on emotional and financial support, the weak ties that normally provided job information would maximise the effect of personal connections on employment outcomes.

5.3 Barriers in the workplace

The lack of understanding of the local workplace culture remained one of the major obstacles that impeded the Chinese graduates' career progression and their adaptation in the workplace. Despite having proven proficiency in the standard

English language, as evident in their New Zealand-earned tertiary degrees and recognised by IELTS (International English Language Testing System) for scoring well on its test, the Chinese graduates found it difficult to cross the cultural and organisational barriers within their workplace. This dilemma was due to their insufficient understanding of the New Zealand workplace culture which was dominated by "legitimate language" referring to "subtle normative codes" (Cederberg, 2015, p. 34). These codes in the workplace were unfamiliar to the Chinese graduates despite their formal and English proficiency. The local colloquial expressions and cultural references in daily conversations were integral parts of the local workplace setting. These two elements joined forces and became a barrier that most Chinese graduates experienced because they did not grow up in the same cultural settings as their local colleagues did. As Pham (2021b) pointed out, international students lacked the right knowledge, appropriate communication skills, sensitivity to cultural differences, and a "standard" accent to help natural and smooth conversations in the host workplace.

Chinese graduates in the current study commonly performed jobs that did not match their New Zealand qualifications. It was hard for them to secure employment in their area of study. Some had to apply for jobs with lower values than the qualification that they held. The problem of "deskilling" or the "deskilled" job prospects was found as a result of the breakdown between their New Zealand qualification and the actual demand in the local job market. The "deskilling" situation faced by the Chinese graduates challenged the view that higher education led to improved employment outcomes (Blackmore et al., 2017; Chen, 2014, February 3). Instead, the transition from university to employment was complex and particularly fraught with uncertainties for international students (Chen, 2014, February 3). Although international education offered the promise of gaining high technical competency, English proficiency, and independent, critical, and hands-on knowledge (Sin, 2013), the capacity of western universities to fulfil international students' aspirations in the professional field was increasingly questionable in the context of

greater international and national labour market volatility and policy changes (Brown et al., 2010).

There was a clear link between human capital and graduates' employability, consisting of a variety of interactive forms of human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2017). Many researchers (Clarke, 2018; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Pham et al., 2019) proposed a broader scope of employability encompassing employment outcomes, career sustainability, job satisfaction, professional skills growth, and wellbeing. To achieve the desired employability like gaining job sustainability, obtaining higher satisfaction at work, and making career advancement, employees needed to "articulate a range of other resources and qualities due to the existence of discourses, rules of the game, and habitus" (Pham, 2021a). The current study found that when initially entering the labour market, the Chinese graduates accumulated the required human capital—knowledge and skills in the form of a recognised tertiary qualification, which was the foundation leading to their entry to the labour market. Moreover, some Chinese graduates in the current study made changes to their study courses in the universities to accommodate the immediate migration needs of the host labour market. They were able to raise their human capital and increase their level of employability by making such changes.

Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration is useful in interpreting Chinese graduates' employability and adaptation outcomes in the workplace. According to Giddens (1984), individuals had strong agency (referring to the action to conduct, create, produce and reproduce structures) and ability to control the environmental surroundings and their life circumstances (Hitlin & Elder Jr, 2007). To achieve a desirable employment outcome in the host organisation, international graduates were expected to build up those sought-after skills like effective communication, teamwork, creative problem-solving, and leadership to enhance their employability. The current study found those Chinese graduates who settled well in the workplace showed diverse employability attributes. Some took initiatives to decode "the cultural rules and scripts of an organisation" (Pham et al., 2019). Some deployed their

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psychological capital such as positive attitude and passion (Tomlinson, 2017) to overcome the lingual, cultural, and career hurdles in the workplace. Some of them successfully moved into management and leadership positions through their continuous efforts. Those success cases resonated with Giddens' (1984) assertion that human actors were able to "deploy a range of causal power to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (p. 14).

The dynamic of the workplace is never a one-way process. In the current study, some participants' success in changing their work colleagues' negative attitudes suggested that when international graduates adapted to the organisation culture, the host organisation itself also changed in order to accommodate such an adaptation (De La Garza & Ono, 2015). However, contrary to what Giddens (1984) described as the "dialectic of control" in structuration theory—individuals were able to carve out "spaces of control" and influenced the actions of the more powerful side towards them, this study found the Chinese graduates had little power to make a profound impact on the domination-subordination model in the workplace. It was still hard for the Chinese graduates to overcome the organisation barriers, although they made efforts to adapt to the organisation culture. The western-centric cultural spaces in their workplace were dominantly shaping their organisation culture, which resulted in student migrants being perceived as the "inferior others" in the western workplace (Pham et al., 2018). As a result, the Chinese graduates were unable to exercise their employability agency or to conduct agentic actions to change the organisational dynamics.

5.4 Beyond staying and returning

Student migrants' mobility patterns are influenced by a series of push-pull factors. The study showed some Chinese graduates were simultaneously pushed and pulled by conditions in both the country of origin and the host country. Some of them were pulled towards New Zealand by migration incentives such as study-to-work and

work-to-residence pathways. Some decided to return home after being pushed out by unexpected factors such as the limited job opportunities in New Zealand or the failure to secure residency. Similarly, while some graduates were pushed to come to New Zealand because of the unfavourable conditions in their home country, some were pulled back to their home country because of the sizable job market and opportunities. The nuances of the push-pull factors should be examined further.

Under the traditional push-pull model developed in the student migration field (McMahon, 1992), when considering overseas studies, some students were pushed by those perceived unfavourable conditions in their home countries, while others were pulled by attractive factors like scholarships and migration opportunities in host countries. Bodycott and Lai (2012) noted that push factors involved the social, political, and economic forces within the home country that initiated a student's decision to pursue education overseas. While the pull factors were those that induced students to choose one particular country over another, such as a chance to work in the host country (Mazzarol et al., 2001). The interplay of those factors resulted in the initial move of international students when they planned to study overseas.

However, the current study discovered that although the Chinese students were still "pushed" out for overseas studies due to some problems they faced, like the bottleneck of their career and environmental issue (air quality and interpersonal relationships), their decisions were found to be less associated with the negative forces in the home country, like unfavourable social conditions, adverse political circumstances, and lack of access to the preferred education institutions (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Those reasons were barely mentioned in the interviews. Instead, the Chinese students' migration decision-making was more related to the pull factors like the advantageous social-cultural prospects in the host country, consisting of a better lifestyle, work-life balance, and greater mobility that are available to residents of western countries (Chen, 2014, February 3). Therefore, the series of weak push but strong pull factors were what triggered the initial move of the Chinese students to New Zealand in the very first place.

The push-pull model can also be used to examine the trend of returning home among the participants of the current study. According to Li and Bray (2007), the reverse push and pull factors consisted of the positive forces in home countries and negative forces in host countries. When exploring international students' reasons for repatriation, the adverse conditions in host countries could be a strong pushing force that drove Chinese graduates out of the host country despite having invested their money and time in local education (Singh, 2020). Some common push factors under the reverse push and pull model identified in earlier literature included dissatisfaction with career and economic opportunities, restrictive immigration policy, racial discrimination, and uncertainty in visa approvals (Li & Bray, 2007; Tharenou & Seet, 2014). The frequent pull factors included economic prosperity in the home country that led to better career and professional opportunities, family ties, and friends' circles (Guo et al., 2013; Tharenou & Seet, 2014). The above reasons, especially the economic prosperity and job opportunities in China, as the key pull factors under the reverse push and pull model, were commonly discussed among the research participants who expressed the desire to return. It is worth noting that, even though most Chinese graduates aimed for employment and residency after their education in the host country, this was not the case for some other Chinese graduates who insisted on returning to their home country after the completion of their studies. Contrary to the popular view that most graduates were determined to stay in the host countries, this particular group of Chinese graduates was what Dimmock and Leong (2010) classified as the "loyalists", who displayed a strong sense of patriotism toward their home country. The "patriotism" demonstrated by those participants was multifaceted, resulting from different factors like cultural values and beliefs, economic opportunities, and familiarity with the social environment back in their home country.

The two popular migration trends among the Chinese graduates were clear at this point of the study: some participants chose to stay put in New Zealand in spite of the uncertainty that laid ahead, whilst some others decided to, either voluntarily or involuntarily, return to the home country. Meanwhile, there was another growing

sentiment that differed from these two trends: the decision to migrate to a third country from New Zealand. This result was in agreement with the research findings by Geddie (2013) that there were multiple geographic directions in which student migrants could be pulled upon graduation and many international students had an open migrations plan (Wu & Wilkes, 2017).

Moreover, as indicated by participants who decided to either return or migrate to a third country, New Zealand, once a popular studying and living destination, was gradually losing its traditional attractiveness for student migrants—that was its favourable immigration policy which used to give international students better access to the labour market and the possibility of obtaining permanent residence through the two-step migration pathway. Emerging issues like the constantly raised immigration threshold (Absolute Immigration, 2022), uncertainty of future for international students to remain in New Zealand upon completion of their studies (Newshub, 2022), huge backlogs in visa processing due to Immigration New Zealand's capacity limits (Critic Te Ārohi, 2022) further diminished the incentives for students to migrate and settle in New Zealand. Therefore, Chinese graduates began to consider either returning home or migrating to a third country due to the potential adverse impacts on their migration plan.

5.5 Female graduates' different trajectory

The current study suggested that compared to their male counterparts, female graduates experienced more difficulties when trying to settle in New Zealand. According to the interviews, Chinese female graduates tended to have lower satisfaction at work and limited opportunities for career advancement. They also encountered significantly more obstacles like deskilling and discrimination when pursuing employment in New Zealand. Despite having internationally recognised education and qualifications, Chinese female graduates were disadvantaged by the asymmetrical gender disparities that commonly existed in most workplaces (Zhai et

al., 2021). Although they had similar job expectations to their male counterparts, Chinese female graduates often encountered greater and additional challenges because of family pressure and social and cultural conventions (Moskal, 2020). The gendered social norms stereotypically assigned to women such as parents' expectations, familial obligations and childcare also caused negative impact on their professional career mobility more than their male counterparts.

The highly gendered host workplace structure resulted in the issue of deskilling and general difficulties skilled migrant women faced in accessing employment that commensurated with their qualifications (Kofman, 2012). Similarly, Chinese female graduates in the current study also faced the problem of "being deskilled" by performing low-skill and low-pay jobs to support themselves while looking for employment that matched their qualification. In addition, they were often stuck in those underqualified jobs longer than expected. Meanwhile, due to the masculine culture in the New Zealand workplace (Holmes, 2020), which was more evident in male-dominated sectors like construction, engineering and Information Technology, some Chinese female graduates were confronted with double disadvantages (Cuban, 2013; Khitarishvili, 2013). First, as migrants they needed to compete with local people to enter the host workplace, then they had to overcome the gender bias in their organisation. In agreement with research finding by Purkayastha (2005), some female graduates' encounter suggested that disadvantage against them at one level (e.g., their prior qualifications and experience brought from the home country were not recognised by local employers), led to the next level of discriminatory assumption (that they were considered as not being capable to perform their jobs due to the gender identity). Moreover, the offense that some Chinese female graduates experienced in the workplace showed that sexual harassment was more likely for those in precarious employment especially for women and migrants (Reid et al., 2020). Because of their vulnerable status, coupled with the fear that disclosing the event would impede their future visa application, most of the female graduates chose to handle the offense by approaches of tolerance, verbal rejection or private

intervention from the employers. This result was consistent with Liu's (2014) research finding that Chinese migrants were more tolerant of bullying due to the language barrier and the need to obtain a work visa or permanent residence through their employer.

Although they were confronted with more challenges and greater barriers at the post-study transition in comparison to their male counterparts, when Chinese female graduates did find employment, they managed to integrate with the host organisation in a unique way. Chinese female graduates in the current study were shown to have high adaptability in the host country, in which they learned to decode the cultural expectations and unspoken rules and were able to "adapt personal behaviours to be consistent with those of others so as to put them at ease" (Earley, 2002, p. 280). Their adaptability came from the experience of volunteering and involvement in various community-based activities which equipped them with cultural insights when entering the host workplace. Benefiting from the "cultural ladder", that was more female-friendly in the process of social mobility (Bourdieu, 1984), the Chinese female graduates managed to integrate in the mainstream society and navigate their post-study transition in the host country tactfully.

5.6 Implications of this study

Based on the discussions presented above, there are several implications of this study for both international tertiary students (discussed in Section 5.6.1) and other stakeholders (discussed in Section 5.6.2) in the education-migration nexus.

5.6.1 Implications for international tertiary students

The current study found that Chinese tertiary graduates faced a series of challenges during their post-study transition in New Zealand. Some participants successfully manoeuvred their post-study journey in the host country by adopting a

number of effective measures. Their encounters have some implications for international tertiary students.

Firstly, maintaining reasonable expectations and adjusting them based on actual situations are important aspects of international students' preparation when entering a new country. To decode those cultural and social norms, cues and practices that were embedded in people's daily life and work, international students need to adjust their thinking and behaviour as quickly as possible, to fit into the host country and organisation's culture. Meanwhile, international students should be aware that although studying overseas is deemed as a prospective pathway to gain a better future for most student migrants, due to the constraints of conditions available to them in their countries of destination, such expectations may not always be realised (Ullah, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary for international students to adjust their expectations on a realistic basis, come to a level of acceptance if their employment and migratory outcomes are not achieved, and consider how to best use their knowledge and skills gained in the host country to achieve their plans by stages.

Secondly, one key issue identified from the study was the insufficient information collected through limited channels before Chinese students embark on their study journey. It is suggested prospective students looking for studying overseas should do more in-depth research on the cultural, social, migratory and employment prospects of the host country. Comparing information received from different channels and cross-checking them before making the final decision are a good practice. Once already in the host country, international students are supposed to expand their social relations and establish more "weak ties" from their peripheral network, to avoid exploitation resulting from over-reliance on their co-national ties either while finding jobs or seeking permanent residency. Lastly, keeping a positive mindset is the key to overcoming obstacles and achieving success in the host country. The results of the study indicate that those participants who stayed positive and showed flexibility, resilience and adaptability when facing unexpected situations coped better with difficulties during their post-study journey. It is imperative for

international students to build those attributes to successfully navigate their post-study trajectory in the host country.

5.6.2 Implications for stakeholders

The transitional experiences of the Chinese graduates' post-study movement in New Zealand disclosed in the current study have implications for the groups of stakeholders in the education and migration nexus including tertiary education providers, student recruitment agents, industry employers, and government agencies. The following sections will discuss these in more detail.

The current study indicates that there was a disconnection between international students' academic qualifications and their employment outcomes. This resulted in obstacles and challenges when they sought employment with the New Zealand qualification not matching the host labour market's real demands. Therefore, tertiary institutions intending to recruit students from overseas should explore pragmatic solutions to bridge tertiary education with employment. Some practical approaches could be considered, which include building the alumni network and encouraging them to share employment success stories with prospective students, organising career expos and inviting industry recruiters for information exchange. Another suggestion is to incorporate work-integrated learning modules into the curriculum for international students and help them to establish a connection with industrial players both during and after study, to cultivate more "work-ready" graduates.

The study found that some Chinese students were given unreliable information by their education agents when choosing study programmes and institutions. It had resulted in the mismatch between their expectation and experience. Therefore, for recruitment agents (especially licensed immigration advisors) to present an objective and realistic picture of the employment and migration outlooks in the host country is as important as promoting the study programmes and earning

commissions. In the end, word-of-mouth feedback from clients (students) plays an important role in building up their reputation. Meanwhile, industry employers should consider offering more internship opportunities for international students and including them in the New Zealand workplace. By providing the required work opportunities, employers would also gain a variety of cross-cultural benefits that international students bring to the organisation like foreign language proficiency, different education, experience, insights, and a global perspective in local business (InterExchange, n.d.). Consequently, a win-win situation would be established for both parties.

As reported in the current study, most Chinese graduates felt disappointed and stressed while seeking employment and migration after completing their tertiary study. The uncertain prospects of the ever-changing and sometimes contradictory policy settings on international education and migration had hindered them from properly integrating into the host labour market. Accordingly, regulatory bodies in New Zealand are urged to engage both higher education institutions and industry employers before issuing policies related to international study, work, and immigration, to ensure the sustainability of the export education and supply of skilled labour for the national economy. In addition, they need to investigate pragmatic ways to improve the operation efficiency and tackle the problems of bureaucracy like lengthy visa approval processes and huge visa application backlogs.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Research summary

As mentioned in section 1.4, my study was intended to address the gap in knowledge about the education-migration nexus for Chinese graduates who came to New Zealand on international student visas. With a focus on exploring the relationship between their expectations to and experience during the post-study stage, the current research specifically explored the met and unmet expectations of Chinese tertiary graduates on gaining employment and residency before coming to New Zealand, the challenges of their transition from education to employment in New Zealand and their post-study migration plan and its development.

In order to provide in-depth answers to the aforementioned research questions, qualitative research method was used for this study. From 2019 to 2021, a total of 25 Chinese tertiary graduates were invited for one-on-one interviews. Most interviews were carried out on video conferencing platforms with data being stored on those digital tools. The thematic analysis was adopted in the data analysis process due to its data-driver nature. After the data transcription, coding and analysis, all emerging themes and sub-themes were summarised and presented in Chapter 4.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the current study, by outlining the major findings (see Section 6.2) and identifying the contributions the research (see Section 6.3). The limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are also discussed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

6.2 Major findings of this research

Throughout this research, the three research questions that were set up had been answered accordingly. The first research question concerned factors impacting Chinese students' decision-making process when they chose to study abroad and their

post-study experience resulting from the interplay of those factors. The thesis as a whole found that Chinese students' decisions on choosing New Zealand as their host destination were made upon rational and thorough considerations. For most research participants, New Zealand was not their first choice of destination country when planning to study overseas. Instead, they decided to come to New Zealand after making carful comparisons with other popular study destinations from the economic, social and migratory aspects. The Chinese students' initial expectations of their future in New Zealand through completion of the tertiary study were linked to migration purpose. However, they generally lacked adequate knowledge of the employment-seeking practice, recruitment rules, and workplace culture in New Zealand. It resulted in a discrepancy between their expectations and experience. As disclosed in section 4.2.3, Chinese students' unmet expectations fell into the work-to-residence journey where a quality employment matching both their education credentials and host labour market skill demands was key to ensure a desirable migratory outcome.

The second research question delved deeper into Chinese students' post-study journey by interrogating challenges and barriers they faced during the education to employment transition and their associated strategies to overcome those challenges. This question was answered in sections 4.3 and 4.4 which provided details of their their employment-seeking journey and workplace adaptation. It found that Chinese students' close social networks played an important role to secure employment. However, over-reliance on the close ties of their network caused the problem of exploitation by their co-national employers. There were other challenges like visa constraints, prejudicial perception by the prospective employers, and their vulnerable status resulting from visible and invisible exploitations. Some had to accept low-skilled, low-paid jobs due to financial burdens and visa limitations but they ended up doing those jobs indefinitely. In addition, there was a lack of connection between work opportunities and their study programmes, which also caused Chinese students' unsatisfactory employment and migratory outcomes. Once they had entered the

workplace, the Chinese graduates found their deficient language skills and the lack of understanding of the organisation culture became key barriers in the workplace. For those who successfully adapted to the New Zealand workplace and won the respect of their colleagues, they deployed effective communication strategies and tactics, such as self-learning, creative problem-solving and social networking. In addition, there were differences in both genders' expectations and experiences during the post-study transition. In general, male graduates were more positive about their experience in New Zealand, whereas female graduates had lower satisfaction about their employment-seeking journey. They were also subject to more gender-specific bias and discriminations in the workplace.

The third research question examined the migration trend of Chinese graduates and the development of it along their transitional movement. The question was answered in section 4.6 which showed that regardless of their employment and residency statuses, more Chinese graduates relinquished their original plan of settling down in New Zealand permanently and instead chose to return home. The returning trend was mainly due to the pull factors at the home country—China's fast-developing economy and increasing career opportunities, and push factors in the host country—the uncertainty around the employment and migration prospects in New Zealand. Meanwhile, the same push factors also caused some research participants to consider moving to a third country which had better migration outlooks.

6.3 Contributions of this study

The current research contributes cross-cultural understandings about student migrants' mobility and migration pattern in New Zealand, situated within the education-migration nexus. Its theoretical and practical contributions are specified in the following sections.

6.3.1 Theoretical contributions

This research applied three groups of theories (namely, motivationl and expectancy-value theories, social network and strength of weak ties theories, and structuration theory) to examine Chinese tertiary graduates' expectations and transitional experience in New Zealand. It has made a number of theoretical contributions to the literature on this subject. The following parts present them in more detail.

First, the study enriched the extant literature on motivational theory and expectancy-value theory from the view that Chinese students' initial decisions to choose New Zealand as their study destination were based on complex educational, cultural and migratory considerations. Primarily driven by the motive of gaining a better future in a foreign country when planning to study abroad, the Chinese students initiated their overseas study journey and made efforts to pursue the dedicated education to employment and migration pathways in the host country. The dynamic process of the Chinese students turning their plan into action resonated that a motive was a starting point that activated the decision-making process, while motivations were the results of participatory interactions of the person acting on the internal forces or motive Uysal and Hagan's (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). In addition, according to the expectancy-value theory, people's performance could be explained by their beliefs about how well they would do in the activity and the extent to which they valued the activity (Eccles-Parsons et al., 1983). The current study found that despite facing unexpected challenges and obstacles, some Chinese graduates had settled well in the host country, owing to their effective adaptation strategies and the strong belief that studying and working in New Zealand would be valuable experiences in their life and contribute to their future.

Second, the present study extended the research concerning migrants' employment-seeking hurdles through the lens of social network and strength of weak ties theories. According to Granovetter (1973), an individual's social network

contains multiple, multiplex social ties of varying strengths. In the current study, it was found that although strong ties comprising people in their close social network provided international graduates quicker access to the labour market, it was those in their "peripheral network" (classified as weak ties) who introduced Chinese graduates to better quality jobs. The result of the current study also showed that over-reliance on close connections in their social network had put some Chinese graduates at risk of exploitation by co-national employers.

Third, the study added to the understanding of the dynamic interactions and communications of individuals in the process of cultural and organisational adaptation. Structuration theory was used in revealing the internal and external factors that affected international graduates' transitional experiences in the host country. Through the theory's key concept of duality of structure (Giddens, 1984), this study contributed to the knowledge regarding Chinese graduates' adaptation in the workplace, especially the process of how the host organisations' practice and culture (the structure) influenced and was influenced by agents' (student migrants) strategies and behaviours.

6.3.2 *Practical contributions*

This study also made practical contributions to the existing literature on international students' transitional experience from the perspectives of cross-cultural communication. As the study adopted a qualitative method to examine Chinese graduates' transitional trajectory in New Zealand, it was focused on the connection between Chinese students' previous expectations towards their post-study movement and their experience in the host country. The study shed some light on the issues facing international graduates, such as employment-seeking and their adaptation to the host workplace's culture by adding Chinese graduates' stories and voices to these fields.

By studying Chinese graduates' post-study transitional experience, this research added a greater understanding of their employability attributes, adaptation to the workplace and their migration outcomes. It also contributed to the existing body of knowledge about Chinese students' expectations and experience which could be applied to international students coming from other countries.

The results of this research showed that Chinese graduates faced challenges during their post-study transition. The root causes resulting in their unmet expectations included insufficient information about the host country's labour market prospects and its employment-seeking practice, the lack of understanding of hidden recruitment rules, and the cultural constitution of the workplace. One significant finding of this study was the pressing need for international students to adjust their expectations, ways of thinking, and behaviour to fit in the host organisation. The study also provided tertiary institutions, industry employers and regulatory bodies with an insight into the issues facing international graduates and their coping strategies. Those results shed some light for various stakeholders of the export education industry in New Zealand on how to collaborate to improve international students' experience.

6.4 Limitations of this study

Through careful preparation and implementation, this study achieved its aim of exploring the connection between Chinese tertiary graduates' expectations and their post-study transition in New Zealand. However, as the research reached its final stages, a number of limitations became obvious.

First, the timeframe of data collection was limited to the fixed period of years late 2019 to mid-2021. The policy setting in New Zealand related to the post-study work rights and skill migrant category programme had undergone significant changes since the research was completed. For example, in September 2021, the Labour government launched a new one-off residence visa pathway for some temporary

work visa holders. Under this policy, applicants did not need to hold a valid job offer or a New Zealand tertiary qualification or equivalent to be eligible to apply for a residence visa. Despite the temporary nature and its purpose of addressing the immediate skill shortages during the pandemic time (SCOOP, August, 2022), this initiative impacted a lot of temporary visa holders including Chinese tertiary graduates who were holding an eligible work visa at that time. Some managed to settle down permanently without going through the same hurdles that were mentioned by most participants in the research. In September 2022, the New Zealand government made further changes to the Post-Study Work Visa as part of the immigration rebalance strategy. Key amendments included the duration of the work visa to be in line with the duration of the course and limited rights for students studying Level 7 and below (Aims Global, June, 2022). Those changes could substantially impact the post-study trajectory of those Chinese graduates who had the intention to stay in New Zealand in the long run. Therefore, if the data collection timeframe of the current research is extended to cover those periods, the research result will be significantly different.

Second, the sample size was small. Only 25 Chinese tertiary graduates were invited to share their personal stories about the post-study journey in New Zealand. Although it was frequently discussed, the issue of sample size has not been reached consensus by qualitative researchers (Boddy, 2016). In addition, the concept of data saturation, which was the point at which no new information or themes were observed in the data from the completion of interviews, provided little guidance for estimating the actual sample size before data collection (Guest et al., 2006). At the start of the current research, the size of 25 research participants was decided on the basis that qualitative sample sizes of 20-30 are typically conducted by researchers to establish data saturation using a grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). However, with the research progressing and more themes being established, especially when the gender difference emerged as a prominent theme, a sample size of 25 was not enough to cover both genders to reach the generalised

findings. Ideally, two separate groups with a sample size of 20 for each are needed. However, due to the fact that data collection was coming to an end and there were not enough resources to recruit more participants, the issue of the small sample size was not able to be addressed by the end.

Third, the current study did not include the voices of other stakeholders. As mentioned in Section 5.6.2, other stakeholders like student recruitment agents, higher education institutions, industry employers and regulatory bodies all played parts in impacting international students' post-study transition experience in New Zealand. Their opinions could also provide rich information on Chinese graduates' trajectory and their contribution to the host country from a different perspective. Therefore, the lack of those stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions towards Chinese tertiary graduates resulted in less definitive evidence for the current research.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

Considering the issues discussed above, this study suggests several potential areas for future research. First, a larger sample of research participants could be recruited to investigate more diverse information about international graduates' expectations and experience of post-study transition in the host country. As mentioned in Section 6.4, two separate groups with at least 20 participants for each gender are preferred so that the research result could provide more in-depth information about gender differences. This potential research area will be significant in assisting the understanding of female graduates' different trajectories from academic life to cultural and social adjustment in the host country. The study result can also be more generalised to the gender-specific situation in the host country.

Second, future studies could apply a mixed methodology, with qualitative method as a primary approach and the quantitative method in the secondary role. With its strengths of supplying the statistical data and enabling standardised, objective comparisons to be made (Creswell & Clark, 2007), the quantitative method

could expand the scale of the study and supplement the qualitative research mode with quantifications of events and occurrences (Chaudron, 1988). If used collaboratively, the qualitative and quantitative mixed methods will provide multiple sources of more accurate and convincing evidence than a single source of information (Yin, 2003) for the research questions stated earlier and ensure more research credibility.

Third, other stakeholders could be involved in future research. As mentioned in Section 5.6.2, education recruitment agents, higher education institutions, industry employers and government agencies are the group members who have direct impacts on international students' trajectory. Apart from hearing the voices of international students themselves, future studies should include those stakeholders' viewpoints. By doing so, the research could add more value in identifying international graduates' expectations and transitional experiences in the host country from different perspectives.

Fourth, further research could be conducted on students of other ethnicities. The current study was focused on Chinese tertiary students' expectations and experience in the host country. Although Chinese students were the largest group of international students studying both worldwide and in New Zealand when the research was carried out, the international education sector is constantly evolving and the backgrounds of prospective students seeking to study overseas are diversifying. Therefore, it is necessary to examine and compare information on different ethnic groups of students, so that the research result could be applied to the more complex situation today.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Date:

Participant:

A. (Topic) General demographic information

1. How long have you been in New Zealand?

2. Which city that you first settled in? And where are you currently residing?

3. What is the highest qualification you have acquired in New Zealand*?*

B. (Topic) Motives and expectations

1. Can you tell me the time when you **first decided** to study in New Zealand*?* (How was the decision made, Is NZ your first choice)?

2. Can you tell me your **expectations towards employment** before starting your tertiary study in New Zealand?

3. Can you tell me your **expectations towards New Zealand residency** before starting your tertiary education in New Zealand?

4. Do you find these expectations (towards employment and migration) **met or unmet**, and why do you think so?

C. (Topic) Employment seeking and workplace communication

C1: Previous (former) job

5. How many jobs you ever had since graduation? What are they? (all types included*)*

6. How did you find your first **full-time paid** job in New Zealand (personal network/ advertisement/ campus recruitment*?)*

7. What do you think is the **most important factor** in terms of getting your first paid job? –

8. Have you been through any **challenges** when accessing jobs in NZ? If yes, can you tell me a bit more about it? (If no, what were the factors contributing to your easy access to employment?)

9. Why did you **change** this job and what is your current job? (if applicable)

C2: Workplace Communication

10. Can you tell me about your current job (**position, roles and responsibilities**)?

11. How did you find this job? (why did you **change f**rom your previous job)

12. What specific actions did you take to familiarise yourself with the ***new environment (workplace)*** and how did those actions work?

13. Can you give me an example how you **got to know each other (collaborate)** of your team members in this organisation?
14. How would you describe the dynamics in your current workplace?
15. Can you give me an example of how does that **dynamic** (relationship with team members) impact your current work/role?
16. Did you ever have a time when the communication in the workplace was **not going well** as planned? If so, what was that and how did you overcome this? (If no, what were the factors contributing to the rapport relations in the workplace?)

D. (Topic) Migratory status and outcomes

17. What attracts you most in terms of deciding to stay in New Zealand for a longer time?
18. How would you describe the process of applying for New Zealand residency?
19. Are there any unforgettable moments during the process of seeking the permanent residency?
20. What advice would you give to new international students about finding a job and seeking residency after their study in New Zealand?

APPENDIX B

Research participants recruitment poster

Participants needed for international students' post study experience research

Did you:

- come to New Zealand as Chinese international student?

- attain Bachelor degree *or* above tertiary qualification from New Zealand during 2010-2020?

- gain the post-graduation paid employment in New Zealand?

- have acquired or in the process of seeking permanent residency in New Zealand?

Do you want to share with us the experience of your post study transition in New Zealand?

Our research involves a 45 – 60 minutes' one on one interview at where is accessible to and convenient for you. It could also be arranged through digital platforms like WeChat, Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

* Please note that audio or video recordings will be used for research purpose.

A koha (small gift) will be provided as a token of appreciation for attending the interview

If interested, please contact below:

Ms. Daisy (Liping) Xu, PhD student,
School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University Email:
lxu1@massey.ac.nz

WeChat:
Cell:

* This research has been approved by Human Ethics Committee, Massey University

APPENDIX C

<div align="right">
Massey University

School of Communication, Journalism &

Marketing
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Project title:

When expectations meet reality:

Exploring Chinese tertiary graduates' post-study transitional experience and migratory outcomes in New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher(s) Introduction

I'm Liping Xu, a PhD student in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, New Zealand. I'm currently undertaking a project to examine the post study transitional experiences of Chinese students who have gained tertiary qualification from New Zealand institutions and are now currently working or residing in New Zealand.

Project Description and Invitation

This study investigates challenges facing Chinese students in seeking employment, making career progressions, and securing the permanent residency upon completion of tertiary studies in New Zealand. It aims at examining Chinese tertiary graduates' post-study transitional movement in the country. One-on-one interviews will be employed in this study with the purpose of providing more in-depth and useful information about your views, experience, expectations and personal stories in the process of transition from study to work and migration.

I am cordially inviting you to participant in this study.

The aim of this study is to seek your answers for following questions:

1) What were the expectations of Chinese tertiary graduates on gaining employment and residency before coming to New Zealand and the extent to which they were met or unmet?

2) What were the challenges impacting their transition from education to employment in New Zealand and how they tackled these challenges?

3) What was their post-study migration plan and how did it evolve?

Participant Identification and Recruitment

I will interview 25 Chinese tertiary graduates who have obtained tertiary qualifications from institution in New Zealand and are currently working or residing in New Zealand.

There's no specific age range for the participants but preference will be given to those who have graduated within recent 5 years, so that the study results can better reflect the current situation of immigration portfolio and future trend.

All interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated and helpful in building an understanding of Chinese tertiary graduates' post study transitional and migration experience. This knowledge is useful and valuable for other migrants to be better prepared when adapting to the host society culture.

Should you wish to take part in the one-on-one interview, please sign the consent form attached to this letter. If you would like a summary of the study, an electronic copy will be emailed to you on completion of the study.

No personal information will be identified in the reporting of this research. Only the researcher can get access to the interview transcripts.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (anytime before the interview);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Any concerns regarding the nature of this study can be raised with the thesis supervisors, Dr. Mingsheng Li (M.S.Li@massey.ac.nz) and Dr. Erika Pearson (E.Pearson@massey.ac.nz), School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact me as below:

Liping (Daisy) Xu

Telephone: ███████████

Email: L.Xu1@massey.ac.nz

Massey University New Zealand

Compulsory Statements

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 19/42. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX D

School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing,
Massey University

Project Title

WHEN EXPECTATIONS MEET REALITY: Exploring Chinese tertiary graduates' post-study transitional experience and migratory outcomes in New Zealand

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL

I have read, and understand the Information Sheet. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

○1. I agree/do not agree to note being taken during the interview and the interview being digitally recorded;

○2. I have noted that I may withdraw from this project at any time without being disadvantaged in any way;

○3. I have noted that if I withdraw, all relevant information including digital recording and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed;

○4. I agree /do not agree that the published results will use pseudonyms.

○5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

○6. I wish /do not wish to receive a copy of the summary of the research.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Table 4. 1

Thematic Table

Codes	Themes	Example
• Low tuition fee • Relaxed immigration policy • Less rigid English requirement • Laidback lifestyle • Multicultural society • Natural environment	Decision-making process	After a thorough comparison of those popular English-speaking countries for my overseas study destination, I decided to apply to study in New Zealand without hesitation. It's simply because I had a limited budget and the tuition fees in New Zealand were lower than those of other countries.
• Migration through study to work • No /vague idea about what kind of jobs are accessible in NZ • Insufficient info. about hidden rules in the job market • Difference between expectation and experience • Evolving expectations with life status changed	Expectations	The reason why I chose to come to New Zealand was mainly to pursue further study and have a break from my 10 years' work in China. I also hoped to get the residence visa to stay here permanently, but regarding what kind of jobs I would do (after studying), I had absolutely no idea at that time. Before I came, everyone told me that it's easy to find a job in NZ matching my educational background. I thought I could get a job shortly after graduating. But of course, the situation was completely different from what I expected.
• Close network for accessible jobs • Exploitation by co-national employers • Unpaid volunteer job & Internship • Excessive working hours • Constraint on visas • prejudicial perception	Employment seeking challenges	I got my first job from the personal network. It's actually like a bonus. As my wife was working in the organisation which had a vacancy by then. In this job, I was required to do different work ranging from packaging in the factory to stock management in the warehouse, bookkeeping, and sales &

from prospective employers • Lack of real job chances from work-ready programmes		marketing. I worked more than 50 hours per week but was paid far less than that. Although those employment workshops helped to improve my CV writing and interview skill, there're no solid chance of meeting the employers and putting those skills into practice.
• Language barrier (small talks) • cultural-related obstacles • Hidden rules • Be creative • Be myself • Stay positive	Workplace communication barrier	I was always blanky. Although I knew how to work with my colleagues. I just didn't understand their small talk, like jokes or what they're making fun of. If I didn't quite understand my colleagues at work, they would use body language to help (communicating). I will do the same too. Although it sounds funny, it works!
• More disappointed/ unsure of expectations met or not • More difficulties in finding jobs • Prone to discrimination and bias • family pressure • Integrate through community-based activities	Gender differences	As the only female immigrant in this company, I found it hard to work in the same way as my other male colleagues do. I still felt anxious under the pressure by my parents and relatives in China. In their mind, as a girl, it's too risky of staying unemployed in a foreign county. They tried to persuade me to go home for better future through marriage or family support. But my younger brother, who's also studying in another country was never told to come back although it also took him a long time to search for jobs after study.
• Lengthy process for residency application • Stringent immigration policy • Lost hope to stay • Fast developing economy & better career chances back home	Migratory plan and outcomes	Under the current immigration policy, it becomes so difficult for me to meet the criteria (like the increased hourly wage) for SMC. Looks like the (initial) target is too far away. I might give up and either go home or

• Better immigration prospects in other destination countries		try other countries (for migration) eventually. I got my residency sorted in 2019 and have been working in the tourism industry since. I love this job. but due to COVID, I was made redundant. After working part-time for a year, I have decided to return home for better career progression.