

Students' struggles for cultural and academic recognition

A Socio-Analysis of an Intercultural Learning Environment in a Sino-Danish Higher Education Collaboration

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Students' Struggles For Academic And Cultural Recognition

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Sino-Danish Higher Education Collaboration

Master thesis by Alexander Støvelbæk
Roskilde University, September 2017



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Abstract

Universities today are under increased influence from globalization. Internationalization strategies have become a part of most universities' management plans and new kinds of transnational branch-campuses, joint university ventures, and exchange programs are opening every year, attracting students from around the world.

On the basis of a three-week fieldwork at the Sino-Danish Center in Beijing, a transnational university collaboration between Denmark and China, this thesis contributes with a student perspective to investigate how the internationalization of higher education is affecting students' learning experiences and the relation between different cultural and academic traditions. Inspired by the socio-analytical method of Pierre Bourdieu, the trajectory and educational strategies of four different students are analysed through individual interviews, in order to make visible with what interests they are studying at SDC. Based on these findings, the students' participation in the educational practice is analysed through interviews, observation of the field, and by drawing upon literature on the internationalization of higher education. Through this analysis, the structure of the field is mapped out with specific emphasis on the misrecognition of the social order related to the cultural backgrounds of the students.

The thesis concludes that Western forms of academic knowledge are dominating the learning environment at SDC, establishing a social hierarchy between the Chinese and international students. Further, the Chinese students' successful acculturation to the Western standards is contingent on their initial amounts of English linguistic and cultural capital. Meanwhile, the Chinese students seek academic recognition outside the westernized curriculum by working for their Chinese tutor, which puts a double strain on them. The dominance of Western academic standards at SDC results in the lack of environments for mutually benefitting intercultural interaction and learning. A gap between the students are thus created on the basis of their cultural backgrounds and national/regional belonging, which in the end negatively affects their intercultural learning experiences. Overcoming these challenges first of all requires an effort to offset the academic and linguistic advantages of the international students, which has been institutionalized in the official learning activities at SDC.

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CHAPTER I

A Sino-Danish University in China

On Tuesday the 25th of September 2007, Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Development¹ Helge Sander met with the Chinese Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang in Beijing. The purpose of the meeting was the signing of the agreement of collaboration regarding research and development between Denmark and China. The strategic aims of the collaboration were to “realize new initiatives, enhancing the student mobility between Denmark and China and supporting the collaboration between the Danish universities and the Chinese scientific institutions²” (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science 2008, 18). The initiative proposals included scholarships for students on exchange, support of trainee and internship opportunities in Danish and Chinese companies, alumni-networks for Chinese students graduating from Danish universities, strategic alliances between Danish and Chinese universities, and finally the establishment of a Sino-Danish University in China. The final initiative became a reality in 2012, as the Sino-Danish Center (SDC) in Beijing was founded, offering double degree master’s programs to a diverse group of Danish, Chinese and other foreign students.

With reference to the above, this thesis takes an interest in the educational implications of the partnership between Denmark and China. On the basis of a three-week fieldwork experience at SDC, this thesis provides an insight into the students’ experiences of learning in an intercultural environment. As such, it contributes with insights of the practical implications of a grand diplomatic and political arrangement.

1.1. Higher Education in a Globalizing World

While the Sino-Danish Center (SDC) is the first large scale higher education collaboration Denmark has been involved in, transnational university collaborations are becoming more common in our age of globalization (Knight 2011). Hence, SDC is part of a broader field of higher education spanning across national borders. Some scholars have studied the relation between the internationalization of universities and the impact

¹ In 2007 the Danish Ministry of Education and Science was called Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Development.

² Own translation from Danish.

of globalization on higher education. One way to understand the effects of globalization is as a process of universities becoming increasingly managed according to the neo-liberal ideology, aligned with supranational organizations such as the World Bank, IMF and OECD (Currie 1998, 4ff). The internationalization of universities, on the other hand, denotes a practice of universities orienting themselves towards an international community of students and academics. Internationalization strategies have become a part of most universities' management plans, and new kinds of transnational branch-campuses, joint university ventures, and exchange programs are opening every year attracting students from around the world. Globalization and the internationalization of universities should not be seen as separate forces, but rather as influencing each other in various ways, where "internationalisation is changing the world of education and globalization is changing the world of internationalisation" (Jane Knight cited in S. Guo and Guo 2016b, 4). Thus, while internationalization strategies of universities have existed as far back as the 19th century or even earlier (Dow 2010, 499), today, globalization is affecting the way universities try to internationalize themselves.

1.1.1. Situating SDC

Dow (2010) identifies a list of different types of transnational, educational collaborations currently operating in China. These collaborations take on various forms in different combinations between at least two of the following actors: 1) a foreign university, 2) a foreign corporation, 3) a Chinese university and 4) a Chinese corporation. Furthermore, these collaborations might have different legal status in China, influencing their degree of autonomy and jurisdiction (He 2015, 86), and work either as loosely structured exchanges between student and staff, provide specific courses or single programs, provide branch-campuses of a foreign university, or work as semi-independent institutions founded collaboratively (Dow 2010, 500). SDC appears to fall outside of the above classification, since it is a public and national collaboration, initiated by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science and including all Danish universities. According to Martin Bech (2016), Ph.D. in Sino-foreign university collaborations, the Danish government was interested in taking part in China's growing educational market and research investments, as well as strengthening the diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries. In this sense, SDC is an example of public diplomacy between Denmark and China (Bech 2016, 33f) and a quite different political structure than any other collaboration found in China. SDC's Chinese partner institution, University of Chinese

Academy of Science (UCAS), is one of the educational centers of the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), a public research institution under direct management of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Despite being a leading global research institution, CAS was not particularly internationalized and neither was UCAS. Hence, from a Chinese perspective, the international collaboration could improve UCAS/CAS' interdisciplinary research activities, research-based teaching, and innovation capabilities according to international standards (Bech 2016, 33). The funding of SDC is split fifty-fifty between Denmark and China and so is the student ratio (ideally). SDC offers double degree programs to their students, meaning that the university grants diplomas from two universities (Knight 2011). While SDC in some ways resemble famous institutional collaborations such as University of Nottingham Ningbo and New York University Shanghai, its public and inherent collaborative nature has led to it being classified as a model-institution – potentially serving as inspiration for future Sino-foreign collaborations (Bech 2016, 36). These specific characteristics of SDC makes it an interesting case for investigating how university collaborations can take form as a public and national collaboration, rather than on the basis of private, institutional incentives. This thesis can thus be seen as a contribution to the abundant research literature focusing on international higher education, by broadening the understanding of the intercultural dynamics and educational possibilities of national and public university collaborations.

1.1.2. International Student Mobility

For the continuously growing numbers of school-leavers around the world, globalization is affecting their possibilities, choices, and not least experiences of higher education. For a growing number of them, the national borders of their country of origin no longer demarcates the limits within which they can make higher education choices. As of 2009, more than three million individuals were studying a tertiary degree outside their home country (Brooks and Waters 2011, 161); a number, which have indubitably grown considerably since. Traditionally, educational migration was a means for the elite factions of developing countries to acquire a world-class degree in the UK or the USA in order to retain their social status in their home country (Brooks and Waters 2011, 168). However, as Western universities set up branch campuses or initiate collaborations with institutions in countries overseas, it opens up the possibility for the less geographically mobile factions of society to obtain a degree with international credentials. However, choosing these foreign-affiliated educational institutions in their home country is not without an

element of risk, since the educational quality and the recognition of international higher education collaborations is highly dependent on the prestige of the foreign institution (see for example Pullman 2013).

1.1.3. Educational Migration and Intercultural Learning at SDC

What seems striking about SDC and its composition of students is that while being one of the relatively new institutional structures described above (a foreign-backed collaborative institutions situated in China), it enrolls not only Chinese students, but also students from Denmark and other countries. In this sense, traditional educational migration patterns are reversed. Research literature on students' migration patterns and learning experiences in international universities has reflected a reality in which students from the global periphery (encompassing Asia in general) have migrated to countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia (Pham and Tran 2017; Gu 2016; Yan and Berliner 2016). Some research has deviated from this pattern by studying the experiences of local students in foreign-backed higher education (Moufahim and Lim 2015; Heffernan et al. 2010; Pullman 2013; Dow 2010), but very seldom in a context where these programs have enrolled both foreign and local students, such as in the case of SDC. Thus, besides contributing to already existing knowledge, focussing on SDC as a specific form of transnational university collaboration contributes with new knowledge about European (and beyond) students' choices to enrol in a master's program in a Sino-foreign university collaboration located in China. Further, it presents a possibility to study the complex dynamics of intercultural encounters in learning situations. While such studies mainly have been carried out with a focus on incoming students in Western environments (Popov et al. 2012; Pham and Tran 2017; Klitgård 2011; Gu 2016), at SDC, the students from the West are the incoming students in a Chinese environment. How these dynamics of culture play out in the context of SDC will be of central concern in this thesis.

1.2. SDC and Its "Problems"

On a Sunday in November, I boarded a direct flight from Copenhagen, Denmark to Beijing, China. The following three weeks I frequented the official learning activities at SDC, hung out with the students during the breaks, joined them for social activities in the evening, and conducted several individual interviews with them. The opportunity to do this fieldwork was presented to me by Jørgen Rafn, one of the supervisors of this

thesis. Rafn and his colleague Henning Salling Olesen had been paying frequent visits to SDC over the course of some years. The two professors were involved in an SDC-funded research project entitled “Theoretical issues of learning and culture(s) related with education and learning in a Danish/Chinese context,” and on separate trips to SDC both Rafn and Salling Olesen had inquired about how the students experienced the intercultural learning environment. What they learned from these inquiries became the prime motivator for conducting the research presented in this thesis. Their initial ‘findings’ indicated an incompatibility between two groups of culturally diverse learners, creating multiple issues and challenges both academically and socially, negatively affecting their overall experiences. Supporting these findings, in June 2016, the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen* brought a controversial article, which questioned whether the eight million Euros spent by the Danish government every year on financing the non-Chinese group of students at SDC was a good investment. Citing some of the students, the article portrayed the Chinese contribution to the program as inadequate according to Danish standards of education, calling the program ‘badly managed’ as well as the conditions of the preliminary housing at the Zhongguancun Campus in Beijing poor (Bernsen 2016).

Being the result of tremendous political and diplomatic visions and ambitions, the bad publicity and the students’ dissatisfaction with the program seemed very unfortunate. While frustrations in learning environments shouldn’t be unconditionally categorized as negative, identifying the roots of what was really causing the dissatisfaction of the students seemed urgent. Was it really the Chinese’s fault? Or was it a lack of educational means to create a fruitful intercultural learning environment? In a general sense, SDC provided an interesting case for studying the forms of frustrations that arise when advanced students in higher education are put together with peers from other cultures. Moreover, studying the learning environment at SDC might lead to an evaluation of the educational nature of the collaboration, considering its status as a model institution for future transnational educational collaborations. Further, SDC does not represent just any intercultural learning environment, but a rather important one in a Danish context, considering its political and financial implications. In this sense, it is a controversial case.

In a generalized perspective, as a place where different institutional and societal structures intersect, manifested through locally and nationally contingent traditions of education and students with different national and cultural backgrounds, SDC seems to provide the settings for a plethora of potential conflicts. Such conflicts might surface

where 1) certain ways of teaching and learning are introduced in contexts that are unaccustomed to them, 2) individuals encounter new educational environments affecting processes of identity formation and acculturation, and 3) different institutions and their involved actors struggle over the power to define right and wrong ways of carrying out educational practices. In a common sense understanding, the differences between Chinese and Danish culture are tremendous. While Danish norms and values are usually associated with the rest of the Western world, China represents a different set of norms and values, often associated with Asia as a whole. The contrast between these two cultural systems is continuously stressed, not only through popular media, but in scientific research as well. As part of the research project mentioned above, Salling Olesen (2011) writes the following about these cultural differences:

“During our academic collaboration informal observations and explicit discussions seem to confirm that Chinese advanced students do bring in experiences and dispositions basically different from those of corresponding European students, and that they develop their research skills and research professionalism in a dual space of Western and Asian cultural influences which goes very deeply into personal engagements and identity processes.” (Salling Olesen 2011, 3)

As Salling Olesen suggests, the differences are visible and essential for understanding the effects of academic training and identity formation of advanced Chinese students in international settings. Drawing a parallel to SDC, the same can be suggested for Danish or other foreign students studying in a Chinese environment. Essentially, this parallel raises questions regarding how students' with diversified educational backgrounds and cultural dispositions handle the dualism of Western and Asian cultural and academic influences in collaborative educational settings.

1.2.1. Research Question

Based on the reflections above, the following research question will guide the knowledge interest of this thesis:

How are the student's cultural background and the institutional setup affecting the contradictions and challenges in the learning environment at the Sino-Danish Center in Beijing?

1.3. Research Limitations and Conceptual Definitions

A research process always includes making choices and priorities. These choices determine both the results of the research and the final presentation of the written report. Below I shortly explain some of the choices I have had to make, both relating to the presentation of my research, but also more general limitations I faced narrowing down the research interest and aim.

This thesis does not include experiences of students who have already graduated from SDC or statistics on graduates' professional occupation, even though these elements could suggest the value of a degree from SDC in a longitudinal perspective. Since the first batch of SDC students graduated in 2014, no data exists yet from which to draw any conclusions on the employability of students from SDC (Bech 2016, 34).

Focussing intensely on the students' experiences of the learning environment at SDC, in this thesis I do not systematically include the perspectives of the politicians, professors, educational planners, or the administration of SDC. These perspectives could have provided an insight into what kinds of struggles occurred on different levels of the collaboration, related to differing perceptions of academic education and learning. Thus, the interplay between the students' experiences and the administrative and political struggles over the institutional setup at SDC will have to be reserved for future studies.

During my three-week stay in China, I spent five days in Shanghai where I got the opportunity to visit New York University Shanghai (NYU Shanghai) for one and a half day. As a different transnational university setup, NYU Shanghai was an interesting place of comparison to SDC. However, because my visit there was mostly based on a few informal conversations and observations, and because of the limited scope of the thesis, any comparison between the two intercultural educational environments have been left out.

In regards to the presentation of the empirical material, the following will provide for some conceptual definitions relating to the categorization of the students. While one half of the student body at SDC are Chinese nationals enrolled by the Chinese admission procedures, the other half are Danish, except for a small group of students with other national backgrounds. These 'other' students are also accepted by the Danish part of the program. While a large amount of them has a bachelor's degree from a Danish university, a small group every year is accepted on the basis of a bachelor's degree from another country. When referring to the students accepted by the Danish part of the program as one group, I use the term 'international students'. This also indicates that this group

consists of the incoming students in a Chinese context³. In regards to their cultural background, I associate the international students with a Western educational background, because they come from Denmark or other European countries. However, in cases where I more specifically deal with the cultural background of single students, I refer to their national or regional origin.

Another limitation of this thesis is that the empirical material concerns primarily the social science programs at SDC and only the institution's first year students. As mentioned earlier, SDC offers seven master's programs. Five of these are within the natural sciences and the final two in social science. These programs are called 'Public Management and Social Development,' and 'Innovation Management.' The two social science programs have different curriculum and academic foci. Despite this academic difference, I conceptualize them as one joint learning environment. While there were some differences in the educational backgrounds of the students and also in how the program coordinators managed their responsibilities in relation to the students, I perceived these differences as less critical for the analysis of the dynamics of the learning environment as a whole. Limiting myself to the social science programs was a pragmatic choice. As such, while in the field, I realized that getting an in-depth understanding and a higher level of familiarity with the students were an advantage for providing a thorough analysis in this thesis, even if it meant not including the natural science students at all. My insight into the natural science programs is based on one individual interview, an informal conversation with a group of students and an observation of a lecture. On the basis of these experiences, it is clear to me that the learning environment and the student interactions are very similar to what can be found at the social science programs. Still, had my study included more perspectives from the students at the natural science programs, my findings could potentially have been nuanced, and perhaps included a comparative perspective of the differences between intercultural learning environments in social science and natural science. Thus, my final results should definitively be understood on the basis of these premises. Future studies could include interesting perspectives on the differentiated individualization of students in respectively social and natural science.

The overall structure, analytical method and in many cases choice of words that describe the social reality of the students in this thesis are strongly inspired by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) and his socio-analytical framework. I will

³ Likewise, other research speaks of international students when referring to for example Chinese and Korean students who study in Australia or England. See for example Pham and Tran (2017).

elaborate on how Bourdieu's concepts have served as instruments for constructing my field of research in the third chapter of this thesis.

1.4. The Structure of the Thesis

This should serve as a short guide to the reader illustrating the overall structure of the thesis, as well as what the reader can expect to find in each of the following chapters. The succession of the different chapters are not randomly organized, but reflects both my research process and the succession I find appropriate for anyone who wishes to understand my findings, both their partiality and strengths.

In chapter two, 'Ethnographic Methods,' I make clear the specific conditions under which the empirical data for this thesis was produced and how this is intrinsically linked to my knowledge interest and final results. Essentially, this includes scientific and practical reflections upon the 'methods of data collection' that guided my way of entering and acting in the field, including participant observation and different forms of interviews.

In chapter three, 'Understanding Culture and Learning,' I develop a conceptual framework for understanding the connection between students' social and cultural backgrounds and their ways of participating in intercultural learning environments. This is carried out with strong inspiration from the socio-analytical concepts of French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. While there are strong scientific arguments for presenting the methods used to produce empirical data after having presented the conceptual framework, the order here reflects my research process. Hence, when I entered the field I still did not know with what concepts I would analytically construct the social space I was to witness. Upon my return, Bourdieu's conceptual framework presented a way for me to make sense of the things I had experienced⁴.

In chapter four, 'Trajectories and Educational Strategies,' the empirical part of the thesis is initiated. The empirical part is comprised of two analytical chapters where the first one provides an in-depth analysis of the trajectories of four different students, studied primarily through the individual interviews. In this chapter, I am interested in understanding with which interests and orientations the students are partaking in the educational practice at SDC on the basis of their social and cultural origins.

⁴ My own reflections on the research implications of this can be found in part 6.4 *Research Evaluation*.

In chapter five, 'Struggles for Academic and Cultural Recognition,' I will objectivize the learning culture at SDC through the individual interviews, my own observations of the field and the group discussion. I thus aim to answer the question of how the institutional structures of SDC affect the students' ways of participating in the educational practice. This chapter also analyses how the structure of SDC create certain forms of intercultural student interaction.

In chapter six, 'Concluding Remarks,' I summarize the whole thesis, including field of research, problem statement, methods of data collection, conceptual framework and the findings of the empirical analytical parts. With specific emphasis on the findings, I put forth an overall conclusion of my research question. At the very end, I reflect on the practical implications of my findings with regard to SDC itself, but also in regards to matters of learning in international higher education in general.

CHAPTER 2

Ethnographic Methods

2.1. Introduction

In order to make the specific conditions clear under which the empirical data for this thesis was produced and how these are intrinsically linked to my knowledge interest and final results, below I will present 1) a thorough run-down of the methods I used to produce my data, 2) a reflection of the methods, including methodological limitations and practical issues I faced using them, and 3) how the methods I used and my methodological choices affect the results of this thesis.

Working with qualitative methods I am interested in studying social phenomenon in a naturalistic setting, as an attempt “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 3). Traditionally qualitative researchers, primarily in the field of anthropology, believed they could go out and record foreign cultures and display their own accounts as objective truths. However, in qualitative research today, reflections on the limits of representation and how to legitimize scientific knowledge in general should be intrinsically tied to reflections on the research process itself (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 21). While this part in general contributes to the validation of the results of this thesis by specifying its methodological conditions, in the end I will discuss how Bourdieu’s notion of reflexive sociology (1992) tackles the issues of representation in general.

2.2. Participant Observation

The participation in the practices of the students at SDC formed my first experiences of the field and served as a precondition for conducting the interviews. These initial experiences of the field helped structure the interview settings and the questions I asked, much like DeWalt and DeWalt highlight when they mention that participant observation “provides a context for sampling, open-ended interviewing, construction of interview guides and questionnaires” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 3).

Doing participant observation is different than just observing situations, but also different from being a full recognized member of the field. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011,

23f) differs between four progressing stages of participation; passive, moderate, active and complete. In the field I mediated between moderate participation and active participation. Moderate participation denotes a researcher who is “identifiable as a researcher, but does not actively participate or only occasionally interacts with people,” whereas active participation involves a researcher who “engages in almost everything that other people are doing” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 23). In the class I would sit in the back with my computer, meticulously jotting down notes of what was happening; who was sitting where, who came in late, what did the teacher say, who asked questions, how did the teacher answer questions, and so on. However, as soon as the teacher called for a break, my role changed. I got up along with the rest of the students, went to buy coffee, went outside to have a cigarette, casually conversing with the other students. When the class was over, I went to have lunch with the students, if they invited me. At lunch we would talk about the class, about living in China, about their lives, family, politics, good restaurants in Copenhagen, and so on. I also went out with the students for dinner, went to a concert and for drinks at a bar. I joined the annual Christmas party, went on a class excursion with the students, met them for beers on a Wednesday night and so on. In all of these activities I was an active participant.

2.2.1. Entering the Field

Due to his long-term affiliation with SDC, Salling Olesen (the RUC professor mentioned earlier) had made sure that the management at SDC agreed to my fieldwork there. Further, I obtained personal permission from all professors before attending their classes. Coincidence would have it that one of my friends in Denmark knew a Danish female student, Sarah, who was studying social science at SDC. The day I arrived in China I contacted her and she agreed to pick me up in front of the SDC teaching building the next morning and take me to their class. Sarah would have a significant impact on my access to the field, serving as my ‘first contact’ (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 44). She was not only able to introduce me to her group of friends at SDC (mostly Danish student), but she was also fluent in Chinese and helped me make contact with Chinese students at the program. Sarah invited me to join the students’ social activities and she helped me with several practical things such as getting a Chinese SIM card, buying train-tickets and so on. Just as much an informant, Sarah became my guide in the field. As my ‘first contact’ and by the fact of our mutual friend in Denmark, Sarah

vouched for me among the other students (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 45), allowing me to effortlessly become a participant in the field.

2.2.2. *Familiarity and Strangeness*

As a student immersing in participant observation among other student, my specific role is a vital point of reflection. The levelness between the students and me could be seen as a potential benefit in the fieldwork context, allowing for a greater degree of confidentiality. I believe that this helped me get access to specific informal activities and situations, where my presence as ‘just a student’ and sometimes as ‘a friend of Sarah’s’ was more evident than my role as a researcher. I could ‘talk the talk’ (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 56ff) of this specific part of the field, because it was a familiar environment for me to be in. On the other hand my imbeddedness in the field of research could have hindered my ability to objectify it properly, taken important social dynamics of international student life for granted. Too much familiarity is potentially a dangerous thing for an ethnographic researcher. Spradley (1979) states that “Ethnography starts with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance” (Spradley 1979, 4). While traditional strands of ethnography (often exemplified through the works of Malinowski, Mead, Good) has focused on making the strange familiar by immersing in the practice of foreign cultures, a central objective for the ethnographic researcher immersing in familiar cultural settings is to make ‘the familiar strange’ (Gorden, Holland, and Lahelma 2016, 2). I worked to achieve this strangeness through writing field notes about everything I saw and heard. In the analytical phase, such notes were useful examples of the specific characteristics of the practice so well known to me from my own time as a university student.

However, the above familiarity only describes half of it. Just as seemingly easy it was for me to become an active participant among the Danish group of students, as difficult was it to get to a level of familiarity with the Chinese students. I was thus engaged in a double process of both ‘making the familiar strange’ and ‘making the strange familiar’. Since the Chinese and Danish students almost never hung out casually after class, I found it hard to spend time with the Chinese students outside the official university setting. In retrospective, I find that this was caused in part by my ‘first contact’, Sarah, having social ties to one specific group amongst the students, and in part because of my own subjectivity as a Dane, which positioned me among the Danish students, according to an already existing division between the students. Ultimately, I was confined to what I

could learn about them in class, through interviews and through what the international students said. My imbeddedness in the Danish culture and the considerable time I ended up spending with the international students at SDC, made it vital for me to work against a too ethnocentric description of the field (Spradley 1979, 22). In this way I have tried actively to make room for Chinese ‘voices,’ and not only representing them on the basis of what the international students had to say about them.

2.2.3. *Taking and Using Field Notes*

Almost every night, I would write up my experiences of the day into proper field notes, usually adding some analytical remarks at the bottom of the document. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) talks of the researcher going through a process of enculturation while participating in the practices of the field, developing a certain tacit knowledge about the field (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 4). Field notes is a way to exteriorize such tacit knowledge and I have wanted to actively use the observations in the analysis to illustrate how this tacit knowledge have been an integral part of the analytical process. Naturally, my observations have ‘come a long way’ from field notes to the observations presented in the analysis (see Appendix A for an illustrative example). In deliberately rewriting the field notes for use in the analysis, again I want to depart from a traditional belief the possibility of ‘true’ representation. The condition for qualitative research beyond the representational crisis (Denzin and Lincoln 1998), as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009, 6) puts it, is that “the research process constitutes a (re)construction of the social reality in which researchers both interact with the agents researched and, actively interpreting, continually create images for themselves and for others.” Thus rewriting the field notes, adding extra layers of meaning and actions on the basis of my experiences of the field, can be seen as an ‘honest lie’ (a reference to Paul Willis⁵ in Dalsgård 2010, 332). If an objective representation in this context is an illusion, the important aspect is not with what objective accuracy I can represent it, but rather how I use my experiences of the field to give a truthful account of it. Using present tense and direct speech examples was an active way for me to reproduce the discourses that I heard so often while in the field.

⁵ Willis, P. 2000. *The Ethnographic Imagination*. Polity Press & Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

2.3. Life-History Interviews

In trying to grasp the meaning-makings of a specific culture, Spradley introduces the notion of ‘making interferences’ (Spradley 1979, 8). Since, as he writes, “a large part of any culture consists of tacit knowledge,” the ethnographer must make interferences into the cultural practice of the group under study if he wants to understand why people do as they do. An interview is a means of interference, since it ‘gets people to talk,’ and thus provides a tool for understanding their specific culture (Spradley 1979, 9). During my fieldwork I did interviews with several students in order to better understand the dynamics of the cultural practice of the field. Dealing with students with very different social and cultural background, I was interested in how their different perceptions structured the way they participated in the educational practice.

2.3.1. *Sampling*

I did interviews with 15 different students (six Chinese and nine International). Most of them (13) were in their first semester at one of the two social science program. Henceforth I will refer to these 15 students as my informants. During the second day of class (with students from both social science program) I passed around a sheet of paper on which the students could sign up for interviews. The next couple of days I emailed all the students who had signed up, specifying what the interview was going to be about, how long it was going to take and a proposal for a day we could meet (see Appendix B for an example of the email). Initially, mostly international students had signed up on the list, but a handful of Chinese female students had also signed up. In order to secure the accounts of as many different students as possible, I thought it useful to have at least representatives of both genders in both cultural groups. Since no Chinese male students had signed up on the list, I had some of the international students help me get in touch with two Chinese male students, who I ended up interviewing as well.

2.3.2. *The Life-history Interview*

The interviews were conducted within a timeframe of 45-90 minutes. They were conducted at a place of the informants’ choosing in order to make it most comfortable for the informant. Methodologically at the point of the interviews I was inspired by a life-history approach. According to Salling Olesen, through a life history approach the researcher strives to understand how individuals cope with circumstances of objective reality (Salling Olesen 2015, 4). Thus, the individuals’ narration of his/her life story

becomes the central aim of the interview in order for the researcher to understand how an objective life course is mediated through subjective experiences. Such mediation rests on the individuals' prior socialization (i.e. social and cultural background), which is why the knowledge about the objective events in the individual's life is important. I was interested in this method of interviewing since I wanted to know how the students' cultural background and previous educational experiences were affecting the way they were experiencing their situation at SDC. The interview was semi-structured, and only guided by me according to three overall topics, namely 1) their social and educational background and reasons for choosing SDC, 2) their experiences with being a student at SDC, and 3) their future career expectations and dreams. I let the informants speak freely, followed up on their own statements, and only occasionally changed the subject or interrupted them.

I found the interview method useful for allowing the informants to freely express their experiences related to being students at SDC, but more importantly I found it useful for later analysis of how they made sense of their reality. According to Bourdieu, life stories is a way for individuals to bridge the gaps between their previous actions, current position and future plans and create a story of being in control of their own life. Through the storytelling of a meaningful life timeline individuals present themselves as they believe to appear, but also strategically as they want to appear. It as an action fostered by a specific habitus to which certain reasonable life stories apply (Bourdieu 1988, 40f). So an important analytical question I could ask was; why do the students construct their life stories as they do, and what can such constructions tell us about their social position in an international university program?

Another important point of reflection on doing interviews, which we learn from Bourdieu (1999, 609), is that like all other social situations the interview situation is a 'market for linguistic and symbolic good.' In saying this, Bourdieu is reminding us of the often asymmetrical relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee, which sets certain limits for the openness of the social exchange. In this sense it is important to achieve a form of 'non-violent' communication where the informant feels she can open up and share her experiences without feeling objectivized or belittled by the researcher (Bourdieu 1999, 609). Again, I will argue that my position as a young researcher and student myself helped provide an atmosphere of trust and recognition between the informants and me. As Bourdieu argues: "Researchers who are socially very close to their respondents provide them with guarantees against the threat of having subjective

reasoning reduced to objective causes” (Bourdieu 1999, 610). However, this proximity was most obvious in my relation to the international student, while the cultural difference between the Chinese students and me did constitute a social distance. According to Bourdieu in these situations it’s important to be able to put yourself in the interviewees place, provide recognition and not least have an understanding of the structural constraints affecting the interviewees situation (Bourdieu 1999, 612). In my experience, despite the language barrier (also reflected on below) and the social distance between the Chinese students and me, the interviews were successful according to the above parameters.

2.3.3. *Language, Transcripts and Translations*

Language barriers were a large practical challenge, especially when interviewing the Chinese students. Since culture is intrinsically linked to language (Spradley 1979, 17f), my lack of Chinese can be seen as a deficit in trying to grasp the meanings ascribed to their lived lives. Their limited English capabilities also prevented them from being able to share their life history in vivid detail, further hindering a deeper understanding of how they had internalized their social circumstances. I have translated the excerpts from the interviews with the Danish students used in this thesis from Danish to English.

Many of the interview excerpts have been abridged when presented in the analysis, and in a sense ‘rewritten’ (I have included an example of this in Appendix A). I have condensed the meaning of the informant’s statements by cutting out repetitions, hesitation, pauses and use of incorrect words, in cases where these discursive elements didn’t contribute to the content of the statement (Bourdieu 1999, 616).

2.4. Thematic Group Discussion

Besides the individual life history interviews discussed above, I also did a group interview with four students from the social science programs. The participants represented each gender from the two national groups (Chinese/international). As a specific method the group discussion allows for a more dynamic exploration of the collective memories of the individuals (Weber 1995, 131) and how these memories are negotiated, asserted upon others, changed or suppressed in social interactions (Flick 2006, 196). The thematic element of the group discussion is supposed to irritate or challenge the participants, in order for them to start discussing and reflecting (Weber 1995, 131). In the context of my

research it allowed me to study the interactions between the students closer, and specifically how their different ideas of learning and education were expressed and negotiated face-to-face. As I wasn't familiar with this specific interview form I followed Flick's (2006, 194f) successive stages of a group discussion. I commenced the group discussion with a discussion stimulus (Flick 2006, 195) in the form of the question: *Is there a European and an Asian way of learning, and if so, will the difference sustain?*⁶ By this I implored the student to reflect upon the differences between the different perceptions of making education that they were exposed to at SDC.

2.5. Other Interviews

Besides the interviews mentioned above I also did an 'expert interviews' (Flick 2006, 165), with a Chinese professor at Shang Normal University, Xiaojiong Ding, an experienced researcher in the field of international education and intercultural student environments in China.

2.6. Textual Material

In the analysis I've also drawn upon a range of different books, journal articles and scientific reports. The textual material included forms the basis for my understanding of the field in general, and is used to contextualize the empirical material. This is done in order to have a "generic and genetic comprehension of who these individuals are, based on a (theoretical or practical) grasp of the social conditions of which they are the product" (Bourdieu 1999, 613).

2.7. Reflexive Sociology: Double Objectification

With the above methodological reflections the double crisis of representation and scientific legitimization is of central concern to me. After having carried out these reflections I am not suggesting that my results will represent an objective truth, but by putting forth the specific conditions for how my empirical data was constructed, I make the limits and partiality of the specific results produced clear (Bourdieu 1999, 608). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), a central realization of the researchers who first acknowledged the representational crisis was that the "researcher does more than

⁶ This question was taken from Salling Olesens article, which asks the same question in its title (see Salling Olesen 2011)

observe history; he or she plays a part in it” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 13). In this sense, the researchers own subjectivity is a fundamental precondition for the above-mentioned partiality. Hence, the knowledge produced is not an objective representation of reality, but rather a construction based on the subjective experiences of and methods applied by the researcher. This doesn’t mean that issues of representation are irrelevant, but rather that reflections on the subjectivity and approach of the researcher are of vital importance in order for research to maintain its validity. Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), and specifically his notion of double objectification⁷, embraces these issues. Applying a reflexive sociology means to be able to objectivize the gaze with which a social problem is viewed (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69f). This means that as a researcher, I should be aware and make clear the specifics of my own stance in relation to the field being researched and also any social and institutional affiliations that might affect the way I present the field. Following this idea below I will highlight some examples of my subjectivity and its consequences for the knowledge production of this thesis.

After three weeks in China I have my own subjective experience of the field, and the everyday life and social dynamics at stake for students who study at transnational university collaborations in China. The ethnographic method and the duration and intensity of my field research has allowed me to enter more personal aspects of the students lives (Delamont 2012, 173). Being a university student myself, it was a natural environment for me to enter, and my personal familiarity and very recent experience with being a student, must be uncovered as part of the way I analyse my data.

Another aspect that has dominated my gaze from early on is the idea of cultural differences, and how these influences learning situations. Cultural differences are a primary indicator of my research gaze, and central in the way I, as a researcher, construct the field under study. Having this specific focus might background other significant factors of analytical value and it might also lead to me overemphasizing the importance of cultural difference as a central point of struggle in transnational higher education.

As far as institutional affiliation goes, my research agenda can be seen as relatively independent. At least it is not affected by the interest of any private or state-funded research programs. Still, I am imbedded in the institutional logic of higher education in Denmark in general, specifically positioned as a master student at RUC. Theoretical and

⁷ The objectification is double, because it is not only a matter of objectivizing the field under study, but also objectivizing the gaze with which the field is viewed.

methodological choices made in this thesis are highly a product of both my academic training through my years of studying at RUC and more presently the advice and suggestions of my supervisors. If other theories or methodological approaches had been used, the result would have been different. With the above examples, some of the aspects of my research subjectivity have been reflected upon, providing an understanding of its final results.

CHAPTER 3

Understanding Culture and Learning

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I am interested in developing a conceptual framework for understanding the connection between student's social and cultural background and their way of participating in intercultural learning environments. My central concern is to present a conceptual understanding of 1) how the participation in education relates to students' social and cultural background mediated through specific educational strategies, and 2) how institutional structures in international higher education sets up barriers and possibilities for different forms of student participation and thereby also of learning.

Below I will conceptualize my field of research through Bourdieu's socio-analytical framework. Of Bourdieu's ideas, I am strongly inspired by his persistence on the dialectic relationship between social structures and subjectivity, presented here through the notion of habitus. Secondly I am inspired by his notion of struggle between agents in a field over material and symbolic goods (connecting the concepts of field and capital). While I have found Bourdieu's concepts useful, their general characteristics and wide applicability, appraised by some (i.e. Reay 2004) and detested by others (i.e. Sullivan 2002), implored me to operationalize them further by drawing on Hodkinson et al.'s (2008) development of a theory of learning culturally.

A central argument for my application of a Bourdieusian framework is that I can apply it while still remaining true to the field. According to Bourdieu himself, his "concepts have no definition other than systemic ones, and are designed to be put to work empirically in systematic fashion" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96). So by being true to the field I mean that rather than adding a layer on top of the empirical data, such as a grand theory or any a-priori theoretical explanations, I use Bourdieu's concepts as investigative tools, which open up a deeper understanding of social dynamics in the field (Swartz 2013, 19f).

3.1.1. *Field Analysis from Below*

While Bourdieu-inspired research often entails a comprehensive analysis of the historical transformation of a field in question, in this thesis I emphasize Bourdieu's inspiration from the interactionists⁸. I apply Bourdieu's concepts as a means for investigating according to what cultural logics the interactions between students in an international higher education setting are structured. In doing so, I write up the structure of the field 'from below,' by mapping out the different positions of the students. Bourdieu's central critique against the interactionists was that they ignored the past experiences and wider historical context embodied in social agents (the habitus), which presupposes every social interaction. Bourdieu writes:

... the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered). That is what is ignored by the interactionist perspective, which treats interaction as a closed world, forgetting that what happens between two persons [...] derives its particular form from the objective relation between the corresponding languages or usages, that is, between the groups who speak those languages. (Bourdieu 1991, 67)

Accordingly, in this thesis, I am not interested in the students as individual subjects, but rather as agents representing certain positions in the field. In this way, their habitus reveals how the structure of the field have been internalized in different ways, and thus helps shed light on the structure of the field itself (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 104f). I will return to a more detailed definition of field and its relevance to my thesis after having presented my understanding of the students' cultures of learning.

3.2. Cultures of Learning and Educational Choices

Some initial questions guiding my construction of the field of research was; 1) who are the students at transnational university programs, 2) what has led them to chose to do their master's degree at SDC, and 3) how are the student's cultural background affecting their experiences of learning. In order to answer such questions, I needed some analytical tools to construct a notion of culture and an understanding of how this related to students' choices and experiences. Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework, I found that these issues could be approached through the concepts interest, capital, trajectory and

⁸ This includes research approaches such as ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism, represented by researchers such as Herbert Blumer, Aaron C. Cicourel, Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman (Swartz 1997, 97)

not least habitus. I will present my understanding of these concepts and their relation to my field of research here.

3.2.1. *Cultures of Learning: Habitus and Trajectory*

... one must analyse the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 105)

Habitus lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theory of practice. As a scientific conceptualization one can speak of the habitus of an individual when referring to that person's embodiment of lived experience. In the context of this thesis it is a useful concept because it foregrounds the fact that the subjectivity of students are shaped by their individual and social history. It also serves to understand that the students partake in the educational practice carrying the social and economic conditions of their past and present in their bodies.

The habitus of the students are intrinsically related to their trajectories, a concept which refers to an agent's travels through social spaces throughout their life (Munk 2003, 9). Studying the habitus involves an inquiry into the positions previously occupied in by the students. This is important, because it is not only the students' positions in the field in question that influence their way of behaving, but also "the relationship between initial capital and present capital" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 103). Therefore, the habitus is closely linked to where the students were born and to whom, because the students' lives up until now and their imaginaries of future possibilities are closely linked to their families' positions – socially, economically and culturally - in a specific society (Bourdieu 2010, 104). For my analysis the cultural background and previous educational experience will be of central importance in mapping some sort of collective trajectory for respectively international and Chinese students in transnational university collaborations. This distinction is based on the obvious differences in Western and Chinese cultures, which are so often emphasized in educational and sociological studies, and which specifically points to differences in histories of teaching and learning (Salling Olesen 2011).

The notion of habitus comprises my conceptualization of culture – as a unique individual imprint of one's life circumstances. It includes both the collective aspect (the social and economic conditions), and the individual aspect (a person's specific trajectory).

In this thesis I will not try to define the concept of culture further, nor try to presuppose a notion of either Danish or Chinese culture. Rather I will let my analysis of the habitus of students define their specific culture, comprised both as a collective and more individual social consciousness.

Inspired by Hodkinson et al., I understand cultures of learning as the embodiment of different cultural dispositions of learning, related to the learners' social trajectories (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 15). From Bourdieu we learn that our position in social space guides our way of experiencing this space (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133). In a learning context this means that how and what we learn depend on our habitus, tacitly affecting our view of the world we live in. Hodkinson et al. writes as follows:

These largely tacit dispositions orientate people in relation to anything they do in life, including learning. Consequently, a person's dispositions can enable or facilitate some forms of learning, whilst inhibiting or preventing others. (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 14)

This means, that to understand what kind of learning is happening in a given situation, intentional or unintentional, one has to understand the learner as a social subject, encompassing that person's accumulated life experience, trajectory and everything that person is and does outside of a given learning situation (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 14).

3.2.2. Educational Choices: Interest and Strategy

In Bourdieu's framework, interest and strategy are central concepts for understanding the reasons for different ways of participating in social practices. Bourdieu states that the actions of social agents are determined "only to the extent that they determine themselves" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 136). Individuals have the power to determine what they want to do in any given situation. However, their choice most often reflects their habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 131). Scholars in educational research have used this to understand within what constrains university students make their educational choices (Thomsen 2008; Sheng 2014; Reay, David, and Ball 2005). These constraints include students' reasonable objective expectations related to their social position. As such, students make educational choices on the basis of collective and individual social experiences (often class-based in Bourdieu's studies), which determine not only what feels realistic, but also what feels desirable for the individual. Habitus is

also a determinant of interest in the sense that students partake in the educational practice differently on the basis of their trajectory and amounts of employable resources accumulated through this – what they can realistically hope to achieve depends on their position in the field. Still, even though their strategy often reflects what they can realistically expect to achieve, success is not given, because of the scarcity of available resources (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 117). As Swartz puts it, the notion of strategy “is associated with the ‘maximizing of material and symbolic profit.’”⁹ Action as strategy conveys the idea that individual practices are fundamentally interested, that actors attempt to derive advantages from situations” (Swartz 1997, 67).

3.2.3. *Education and Social Mobility: Capital Conversions*

Social advantages come from the possession and successful conversion of capital. These resources can be identified as different forms of capital, such as economic, cultural and social capital. Economic capital is simply money or currency, cultural capital is informational capital and can be embodied (relating to behaviour), objectified (relating to the possession of things), and institutionalized (relating to the belonging to certain institutions). Finally, social capital is obtained through a person’s mutual acquaintance with and recognition in different institutionalized social networks (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119). When either of these forms of capital are recognized as legitimate within a certain social space they become symbolic, and can be used to assert one’s relational position to others (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119). Bourdieu also describes this as the ‘weight’ of the capital, which varies depending on the specific field (Bourdieu 1989, 17).

A very prominent form of symbolic capital in modern society is educational capital. Educational capital is symbolic in the sense that the value of, for instance, a certain master’s degree, depends on the legitimization of the educational institution, granted in the first instance by the state, and secondly through struggles between different fields of power, such as the labour market and elite fractions of society (Bourdieu 1996). Getting a degree from the right university today gives advantages when entering the labour market, and thus in life in general. However, the overall massification of higher education today has made it a central site of struggle (Munk 2003, 7f). Because of its scarcity, getting a prestigious degree often requires the successful conversion of large amounts of capital, either economic (paying high tuition fees), cultural (the right entry qualifications), or

⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press

social (i.e. knowing people in the university boards), and often a combination of all the forms of capital.

Drawing on the above conceptualizations of capital conversions and educational strategies, the central concern of the first half of my analysis is to understand what different forms of capital the students at SDC have been able to accumulate and convert allowing them to enter their current positions. This is directly related to the students' trajectories, because their volume and composition of capital and its changes over time are "manifested by past and potential trajectory in social space" (Bourdieu 2010, 108). This says something about what kind of higher education choice SDC is, and consequently, how this choice stands in relation to the competition for favourable social positions through academic accreditation and institutional affiliation. One of my most present points of interest in this regard is whether and how these strategies take on different forms in the trajectories of respectively the international and the Chinese students.

3.3. Learning Cultures and Intercultural Interactions

A second range of initial question guiding my construction of the field was; 1) how are cross-cultural student interaction played out within and outside the learning activities at SDC, 2) how is the institutional setup at SDC structuring the student's participation in the learning activities, and 3) how are social and historical developments of transnational higher education visible in the structure of SDC. Through Bourdieu's concepts of field, doxa, symbolic violence, and misrecognition, I wish to present my conceptual understanding of the above-mentioned issues.

3.3.1. *Learning Cultures: Field and Doxa*

Hodkinson et al. (2008) takes Bourdieu notion of field to support their theory about learning cultures. Field is a useful concept for studying the dynamics and structure of social spaces such as institutions and learning situations. A fields' specific structure is constituted by the objective relations between the different positions agents take within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99). These relations are made up on account of agents' different endowment of capital. The concept of field is thus essential to Bourdieu's theory, and it is an equally important concept in my thesis. Studying the life trajectories and habitus of the students at SDC will contribute to making a theory about

the structure of the field, in the sense of knowing what dispositions the agents in the field possess.

Fields are different from one another on the basis of what forms of capitals are recognized within them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). However, all fields are structured on the basis of the same social dynamics. This includes, 1) that there are agents who occupy both dominant and dominated positions, 2) on-going power struggles between agents over material and symbolic good, and 3) the existence of certain mechanisms that serve to reproduce the social order (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 105f). The struggles are imposed on the agents through the *doxa* of the field (Swartz 1997, 125), and are only possible because of the agents' *illusio*; their belief that the competition is worth partaking in, with regard to the potential outcome (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 116f). The concept of *doxa* in this sense denotes that the agents agree on the "definition of rewards and of ways of obtaining them" (Swartz 1997, 126). The *doxa* of a field is not deliberately accepted and agreed upon. Rather, as the concept *illusio* suggests, it works tacitly, as an illusion, often concealed from the agents under its influence (Swartz 1997, 125). To those fully invested in the field, the *doxa* of that field will be embodied in them as their *habitus*, structuring their perception of the world and the logic of their actions. To them nothing is more natural and 'real' than the logic of the field:

.... when the embodied structures and the objective structures are in agreement, when perception is constructed according to the structures of what is perceived, everything seems obvious and goes without saying. (Bourdieu 1998, 81)

Bourdieu also calls this the deepest belief of all, because it entails that one does not consider it to be a belief (Bourdieu 1998, 81). However, for the convergence between the objective and embodied structures to occur, individuals and groups go through an acculturation, the specifics of which define the struggles going on in a field (Robbins 2003, 72).

From Bourdieu we understand, that all fields are affected by a number of other fields that overlap and intersect in the field in question (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 100f). The same is the case for the learning culture within these fields. In the case of higher education one can refer to a general learning culture institutionalized as global and national conventions for making higher education, but more locally based practices and traditions also affect the learning culture. The field in question is also structured according to the field of power, which in the case of higher education can relate to

political decision-making, economic rationales and the labour market in question (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 10f). I have included these aspects in my analysis by drawing on literature regarding the historical transformations and the current landscape of the field of global higher education (most prominently through Marginson 2008; Brooks and Waters 2011; He 2015; Yang, Vidovich, and Currie 2007). Conceptualizing learning cultures is not an aim to completely define a specific learning culture, and explain why some agents learn successfully, while others do not. Rather, as Hodkinson et al. writes “...there is a complex interaction between position, habitus and the learning culture, so that the field of force influences the process of learning in complex and changing ways” (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 15).

3.3.2. Intercultural Interactions: Symbolic Violence and Misrecognition

Resting upon the above conceptual definitions of fields as learning cultures, my specific interest is the structure and the doxa of the learning culture at SDC. Since the student body at SDC is comprised of students from very different cultures, it is plausible that the struggles acted out between students are especially volatile. According to Bourdieu, struggles in fields vary in intensity based on its historic origins and acquired legitimacy (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 102). Hence, the fact that SDC is a relatively new institutional setup and that it is founded and run collaboratively by two historically and geographically independent cultural systems, makes it a distinctively interesting site for investigating the nature of cultural struggles. Through the concepts of symbolic violence and misrecognition I will elaborate on the dynamics of cultural struggles.

Struggle is synonymous with history in the sense that all of our institutions and cultural practices have their own history of struggles between different interests, which have resulted in them having their current form (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 102). The outcome of the struggles is reproduced through the doxa of a field, which fosters a self-evidence that masks the fact that those dominating a field also act on the basis of their own specific interests. In this sense, doxa has an ideological function, because it naturalizes the actual arbitrariness of current structures of fields, and thus contributes to the legitimization of social division (Süsiäinen 2008, 14ff). The social order is arbitrary, because it favours those social groups that end up with the most symbolic capital (Houtsonen and Antikainen 2008, 3). Groups or individuals with less symbolic capital will be the dominated. However, even those in less favourable positions are implored to tacitly accept their disadvantageous conditions. According to Bourdieu a specific social

dynamic of modern society is that domination is no longer coercive, but rather self-enforced (James 2015, 110). Bourdieu writes:

All symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity, which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values. [...] The distinctiveness of symbolic domination lies precisely in the fact that it assumes, of those who submit to it, an attitude, which challenge the usual dichotomy of freedom and constraint. (Bourdieu 1991, 50f)

The consequences of the symbolic domination of socially or culturally disadvantaged groups can be conceptualized as symbolic violence. The educational system in modern societies offers an example of this. Bourdieu have highlighted how, in the case of France, the school system works as a sorting mechanism, reproducing unequal class structures because the symbolic order favours middle and upper class habitus and the capital accompanied by it (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In a common sense understanding children's successes and failures in school are most often justified with reference to their cognitive ability. In conceptual terms, this common sense understanding of school achievements is a misrecognition of the actual social structures preventing working class children from having educational success. What's more, those in unfavourable positions, in this case the working class families, usually accept this common sense belief, not seeing the constraints they thereby submit themselves to. The term misrecognition thus refers to when the fundamental ordering principles of fields, the doxa, is not recognized by the agents. This serves to explain why people feel powerless and hopeless being caught in socially disadvantaged positions (James 2015, 110).

For Bourdieu, the central aim of socio-analysis is to call attention to the misrecognized social structures by revealing with what interests agents act through fields. Even though his writing often didn't suggest practical or political solutions to such social injustice, his research program was meant to raise awareness about the structures so that they could be challenged (Swartz 1997, 9f).

In this thesis, I am specifically interested in analysing with what interests the students are partaking in the educational practice. By making these forms of inquiries to the empirical material, my aim is to uncover the misrecognized social orders and the categories of perception and appreciation relating to academic and social environment at SDC (Bourdieu 1989, 20). The conditions for the relations of culture and power in intercultural settings are with no doubt different from traditional socio-analytical studies of social differentiation and struggles within societies (Houtsonen and Antikainen 2008,

1). As such, I am specifically interested in how the processes of globalization and the internationalization of higher education affect intercultural student environments. In studying perceptions of differences and cultural self-representations in an intercultural learning setting, I aim to reveal what cultural and academic hierarchies are established and thus what the ideological implications of the structure of the field is. Social orders can be studied through interactions and the statements of agents in a field because, as Bourdieu writes:

“The value of utterances depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers’ linguistic competencies, [...] it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products. (Bourdieu 1991, 67)

Thus, noticing how the students present themselves, and not least present the other students, will allow me to construct the field and its inherent cultural and academic logics structuring it.

3.4. Analytical Strategy

With the above definition of the concept through which I intend to construct my field of research, here I will more specifically draw up a disposition for the following analytical chapters. The division of the analysis in two separate chapters, reflect the duality of my research question, relating to respectively, 1) the students’ cultural background (*habitus*), and 2) SDC’s institutional setup (*field*). While each analytical chapter contributes with independent analytical findings, in the second chapter I draw on findings from the first chapter to see how the cultural backgrounds of the students structure their participation in the institutional setup.

The first analytical chapter traces the trajectories of the students and analyses their educational strategies by looking at the social positions they are pursuing by coming to SDC. This kind of analysis gives an understanding what future potentials they believe a transnational university program provides them with. These potentials are related to the students’ perceptions of their chances of either maintaining their social position (handed down from their family) or of social mobility through getting a specific university degree. Strategies of social mobility are connected to the trajectories of social agents in the sense that agents invest themselves in different fields, or differently in the same field, on the basis of their available dispositions (*capital*). Thus, students often chose their educational

programs on the basis of what they believe will lead to the best output of different forms of capital, which can later be utilized to live the life they prefer.

The findings in the first analytical chapter will form the basis of the second analytical chapter, which analyses the institutional setup, or learning culture, at SDC. In this I am interested in how the students partake in the academic and social environment at SDC. In the light of the result from the first part of the analysis I look into how the students way of partaking in the cultural practice is related to their social and cultural background. In an theoretical perspective agents' way of participating in a cultural practice can be understood partly as a struggle for dominating positions in the field. The learning culture at SDC isn't just affected by the internal struggles for dominating positions and recognition, but these struggles often reflect more general cultural clashes and oppositions, going on at many levels of the social.

CHAPTER 4

Trajectories and Educational Strategies

4.1. Introduction

The following provides an in-depth analysis of four different student trajectories. In this I am interested in understanding with what interests and orientations the students are partaking in the educational practice at SDC. Their attitude towards studying can also be conceptualized as their culture of learning (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008), which relates to their embodied patterns of behaviour, their perceptions of the world and their own place within it, theoretically inspired by Bourdieu's notion of habitus. The learning cultures of the students are inductively brought forth through an analysis of the interrelation between their family background, educational choices and experiences, and their career expectations. In order to embrace the cross-cultural perspective that permeates this thesis and to equally represent the two different cultural perspectives, I have included two Danish students and two Chinese students in the analysis. I find that the four informants are exemplary of four common learning cultures, each embodied by more than just this one student at SDC, but I'm well aware that there might be other types with their own distinctive features. The titles of the strategies do not reflect theoretical arch-types, but are conceptual typologies developed using the empirical data.

4.2. Julia: Staying in the Game

For the interview, Julia suggested I come by her dorm room. We sat by her desk under a bed loft, and during our interview Julia frequently looked up English words on her computer to formulate her answers to my questions. Several times it was very difficult for her to understand my questions and I had to repeat and rephrase them.

4.2.1. *Upbringing: Like Fighting a War*

Julia grew up in a rural area about 1000 kilometres from Beijing. Julia's father was a factory worker, and her mother a stay-at-home mom. Today they are both retired and live with Julia's brother, his wife and their children. Julia's brother now supports the family by working as a mechanic at a local factory. With such background, an academic

trajectory doesn't seem to have been in the cards for Julia. However, through her years in a strict but supportive high school, Julia's got a chance to prove herself academically without being held back by her social origin, she says:

I like the strict management and that school ... all students is studying and the teacher is very lovely. They will tell you how to study, and how to live your life. And how to do your self actions. And the teacher is very.... You know, sometimes a teacher looks at you and say "ah, your family [pretends to speak like the teacher], your father has that job, has many...", so they will be lovely to you. But another student is bad or poor performance they will, "ah, no no no". But in my high school, the teacher is "ah, all is my children, all my children, I will do something just for you better". So I like the high school. (Julia, Chinese female student, interview excerpt)

The parental guidance from her teachers, acting as a substitution of her own parents, has helped her enter the academic field. According to Xiaoming Sheng (2014), who has studied higher education choice and social stratification in the Chinese society, students from working class families rely much more on the guidance of their teachers and classmates than on their family when making educational choices. Sheng (2014) argues that "many of the working class parents were dependent on judgement of their children or the suggestions of their children's teachers" (Sheng 2014, 65). In this sense, being able to pursue a higher education degree, despite her parents' lack of economic and superior cultural capital to support her, can be attributed to Julia's institutional habitus (Sheng 2014, 140) acquired through the discipline and educational guidance she received in her high school.

Coming from a non-academic background, Julia has had to work extra hard to get the educational results that enabled her to enter a university program. This is illustrated in the interview excerpt below:

Alexander: I thought about this; you said the Chinese universities, or in the school system there is a lot of pressure. What is this like? Can you explain more?

Julia: If you want to get an undergraduate or a master it's very difficult. It's just like a war. Everyday in the high school you get up early. In the last year with the exam for the master I got up every morning at five o'clock and I studied until the night at maybe eleven o'clock. All day. After the lunch, after the breakfast... It's very hard. Because we read too much our eyes get... [looks up word], bad sight, glasses, because we study too hard. And I don't have time to do other things [...].

Julia's statement is a testimony to the full investment she has made in the field of education. Saying that 'you don't have anything' if you don't get a degree shows that for

Julia, getting into a higher education program is perceived as a life or death situation. Julia compares the competition for entering higher education to a situation of war – a war Julia has chosen to join, and her perception of which have structured her way of participating in it. That Julia has had to work extra hard to achieve academic success because of her social background is supported by Sheng (2014) who writes that “individual rural students have to strive for high test scores in the competitive entrance examinations in order to have the opportunity to be at the same starting point as those students from urban areas” (Sheng 2014, 16). In this sense, working class children, such as Julia, lack the appropriate cultural capital to excel in the field of education, and thus have to work harder to accomplish results equal to those with more cultural capital.

For Julia, the ‘war’ is not just a part of competing for good test scores to get into a good university. She also perceives it as the state of the Chinese society, in which there are ‘too many people’ fighting for the resources available. The way Julia pictures the educational field as a ‘battle ground’ for advancing one’s social position echoes a general perception of education in China. Achieving a good academic degree is one of the most recognized ways to advance your social position in China today (Sheng 2014, 15). This is reflected in an extreme rise in the rate of entry into institutions of higher education during the last 35 years, from 1.5 to 17.7 percentages. According to Sheng, this rapid increase can be seen as the outcome of political reforms on higher education expansion (Sheng 2014, 12), but it also reflects the consequences of the transition of Chinese society from a static communistic society to a more socially differentiated socialist market society (Bian 2002).

4.2.2. Educational Choices: A Complex Person

After finishing high school Julia entered an undergraduate program in robotics. Considering her father’s and her brother’s occupation in machine repair, it makes some sense that Julia would pursue an academic career in a similar technical field. Accordingly, Sheng (2014) argues that working class families perceive technical degrees or vocational training to be more safe investments, and implore their children to pursue such. This is often ascribed to the families’ limited knowledge of and experience with the higher education system, which fosters a scepticism towards what a more general university degree might lead to in terms of occupation (Sheng 2014, 65f). However, as it was pointed out earlier, Julia seemed to have relied heavily on the guidance of her high school teachers. In this regard, Sheng writes that teachers’ suggestions usually take the economic

situation of the student into consideration. Hence working class children are implored to apply for less prestigious (and cheaper) programs and universities in order to avoid the disappointment of not being able to pay the tuition fee, if full scholarship would not be granted (Sheng 2014, 137f). These conflicting influences might have led Julia to choose robotics as a pragmatic choice, adhering to both her family and the suggestions of her high school teachers.

Julia's weak appropriate cultural capital has made her time in the higher education system turbulent. After not being satisfied with her undergraduate program, because she thought it was 'too difficult for her,' Julia decided to do her master's program in social science at SDC. Such educational shift indicates that Julia had to reconsider her educational strategy, realizing that she was not going to become a successful robotics engineer. In the light of her social background, Julia's struggles in higher education can be regarded as an expression of the barriers inherent in higher education culture, which differs distinctively from Julia's high school experience. Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) has discussed the inherent cultures and hierarchies that structure higher education. Such 'hidden curriculum' subtly classifies and stratifies students on the basis of their social background by augmenting or limiting their chances of academic success. Julia's success in high school can be attributed to the balance between the strict management and Julia's domestic-like relationship with the teachers. According to Reay et al. (2005) Such institutional logics contribute to the chances of working class children having a positive school experience. However, Julia does not possess the cultural capital necessary to get on in the academic field on the same conditions as students from middle and higher class families (Bourdieu 1999, 411f; Sheng 2014, 65). This conclusion might explain why Julia decided to change her educational strategy, and instead of pursuing technical skills or academic contemplation chose to apply for an international program where intercultural skills, such as learning English, have become a distinctive focus for her:

Alexander: Was UCAS your first priority when you had to apply for a master's program.

Julia: Yes. Only UCAS. Because they have SDC. I like this program, I think it is a chance for me to communicate with others and have a chance to go to Denmark to study, and I want to apply for the internship in Denmark. I have friend who is a student and is now in Denmark at the Confucius Institute in Denmark for an internship. So I want to do an internship in Denmark. And I think my parents will support me [...]. I think it's very good for my career and I want to improve my English skill so I come here.

Through her reorientation, Julia hopes to improve her chances of professional success later in life and assumes that an international orientation holds more promises for her than the path she was previously on. Sheng has argued that primarily families with strong economic capital are able to offer their children international career opportunities by sending them to selective universities abroad (Sheng 2014, 117). Historically, such international study opportunities was confined to the political and academic elite in the Chinese society (Bieler 2004). However, changes in Chinese educational policy since 1995 have opened up for foreign universities to set up shop in China (He 2015), which, much like SDC, allows Chinese students of less resourceful families to enter international educational trajectories. Moreover, Gou (2016) finds that improving the English proficiency of the Chinese population is not only politically proclaimed as a way to sustain China's economic development through global trade and scientific exchange, it is also considered a way to achieve social mobility for the individual (Y. Guo 2016, 119). By pursuing the international orientation, Julia aims to reposition herself according to this dominating logic of the benefits of intercultural competencies.

Julia's choice of master's program is also based on her perception of how she can come to live a 'beautiful life.' For her, a beautiful life is being able to speak English, travel to Denmark for an internship and meeting a foreign man with whom she can have a baby. This concept of the 'beautiful life' stands in contrast to the social 'war' that for Julia characterizes the Chinese society – a war that she might be losing. This idea of a beautiful life can be seen as a romantic dream or cultural imagination (Appadurai 1996), guiding Julia's social desires and reconversion strategies.

However, during the interview with Julia, I got some different and opposing statements regarding her career expectations and future dreams. When I first asked her about what kind of job she would be interested in, she said the following:

Alexander: If you stay in China, what kind of job do you want to do?

Julia: I want to work in the government or in a public department. I want to change the state of the China now. I want to change the education about the children, I think that education should be the same as the international system. China is too behind of the international standards so I want to change it. But now, in the nearby future I want to go to other countries to study and to study their culture and education then come back to change it here.

While Julia previously seemed to be having a dream of living a beautiful life in another country, she also expresses a desire to change to Chinese educational system after having

experienced the international style of education and society. These career ambitions reflect the specific characteristics of the international social science program she is in, and they can be seen as her attempt to internalize her immediate position in the educational system. However, a job in the Chinese public administration, which Julia discusses, is not easily attainable. Civil servant jobs are highly regarded in the Chinese society and often receive up to 10.000 applications. It requires a considerable social network (such as party affiliation), a spotless educational record (Bian 2002, 106), as well as a top performance in a special civil servant's examination to even be considered a candidate for such a job. In this light, Julia's career expectations seem inconsistent with her realistic expectations, and these expectations seem more like a dream for her. Later in the interview, Julia suddenly strays from her initial answers:

Alexander: Why do you want to go to other countries?

Julia: I think that I'm a complex person. I want to visit others, I want to visit there, but sometimes I want to just stay in my room or just stay in a mountain, in the nature. In China I always meet some Chinese people, but I want to go to the other of China to meet foreigners to realize their other ideas and their lifestyle. And especially I want to teach other foreign children to introduce some Chinese culture. I want to play with other different children. I want to become a teacher to teach some children. I want to have many children in my home and I'm cooking for them everyday. I want to set up an orphanage for children.

In the previous quote, Julia was keen on travelling the world and bringing back knowledge that could improve the Chinese society. However, in the quote above she talks about giving up everything hiding away in her room, or retreating into the nature in isolation. Her future disorientation suggests hopelessness and doubt within her, which prevents her from making a realistic plan for the future and sticking to it. Julia's ambivalent experiences with the higher education system; her failure at succeeding in her bachelor studies and her current struggles in the international academic field, leads her to assess a complete different future strategy more reminiscent of her familial habitus. After talking of isolating herself she shares another dream, which involves opening an orphanage to take care of children. This seems like a simpler dream for her that would not require her to compete for prestigious jobs in the Chinese public sector. Her future orientation, which now points in many different directions without a logical coherence, can be seen as the result of a habitus divided against itself (Bourdieu 1999, 511), split

between her family background, her semi-successful educational trajectory and the new international field that will potentially bring her further away from her social origin.

Julia works very hard to fit in and follow the rules of the social spaces she goes through. Julia ‘joined the war’ and invested herself in the educational system to advance her social position. In this sense, she owes her social mobility to this system, which she now experiences is leaving her in a relatively disadvantaged position, without a certain sense of place in the field. Julia’s experiences seem to reflect a trend relating to overall devaluation of a higher education degree. As the rate of the world’s population with a higher education has increased two-hundredfold through the previous decade (Meyer and Schofer 2005, 989), a university degree today is no longer a guarantee for high prestigious professional employment. In a Chinese context, these developments have also taken place, and the employment conditions for many graduates are way below their educational level, a World Economic Forum article presents (Stapleton 2017). Bourdieu and his colleagues have pointed to how the massification and broader availability of higher education leads to increased social differentiation through competition and hierarchization within and between educational institutions (Bourdieu 1999, 421ff). Even though Julia can be considered successful for her academic advancements, her success is only relative and her future seems uncertain to her. She is in a risky position of becoming one of the ‘outcasts on the inside’ (Bourdieu 1999, 421). Hence, Julia is hoping that by getting an international master’s degree from SDC, she might be able to break out of her inferior social position and *stay in the game* by getting valuable intercultural skills, which she can apply, on a Chinese-international labour market.

4.3. Weici: Exploring Possibilities

During our interview, Weici she was very talkative and noticeably fluent in English compared to most other Chinese students I met during my fieldwork.

4.3.1. *Upbringing: Freedom and Control*

Weici’s educational choices seem to have been strongly influenced by her parents. Her parents have actively made decisions for her according to what they thought was best for her, both personally and academically. However, Weici has tried to prove her independency to them throughout her youth. Below is an abridged excerpt in which Weici speaks about her upbringing and her educational choices:

I came to Beijing four months ago, before that I was always living in my hometown with my parents. [...] My parents came to Beijing to visit because they feel excited when I entered the university at UCAS. So they come here and made sure I was okay here, and they also visited Beijing including the great wall and everything. [...] I have a brother but he didn't come because he has work. He works in a bank about investment. He studied finance in the same university I went to for my bachelor and then he went to the bank. [...] In my bachelor's degree I want to go university in the south of China, but they [her parents] are afraid that I'm too young so they don't allow me to go. Then I said okay I can accept, but when I'm in the master's degree I can go. [...] You know, in my bachelor's degree I travelled to over 15 cities in China by my self. So then they accepted that I will study in Beijing for my master's degree. I go there by my self and each time when I arrived in a city I will call them. [...] If I told them before they would worry about everything. But once I went there they can't change anything. Then I can handle by myself. (Weici, Chinese female student, interview excerpt)

Even though Weici has had to make compromises to adhere to her parents' wishes, she has benefitted from her family background compared to Julia. In contrast to working class families, middle-class parents take a much more active interest in the educational choices of their children and have ditto high expectations of them (Sheng 2014, 125f). Such support and expectation often results in middle-class children having more educational success than their working-class peers. Furthermore, contrary to Julia, Weici is not the first in her family to enter an academic trajectory - she follows the footsteps of her brother who studied finance at Weici's undergraduate university. Her brother's familiarity with the university system might also have contributed to Weici's good results in the educational system.

Despite adhering to her parents' instructions of staying in their province for her bachelor's program, Weici expresses that for a long time she has had an urge to 'see different places.' During her bachelor's program she defies her parents' protectiveness and goes on several trips to different Chinese provinces and cities without asking permission. The trips seem to have provided her with some experiences of being able to take care of herself - experiences which are very relevant in the context of her new international program, since travelling abroad has become a very likely future scenario for her. Moreover, Weici's emphasis on her travel experiences and independence from her parents can be seen as a way for her to seek social recognition because such experiences have symbolic value at an internationalized field such as SDC. Even though Weici does not have anywhere near the same travel experience as her international classmates, her travel-story is a way for her to position herself according to international social standards where your social position, and personal legitimacy, is in part based on things such as travel experiences and level of independency (at least among young

international academics). Weici does not want to be mistaken for a traditional Chinese girl, dependant on the protection of her family. Thus, it seems her story of wanderlust and the fight for personal freedom against the backdrop of a traditional Chinese communitarian culture was part of her strategy of harvesting social recognition on the basis of the symbolic order dominating the field at SDC.

In the analysis of Julia's educational strategy, I put considerable emphasis on the Chinese culture of performance that Julia had struggled with, and was still struggling with in the higher education program. Weici also acknowledges the Chinese culture of performance, but she distances herself from it:

Alexander: Okay, what do you think are the biggest differences between you and the international students?

Weici: Our way to live the life. Because you know, I think internationals they really work hard in the day, but in the night, after maybe 6 pm, it's their own time. They enjoy everything they like and they do everything that they like to do. But in China you will have work during the day, but you will try to be more working in night to stress what you have learned during the day. So they are really under great pressure. And they loose their ability to enjoy life. [...] I'm free, I think. Compared with many Chinese people. It's very fortunate; it's very lucky that I'm really free. I don't have any pressure from my family, so it's okay. I can do anything. I think that many of my friends they prefer to stay in China, they will marry a husband and then they will get a baby, but I never think about that. I will worry about it, but I want to do something that I really like to do. Especially when I have some connection with my international friends. I think they are really friendly, they are really nice and I think there are so many things that I never experienced. So I want to have a try...

By using the third person pronoun 'they' Weici distances herself from the common Chinese work ethic and seems to refer to 'all the other Chinese.' It is quite possible that Weici has had to put in a great effort through her school life to be able to enter an academic trajectory. However, it is not something she chooses to identify with. This disassociation with the common Chinese work mentality reveals Weici's relaxed attitude towards her educational achievement. Hence, Weici is invested in the educational system on distinctively different terms than Julia, for whom it was a matter of life and death. For Weici, it is important to be able to enjoy life like the international students are doing, and it seems her social position allows her to do so. Weici's educational strategy might have looked different if her brother had not had a successful job in banking, which makes him the future primary caretaker of the family. Her obligations towards her family, as part of the strong communitarian tradition in China, can be cast aside in order for her to embrace a greater individual freedom. Weici uses her freedom to explore different career

opportunities and lifestyles that are strongly inspired by the international environment she has ended up in, which becomes evident below.

4.3.2. *Educational Choices: Feeling Lucky*

Weici tells me that she was one of the best students in her bachelor's program. However, in the master's degree entry test she did not do well enough in math to get accepted into her top priority university. The social science program at SDC was thus Weici's second choice for a master's program. Despite this disappointment, Weici is content with her current situation, and considers herself lucky for 'discovering' SDC:

Alexander: ... the reason you thought that SDC was a good place, was it because of UCAS?

Weici: No, I'm not sure but actually when I choose that to be one of my choices for my master's degree I think that it is UCAS, because I have less knowledge about SDC, but when they give me the message that you can have interview here I searched on the internet, even though the information is very very nice, it's really good, and I found a person who already studied in SDC and he give me some information and I think, wow, it's a big surprise, so it's really nice and I'm really lucky, I'm always very lucky, from my childhood and teenager, I'm always very lucky.

UCAS was a pragmatic choice for her, as it was the best possible 'available' institution that could also match her academic background. Weici learned about the international character of the program after being called for an interview. But rather than keeping her from pursuing admission into the program, the international aspect of the program seemed to have encouraged her interest. Considering the high educational expectations that Chinese middle class parents have of their children (Sheng 2014, 55), it is easy to imagine that it was a disappointment for Weici and her family that she was not able to enter her first priority master's program. However, Weici never mentions being disappointed to me and she is not explicit about how her new circumstances might have changed her educational strategy. The way Weici embraces this international orientation, despite the fact that her educational trajectory does not assume this perspective, shows her very open attitude towards her educational opportunities and also her ability to adjust to her new circumstances on behalf of her good English skills. As mentioned in Julia's strategy, having an international educational profile can be a possible advantage in the Chinese labour market. Particularly the advantage of being able to speak English, which

can be seen as one of the reasons that Weici is content with her situation despite not being able to pursue her first priority master's program.

I found Weici's plans and career expectations to be positively attuned to her newfound international position, which I find an interesting fact, since SDC was essentially her second choice.

Alexander: You want to live abroad as well?

Weici: Yes, because my brother will take care of the family instead of me, so it's okay for me to do everything I want. Maybe in China or maybe in Europe, I'm not sure. Or maybe in Australia... I'm not sure. That depends on how can I do about my job and how can I do about my academic. [...] I have some companies that I want to work for. Like Siemens and like... And also maybe I think it's a good choice to work in the university as a teacher. I think that's the two choices that I want to do most. One: work for international company, and the other: to work for the university. I will try my best to finish one of them, ... it depends on how I will be in two years. If I'm good at academic I will try and be a teacher, and if I'm good at internship then I will try to go to the international company.

Her entrance into the international academic field at SDC has opened a lot of new possibilities for Weici that are not constituted in her social background or previous educational trajectory. However, Weici is positively attuned to the possibilities the international degree offer her. She expresses more than one desired future, and she is pragmatic and realistic about which future outcomes and opportunities that will lead her to each one. Firstly, in the most recent future she wishes to travel outside of China for her internship. Then, if her internship goes well, she will aim for a career in an international company. If her internship does not go well, she will pursue an academic career which entails conducting a big research project in the final and third year of her master's and then pursuing a Ph.D. afterwards. Both Weici's desired futures are firmly rooted in her current positions reflecting the logic of the international master's program. Being at peace with the realistic expectation of her future shows the adjustment between her habitus and the dominating logic of the field. Hence, she has found her 'place' as a Chinese girl in an international environment. Her educational strategy now aims for becoming more and more like her international friends.

To sum up, Weici's educational strategy is characterized by an openness to the opportunities presented to her, without any concern for not being able to secure a good future. She seems ready to embrace career opportunities in the outside world or in international companies in China, and if not she will 'settle' for an academic career in

China or a Ph.D. program abroad. Because of her family circumstances, particularly her brother being able to support their parents' retirement, Weici can afford to be socially open and culturally experimenting. She accepts the possibilities that are offered to her, and she has the social and cultural capital to thrive in an international academic field.

4.4. Chinese Cultures of Learning

Through the above analysis of the trajectories and educational choices of two different Chinese students, some important differences in their cultures of learning were found. I found these differences to be based on the resources passed on to them from their social background and accumulated through their trajectories, which has structured their general perception of their educational endeavours and realistic future expectations.

Both Chinese students had a central motivation for learning English and improving their international communication skills through interactions with foreign students. They saw this as the major potential benefit for studying at SDC, since these competencies would enhance their future value on the Chinese labour market. As such, Brooks and Waters (2011) write:

English provides students with a 'positional advantage' in their home labour market. There is a strong belief that employers in Asia (within certain occupational sectors) will value highly competency in English. (Brooks and Waters 2011, 62)

Interestingly for both students, their orientation towards a future career in an international environment constituted their 'second chance' in the educational system, which represents a less traditional route to professional success. This was most clearly illustrated by Weici, for whom SDC was a second choice after not being able to enter a classic Chinese management program. But this perspective was also apparent in Julia's strategy even though SDC was her first priority. For Julia, choosing SDC was a way for her to make up for the failure she experienced in her undergraduate program and thus a 'second chance' for improving her future success through other, more non-academic means of professional distinction. On the basis of my findings, the international orientation of SDC constitutes a second choice for Chinese students who have had to find an alternative way to make themselves desirable on the Chinese labour market. Their international orientation can be understood as a compensatory strategy (Munk, Foged, and Mulvad 2011), because it is likely that Weici and Julia would have chosen prestigious Chinese master's programs, had they been able to. This also refers to a tendency in which

the educational system in many Asian countries, China included, are becoming both domestically and internationally recognized, so that entering the best universities 'at home' represents the best future opportunities (Brooks and Waters 2011, 65).

While the two Chinese students, Julia and Weici, had the compensatory strategy in common, their individual ways of handling their new position at the international master's program, seen through their future orientations, were quite different. Julia had mostly experienced the educational system as a war. This very potent metaphor revealed the struggle she, as a working-class girl, had to go through to get where she is today. Apart from struggling with the high demands of higher education, it seemed she was also struggling internally between different conceptions of possible futures, torn between a) travelling the world and pursuing a successful, international, academic career, made possible by academic achievements at SDC, and b) a simpler dream of managing an orphanage in China, reminiscent of her working class origins. At the same time, Julia's English skills were poor, which seemed to foster significant doubt of whether she could even meet the challenges of an international program. Her low proficiency in English can be regarded as a major deficit in her pre-qualifications, which affects her possibilities of engaging in the educational practice at SDC. In conclusion, she is engaging in the educational practice with a warrior-like mentality, fighting for her right to stay in the game of education, as she had always done as a consequence of her working class background. In Julia's case, the game metaphor seems misguided though, because it is clear that getting an education is no game for Julia. Like she said herself: it is like fighting a war.

Weici came from a supportive home that took an active interest in her educational choices and accomplishments. This seemed to have transmitted useful cultural capital to her, which could help her master the field of education. Despite her parents' influence over her choices, Weici developed an independent manner of action during her undergraduate studies. She used this to actively position herself as an independent woman and distance herself from traditional Chinese gender patterns. At the same time, Weici's English skills exhibited her strong linguistic capital with which she entered the international academic program. Weici can afford to have a light-hearted approach to her educational endeavours because her brother has already had some academic and professional success and is able to support their family. This gives Weici the freedom to pursue personal desires and international opportunities. Weici's culture of learning is thus

open to the possibilities presented to her, and she has a strong personal conviction that she will do well facing most challenges backed up by her cultural capital.

4.5. Hans: International Business Culture

4.5.1. *Upbringing: Making Big Money*

Hans is a Danish male student from the northwest part of Denmark, often known in as the geographical periphery in Denmark. Out of Denmark's five regions, the northwest region, Nordjylland, has the second largest share of people with vocational training as the highest level of education. Hans' family background reflects these general statistics in the sense that he is the first in his family to enter university. In the interview excerpt below, Hans talks about his educational choices in relation to his family background:

Alexander: This desire to get out and your orientations towards the international, where do you think this comes from? Did your family inspire you in this direction?

Hans: No, I am the first in my family to enter university, so these are my own ambitions. My family actually contested it, rather than they supported it, because at first they thought that it would be best for me to finish my education as fast as possible. But I thought it wouldn't hurt to spend an extra year or two, and get some more experience while being a student. But they changed their perspective later, and they also took it back when I came back from Germany speaking fluently German, then they realized that it had paid off. So yes, it's my own ambitions, but also through my social network, when you start discussing, well, what will the future bring, and what is important when you enter the job market, what do we have to show for that makes us stand out in the crowd. And that's where an international perspective, in my opinion, is a good thing to show through your. [...] One thing is the CV, and the other is the fact of becoming more prepared for the future.

Despite his family's opposition thereof, Hans decides to spend a year in Germany before he starts university (and later one and a half year in Mexico during his bachelor's program). The fact that his family is sceptical towards Hans' choices shows their limited comprehension of the rules of the social field he has entered and plans to advance in. In an environment where work is the only meaningful activity, Hans' extra years in the educational system and pursuit of international experiences can easily be perceived as a waste of time. Hans is not habitually trained to get on in the world of higher education, since his family have not had the any insight or personal experience with this a field. As a consequence, Hans has relied more on his social networks to find inspiration for his educational strategies, since his family hasn't been able to support him. Through his

experiences, Hans has become aware that there is more at stake than just achieving an educational diploma. Thus, from early on, Hans' learning culture emphasises practical skills and international experience, because he believes this will improve his CV, positioning himself better in the competition for future jobs.

Hans' upwards-social mobility is noticeable, and it can be seen as a part of a general tendency in which the overall education level in Denmark is rising. Despite this fact, the relative inequality between different social classes still persists, meaning that children from non-academic or vocational homes are underrepresented in higher education. According to Thomsen (2008), who has conducted a study of class differences in higher education in Denmark, children of unskilled workers are seven times less likely to achieve a university degree when compared to children of academically educated parents (Thomsen 2008, 76). Hans stands as an example of one who has broken the cycle of social reproduction, but still, his way of positioning himself in the educational field have some classed connotations, which we will see below.

Alexander: Let's back up a little bit. What were your thoughts when you had to choose your bachelor's program?

Hans: It was almost a matter of course after having taken the HHX [Danish Commercial High School Examination]. From I was a child, already during the last year of lower secondary education [last year of the Danish folkeskole] I was very keen on making a lot of money when I grew up. It sounds funny right, but that's the way you thought about things back then, cause you didn't know any better. Going out and making big money, and preferably in another country, so you didn't have to pay so much tax. You know, those misconceptions you had back then. So that's how I thought. I was gonna take a HHX and work in the business sector. And then this bachelor's program came hand in hand. So it was like, there weren't a lot of confusion on my part regarding what direction I should take after that. But what I considered back then was whether to do the bachelor in Danish or English. And that's where I thought, it's important to have the international focus, which then was the reason I chose to study in English.

Hans' initial educational strategy is based on a financial incentive, with an aim at converting his educational efforts to economic capital. Such a rationale seems reminiscent of his family's wishes to have him complete his education fast in order to enter the labour market. Making 'big money' seems to be a part of Hans' dream of advancing beyond his social situation in a working class environment. This indicates that Hans studies for the attainment of economic capital, rather than to become more enlightened or cultured. This can be seen as the only way Hans, as a young man, is able to make sense of taking a university degree, since his family background does not

support curiosity or self-realization as meaningful reasons for spending five or more years studying. Accordingly, Hutter (2004) argues that working class students are inclined to choose educations that can apparently seem to be more job-secure (Hutter 2004, 237). As such, they will make what they believe to be the safest investment in their future economic situation.

These suggestions provide an understanding of the logic of Hans' trajectory, and they resonate with a more general tendency, in which children from non-academic families are more likely to pursue degrees in trade and commerce at universities in the geographical and institutional periphery¹⁰ (Thomsen 2008, 82f). Entering an academic field less confined to the cultural and academic elite reflects the realistic expectations of Hans. This perspective doesn't deny the fact that Hans' motivations and dreams are genuine, but it supports the idea that his habitus is a reflection of his upbringing and that it provides him with a practical sense of what is reasonable and attainable for him, and thus guides his educational strategies (Bourdieu 2010, 104).

4.5.2. *Educational Choices: An International Business Profile*

Studying at a peripheral university in the field of trade and commerce can be seen as adjusted to Hans' realistic expectations, but his international orientations are less easily attributed to what Bourdieu would call a modal class trajectory (Bourdieu 2010, 104). Hans' international experiences include an internship program in a European country, studying his bachelor's program in English, and one and a half year as an exchange student in Central America (including doing an internship and getting a local girlfriend). It is clear that Hans has gone through considerable effort to distinguish himself from the ordinary business student, and have hoped to improve his chances of 'making big money' in international business.

Even though Hans enters an exchange program in his bachelor's program with the hopes of enhancing his future career opportunities in an international business field, he seems to be confined to a non-elite university in Central America. According to Munk et al. (2011) pursuing international distinction through non-elite academic institutions¹¹ is the most common strategy of students with non-academic backgrounds (Munk, Foged,

¹⁰ Thomsen's (2008) conclusions can be juxtaposed to Bourdieu's study of the French *grandes écoles* that are largely confined to the elite and give access to positions of considerable power and influence in the French society (Bourdieu 1996). See also Bourdieu (1999) and Karabel (1977) for a discussion of the effects of the massification of higher education.

¹¹ Munk et al. (2011) characterizes non-elite institutions as those not included in the QS-Times Higher Education ranking of the world's top 200 universities.

and Mulvad 2011, 49). In Hans' situation, this seems to be the case due to the cultural and economic deficit of his social background, making the Central American university his best available option for international mobility.

Despite presented with the opportunity of learning Spanish, Hans seems to have found the effort of learning the language not worth the possible benefits in regards to advancing his social position. Such an argument speaks to the fact that English has become the *lingua franca* of global society, which seems to hold specifically true in the international business field (Shi and Lin 2016, 170). Also, as social strategies are always formulated and carried out in relation to the position of others, one can imagine that Hans experienced others being more invested in Latin American culture and language, to the extent that he 'backed out' of what could have potentially led to other more Latin American specific strategies. In the competition of cultural affluence it seems that Hans has pursued a more general, all-around international career profile, better suited his less cultured familial dispositions. This is reflected in his choice to shift attention away from Central America, and pursue a master's degree in China.

In the interview excerpt below Hans' expresses why he chose to study his master's program at SDC in China.

... I did want to go somewhere outside Denmark, and this program was in China, which I didn't know a lot about at that time. But I thought it was a great opportunity to do a double degree from a Danish and a Chinese university. In Denmark there's a big hype on cooperating with the Chinese, so in that sense it would also enhance my chances later in life and that was one of the factors that helped decide for me; that it would definitely improve my future possibilities. Besides that, at this program there's full employment. Everyone gets a job or writes a Ph.D. after finishing their studies. (Hans, Danish male student, interview excerpt)

A part of Hans' motivation for going to China is based on what knowing about China might provide him with in the terms of a future career, because, as he says, there's a 'big hype' on cooperating with the Chinese. His choice is a reflection of a generally known political and economic focus on China as a developing economy that persists in the Danish society, which SDC itself is a product of. China thus stands as a country of special interest in the Danish business sector, shown through various government reports and private sector lobby organisations¹². This indicates that China is interesting for Hans be associated with professionally, because it can provide him with an edge on the competitive labour market. Hans strategy becomes more nuanced through the latter

¹² See for example Danish Industry's specific focus on China (www.di.dk)

part of the interview, when he starts talking about some of the extra-curricula career oriented activities he has pursued in China, which he presents as the most beneficial intercultural learning experiences for him so far:

We've started talking to some people who administer an innovation network that's based here in Beijing. They got us on a trip to a big city in the south of China where we did a presentation about innovation in relation to smart hardware in our own countries, you know Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Germany, the three of us who went down there, and the Chinese government paid everything, because they are very focused on innovation. But, you know, when you talk to these people who have a good education and a good background and listen to their perspectives on the world, and they just want to learn from us in Europe, and they want to benefit from that, so they include us in their network, because it also benefits us a lot. [...] There's an expression that some of my friends use, if you give China your little finger, they will give you back a whole arm. They really want to help, they really do. (Hans, Danish male student, interview excerpt)

Gaining social and professional relations in China is a central strategy for Hans, and it's a way for him to specialize his business orientations further through valuable practical experience. From the way he tells it, it obviously means a lot to Hans that he is successful in these endeavours, such as partaking in the innovation conference, sponsored by the Chinese government. Being a foreigner in China seems to have put him in an advantageous position in regards to strengthening his career expectations in this certain direction. As he puts it himself, the Chinese has a lot of interests in making relations with foreigners because the West is generally perceived as being ahead in fields such as innovation and new technology.

Hans might be well on his way to have a successful career in the international business field with a distinct focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, but his more long-term plans include moving back to Denmark:

In time I want to go back to Denmark. So I won't stay out here all my life. But it's also about, you know it's about doing these things while your still young. Because it's just as much about experiencing things, it's not like a vacation, but it's still a time that's very different than what you would have experienced if you stayed in Denmark. And you already know how life will be, once you start working, so whether you have that for 40 years while living in Denmark, or you just take 30 years of that, and then 10 years in some other country to get all the experience you need. And then you can return to Denmark, get settled and live a cosy family life after that. (Hans, Danish male student, interview excerpt)

In SDC, Hans seeks to continue the accumulation of his international capital, with which he plans to get a job in an international business environment. However, in the long-

term perspective, he plans on returning to Denmark, using his professional experience in an international business environment to get a good job here. Leaving Denmark in order to pursue international qualifications and an international diploma can thus be seen as a compensatory strategy (Munk, Foged, and Mulvad 2011) to make up for the risk of blending in with the crowd of working class children with diplomas from the inferior parts of the Danish higher education hierarchy. His learning culture is structured accordingly, open towards learning about international corporations and Chinese business culture both inside and outside the institutional context of SDC. Hans plans to use his English language skills and the advantage of his Western background to increase his business networks in China.

4.6. Lisa: Practical Dispositions

4.6.1. *Upbringing: Cosmopolitan Formation*

Lisa is one of the Danish female students in the social science programs. This following short interview excerpt sheds light on some key features of Lisa's social origin that I believe has had considerable effect on her international educational strategies:

Alexander: Where in Denmark are you from?

Lisa: I'm from Copenhagen, north of Copenhagen [...] and I've lived in Copenhagen most of my life. As a child I lived in different countries with my parents, so I imagine that also contributes to the fact that the international perspective have followed me my whole life. I've always wanted to get out. [...] It was from I was born until I was 7. After that I started in school in Denmark. So I've primarily been in the Danish educational system anyway.

As a child Lisa moved around Europe with her parents, living in different cities where her parents were stationed. At seven, Lisa moves back to Denmark with her parents, and they settle in a very attractive neighbourhood just north of Copenhagen. Lisa's cosmopolitan habitus is thus formed at a young age, and throughout her trajectory it seems she has used this experience to position herself in the social and academic field. Living in one of the richest municipalities in Denmark, one can imagine, that Lisa's family is economically well off. Still, Lisa parents do not have an academic degree, which resulted in Lisa own doubts to whether university would be the right place for her:

Alexander: Did you ever consider other educational programs, a professional bachelor or...

Lisa: No, actually not. Well, yeah I wanted to be an actress when I was young, but that was completely discarded because I'm not that competitive-minded, so I think I just didn't wanna do that. But no, I think that time when I had to choose whether or not to go to university it wasn't without certain reservations that maybe it wasn't something for me. I had worked in cafés and restaurants and such and thought that no matter what I'd be able to get job in some way, so I didn't feel that I really needed... My parents never told me to get a university degree, my parents don't have a university degree. So it was more like I felt I might as well try. I think I always had the idea I'd probably drop out...

Lisa seems to perceive a university degree as just one out of many other possibilities that might bring about the right future for her. One can also imagine that Lisa's light-hearted approach to her future possibilities was rooted in the economic safety her parents could provide her with, if she would have to drop out. However, looking at the demographic differences of the projected enrolment into higher education provides an understanding of why it might not have been that unlikely for Lisa to enter an academic trajectory, despite her ambiguous thoughts about it at the time. As such there is a huge difference between the rates of enrolment into higher education based on which part of Denmark you're from. The scale ranges from 45% in some peripheral municipalities, to 79% in in the part of Denmark, where Lisa is from. In order to explain such regional differences, Reay et al. (2005) has pointed to how certain high school's have both deliberate and subtle practices that prepares and stimulates the pupils for entering an academic trajectory (Reay, David, and Ball 2005, 43ff). In municipalities north of Copenhagen, it's likely that such practices are be much more forceful and effective, shown through the very high rate of the pupils from this area, who goes on to pursue a higher education degree. One can also consider Lisa entry into an academic trajectory as a reflection of her social network. If all of Lisa's friends were getting a university degree, it's very likely she herself would be inclined to do so as well.

Finally, in the excerpt above, Lisa explains how she came to like her time in university, and that this was a central motivation for her not to drop out. In contrast to the educational strategies of the Chinese presented earlier, Lisa's motivations for studying are driven by a personal desire to learn about the things that interest her and to develop as a person. Such articulation constitutes a specific position taken by Lisa that demarcates a distance from a socially disadvantaged position from where education serves a very practical purpose of social mobility and the security of future income (such position was evident in the analysis of Hans' educational strategy). Lisa seems to have the social, cultural, and perhaps also economic capital, via her family background, to express

indifference towards the educational system, and she actively detaches herself from the commonplace meritocratic discourse that exists in most modern capitalistic societies.

4.6.2. *Educational Choices: A Practical Person*

In her sabbatical year after high school, Lisa gets the opportunity to move to Beijing and work as an au pair for a Danish family (a neighbouring family in her Danish hometown). This is her first experience with China, and serves as the foundation for a strong personal interest and curiosity related to Chinese people and culture, which also ends up affecting her choice of bachelor's program:

Alexander: So choosing to study Chinese... can you elaborate on why you became so interested in China?

Lisa: First of all I think it was a... because I was limited in what I could get into, I always thought about studying Anthropology, so that's the whole thing about other cultures and travelling and such, but I didn't have the grade average for that. I'm actually happy about that now, because I don't think that would have been as good a match. Well, then I thought, what can I get into, and I liked languages and always liked languages and I speak German and French and Scandinavian languages, you know, I like it a lot, and also I've always thought I was quite good at it. I was in a lot of doubt whether or not I should go for the university degree, because I see myself as a practical person, so I like and I would like to have some skills. So I think I choose, well that skill is the language, so language is like the trade I am learning. And throughout my studies it's been really nice to have this variation between the academic, you know reading theory and difficult texts and then at the same time getting your book, where you'd learn the Chinese signs, which requires a much more practical approach.

Lisa's first expectation was to study Anthropology at Copenhagen University, and it was something she had 'always thought about'. Wanting to study Anthropology can be seen as an expected strategy for Lisa, considering her international experiences as a child and her parents' international job experiences. However, her desires also reflect broader social patterns of higher education choice. As such, Thomsen (2008) finds a both classed and gendered pattern in which daughters of the cultural elite cluster around the humanistic and soft social science programs in the most prestigious universities such as Copenhagen University and Aarhus University (Thomsen 2008, 90). While Lisa's initial educational strategy was adjusted to these classed and gendered expectations, her average high school performance forced her to pursue alternative options.

That Lisa draws on experience from her gap year in choosing a higher education program is consistent with the findings of Hutter (2004). Hutter argues that high

school leavers often use their gap years to orient themselves toward the higher education field, making an adjustment between how they perceive the field, and their available dispositions (Hutters 2004, 203). Realizing she didn't have the grade point average to get into Anthropology, Lisa had to find alternatives that could meet her specific volumes of capital, and her realistic expectations in the higher education system. In this sense, it also seems that Lisa perceived studying Chinese as a less strictly academic program, and thus better suited her dispositions as a more practical person.

Lisa is very explicit about 'being a practical person', and more than once she mentions that university might not be something for her. Such statements can be seen as a sort of self-regulatory practice, in which Lisa embodies her life history in the sense that she was only average in her high school, which contributes to the structuration of a practical learning culture. Studying Chinese becomes a 'better match' for her in this sense, because it involves a propaedeutic year of learning Chinese. Lisa perceives this language acquisition as a skill that's more tangible than 'reading difficult texts', and thus better suited her practical habitus.

The interview excerpt presented below foregrounds Lisa's choice of a master's program as closely related to her personal life and continued strategy of having China as a central part of her future job possibilities:

Alexander: And did you choose to study as SDC over something else...? Or did you have other possible master's programs in mind?

Lisa: After finishing my bachelor I went to Beijing with my boyfriend, because we both got an internship... and we wanted to stay here and do a master's out here, and I've always kept SDC in the back of my mind as something I would like to do... I knew they had limited capacity, so I had the idea that if I didn't get in, I would have to find something else out here, because I was keen on staying. So it's also been my ticket to staying in Beijing. [...] So that's also been a big part of choosing SDC, because that allowed us to stay here together, and just that fact of being with someone who also wanted to live here, and there's a lot of things that pulled me out here, a lot of my good friends in Beijing and I wanted to study in China to improve my Chinese...

Getting into SDC was Lisa's 'ticket' for staying in Beijing and staying together with her boyfriend. Also, by staying in Beijing, Lisa could continue to pursue further intercultural experiences related to the Chinese culture, such as learning Chinese.

Today Lisa speaks Chinese quite well, and she wants to get better at it. The considerable time spent in Beijing and her investment towards learning Chinese is now a useful resource for her, and she uses it actively in terms of her career expectations.

Alexander: What are your thoughts in the future? What would you like to do once you finish your education?

Lisa: I imagine working for a Danish municipality maybe, or with urban cooperation, focused on cooperation between Denmark and China, primarily in the field of culture. It could be a lot of things, I haven't really eyed a specific job I would like to do. I know that Odense [Danish city] for example does a lot of cooperation with China, and there's also a lot of these urban collaborations between Denmark and China that focuses on culture and sustainability and such and that's somehow something I've oriented myself towards. [...] But in regards to my career I'm not afraid of not finding a job. That was also my thoughts when applying for SDC and not just studying Chinese language and culture, it's partly been a rational choice, because the pure humanistic background is not that... unfortunately it's something that isn't valued a lot in the Danish labour market. [...] Maybe I'll stay here in China some years after I finish my program, because it's easier to get a job here and because hopefully I'm gonna get better at Chinese. I wanna go back to Denmark at some point...

Lisa is interested in what she calls 'culturally driven urban development' and she is confident that getting a job in China will be easy for her with her current dispositions. However, Lisa doesn't see herself living in China for the rest of her life, so her strategy of studying at SDC is also getting some experiences and specific knowledge about China that can be utilized on the Danish labour market. In this sense, Hans and Lisa are alike, and it shows a general tendency in which China is an interesting way for them both to get experiences and career profile, but that ultimately, they both plan on living in Denmark.

4.7. Danish Cultures of Learning

For both Hans and Lisa, choosing SDC was with a plan of becoming familiar with Chinese culture and accumulating some forms of intercultural capital. While both imagined working in an international sector in China or elsewhere, a common narrative for them was their plans of moving back to Denmark after some years of international work experience. Their motivations for studying an international degree thus also highly involve their future possibilities on the Danish labour market. As such, SDC seemed to offer them both a very convenient opportunity to get international educational distinction, while still keeping the connection to Danish system.

As a consequence of the student's educational strategies, their learning culture can also be conceptualized as oriented towards practical intercultural experiences deployable in a Danish context. However, Hans and Lisa have different conceptions of what kind of

practical experiences are most important, which seemed to be related to their social backgrounds. Hans has strong business oriented dispositions accumulated through two internships outside Denmark. Also is used to studying in an international environment through his international bachelor and his exchange semester in Central America. Hans' lack of Chinese language skills didn't constitute a disadvantage for him, since the position he pursues can easily be mastered without this linguistic capital. He wants to learn how to work together with the Chinese in a business context; knowledge he believes will be a valuable asset in a Danish business focusing on cooperating with China. Lisa's trajectory is characterized by an early formation of a cosmopolitan habitus through living abroad as a child. Through her gap year and her bachelor's program, Lisa accumulates a vast amount of specific Chinese cultural capital. Both experiences can be seen as a strong asset for her in studying in an international program in China. Lisa is oriented towards a deep understanding of Chinese culture and language. She pursues this cultural specific position in part by living in Beijing, where she already has a social network, and in part through studying side by side with the Chinese students at SDC.

4.8. Sub-Conclusion: The Ambiguity of SDC

Through the above analyses a picture of SDC's institutional ambiguity is drawn up. SDC figures as a broadly defined educational institution, where students from different cultural and social backgrounds try seizing an opportunity for future professional recognition, not through academic prestige, but through intercultural skills. The background of the students varied in the sense that some came from working class homes and others from more educated and culturally affluent homes. These features seem to point out the disputed possible benefits of the international academic profile. SDC isn't just for the parvenus (Bourdieu 2010, 104) in the academic field, such as Hans and Julia, who struggle for social mobility through the higher education system. SDC is also for students like Lisa and Weici, who couldn't redeem the potential of their social and cultural privileges, and thus had to choose an alternative educational track, hoping to maintain the social and economic privileges of their social background through becoming affluent in intercultural environments.

The intercultural skills sought by the students come in different forms of capitals. They are pictured as both international business capital, Chinese *or* English linguistic capital, intercultural communication capital, and knowledge capital about either Chinese

or Western (Danish) culture and society. The social and cultural backgrounds of the students help determine what kind of capital they are seeking on the basis of their strategic plans for the best possible future for themselves. Cutting across cultural differences, students with more cultural capital are more oriented towards the intercultural aspect of the program, pursuing linguistic (English or Chinese) and intercultural capital. Amongst the students from non-academic homes, different strategies are utilized. For the Danish part, an orientation towards establishing business relations (social capital) in China is highly outspoken. The Chinese working class strategies are more unspecific, revealing the incompatibility between Chinese working class dispositions and the structures of the program. For many students, studying at SDC seems to be a compensatory strategy, making up for the failure to enter other more desired programs. The analysis also shows, that the students, even though they are studying at an international master's program, to a large extent orient themselves towards a future work and family life in their country of origin, after some years of international experience. Their strategies are thus still made up within the perception of a national division of labour markets.

CHAPTER 5

Struggles for Academic and Cultural Recognition

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the learning culture at SDC through the individual interviews, my own observations of the field and the group discussion. Through this I aim to answer the question of how the institutional structures of SDC affects the students ways of participating in the in the educational practice. Further, I am interested in objectivizing the position occupied by the students on account of their dispositions, analysed in the previous chapter. I do this by firstly focusing on the students' perceptions of the official learning activities; what is required of them and how do they positions themselves in relation to these requirements. Then, I shift attention to the social dynamics, with specific focus on the established intrapersonal hierarchies between the students, acted out most vividly in the cross-cultural group work. Finally, I shortly illustrate how the social life and preferences of the students outside the university affects the academic relationship as well. Thus, in in contrast to the previous analytical chapter, here I will deal specifically with the educational practice at SDC, and how the social structures are (re)produced through the interactions between the students.

The structure of the field, in the above-mentioned sense, can be studied through the agents because it is only the objective relations of force between these individuals that allow the construction of a field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). However, one must also look beyond the immediate social interactions between the agents in the field to understand how their actions are shaped by their former experiences and in relation to their position in social space (Bourdieu 1991, 50f)(Bourdieu 1989, 20). In this study, it is essential to understand that the culture of a specific learning site, constituted here by the social science programs at SDC, is “interpenetrated by issues of social class, gender and ethnicity and issues of globalisation that cut across society as a whole” (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008, 11), and that these structures are also embodied in the habitus of agents (which was shown in the previous chapter). Thus my central concern in this part of the analysis is how relations of symbolic power are acted out in the field and also how

these interactions between the students¹³ are related to political struggles of power and domination of cultural classifications of right/wrong, good/bad etc. (Bourdieu 1989, 20). In the context of the international learning environment at SDC, my main focus is thus the relations between Chinese and Western culture, because this exact form of classification was evident in the field. For this purpose just described, I will be applying Bourdieu's different concepts of the symbolic¹⁴, which mediates the relation between the objective and the subjective realm of social life, intrinsically related to questions about culture, ideology and power.

5.2. Life and Learning at SDC

Before delving into the student's experiences of the learning environment, I here present some overall characteristics of the social science programs at SDC as well as some observations of the lives of the students in and around SDC in general. This will provide a context for understanding the immediate objective circumstances of the students.

The first two semesters at the social science programs are comprised of course work and two problem-based semester projects, most often carried out in cross-cultural groups. All teaching and group work, as well as all the readings, are in English. A semester consists of 3-4 different thematic courses held in succession, most often in 3-4 week periods, thus comprising the first 2-3 months of the semester. While the two social science programs have different curriculum, one methods course is held as a joint course for both programs. Usually one or two professors are responsible for one course, but other professors might carry out single lectures as part of a course. The professors come from different Danish universities, UCAS, or other Chinese universities, and often only stay at SDC for the duration of their specific teaching obligations (3-4 weeks or even just a couple of days for some). On their third semester, all the students are implored to do internships, which might take place at an international company in China, or overseas. In their fourth semester, the students write their thesis. At this point, a lot of international students chose travel to their home country and carry out the thesis. Thus, some international students end up only spending one full year at the university in Beijing itself. While the master's program is a two-year program for the international students,

¹³ It is due noted that the following analyses have not incorporated the perspectives of the teachers or the actual results of the students (in terms of grades). However, resting on the experiences of the primary participants of the educational practice, the students, I find clear expressions of how the learning culture is structured.

¹⁴ These concepts are Symbolic Capital, Symbolic Power and Symbolic Violence, my understanding of which was presented in Chapter 3.

the Chinese students need to complete a third year as either an internship or a larger academic work, often as a preparation for entering an academic position.

Social life at SDC is very structured according to cultural belonging, and the students experience difficulties in socializing with students from the ‘other’ cultural groups. Most of the students are living in dorm buildings just 300 meters from the teaching facilities. In the dorms, the female and male students are housed in different buildings and live in double rooms together with students from their own ‘cultural groups’ (international/Chinese). The dorm area has different facilities such as a swimming pool, an area with Ping-Pong tables, and a movie theatre. The Zhongguancun area is known as the Silicon Valley of Beijing, as it houses a lot of Chinese tech and software companies. Straight to the north one enters the Wudaokou District, famous for its international style clubs, bars, cafés and restaurants. Wudaokou attracts a lot of Beijing’s international students because a lot of universities are located here, and the famous Tsinghua University is very close by. Some of the international students have moved out of the dorm and now live in either Wudaokou, the Hutongs (traditional Chinese quarter) near the city centre, or in other areas closer to the city centre. From the Zhongguancun campus it takes about 30 minutes to get to Beijing’s city centre.

5.3. Academic Logics: Western Domination

Below the institutional logic of SDC is presented through the most formalized features of the learning environment. Through observation of lectures, workshops and interaction between students, I will analyse how the students experience the institutional setup at SDC, and what wider social and historical circumstances affect the way the learning activities are structured.

5.3.1. *Class Participation and Language Barriers*

Ontological Interruption (Observation – On a Wednesday in November, Beijing)

Five minutes into the lecture a Danish male student interrupts the professor by asking a question (the specifics of which I didn’t make a note of). The professor answers in short and picks up the presentation of the day. Meanwhile, a few students, a mix of international and Chinese, have managed to quietly enter the lecture hall and sit themselves down. I’m in a joint Social Research Methods lecture for the two social science programs at SDC. Today’s topic is Ethnography presented by a professor from a Danish University. After going through a couple of more slides, an international male student, Lucas, interrupts the professor by asking; “where did Weber get the inspiration for his methodological

approach?” The professor answers the question, and continues her lecture. Obviously not contempt with the first answer he got, Lucas raises his hand shortly after. The professor answers the question, – it is already the third interruption within the first 15 minutes of her presentation. Lucas now asks; “Well, you just said that naturalism and positivism were two opposite methodological approaches, but in the text by XX something different is stated.” The professor seems a little puzzled by the very specific question and buys herself some time by taking a sip of water before answering the question. “Apparently some researchers use the terms differently”, she replies, likely hoping to be able to return to her lecture, which is probably already running behind schedule. However, her answer seems to ignite Lucas’ spirit of inquiry. Now Lucas wants to know more about the difference between positivism and constructivism. Patiently, the professor starts explaining different scientific points of view, but she cuts herself off by adding that this topic is not directly related to the content of today’s lecture, which is ‘more about data collection’. But Lucas doesn’t give up so easily, and he follows up with a question about the ontological basis for respectively naturalism and positivism. Still with some patience left, the professor argues that it’s not completely ‘black and white’, and that there are overlapping ontological perception between the two. Finally, she changes the subject back to ethnographic data collection, which she once again stresses is today’s topic. Like this, ten minutes of the lecture passed basically as a dialogue between Lucas and the professor.

On behalf of my own imbeddedness in a Western academic logic, I was struck by familiarity and a sense of being back in class in my own university in Denmark, as I participated in the classes at SDC (described in the observation ‘Ontological Interruption’). However, afterwards the peculiarity of the situation struck me; despite having travelled halfway across the world and landing in a completely different cultural environment, in my first encounter with SDC I was thrust into a very familiar cultural setting.

A couple of days later I interviewed Julia, one of the Chinese student presented in the previous analytical chapter. The class dynamics that to me had seemed very familiar and fruitful for fostering student-centred learning, was not perceived as positive by Julia:

When we came here the class was international... international curriculum, but before we study in the Chinese curriculum... the way is very different, but the Chinese teachers at UCAS didn’t make any class or introduction to the international style... [...]. In China when I have the class, the teacher will speak all the class and after the teacher is finished we will ask the questions, but the in international class students always interrupt, and say ‘oh I have a question’, always, too many questions... The slides from the Chinese professor always have a strict logic, very logical, and have many information, but the slides from the foreign professors are always about other things and stories and presentations and workshops, and I think it’s very good for students to study this way but it’s different from before, so I think SDC should have a procedure to adapt the Chinese to this... (Julia, Chinese female student, interview excerpt)

Julia's remarks reveal two aspects of how certain Chinese students are positioned in the learning culture at SDC. Firstly, they indicate that Julia lacks a certain kind of cultural capital, namely one of being an active, critical student, confident in speaking up in class and challenging the professor. Her lack of these cultural dispositions prohibits her from acting according to the dominating logic of the field, preventing her from being a good international student. Secondly, by referring to this foreign teaching style as 'very good,' and stating that she wishes someone would have taught her how to act according to it, she acknowledges her own inferiority, confirming a symbolic order in which the Western teaching style and a westernized student behaviour is favoured over the Chinese. Julia's way of accepting her inferior position in the symbolic hierarchy of SDC displays how symbolic violence works in the sense that the unequal positions attributed by the symbolic order in social space are accepted by those subjugated to it. Julia freely constrains herself under the (arbitrary) demands of class participation, rooted in a Western academic tradition (Bourdieu 1991, 50f). Also, by using the classification 'international curriculum,' Julia reveals the naturalization (Siisiäinen 2008, 16) of the Western teaching style in the context of an international master's program. International in this sense is not used to express something that transcends national distinctions, but to indicate the prevalence of Western cultural standards in international educational contexts (see also Nguyen et al. 2009).

While most of the professors teaching in the program was from Europe, the program also had Chinese professors lecturing. One could thus imagine that the practice in their lectures might be different, since the professor would have expectations to the students more in line with what the Chinese students were used to from their undergraduate programs. However, according to the Danish student Lisa, the participatory dynamic of the class carried over into all the lectures:

We also had some Chinese professors and that's been a different way, they lecture about some other things... but still, the dynamics in the class are still like the Danish way because all the Danish students still put their hands up and asks questions during the class... but the Chinese professors know this, that this is the way we are usually taught, so they accept it completely, and they 'embrace' it and I think they want us to participate like this, but I just think it kind of shocks the Chinese students that it works in this way, that you don't have the same kind of respect or... (Lisa, Danish female student, interview excerpt)

The Western way of behaving as a student in class settings (namely one of being active, taking a personal stance towards the academic content, and interrupting the teacher if

something is unclear or if one disagrees) is thus naturalized, even across the international and Chinese class settings. In this way, the international students were able to master the whole academic environment, since their cultural dispositions weighed heavier than those of the Chinese students in the institutional context of SDC (Bourdieu 1989, 17). This unequal recognition of the dispositions of the students according to the symbolic order at SDC established a 'pecking order' (Hua and Kramersch 2016, 377) where the international students were the dominant group and the Chinese students were the dominated.

Their feeling of being disadvantaged led the Chinese students to try and change their behaviour according to the learning culture at SDC, in order for them to receive academic recognition by both the professors and the international students. For a student such as Weici (the trajectory of whom was analysed earlier) this was done with some success:

The dynamics and the teaching methods I think is the same. Also team work, also some presentations, also some papers. You know there are also some dynamic Chinese students in our class, so it's the same, but in the international class, maybe the Chinese students at first they feel nervous about answering questions, but later it will get better, so I think it's the same. (Weici, Chinese female student, interview excerpt)

Weici's opinion that the class dynamics is not so different from what she is used to, is a stark contrast to Julia's testimony above. Weici's apparent ease with tapping into the logic of the class dynamic might be rooted in her favourable dispositions in the SDC-context. As concluded in the previous analytical chapter, Weici was one of the best English-speakers among the Chinese students and she had a middle-class cultural background through which she was able to get some travel experiences inside China. These elements of her trajectory seems to work in her favour, seeing how she is more successful at converting her cultural and linguistic capital into symbolic capital at SDC. Other students, including Julia, did not fare so well in this competition for recognition:

I know it's an international program, so we should speak in English, but I think that in Europe the languages is a little bit the same [as English]... so understanding English will be more difficult for the Chinese, but we work very hard to study and improve our English, but the professor speaks quickly and not very clearly and the voice is not very loud, sometimes I cannot understand very easily. (Julia, Chinese female student, interview excerpt).

Julia's disadvantaged position in the academic environment is reinforced by her challenges with speaking English. Considering her social background, explored in the

previous chapter, the deficit in her dispositions, both relating to adapting to the Western teaching style, and in relation to her lack of linguistic capital, can be seen as a consequence of her working class habitus. Such a conclusion asserts that Chinese middle-class students, such as Weici, have more appropriate cultural preconditions to succeed in international learning environments. This also establishes a pecking order within the group of Chinese students where those best adapted to the westernized standards of education and with the most English linguistic capital are positioned highest. In a comparative perspective, this corresponds, to what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) have also pointed to in a French context, in terms of international higher education; the reproduction of the social order through symbolic violence excludes working-class students from entering dominating positions in higher education.

Despite the naturalization in the westernized academic logics, Julia's quote above implies a challenge of the misrecognition of the doxa of the field (James 2015, 110). By stressing the unfairness of the English language deficit of the Chinese, rooted in social and historical circumstances such as the similarity of English to other European languages, Julia is questioning the self-evidence of English as the lingua franca in international educational settings. This reveals Julia's subjective struggle against the symbolic order in the face of her own arbitrary disadvantages, and thus a struggle to "transform the categories of perception and appreciation of the social world" (Bourdieu 1989, 20). Julia seems to be in a dominated position because she has not yet completely internalized the rules of the game (Swartz 1997, 126). By this fact, she seems able to challenge the doxa of the field. Chinese students like Weici, or the international students for that matter, never challenged the doxa, because they embodied the structures of the field completely. As Bourdieu states: "when perception is constructed according to the structures of what is perceived, everything seems obvious and goes without saying" (Bourdieu 1998, 81). These structures were not obvious to Julia, but rather a cultural barrier preventing her successful conversion capital.

5.3.2. *Plagiarism and Critical Thinking*

Group Work 101 (Observation – On a Monday in November, Beijing)

I'm waiting for the Danish student Hans outside the teaching building. We have an interview at 12 o'clock. While waiting, two other Danish male students from PMSD come out of the teaching facility. They've just been to a project group meeting with the program secretary and the professor responsible of plagiarism affairs. Apparently, the Danish

students had requested the meeting because they were worried about the Chinese students' contribution to the project work. The Danish guys are very frustrated. "Only one out of the three Chinese students in our group speaks proper English", they tell me, "so she has to translate for the others". As a consequence their work progress is way too slow, they think, because "there are so many things that the Chinese don't understand". One of the guys tells me that he had some 'face-to-face time with one of the Chinese', and that 'she's actually quite smart and has a lot of useful perspectives on their project work, but she just never contributes during their group meetings'. The other guy adds, "that's just something we, as international students, have to accept," and that "we have to learn to communicate and facilitate the group work process through the cultural and linguistic challenges we face. It's our responsibility because we know about the group work from before, and the Chinese don't." The other guy continues by telling me about how bad the Chinese students are at using references and how they have no sense of source criticism. At one point he was working through some parts of the project that was due to their supervisor, trying to figure out what sources the Chinese were referring to. "First of all", he tells me, "they mostly referred to Chinese sources. Secondly, they didn't just refer to scientific research, but one of them had made a reference to QQ, the Chinese version of Facebook!"

As illustrated above, the naturalization of English as the medium of instruction at SDC seems to constitute a major challenge for the Chinese student's successes of academic recognition. This is also evident in the observation above, and moreover, the observation shows how the frustrations of the international students directed at the language 'deficit' of the Chinese. However, this does not seem to be the only issue. The Western academic logic prescribes that the students have to reference correctly to avoid plagiarism, which seems to be unfamiliar to the Chinese students. This is reflected in the following quote from the Chinese student Hannah, taken from the group discussion:

... I think our logic is entirely different, we have our style and Danish have international logic but we don't know what is international logic, and because we haven't had such courses before, we don't know how to think problem in an international way, and for example I ask a Chinese teacher how to do some reference, he told me, because I have an international education now so I should change my logic... (Hannah, Chinese female student, group discussion)

The Chinese students have to go through a process acculturation to the Western standards of plagiarism, poised also by their Chinese teachers. Again, an effect of the symbolic violence is evident, where the Chinese students' academic background is devalued and they are encouraged to change their practice. However, breaking with this dominating perception of the naturalized superiority of Western-style referencing Klitgård argues; "we should refrain from [making] our habits the norm and their habits unlearned and primitive, but instead try to grasp the complexity of the students' cultural heritage" (Klitgård 2011, 179). In her article about issues of plagiarism in culturally

diverse academic settings in Danish universities, Associate Professor at Roskilde University Ida Kiltgård reminds us, that Western academic referencing style is historically linked to the Western academic tradition and its obsession with individualized ownership of things, including knowledge. In contrast, in a Chinese Confucian educational tradition, knowledge has been perceived as a common property, which makes referencing unnecessary, or even anti-collectivistic (Kiltgård 2011, 176). While the idea of individualized ownership of knowledge and plagiarism has not been institutionalized in Chinese under-graduate education, evident in the Chinese students statements above, these Western academic practices are moving into the Chinese higher education system, in line with other aspects of internationalization. This underlines arbitrariness of such reference requirements in a Chinese cultural setting, and contributes to the argument, that the Western academic structures are spreading throughout the academic world.

The Chinese student's difficulties with acculturating to the Western idea of plagiarism has resulted in a practice where the international students feel they have to take the responsibility of the project work, delegating work to the Chinese students in the project groups (as reflected in the observation 'Group Work 101'). Such practice seems to solidify the pecking order already established by the symbolic order based on the cultural background of the students. The Chinese students, who are already disadvantaged because of their lack of linguistic and Western academic capital, are thus constantly confronted with their own inferiority by having to subordinate themselves to the international students leading the way through the project work.

The westernization of international higher education, traced above through the experiences of the student's at SDC, has wider implications on a global scale. Across the board, literature on the effects of globalization on higher education tells the story of an increased worldwide occupation with what is referred to as Western educational standards. According to Kauppi and Erkkilä (2011) neoliberal instruments such as global university ranking lists compels universities to change their practice according to a set of measurable predefined parameters, often neglecting local social responsibilities in terms of knowledge production, labour qualification, civic engagement and access to higher education (Kauppi and Erkkilä 2011, 316). Within the same paradigm of thought, Appadurai (2006) argues that the foreign expansion of overseas universities in India and China is undermining local citizenship and distorting the relations of knowledge production between East and West (Appadurai 2006, 172f). An institutional hierarchy of higher education on a global scale results in the emergence of relatively few highly sought

after university degrees, and a tremendous bulk of universities trying to emulate the practices of the top rated universities. In this sense, Marginson (2008) speaks of an Anglo-American university hegemony permeating the global field of higher education. Such hegemony can be attributed to the global flows of cultural imaginaries transmitted globally through Hollywood films and American pop-music (a conclusion similar to Appadurai's (1996)), but also as a consequence of American financial, technological, and military power (Marginson 2008, 311). Brooks and Waters (2011) have also referred to "an enduring colonial legacy underpinning the development of international education" (Brooks and Waters 2011, 63). The results of such colonial legacy is among other things, the institutionalization of English as the lingua franca in world wide academic discourse (Kauppi and Erkkilä 2011, 324; Marginson 2008, 311). However, Marginson questions the lasting effect American hegemony and highlights how emerging knowledge economies such as China pose a challenge to Anglo-American domination in the field of higher education (Marginson 2008, 314). Dow (2010) raises a similar issue in asking the question: "Does it seem likely [...] that China will succumb to this 'hyperglobalist'¹⁵ tendency when we see how carefully the 2008 Olympic spectacular was stage-managed?" (Dow 2010, 499). Through my empirical data, it became obvious that there were more at stake than just the westernized academic curriculum. I will elaborate on this below.

5.3.3. *Competing Symbolic Orders*

Double Obligations (Observation – On a Wednesday in November, Beijing)

The exam Q&A session is over. Most students are rushing out the lecture hall going home to study. They'll spend the next two days preparing for the exam. I make my way to the podium and introduce myself to the professor. He's a Danish professor who has been on the social science programs since they opened up. During our conversation the professor tells me that they have 'struggled' with the Chinese students' 'double obligations.' "The Chinese students are most often placed at SDC by a professor from their bachelor's degree," he tells me. "They have to work for this professor, or some other professor from UCAS," he adds. And he continues, "we've been really challenged by this, because this professor might call upon the student at any moment. The Chinese students have to work on their professor's research in addition to keeping up with their studies in the program."

The observations above give an insight into the complexity of the Chinese academic life from the viewpoint of a Danish professor. The Danish professor finds the role of the Chinese tutor very problematic in relation to the Chinese students' double obligations.

¹⁵ By using the term hyper-globalist Dow is referring to waning power of nation-states in the face of the growing effects of transnationalism.

This issue indicates a discrepancy between the westernized structure of the program and the Chinese tutors' significance for the Chinese students' academic life. In the group discussion, Chinese students Bao and Hannah mentioned the complex relationships between the Chinese students and their tutor:

Hannah: Our Chinese tutor will not be very satisfied with us because our courses content is different from Chinese and they say we have to do a Chinese master thesis to get our master's degree, but we haven't attended their Chinese classes, so our Chinese tutors will not be very satisfied with us, we have much pressure to deal with our relationships...

Bao: Because you know in China students and the tutor, their relationship is complex. [...] They maybe also want you to learn more about your international things, but the more time you spend on your international skills and international communication you put less time in his course, so you cannot develop in the Chinese master skills, and he will not be very satisfied...

The above statements of Hannah and Bao indicate that there exists a subfield within the institutional structure of SDC, or a parallel field. The limits of a field can be studied by noticing what kinds of capital agents actively apply to advance their own position in that field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98ff). The Chinese students seem to utilize different forms of capital, when seeking academic recognition from their Chinese tutor. In this pursuit, their Chinese academic skills are more important, and what they learn in the official classes irrelevant. Thus, the Chinese tutor represents a Chinese system that challenges the prevalence of westernized academic education.

In an interview with the Chinese professor at Shanghai Normal University, Xiaojiong Ding, she told me that "Most master students in China they want to participate in their tutors projects", because, as she says: "they can learn something and publish papers" (Professor Ding, interview excerpt). Her statement supports the notion, that the Chinese students are playing two different academic 'games,' the stakes of which relate to different future opportunities because they are rooted in different cultural traditions and different societies. As Chinese nationals in an international university program (located in in China), the Chinese students are evaluated according to two different orders of perception and appreciation. The Chinese students can play for either Western accreditation by putting their effort into the westernized structures of the program (such as learning English, the Western referencing styles, leaving behind their Chinese learning culture), thereby hoping for a future international career. Or, they can develop their Chinese academic skills and maintain the relationship with their tutor

(gaining Chinese academic capital and Chinese *Guanxi*¹⁶), thereby hoping to improve their future chances on a Chinese labour market. For some of the Chinese students, participating in the official learning activities seemed difficult and sometimes fruitless. On behalf of their social circumstances, highly tied to their prospected socio-economic condition in a Chinese society, the Chinese students seemed to find it risky to invest themselves entirely in the westernized educational standards at SDC. Besides spending a lot of time working for their tutor, they also questioned the relevancy of the academic content in the westernized curriculum. Thus, the Chinese students did not single-mindedly pursue the westernized academic skills, which is a contrast to the findings of Moufahim and Lim (2015):

Our findings show that [Chinese] students still, in this day and age, assume that Western models are more advanced, more open, more flexible, more creative – better, in other words. (Moufahim and Lim 2015, 449)

Rather, the Chinese students at SDC seemed aware that there were more at stake for them than adapting to the Western models. So, however strenuous a situation their double obligations would put them in, they were not ready disregard the Chinese academic demands, because the Chinese labour market still seemed to be most realistic destination. These findings are more in line with those of Dow (2010) who advises not to underestimate the Chinese students' history and most of all agency to criticize 'foreign experts' (Dow 2010, 506). Even though the Chinese students wanted to learn how to think and work according to the international academic standards, they did not seem to have any 'colonial illusion' about the superiority of Western education. Hence, the Chinese part of their degree still represented their best opportunities of advancing in the Chinese social hierarchy, albeit the international skills they would acquire could potentially catapult this advancement, either by internships and/or study opportunities abroad. Accordingly, professor Ding argued that Chinese students cannot rely completely on internationalization, since the old traditional universities still hold a lot of power in China:

Ding: Mostly, [Chinese students in an international program] are there for learning English. But they also use such programs as a springboard to go abroad, because they want an international degree, for them to find a good job on the labour market. [...] Most of them don't want to [move to another country], because they think that there are much more opportunities in China. But they

¹⁶ A Chinese expression for good social relations that give certain benefits, for example in relation to finding a job.

want to have international experience, an international degree and the English language.

Alexander: And international experience is that considered a valuable experience on the labour market?

Ding: Absolutely. But it's strange, because most of them don't think they will earn more after graduation compared with local program students, because they think that most of their time is spent on language, they do not have a good mastery of specific knowledge or skills, so they don't think that their earning power is the same as someone from a local program. [...] Maybe this is because some Chinese universities are very famous and their students are very powerful.

As Ding argues, the social prestige and future value of intercultural competencies and an international degree becomes devalued when the priority of the students is the local competition for better jobs. Learning English becomes a nice co-benefit from studying at an international program that increases the students' chances on the Chinese labour market, but it cannot be attained without honouring the Chinese academic life.

In a historical perspective, Western forms of education has not always been welcome in China (see for example Bieler 2004 for a historic illustration of Western educated Chinese). However, since China's shift from a centrally planned economy to a relatively free market economy, as well as its opening up reforms from 1978 has brought about extensive changes in its higher education system¹⁷. From being strictly government controlled, higher education in China has gradually seen a larger degree of autonomy, opening up the possibility of private partnerships and investment (Yang, Vidovich, and Currie 2007) as well as collaborations with foreign universities (He 2015). Today, many transnational university collaborations open up with financial incentives and a keen eye on the fast growing Asian population of potential students. In this context, China, the worlds fastest growing market for higher education (Dow 2010, 510), has received the attention of Western higher education institutions, many of which have opened university campuses on Chinese soil in collaboration with local universities. As of 2015, He (2015) accounts, there were 64 transnational higher education institutions in China and over 1.000 different transnational higher education programs. Chinese educational reforms in respectively 1995 and 2003 have catalysed this development. While the interest of foreign universities might be partly driven by financial incentive in a lucrative Chinese student market, it might also involve an internationalization strategy that will potentially improve the universities position within the global higher education hierarchy.

¹⁷ See Gou and Gou (2016b, 2016a) for elaborative accounts of the effects of both marketization and globalization on China's higher education system.

Still, foreign universities have usually had to settle for second- or lower tier universities when making collaborations in China (Dow 2010), and in China the same concern for the quality of foreign degrees has been voiced, resulting in increased political focus on high-standard foreign collaborators (He 2015, 82). As Dow reminds us, we should not underestimate the geopolitical agency of China as a historically and culturally strong nation-state, with their own specific intentions in regards to opening its doors to foreign higher education ventures. As such, from a official Chinese perspective, China's strategies of educational internationalization are regarded as a "springboard into its rightful place in the modern world" (Dow 2010, 503).

With the above historical and geopolitical insight, the picture of China's higher educational system as a victim of westernization can be nuanced, as was seen in the case of the competing fields at SDC. While acknowledging the necessity of internationalization (in the form of westernization) in an attempt to assert a global educational superiority, the Chinese academic traditions are not abandoned by the Chinese officials. Even though the Western influences at SDC might be the most obvious at a glance, the Chinese actors (students and professors) of the program seems to be reproducing traditional Chinese academic discourses, ultimately resulting in a form of eclecticism or pragmatic duality in the requirements of the Chinese students. On the other hand, the Danish actors in the program seemed keen on keeping within their familiar academic framework, rejecting any form of Chinese contributions, dead-set on the inferiority and lack of relevancy of the Chinese academic tradition.

5.4. Student's Educational Practice: Reasons for Learning

The consequence of the westernized organization of the program is that the Chinese students are positioned as less academic because their dispositions and academic resources are not useful in the Western academic practice. This creates a tension between the international students and the Chinese students resulting in a struggle for academic and social domination. These conflicts seem to be most vividly played out in the space of the intercultural group work, because it requires the students to work closely together and be dependant on each other.

5.4.1. *Inclusion and Exclusion*

Peking Duck (Observation – On a Friday in November, Beijing)

We're eating Peking Duck. They say it's the best place in Beijing. I'm with a small group of the international students, celebrating finishing their exam today. We are sitting in our own private room and the students are talking about their group work. One of the students, Lucas, got a text-message earlier from a Chinese student in his group saying that he was going to leave the group. Then just now he got another text-message from the same Chinese student saying that apparently he wasn't allowed to leave the group, so he was still in. Lucas isn't happy about it and tells us that the Chinese guy is "really difficult to work with," and that he "never shows up for the meetings and don't put as much effort into it as the rest of us." We stay on the topic, and the students try to figure how many pages you have to write if you are doing the project on your own. Most of them agree that you have to write ten pages, but some of the students act surprised. A Danish student, Sarah, says, "either way you only have to write ten pages, because in a group everyone has to write ten pages each, that's the minimum." Suddenly Michelle exclaims, "Well I still have to write twenty or thirty pages, because I don't expect the Chinese student to contribute with anything." Some of the student object to it, and Sarah says, "You know they have to contribute also." "That might be true", Michelle says, "but I'm dead certain that they aren't going to, so I expect to produce each of their ten pages."

The observation illustrates two different aspects of intercultural student interaction at SDC. Firstly, it shows how the international students feel like they have to carry the project work single-handedly because the Chinese student cannot, or do not know how to, make a project the right way. Secondly, the fact that the Chinese group member wants to leave Lucas' group seems to be fuel on the fire for the frustrations of the international students, since they experience the Chinese students as demotivated and disinterested in putting an effort into making a good project. Yet the Chinese students also seem to be frustrated because the international students doubt both their abilities and motivations. As Julia explains

At the same time the foreign student are a little disrespectful... they think the Chinese student's are... they say 'why do you don't speak your ideas [pretends to speak like the international students]', 'why you did so small work', 'all work is by the foreign students', 'oh we are tired and we don't have the responsibility to help you, to teach you'. I think in China everyone should helps each other, especially in class, students should help each other and tell you how to do and what to do, I think it is very common, but the foreign students think, 'oh, I don't have the responsibility to help you', 'you should know how to do yourself'. I think they are selfish sometimes. (Julia, Chinese female student, interview excerpt)

The international students categorizations of the Chinese students' incompetence can be understood in the perspective of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, or as a stigmatization of the Chinese students, which, according to James (2015, 110), is not without some psychological effect. This psychological effect seems illustrated as severe frustrations in Julia's statement above. However, the international students' actions are

legitimized according to the symbolic system, which recognizes the hierarchy between the international and Chinese dispositions. The international students seem to actively try to maintain their dominating position, more or less unconsciously, by referring to the academic requirements naturalized in the institutional context of SDC. This is the case with Lisa, who is worried about getting a good grade:

Lisa: ... Before coming here I thought I would be better at working together with the Chinese, but I really don't feel like that now.

Alexander: What do you think is the reason for that?

Lisa: That I'm frustrated like everybody else because we have to produce this project together and we are all assessed individually... I think I had the personal surplus to be a bridge between the two cultures... before we started this project, which we are getting a grade for, so I'm also invested in the sense that I want it to go well. [...] As soon as you have to do something that you want to do well, then you quickly get an attitude like, 'you don't know how to do this as well as I do,' and then the environment becomes kind of hostile, which I think is a shame for the sake of the program.

Lisa's statement reveals that the stakes for her in terms of her academic performance might be more important than the intercultural learning aspects. She is not willing to risk getting a bad result in her project exam, which she considers as more likely when working together with the Chinese students. In a general sense, the international student's interest in getting good grades resulted in a partial exclusion of the Chinese students from the group work, as the Chinese students couldn't be trusted to deliver an adequate academic product. This process of exclusion is also evident in the observation presented below:

Unprofessionalism (Observation – On a Friday in December, Beijing)

We have a break from class. I'm outside the entrance of the teaching facilities with a couple of international students smoking a cigarette. Two of the students are in the project group together and they are talking about a third group member, a Chinese student. From their conversation I make out that they have to visit a certain company to do an interview with one of the employees as part of the data collection for their project work. The international students are frustrated because they already decided that it was only the two of them who were supposed to visit the company and do the interview. But now the Chinese student suddenly also wants to go, and she thinks the whole group should go. "It would be so unprofessional if we all went" one of the International students say, "why can't she see that? And we already decided that we were the ones going."

The processes of inclusion and exclusion are conflicting in the sense that the international students want the Chinese students to participate more and share more of

their perspectives, but still find the contributions of the Chinese students inadequate. Because the project work is new to the Chinese students, it is hard for them to be confident and contribute. These difficulties are reinforced by the international students' exclusion of the Chinese students. This results in the Chinese students losing their share in the group work and for some it means that they would rather back out of the project work entirely (as revealed in the 'Peking Duck' observation).

Surprisingly, the above-described issues reveal a major contrast between the educational strategies of the international students (gaining intercultural experiences and working together with the Chinese students) and their actual participation in the educational practice. Rather than being open minded towards cultural differences and trying to acquire a deeper understanding of the ideas and behaviour of the Chinese students, the international students are preoccupied with getting good grades. When the official curriculum and its evaluation criteria are based on a Western academic tradition, the international students seem to fall back into their academic habitus, because good grades is perceived important for later professional success. Since these forms of actions are poised by the official structures of the program, the real problem seems to be that there is no official system for recognizing efforts of intercultural understanding. This culturally hegemonic practice should be seen in the context of a Western labour market, where the official diploma and academic performance are worth more than having 'intercultural competencies.' This is expressed by the international students distancing themselves from what they perceive to be a Chinese way of education:

For me, the Chinese way of learning is not satisfying, so I wouldn't be satisfied if I came here to SDC and only receive the Chinese way of education, and I sort of I think it seems now that sometimes if we have a Chinese teacher it's seems to not satisfy the majority of the European students, simply because there is no class... it's just, obviously it's different from what we are used to back home, we just have to sit in class and listen to a professor telling us things, which in general I find it nice if there's a bit of class discussion, I think it's very admirable that you can reproduce so much information, because I could not ever do that, but I don't see a point in learning it to remember it and then that's it, and I think that our, no offense, I think that my way of teaching or my way of education taught me a lot more than I could have learned if I had been in a Chinese university (Anna, international female student, group discussion).

Even though the International students have chosen to go to China to study their master's degree, and even though most of them express some sort of intercultural interest, they seem to regard a Chinese form of education, associated with 'reproduction,' as inferior to the Western form education. Thus, the International students want to learn

about China, but they do not seem to want Chinese learning because it is not attractive for them, neither as a marker of identity nor as a strategic investment in their future chances of employment.

5.4.2. *Being There for the Right Reasons*

True to the Party (Observation – On a Thursday in December, Beijing)

I had a short talk with a Danish informant, very involved with the management of SDC¹⁸. Even though I hoped to do an interview with him, unfortunately he didn't have the time. At the end of our conversation he quickly adds, "A lot of the Chinese students who study here don't really have a choice about it. For them it's all about rising in the social hierarchy. A lot of them are from the countryside - they're very true to the Party. The Chinese Academy of Science [formally in charge of UCAS] is a national institution under the government, so the social science programs are very much operating in a grey zone. The students can't be too critical; they can't become too open-minded. They have no options but to follow the instruction of their tutor."

Whether or not the informant was right in saying that the Chinese students did not have any choice and that the Party placed them at SDC, it was interesting noticing that many of the international students questioned the motivations and free will of the Chinese students. Looking through some of my interviews and observations, indications of the idea that the Chinese students had not chosen SDC themselves kept appearing. For example, this came up as an issue during my interview with Lisa:

I have a feeling that this program is something they [the Chinese students] haven't actively chosen, because they were interested in the this specific subject, somehow it feels like they were just placed somewhere, so they're not as driven by their personal desires as we are. It's more like, they read what they have to and to get it over with and then they're free. So I think they're driven by some other things. [...] And then I think they're motivated because they want to be able to get a job afterwards, of course we want that too, but I just think we have a culture where you study both so we can get a job, but also because studying is a kind of personal development and that you have to think its interesting and it's an important part of your life. I don't think the Chinese students are motivated like that. (Lisa, Danish female student, interview excerpt)

Lisa puts forth a clear contrast between an instrumentalist perception of education, relating to the Chinese culture, and studying for personal development and enlightenment, related to Western culture. The motivations for studying are characterized as a central issue that affects the possibilities for mutually benefitting group work.

¹⁸ The official role and identity of the informant is undisclosed in order not to compromise the official position of the informant.

In the following excerpt from the group discussion, the international female student Anna also touches upon the Chinese students' specific reasons for being in SDC:

Anna: I think that's also... I know some of the girls from our class told me as well that they are here to learn English, but it's also not completely your own choice right, to do this master's? Isn't it also that some of the people are picked? Like chosen by the party to...

Bao: What, I don't get it?

Anna: Never mind, never mind, but some of the girls from our course told me that they are doing this program to learn English, and what Esben says, I don't think that is, for any of the international students, the reason, it's a nice side effect, but I think it's a nice objective for a lot of the Chinese student's to have... You know in my opinion you should do a master's program if you're interested in that subject, but if it's just for learning English I don't really see the point, because then I think you would lack the motivation or the interest in the particular topic, because I don't think it's a topic that everyone likes.

When Anna suggests that the Party (Communist Party of China, CPC) is involved in choosing some students for the program, Bao does not seem to understand it. The incomprehensibility of Anna's suggestion to Bao highlights some fundamental differences in the life-worlds of the two students. This shows how the students, caught up in different cultural systems, do not share the same sense of what is important or relevant in a given situation. For Anna, the motivations behind why people are in the program are very important, and the specific topic of the program should be the central motivation. Her statements seem to suggest that Anna is implicitly reproducing a Western idea about education, relating to personal interest and an inner motivation guiding her educational choices, just as we saw in the quote from Lisa. It is not only the Chinese language proficiencies and academic skills that are being problematized by the international students – they seem to question the whole justification for the Chinese students being at SDC. By believing the Chinese students to have been placed at SDC by the Party, a Chinese tutor from their bachelor (as the professor did in the 'Double Obligations' observation) or because it is the will of their family, the international students and professors are delegitimizing the Chinese students' mere presence at and intentions with the program. As such, the reason why a student is in the program also becomes a central sorting factor in which the Chinese students are academically disregarded, which leads to a serious devaluation of their skills and dispositions. The international students seem to think that rather than contributing to the academic environment and the learning goals of the international students, the Chinese students

are sometimes a hindrance for them to achieve what they set out for, because the Chinese lack academic interest. In order for the Chinese students to be acknowledged by the international students, and in order for them to be perceived as academic equals, they not only have to get better at English, become actively participating students, learn to make references and learn to be more curious and think more critically - they also have to learn to love the subject they are studying.

In the group discussion Bao confirmed that a lot of the Chinese students were mainly focused on getting their master's degree because of what it could provide them with in terms of a good future career and personal prosperity:

Bao: You know that in China every year we have 1.3 million just try to get a master's degree, but just 0.3 or 0.4 can get opportunity to attend the master's program, so the competition is very high, especially in some universities such as UCAS, Tsinghua and other famous universities, so we are also very lucky people, the Chinese students here and some times some Chinese student their first choice isn't the PMSD, because their first choice in university didn't let them have the opportunity to study there so they just change their mind to the UCAS PMSD, if they don't do that they will loose their opportunity to attend a master's program.

Esben: Is that the case for a lot of you guys?

Bao: Not a lot of us but maybe one third who came here like that, so for the Chinese it is also complex. In China the competition is very high... Most students just wanna get a high degree and get a good job, and also some of them want to just go straight the academic way...

As was highlighted in the previous analytical chapter, the excessive competition in the Chinese society and the means of advancing one's social position through a good academic education seems to be an imminent motivation for the Chinese students to do a master's degree. The specific subject becomes secondary. We find similar arguments for this in Kim's (2009) article, when she writes that Chinese educational motivation is dominated by a "single-minded pursuit of a successful university entrance and successful job" (Kim 2009, 865). Still, while this might be the social reality of the Chinese students, it also creates fundamental issues and conflicts of interest between the students, which fosters an environment of distrust at SDC. The international students seem to use these social circumstances against the Chinese students to justify that the Chinese students are not studying at SDC for the right reasons, reproducing a Western individualistic logic of what education is supposed to mean for the subject. Since the Chinese students fail to live up to this specific logic, it is easy for the international students to disregard the

difficulties in the project work as an effect of the Chinese supposedly not caring enough for the specific subject they are studying.

5.5. Social Preferences: Widening the Gap

In the following I will look into how the students spend their time outside university and what different cultural practices are shared between the students, since there are strong signs that their experiences of the learning environment at SDC are also affected by their experiences and interactions in everyday life outside the university.

5.5.1. *Youth Culture and Social Relations*

Several factors support the fact that the academic issues the students were facing in coping with the intercultural group work were also related to the differences in aspects of social life and especially youth culture. Hence, the two groups of students had distinctively different cultural practices relating to life outside of school. When asked about their free time activities most of the Chinese students mentioned shopping, watching movies together, hanging out, drinking tea, and talking. Some of them also did sports activities. While the international students also spent their free time shopping, visiting sites in Beijing, doing sports or watching movies together, what seemed to distinguish the two groups were the habits of going out, particularly the habits of drinking alcohol. This specific difference in preferences for free time activities was very defining for the structure of the relationship between the Chinese and international students. Both groups of students seemed to have an interest in including the other group in their social activities, and these integrational processes were often highly recognized amongst the students. For the international students, it meant a lot if the Chinese students took part in their ‘drinking culture’. As Danish student Hans explains

We’ve gotten them to join some of our activities, but it’s something... they are getting better at that, but they also have to figure out, ‘who are these big northern Europeans who come out here and go out drinking every weekend almost.’ But they’re getting used to that and they join us sometimes. For example, this girl [Weici], she went out with us last Friday, and she was with us until the very last. So that was crazy, she never touched alcohol before that, so I think that shows, not because everything has to involve alcohol, it’s more like a process that they have to... we have to learn about each other, how we act as people with a different cultural background. (Hans, Danish male student, interview excerpt)

For Hans it seems natural to ‘socialize’ with alcohol involved and he also finds it to be a big part of the way that the international students are together. He is aware that the

Chinese students do not have the same kind of youth culture, and he acknowledges Weici's efforts to engage in their cultural practice. Often when Chinese students had gone out drinking with the international students it became the 'talk of the town' at SDC, like Hans mentioning that Weici was 'staying until the very last'. In this way, Weici is successful in gaining social capital through her participation in the cultural practice of the international students. The Chinese students generally seem to be rewarded socially for partaking in the favoured social activities of the international students. In this way going out and drinking alcohol was a social sorting factor, as this was a way to receive social recognition from the international students.

Taking a Break from the Chinese (Observation – On a Wednesday in December, Beijing)

The class just finished and I'm walking to the cantina with a group of Danish students from one of the natural science programs at SDC. We start talking about social activities and friendships between international and Chinese students. "Yeah, I think we've been pretty good at doing things together," one student says. However, it seems not everyone agrees; "Well, I don't really think three dinners are a lot," another student argues. The others students mostly agree with the latter statement. They think that hanging out and doing stuff with the Chinese students is difficult: "At first I think everyone was really motivated to go out and do stuff together, but it's like the energy level now is low. Personally, I'm just taking a little break from doing social activities with the Chinese right now. But I think it will turn at some point," a student tells me, while we're having lunch in the cantina. "The Chinese students rather want to stay at home, watch TV or relax, than go out and see the city," the students tell me. "We did have one drinks night, which was really cool, some of the Chinese really went at it," they say and continue by telling stories of the drinks night.

In terms of social relations, the international students seemed to perceive making friends with the Chinese a quite demanding endeavour because of the difference in culture and social preferences. Consequently, some of the international students felt they had to 'take a break' from socializing with the Chinese students. In result, the international students were more inclined to make close friendships within their own cultural group. One possible explanation for this is that it was a way to make up for being outsiders in the Chinese culture - a conclusion which is also highlighted in Pham and Tran's (2017) studies of international students' social engagement in their host community (Pham and Tran 2017, 208). The habitual difference between the students prevented them from engaging in everyday practices that were meaningful to both groups. Such distance stood in the way of the students being able to engage in a natural close friendship together, because of the lack of common ground in terms of cultural conceptions of social

practices. Every time the students were together, there had to be a negotiation of what constitutes a meaningful social practice, which seemed to require a certain degree of effort. However, it also became a site of struggle in which both cultural groups tried to define what a meaningful social practice was supposed to be on the basis of their dispositions. In order to avoid always having to negotiate these practices, it was more likely for the students to engage in social activities with the group that they belonged to, which enforced the social divide between the international and Chinese students. However, even though both groups expressed a desire to do more intercultural activities, efforts to do so were mainly seen where Chinese students engaged in the cultural practice of the international students, including going out and drinking. In this sense, intercultural social activities seemed to be mostly organized on the terms of the international students' cultural practice.

Concluding Remarks

In this final chapter, I summarize the entire structure of the thesis, including the field of research, problem statement, methods of data collection and conceptual framework for the empirical analysis. I then summarize the findings of the empirical parts, articulating an overall conclusion of my research question. Finally, I will shortly delve into the practical implications of my findings concerning both SDC itself, but also matters of learning in international higher education in general.

6.1. Research Field and Structure

As an educational internationalization strategy, the Sino-Danish Center in Beijing is a political and diplomatic project aimed at enhancing the bilateral relations between Denmark and China in commerce and trade by educating master students with academic skills and intercultural competencies ideal for working across Danish and Chinese borders. From the beginning, the knowledge interest of this thesis was sparked by apparent intercultural challenges and contradictions experienced by some of the students at SDC. Studying the challenges and contradictions in intercultural learning environments presented both an academically and practically interesting task. In this regard, the scientific interest guiding this thesis can be encapsulated in two questions; what kinds of issues arise when culturally diverse learners are brought together in a common learning environment, and how can these issues be scientifically constructed and understood? Further, how is the internationalization of higher education affecting local and regional specific academic knowledge and its learners? SDC offered an appropriate case for studying such interests, which makes the findings in this thesis relevant in a very practical sense.

The main data for analysis was produced during three weeks of fieldwork at SDC in Beijing. This included participant observation of the students during their official learning activities and informal social activities, individual life-history interviews with 15 students, a thematic group discussion with four students, as well as an interview with a Chinese professor in Shanghai, specializing in international higher education in China. Analytically, I found Bourdieu's socio-analytical approach useful for constructing a notion of how the students' cultural differences were affecting the way they participated

in the educational environment. Referring to the concept of habitus, the students' social practices and perceptions thereof can be seen as an embodiment of their social and economic conditions. Further, Bourdieu's emphasis on the symbolic dimensions of social life was useful for understanding how cultural differences were constructed on the basis of the historic foundation and transformations of that specific field.

With the above methodological approach, this thesis set out to understand and conceptualize how contradictions and challenges in a Sino-Danish higher education learning environment were related to the educational strategies and cultural backgrounds of the students and also to the institutional setup of SDC. The empirical part of the thesis was organized in two chapters, dealing firstly with an in-depth analysis of four different student trajectories, conceptualizing the students' educational strategies on the basis of their social and cultural background and their specific investment in the field of higher education. The second empirical part constructed a notion of the field with specific emphasis on the academic logics dominating the learning environment at SDC.

6.2. Conclusions

In the first empirical analytical chapter, the institutional ambiguity of SDC is illustrated through the different educational strategies of its students. Aside from having a culturally diverse body of students, SDC also has a broad social base of admission, enrolling students with different compositions of economic and social capital. The difference is exhibited through how the students position themselves and seek different forms of capital. Cutting across cultural differences, students with more cultural capital are more oriented towards the intercultural aspect of the program, pursuing linguistic (English or Chinese) and intercultural capital. Amongst the students from non-academic homes, different strategies are utilized. For the Danish part, an orientation towards establishing business relations (social capital) in China is highly outspoken. The Chinese working class strategies are more unspecific, revealing the incompatibility between Chinese working class dispositions and the structures of the program. For many students, studying at SDC is a compensatory strategy, making up for the failure to enter other more desired programs. In this sense, SDC doesn't enjoy the same prestige as other more recognized higher education institutions such as Tsinghua (Chinese) or other highly regarded transnational institutions such as Nottingham Ningbo and NYU-Shanghai. This fact makes especially the Chinese students uncertain about the value of a degree from

SDC. The analysis also shows, that despite getting an international education, all the students orient themselves towards a future work and family life in their country of origin after some years of international experience. This fact has several consequences for how the students participate in the educational practice.

In the second empirical chapter, the learning environment at SDC is constructed as a field where Western educational standards dominate, rooted in a naturalization of a Western academic logic in international education in general. The Chinese students' desires of acculturation to the Western academic logic implies a misrecognition of the symbolic order, because they are subduing themselves in inferior positions because of their apparent 'cultural deficit'. However, their actions and desires are related to their social circumstances, in which an international education is generally perceived as enhancing one's employability on the Chinese labour market. Meanwhile, the international students enjoy dominating positions on behalf of their cultural dispositions, which is legitimized as symbolic capital in the context of SDC. Moreover, they deny the arbitrariness of their own advantaged position, reproducing the schemes of perception and appreciation constituted by the official curriculum at SDC. The international students maintain the symbolic order through negative categorizations of the capabilities and academic interests of the Chinese students, which is in contrast to the educational strategies analysed in the first empirical chapter. This contrast shows that in situations of academic evaluation (grades, diploma etc.), the international students' intentions of learning 'interculturally' are overshadowed by their pursuit of academic recognition.

Even though the Chinese students invest themselves in forms of Western acculturation, they also carry out large amounts of extra-curricula work for a Chinese tutor, appointed to them. As such, a subfield within SDC exists, through which the Chinese students are positioning themselves according to Chinese academic standards, sometimes disregarding the official westernized curriculum requirements. Through this subfield, the Chinese students hope to increase their chances of success on the Chinese labour market – something the westernized aspects of the program at SDC alone cannot give them. These double obligations are an effect of wider geopolitical struggles between the prevalence of academic traditions between the West and East. In this sense, transnational university environments are sites where the relation between culture and power are put into practices and cultural systems are competing for domination.

The contradictions and challenges in the learning environment at SDC arise in part because the students orient themselves towards their chances on distinctively

different labour markets and thus seek the capital best suitable for their desired future. In this sense, the international students have the immediate advantage, because the program is designed primarily for their current dispositions and future needs. The biggest issue for a mutually benefitting learning environment is thus the one-sided focus on Western standards of education, which fail to take into consideration local practices and their historical significance, as well as the social reality of non-Western students. If SDC wants to create international education for the benefit of both Chinese and international students, the institution should not take the (life) history and future orientations of the Chinese students for granted, but rather work towards a common goal. The lack of common environments for mutually benefitting intercultural interaction creates a gap between the students based on their distinct cultural backgrounds and national/regional belonging, which in the end negatively affects their intercultural learning experiences.

6.3. Future Perspectives

The purpose of a socio-analysis is to reveal which misrecognized common logics people act according to. Revealing such hidden structures is a means to empower the marginalized groups by providing them with a disenchanting perspective on their social predicament. Direct transformative action thus lies outside of the scientific aims of this approach. However, to provide some future perspectives and make relevant my findings, I will discuss possible ways to use these findings to improve the learning environment.

One of the immediate visible challenges in the learning environment of SDC is the Chinese students' general lack of English language proficiency. If SDC could implement a new procedure for testing the language skills of its Chinese students before admission, it would perhaps be easier for the students to work in groups, and also easier for the Chinese students to acculturate to the westernized academic standards. Still, the Chinese students would lag behind the international students, since they wouldn't enter the program with the same Western academic dispositions. However, this solution neglects an important argument made in this thesis. For the Chinese students it is too risky to turn their backs on the Chinese academic tradition and devote themselves to the westernized academic standards. This argument breaks with any ethnocentric solution that fails to understand the Chinese historic and social circumstances and the Chinese students' future possibilities on the Chinese labour market. Any normative solutions to the challenges and contradictions of the learning environment at SDC should take into

account the underlying cultural logics structuring the organization of the program, which distort the relations between the students because of their predetermined national categories. Off-setting the international students' a priori advantages could possibly open up the possibility for more mutually benefitting intercultural encounters. However, the international students' social circumstances are also of great importance, since they provide the students with the misguided notion that even though learning about China presents a great professional advantage, the Chinese educational tradition is inferior to the Western. Unless symbolic orders such as these, deeply entrenched in a Eurocentric colonial narration and the global neo-liberal agenda, are challenged, it seems implausible that the international students will invest in anything but education that prioritizes Western academic standards.

Only a few days before the submission of this thesis, the Danish Crown Prince officially inaugurated SDC's new state of the art teaching building at UCAS Yanqihu Campus, about 70 kilometres north of Beijing. This indicates that political and financial powers will keep this Sino-Danish collaboration afloat for a while. This thesis thus suggests that all actors involved in the collaboration start considering the kind of ambivalent student experiences that lurk behind a great political and diplomatic idea. They should keep on trying to understand the situation and motivations of the students, and avoid leaving them grasping for academic recognition in culturally arbitrary settings. Cultural understanding is a two-way process, and the international students might be able to learn more from the Chinese students than the common discourse posits. The internationalization of higher education has more potential than providing the basis of the westernization of the world.

6.4. Research Evaluation

As mentioned earlier, every research process requires that the researcher make important choices and painful limitations. Most often, the consequences of such limitations and choices are not completely clear in the moment they are made. In this last part of the thesis I will discuss the implications of my research approach and suggest what could have been done differently, to achieve other and maybe more scientifically rigorous results.

At the outset of this thesis, I planned to apply the psycho-societal theoretical developments of Salling Olesen and his colleagues from RUC (2015). I brought this perspective with me to China and conducted the interviews inspired by the life-history

method. During the initial months writing on this thesis the psycho-societal approach stuck with me, but the entrance of Bourdieu's theoretical framework had already started to cause some doubts. Keen on finding a way to combine the two in an analytical context, I commenced the first part of the analysis still with both approaches present. While I found many similarities between the two approaches, especially in their view of the constitution of the self through social structures, I found their research priorities rather different. Socio-analysis is the study of fields, and individuals are nothing more than means to study this field. In the psycho-societal approach there persists a genuine interest in the individuality and psyche of subjects, and how this is formed through social experiences (2015). However, through the process of analysis, the socio-analytical approach swallowed up the psycho-societal, as it became clear, that Bourdieu's concepts possessed a more stringent and not least more applied approach to the issues I was interested in analysing. Thus, what started out as personal portraits of the identity formation of four different students at SDC, I later felt the necessity to alter into four exemplary positions, indicating the structure of the field. I find this reflected in the final outcome of the thesis. In some areas, the first analytical chapter tends to fall between these two approaches, which is less beneficial for the thesis as a whole. Still, I believe the chapter succeeds in pointing out the diversity permeating the student group at SDC, clearly affecting some of the challenges in the learning environment.

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Appendixes

8.1. Appendix A: Rewriting Empirical Material

8.1.1. *From Field Note to Object of Analysis*

This is an example of how I ‘translated’ my raw field notes into pieces of text, or objects of analysis, presented in the this thesis. I wrote field notes in Danish, so I’ve translated them into English here (which denotes even another ‘rewriting’):

The students started talking about the group work and about the possibility of someone leaving a group. Lucas had gotten a message from someone in his group, who wrote that he was leaving the group, but then shortly after he wrote that he wasn’t. They talked about that then you’d have to write 10 pages if you were alone, some was surprised. In response Sara said that it was the same if you were in a group, 10 pages each. That had Michelle saying, that she was gonna write 20-30 pages in her group because she didn’t expect the Chinese to contribute at all... (‘Raw’ field notes)

And this is the same observation after it was rewritten:

Lucas isn’t happy about it, and tells us that the Chinese guy is “really difficult to work with,” and that he “never shows up for the meetings and don’t put as much effort into it as the rest of us.” We stay on the topic, and the students try to figure how many pages you have to write, if you are doing the project on your own. Most of them agree that you have to do ten pages, but some of the students act surprised. A Danish student, Sarah, says, “either way you only have to write ten pages, because in a group everyone has to write ten pages each, that’s the minimum.” Suddenly Michelle exclaims, “Well I still have to write twenty or thirty pages, because I don’t expect the Chinese student to contribute with anything.” (Rewritten field notes, also used later as an analytical object)

8.1.2. *From Transcript to Interview Excerpt*

The following excerpt is from my interview with the Chinese female student Julia. Her English was quite poor, and during the interview she frequently looked up words on Google Translate on her computer. This is the un-edited version from the transcript:

Alexander: I thought about this; you said the Chinese universities, or in the school system there is a lot of pressure. What is this like? Can you explain more?

Julia: Pressure?... Hm... for example participating in the exam, the student work too much, but they chose a little bit a small part. And if you want to get an undergraduation or a master it is very difficult. [Looks up a word] It’s just like a war.

Alexander: It’s a war? Between the students?

Julia: Yeah... Everyday in high school I will get up early, about, last year, when I had the exam for the master, I get up early morning at 5 o'clock.

Alexander: Five o'clock...

Julia: Early, morning, AM. Five o'clock.... And study to the night at maybe 11 o'clock.

Alexander: Okay, all day.

Julia: Yes, all day. After the lunch, after the breakfast it's just [pretends to read in a book]. It's very hard, and I don't have any time to do other things.

Alexander: No.

And this is after I edited the transcript, and how it is presented in the analysis:

Alexander: I thought about this; you said the Chinese universities, or in the school system there is a lot of pressure. What is this like? Can you explain more?

Julia: If you want to get an undergraduate or a master it's very difficult. It's just like a war. Everyday in the high school you get up early. In the last year with the exam for the master I got up every morning at five o'clock and I studied until the night at maybe eleven o'clock. All day. After the lunch, after the breakfast... It's very hard. And I don't have time to do other things [...]. And I don't have time to exercise and make some sports.

8.2. Appendix B: Email to Students at SDC

This is an example of the email sent to the students who signed up on the list passed around the second day of class:

Dear

Thanks for signing up on the list to be interviewed for my master thesis project. My project is about student experiences in transnational higher education corporation. SDC is my case. So I'm really thankful that you agreed to speak with me. The interview will take 45 minutes to one hour, and I wish to record it (sound only). Of course, everything will be anonymous in my final paper. If this is a problem for you, please let me know, and I will not record it.

You have signed up to be available this Saturday the 24th. What time during the day would be okay for you to meet? I will suggest some time between 1 pm and 5 pm, but other times would also be fine. I don't know the area that well, but I live close to the school and the dorms. You can suggest a place to meet, like a café, or maybe the school is fine for you. Please let me know about the time and place, I'm very flexible 😊

Again, thank you very much for your time. See you.

Best regards

Alexander Støvelbæk

Roskilde University

[Phone Number]

[Wechat ID]