

**THE UNEXPECTED TRANSFORMATIONS OF
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the contemporary phenomena of Chinese students going abroad to pursue their education. Bourdieu's concept of „capital“ is used to examine the broader social context of the international student experience. Most previous studies have focussed solely on this group's immediate concerns.

Part One argues that studying abroad has played an important role in China's education system for almost 150 years and is consistently linked with the accumulation of certain kinds of cultural capital and social reproduction. Bourdieu's conceptual framework explains these phenomena well but does not adequately account for transnational education undertaken in an era characterised by rapid social changes and globalisation.

Part Two outlines the design of this qualitative study into the lives of Chinese international students in Adelaide, Australia, and summarises relevant demographic characteristics. Part Three provides an analysis of the students' experiences including their lives in China before they went overseas (Chapter Five), their experiences in Australia (Chapter Six) and their perceptions of the roles that their overseas education will play after graduation (Chapter Seven).

The key findings include that these students saw themselves as being on a journey from what they and their families saw as major deficiencies or lack of opportunity in China as well as a means to overcome personal shortcomings. Their families believed that by studying overseas their children would be able to generate enough capital to find the success which would otherwise have been denied to them.

In Australia the students gained not only the capital they anticipated, but also transformed in ways they had not and could not have expected. They became more independent and confident. Importantly, they also became happier and more contented than they had been in China. This

inadvertent reconfiguration of their values can be seen as a shift from being almost solely modern and achievement-oriented to reflecting post-modern Western cultural values.

These unexpected transformations provide these students with unplanned further capital which arises from their capacity to function interculturally. Their new ability to confidently cross borders and take up highly valued jobs mediating between cultures gives them a key distinction over counterparts.

Bourdieu's concepts remain powerful tools for an analysis of the phenomena of Chinese international education but this work finds that a greater level of flexibility and acceptance of uncertainty needs to be introduced to take into account any unexpected outcomes of international education, the influences of global culture and the cultural differences between China and Australia.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Glen Stafford and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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