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Student Mobility in the Wake of COVID-19: The Mainland Chinese Parent Perspective

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STUDENT MOBILITY IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19: THE MAINLAND CHINESE PARENT PERSPECTIVE

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PIM79
A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 10, 2021

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This paper is dedicated to my Uncle Tommy, who encouraged me to continue my studies and has supported me every step of the way. It is also dedicated to my classmates and professors at SIT, particularly my advisor Alla Korzh and Degree Chair Sora Friedman.
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perspectives of mainland Chinese parents on outbound international student mobility (ISM) following the COVID-19 pandemic. A narrative study situated in the qualitative paradigm, this study is informed by the push-pull theory of international student mobility and employed a socio-cultural framework based on the traditional Confucian value system and recent developments in mainland Chinese education. Through semi-structured interviews, the following research questions were addressed: What are mainland Chinese parents’ perspectives on outbound student mobility post-COVID-19? How has the pandemic transformed their motivations, needs, and expectations of international education?

Findings revealed that parents have sustained interest in sending their children abroad to study in the wake of the pandemic, but that they will delay their plans. Key reasons for delay included health and personal safety and a newfound appreciation of Chinese cultural capital. Key push/pull factors sustaining ISM include limitations of the Chinese domestic education system and the breadth of pedagogical options abroad. This study has implications in the development of international programming and marketing strategies for international student recruitment.

Key Terms: Confucianism, cultural capital, Gaokao, holistic education, international student mobility, pandemic, push-pull model, safety.
Introduction

For over two decades, mainland China has been a critical source of international students for higher education institutions (HEIs). In 2019, UNESCO reported 993,367 mainland Chinese students studying abroad, roughly 30% of international students worldwide (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019). Higher education institutions depend on mainland Chinese students for tuition revenue (Redden, 2019) and Chinese families depend on international universities for high quality tertiary education (Chan, 2018). In 2020, This symbiotic relationship was abruptly dismantled when COVID-19 brought international student mobility (ISM) to a total standstill. Suddenly, international students and HEIs alike were forced to abandon their established plans and renavigate education under post-pandemic conditions.

While all international student mobility has suffered interruptions, it can be argued that mainland China has been affected more than any other region in the world. Since the start of the pandemic, The Council on Foreign Relations published an ongoing report on international travel restrictions, tracking border closures, entry or exit bans, visa restrictions, and flight suspensions. Mainland China has been identified as the most affected region (See Figure 1) (Kiernan & DeVita, 2020).

On top of logistical impediments, concerns about personal safety and hostile political rhetoric have affected Chinese international students considerably. The events of 2020 sparked a global surge in racist attacks against Asians, which in turn, resulted in a growing divide between east and west (Human Rights Watch, 2020).
Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has elicited a crisis for international student mobility as a whole. Furthermore, mainland Chinese students, who make up a third of the total international student population worldwide, are facing exceptional challenges that need to be addressed. Within the last year, scholars in the field of international education have already begun to study this paramount issue in-depth. This study contributes to the growing body of research by investigating mainland Chinese parents’ latest perspectives on outbound student mobility. It explores the opinions and needs of mainland Chinese parents with regards to their children’s education abroad. The findings of this Capstone can guide higher education institutions in the retention and enrollment of Chinese international students going forward. The findings can also help universities to effectively address the contemporary needs of mainland Chinese families.

For this Capstone, the following research questions guided this study: What are mainland Chinese parents’ perspectives on outbound student mobility post-COVID-19? How has the pandemic transformed their motivations, needs, and expectations of international education? I interviewed eight mainland Chinese parents of elementary level-students about their study plans.
The analysis of participant narratives revealed several shared perspectives on outbound student mobility. Most notably, all of the participants expressed sustained interest in study-abroad following the pandemic.

This paper begins with a brief review of literature, which first summarizes the present discourse on the outlook for higher education internationalization, generally, and then focuses on the Chinese context, specifically. Next, I introduce a hybrid-sociocultural framework, based upon the cultural, pedagogical, and political factors affecting Chinese education today. I go on to describe the structure and rationales for this study, and the key findings that emerged. Finally, I draw conclusions based on the interview data within the socio-cultural framework.

**Literature Review**

**Higher Education Internationalization Post-COVID-19**

A year into the pandemic, there is already a robust body of research surrounding shifts in student mobility and other changing practices in international education. From the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, scholars have engaged in fervent discussion, speculating on what international education will look like in the future, and whether or not the pandemic can be a catalyst for progressive transformation. Is this the end of globalized higher education, or the start of a revolution: a step towards increased accessibility, lowered costs, and a smaller carbon footprint?

Prominent thinkers in the field, Philip Altbach and Hans deWit, have provided a running commentary since the start of the pandemic, shedding their insights and predictions in academic discourse and publications. At the start of the pandemic, there was considerable speculation that much of higher education would shift to an online platform. A year into the pandemic, deWit concluded that the
pandemic did not pose a permanent threat to face-to-face higher education and international student mobility (de Wit, 2021).

In March and April of 2020, the pair published two articles that evoked skepticism about the future of higher education internationalization (Altbach & de Wit, 2020a, 2020b). In both of these articles, they challenged the viewpoint that a shift to online learning could minimize the carbon footprint of student mobility and increase accessibility to global education. They reiterated an earlier viewpoint that student mobility for profit was a threat to the quality of higher education internationalization: “The crisis might signal that seeing international education mainly as an income generator is undesirable from many viewpoints, but one has to fear it will not” (Altbach & deWit, 2018, p. 2).

Altbach and deWit also shared several projections about shifts in mobility patterns. They predicted an end to the Chinese student boom but asserted that China will remain the single largest source for international students for the foreseeable future. They also expected that the United States would lose some of its appeal as a destination country. Their projection of greater political and ideological regional divides reflects the team’s earlier work, which discussed the threat to international education posed by a global rise in nationalism and populism (Altbach & deWit, 2018). deWit (2021) concluded: “It is more important than ever to follow the developments closely in the coming period, pay attention to critical concerns such as inequality, as well as to positive signs of innovation.” (p.3).

Another prominent scholar in the field, Simon Marginson (2020), has shared a breadth of insights on the effects of the pandemic. Marginson shares deWit’s viewpoint that face-to-face education and ISM will prevail after the pandemic subsides. Marginson argues, “Demand for face-to-face higher education will not decline in future. The organic classroom has personal and status benefits that cannot be replaced.” (p. 2). Concordantly, he believes that online education
should not mimic face-to-face education, but instead, be used as an innovative tool that is at once innovative, accessible, and affordable.

Marginson also made the projection that the student mobility sector will shift from a supplier’s market to a buyer’s market. Heisel (2020) responded that this is a call to action for HE providers to rethink the core purpose and value of the international experience.

Likewise, Mercado (2020) urges a shift towards “responsible mobility,” that is more efficient in terms of carbon usage and achieving international learning goals. Mercado expresses the viewpoint that ISM will remain in high demand, as developing countries continue to shift to knowledge-based economies but lack sufficient tertiary education to train highly skilled professionals.

Purcell and Lumbreras (2020) view COVID-19 as a call to action to align higher education with the U.N. sustainable development goals and to prepare students to face so-called VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) conditions. They call for a greater focus on international research cooperation. Purcell and Lumbreras encourage a collaborative mindset, in which HEIs and governments form multi-stakeholder partnerships recreate global communities of learning in a travel-restricted world.

In the pre-pandemic model, China was a major player in the international education sector, as the chief provider of internationally mobile students. Going forward, it is imperative to ask, what role will China play in the new international education? How can HEIs meet the changing needs of this chief stakeholder? Now is the time to pause and re-imagine the possibilities of international student mobility and global collaboration. It is essential, both for the financial wellbeing of higher education, and for a shared sustainable future, to carefully consider the Chinese perspective.
Present-Day Trends in Chinese Student Mobility

Redden (2020) stated plainly, “The biggest story in international education over the last decade was, in a word, China.” At the start of the pandemic Redden published a projection of the coming Chinese enrollment crisis, and the detrimental financial impact on HEIs. She noted that Australia, in particular, was suffering due to a loss of Chinese enrollment. Redden suggested that institutions handle the crisis by offering more support and guidance to the Chinese community at this challenging time.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, Skinner (2019) warned against an overreliance on Chinese student enrollment. Looking at Chinese student enrollment in U.S. universities, Skinner identified a steady enrollment slowdown (See Figure 2). He attributed the decline in interest to growing political and economic tensions between China and the USA, visa restrictions, China’s growth as a world power, and increasing provision of domestic higher education within China. With conditions already in place for a shift away from outbound Chinese student mobility, could COVID-19 be the catalyst for a lasting change?

To project the lasting impact of coronavirus on Chinese student mobility, several organizations have conducted large-scale surveys of Chinese international students. In March 2020, The Beijing Overseas Study Service Association (BOSSA) issued a comprehensive report of Chinese students affected by the pandemic. BOSSA shared that 87% of respondents were concerned about the direct health risk posed by COVID-19, with 63% of them deeming the pandemic control actions of their host countries insufficient. Additionally, 73% of respondents reported concern about interruptions to their studies, and 86% reported a suspension or classes or switch to an online platform. Furthermore, 94% of participants were affected by travel restrictions and increased airfare, and 61% identified as victims of discrimination.
The China Overseas Study Service Alliance (COSSA) conducted a similar study and found that 66% of agencies expect a decline in outbound student mobility, while 40%-60% of students are directly blocked by logistical delays in testing, visa processing, and travel.

Mok et al. (2020) conducted a survey of 2739 mainland Chinese and Hong Kong university students to assess their post-pandemic study plans. The survey revealed that 84% showed no interest in pursuing education abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mok et al. identified a shift in destination preference from Western countries to destinations in East Asia, with Hong Kong surpassing the U.K. The research team also noted that the pandemic led to increased concerns about health and safety and reflected on the ethics of accepting international students in the midst of a global health crisis. They call for further research on the socio-political influences of the pandemic on outbound student mobility from China.
Health and Safety

Mok et al. reported the significant finding that health and safety are of growing concern for Chinese international students. The British Council (as cited in Mok et. al., 2020) found that 87% of respondents were concerned about their personal safety and 79% of respondents were worried about their health and wellbeing. Two major health and safety concerns following the pandemic were racist attacks against Asians and poor pandemic control. Both of these factors have affected Chinese international students considerably over the last year.

The onset of COVID-19 brought with it a global rise in xenophobic incidents and racist attacks on Asians (HRW, 2020). Chinese students studying abroad feared for their safety, and many families urged students to repatriate. Racist incidents escalated after U.S. President Trump began calling the coronavirus “The China Virus,” inspiring his followers to engage in discrimination and violence against Asians (Chiu, 2020). The impact of these incidents reverberated worldwide, and the Chinese media began to portray the West as a dangerous destination. This also backfired resulting in a rise in xenophobia against foreigners in mainland China (Walden & Yang, 2020).

In addition to the rising risk of xenophobic violence, COVID-19 itself poses a risk to personal safety. In June 2020, Forbes published a list of the safest countries for COVID (Koetsier, 2020). Despite the pandemic’s origin in Wuhan, mainland China topped the list of safe countries. In October of 2020, nine cases of COVID-19 were found in the coastal mainland Chinese city of Qingdao. The municipal government took immediate action and tested all of Qingdao’s 12 million residents, the first 9 million within three days (BBC, 2020). The government’s response was widely publicized within mainland China and used to highlight the relative safety of living conditions within China vs. outside the country.
CHINESE PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON ISM POST-COVID-19

Political Influences

The stringent pandemic control protocol in mainland China has been a source of national pride. China Youth Daily conducted a survey of young Chinese citizens from provincial level regions and found that their self-reported level of national pride had risen to 9.57 out of 10, due to their nation’s response to the pandemic (Xinhua, 2020).

Overlapping with safety concerns, political factors play a major role in decision-making about international study plans. Before the pandemic, the U.S./Chinese trade war and rising Chinese nationalism were already significant factors in the enrollment slowdown (Skinner, 2019). Post-pandemic visa restrictions only further fueled the hostile political discourse, leading to greater tensions between China and the U.S. (Jordan & Hartcollis, 2020).

Wang (2020) makes the astute observation that tight central authority and collectivist values in East Asian countries led to better pandemic control, and thus, significant reflection on diverging ideologies between east and west. Cultural resistance to face masks in the west, and subsequent racist attacks against Asians donning masks, expanded the socio-political divide. Wang cites variations in pandemic control and cultural differences as the main causes of new political tensions, and even warns of a new “Cold War” dawning:

The pandemic has changed the world, disrupted normal life and also made the relationship among nations more tense and anarchic. The global crisis requires a global response. Facing the first truly globalized public health crisis, the major countries did not unite the world; on the contrary, the outbreak prompted greater strategic competition and disagreements over ideology between the great powers. (Wang, 2020, p. 3)

Despite the bleak political outlook, international education experts remain mostly optimistic that ISM will recover, and can, perhaps, become even more salient. Now is the time to
deepen our understanding of Chinese international students, not simply as the greatest source of tuition revenue, but as the pioneers of a new public diplomacy.

**Sociocultural Framework**

**Push-Pull Model of International Student Mobility**

The “push-pull” model of international student choice, proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), is considered a gold-standard evaluation method in international student recruitment. In this model, “push” factors refer to unfavorable conditions in the student’s host country, which can lead to outbound student mobility. “Push” factors can vary considerably, ranging from living conditions, to economic factors, to pedagogical variations. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) outlined six crucial “pull” factors that attract students to study in a particular destination. These factors include: 1) awareness of the host country; 2) the views of important people, such as parents; 3) financial and social cost; 4) climate; 5) geographic proximity; and 6) family living at the destination.

Further research has identified “push/ pull” factors that are particularly relevant to Chinese students. Chen (2017) conducted a qualitative study of Chinese international students at a Canadian university. Using inductive analysis, Chen isolated key push/ pull factors affecting the research participants, then categorized the push/pull factors as micro, meso, and macro. The push factors included academic streaming, academic competition, the Gaokao university entrance exam, and limited experiential language learning in Chinese universities. Pull factors included the desire for new life experiences, making international friends, the relative safety of Canada vs. the United States, career opportunities after graduation, and a need for social interaction in English.
Chen also alluded to the influence of the traditional Confucian value system. Chen argued that no study on Chinese students should omit the significance of traditional family structure and the decision-making power of the family, parents in particular: “Such approach implicitly neglects the fact that students’ choice to study overseas is affected by numerous, complex, and often interrelated factors that operate at several levels” (p. 115). Indeed, when studying Chinese students, it is crucial to take account not only of the Confucian tradition, but of numerous sociocultural trends and developments in Chinese culture.

**Contextualizing Chinese Education**

As Chen mentioned above, the Confucian tradition and a culturally established family value system are key points to note. In their qualitative study on outbound student mobility from mainland China to Hong Kong, Bodycott and Lai (2012) emphasized the influence of family on student decision making:

To understand the international and cross-border movement of PRC students, researchers, marketers and recruiters have focused on the perspectives of these students. However, in traditional Confucian societies such as the PRC, major decisions related to education and future employment are very much a family, if not a solely, parental affair. (p. 253)

The team conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. In it, 65% of participants reported that their parents determined their study destination, and 15% of the students felt that their parents completely ignored their own preferences. However, the findings also revealed that the students welcomed their parents’ authority as a form of support.
Wei Liu (2016) discussed Chinese education culture as a key push factor in outbound student mobility. Liu developed a useful framework that breaks down traditional education culture into three components: the education-first culture, the saving culture, and the extended-family culture. Essentially, Liu explains that Chinese families value education highly, which they can afford because of high-saving habits and a clan system in which extended families share resources and invest in their youngest relatives. Liu’s “education-first” theory is grounded in Chinese history, including Confucian filial tradition and the meritocratic Keju imperial examination system, which was the basis for Chinese education from the Sui dynasty (605 A.D.) to the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1905. This examination was purely meritocratic, and anyone who passed the exam was appointed as a civil servant, regardless of their socioeconomic background. The longstanding Keju system established the entrenched ideal that academic achievement is the key to success. It can also be argued that this tradition was the precursor to the modern-day Gaokao university entrance exam, which is the cornerstone of modern mainland Chinese education. Liu builds a strong argument that these cultural factors have sustained outbound student mobility and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Domestic Tertiary Education Provision and The Gaokao

The Chinese higher education system is the largest in the world and growing. In 1999, less than 10% of the Chinese population had access to higher education, whereas just twenty years later in 2019, that number rose to 51% (Gu, 2019).

Another striking figure is the percentage of successful Gaokao entrants compared to the number of Gaokao entrants accepted at top-tier universities. In 2018, 81% of entrants passed the Gaokao, but only 8.5% were accepted to top-tier universities. The system is also weighted in
favor of local residents. Beida and Tsinghua, the best universities in mainland China, are both located in Beijing. Applicants from outside Beijing face lower chances of admission. For example, applicants from neighboring Anhui Province have a 40% lower chance of admission to these universities than Beijing residents (Gu, 2019).

*Other Notable Developments in Mainland Chinese Education*

As China’s middle class grows, more and more of the population finds that they have a variety of options for their children’s education. Over the last decade, China has experienced a boom in the private school sector (see Figure 3).

![Percentage of Students in Private Chinese Schools by Level of Education](image)

*Figure 3: More Chinese families are choosing private schools (Gu, 2019).*

Most of these private schools fall into the category of “Private Bilingual School,” or a school that offers both rigorous English training and the Chinese national curriculum for the compulsory nine years set by the National Bureau of Education. After ninth grade, parents can choose for their children to take part in the Zhongkao national high school entrance exam, and
subsequently, the *Gaokao* national college entrance exam, or take western exams such as IB, SAT, and A-levels (Gaskell, 2020). These schools mostly cater to Chinese local children, whereas international schools target foreign nationals and Chinese children holding foreign passports. The rising growth of bilingual schools over the international school sector is indicative of a greater sociocultural shift towards biculturalism. The growth of this sector also opens more opportunities for non-foreign passport holding Chinese nationals to compete in the global higher education sector.

Another telling trend is the rise of holistic early childhood education practices. Both public and private early childhood education have undergone significant changes over the last century, and especially, over the last two decades. Zhu and Zhang (2008) assert that contemporary early childhood education is becoming more child-centered and research-based, partly due to international influences. This indicates an overall shift in preference towards diversified, holistic education.

The conceptual framework for this Capstone takes into account all of the socio-cultural, pedagogical, and economic factors described above. I draw upon the push-pull model, traditional Chinese family values, and Liu’s “education-first” concept in interpreting my research findings. I also contextualize the study based on the domestic tertiary education landscape and recent trends that span all stages of domestic Chinese education.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This Capstone is a qualitative study that explores the perspectives of mainland Chinese parents considering sending their children abroad. Through open-ended inquiry, I address the following research question: What are mainland Chinese parents’ perspectives on outbound
student mobility post-COVID-19? How has the pandemic transformed their motivations, needs, and expectations of international education?

**Methodology Choice and Rationale**

This Capstone is a narrative study within the qualitative paradigm. Merriam (2009) states that “questions about understanding [people’s] experiences call for a qualitative design (p. 6) This study is open-ended and exploratory and looks at participants’ experiences from their own perspectives. Therefore, a qualitative design is most suitable.

I chose to do a narrative study to give a voice to my participants and to gather thick descriptive data. Merriam (2009) explains that storytelling is an ancient practice, the oldest way in which human beings share their personal experiences with one another. Inviting participants to share their personal narratives is a natural way to gather their perspectives.

**Sampling Strategy**

For this study, I employed convenience and snowball sampling. Through word of mouth and a public WeChat invitation, I recruited parents from my current city of residence, Qingdao, Shandong, and selected eight participants based on the following criteria: 1) Participants should be the parent of an elementary level student; 2) Participants’ children should be enrolled in a bilingual international program. These sampling criteria are based on the following rationales: 1) The perspectives of parents with younger children (grades 1 through 6) would provide a longer-term outlook on the lasting effects of COVID-19. Most Chinese parents do not send children to school abroad until university or sometimes secondary school (Gu, 2017). Because pandemic related travel restrictions and public health concerns are a current issue, interviewing parents of older students might yield crisis-response data, as opposed to a broad outlook on the changing
landscape of student mobility. 2) I chose to interview parents of students in bilingual programs because these students are currently studying the Chinese national curriculum and a foreign (often British or American) curriculum, simultaneously. This choice of program indicates that their parents are still undecided about their children’s future education plans.

**Method of Data Collection**

The data collection for this study consisted of eight semi-structured interviews. I conducted six face-to-face interviews and two online interviews. For the face-to-face interviews, I met participants in a private room in either a tea house or a restaurant. For the virtual interviews, I used WeChat video software. Each interview lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. With the aid of an interview guide (see Appendix A), I invited participants to share their personal narratives about their children’s education and plans for the future. I conducted seven of the eight interviews in Mandarin Chinese, and one interview in English, based on the language preferences of the participants.

**Ethics of Research**

This study posed little actual risk to participants, but I anticipated some perceived risk. Because the participants discussed their opinions about the Chinese education system, some participants may have experienced discomfort while sharing their personal narratives. They may also have had misgivings or discomfort about sharing critical perspectives about their country with a foreigner. Likewise, they may have felt uncomfortable criticizing the United States when talking to a U.S. citizen. To mitigate these feelings of discomfort, I reminded the participants of their rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.
I fully disclosed the purpose of the study and its audience. Participants all gave their verbal informed consent, which is more culturally appropriate in China than signing an informed consent form. To protect the interviewees’ privacy, I did not disclose to other potential participants which of their acquaintances had agreed to participate in the study. I also invited participants to choose pseudonyms. I informed participants that I would not disclose identifying information, such as the name of their child’s school, but that I would disclose basic demographic data, such as the city or country where the parents attended university.

For the face-to-face interviews, I employed basic COVID-19 era safety measures. Although Qingdao is a “green zone” with a low-risk for COVID-19, I wore a mask during all of the face-to-face interviews. Some of the participants elected to wear masks, and others did not.

**Cultural Context of Data Collection and Analysis**

Because this Capstone is grounded in thick descriptive data, gathered from semi-structured interviews, it is important to make note of preferred patterns of communication within the mainland cultural context. These communication preferences affected both the data collection process and data analysis. Put plainly, mainland Chinese citizens are selective about what they share, especially when discussing their own personal experience. Bodycott and Lai (2012) stated, “In the PRC, strong expressions of personal feelings or the divulging of personal information about family have been discouraged by centuries of cultural norms grounded in Confucian ethics” (p. 257).

American Anthropologist Edward Hall (1976) developed a model for contextualizing communication across cultures. Hall’s model breaks cultures into two poles on a sliding scale: high-context cultures and low-context cultures. Halverson (1993) expanded on Hall’s model and
created a list of cultural context characteristics. China falls into the high-context category, with most people preferring non-verbal cues, culturally embedded protocols, and other indirect methods to direct verbal communication (Halverson & Tirmizi, 2009). Keeping these factors in mind, I did not press participants to divulge more information than they felt comfortable sharing. Furthermore, during data analysis, I took the liberty of extrapolating some information from the participants’ behaviors in addition to their direct commentary.

**Researcher Positionality**

This Capstone is grounded in the belief that a more thorough and nuanced understanding of mainland Chinese parents’ needs can not only safeguard the future of outbound student mobility, but also guide HEIs in developing better programs and services for this population.

Given the current political tensions between the United States and China, as a white American researcher, I ran the risk of making participants uncomfortable. I did my best to mitigate those effects by following local Chinese manners and standards of behavior.

I also communicated to the research subjects that I am open-minded and eager to learn. Although I have lived in China for years, it would be haughty to claim total familiarity with the culture. I respect this culture without fully understanding it.

Additionally, I am a strong and vocal proponent of international exchange and cross-cultural experiences. I was particularly mindful to avoid asking leading questions that reflect my personal stance on international education.

**Data Management and Analysis**

I audio-recorded the interviews and saved the MP3 files on my password-protected laptop. I transcribed and translated the interviews from Mandarin Chinese to English, then
uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose data management software. I ran the data through two cycles of coding. For the initial cycle, I used in-vivo coding (Saldana, 2016), drawing codes from the participants’ own language (in translation). For the second cycle, I used thematic coding based on my conceptual framework. I used the final data set to corroborate the data and seek significant patterns in the participants’ shared experiences, plans, values, and opinions.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness of Findings**

This study only looks at Chinese student mobility through the eyes of one body of stakeholders: the parents. That said, it is framed by existing literature that looks at the perspectives of students and higher education institutions. Most importantly, this is an exploration of their personal experiences and perspectives, which should not be generalized. This series of interviews provides a glimpse into the daily lives and motivations of Chinese parents, raising children in a complicated, globalized world. The study sheds light on the Chinese parent experience and exposes potential new trends in outbound student mobility from mainland China.

To reduce researcher bias, I engaged in dialogue with other researchers and followed SIT’s HSR protocol (see appendix C). I used member-checking and asked participants to review the interview transcripts before analysis. While collecting and analyzing the data, I engaged in self-reflexivity, the process of openly acknowledging one’s own biases and values. Subramani (2019) describes reflexivity as follows: “Through reflexivity, I hold myself accountable and open for readers and peers to see how moral knowledge construction happens in the particular context” (p.7) I tried to be an “open book” for my participants to make them feel comfortable. For example, when engaged in a conversation about Sino-American politics, I shared my own perspective with the interviewee after she shared hers. I also exchanged views on pedagogy in
some interviews, being careful not to impart my own ideas on the participants. I found that being openly reflexive encouraged participants to speak candidly about their experiences.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This is a small-scale study on a broad topic that welcomes further investigation. I delimited the study to a small and highly specific sample, seven parents and one brother of elementary age children enrolled in bilingual programs. When I designed the study, I felt that interviewing parents of elementary age children would provide a longer-term outlook on student mobility than parents of older children. Some of the participants in the study also had older children. Based on the rich data that the parents of older students provided, I would like to do a follow-up study that focuses on this population subset. Given more time and resources, I would also sample from families in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

One limitation that I did not foresee was respondent bias. Many potential research participants with purportedly more conservative viewpoints expressed interest but dropped out of the study shortly before their scheduled interviews. Considering the Chinese cultural context, it is likely that these individuals expressed interest in the study to be polite, then made excuses and dropped out at the last minute to avoid directly telling me that they were uncomfortable with the research topic. Had these individuals participated in the study, their perspectives may have provided broader insights into the overall changes taking place across mainland China.

This study did not achieve triangulation. I used one method of data collection, semi-structured interviews, and only gathered data from one source: parents. It is a small-scale, narrative study that explores the individual participants’ experiences, so I do not make any claims about the generalizability of this study.
Findings

Participant Demographics

All of the participants are parents of sons in dual-track (bilingual) international programs, with the exception of William, who is the older brother of a dual-track elementary student. All of the participants are originally from Shandong, China and self-identified as wealthy or upper middle class. All of the participants, with the exception of William, received primary through tertiary education in the mainland Chinese system.

- Beibei, 40-year-old mother, one son, 7 years old; both parents never studied abroad.
- Ashley, 42-year-old mother, one son, 9 years old; both parents studied abroad.
- Nicole, 37-year-old mother, two children: 7-year-old son, 4-year-old daughter; both parents never studied abroad.
- Zhou Hang, 42-year-old mother, two sons, 16 and 8 years old; mother has never traveled abroad, father has done business abroad.
- Eric, 42-year-old father, one son, 9 years old; both parents have traveled abroad but have not studied abroad.
- William, 23-year-old brother, one brother, 9 years old; parents have not studied abroad, but older brother has.
- Yang Yang, 37-year-old mother, two sons, 9 and 5 years old; both parents never studied abroad.
- Li Yang, 37-year-old mother, two sons, 12 and 8 years old; both parents never studied abroad.
Key Findings

The findings from this study confirmed the general outlook that Chinese outbound student mobility will likely resume after COVID-19. All eight participants expressed sustained interest in sending their children overseas to study. That said, seven out of the eight participants have delayed or plan to delay their children’s international departure. First, I discuss the push/pull factors that influenced the participants’ perspectives on sending their children overseas to study. Next, I examine the reasons for delay, or “stay” factors provoking the participants to keep their children in China.

Sustained Interest in Student Mobility

Push Factors

All of the participants of this study expressed concerns that domestic Chinese education is too limited. Some common words that participants used to describe the domestic education landscape were 窄 zhai “narrow” and 无趣 wuqu “colorless.” With the recent influx of international private primary and secondary education (Gu, 2019), most of the participants reserved their criticism for Chinese universities, or for public secondary schools that prepare young students to enter Chinese universities.
In all eight interviews, participants alluded to gaps in domestic tertiary education as a primary factor pushing them to seek options abroad. The participants cited various reasons for their dissatisfaction, ranging from pedagogy to competitive college admissions.

Based on their own experiences at Chinese university, Yangyang and Liyang were especially disillusioned with the quality of domestic tertiary education. Yangyang lamented that her college education did not prepare her well for life after graduation:

We Chinese college graduates, we’re like skillful machines. We can answer questions very fast, but after we’ve handed in our test papers, we’re clueless. We can’t apply any of those concepts in real life. We have no skills to face reality. My education was completely out of touch with society.
Yangyang had plans for her two sons to begin their education abroad for middle school. She is the only participant who was not affected by the pandemic and did not delay or plan to delay her children’s departure.

Liyang, who had a similar college experience to Yangyang, expressed concerns that the narrow scope of domestic education might dampen her two sons’ natural love of learning. Liyang had planned to send her older son to boarding school in England in September 2020, but her plans were thwarted by COVID-19. As the pandemic winds down, Liyang reported making preparations to send both of her boys abroad before high school. She wants to ensure that they have ample time to play sports and read for pleasure. “In the Chinese system,” she explained, “there’s just no time for extracurriculars. It’s “teach to the test”, and nothing else. How can they become lifelong learners in that kind of environment?”

“The test”, of course, partly refers to the formidable Gaokao college entrance exam, a push-factor cited by all eight participants. When asked if their children would participate in the Gaokao, some participants laughed in disbelief, and others simply shook their heads. Even Nicole, who assigned her seven-year-old fifty pages of math practice a night, was eschewing the Gaokao system to alleviate academic pressure on her child. Only Zhou Hang considered the Gaokao a viable option for her children. Zhou Hang’s older son is enrolled in a special dual-track high school program that simultaneously prepares students to prepare for the Gaokao and international college entrance exams. He does homework until midnight, on average, and takes extra courses during his summer and winter vacations. Zhou Hang’s eight-year-old son Owen is on track to follow the same path as his brother.

Ashley criticized the Gaokao system for its rigid parameters, many of which, she felt, were not in line with child-development: “All children have different characters, different
abilities. The Gaokao doesn’t make allowances for that. Especially boys, it’s so hard for them to make it in this system.”

By “make it,” Ashley meant reaching an impeccably high standard of success. Although higher education provision has increased significantly in China over the last two decades (Gu, 2019), many middle-class parents will only consider top-tier universities for their children (see figure 3).

Although Chinese students make up the largest percentage of university students worldwide, only six universities in mainland China made the Times Higher Education World Rankings top 100 list in 2021 (THE, 2021). With Gaokao success rates for the top domestic universities under 8% and even lower for students from more populous provinces (Gu, 2019) prestigious universities abroad are a more realistic option for many families. Zhou Hang believes that her sons can get a better education at a top-30 university abroad than a tier-2 university in China. She lamented that as a resident of the small provincial city of Qingdao, her son is competing for one of a small handful of places at Beida and Tsinghua.

William, whose father attended Beida, implied that college rank is a practical consideration, with prestigious degrees leading to better job prospects after graduation: “What choice do they have? If their kids can’t get into Beida or Tsinghua, they have no future here. They have to go abroad for tier 1 colleges. That’s the only choice.”

**Pull Factors**

Just as Chinese college rankings and slim Gaokao success rates are a push factor sending students out of China, the greater availability and variety of high-ranking international universities draw Chinese students abroad. Six of the eight participants directly identified or implied prestige as a pull-factor drawing them abroad. Nicole, Ashley, Zhou Hang, Liyang, and
William all stated the opinion that high ranking schools offer a better education. Nicole, Zhouhang, and Ashley shared the perspective that prestigious schools can benefit their children by offering a more high-brow social circle. They all expressed that education is just as much about building good habits as it is about learning facts. Ashley stated, about her son, “I hope he can go to a good school so he can compete with other talented students and develop good skills and hard work habits.” Interestingly, these three participants also expressed the most anxiety about their children’s safety abroad.

Figure 3: Parents have idealized expectations for their children’s education, which lead to outbound student mobility.
For all of the participants, holistic education was a key pull-factor. In contrast with the limited teach-to-the-test Chinese system, participants felt that western pedagogies were abundant and diverse, with ample opportunities to study the arts and participate in sports on top of core academics. Before enrolling in bilingual private schools, all of the participants’ children attended exclusive private kindergartens. Zhu and Zhang (2008) recorded that Chinese early learning was becoming more child-centered and play-based under international influence.

Eric, the director of one such kindergarten, shared that his professional experience with child-led learning was a key factor in his choice to send his son Aaron abroad for college and maybe high school. Eric exhibited full trust in American pedagogies, which he attributed to watching his students progress successfully at the American-inspired kindergarten he owned.

Unlike some of the other parents, Eric did not find university rankings important. According to Eric, studying in America would be valuable itself: “If Aaron studies well, we will send him to a top school. If he doesn’t, an average school is fine. As long as he studies in America, he will get a good education, follow his interests, and learn critical thinking.”

In addition to diverse pedagogies, all of the participants expressed a need for intercultural learning. Beibei stated that she wanted her son to “open his eyes to the world.” Ashley and William, the participants who had studied internationally themselves, were especially vocal about the advantages of international exposure. They also experienced the most striking ideological shifts following COVID-19. Both participants felt that the pandemic increased their sense of national pride. China’s well-organized pandemic response and corresponding hostility from the west led both Ashley and William to treasure their Chinese heritage more than ever.
Stay Factors: Reasons for Delay in ISM

Seven of the eight participants delayed or planned to delay their children’s departure abroad. For some, it was a simple matter of logistics. Liyang, for example, had planned to send her son to England in 2020, but ended up postponing his studies by a year. For others, the pandemic led to unforeseen concerns about safety, and the realization that international travel might not always be possible. As a result, some parents have modified their plans to better prepare their children for future lives in China. Participants also shared that the pandemic changed their outlook on Sino-global relations.

Health and Personal Safety

Chiu (2020) and Mok et. al (2020) determined that safety is a growing concern for current and prospective international students from mainland China. These students are facing the twofold threat of the virus itself and the recent wave of racist attacks targeting Asians. My interviewees expressed similar worries. Insufficient pandemic control concerned Ashley, Zhouhang and Nicole, while William, Beibei, and Liyang were more perturbed by discrimination and violence.

For Ashley, poorly coordinated pandemic control in the West led to a profound sense of disillusionment, and an increased sense of patriotism. This is congruent with the China Youth Daily survey results that indicate an upsurge in national pride following the pandemic (Xinhua, 2020). An overseas returnee herself, Ashley favored Western culture and society over her own until 2020. Referring to her sudden change of heart, Ashley shared:

Now those leaders have all been exposed as frauds. How can they claim to be the best when their countries are in shambles? I really don’t understand foreign democratic thinking. For the sake of the economy, they didn’t do anything to secure public health.
CHINESE PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON ISM POST-COVID-19

Why didn’t anyone stay home? We really think differently. This is a question of all humanity. If you as an individual aren’t responsible, then everyone will suffer. For Zhouhang, international divergences in public health led to lifestyle modifications that mirrored Ashley’s attitude shift. Looking quite tired, Zhouhang explained to me how she adjusted her sons’ busy schedules to adapt to post-COVID-19 conditions, adding more Chinese language courses to better prepare for the Gaokao. Zhouhang explained her motives:

We are still observing to see if foreign countries can control the pandemic better. We still have two years before my older son goes to America to study. If the vaccine gets things under control, we won’t change our plans. But if they still can’t get it under control, I’ll definitely keep my son closer to home. He’s working hard now so he can take the Gaokao. We still have both options. We need to prepare for everything.

According to Liu (2016), it is common for Chinese parents to prioritize their children’s education above their own comfort: “Most middle- or lower-middle-class families, a soon as children are born, economize on food and clothing on a daily basis to save for their children’s education” (p. 51). Before the pandemic, Zhouhang already spent countless hours attending to her sons’ studies. Now, with the added pressure of preparing for the Gaokao, she barely sleeps. Although Zhouhang still intends to send her children overseas to study, as originally planned, her new commitment to Chinese language education highlights the impact of the pandemic. Uncertainty about the future of international travel appears to be a significant “stay” factor that may keep high performing students in China in the near future.

Mok et. al. (2020) predicted that diverging practices in pandemic control between Eastern and Western countries would re-route mainland Chinese student mobility to destinations in east Asia. Before the pandemic, Nicole planned to send her son to the U.K. to study. Now, she is
sending him to Korea. Nicole’s primary reason for choosing Korea as a new study destination was safety. She also cited proximity to home and favorable moral values and “study culture” as reasons for her new decision: “It seems that Korean children have a more passionate attitude towards education. Their parents too. Their country is small, and their resources are limited. It’s extremely competitive, so parents hold their children to a higher standard. I want my children to be in that kind of environment.”

Participants reported discrimination as another key “stay” factor. William, who was at his university in Switzerland at the height of the pandemic, experienced anti-Asian violence firsthand:

One night, we just finished grocery shopping, me and my friends, and we were walking home, wearing masks, you know, and we got knife attacked. These two local kids were just waiting there with a knife, just waiting to stab minorities. Actually, that was quite normal in Europe at that time. There were a lot of Asian kids getting attacked just because they were wearing masks.

William went on to share that this was not the first time he had experienced bullying and racism, but that it had certainly worsened since the start of the pandemic. Reflecting on the violent encounter, and other hardships he faced as an international student, William suggested that students can protect themselves by heading abroad with a strong sense of their cultural heritage.

Chinese Cultural Capital

For several participants, the pandemic inspired a deeper sense of Chinese cultural identity and patriotism. Participants who formerly envisioned their families settling down abroad are now planning their children’s futures in China. Participants explained that in order to prepare their
children for successful careers in China, they needed to learn basic language skills and cultural knowledge in childhood. In addition, some participants stated that they are less inclined to assimilate to Western culture than they were before 2020. All of these factors intersect, leading to a delay in outbound mobility.

William started boarding school in the U.S. at age twelve, but he hopes his little brother Steve will go abroad after high school, when he is more mature. William believes that children need to build a strong cultural foundation before embarking overseas. He developed this opinion in response to challenges he faced as an international student.

I witnessed a lot of violence, bullying. It was a great experience for me in the end, but quite a tough journey. If my brother grows up in China, he can gain confidence before going West, you know? He can develop his talents, learn his culture, and bring it all with him. Then he can really make good friends abroad. At the end of the day, they need to master one culture before adopting a new one.

Ashley also felt that Chinese students should build their own cultural identity before going overseas to study. She echoed William’s opinion that a strong cultural upbringing at home sets the foundation for a successful international sojourn. Ashley used the metaphor of arming oneself for battle several times as she imparted her vision for her son Tony’s overseas education:

I hope before [my son] studies abroad that he will be armed with some understanding of the outside world. Moreover, I want him to take pride in being Chinese. I hope when he goes abroad, it’s to engage in cultural exchange. I came here to learn your Western culture, and to teach you my Chinese culture. For example, when they’re all in the classroom having a discussion, I can confidently introduce my Chinese culture and my point of view. I hope it will be a condition of exchange, not brainwashing. I want him to be armed with his own
judgements and sense of identity, and his own pride, and very confidently go out into the world.

Like William, Ashley believes that learning Chinese culture can help her son better navigate his time abroad, but her paramount reason for delaying Tony’s international departure is to equip him for a bright future as an overseas returnee: “We believe now that first we need to learn our native things, adapt to the local culture, adapt to the people and rules here, understand how things work here. The more the better, to benefit his future. So now, we’ve pushed back our international study plans.”

Before 2020, Ashley was undecided about where her son would settle down in the future. Now, in the wake of the pandemic, she is resolute that his future will be in China. Ashley disclosed that the coronavirus pandemic and the geopolitical trends of 2020 opened her eyes to the shortcomings of the Western world and strengthened her appreciation of Chinese culture and society. According to Ashley, it takes decades of cultural immersion, language arts education, and relationship-building to become a successful Chinese citizen. She explained, “We rich Chinese, we used to plan our children’s futures abroad. Not now, not in these conditions. In these conditions, the future is likely to be in China. Tony needs to learn to be a ‘typical Chinese,’ so he shouldn’t go abroad too early. It takes time to learn over 3000 years of cultural heritage.”

Liyang shared the viewpoint that a childhood in China would lead to more local opportunities: “Chinese society is all about relationship-building. As early as elementary school people start making future business connections. Some of my family members think I’m doing my boys a disservice by sending them to England, you know, because they won’t make those connections. But I care more about their happy childhood and quality of education. We have the ability to support their fruitful childhood, so why not? We need to live for the present too, not
just the future.” Among the participants, Ashley, Nicole, and Zhouhang were the most future-oriented. All three hoped that their children would eventually return to China to settle down.

Bodycott and Lai (2012) found that intent to emigrate was a significant pull factor driving Chinese outbound student mobility. They introduced three common patterns of migration. For wealthier, better-educated families, the preferred first step in the immigration process was to send a child overseas on a student visa. Chen (2017) also found that plans to settle down abroad were a major pull factor driving student mobility. Chen found that many students went to school in Canada as an avenue for establishing future careers there. Now, in the wake of the pandemic, emigration is no longer a pull factor for some families. In this study, three out of eight participants were adamant that their children should settle down in China, seven out of eight hoped that their children would return to China, and one remained undecided.

Conclusions

This study explored eight mainland Chinese families’ perspectives on outbound student mobility post-COVID-19. The findings revealed that parents are still interested in sending their children to study overseas. Pull factors included holistic education, tertiary education that focuses on honing critical thinking skills, and the abundance of prestigious universities abroad as opposed to six world-ranked universities in mainland China. Limited domestic tertiary education was a key push factor. Other push factors included the high-stress Gaokao track education system and, to a lesser extent, limited job opportunities for domestic college graduates. This study also revealed that the pandemic has led some Chinese parents to postpone their children’s education abroad until after high school. Pandemic control proved to be a major concern. Global disparity in pandemic control highlighted the importance of health and safety, and also led to
overall ideological changes. The study revealed a notable increase in national pride and a
decrease in immigration intent. Likewise, participants revealed a growing appreciation for
Chinese cultural heritage.

**Implications for Further Research and Practical Applications**

While stay factors related to health and safety may dissipate along with the pandemic,
ideological stay factors, such as esteeming Chinese cultural capital, are likely to last. As long as
education in China remains limited, there will be a continued need for international student
mobility. However, if better systems are built within mainland China, student mobility may lose
its appeal. These conflicting value systems are worth exploring over the next decade.

Marginson (2020) predicted that student mobility will soon shift to buyer’s market.
Despite the small scale and limited generalizability of this study, it revealed some key needs that
can guide higher education institutions, student mobility companies, and stakeholders in
education development.

Most of the participants of this study revealed that they now intend to delay their
children’s international departure. Five of the eight participants formerly planned to send their
children abroad for high school, but now intend to wait until college. This indicates that the
“more and earlier” trend (Gu, 2017) might be over, and that student recruitment for Chinese
outbound students should focus more on tertiary rather than secondary students.

Purcell and Lumbreras (2020) referred to the post-COVID-19 era as VUCA- volatile,
uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. This palpable uncertainty has influenced Chinese parents’
needs in different ways. Many participants are now placing a greater emphasis on Chinese
language and culture studies to equip children to stay in China for college, if needed, or to return
to China after their studies. For others, the sense of uncertainty led to a greater need for holistic education that hones critical thinking skills.

The findings of this study shed some light on education development within mainland China. This study reveals a rising need for primary and secondary schools that provide students with comprehensive Chinese language and culture education in conjunction with courses that focus on critical thinking and extra-curriculars.

This study also revealed a sustained interest in outbound student mobility from mainland China due to a few key push-pull factors. All of the push-pull factors highlight gaps in domestic Chinese tertiary education. In addition to the continued development of student mobility programming, this indicates a market for the development of international branch campuses, dual-degree programs, and international programming within Chinese universities.

Furthermore, the participants from this study who attended universities abroad expressed a need for university programming that facilitates balanced cultural exchange. Ye, Leon, & Anderson (2016) found that a foundation in one’s native culture can facilitate self-authorship for international students.

Chinese parents are key stakeholders in international student mobility. This small-scale study yielded a wealth of information about the Chinese parent perspective on ISM. Expanded qualitative research on this topic can further elucidate the perspectives, hopes, and needs of this fundamental population. Furthermore, the greater international education community can draw upon Chinese parents’ insightful reflections and suggestions to co-create innovative programming for the future.
References


CHINESE PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON ISM POST-COVID-19


Appendix A. A Breakdown of Push-Pull Factors

Reasons for Delay in ISM (per participant)

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A. More time for scaffolded development
B. Chinese cultural foundation
C. Concerns about pandemic control
D. Future in China
E. Racist attacks
F. Increased national pride
**Reasons for Continued ISM (per participant)**

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A. Stress and dissatisfaction with *Gaokao*
B. Holistic western education
C. Low-quality domestic tertiary education
D. Cross-cultural experiences
E. Limited jobs for domestic college graduates
F. Prestige
Appendix B. Interview Guide

1. I understand that you are a parent of an elementary school student. Could you please tell me your child’s age and grade level?

2. What type of school is your child enrolled in?

3. What is the language(s) of course delivery in your child’s school?

4. Do you speak any other languages besides Chinese?

5. Do you want your child to speak multiple languages? Elaborate.

6. What are your goals for your child’s education?

7. How do you support those goals?

8. What are your future plans for your child’s education?

9. Have those plans changed within the last year? If so, how?

10. Did you ever have aspirations to send your child abroad? At what age? For what purpose?

11. Do you currently plan to send your child abroad?

12. Did you study abroad yourself?

13. Can you tell me about your experience abroad?

14. Did you experience any hardships?

15. What do you hope your child can gain from studying abroad?

16. What are your worries/concerns?

17. Who else participates in making decisions about your child’s education?

18. What else has influenced your decisions about your child’s education track?

19. What else would you like to share?
Appendix C. HSR Application

School for International Training
@ World Learning

Human Subjects Review Application (HSR)

Instructions for completing this form:

The researcher has the primary responsibility to ensure safe research design and to protect human participants from all types of harm. Research that exposes human subjects to the risk of unreasonable harm shall not be conducted. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the primary responsibility for determining whether the proposed research design exposes subjects to risk of harm.

In order to ensure expeditious review of the form, the applicant and the advisor (if applicable) must provide sufficient detail and be explicit about how the proposed research study upholds ethical standards. Incomplete information may delay review. While proposals should be included, it is expected that the researcher provide all necessary details within the HSR form. Please note:

- All materials must be typed; handwritten materials will be returned.
- Submit one file with the HSR form at the beginning and all other documents (interview guides, surveys, recruitment letters or fliers, consent forms, proposals) as appendices. Exception: Organizational letters of support may be submitted separately as PDFs. Proposal should be appended last.
- Students must obtain the advisor’s approval before submitting the form. The advisor may sign the form digitally.
- Please submit application AS ONE FILE to irb@sit.edu. Submission must come from your official SIT email with the following file name: last_first_type (example: Smith_Jane_expedited.docx; Nguyen_Viet_exempt.docx).
- Unsigned or incomplete applications will be returned for resubmission.

DO NOT begin contacting potential project participants or data collection until the IRB notifies you that your project has been approved.

DO NOT leave a question blank in Section IV; write "N/A" if a question does not apply to the application.

Section I. General Information

Researcher  Anna Profatilova

E-mail  anna.profatilova@mail.sit.edu  Phone +86 156 2112 7006
Section II. Project Description

1. Briefly describe the proposed project including the research question: This is a qualitative study on Chinese parents’ changing attitudes towards outbound student mobility after COVID-19. This Capstone will be guided by the following research questions: What are mainland Chinese parents’ current perspectives on sending their children abroad to study? What key factors are shaping their opinions and influencing their decisions? Through semi-structured interviews, I will explore Chinese parents’ perspectives on the abrupt interruption to global student mobility in 2020, and how it has impacted their future plans.

2. Briefly provide a summary of the research methods proposed: This is a qualitative research study in the narrative genre. I will collect data through semi-structured interviews.

Section III. Review Categories – Self-Assessment
Read and check all appropriate boxes. For complete descriptions of each category, see the SIT Human Subjects Research Policy.

My research does not need IRB review because it

☐ Does not involve the participation of human subjects.

If you checked the box above, go to the end of the form, sign, have your advisor (if applicable) sign (digital signature), attach your proposal and submit to irb@sit.edu
My research design may require a FULL REVIEW because:

- Children or vulnerable groups are involved (e.g. prisoners, educationally disadvantaged persons, cognitively impaired persons, trauma survivors, or populations considered vulnerable in local social situations or cultural contexts).
- Research involves the intentional deception of subjects, such that misleading or untruthful information will be provided to participants. Participants includes people being observed or interviewed as well as supervisors of those participants.
- Projects use procedures that are personally intrusive, stressful, or potentially traumatic (stress can be physical, psychological, social, financial, or legal).
- Research concerns sensitive subjects such as sexual attitudes, preferences, or practices; the use of alcohol, drugs, or other addictive products; activities that may be illegal, or likely to offend prevailing standards of ethical practice for a given country context.
- Research may collect information
  - that, if released, could reasonably be damaging to an individual's financial standing, employability, or reputation within the community;
  - that, if disclosed, could reasonably lead to social stigmatization or discrimination;
  - pertains to an individual's psychological well-being or mental health;
  - that, if released would put the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability
  - in other categories that may be considered sensitive because of specific cultural or other factors.

My research design may require an EXPEDITED review because the research:

- Does not involve children or other vulnerable participants. Vulnerable participants are children, the economically or educationally disadvantaged, prisoners, refugees and others vulnerable in the local research context.
- Involves individual or group contact in no risk/minimal risk circumstances and with non-sensitive topics.
- Involves collecting data from voice, video, digital or image recordings made for research purposes.
- Concerns individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior.)
- Uses surveys, interviews, focus groups, program evaluations, human factors evaluations, or quality assurance methodologies in which subjects are or can be identified directly or indirectly.
- Was approved under 12 months ago, minor changes to the research design have been made and additional research will be conducted.

My research design may be EXEMPT because the research:

- Involves the observation of public behavior.
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Section IV. Steps to Ensure Ethical Protections
All questions must be completed. If the question does not apply to your research please mark N/A. Please do not leave any questions blank. Incomplete applications will be returned and resubmission will be required.

1. Data Collection
   A. Please indicate the number of participants by age and gender:
      a. Children (under 18 years of age), female _____ male _____ other _____
      b. Adults (over 18 years of age), female 6-8 male 2-4 other _____

   B. Does the study involve any vulnerable populations? Yes ☐ No ☒ If yes, please explain. _____

   C. What will participants be asked to do? (Append interview questions, focus group questions, survey instruments, and other relevant materials) Participants will be asked to participate in face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

   D. If participants are interviewed, will you conduct the interview yourself and, if not, who will? In what language(s) will participants be interviewed? Where will these interviews take place? I will conduct the interviews myself in Mandarin Chinese in a private room at a tea house. Qingdao is a low-risk area for COVID-19, so it is ethical to meet in person. As a courtesy, I will ask the participants if they want to wear masks.

   E. How many meetings will you hold with participants and where will these meetings be held? (Will it become a burden to the participants of the research?) I will hold one meeting with each participant. I will provide refreshments at the meeting, and it should not exceed one hour.

   F. How will participants be recruited? I will contact potential participants through three gatekeepers, friends who have children in dual-track international programs at private Chinese schools. Then I will use snowball sampling and recruit more participants with the help of the initial respondents.

   G. Are participants compensated in some form? If yes, please describe. Yes ☒ light refreshments No ☐

   H. Explain your sampling protocol. What are the criteria for including or excluding participants? How will you select potential participants? I will use convenience and snowball sampling. First, I will contact my three friends who have children studying in three different dual-track international programs at Chinese private elementary schools throughout the city. Then I will use snowball sampling to recruit further participants with the help of the initial respondents. I will only include parents of children attending dual-track (Chinese/English) programs, in grades 1–6.
I. How will you protect participants from feeling pressured to participate in the study due to any power differential? For instance, if there is a formal relationship between researcher and participants (teacher/student, aid worker/client) that might influence a participant’s ability to refuse to participate, identify alternative options to participation in the study. I will not select participants who are parents of my students or connected to me in any formal way. I will only interview friends and acquaintances who express interest in participating in the study.

J. How might participation in this study benefit participants (there may be no benefit)? Participation in this study may benefit participants by providing them with an opportunity to share their thoughts in a safe and respectful setting.

K. Do participants risk any stress or harm by participating in this study? Yes ☒ No ☐ If yes, describe the risk or harm and the safeguards employed to minimize the risks. Due to the current political relationship between China and the USA, but there may be some perceived risk, which may cause slight psychological discomfort. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing candid information with an American researcher. To mitigate these feelings, I will clearly articulate the participants’ rights to privacy and confidentiality.

L. Will participants receive a summary of results? Yes ☒ No ☐ How will you disseminate the results to them? I will deliver a hard copy of the final paper to each participant. I will also engage in member-checking and invite participants to review interview transcripts before they are analyzed.

M. Indicate what type of consent you will obtain and explain any waiver of written consent. For research with children you will need a minor assent and parental consent form. I will obtain oral informed consent because it is more culturally appropriate in China.

a. ☐ Written
b. ☐ Electronic
c. ☒ Oral

d. If your subjects are non-English speakers, explain how you will obtain consent/assent. I am a Mandarin Chinese speaker and will obtain consent in the participants’ native language.

(Append sample consent/assent language, including consent forms for each type of research participant)

2. Protection of participant information. How will the following be addressed? (Answers must align with informed consent forms. The intended use of the research data, as stated in the informed consent form, and the actual use of data by the researcher in practice must be consistent.)

A. Anonymity: Data are anonymous when no identifiers (e.g., name, address, telephone number, professional status) are collected that link the information/records/samples to the individual from which they were obtained. Data collected in person cannot be anonymous and the existence of a list of codes and associated identifiers means that the data are not anonymous.

Are your data anonymous? ☐ Yes ☒ No ☐
B. Confidentiality: Confidentiality refers to the treatment of information (data) disclosed in a trust relationship and with the expectation that it will not be divulged without permission to others in ways inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. Confidentiality is an agreement between parties made via the consent process. Researchers must keep participants’ contributions to the research confidential unless participants have agreed otherwise (preferably in writing).

How are you protecting confidentiality in the proposed study? What elements of a person’s identity may be known in the final paper/report? How are you providing participants with adequate understanding of your research processes? How will you obtain consent?

Before the interviews, I will share the topic and purpose of my study. Please see the attached informed consent form for reference. I will maintain confidentiality by asking participants to select pseudonyms. I will reveal the following information about their identities: child’s age and grade level, city of residence, university attended. I will obtain oral informed consent. For the participants’ comfort within the Chinese cultural context, I will not ask participants to sign the informed consent form. However, I will paraphrase the content of the form in Chinese before the interviews.

C. Privacy: Privacy is an individual’s control over the extent, timing and circumstances of sharing him/herself (physically, behaviorally, or intellectually) with others.

What measures will you put in place to safeguard participants’ privacy during recruitment, data collection and within study results? How will data be stored and for how long? Will it be used in the future and, if so, how will permission for further use be obtained? Will your data be accessible online? I will not disclose who has agreed to participate in the study. I will store the data on my password-protected laptop and delete it after 5 years. The data will not be accessible online, and it will only be used for the purpose of this Capstone.

3. Does your study require approval from an external IRB in addition to the SIT IRB? Yes [ ] No [x] If yes, please identify the institution as well as your plans for seeking approval: n/a

4. If necessary, please discuss other details or procedures of the study that should be known by the Institutional Review Board: _______

By initialing below, I certify that all of the above information (and that attached) is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and that I agree to fully comply with all of the program’s ethical guidelines as noted above and as presented in the program and/or discussed elsewhere in program materials. I further acknowledge that I will not engage in research activities until my advisor has notified me that both my proposal and my Human Subjects Review application are approved.

Anna Profatilova
Applicant’s full name (printed)

AP __________________________________________ 12/23/2020 __________________
Applicant’s initials Date

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AS APPROPRIATE
(CHECK ALL THAT ARE ATTACHED):
Participant Informed Consent

**Title of the Study:** Chinese Parents’ Perspectives on Outbound Student Mobility in the Wake of COVID-19  
**Researcher Name:** Anna Profatilova

My name is Anna Profatilova. I am a student with the SIT International Education Master’s program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for completion of my MA in International Education. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

I am conducting this research in order to better understand your plans for your child’s education after the global pandemic. As a researcher in international education, I value your opinion, and I think it is important to explore the perspectives of Chinese parents. I will protect the data from our interviews on my password-protected laptop, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcription of your interview before it is analyzed. The data will not
be shared publicly, and will only be used for the purpose of this Capstone. I will share the published research findings with the research participants and the SIT community.

To protect your anonymity, I request that you please choose a pseudonym. I will keep your identity confidential, but I will share some identifying information, such as where you attended university and the city in which you live.

Your participation will consist of an interview and will take up approximately 30 to 60 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to have the interview recorded, please let me know and you will still be able to participate in the study.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time. There are no anticipated benefits to the participant for this study.

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

“I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Researcher’s signature ___________________________ Date ________________

**Consent to Audio-Record Interview**

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

[ ] I agree to the interview being audio-recorded

[ ] I do not agree to have the interview audio-recorded

**Consent to use Name and position title in the study**

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

[ ] I agree to the use of my name and position title

[ ] I do not agree to the use of my name and position title
If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at anna.profatilova@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at alla.korzh@sit.edu.

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher, please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

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