Leveraging National Prestige

A Mixed Methods Case Study Investigation of China's Position on the Global Field of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate China's role in global higher education. It did so through focusing the investigative lens on global student mobility. The thesis followed a mixed-methods case study design, using interviews with Nordic students about their motivations to illuminate some of the features of Chinese higher education in a global context. A framework drawing concepts from the oeuvre of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was used to analyze figures on global student flows and interviews with Nordic students. The study found that China is becoming an increasingly popular destination for international students and that Nordic students are motivated to study in China by the attractiveness of Chinese culture and a belief in the country's increased importance in the world. Taken together, these results were used to suggest a dipolar structure of the global field of higher education, where nations are able to improve their position in the global hierarchy by relying either on an autonomous principle of academic quality or a non-autonomous principle of national prestige.

Keywords: global higher education, field, Bourdieu, cultural capital, international student mobility, China

Where thanks are due:

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT OF STUDY – GLOBALIZATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The institution of higher education was arguably international from its outset. The first universities in Paris and Bologna transgressed national boundaries, using Latin as a common language. Students and professors alike were recruited internationally (Altbach and Teichler 2001, 6). Furthermore, some would claim that the universities' knowledge producing activities, which entails exchanging and scrutinizing ideas without regard for their geographical origin, are inherently global (Healey 2007, 334). The rise of nation-building after the reformation arguably gave higher education a more national orientation: teaching began to be conducted in national languages, and the universities were generally tied closer to the nation-state administratively. Still, science remained international and the universities continued to have important international links (Altbach and Teichler 2001, 6).

In the last few decades, many would argue that this international dimension of higher education has intensified. Scholars commonly link this process to *globalization*, hard as that term is to pin down (Lauder et al. 2006). There are different phenomenon and indicators that could be used to argue that higher education is going through a process of globalization. For instance, one could point to the rise of intra-national or global organizations that have major impact on shaping higher education policy (Robertson, Bonal, and Dale 2002), or the emergence and increasing importance of university rankings that make universities comparable on a global scale (Wedlin 2011; Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Marginson 2007).

This study focuses on the role of China in this increasingly globalized landscape of higher education. It does so by homing in on international student mobility. China is investing heavily in higher education and has ambitious goals and programs in place with an explicit aim of competing with the top universities and leading higher education systems in the world. The study uses the case of Nordic students in China as a way of gauging China's current place within global higher education.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Previous research has shown that the motivations underpinning the decision to study abroad are diverse and often highly personal. The decision to study abroad can be understood as taking place not in a neutral space, but in an environment with specific structural features. It has been suggested that higher education constitutes a "world-wide arrangement" through which students seek to accumulate cultural capital. The global production of cultural capital is not undifferentiated, but hierarchical. Nations occupy different positions in the global hierarchy on basis of the value of the cultural capital they produce: some national education systems produce cultural capital of high value, while other systems produce cultural capital of relatively lower value. The global student flows are at least in part a function of this hierarchy: students tend to migrate towards national systems that produce high value cultural capital. This helps explain why global flows are dominated by an East-West current: Asian students are able to acquire higher value cultural capital through migrating to (primarily) the USA and Europe.

Quite recently, the shape of global student flows has undergone changes. In particular, China seems to be emerging as a more popular host for international students. Many of these students are from Asian countries or other national education systems which could be considered to be relatively far down in the global hierarchy. However, China is also increasingly attracting students from nations in Europe and North America that are at the top of the global hierarchy. The *research problem* of this thesis is how this shift should be interpreted. Do the increasing flows of students to China indicate that it is now producing cultural capital of higher value than previously? Is China improving its position in the global hierarchy of higher education?

1.3 AIM, SIGNIFICANCE, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The *aim* of this thesis is to contribute to interpreting China's position in the global hierarchy of higher education in light of its increasing popularity as a host for international students. There are three interconnected expected outcomes of the study. *Firstly*, the study seeks to contribute to understanding the motivations underpinning the decision to study abroad for a particular group, namely Nordic students in China. Most studies that have been conducted have focused on groups migrating to Europe or the USA to pursue higher education. Building on this, a *second* expected outcome of the study is to contribute to interpreting China's role in global higher education. *Lastly*, the study hopes to make a contribution to theorizing global higher education more broadly.

To achieve the aim and make these contributions, the study draws primarily on three sources: data relating to the Chinese higher education system, figures on global student flows, and interviews with students. The study can be described as a mixed-methods case study. The case of concern is Nordic students in China. The design and procedures are described in greater detail in the methods chapter (3). The study is guided by three research questions, formulated to achieve the stated aim and with due consideration to the design of the study.

RQ1:   *What is China's current role in global higher education and international student mobility?*

RQ2:   *How do Nordic students motivate their choice of studying in China?*

RQ3:   *How can the students' motivations help in understanding China's position in global higher education and international student mobility?*

The first and third research questions are partly overlapping. RQ1 is primarily concerned with Chinese higher education system in a global context, including its role as a sender of – and host for – international students. It is not tied very closely to the theoretical framework (Chapter 3). RQ3, on the other hand, is concerned with the position of China in global higher education. The term position relates directly to the theoretical frame of the thesis. In brief, China's position has to do with its place in the structure of the global field of higher education.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THESIS

Following the Introduction, the subsequent chapter (2) lays out the previous research that has been done in the area of international student mobility and global higher education. It also established the theoretical frame that the analysis sets out from. Section 2.1 situates the study in relation to the debates about internationalization and globalization of higher education. After this (2.2) follows a review of the methods used in previous research on student mobility. Section 2.3 provides a review of the empirical findings as to the reasons students go abroad (2.3.1) as well as the attempts at theorizing the context of international student mobility (2.3.2). This section also serves to establish the theoretical frame that the study employs.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used to fulfill the aims and research questions of the study. The first section (3.1) presents the research design. In section 3.2, the data that was used is described, after which the method of analysis is accounted for (3.3). The chapter is concluded with a brief section on ethical considerations (3.4).

In chapter 4, the analysis is presented. It is structured according to the research questions presented in the introductory chapter. Section 4.1 corresponds to the first research question, and analyses the development of Chinese higher education and China's role globally. The subsequent section (4.2) draws on the interviews and the theoretical frame to answer the second question of why Nordic students go to China. The last section of the analysis corresponds to the third research question and suggests how China's role in global higher education and international student mobility can be understood.

The concluding chapter (5) is a condensed statement of the study's outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAME

2.1 GLOBALIZATION, INTERNATIONALIZATION, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

As alluded to in the Introduction, there are ongoing debates regarding the *internationalization* and *globalization* of higher education. In the academic debate, it is generally difficult to talk of one without at least making reference to the other. Yet, the two concepts are not identical. They denote different perspectives, and researchers tend to focus more on one or the other. Altbach and Knight (2007, 290) have formulated the difference as follows:

> Globalization and internationalization are related but not the same thing. Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment.

For researchers interested in the process of globalization, the concern is with how this *context* affects universities and higher education systems (Marginson and Sawir 2005; Marginson 2006;

Marginson 2008; Robertson, Bonal, and Dale 2002). As stated by Marginson (2010, 6963), the researcher's task is then to accurately depict and disentangle the effects and implications of globalization:

> By studying the changing global landscape of higher education, we can draw out the implications for the policies of governments and national identity, for the developmental strategies of universities, and for international agencies.

The object of such studies is the global landscape of higher education. It is studied because of the implications it has for governments, identities, universities, and international agencies. The agenda tends to focus on *description,* though policy recommendations in this literature are not absent. Researchers primarily interested in internationalization, on the other hand, focus on how universities and higher education systems should and do *respond* to this context (Altbach and Knight 2007; Altbach and Teichler 2001; Knight 2004; Teichler 2004). As stated by Altbach and Teichler (2001, 6):

> As we enter the new millennium, we face the inevitability of a globalized economy and of a globalized academic system. Higher education is in a favorable position to adapt to new circumstances. It benefits from a number of elements that foster internationalization.

Here the focus is more clearly on the agency of higher education institutions. The internationalization literature tends to have a more prescriptive agenda and is often concerned with policy recommendations.

2.2 STUDYING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS

International student's motivations have been studied using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Some studies rely on both, employing mixed methods designs. The qualitative studies typically gather data through semi-structured or open-ended interviews. Interviews are then coded or indexed with the aim of identifying key themes (Brooks and Waters 2009a; Kim 2011; Waters 2006). These studies generally subscribe to a "people-centered perspective on student mobility," aiming for "understanding the often highly personal and always social reasons why individuals migrate for education" (Waters and Brooks 2011, 163). In line with qualitative work in other fields, the qualitative research on international student's motivations is usually committed to seeing the world through the eyes of those being studied (Bryman 2012, 399–401).

The quantitative research on international students does not always share this commitment to the world-view of those being studied. It is important to point this out, since it has implications for the interpretation and comparison of results. *Qualitative* research typically sets out to "explore the *motivations* of students moving abroad" (Brooks and Waters 2010, 144). More quantitatively oriented work, on the other hand, usually has research designs that "[e]xamines the *factors* motivating international student choice" (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, 82).

In some cases, quantitative studies can still inform our understanding of student motivations. This is valuable, as these studies have the advantage of generating results that can be generalized with greater confidence. For instance, Findlay & King (2010, 61) constructed a quantitative survey in which UK students were asked "What were the main determinants of your decision to study outside the UK?" Answer choices included for instance "I saw study abroad as an opportunity for a unique adventure" and "I was determined to attend a world-class university." Although the question asks the students for *determinants* of their choice, the answer alternatives indicate that the researchers are investigating something that is at least similar to what qualitative researchers mean by *motivations*.

In other cases, much more caution needs to be exercised. For instance, Mazzarol & Sautar (2002) found that students' "knowledge of the host country" was an important motivating factor when international students were choosing a destination, and Li & Bray (2007) found that the ease of getting a visa was a motivating factor for mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong and Macoa. In both of these cases, it seems clear that the research has identified something other than student motivations. Though these factors may be important, it seems unlikely that students would go to a particular place because they know it exists and they are permitted to reside there.

2.3.1 STUDENT MOTIVATIONS

A review of the literature reveals a very diverse and unruly range of motivations underpinning the decision to study abroad. Brooks & Waters suggest two broad classes of motivations for students to pursue higher education abroad: *strategic* respectively *experiential* motivations (Brooks and Waters 2011, 164). This is not a typology of motivations that all researchers in the field subscribe to, but most of the current knowledge on student motivations can be fitted into this scheme. The typology is used here as a way of structuring the literature on student motivations.

With the term *strategy,* Brooks & Waters want to capture instances where students' motivations indicate an acute concern for investing wisely in their future (Brooks and Waters 2011, 164). Many sub-categories of motivations can be placed under this heading, and many of these sub-categories in turn connect to broader theoretical projects. For example, Waters (2006) finds that students from Hong Kong study in Canada to obtain valuable education credentials. Though university education is present at home, the more valuable credentials can be acquired only by traveling abroad. Drawing on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), the study conceptualizes this as an instance of accumulation of *cultural capital.*

Kim (2011) takes this theorization another step on. He finds that an important motivation for Koreans to study in the USA is to "pursue learning in the global center of learning" (Kim 2011, 116ff). Relying on the work of Marginson (2006), Kim expands Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. He suggests Koreans study in the USA to acquire *global cultural capital,* understood as "the symbolic and cultural resources to demarcate global elites from others" (Kim 2011, 121). A quantitative study by Park's (2009) found that the most important factor driving Korean students abroad was a perception of "low quality of [domestic] college education. Although concerned more with *factors* than *motivations,* it adds some credibility to Kim's finding that Korean's consider domestic education to be second rate (Kim 2011, 117).

Brooks & Waters (2009b) resonates with these findings of students seeking high-value education. They report that the choice of studying abroad constituted a "second chance at success" for British students. For those that had applied for the most prestigious universities in the UK without success,

the top US institutions were an acceptable second option. Findlay & King (2010, 27; King et al. 2011, 170) are not able to contextualize their results in their more quantitatively oriented study, but nonetheless find that one of the primary motivations for UK students to study abroad is to attend a "world-class" university.

Students also link the pursuit of high-value academic credentials to improving their social status and opportunities for employment (Kim 2011, 114; Li and Bray 2007, 804). In both Waters'(2006) and Kim's (2011) studies, the improved job opportunities are linked to a the better command of *English* that is implied by studying abroad. In other studies, it is indicated that students perceive study abroad as a step towards an *international career* (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 204ff; Findlay and King 2010; King et al. 2011).

The other side of Brooks & Waters' (2011) typology covers the *experiential* motivations of international students. For some, international studies constitute "a life-enhancing, formative experience" rather than a rational calculation (Waters and Brooks 2011, 2). Quantitative studies have found that "extending life experience" (Findlay et al. 2006, 301), and experiencing a "unique adventure" (Findlay and King 2010; King et al. 2011, 170) are important reasons for students to pursue study abroad. In Brooks & Waters (2011, 10), this search is linked to "experiencing something different" and "mixing with individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds." In the quantitative study by Doyle et al. (2009, 478), it was found that New Zeeland students perceived the most important benefit of studying abroad to be "exposure to a foreign culture and language."

Kim (2011, 120) also indicates that the opportunity to improve one's command of English is not only a strategic concern, but can also be linked to motivations relating to identity construction. For the students of Korean in Kim's (Ibid.) investigation, study in the US was linked to a desire to become *world-citizens*. Mastering English was considered a crucial step in achieving this.

Some of the quantitative research has an explicit framework of motivation that is different from the typology of strategy and experience. It is referred to as the *push-pull model*, and is concerned with a different set of motivating factors. *Push* factors are those that influence students to want to study abroad in general; *pull* factors attract students to a particular destination (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, 82). These studies usually list a very large number of push and pull factors, and it is no use giving a complete list; some of them have been mentioned in this section already. The push-pull model also

operates with a theory of decision-making. Mazzarol & Soutar claim that students first decide to go abroad, then settle on a host country, and finally settle on an institution; in each step, different factors are at work. Their model has since been discussed and developed. Park (2009) suggests that some students settle on an institution right away, skipping the step where a host country is selected. Li & Bray (2007) choose to make a distinction between *external* and *internal* factors. They claim that a weakness of previous models is that they only take external factors into account. Li & Bray's (Ibid.) remedy is to include what they perceive to be internal factors, such as the students socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspiration.

2.3.2 STUDENT MOTIVATIONS IN CONTEXT

As suggested in to in the previous section, there are various attempts at theorizing international student mobility. One group of scholars has done so by drawing from the conceptual arsenal of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Two concepts are central in these attempts: *cultural capital* and *field*. The following section provides a review of these concepts, including how scholars in the field of global higher education have used them. This section also constitutes the theoretical frame of the thesis.

Waters' study focuses on Hong Kong students migrating to Canada to pursue higher education. In her interpretation, "migration to Canada has enabled middle-class [Hong Kong] families to accumulate a more valuable form of *cultural capital* in a 'Western' university degree" (2006, 179). The concept of cultural capital was first suggested by Bourdieu and played a key role in several of his major works (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Bourdieu 1988; Bourdieu 2010a). Bourdieu himself never gave a formal definition of the concept. This was not due to neglect, but a conscious decision rooted in his understanding of research: "[S]cientific theory as I conceive it emerges as a program of perception and of action - a scientific habitus, if you wish - which is disclosed only in the empirical work which actualizes it." (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989, 50–51). As an approximation, we can understand cultural capital to denote "valued and exclusive cultural resources that enable one to signal, attain, or maintain a certain type of social status or position" (Kim, 2011, p. 111).

As Waters (2006) points out, cultural capital exists in different states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The Hong Kong students emphasized the accumulation of cultural capital in both

its of embodied and institutionalized state. Embodied cultural capital are cultural resources that are (as the term suggests) "linked to the body and presupposes embodiment" (Bourdieu 1986, 85). In Waters' study, English language ability is taken as an example of embodied cultural capital that students sought to accumulate overseas. In its institutionalized form, on the other hand, cultural capital achieves a degree of autonomy from its bearer. The institutionalized cultural capital par excellence is the academic qualification. An English proficiency certificate, such as TOEFL, would be cultural capital in institutionalized form. Holding such a certificate can confer certain advantages over simply being able to speak English. For proof, one needs only consider the university application procedures: if English proficiency is required for a particular course or program, it is often impossible for someone to be accepted without some kind institutional recognition. Even if applicant A has mastered the language more fully, applicant B will generally prevail so along as s/he has a certificate of proficiency.

When Bourdieu began using the concept, cultural capital was put in a national context. Bourdieu's seminal works on education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), life-styles (2010b), and academic production (1988) are limited to investigating *France*. In order to take a globalized context into account, Kim (2011) proposes that students are seeking to accumulate *global* cultural capital. The prefix is used to signify that "degree attainment, knowledge, taste, and cosmopolitan attitude and lifestyle, understood as exclusive resources [i.e cultural capital] that designate one's class and status, globally operate, circulate, and exchange" (Kim 2011, 113).

For Bourdieu, cultural capital was but one type of capital. Swedish sociologist Donald Broady (1991) has interpreted Bourdieu's works to imply a threefold typology of capital: economic, symbolic, and social. Economic capital is straightforward, and is used to signify roughly what the term denotes in everyday use. Social capital denotes connections and relationships that can be utilized to acquire different types of resources. Lastly, symbolic capital is a very wide term, denoting "that which is recognized by social groups as valuable" (Broady 1991, 169). In this typology, cultural capital is considered a sub category of symbolic capital. In a way, however, cultural capital is a concept on a different level than symbolic capital. Given the broad definition suggested, symbolic capital can be almost anything. Depending on which social group is considered, a variety of things and attributes could be ascribed with value. According to Bourdieu, however, cultural capital is a type of resource that is valuable for virtually *all* groups in society. As such, cultural capital is a force that is crucial for understanding society as a whole. Perhaps for this

reason, Bourdieu has in at least one text suggested a four-fold typology of capital, where cultural capital is added to the list on the same level as the other three ("Social Space and Symbolic Power", Bourdieu 1989).

In his works, Bourdieu (and other researchers and theorists after him) made use of a long list of *other* types of capital that could be considered subcategories of symbolic capital. For different groups in society, a host of different things and attributes are recognized as valuable. For instance, photographers value the ability to take (qualitative) photos, and this can be expressed as *photographic* capital. As should be clear, there is a potentially endless list of different types of capital.

As outlined above, Waters (2006) and Kim (2011) have transposed Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in order to theorize global student mobility. Marginson (2008; 2006) can be credited with creating a framework for understanding the *context* in which global student mobility takes place. Marginson proposes that higher education today should be understood as a "world-wide arrangement". By this, he does not indicate a perfectly integrated and unitary system, but

> a more complex combination of (1) global flows and networks of words and ideas, knowledge, finance, and inter- institution dealings; with (2) national higher education systems shaped by history, law, policy and funding; and (3) individual institutions operating at the same time locally, nationally and globally. (Marginson 2006, 1)

He likens this arrangement to what Bourdieu called a *field*, "a social universe with its own laws of functioning" (Marginson 2008, 304). A field has a degree of autonomy that allows it to reject external determinants. It is also characterized by a structure, a configuration or network of positions that are occupied by different agents. Considering the global field of higher education, Marginson proposes that it exhibits a hierarchical structure. The hierarchy of positions can be though of as occupied by both institutions and nations. In Marginson's conceptualization, nations occupy different positions within the field depending on the value of the education they produce. Closer to Bourdieu, I would propose that nations occupy different positions in the hierarchy depending on their capital endowment, while the value of the education they produce (i.e the cultural capital) also follows this hierarchy. Marginson attributes the hierarchy of nations to three factors: the uneven distribution of research capacity, the global dominance of English, and the cultural, economic, and military dominance of the USA. Thus, the US is in a dominant position, closely followed by other English speaking nations with high research capacity such as the UK.

The above account suggests the objective nature of the hierarchy. Marginson makes note that the hierarchy also has a subjective existence:

> Within each national higher education system (or national market, as in the USA), students, families and employers of graduates rank the degrees on offer on the basis of institution and field of study. The hierarchy of rankings is steeper in some nations than others, and more powerfully felt in some places than others, but always exists.(Marginson 2006, 3)

This subjective side of the hierarchy is present on the global scale as well, though in a less complete fashion due to the imperfect nature of the "world-wide arrangement" that the global field of higher education:

> Few people in each nation know the higher education systems of other nations, but the peaks of global status are visible from everywhere. Although the national and global hierarchies are imperfectly integrated, they now constitute a single set of possibilities for a growing number of undergraduate students and their parents (they have long been seen this way by faculty and many graduate students) (Marginson 2006, 27–28).

A hierarchy implies a one-dimensional structure, but Marginson (2008) has also proposes another dimension of the field's structure in which the opposition is not between the favorably and unfavorably endowed, but relates to the nature of their endowments. In the second dimension, there is an opposition between elite education, driven by cultural prestige, and mass-education, which follows commercial imperatives. He poses further that this is an opposition between an autonomous and non-autonomous pole. The positions (and institutions that occupy them) that produce elite education are governed by laws internal to the field and therefor more autonomous. The positions that produce mass-education, on the other end, are less autonomous in that they are driven by imperatives that lie closer to the purely economic field. In terms of capital distribution, this structure can also be understood as an opposition between institutions that are relatively more endowed with cultural capital and those that are relatively more endowed with economic capital.

Taking the analysis a step further, Marginson (2008) further suggests that an agent's position within the field's structure can explain the actions, attitudes, and strategies of the agents that occupy them. This is an attempt to transpose Bourdieu's idea of the relationship between *position* and *position-taking* to the area of global higher education. While position, already described above, is determined by capital endowment, position-taking attempts to capture an agents actions and practices. The pairing can be interpreted as an attempt to find a material basis (i.e. capital endowment) for understanding and explaining social practices.

In summary then, the theoretical frame of this study draws primarily on Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and field. It is a synthesis of these concepts as they have been transposed to the research area of global higher education by Marginson (2006, 2008), Kim (2011), and Waters (2006). Student mobility (and university studies in general) is understood as an instance of cultural capital accumulation. Cultural capital can be accumulated in different states, of which the institutionalized and embodied are of interest here. Furthermore, cultural capital is understood as an instance of symbolic capital. The student's accumulation of cultural capital is understood to take place within a global field of higher education. This field is a structured space, in which nations occupy different positions in the structure. The value of the cultural capital produced in a nation's education system varies with its position in this structure. The field is multi-dimensional, and the structure is determined by a polarity on different scales. The position in the structure tends to shape an agents behavior or position-taking.

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to answer the research questions, and through that achieve the aim of the thesis, the study is designed as a mixed-methods case study. As such, it makes use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The design is constructed on the foundation of a particular ontological position, in turn tied to the theoretical frame. Cultural capital is the central concept around which the study is constructed, and the description of the study's design below is structured as a discussion of this concept.

For the purposes of research, cultural capital has a dual existence. On the one hand, cultural capital is a structural feature of the social world. It has the power to determine the outlooks and actions of agents in the social world. To an extent, it lies beyond the individuals ability to influence. The hierarchy in the global field of higer education is equivalent to the value of the cultural capital that is produced: nations that produce high value cultural capital dominate nations that produce cultural capital of lower value. Previous research suggests that the ability to accumulate higher value

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cultural capital is a motivating factor for individuals to study abroad. This would indicate that global student flows are one way of gauging the value of the cultural capital that China's higher education system produces: the nations which host the highest number of international students are likely to be the ones that produce the highest value cultural capital. This in turn would give an indication of China's position in the field. For this reason, figures on international student flows are used as one source of data for the thesis.

It should be noted that there is no one-to-one equivilancy between the figures on international student flows and the structure of the global field of higher education. That is, the top ten host nations are not necessarily the ten nations that produce the highest value cultural capital, and thus retain dominant positions in the field. The theoretical frame assumes that global student flows are structured by the uneven value of cultural capital produced in different higher educaiton systems, but global higher education does not exist detached from other factors. In other words, the global field of higher education is a semi-autonomous field. Naturally, geopolitical factors and imigration laws have an effect as well. Furthermore, nations with large higher education systems are able to cater to more international students, and this does not automatically mean that larger nations always produce cultural capital of higher value. Thus, figures on global student flows should be seen as an expression of the structuring power of cultural capital, but the data has to be treated with caution.

On the other hand, cultural capital is a social construction. Though it constitutes a social force that is beyond the power of any individual to withstand, it is at the same time constructed by groups individuals: it is an object or feature that constitutes a social force precisely because it is given value by individuals. Therefor, cultural capital can also be studied from the perspective of the individuals who accumulate it. By interviewing students on the motivations for studying in China, it is possible to get an idea of the nature and value of the cultural capital they strive to accumulate. This information can in turn be used to describe China's position in the global field of higher education.

In addition to figures on international student flows, the study thus relies on interviews with Nordic students studying in China. Students from the Nordic nations come from higher education systems that are generally thought to have universities of globla repute in their own right. That is, it might be argued that they migrate from educational systems that produce higher value cultural capital than the one they are going to. Though there are many good reasons to investigate students from Africa or other Asian nations, this phenomenon does not amount to the same kind of research problem, as

current theory has an explanation for it. Most of these students come from higher education systems that are generally thought to produce cultural capital of lower value. Finding out what motivates Nordic students has, I would argue, more potential to illuminate China's position in global higher education.

In summary then, the study follows a design in which cultural capital is studied from two directions: both as a structural phenomenon and a constructed object. In so doing, it is in line with Bourdieu's social ontology of *structuralist constructivism* or *constructivist structuralism* (Bourdieu 1989). That is to say, the social world is at once objective and subjective. On the one hand, there is no social world without the individuals that populate it, and it is individuals who *construct* the social world. On the other hand, the social world has structural features that lie well beyond the scope of the individual to do anything about, and in this sense the social world has an objective quality as well. This social ontology is very similar to the one outlined by Luckmann & Berger in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1991), although they themselves characterize their position simply as "constructivist."

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The study used three types of data: statistics on student flows, literature on Chinese higher education, and interviews with Nordics studying in China. The statistical data on Swedish and US students abroad and in China was collected from Statistics Sweden (SCB 2009; SCB 2013) and Institute of International Education (IIE 2015) respectively; data on international students world-wide, international students in China, and most prominent hosts and senders of international students were collected from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2015). The literature on Chinese higher education was collected from Lund University Library and Lund University's digital databases, accessible through LUBsearch.

Interviewees were recruited by convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were that the individual came from one of the Nordic countries and was studying at a Chinese university at the time. Various strategies were used in order to recruit participants, including friendship contacts, supervisors and staff at the universities where students were studying, etc.

22 interviewees were recruited in total, coming from Sweden (12), Iceland (5), Denmark (3) and Norway (2), with an age span between 18 and 29 years. A majority of students (17) were studying

in Beijing, the remaining in Kunming (5). Six different universities were represented, of which ten are generally considered to be China's absolute elite institutions (very highly ranked also in international comparisons). Another three students attended what might be called second-tier elite universities (being part of the prestigious *985 project*; see below). Eight students were enrolled in less prestigious universities and one person was studying at a joint-campus university.

Most students (14) studied Chinese language, while another five were studying various social science subjects (including politics, international relations, management, and economics). Two students were completing studies in a technical or natural science subjects, and one was enrolled in a teacher's education program. The majority of students (17) were completing short-term (one year or less) courses for credit. The remaining five students were completing full-degree programs in China (1 bachelor, 4 masters). Most of the students (14) were free-movers and had applied to their current institution on their own accord, three were in China as part of voluntary exchange agreements, while the remaining five were completing what might be called a "mandatory period abroad" that was part of their degree.

The interviews were conducted in various locations in Beijing and Kunming, mostly in cafés or in some cases the students' homes. Care was taken that the interviewee was comfortable with the location, and that the interview could be conducted without disturbance. An iPhone was used for recording.

When the first interviews were conducted, I had a very rigid theoretical frame in mind, paired with an inclination to use the interviews as a way to check the theoretical concepts in my arsenal. This made the interviews similar to sessions of hypothesis testing rather than the intended "conversation with a purpose" that lets the interviewee come to terms. Some researchers find hypothesis testing fruitful even in qualitative research, but in my case it resulted in very leading questions whose answers were of very little use. I therefore soon settled on an open-ended format with a few general themes that I kept in mind (see Apppendix). In this way it was possible to "combine structure with flexibility", which in turn allowed the generation of the kind of "depth of answer in terms of penetration, exploration and explanation" (Snape & Spencer, 2003) that is one of the advantages of qualitative inquiry.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Once conducted, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Transcription was done using the on-line transcription software oTranscribe (Bentley 2015). As commonly observed in qualitative research, both aim and research questions tend to change during the research process. So also for me, and as a result, some parts of the data tended to become less important along the journey. Some interviews, where all or most of what was discussed was deemed highly relevant in light of the aim that was finally settled upon, were therefore transcribed in their entirety; other interviews were transcribed only in part.

The transcripts were then subjected to analysis. Various attempts were made at applying a more stringent framework for identifying and grouping important segments of empirical data, but in the end a more inductive approach was used, employing only the very loose framework suggested by a critical review of the literature. The objective of the analysis was to identify key themes that seemed to be of relevance for fulfilling the aim and answering the research question. In order to do this, and in order to manage the "attractive nuisance" that the interview data constituted, the 'framework' approach was used. Here, the basic procedure, as described by Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor (2003) is for the analyst to first familiarize oneself with the data and identifying what appears to be important themes. In this study, it resulted in a rather unwieldy list of various important points in the data. From this list, a workable index was created, through identifying superfluous codes and grouping them under larger themes. The process was highly iterative, moving back and forth between coding interview lines and refining the index of available codes. Often, specialized software is used for indexing texts in this way. For my own work, however, I relied on the spreadsheet software Excel, in much the same way as outlined by LaPelle (2004).

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interviews were conducted with informed consent and in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (2012). Though the topics of the interviews were deemed non-sensitive, care was taken to protect the anonymity of those interviewed. The names of the interviewees used in the thesis have been changed. In addition, the names of the institutions of

study have been omitted. Care was also taken to protect the recorded interviews and the transcriptions. This, however, is becoming more of an issue as most researchers make use of different kinds of cloud services. It was not until the end of the research process that I became aware of the potential risks of using services such as Drop Box and oTranscribe. For future projects, it may be necessary to look into ways of encrypting data to safeguard anonymity.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

4.1.1 SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

The origins of Chinese higher education can be traced back to the Zhou Dynasty. Throughout the Imperial Era, higher education in China had its basis in Confucian ideals and its essential function was to produce senior scholars and administrators in service of the state. The first major impetus for a reform of this system came with the Westernization Movement of the 1840s (Zhou 2006, 4–6), but a modern higher education system did not surface until about half a century later. The modern development can be thought of as going through three phases. In the first phase, starting around the 1900s, the higher education system consisted of public-, private-, and missionary institutions. In the second phase, starting at the end of 1952, all institutions were subjected to public ownership. The organization of the system followed the Soviet model that entailed a high degree of centralization and consisted of small and highly specialized institutions. In the third phase, starting in the 1980s, the system started moving towards more market-oriented coordination. Private institutions were re-introduced, more types of education began to be offered, and the administrative system was reformed (Levin and Xu 2005, 34–36).

The Chinese higher education system has grown continuously in the past decades. In 2011, the system included 2,762 institutions of higher education and enrolled more than 31 million students (MOE 2011). These institutions can be divided into adult education institutions and so-called regular institutions. The regular institutions in turn can be divided into junior colleges and universities. This division reflects the level of education that can be obtained at the institution. The majority of institutions are public, but there are both junior colleges and universities that are private as well. Regardless of the form of ownership, however, an institution of higher education is always administratively affiliated with some state organ. At present, institutions either have an affiliation with a central authority (the Ministry of Education or another state department) or a local government at some level: provincial, municipal etc. (Zhou 2006, 11ff).

As already indicated, the system described above is becoming increasingly internationalized. This can be seen from many indicators. China has been the largest sender of international students for some time, but more recently it has also climbed the ladder to become one of the most popular host countries for international students (Pan 2013). Another indication is an increase in the number of transnational higher education programs that now exist in China (Yang 2008). This is in line with the official higher education policy, with one of the aims being for its higher education institutions to be internationally competitive.

Two initiatives are of particular importance for achieving international competitiveness. The first is the *211 Project*, set up as a way to create a spearhead of high quality institutions in China. The overall aim is to improve the quality of Chinese higher education by funneling resources to 114 institutions that are considered to have the greatest potential. There is a definite international dimension to this as well: the institutions that participate are expected to "increase international exchange and cooperation, and expand the global influence of Chinese higher education" (Zhou 2006, 36). The second initiative is the *985 Project*, which consists of 39 institutions. The institutions that are selected for this project are all part of the *211 Project*, and are given additional financial support from the central government. The 39 institutions that are part of the *985 Project* constitute the tip of the spearhead, and the project is more explicitly focused on the international dimension. The stated goal is to create "world-class universities and world-famous research universities" (Zhou 2006, 39).

As many scholars have pointed out, global student mobility is highly skewed. Some regions and nations are primarily *attractors*, meaning they are very attractive destinations for international students; some are primarily *senders* of international students. Others are all but left out of the circuit. In short, the global flows have a distinct structure. Furthermore, this structure has been relatively stable over time.

Table 1. Top ten senders of international students 2013. (Nation rank for 2006 and 1999 for comparison)

Nation	Students sent 2013	Global rank		
		2013	*2006*	*1999*
China	712 157	1	1	1
India	181 872	2	2	5
Germany	119 123	3	4	7
Republic of Korea	116 942	4	3	2
France	84 059	5	7	9
Saudi Arabia	73 548	6	45	45
USA	60 292	7	6	10
Malaysia	56 260	8	8	6
Viet Nam	53 546	9	29	62
Nigeria	52 066	10	20	28

Table 1 gives an indication of where the world's international students come from. The list of the largest senders of international students is fairly stable over the period. Seven out of 10 nations retain their top ten positions for the period. Saudi Arabia, Viet Nam, and Nigeria are the exceptions that break in to become major senders in 2013, perhaps as a result of geopolitical shifts and economic development that allow more individuals from these nations the opportunity to study abroad. However, it is China's position that is of primary interest. For the periods measured, China has remained to top sender. It overshadows the other nations in the top list in terms of the number of international students sent; in 2013, China sent almost as many students as the other nations on the list combined.

Table 2. Top ten host of international students 2013. (Nation rank for 2006 and 1999 for comparison)

Nation	Students hosted 2013	Global Rank		
		2013	2006	1999
USA	784427	1	1	1
UK	416693	2	2	2
Australia	249868	3	4	5
France	239344	4	3	4
Germany	196619	5	no data	3
Russia	138496	6	6	no data
China	96409	7	13	no data
Austria	70852	8	10	11
Netherlands	68943	9	15	18
Saudi Arabia	62143	10	31	28

Table 2 shows the persistent dominance of the US and UK in terms of attracting international students; the two remain number one and two for the period considered. The table also gives an indication of the dominance of the West. As it stands, China is, with no comparison, the largest *sender* of international students in the world. It is still far behind the leading nations in terms of *hosting* international students. In fact, United States hosts approximately the same number of international students as China sends. However, in the past 15 years, China has become an increasingly popular destination for international students. The latest data available is from 2013 and shows that China is now the 7th largest host of international students.

The figure below (1) shows the total number of international students hosted by China for the period 2006-2012. China has more than doubled the number of hosted students over a period of seven years. More importantly, the graph shows that this is not simply a matter of an overall increase in the total number of international students. Over the period, China has almost doubled its *share* of hosted international students. This indicates that China is becoming a relatively more popular destination for international students over the period.

Figure 1. The total number of international students hosted by China 2006-2012, and China's relative
share of the total population of border-crossing international students during the same period.
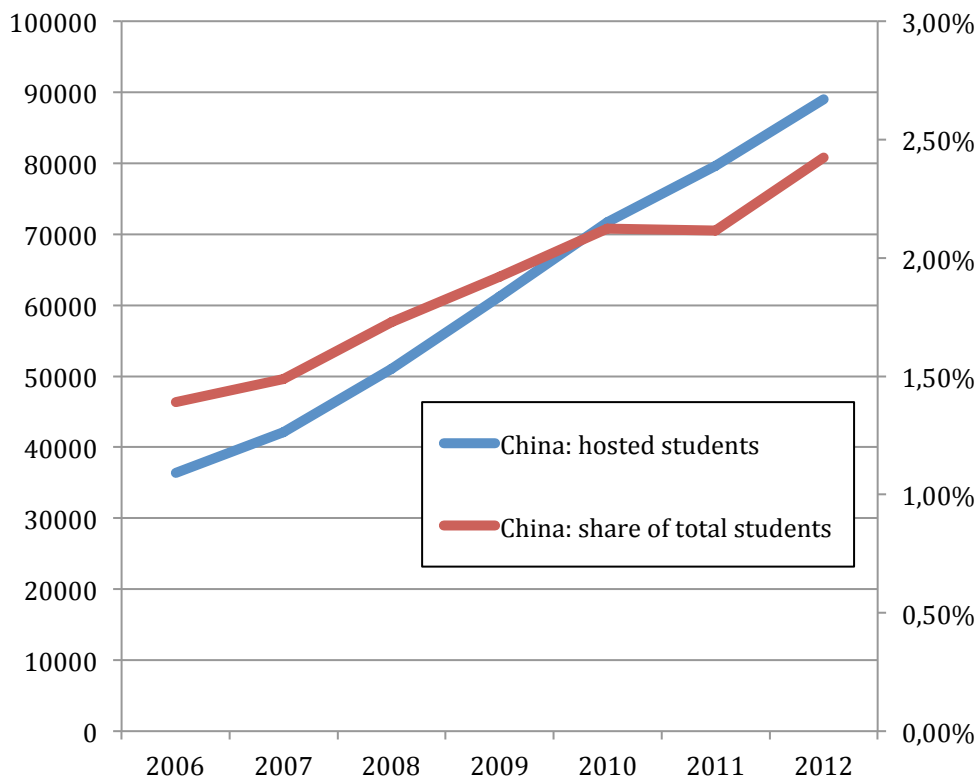
Unfortunately, data on the origin of China's international students is not available, and thus we cannot know with certainty where these students come from. There are indications, however, that it is not only other Asian students that are flocking to China. Thus, figure 2 (next page) shows students going from the USA and Sweden to China. As with international students going to China in general, the total number going from the USA to China has doubled. This cannot be attributed solely to the overall increase in the total number of international students in the world.

Figure 2 shows the *proportion* of the total international students from the USA and Sweden that are choosing to go to China. Over the period, China is increasing its share of international students from both of these nations. Though China's share of these countries' international students is still far behind the most popular host nations, China's share of US international students has more than doubled during the last ten years. In the case of Sweden, the increase is more than fourfold.

In summary, the data indicates that China is becoming an increasingly popular host nation. Further, China is attracting students even from nations that could be viewed as producing high value cultural capital. This may indicate, as well, that China is improving its position on the global field of higher education.

4.2.1 GOING GLOBAL OR GOING TO CHINA

One tension in previous theorizations has to do with the global and the local. Both Kim and Marginson suggest that higher education should be understood as a global phenomenon. Marginson, however, believes that there are "pockets of autonomy" and that universities exist both on a national arena and a global arena. Kim, on the other hand, suggests the term global cultural capital to indicate that all higher education exists as one system. In this part of the analysis, the students understanding of the international and local aspects of their studies are discussed in the hope of contributing to this debate. It is not suggested that the students accumulate either local or global cultural capital. Instead, the analysis is focused on investigating what role the local and the global has for the accumulation of cultural capital.

The analysis revealed a tension between the *international* and the *local* in how the interviewees conceptualized their studies in China. For a small group of interviewees, their current studies were primarily a matter of *studying abroad*. An excerpt from the interview with Vanja illustrates this attitude. She was in China through an exchange program in which she was given several different options of countries and institutions. Asked to describe the process that led her to studying in China, Vanja explained that

> I first decided to study abroad in general, and I checked my options. There was a list of
> different universities around the world to choose from, mostly Asian ones for the semester
> I was applying for. There were several different options, in Europe, in Asia, not so much
> the USA. So I just chose six universities that I would consider studying at from this list.
> (Vanja # 42)

As the quote illustrates, Vanja conceptualizes her decision as a matter of *studying abroad*. She has no particular interest in China. To Vanja, China is only one of several pathways to studying abroad and accessing the *international*. The student Amelie describes her studies in a similar way, stating that everything started with her wish to "study abroad." Ending up in China, on the other hand, was mostly a "coincidence." The decision making process of these students corresponds roughly to the push-pull model (e. g. Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), according to which the decision making process

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can be separated into discrete steps: *first* of deciding to study abroad, *then* settling on an country, *lastly* settling on a particular institution.

At the other end of the spectrum, there were students for whom the specific conditions, aspects, and resources of the *local* were of paramount importance. These students saw themselves as studying China; that they might also be classified as international students was of little concern to them. These students had a strong connection to China in that at least one of their parents were of Chinese origin. They had planned to go to China specifically for a long time. For them, studying in China was a way of exploring their roots and identity.

> I felt that I had lost that part of me, that I'm half Chinese but didn't really know the language, the culture. And I have been to China so many times visiting my family, but I always felt that there was a distance; so coming to china was... Well, I saw it as an opportunity to take a year before my studies to just come here and stay here for one year, to actually get to know the culture and the language, and to feel that I'm getting closer to that other part of me. (Anna-Lisa # 46)

As shown in the quote above, Anna-Lisa understands her decision as driven by a feeling that something is missing. It was a theme that was invoked by other students that had one or two parents from China. For these students then, the decision was not informed by a desire or aspiration for the international. The international, in fact, was sometimes described as an obstacle. As explained above, learning the language was an important aspect of Anna-Lisa's project of "getting closer to that other part of me." She explained that it was a problem that all her classmates were international students. This meant they often spoke English, which hindered her in developing her language skills.

It was thus possible to discern an "international" group and a "local" group. The larger part of the students, however, did not sort into either of these polar extremes. The analysis revealed a more complex relationship between conceptualizing their studies in terms of the international and the local.

Most of the students expressed an interest in China as such. They were not "studying abroad," but exploring, experiencing and learning about a specific place of interest. Their endeavor, in other words, was firmly anchored in the local. Many had been in China several times before; some through studies, other through work or travelling. Those who did not have extensive experience of living in China had a long-standing interest in the country, and their current session in China was the realization of a desire they had carried for a long time. The interest in China was anchored in

various aspects of the country: language, culture, different aspects of society, history, etc. The students often formulated that the attraction of China lay in it being so different from anything else they had experienced. Hannes, for instance, had studied in China several times before. At the time of the interview, he was completing a social science program at one of the top universities in China. His description of how he picked up an interest in China, and what aspects of it he liked, was echoed by many other students:

> I guess I have always been fascinated with China, just through very different things, like movies I've seen and music. My first Chinese teacher was actually a famous pipa player from Luoyang Province, so she would play for us and it was just something so mystical about you know very far away something that, you know, I had never experienced before and I wanted to sort of get more acquainted with it and when I did I found out it was something that I really, really enjoyed. (Hannes #52)

In some parts of the interviews, the students hinted at a conflict between their ability to meet their aspirations for the local and Chinese. In general, however, the international did not constitute a threat. For these students, the international was something attractive that did not obscure the local and Chinese. Several students put their international aspirations in terms of work, stating that they wanted "the world as their work place", or wanted a job where they were "constantly on the move." They also put it in terms of relationships, expressing a desire to "meet people from all over the world". An excerpt from the interview with Annika is a typical example. Annika was studying Chinese at the time of the interview. Asked why, she responded that

> Like I said, I want to be an international citizen so I've always wanted to have an international job where I'm able to be in an international community. And what I've learned is that speaking a lot of languages is very useful. (Annika #118)

The quote illustrates how most of the students viewed the relationship between the local, or Chinese, and the international. Rather than the two being in conflict, the *Chinese* was a stepping-stone to the *international*.

Thus, the Chinese and local constituted a part of the international. In conjunction, a re-occurring sediment was that China was becoming increasingly import internationally. Thus, if you want to access the international, it is increasingly important to know and understand China and Chinese conditions. An excerpt from the interview with Hannes provides an illustration of this line of thought:

China is going to play a huge role in the future. It already is! People all over the world may have different feelings about China, but we do need to come to the understanding that the world is changing and China is going to be more active in the future. And I think that as far as opportunities go, it would be wise for me to maintain my studies and my understanding of Chinese culture and the country itself. I feel that if I do that then I can tie all the things that make me who I am and perhaps it will give me a lot of opportunities in the upcoming future. (Hannes # 100)

From an objective or systems perspective, it might make sense to talk of global cultural capital. It highlights that higher education exists as a global arrangement. On the other hand, the concept can be misleading. Most of the students were indeed cognizant of the global, or international dimension of what they were doing: in discussing their decision to study in China, they were able and capable of relating their endeavors to a larger international or global arena. On the other hand, the students were not interested the global, they were interested in the local and Chinese. Rather than talking of a global field of higher education where global cultural capital is transmitted, we might talk of a global arrangement where different types of cultural capital is produced and acquired locally. This locally acquired cultural capital, however, relates to a global context. Cultural capital produced in different locations is in constant change in terms of value. Studying in China gave the students cultural capital from one particular location, and they were betting that this location would become more important in the future.

4.2.2 ACQUIRING SKILLS AND ACQUIRING CREDENTIALS

Waters points out that students going abroad can accumulate cultural capital in embodied and institutionalized form. However, neither Waters nor Kim put stress on the distinction between these two. In this section, it is investigated how the students conceptualize their studies: in their own understanding, are they mainly acquiring embodied or institutionalized cultural capital?

For the students, *being* in China was a major motivation for their endeavors. As discussed in the previous section, there was a dynamic relationship between interest in the international and interest in the local and Chinese. For Hannes, for instance, it was important to get an experience of the local, a "China experience"; at the same time, an important aspect his study session in China was the encounter with the international:

> I knew that coming to [name of university], there would be a lot of interesting people that I would meet along the way and that has been one thing that has definitely been upheld. I have met a lot of people from different parts of the world, we party together, we eat dinner together we study together and that's been something I'm very happy with. (Hannes # 89)

Another major motivation was the Chinese language. Many of the interviewees were engaged in language studies. Chinese was viewed as a way of enhancing the China experience, but for many the language was an important aspect of China that had led to a deeper interest in the country. For the students, the encounter with the Chinese characters and the language as a whole was fascinating. For most of them, a learning to communicate more effectively in Chinese was a major objective of their session in China. Mark's first encounter with China was through an internship that was part of his degree in marketing; arriving in China

> I got really fascinated, especially by the characters. So actually I ended up spending more time learning Chinese than I did spend time on my actual education. And so when I got back to Denmark I just thought well, I am just so fascinated and I wanted to learn so much more. (Mark # 50)

The students often spoke of following their interest. Their current studies in China were something that they "just wanted to do." Nonetheless, the students frequently touched on the career aspect of their studies in China. Many held that China was likely to become more important in the future, and that knowledge of both the society and the language as such would become valuable and desirable. Other students believed that their studies in China gave them with valuable skills and abilities such as being able to deal with uncertain and new situations. Vanja, for instance, thought her studies would strengthen her CV, because

> having experience of being abroad, especially studying abroad, looks good [on the CV]. It shows that you are able to deal with new people and new cultures, that you are an open person. (Vanja # 62)

Experiences, skills (ability to deal with people and cultures) and knowledge (of China or Chinese) are essentially cultural capital in its *embodied* form. It is cultural capital that can be constantly called into question and that has to be proven. If a firm is looking for an employee that can translate business documents into Chinese, the applicant has to *embody* the kind of cultural capital the firm is looking to acquire.

Overall, the students motivated their studies in language that indicates embodied cultural capital. Talk that could be interpreted to indicate cultural capital of an institutionalized sort was less

frequent, though not altogether absent. For instance, for Amelie it was appealing to study in China because she would attend a "top-university, ranked as high as MIT." This, she contended, was "a good thing to have on paper." For Calle, it was valuable to "get official credentials from one of China's top universities" because "it shows you know your stuff, simply put." Hannes also attended a Chinese top-university, and he was frank about its appeal, saying he was attracted by

> the prestige of [the institution]. What I had already learned in Chinese I wanted another degree that would enhance the possibilities of finding work afterwards. And I knew when I was applying that the three top universities in China Tsinghua, Beijing University, and Fudan in Shanghai, they usually say graduating from those universities is sort of a golden diploma, because it will help you find work very easily. Most of the communist party member officials in the government here in China are graduates of [the top universities]. (Hannes # 70)

In the quote above, Hannes captures the essence of cultural capital in its institutionalized form, describing it as a "golden diploma". The certificate in itself opens doors and enhances the possibilities for finding good employment positions. Neither Hannes nor Calle were primarily concerned with attending top-universities, however. It was the pull of the *local*, China and the Chinese, *combined* with the prestige of the university that had set them on their course.

Other students mentioned that their current studies in China was "beneficial for their CV" or otherwise furthered their career prospects. For the majority of the students, however, this was not so much because of the prestige of the institution, degree, or diploma they would acquire. Instead, having credentials from a university in China was viewed as giving them an international profile. It was proof that you had been exposed to a different culture and were able to deal with living in a social setting very different from the native one:

> I think it's a great merit, having lived in China is a very good thing to have on your CV. In many ways it's a very complicated country for a Swede I think, and I feel that I'm ready for most things now. I've been through all the culture shocks, I could probably move anywhere now after having live here [in China] this long. (Lina # 120)

What Lina describes above, the ability to deal with complications and different cultures, is most appropriately classified as embodied cultural capital. However, when she says that living in China is a "great merit", she is also implying that a degree of institutionalization of this embodied cultural capital. Having lived in China backs up her claim that she has skills and abilities to deal with new situations, serving as a guarantee of the truthfulness of her claims. Vanja reasoned along the same lines:

Having experience of living abroad, especially studying abroad, looks good [on your CV]. It shows that you might be better than others at meeting people or cultures. It shows that you are an open person. (Vanja # 62)

This type of institutionalized cultural capital is interesting in that it is quite different from what is usually captured with the term. More commonly, institutionalized cultural capital is associated with different types of credentials. In the case of educational degrees, the institutionalized cultural capital is transferred from a university to a student. The university, it is assumed, serves as a kind of guarantor of the cultural capital that the student holds. The kind of institutionalized cultural capital that Lina and Vanja describe above, however, is not associated or controlled by the university. In the last instance, it is arguable controlled and conferred by the migration agency and the stamps that indicate the student has in fact lived in China.

4.2.3 FITTING CHINA INTO THE LIFE PLAN

The cultural capital that the students accumulate in China can be investigated through considering how the studies fit into the students' overall strategy. An initial distinction can be made between heavy investment strategies and light investment strategies. Some of the students were studying in China relatively short term, for one or two semesters. They were studying in China either as free-movers or through some sort of exchange program. For these students, the studies in China constitute a relatively light investment. There were other students who were in China for much longer, studying full time degrees on either bachelor or masters level. For these students, the studies in China were a heavy investment.

For the light investors, there were different understandings as to the function that the studies played in their life and career. For some, the studies in China were considered a breathing pause. For some of these students, studying in China was something they did before embarking on university studies in their home country. Annika decided to pursue language studies in China during her last year in high school. She was unsure what major or program she would apply for. She had been interested in China for a long time, and saw an opportunity to pursue her interest while getting some time to think through her next career step:

I felt that I needed a break before entering university and I was also unsure of what I wanted to do. I felt that if I took a decision of entering university right after high school I

would probably do what other people thought or expected of me to do. For example I was a natural science major so it would be natural for me to do something with science. And at that point, I thought it too. I was like: Of course I have to do this! What else should I do? I just wanted to get out of this bubble and think outside the box and just kind of have an overview on everything and then make a decision. And first go to China because I know this was my dream and maybe I'll meet something in China that will change my view on things or my decisions for the future. (Annika # 128)

There were several other students who echoed the same sediment of getting some time to think and plan out their next major life step. Some students were in the middle of a longer education in their home countries, or approaching the end of their studies. Studying in China was a break or a gap-year. They saw working life coming up ahead of them, and wanted to use the opportunity to experience an adventure or pursue their special interest. Amelie was on her last semester of a degree program in Sweden, and saw her period in China as her last chance to experience studying abroad.

Both of my siblings have had good experiences of being abroad. I also have other friends who have been abroad who have really enjoyed it. So I really wanted to go abroad. I felt like this was my last opportunity to do it, at least while I'm a student. (Amelie # 42)

For some students, studying in China was little more than a break or an opportunity to gain an experience before starting or finishing university. They saw their period in China as separate from their larger career and life plans, and had no hope of being able to use the credentials they gained. Mattias was finishing a law degree in Sweden. He had long-standing interests in languages and Chinese culture. At the time of the interview, he was taking a break from his law studies to learn Chinese. When asked if he would be able to use the studies in China in his future career, he was skeptical:

I will try to make use of it somehow, but I'm a realist. I meet a lot of students here that I would claim are not very realistic. They think that they will be able to use their Chinese in the future, but I kind of chuckle to myself and think "no, you're never going to make any use of your Chinese." I think in realistic terms. (Mattias # 83)

For Mattias, this did not constitute a problem. Studying in China was a chance to pursue his interest, and it was not necessary to fit it into a larger life or career plan. Other students were more hopeful and believed that the studies in China were valuable for their future. Lina was studying Chinese at the time of the interview. She planned to go back to Sweden after the semester to pursue a degree in health care. She hoped that she could work internationally with health issues in the future and make use of her Chinese abilities in this way:

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> I would like to work with something international, of course. And I would love to be able to use my Chinese skills in the future. I'm very interested in issues to do with health. I had plans to become a physiotherapist for a while, but it's really difficult to get in, it's very popular. But I'm also considering studying public health, from an international perspective. In that way, I hope to be able to use my Chinese in some way, maybe involve Asia somehow. I've thought about it a lot while here in China, they really need more work when it comes to public health issues. (Lina # 72)

For one group of students, then, the studies in Chine were part of a "gap-year" or "break" strategy. The studies in China were an opportunity to get time to think or pursue personal interests, but they did not fill a clearly defined role in the students' career plans. Some students were hoping that they could use their studies in the future, but they had other educational plans that were considered relatively separate from the studies in China.

There were also light investors for whom the studies in China fit into their overall career plan in a more clearly defined way. A number of students were completing degree programs in their home country, and they were studying in China as part of exchange agreements that were a mandatory part of their degrees. These students were either doing degrees in China Studies or degrees with a China profile. The studies in China were important for these students for were practical reasons: they would not be awarded their degrees if they did not study one or two semesters in China. The students were very positive towards their mandatory exchange period. For most of them, the exchange period was one of the reasons they chose the degree in the first place.

At the other end of the spectrum were the heavy investors. These students had – or intended to – spend several years in China in order to finish full degrees. Many of these students had already invested heavily in China in different ways. Vanessa, for instance, was completing a master's degree in teaching at one of the top universities. She had previously completed a bachelor at the same university. Johannes is another example. At the time of the interview he was enrolled in a bachelors program at a top-university. He had spent several years in China before enrolling in the program learning the language. Both of these students saw themselves living in China in the future. These students were investing heavily in China, and they were doing so by investing directly into the Chinese higher education system.

There were also other discernable strategies among the students. Calle was studying a double degree program. The program was a collaboration between a Chinese top-university and a top university in England. He applied to the program because it satisfied his requirements of completing

a masters that gave him more knowledge about China while getting an education of high quality and prestige. Before applying to the program, he had spent a year in China working as a teacher. He had also worked with policy making relating to China, and saw an opportunity to gain his own niche:

> I lived there [in China] for a year, and then worked with it [policy making in relation to China] for a year. I noticed a lack of knowledge about China in Great Britain, and all of Europe really. My friends didn't know anything about it and it was difficult to talk to them about what it's like and about the problems and challenges in China. So I though, hell, I have to go back and learn more about this... So I was interested in doing a master's, but I didn't want a Chinese master's degree because I know that the academic quality is actually not that high, simply put. (Calle # 74)

4.3 COMPETING WITH NATIONAL PRESTIGE – CHINA'S POSITION ON THE GLOBAL FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In the first part of the analysis (4.1), it was shown that China is becoming increasingly popular as a host nation for international students. Special emphasis was put on the fact that China is capturing an increasing share of students from the USA and Sweden. As these countries are generally thought to produce cultural capital of relatively high value, it can be seen as one indicator that China is improving its position in the global field of higher education. By combining this data with interviews with the Nordic students, we can learn more about China's position in the global field of higher education. The second part of the analysis (4.2) indicates that the decision to study in China was closely tied to an interest in the country, the culture, the language, etc. The students were not looking for global cultural capital abstracted from location, but cultural capital that was tied specifically to the local or national. At the same time, the students commonly related their decision of studying in China to a global or international dimension. The students often stated that studying and learning about China was valuable, because China was becoming more important on the global arena. It thus appears that China's improved position in the global hierarchy of higher education is tied to China's increased national prestige and importance in the world.

We can relate this finding more directly to Bourdieu's theorization of the field. A crucial feature of the field is that it has a degree of autonomy. That a field is autonomous means that events in it cannot be explained solely by forces external to the field. In a fully autonomous field of global higher education, changes within it would have exclusively internal explanations. For instance, changes in the structure of the field (such as China's rise in the hierarchy) would be attributed to an improvement of educational quality. For the Nordic students, this did not appear to be the case. Though some of the students took care to highlight the prestige of the institution they were studying at, it was generally not the case that they came to China to attend a "world-class university". Again, their decision was tied to a general interest in the country, and to a perception that China was increasing in importance internationally. Thus, the change in the field's structure is attributed to forces *outside* the global field of higher education, namely China's increased importance and prestige in relation to other nations. This can be taken as an indication of the degree of autonomy of the global field of higher education.

An alternative interpretation is that the students' attraction to China as a nation might say something about the characteristics of China's position in the global field of higher education. Conceptualizing the structure of the global field of higher education as a hierarchy implies a field with one dimension, in which those high up in the hierarchy are separated from those lower down. Bourdieu, however, considered fields to be spaces of multiple dimensions. In drawing up the field of cultural production in France, for instance, Bourdieu distinguished between the dominant and the dominated on basis of the total capital different agents possessed. However, the dominants could also be distinguished from each other by looking at the composition of the capital portfolio. Thus, the dominant groups could be separated into a commercial elite that based their power primarily on economic capital, and an intellectual elite who's power rested on having large volumes of cultural capital. These two groups occupied diametrically opposite positions on the field of cultural production in France. Furthermore, these two positions followed different principles of hierachisation. On the one end (the intellectuals) was the autonomous pole, where power and position in the hierarchy rested firmly on rules internal to the field of cultural production; these agents upheld their position through producing what was considered "good art." On the other end (the commercial actors) was the less-autonomous pole, where the hierarchy was determined by business principles. These agents upheld their positions through creating commercially successful cultural artifacts.

We might interpret the students' emphasis on China's increased importance in a similar way, hypothesizing that China occupies a more non-autonomous position in the global field of higher education. This position is less autonomous in the sense that it is more closely tied to the fortunes of the nation state. If so, the more autonomous pole would be occupied by nations such as the UK and the USA. Previous studies give some evidence to support this kind of conceptualization of the global field of higher education. Kim's study, for instance, shows that Korean students are motivated to immigrate to the US for studies, as it is perceived to be the "global center of learning", while Waters and Brooks study indicates that UK students go to the US as a second chance at attending a "world class university." In both cases, the motivations underpinning the students' decisions are arguably indicative of a more autonomous position of the USA, in which forces international to the field are manifest in the students' motivations. This being said, it should be emphasized that this study can do nothing more than suggest the possibility of such a polar structure of the global field of higher education. In order to investigate this hypothesis further, it would be useful to set up comparative studies in which the motivations of students going to different nations are investigated. For instance, it might be worthwhile to compare Chinese students in the UK and with UK students going to China.

Previous theorization suggest that the global field of higher education can be conceptualized as a hierarchy that reflects the value of the cultural capital that is produced in the national education system. In Marginson's view, this hierarchy is structured by research capacity, the dominance of the USA, and the hegemony of the English language. Using the concept of capital, and drawing on the results from this study, an alternative conceptualization can be hypothesized. The global field of higher education is structured by two kinds of capital: academic capital and national prestige. The production of cultural capital that students can accumulate is based on both of these. Further, cultural capital can draw value from either resource. Thus, a nation can be positioned highly in the hierarchy primarily on basis of its national prestige or its academic capital.

For Bourdieu, distinguishing between actors within a field (such as suggested above) is not an end in itself. Instead, it serves as a basis for a showing the material underpinnings of the actions of agents within the field. While position refers to an agent's location on the field in relation to others, position-taking refers to strategies and actions that agents employ in the struggle against others in the field. Often, the two correlate closely. Referring again to Bourdieu's cultural sociology, he has

for instance shown that specific positions in the French field of cultural production correlate with esthetic ideals and artistic styles.

At least in terms of attracting international students, there is a fundamental problem if a country's position in the field of higher education is closer to the non-autonomous pole and tied to national prestige and power. This is the problem of how universities can turn increased national prestige into cultural capital that students want to accumulate. Universities in countries closer to the autonomous pole are faced with the issue of product packaging as well, of course. Yet, the problem is different: at the autonomous end, the basic raw material used for manufacturing cultural capital for students is the cultural capital that the institution is associated with and possess; closer to the non-autonomous pole, the basic raw material is not associated with the institution, but with the nation as a whole. The problem lies in leveraging the advantage that increased national prestige and fortune confers.

Many of the students emphasized the importance of the *embodied* cultural capital that they wanted to accumulate through studying in China: learning to speak the language, practical knowledge of the country and culture. With China's increased prestige in the world, knowledge of the Chinese language becomes more valuable. However, it is difficult for universities in China to claim monopoly on the production of this specific cultural capital: learning to speak Chinese does not necessarily have to be accomplished at a university. In the same way, general practical knowledge of the country and the culture becomes a more valuable asset as China's national prestige increases. Again, the challenge for the universities lies in the fact that this kind of practical knowledge does not necessarily have to be provided by institutions of higher learning. The universities run the risk of not only competing among themselves, but having actors from different sectors competing with them to produce the kind of cultural capital that is increasing in importance: they might compete with language schools that are not officially recognized as universities, or even firms that are willing to hire foreign nationals.

Furthermore, though China's increased prestige can constitute a weapon in the global competition, Chinese institution cannot monopolize knowledge of China even in relation to universities in other parts of the world. The majority of students interviewed were in China short term. Though they generally expressed plans to complete a degree of one kind of or anther, few intended to complete this degree at a Chinese university. Of those that planed on completing a degree at a Chinese university, many were aiming for a double degree. In short, there seemed to be a pattern among the students of studying in China short term, through exchange programs where a degree was awarded

by an institution in the home country, or through double degree arrangements. The sample of this study is not nearly large enough to make any claims as to whether this is generally the case for international students in China. Nonetheless, it is a noteworthy pattern that should be researched more in-depth.

5. CONCLUSION

The first research question of the thesis is concerned with China's role in global higher education and international student mobility. As shown in 4.1, China is playing an increasingly important role in global higher education. It has ambitious policies in place to become more internationally competitive. In terms of international students, China is foremost the world's largest *sender* of international students. However, it is also becoming a more prominent *host* for international students.

The second research question of the thesis is concerned with why Nordic students chose to study in China. Employing the concept of cultural capital, an attempt to answer this question is made in 4.2. The analysis begins by looking at the strategic role of the studies in China. It is revealed that the students' strategies vary a great deal. Some are investing relatively lightly in China and perceive their studies as a "gap-year." Others invest heavily, completing full degrees at Chinese universities. The analysis also reveals that many students stress the embodied nature of the cultural capital they accumulate in China, such as learning to speak the language and experiencing the country. For some students, the institutionalized cultural capital is important as well. The period in China is believed to look good on the CV as a kind of indicator that one is flexible and open to meeting new people and cultures. Lastly, it is shown that studying in China satisfies the students' aspirations for the international. The analysis also reveals that students also pursue education in China out of an interest in the country itself.

The last research question concerns how the students' motivations can contribute to an understanding of Chinas role in global higher education and international student mobility. It is suggested in this thesis that China's rise as a major host nation for international students can be attributed to the perceived rise of China as a coming superpower. By contrast, it is also contended that China's emergence as a host nation has much less to do with a growing prestige of Chinese

universities. Generally, the students did not study in China to get the best education. Their motivations were tied much closer to fascination with the culture and the importance of China internationally. This suggestion of China's position also fulfills the thesis aim of contributing to the understanding of China's role in global higher education. The tentative nature of these results should be stressed; rather than presenting any kind of solid proof, this thesis suggests an hypothesis which might fruitfully be investigated further in future research.

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7. APPENDIX

7.1 INDEXING SCHEME

The indexing scheme developed during the course of the research and the analysis. The following is the last scheme that was employed before the analysis section was written up.

1. Biography

    1.1 Previous China experience

    1.2 Current place of study

    1.3 Other

2. Personal development

    2.1 Sense of place, real geography

    2.2 Metaphors of space

    2.3 Personal development

    2.4 Difference/Change/New

    2.5 Experience/adventure

    2.6 Personal development vs. Education

3. Identity construction

4. Personal interest (China)

    4.1 Aspects of interest

    4.2 Describing China

5. Instrumental considerations (China as opportunity)

6. Career plans/considerations

7. The international and the Chinese

    7.1 Want chinese

    7.2 Want international

    7.3 International = Chinese

8. Other