

# Chinese International Students and their Identity Narratives:

## Critical Thinker, Global Citizen and People Person

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# Introduction

- “I got to travel a lot. I've been to Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, China, United States, of course Qatar, United Arab Emirates. You know where Dubai is. There are some more. Like Turkey. Plenty more. I guess there are a few more but I can't remember at the time.”

- Roberto

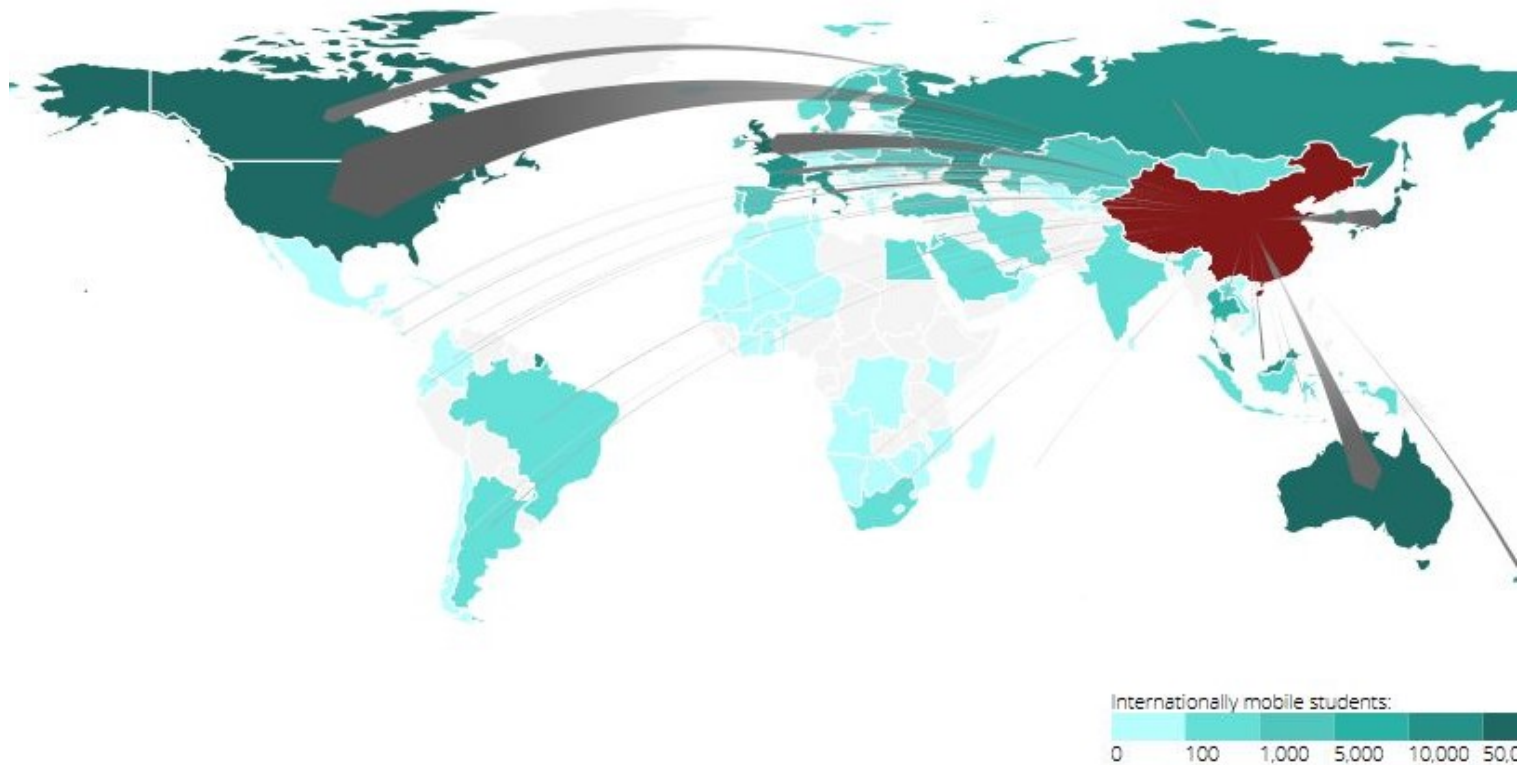
# Overview

- International Student Mobility
- Methods and Fieldwork
- Preliminary Results
  - Critical Thinker
  - Global Citizen
  - People Person

# International Student Mobility

- Increase in worldwide student mobility, disproportionate to overall population growth
- Contributing factors: globalization & modern technology (Y. Chen 2012)
- Chinese students: 17.5% of internationally mobile students (UNESCO 2020)

# Chinese Student Mobility



# Literature Overview

- Extensive research on intercultural adaptation and conflict, educational outcomes, decision-making processes
- Few studies on Students' own perspectives and identity issues
- Starting point for my Ph.D. project
- How do the students narrate their identities in an intercultural setting?

# Methods and Fieldwork

- First data collection phase in USA (August – November 2019)
- top-down approach and bottom-up approach
- Diverse participant sample
- Focus on undergraduates (age 18-21)
- Biographical interviews with 29 Chinese students (in Mandarin and English)
- 15 expert interviews with graduates, educational experts and university staff

# Methods and Fieldwork

- Second phase of data collection in Jan-Feb 2020 in China
- Interviews with parents and educators
- Transcription and coding in Nvivo using qualitative data analysis methods by Mayring (2015)
- Being a non-Chinese researcher

*“Talking with a young lady from the Western world, not China, I feel good, yeah.”*



## Preliminary Results: Critical Thinker

- Ability to think critically and strong intellect → distinguishing marker
- Sense of superiority in relation to other Chinese
- Sense of superiority in relation to classmates
- Impact on social life

# Preliminary Results: Critical Thinker

„First of all, I can't publicly resist their view and say: oh, you are stupid, because they are my family members and my friends and they are older than me, most of them, and I am supported by them now, so I can't reject what they say generally, so I think just being eclectic...

I will just say: Oh, I'm not here to support the West, I'm just here to contact with more people, to see the larger world and fulfill my personal academic goals, to experience, that's all I can say now. **I hope they can comfort, I hope that these views can balance their nationalism and their narrow expectations for me.**“

- Hailin

- Sense of superiority in relation to family and friends in China



- “My friends are **interesting enough** for me to like them and be friends with them, and they are also **smart enough** so that we can study together and I can get some help for my study.”

- Amy

- Impact on social life

## Preliminary Results: Critical Thinker

- Every child needs to be a winner (Fong 2004)
- Academic pressure internalized?
- Intrinsic vs. extrinsic
- Espousal of American educational philosophies & criticism of Chinese educational system

## Preliminary Results: Global Citizen

- “I got to travel a lot. I've been to Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, China, United States, of course Qatar, United Arab Emirates. You know where Dubai is. There are some more. Like Turkey. Plenty more.
- **I guess there are a few more but I can't remember at the time.**
- I consider myself to be a citizen of the globe, not like citizen of China or citizen of United States, I consider myself citizen of the globe, **since I've been to so many places.**”  
- Roberto

- “so I formed this global perspective early on and it's like built inside of me. A lot of others do tend to have just a very local perspective. I think the most important thing in life for people living in 21st century is to have to form this special global perspective. It's like it's going to be essential for your success.”  
- Roberto
- Highly contested concept
- Economic and Cultural Global Citizen (Oxley & Morris 2018)



## Preliminary Results: People Person

- **“I’m like super into people.** I think that's also saying I am good at this. I'm just gonna keep this pace and just head on in. To use my talent. Yeah just. Like talk with people. **And I think it's also like the only thing I'm good at.** I just really like people”

- Bianca



## Preliminary Results: People Person

- “I seldom talk about my dreams to others. And we're very close friends. And I think I don't want to be really different from them. They will just think, maybe **it's just a one moment, one second** if they think: Oh you're so different from us.”

- Juliane

## Preliminary Results: People Person

- Theories of individualization in modern China (Hansen & Svaverund 2010; Alpermann 2011)
- Belonging to a group, connecting with people and conforming to collective norms → central to their identity
- Strong competition drives personal narratives of exceptionalism

- “Sort of as a kid, I’m not the average Chinese by any means once you get to know me. I knew that the Chinese education system doesn’t fit me, I felt that the family felt that too. **And they knew I had a great potential.** I mean they didn’t know I was going to success here, but they knew they were going to send me abroad.”

- Ricky

# Conclusion

- Identity paradox: enthusiastic learner vs. „pressured single child“
- Identity paradox: open-minded global citizen vs. ignorant other Chinese
- Identity paradox: Being exceptional vs. belonging to a community

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Thank you for your attention!

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