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**Educational Mobility in Transition: what can China and the UK learn from each other?**

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**Educational Mobility in Transition: what can China and the UK  
learn from each ~~one another~~?**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the differences in international student mobility in two contrasting countries: UK and China, at national, institutional and individual levels. They are countries in transition in a greater global context. The objective is to identify what these countries can learn from each other about the issues and policies surrounding the management of educational mobility. An inductive approach was employed to understand real-life experience via case studies. Participant observation and semi-structured interview methods with a variety of stakeholders were used to collect data which were then subjected to a thematic analysis to identify in which areas countries had developed good practice. Over-arching themes were developed through comparing national findings. These reveal that national policy and family support are most influential in China, while British universities largely drive student mobility at an institutional level. Concluding that no one country has a comprehensive and complete approach, this study proposes the areas in which both could develop and details good practice. The value therefore emerges from the comparison and contrast and the practical focus of the research.

**Keywords** Student mobility, UK, China

**1. Introduction**

UK, and China are countries in transition. The Chinese' paradoxical culture (Fang 2003) allows them to develop their own interpretation of capitalism under a communist party and the country turns outward to the international stage. The United Kingdom is no longer united: the Scottish referendum in 2014 came close to dissolving the union and the Brexit vote in June 2016 has divided the country. Despite very different histories, both ~~all three~~ are searching for a new position in the world.

Our students are also in transition. Despite the higher-level debate concerning their home countries' integration in the outside world, students are increasingly, inexorably moving across borders (Daly, 2011), but not always in both directions. China's youth

travel across the world in search of the best higher education, but many fewer international students seek out China's universities (Chinese MoE, 2015). Meanwhile, British universities are heavily subsidised by lucrative incoming international students, but famously low numbers of British students' study abroad (British Council, 2016).

It is evident that students who participate in mobility programmes gain competitive advantage and distinguish themselves from others who do not have mobility experiences (Daly, 2005). Many existing studies have examined the individual drivers of shaping student outbound mobility (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2009; Daly, 2011) by focussing on a single country or region, such as the USA (Salisbury et al., 2009), Australia (Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015), Europe (Teichler, 2012) or Singapore (Mok, 2012). There is a shortage of analysis comparing international student mobility in the context of different countries. Between these two countries, the UK has strong inbound mobility but low numbers of inbound. China's inbound student mobility is less developed than outbound student mobility but we look at both, in order to maximise learnings. A policy of 'subjectivity with transparency' and transcontextual credibility throughout enables the reader to judge transferability.

Uniquely, this study explores the differences in international student mobility in two contrasting countries: UK and China. Analysing the phenomenon of student mobility at national, institutional and personal levels, we attempt to discover what these countries can learn from one another about the challenges in encouraging and managing educational mobility. Specifically, our objectives were 1. what are the key factors affecting student mobility from different stakeholder perspective? 2. How do higher education (HE) institutions encourage and manage mobility students to study

abroad? 3. What can the countries, UK and China learn from each other about the challenges of student mobility?

**2. Theoretical Understanding of Student Mobility**

Higher education has emerged as a universal agency, which provides guiding principles not only how to gain knowledge, but also as a means for scholars to learn how to live; realise their full potential and use their skills for the greater good, thus overcoming the disadvantages associated with the socio-economic conditions (Dewey, 1938). International competence is now critical to a nation's health – *“a generalized necessity rather than an option for the tier of societal elites as in the past”* (Bartell, 2003, p.49). Dewey (1938) and Scheurman and Newman (1998) believed that students thrive in an environment where they are offered opportunities for authentic experience and learning. In the various studies conducted into higher education and its internationalisation, considerable attention is paid to student mobility (West and Barham, 2009), which is a phenomenon involving different stakeholders.

**2.1 A stakeholder view in driving student mobility**

Stakeholders can be *“any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives”* (Freeman, 1984: 46). Both primary stakeholder group and secondary stakeholder group have different levels of interests, influence and power in determining institutions' continuous survival and prosperity (Peng, 2014). Delivering sustained value and quality to stakeholders is expected from stakeholder perspective. Souto-Otero et al. (2013) confirmed that various stakeholders in and out of the Erasmus programme recognise the benefits of student mobility. However, barriers differ between them.

The involvement of higher education institutions in international activities is influenced by a variety of external and internal stakeholder groups (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Schofer and Meyer, 2005), including government, HE institutions, students, parents and industry (Bolton and Nie, 2010). Those stakeholders potentially have divergent perceptions of value for student mobility (SM). In examining the focus of research on SM, it is evident that government and HE institutions, as important stakeholder groups, play important roles in motivating SM. The rationales of government in promoting SM programmes have been highly recognised among the existing literature (Daly, 2011; Daly and Barker, 2010). For example, in China, government has been an influential player in opening up the Chinese education system and encouraging both strategic alliance between Western and Chinese universities (Bolton and Nie, 2010). At the institutional level, a relatively large body of literature examines what motives universities to embrace SM programmes (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013; Daly and Barker, 2015). The changing paradigm of HE (e.g. competition for financial and intellectual resources) drives many universities in both Western and Eastern economies to diversify their education products. The value of SM is being more widely recognised at a strategic level by many HE institutions.

In students, as a key stakeholder group, perceptions of ~~mobility-SM~~ are crucial in implementing internationalisation strategy. Many existing studies have examined the individual drivers of shaping student outbound mobility and discovered that academic development, personal development, career development and work-skills development are primary factors motivating SM (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2009; Daly, 2011). Moreover, continuing change in the HE environment (e.g. competition and

tuition fees) makes parents important stakeholders. According to Whitham (2003), parents need to be better informed, their interests will affect opportunities and outcomes of HE. In Chinese society, parents are active stakeholders. Their experiences and support of their children’s international activities need to be highlighted (Waters, 2005, 2006). As in the West, although decision making is largely influenced by university status (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013), parent support of student mobility is recognised. For example, Dall’Alba and Sidhu (2015) found that mobility students in Australian universities are mainly from middle-class families and the level of parental income seems an indicator of SM. This finding confirms Salisbury et al’s., (2009) results American universities.

It is increasingly clear that continuing cross-border activity, especially studying abroad, brings pressures to different group stakeholders (financially and academically). For such a dynamic and complex process (SM), how to align different stakeholder groups’ interests, needs and power to manage an SM programme efficiently is a great challenge.

**2.2 Managing student mobility**

With increasing market influence and competition in the HE industry, many universities seek better solutions in terms of how to manage SM efficiently. It is clear that significant institutional support is crucial if universities are to achieve internationalisation goals (Daly et al., 2005). A small body of literature examines good and in-depth good practices in facilitating and managing participants in SM programmes, for example, Souto-Otero et al. (2013), who focus on barriers and benefits.

According to Bridger (2015), variety of approaches can be used to increase SM participants, such as designing SM as a part of programme studies; better communication between potential participants and the central international office. Moreover, inspirational staff and strategic commitment at institutional level are regarded as two key drivers for SM programmes. There are a number of hurdles that demotivate SM participants, such as difficulties in accessing mobility opportunities and the complexity of the application process. To overcome these barriers, in addition to efficient communication between participants and staff, universities can adapt adequate strategies to support student-targeted action (King and Findlay, 2010).

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to initiate an exploration of student mobility mechanisms in the UK and China through the comparison of case studies. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, we employed an inductive approach to understand real-life context via multiple case studies for both China and the UK (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2003). The authors asseverate that the lived experience of individuals and institutions can provide an epistemological advantage over other methodologies and improve understanding of the phenomenon. We utilised a single case study method in each selected country (UK and China), but employed the multi-case approach to analyse our data comparatively.

To collect data, the authors used participant observation and semi-structured interview methods (Creswell, 2007; Gillham, 2000) which combined to form a set of evidence from multiple sources. Across on-campus and country visits in person, we interviewed a convenience sample composed of undergraduates, university staff and

parents in the UK and China, who were involved in international student mobility.

The details of the data collection methods are summarised below:

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Countries	Research methods	The researchers' roles
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Action Research method of data generation through Dionysian cycles of Action Research (Heron, 1996) over 3 years and accompanying analysis.</li><li>Participant observation and interviews for data collection.</li></ul>	Initiator of the student exchange programme at the researched UK institution / more than 10 years' experience in student and staff mobility
China	<p>One-to-one personal interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4 staff (vising scholars from the researched Chinese university – conducted in UK)</li><li>4 students (conducted in UK)</li><li>2 parents (conducted in China when the author visited the Chinese partner universities)</li></ul>	<p>Responsible for the <del>In charge of</del> Chinese CV partners in the researched UK institution in the last 12 years / looks after visiting scholars from Chinese partner universities</p>

As indicated in the above table, participants from different groups of stakeholders were interviewed for this research. Two different approaches overlapped in the two geographies due to differing levels of access. This added to the richness of the data available: some 'generated' and some 'collected'. ~~The s~~Semi-structured interviews featured in both approaches: they lasting about 50 minutes and in average and were conducted in English and Mandarin Chinese. Using interviewees' native languages is important because scholars have long argued that participants were more comfortable ~~in~~ telling their stories in their mother tongue (Quan, He and Sloan, 2016). Some interviews were conducted in the UK, and others were in foreign countries (e.g. Chinese parents in China). The selected core quotes, which bring the connection between key themes and questions, were translated by the Chinese researcher.

In the UK, the authors participated directly in the events and initiatives described.

Data were analysed by using thematic analysis (King and Horrocks, 2010), which

enabled us to conduct the analysis iteratively, revealing a set of key themes relating to the issues under investigation (Huberman and Miles, 2002). Each researcher processed their raw data and coded the key themes emerged individually first, then a few panel meetings were held among the three-researchers to finalise the coded themes. The constant comparison method was used to discover the similarities and differences for comparison analysis. Such emerging key themes were all coded in English. To respond the question 'how many codes are enough', we followed the rule that no new themes and rare samples occurred after all interview transcripts were analysed (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). All participants were ensured of confidentiality. All participants were also given a choice to opt out of the interviews if they felt uncomfortable during the process. Moreover, it is believed that the researchers' roles (indicated in Table 1) and experiences brought valuable insights to enhance the credibility of this study.

#### 4. Case Background

##### *UK Case*

Outward mobility is recognised as essential by the UK government (British Council, 2016). British HE institutions are under growing pressure to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a rapidly developing higher education market, in order to attract prospective students. In 2011/12, approximately 6% of UK domiciled students undertook a mobility placement overseas (HESA). The majority of outgoing UK students access study and work opportunities overseas through the European Union's (EU) Erasmus Mobility Programme. The UK currently ranks only sixth in terms of the overall number of outgoing students taking part in the Erasmus Programme.

The institutional case in this study is a provincial, post-1992 university where a third of students are local, a third from working-class homes and 15% from areas with little tradition of HE. 91% come from state schools. To develop international experience in ‘home’ students, the University sought out methods of experiential-and situated-learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in which the teacher acts as facilitator and supporter. Experimenting with integrating such students with incoming international students in various ways, none was found to be adequate to develop authentic global citizens. Instead, they set out to build students’ self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) - the motivation and confidence - to participate in a work/study abroad programme and to provide them with appropriate opportunities. In situated-learning, achievement is attained through authentic experience of real situations (such as living abroad) and success is directly related to effort and support received. The result was an increase in participation in outward mobility from 10 to 300 students. Fundamentally, the nationwide belief that British students are reluctant to go abroad (eg in Shepherd, 2010) was rejected.

*China case*

Inbound and outbound student mobility is imbalanced in China. According to the UKCISA (2012), Chinese students entering the UK in 2011-12 totalled 78,715. Numerous studies have claimed that long-term Chinese student migration has brought enormous benefits for the host countries’ economies and enhanced students’ cross-cultural learning (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013; Dall’Alba and Sidhu, 2015). However, with continuously increasing outward mobility, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) encourages Chinese universities to ‘diversify’ higher education markets. As a result, other forms of mobility in Chinese higher education markets

emerged, including Chinese staff outbound mobility (Pearce and Quan, 2015) and international students outbound and inbound mobility. Statistics indicate that the first group of 33 students from Eastern European countries studied in China in 1950. Between 1979 and 2000, the total number of international students studying in China reached 407,000 now. These international students are from more than 175 countries and are accepted by 353 Chinese universities (Chinese MoE, 2015). Meanwhile, short-term student outbound mobility programmes, such as summer schools and student exchange, are booming as well.

The Chinese university chosen for this study is a provincial university in South East of China. After more than 10 years' collaboration with a number of British universities, this one has successfully attracted hundreds of international students to the School of International Education (inbound mobility). Meanwhile, the number of outbound students has increased, including 2+2 and 3+1 programmes, a 3-week summer school and one semester student exchange programmes.

## 5. Findings

On comparing [the UK and China](#) these two cases, [seven](#) broad areas were identified as themes revealing the differences in the challenges to international student mobility in [these two](#) ~~these three~~ contrasting countries.

**Table 2:** Summary of the emergent key factors influencing student mobility

Theme	UK (Outbound)	China (Both)	Selected Related Authors
<b>National &amp; Institutional Policy &amp; Support</b>	Government strategy. Mandatory international experience.	Government financial incentives (inbound) Student support initiatives (inbound)	Daly (2011) Daly and Barker (2010)
<b>Process Familiarity</b>	Scaffolding, peer-to-peer learning. Campus community.	Multiple administration processes at both levels (outbound).	None on overall issue
<b>Specific Communication</b>	(Technology-enhanced) scaffolding.	Imbalanced between in- and outbound.	None on specific context

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Challenges	'Open-door' policy. Retro-marketing. Social media. Peer-to-peer learning.		
Educational Culture	Authentic assessment of adjustment.	Change of HE culture as pull-factor (inbound).	Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip (2013) Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015)
Opportunity Value	Credit-transfer programmes. Double-degrees. Experiential education.	Short-term mobility programmes eg mini-MBA (outbound).	None on specific context
Personal Development Approach	Authentic-learning for additional critical global competences. Self-reflection.	Social capital, soft employability-skills and confidence-building (inbound). Cultural awareness, critical-thinking (outbound).	None on specific factor in this context
Family Support	Historical social class influence and official family exclusion.	Financial and emotional (outbound)	Waters (2005, 2006) Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015)

Government and Institutional Policy and Support

By participating in a the variety of institutional meetings and organising numerous student mobility events as part of action research cycles, the UK researcher generated and collected accumulated a large amount of research data notes. One of the emerged key themes emerging from analysis of this dataese research notes shows that, in the UK, a semester abroad was made mandatory for students studying international business management. This was then extended to two mandatory semesters abroad. As the programme snowballed, academics were brought on board. The challenge of scaling up, as well as improving quality over a broader range of L&T innovations throughout the process, was met by increasing involvement of a greater number of colleagues from a wider range of departments and external partners, creating challenges in consistency and focus. As attitudes changed, it had a positive impact on the school's confidence and work/study abroad opportunities were opened across the UG portfolio. A much larger number of programme leaders and directors were

involved. Regular updates to formal management meetings and attended committee meetings with student representatives took place. Applying the 'scaffolding' approach to this wider team, support points for academic staff were identified and the core team acted as mentors as they became more involved in promoting study abroad at open days, dealing with students' concerns and developing initiatives with partner institutions.

~~As the programme has now become institutionalised and developed in other faculties,~~

According to the narrative of staff interviewed in our China case, the findings shows that the motivation ~~for~~ inbound student mobility in China is closely related to institutional support from the Chinese government. ~~They that enacted~~ released a series of policies to encourage Chinese HE institutions to recruit overseas students. For example, the Chinese MoE provides financial support for HE institutions if they recruit a certain number of foreign students from overseas. Encouraged by the Chinese MoE, many Chinese universities restructured their organisation and created a new schools called *The School of International Education*. The number of overseas students recruited has been used as an indicator to measure the internationalisation performance of HE institutions by MoE in China.

Staff interviewed from the Chinese university indicated that overseas students studying at Chinese universities are provided with enhanced services than local students, such as better accommodation, student well-being services, language learning and cultural visits. Staff involved in the support of overseas students emphasised this improvement as a key driver. Professors from other faculties within universities are invited to deliver lectures to overseas students. One professor recalled her experience working regarding overseas students:

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8 I have taught many overseas students in our university. Our university takes really  
9 good care of these students ...it is difficult for them studying and living a country  
10 where language and culture are different from their own home countries. The  
11 university should provide all possible supports.

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13 Staff Member (interviewee - China)

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15 It is evident that institutional support is influential in attracting more overseas students  
16 to study at Chinese universities.

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19 **Communication Challenges**

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21 Based on the UK researcher's action research 'learning by doing' practices and  
22 experiences, communication emerged as a strong theme in managing student mobility.  
23 The second theme emerging from our case comparison concerns communication. In  
24 the UK, an important change introduced initially was a reversal of the way in which  
25 'study abroad' opportunities were communicated to students. Using 'retro-marketing'  
26 (McCole, 2004) communication techniques, the 'year abroad' was presented as  
27 straightforward, aspirational and competitive, replacing the previous apologetic tone.  
28 Retro-marketing was developed to appeal to a complex, post-modern world  
29 overwhelmed by choice and information and cynical of marketing messages,  
30 efficiently using new technology. For study abroad, this included an interactive e-  
31 learning site with a database decision tool, a suite of country-specific, student-led  
32 Facebook Groups and a Twitter feed.

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45 Combining 'retro-marketing' and a psychographic segmentation of student  
46 motivations with the 'scaffolding' L&T approach (Bruner, 1960), the dedicated team  
47 designed and implemented a new promotion, recruitment and allocation process,  
48 informed by the work of Kruse and Brubaker (2007) and other best practice. This  
49 pinpointed a series of 'support points' required by a student in the process of

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application / preparation and identified the importance of guidance from a teacher or more competent peer as students entered their 'zones of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) to consider and manage living abroad. The new process introduced detailed briefing events of increasing specificity with enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, alumni and incoming exchange students, 'buddying' events, personal consultation opportunities and careful destination-matching on a wide range of criteria. It started with pre-application Open Days and continued through Years 1 and 2, as students made applications, and into Year 3, when students were abroad.

~~Developed, signed and participated by the UK researcher, a~~ An important element was the introduction of 'Pre-departure Briefing' sessions, including cross-cultural exercises, dealing with culture shock and opportunities to meet incoming students as recommended by Kruse and Brubaker (2007). These responded to a small but growing number of students who returned early, culture-shocked and homesick, causing serious problems personally and for the institutions. In the last three years we attained a "zero return" rate, maintaining 'technology-enhanced scaffolding' (Pea, 2004) beyond the student's arrival abroad through the use of social media. Initially faced with cynicism (at worst) and apathy (at best) from many academics, a policy of 'working with the willing' was adopted by the team in the UK. Developing an area from scratch meant there were no formal roles defined so experimentation and innovation were not only desirable but necessary.

~~W~~ Also, ~~working and researching in real time in the 'real situation', the UK action~~ researcher discovered that pPeer-to-peer learning was increasingly effective and efficient: students and interested academic colleagues were organised into communities-of-practice from Year 1. Returning students in Year 4, working with

incoming students and interested staff, volunteered to co-ordinate meetings, social events and to run social media groups which could then include alumni and students currently abroad. Developing peer-to-peer learning allows students and staff to provide up-to-date detail and colour to a briefing and support process. (Pearce, Powell and Burns, 2016). These democratic groups – a campus community - impacted the learning of students and staff alike. The resulting confidence in implementing an ‘open-door’ policy for advice was so successful that team members were interchangeable as self-efficacy supporters, providing high accessibility for maximum impact on a growing number of students.

*The most important thing for me was having a connection to people back home, such as lecturers, who were there to offer support and gave me the strength to get through the hard parts in Hong Kong.*

*Outward bound student (interviewee - UK)*

**Process Familiarity**

Another interesting theme emerged from our ‘action research data’ concerns the students’ application process. In the UK, applying the ‘scaffolding’ (Bruner, 1960), concept to administrative staff colleagues, operational expertise was developed in a focussed team and extended to students, creating a campus community with process experience (Pearce, Powell and Burns, 2016). They were involved in the management of the area as the challenge of scaling up from ten to three hundred students was met. ~~based on the UK action researcher’s record.~~

### *Differences in Educational Culture*

The third theme, centred on the learning process and institutional facilities, was developed by combining learnings from the Chinese and British cases. The adaptation to the host country and institutional environment is of great importance for mobile students.

Various challenging differences are evident through the analysis of the [interview data in the China casecases](#), including compulsory attendance in China with extensive attendance monitoring and an inability to obtain feedback from tutors about assessed work. This illustrates a considerably broader challenge faced by the integration of higher education systems.

In the UK, the 'authentic-learning' circle, actively engaging students in higher-order thinking to analyse their own real-world experience and apply it outside the classroom was completed. The learning outcomes cannot be pre-determined but can be focussed on global citizenship. Inspired by the concept of 'authentic assessment' (Scheurman and Newman, 1998), the team [\(with the UK action researcher as a participant\)](#) in the UK case developed an integrated preparation and reflection assessment strategy using on-line portfolio technology, with appropriate interventions from that team pre-departure, in-country and post-return. Giving students the opportunity to reflect upon and monitor progress is essential to authentic-learning's metacognition: assessment is integrated seamlessly into the learning task (working/studying abroad), in order to reflect 'real-world' assessment. [according to the conversations between the UK action researcher and students](#). Much of what students learned while abroad was unintended and so setting learning outcomes was challenging. Flexibility was allowed to accommodate students' experiences.

For incoming students to China, a change of HE culture in China is a key driver in attracting them. [Both secondary data \(Chinese MoE, 2015\) and staff interview narrative indicate that p](#)Promoting inbound student mobility has been regarded as part of a Chinese university’s international learning and teaching strategy. Many institutions make significant efforts to leverage teaching quality and partially integrate the traditional Chinese teaching system with Western learning methods. For example, [the staff interviewed from the case this university state that they](#) invites Western academics (e.g. US, UK, Canada) to teach both home and foreign students at their university. [The awareness of educational culture differences between home and host countries by decision makers at both central and institutional levels may facilitate the scope and scale of international students’ mobility.](#)

*Opportunity Value*

[Through ~~the~~ action research, the UK case researcher gained sufficient experience from her students who lived, worked and studied abroad by solving ‘real students’ mobility problems’ in person. From her perspective, creating valuable opportunities \(via careful across-institution curriculum design\) such as ‘credit-transfer’ and ‘double degrees’ -may motivate student mobility, such as ‘credit trasfer’ and ‘double degrees’.](#)

In the UK case, the first ‘credit-transfer’ scheme was introduced in 2009, allowing students to study abroad for a semester in their second year and opportunities were made available to all undergraduate students. This allowed students on three-year programmes and those with a UK work placement in their sandwich year to participate in the study abroad programme. To develop the credit-transfer programme, a flexible, semester-based module structure was proposed and a single trusted partner was chosen to introduce an English programme for students with no foreign language.

Members of the UK-based team, [including the UK case action researcher for this study](#), worked at the French partner for six months (funded by Erasmus) to implement the new programme and have delivered a module on it every year since. An increasing number of students now complete three semesters abroad, sometimes on three different continents.

An important extension of this strategy was a focus on the development of ‘double degrees’, in which students join the final year of a partner institution’s degree and graduate at the end of this year, before returning to their home institution to graduate a second time. This provides a tangible outcome valued by students and ~~lends~~ credibility to their activities, particularly important as tuition fees increased. [This value has been confirmed by students through their personal reflections on different occasions \(e.g. peer-to-peer learning workshops organised by the action researcher\).](#)

To ~~further~~ widen ~~further~~ the appeal of ‘study abroad’, internships were introduced into exchange schemes as ‘experiential education’ (Steinberg, 2002). Students were originally forced to choose between studying abroad or gaining work experience in the UK. Now, almost half of students on “exchange” are on a scheme combining work and study. This was achieved by working with existing international partners to develop new schemes and selecting new partners for the internship opportunities they offer.

In China, [staff interview evidence indicates](#) while large numbers of Chinese students study at Western Universities for degrees as long term academic sojourners, short-term mobility increased as well, such as summer schools for university students (especially in the first and second year), short training programmes (e.g. mini MBA) and one-semester exchange programmes. As a new trend, [according to the Chinese](#)

[professor](#), outbound Chinese student mobility tends to be more short-time oriented and more diversified than before. [She claimed:](#)

*[“China now is truly international oriented, intercultural knowledge is critical for university students. Many HE institutions make great efforts to provide more diversified opportunities encouraging more students ‘go global’, such as short-term programme”](#)*

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The evidence suggests that, for this short-term oriented outbound student mobility, the main purpose is to develop inter-cultural awareness and enhance awareness of global citizenship. For example, in one Chinese Mini MBA programme delivered in the author’s institution, none of the students had been to the UK before. One Mini MBA student claimed that:

*‘Seeing is believing. Many things I saw are different from what I thought (about British culture) before. I wouldn’t know that if I did not come here to the UK)’.*

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China is the country with largest population in the world. There are still large numbers of Chinese students (their family) cannot afford the expensive tuition fees studying abroad. Such short-term student mobility programmes have provided great opportunities which enable and encourage more Chinese student developing their inter-cultural knowledge and enhancing their employability skills.

**Personal Development**

~~R~~The responses from all interviewees - ~~the students, staff and parents -~~ indicate that self-driven motivation played an important role motivating ~~foreign~~ students to ~~travel~~ to China. The key drivers connected to personal development include 1) gaining cultural and social capital; 2) seeking personally rewarding experiences; 3) maximising educational and employment opportunities. Our findings show that

studying overseas ~~not just~~ reinforces not only a students' ~~s~~ global mindset, but also their sense of intellectual awareness. One inbound exchange student in China mentioned that he was '*much more confident*' ~~he would in~~ finding a job after finishing his studies in China with 'developed global competences'. For outbound Chinese students mobility, studying abroad brings them educational and personal benefits in relation to the acquisition of knowledge, cultural awareness, English language proficiency and development of skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving. After analysing the interview data, it wasis discovered ~~Our findings indicate~~ that the majority of Chinese students become more confident and their ability to get on with people was is enhanced. They managed d unpredictable situations better and be~~ame~~ more mature. The following quote illustrates the mobility benefits for Chinese students studying abroad:

*I rarely spoke to foreigners when I was in China. Now I won't be afraid to talk to foreigners. Opening a bank account, cooking and shopping, washing clothes... I had to deal with all those things after I came here. They used to be my parents' business- tough at the beginning, but you will learn eventually.*

*Outbound student (interviewee - China)*

The majority of Chinese students believed that studying abroad had brought many benefits for their career development. They felt more confident and ~~had a better~~ ability to coped better with difficulties and solving and solve problems. These students ~~we interviewed~~ believe ~~d~~ that studying abroad surely enhanced their employability skills and helped them finding jobs ~~in the future~~. One Chinese student interviewee described himself as 'a problems solver' (student interviewee 2): -h His parents appraised him 'much more independent' (Interviewee 2 parents): -d and his

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[tutor \(accompanying their exchange students in the UK institution as a visiting scholar\)](#)  
[claimed that this student was 'more competence and resilient' \(staff interviewee\).](#)

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Similarly, study abroad students in the UK were encouraged to reflect deeply on their management of such experiences. To enhance the 'authentic-learning' approach, post-return 'Maximising Employability' sessions, as recommended by Kruse and Brubaker (2002), were organised [by the UK action researcher](#). Some students struggled to realise the value of challenges they had overcome, slipping into negativity because they had not entirely enjoyed their experience abroad. Students who had thoroughly enjoyed themselves could find it even more stretching. [Based on analysis of the -the UK action research dataer's participating experience.](#) These sessions helped students to 'unpack' (Gardner et al, 2009) their experiences, positive and negative, and translate them into evidence of the 'additional critical global competences' employers seek (Diamond et al, 2011), such as adaptability, resilience, self-reliance and an ability to work internationally with many different people.

Students are transformed by their international exposure, which is a 'life-affirming learning experience' [as some students confirmed in the peer-to-peer learning workshops](#). The tangible effects on their confidence, global outlook and employability are marked:

*Before my placement in Germany, I was content to finish university and find employment within my hometown, Newcastle. Returning from the placement, I knew that there was no going back to a simple life in Newcastle for me. I moved to London to find a job in the corporate world. My international experience allowed me to obtain long term secondments within my company's offices in Zurich and Miami. Six years later, I have transferred my life to Switzerland where I work internationally for the world's largest Corporate Insurance Broker.*

Outbound student (interviewee – UK)

### Family Support

During the interviews, both parents' and students' responses both confirmed and illuminated that outbound Chinese mobility was clearly driven by family support, both financially and mentally. This finding is not recognized in the Western student mobility literature. Currently, financial support from parents still plays a key role in driving Chinese students studying abroad. Due to fast economic growth in China, increasing numbers of Chinese families, especially the middle class, are willing and can afford to send their children to study overseas. As opposed to European countries, where students can seek financial support from different institutions and special programmes such as Erasmus, Chinese outbound mobility is largely financed by their parents. Chinese parents have realised that their children face more challenges than ever before in the job market. Better To better prepare their children in advance has become a target goal for many Chinese parents. One parents emotionally stated: *"We only have only one child. The purpose of making money is to support our son. We want our child to feel unconditional love"*.

In addition to financial assistance, mental support from the family is vital for outbound mobility, especially in the early stages. Chinese students normally lack independence. Studying and living in a different environment causes anxiety and discomfort (Quan, Smailes and Fraser, 2013). To overcome these barriers, Chinese parents play a crucial role in encouraging their children 'going mobile'. One mother we interviewed reflected how she persuaded her daughter to engage in a four-month exchange programme:

*My daughter is well protected. She had never left China on her own before she went to the UK. She was so nervous when I encouraged her to apply for the exchange programme. I promised to communicate with her on a daily basis via WeChat...we did! I spoke to my daughter every day when she was in UK.*

(Interviewee /mother--- China)

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The China case reveals that family support, both financial and mental~~support~~, are key drivers for Chinese student outbound mobility, especially for those students who lack of individual confidence and are over protection at home country.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aims to explore how countries practise student mobility programmes differently, and how to learn from one another. By analysing the contextualised cases in the UK and China, our findings reveal that undergraduate student mobility is closely linked to national supports; institutional strategy, family support and students’ own self-driven motivations (see Table 3). To support better student mobility and sustain the balance between inbound and outbound student mobility, ~~these two~~<sup>three</sup> countries can learn from each other by enhancing family supports (emerged from China case) and the institutional good practice (~~ass~~ in the UK context).

Table 3: Areas of good practice in two countries

	Regional/National Support Policies	Family Support	Institutional Innovation	Personal Motivation
China	MoE policy links student mobility to university performance	<b>Strong financial and emotional support to children</b>	Limited	Self-motivation combined with family and institutional push
UK	EU Erasmus+ programme	Limited	<b>Retro marketing, scaffolding, buddying system, open days, pre-departure briefing, peer-to-peer learning, debriefs</b>	Limited

Our findings with respect to the student ~~international~~ mobility in different country contexts have revealed ~~the several~~ influentialkey themes, ~~which influence SM~~. For instance, we argued that process familiarity; specific communication; opportunity

value and a personal development approach (See Table 2) are crucial in facilitating mobilitySM. ~~Nevertheless, there is~~are limited literature which illustrates these areas in details. In addition, our findings place emphasis on the influence of 'national educational culture' relevant to mobilityin terms of SM. Policy makers in the Higher Education industry in ~~botheither the UK and or~~China need to promote student mobility in a more strategic fashion to develop students' cultural capital (Oleksiyyenko, Cheng and Yi, 2013) and enhance their multi-cultural capabilities (Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015).

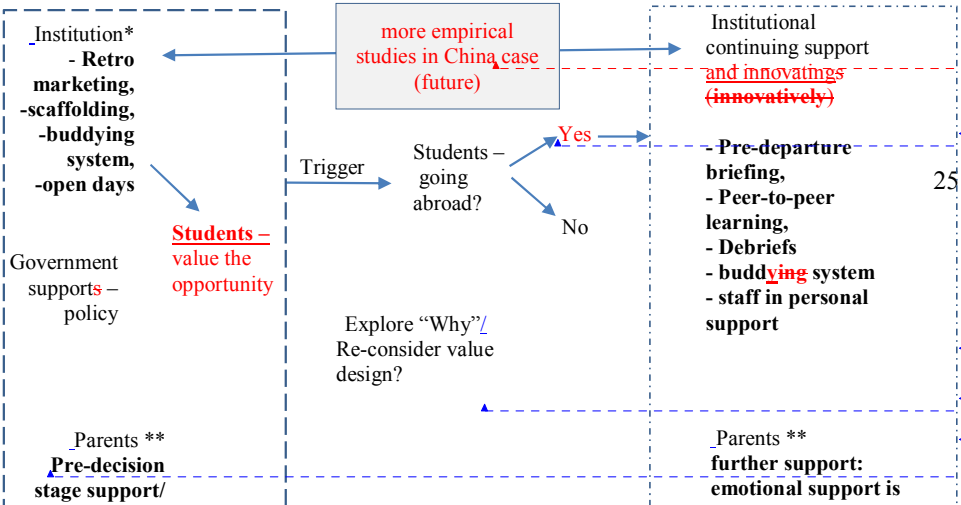
Importantly, the potential influence and value of family support is clear from the Chinese case, ~~wherethe only one in which~~ it emerged as an explicit theme. Inbound student mobility responds to a combination of Chinese government support, Chinese HE institutional support and students' self-motivation. However, outbound mobility is mostly influenced by family support (Waters, 2006). We suggest that the individual benefits of studying abroad – personal development, enhanced employability etc - can in turn drive support from the family, both financially and emotionally. This finding clearly provides empirical support for Bolton and Nie's (2010) and Daly's (2011) arguments from a stakeholder perspective, which claims that ~~multiple-~~stakeholders, including parents, are exerting profound influence on students' higher education decisions-making choices. The 'parental choice' in an international education market clearly has impact on students' mobility (Waters, 2005). These can be maximised through the development of valuable opportunities providing credit transfer, a double degree and other employability enhancements along with an educational culture which helps students identify their learnings from challenging experiences. The

universities in the UK could consider more the role of the family in supporting internationally mobile students.

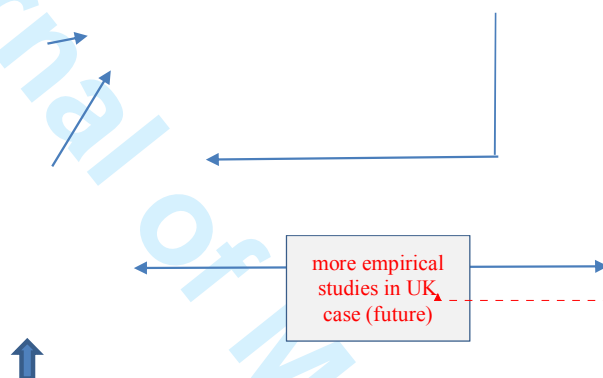
In the UK case, the growth in outward mobility was driven by institutional policy behind the structure and process of recruiting and supporting students, which in turn produced a focus on building the valuable opportunities for individuals described above and highly motivating communication. These findings provide indications for institutions that determine to promote and manage their student mobility efficiently (Daly et, al., 2005). The variety of mechanisms utilised in the UK case reveals that adequate strategies at institutional level play a pivotal role in supporting students' mobility (King and Findlay, 2010). While Chinese universities focus on incentives to attract inbound students, they are less concerned with supporting 'exchange' mobility as part of home studies. Most outbound students are self-funding and engage in full-time study abroad on their own initiative. The decision makers at Chinese HE institutions should be aware of the importance of the student mobility for home students and learn from our UK case to encourage and motivate more Chinese students taking part of SM activities with strong institutional supports.

In conclusion, we ~~our~~ developed a theoretical model (~~in-f~~Figure 1)-below showing the trajectory of managing international student<sub>s</sub>-mobility by combining the UK and Chinese cases.

**Figure 1: A dynamic model of international student mobility**



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~~Having discussion in our prior literature~~As discussed earlier, it is crucial to understand how stakeholder groups might have a potential impact on international student mobility. Our findings support this assertion.~~provide empirical support in China case. Nevertheless, due to China is in transition, including its higher education system reform.~~ Many institutional innovations in supporting British student mobility in the UK case can be learned by Chinese universities in promoting and managing Chinese students' international mobility with the consideration of country context.

The key contribution of our study is to examine practices of student mobility in different country contexts. Our findings provide new insights for national policy makers; institutional strategic decision-makers and parents in terms of how to promote and better support student mobility. It is evident that the next generation, as global citizens, are facing unprecedented challenges. ~~The Our~~ case findings suggest if government and institutions attempt to encourage or attract more students to study

abroad, better understanding, more assistance and support are required in considering the contextualised situations in different countries.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study relies entirely on subjective, qualitative data collected through a variety of methods and not designed to be directly comparable. The countries are represented by single case studies of different types. For this reason, it avoids the aim to generalise and conclusions are instead **transferable**. O’Leary (2005) judges the integrity of research in part through applicability outside one’s immediate frame of reference, proposing that *“lessons learned that may be germane to a larger population, a different setting or another group”* (p.75) demonstrate transferability, rather than generalisability.

Our study focused on UK and China as countries in transition. This research would be developed by adding other ‘countries in transition’ in different regions, such as Ukraine. Ukraine’s diverse population is pulled in two opposite directions - East and West – with tragic results. Ukraine’s system of higher education is going through a period of transformation at a time of economic austerity. It has been undergoing transition from the Soviet style highly centralised system to an integrated European system (Shaw et al., 2012). tragic results. The government effort to harmonise the system of education with European counterparts started off by joining the Bologna process in 2005. Since then initiatives have been implemented with the aim of cultivating the Humboldtian traditions of enhancing the quality of teaching and research in autonomous universities. The internationalisation of the system requires not only the adoption of best practices, but also increasing the opportunity for student mobility through full participation in various mobility arrangements (West and Barham, 2009). The recent elaboration of the Erasmus programme enabled students

outside of the European Union to participate. Student mobility is seen as an extra tool for the transition of Eastern European systems of higher education, adapting them to Western institutions. —However, Western European students are historically not interested in studying in Eastern Europe (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). ~~At the same time, Eastern European students experience difficulties with the approval process as well as provision of financial support.~~

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**Educational Mobility in Transition: what can China and the UK  
learn from each one another?**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the differences in international student mobility in two contrasting countries: UK and China, at national, institutional and individual levels. They are countries in transition in a greater global context. The objective is to identify what these countries can learn from each other about the issues and policies surrounding the management of educational mobility. An inductive approach was employed to understand real-life experience via case studies. Participant observation and semi-structured interview methods with a variety of stakeholders were used to collect data which were then subjected to a thematic analysis to identify in which areas countries had developed good practice. Over-arching themes were developed through comparing national findings. These reveal that national policy and family support are most influential in China, while British universities largely drive student mobility at an institutional level. Concluding that no one country has a comprehensive and complete approach, this study proposes the areas in which both could develop and details good practice. The value therefore emerges from the comparison and contrast and the practical focus of the research.

**Keywords** Student mobility, UK, China

**1. Introduction**

UK, and China are countries in transition. The Chinese' paradoxical culture (Fang 2003) allows them to develop their own interpretation of capitalism under a communist party and the country turns outward to the international stage. The United Kingdom is no longer united: the Scottish referendum in 2014 came close to dissolving the union and the Brexit vote in June 2016 has divided the country. Despite very different histories, both all three are searching for a new position in the world.

Our students are also in transition. Despite the higher-level debate concerning their home countries' integration in the outside world, students are increasingly, inexorably moving across borders (Daly, 2011), but not always in both directions. China's youth

travel across the world in search of the best higher education, but many fewer international students seek out China's universities (Chinese MoE, 2015). Meanwhile, British universities are heavily subsidised by lucrative incoming international students, but famously low numbers of British students' study abroad (British Council, 2016).

It is evident that students who participate in mobility programmes gain competitive advantage and distinguish themselves from others who do not have mobility experiences (Daly, 2005). Many existing studies have examined the individual drivers of shaping student outbound mobility (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2009; Daly, 2011) by focussing on a single country or region, such as the USA (Salisbury et al., 2009), Australia (Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015), Europe (Teichler, 2012) or Singapore (Mok, 2012). There is a shortage of analysis comparing international student mobility in the context of different countries. Between these two countries, the UK has strong inbound mobility but low numbers of inbound. China's inbound student mobility is less developed than outbound student mobility but we look at both, in order to maximise learnings. A policy of 'subjectivity with transparency' and transcontextual credibility throughout enables the reader to judge transferability.

Uniquely, this study explores the differences in international student mobility in two contrasting countries: UK and China. Analysing the phenomenon of student mobility at national, institutional and personal levels, we attempt to discover what these countries can learn from one another about the challenges in encouraging and managing educational mobility. Specifically, our objectives were 1. what are the key factors affecting student mobility from different stakeholder perspective? 2. How do higher education (HE) institutions encourage and manage mobility students to study

abroad? 3. What can the countries, UK and China learn from each other about the challenges of student mobility?

2. Theoretical Understanding of Student Mobility

Higher education has emerged as a universal agency, which provides guiding principles not only how to gain knowledge, but also as a means for scholars to learn how to live; realise their full potential and use their skills for the greater good, thus overcoming the disadvantages associated with the socio-economic conditions (Dewey, 1938). International competence is now critical to a nation’s health – “a generalized necessity rather than an option for the tier of societal elites as in the past” (Bartell, 2003, p.49). Dewey (1938) and Scheurman and Newman (1998) believed that students thrive in an environment where they are offered opportunities for authentic experience and learning. In the various studies conducted into higher education and its internationalisation, considerable attention is paid to student mobility (West and Barham, 2009), which is a phenomenon involving different stakeholders.

2.1 A stakeholder view in driving student mobility

Stakeholders can be “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984: 46). Both primary stakeholder group and secondary stakeholder group have different levels of interests, influence and power in determining institutions’ continuous survival and prosperity (Peng, 2014). Delivering sustained value and quality to stakeholders is expected from stakeholder perspective. Souto-Otero et al. (2013) confirmed that various stakeholders in and out of the Erasmus programme recognise the benefits of student mobility. However, barriers differ between them.

The involvement of higher education institutions in international activities is influenced by a variety of external and internal stakeholder groups (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Schofer and Meyer, 2005), including government, HE institutions, students, parents and industry (Bolton and Nie, 2010). Those stakeholders potentially have divergent perceptions of value for student mobility (SM). In examining the focus of research on SM, it is evident that government and HE institutions, as important stakeholder groups, play important roles in motivating SM. The rationales of government in promoting SM programmes have been highly recognised among the existing literature (Daly, 2011; Daly and Barker, 2010). For example, in China, government has been an influential player in opening up the Chinese education system and encouraging both strategic alliance between Western and Chinese universities (Bolton and Nie, 2010). At the institutional level, a relatively large body of literature examines what motives universities to embrace SM programmes (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013; Daly and Barker, 2015). The changing paradigm of HE (e.g. competition for financial and intellectual resources) drives many universities in both Western and Eastern economies to diversify their education products. The value of SM is being more widely recognised at a strategic level by many HE institutions.

In students, as a key stakeholder group, perceptions of mobility-SM are crucial in implementing internationalisation strategy. Many existing studies have examined the individual drivers of shaping student outbound mobility and discovered that academic development, personal development, career development and work-skills development are primary factors motivating SM (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2009; Daly, 2011). Moreover, continuing change in the HE environment (e.g. competition and

tuition fees) makes parents important stakeholders. According to Whitham (2003), parents need to be better informed, their interests will affect opportunities and outcomes of HE. In Chinese society, parents are active stakeholders. Their experiences and support of their children’s international activities need to be highlighted (Waters, 2005, 2006). As in the West, although decision making is largely influenced by university status (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013), parent support of student mobility is recognised. For example, Dall’Alba and Sidhu (2015) found that mobility students in Australian universities are mainly from middle-class families and the level of parental income seems an indicator of SM. This finding confirms Salisbury et al’s., (2009) results American universities.

It is increasingly clear that continuing cross-border activity, especially studying abroad, brings pressures to different group stakeholders (financially and academically). For such a dynamic and complex process (SM), how to align different stakeholder groups’ interests, needs and power to manage an SM programme efficiently is a great challenge.

**2.2 Managing student mobility**

With increasing market influence and competition in the HE industry, many universities seek better solutions in terms of how to manage SM efficiently. It is clear that significant institutional support is crucial if universities are to achieve internationalisation goals (Daly et al., 2005). A small body of literature examines good and in-depth good practices in facilitating and managing participants in SM programmes, for example, Souto-Otero et al. (2013), who focus on barriers and benefits.

According to Bridger (2015), variety of approaches can be used to increase SM participants, such as designing SM as a part of programme studies; better communication between potential participants and the central international office. Moreover, inspirational staff and strategic commitment at institutional level are regarded as two key drivers for SM programmes. There are a number of hurdles that demotivate SM participants, such as difficulties in accessing mobility opportunities and the complexity of the application process. To overcome these barriers, in addition to efficient communication between participants and staff, universities can adapt adequate strategies to support student-targeted action (King and Findlay, 2010).

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to initiate an exploration of student mobility mechanisms in the UK and China through the comparison of case studies. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, we employed an inductive approach to understand real-life context via multiple case studies for both China and the UK (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2003). The authors asseverate that the lived experience of individuals and institutions can provide an epistemological advantage over other methodologies and improve understanding of the phenomenon. We utilised a single case study method in each selected country (UK and China), but employed the multi-case approach to analyse our data comparatively.

To collect data, the authors used participant observation and semi-structured interview methods (Creswell, 2007; Gillham, 2000) which combined to form a set of evidence from multiple sources. Across on-campus and country visits in person, we interviewed a convenience sample composed of undergraduates, university staff and

parents in the UK and China, who were involved in international student mobility.

The details of the data collection methods are summarised below:

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Countries	Research methods	The researchers' roles
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Action Research method of data generation through Dionysian cycles of Action Research (Heron, 1996) over 3 years and accompanying analysis.</li><li>Participant observation and interviews for data collection.</li></ul>	Initiator of the student exchange programme at the researched UK institution / more than 10 years' experience in student and staff mobility
China	<p>One-to-one personal interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4 staff (vising scholars from the researched Chinese university – conducted in UK)</li><li>4 students (conducted in UK)</li><li>2 parents (conducted in China when the author visited the Chinese partner universities)</li></ul>	<p>Responsible for the <del>In charge of</del> Chinese CV partners in the researched UK institution in the last 12 years / looks after visiting scholars from Chinese partner universities</p>

As indicated in the above table, participants from different groups of stakeholders were interviewed for this research. Two different approaches overlapped in the two geographies due to differing levels of access. This added to the richness of the data available: some 'generated' and some 'collected'. ~~The s~~Semi-structured interviews featured in both approaches: they lasting about 50 minutes and in average and were conducted in English and Mandarin Chinese. Using interviewees' native languages is important because scholars have long argued that participants were more comfortable ~~in~~ telling their stories in their mother tongue (Quan, He and Sloan, 2016). Some interviews were conducted in the UK, and others were in foreign countries (e.g. Chinese parents in China). The selected core quotes, which bring the connection between key themes and questions, were translated by the Chinese researcher.

In the UK, the authors participated directly in the events and initiatives described.

Data were analysed by using thematic analysis (King and Horrocks, 2010), which

enabled us to conduct the analysis iteratively, revealing a set of key themes relating to the issues under investigation (Huberman and Miles, 2002). Each researcher processed their raw data and coded the key themes emerged individually first, then a few panel meetings were held among the three-researchers to finalise the coded themes. The constant comparison method was used to discover the similarities and differences for comparison analysis. Such emerging key themes were all coded in English. To respond the question 'how many codes are enough', we followed the rule that no new themes and rare samples occurred after all interview transcripts were analysed (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). All participants were ensured of confidentiality. All participants were also given a choice to opt out of the interviews if they felt uncomfortable during the process. Moreover, it is believed that the researchers' roles (indicated in Table 1) and experiences brought valuable insights to enhance the credibility of this study.

#### 4. Case Background

##### *UK Case*

Outward mobility is recognised as essential by the UK government (British Council, 2016). British HE institutions are under growing pressure to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a rapidly developing higher education market, in order to attract prospective students. In 2011/12, approximately 6% of UK domiciled students undertook a mobility placement overseas (HESA). The majority of outgoing UK students access study and work opportunities overseas through the European Union's (EU) Erasmus Mobility Programme. The UK currently ranks only sixth in terms of the overall number of outgoing students taking part in the Erasmus Programme.

The institutional case in this study is a provincial, post-1992 university where a third of students are local, a third from working-class homes and 15% from areas with little tradition of HE. 91% come from state schools. To develop international experience in ‘home’ students, the University sought out methods of experiential-and situated-learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in which the teacher acts as facilitator and supporter. Experimenting with integrating such students with incoming international students in various ways, none was found to be adequate to develop authentic global citizens. Instead, they set out to build students’ self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) - the motivation and confidence - to participate in a work/study abroad programme and to provide them with appropriate opportunities. In situated-learning, achievement is attained through authentic experience of real situations (such as living abroad) and success is directly related to effort and support received. The result was an increase in participation in outward mobility from 10 to 300 students. Fundamentally, the nationwide belief that British students are reluctant to go abroad (eg in Shepherd, 2010) was rejected.

*China case*

Inbound and outbound student mobility is imbalanced in China. According to the UKCISA (2012), Chinese students entering the UK in 2011-12 totalled 78,715. Numerous studies have claimed that long-term Chinese student migration has brought enormous benefits for the host countries’ economies and enhanced students’ cross-cultural learning (Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip, 2013; Dall’Alba and Sidhu, 2015). However, with continuously increasing outward mobility, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) encourages Chinese universities to ‘diversify’ higher education markets. As a result, other forms of mobility in Chinese higher education markets

emerged, including Chinese staff outbound mobility (Pearce and Quan, 2015) and international students outbound and inbound mobility. Statistics indicate that the first group of 33 students from Eastern European countries studied in China in 1950. Between 1979 and 2000, the total number of international students studying in China reached 407,000 now. These international students are from more than 175 countries and are accepted by 353 Chinese universities (Chinese MoE, 2015). Meanwhile, short-term student outbound mobility programmes, such as summer schools and student exchange, are booming as well.

The Chinese university chosen for this study is a provincial university in South East of China. After more than 10 years' collaboration with a number of British universities, this one has successfully attracted hundreds of international students to the School of International Education (inbound mobility). Meanwhile, the number of outbound students has increased, including 2+2 and 3+1 programmes, a 3-week summer school and one semester student exchange programmes.

## 5. Findings

On comparing the UK and China these two cases, seven broad areas were identified as themes revealing the differences in the challenges to international student mobility in these two ~~these three~~ contrasting countries.

**Table 2:** Summary of the emergent key factors influencing student mobility

Theme	UK (Outbound)	China (Both)	Selected Related Authors
<b>National &amp; Institutional Policy &amp; Support</b>	Government strategy. Mandatory international experience.	Government financial incentives (inbound) Student support initiatives (inbound)	Daly (2011) Daly and Barker (2010)
<b>Process Familiarity</b>	Scaffolding, peer-to-peer learning. Campus community.	Multiple administration processes at both levels (outbound).	None on overall issue
<b>Specific Communication</b>	(Technology-enhanced) scaffolding.	Imbalanced between in- and outbound.	None on specific context

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<b>Challenges</b>	'Open-door' policy. Retro-marketing. Social media. Peer-to-peer learning.		
<b>Educational Culture</b>	Authentic assessment of adjustment.	Change of HE culture as pull-factor (inbound).	Oleksiyenko, Cheng and Yip (2013) Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015)
<b>Opportunity Value</b>	Credit-transfer programmes. Double-degrees. Experiential education.	Short-term mobility programmes eg mini-MBA (outbound).	None on specific context
<b>Personal Development Approach</b>	Authentic-learning for additional critical global competences. Self-reflection.	Social capital, soft employability-skills and confidence-building (inbound). Cultural awareness, critical-thinking (outbound).	None on specific factor in this context
<b>Family Support</b>	Historical social class influence and official family exclusion.	Financial and emotional (outbound)	Waters (2005, 2006) Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015)

*Government and Institutional Policy and Support*

By participating in a the variety of institutional meetings and organising numerous student mobility events as part of action research cycles, the UK researcher generated and collected accumulated a large amount of research data notes. One of the emerged key themes emerging from analysis of this data these research notes shows that, in the UK, a semester abroad was made mandatory for students studying international business management. This was then extended to two mandatory semesters abroad. As the programme snowballed, academics were brought on board. The challenge of scaling up, as well as improving quality over a broader range of L&T innovations throughout the process, was met by increasing involvement of a greater number of colleagues from a wider range of departments and external partners, creating challenges in consistency and focus. As attitudes changed, it had a positive impact on the school's confidence and work/study abroad opportunities were opened across the UG portfolio. A much larger number of programme leaders and directors were

involved. Regular updates to formal management meetings and attended committee meetings with student representatives took place. Applying the ‘scaffolding’ approach to this wider team, support points for academic staff were identified and the core team acted as mentors as they became more involved in promoting study abroad at open days, dealing with students’ concerns and developing initiatives with partner institutions.

~~As the programme has now become institutionalised and developed in other faculties,~~

According to the narrative of staff interviewed in our China case, the findings shows that the motivation ~~for~~ inbound student mobility in China is closely related to institutional support from the Chinese government. ~~They that enacted~~ released a series of policies to encourage Chinese HE institutions to recruit overseas students. For example, the Chinese MoE provides financial support for HE institutions if they recruit a certain number of foreign students from overseas. Encouraged by the Chinese MoE, many Chinese universities restructured their organisation and created a new schools called *The School of International Education*. The number of overseas students recruited has been used as an indicator to measure the internationalisation performance of HE institutions by MoE in China.

Staff interviewed from the Chinese university indicated that overseas students studying at Chinese universities are provided with enhanced services than local students, such as better accommodation, student well-being services, language learning and cultural visits. Staff involved in the support of overseas students emphasised this improvement as a key driver. Professors from other faculties within universities are invited to deliver lectures to overseas students. One professor recalled her experience working regarding overseas students:

*I have taught many overseas students in our university. Our university takes really good care of these students ...it is difficult for them studying and living a country where language and culture are different from their own home countries. The university should provide all possible supports.*

*Staff Member (interviewee - China)*

It is evident that institutional support is influential in attracting more overseas students to study at Chinese universities.

**Communication Challenges**

Based on the UK researcher's action research 'learning by doing' practices and experiences, communication emerged as a strong theme in managing student mobility.  
~~The second theme emerging from our case comparison concerns communication.~~ In the UK, an important change introduced initially was a reversal of the way in which 'study abroad' opportunities were communicated to students. Using 'retro-marketing' (McCole, 2004) communication techniques, the 'year abroad' was presented as straightforward, aspirational and competitive, replacing the previous apologetic tone. Retro-marketing was developed to appeal to a complex, post-modern world overwhelmed by choice and information and cynical of marketing messages, efficiently using new technology. For study abroad, this included an interactive e-learning site with a database decision tool, a suite of country-specific, student-led Facebook Groups and a Twitter feed.

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Combining 'retro-marketing' and a psychographic segmentation of student motivations with the 'scaffolding' L&T approach (Bruner, 1960), the dedicated team designed and implemented a new promotion, recruitment and allocation process, informed by the work of Kruse and Brubaker (2007) and other best practice. This pinpointed a series of 'support points' required by a student in the process of

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6 application / preparation and identified the importance of guidance from a teacher or  
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8 more competent peer as students entered their 'zones of proximal development'  
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10 (Vygotsky, 1978) to consider and manage living abroad. The new process introduced  
11  
12 detailed briefing events of increasing specificity with enthusiastic and knowledgeable  
13  
14 staff, alumni and incoming exchange students, 'buddying' events, personal  
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16 consultation opportunities and careful destination-matching on a wide range of criteria.  
17  
18 It started with pre-application Open Days and continued through Years 1 and 2, as  
19  
20 students made applications, and into Year 3, when students were abroad.  
21

22  
23  
24 ~~Developed, signed and participated by the UK researcher, a~~ An important element was  
25  
26 the introduction of 'Pre-departure Briefing' sessions, including cross-cultural  
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28 exercises, dealing with culture shock and opportunities to meet incoming students as  
29  
30 recommended by Kruse and Brubaker (2007). These responded to a small but  
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32 growing number of students who returned early, culture-shocked and homesick,  
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34 causing serious problems personally and for the institutions. In the last three years we  
35  
36 attained a "zero return" rate, maintaining 'technology-enhanced scaffolding' (Pea,  
37  
38 2004) beyond the student's arrival abroad through the use of social media.  
39  
40 Initially faced with cynicism (at worst) and apathy (at best) from many academics, a  
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42 policy of 'working with the willing' was adopted by the team in the UK. Developing  
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44 an area from scratch meant there were no formal roles defined so experimentation and  
45  
46 innovation were not only desirable but necessary.

47 ~~Also, working and researching in real time in the 'real situation', the UK action~~  
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49 ~~researcher discovered that p~~ Peer-to-peer learning was increasingly effective and  
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51 efficient: students and interested academic colleagues were organised into  
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53 communities-of-practice from Year 1. Returning students in Year 4, working with  
54

incoming students and interested staff, volunteered to co-ordinate meetings, social events and to run social media groups which could then include alumni and students currently abroad. Developing peer-to-peer learning allows students and staff to provide up-to-date detail and colour to a briefing and support process. (Pearce, Powell and Burns, 2016). These democratic groups – a campus community - impacted the learning of students and staff alike. The resulting confidence in implementing an ‘open-door’ policy for advice was so successful that team members were interchangeable as self-efficacy supporters, providing high accessibility for maximum impact on a growing number of students.

*The most important thing for me was having a connection to people back home, such as lecturers, who were there to offer support and gave me the strength to get through the hard parts in Hong Kong.*

*Outward bound student (interviewee - UK)*

**Process Familiarity**

Another interesting theme emerged from our ‘action research data’ concerns the students’ application process. In the UK, applying the ‘scaffolding’ (Bruner, 1960), concept to administrative staff colleagues, operational expertise was developed in a focussed team and extended to students, creating a campus community with process experience (Pearce, Powell and Burns, 2016). They were involved in the management of the area as the challenge of scaling up from ten to three hundred students was met. ~~based on the UK action researcher’s record.~~

### *Differences in Educational Culture*

The third theme, centred on the learning process and institutional facilities, was developed by combining learnings from the Chinese and British cases. The adaptation to the host country and institutional environment is of great importance for mobile students.

Various challenging differences are evident through the analysis of the [interview data in the China case](#), including compulsory attendance in China with extensive attendance monitoring and an inability to obtain feedback from tutors about assessed work. This illustrates a considerably broader challenge faced by the integration of higher education systems.

In the UK, the 'authentic-learning' circle, actively engaging students in higher-order thinking to analyse their own real-world experience and apply it outside the classroom was completed. The learning outcomes cannot be pre-determined but can be focussed on global citizenship. Inspired by the concept of 'authentic assessment' (Scheurman and Newman, 1998), the team [\(with the UK action researcher as a participant\)](#) in the UK case developed an integrated preparation and reflection assessment strategy using on-line portfolio technology, with appropriate interventions from that team pre-departure, in-country and post-return. Giving students the opportunity to reflect upon and monitor progress is essential to authentic-learning's metacognition: assessment is integrated seamlessly into the learning task (working/studying abroad), in order to reflect 'real-world' assessment. [according to the conversations between the UK action researcher and students](#). Much of what students learned while abroad was unintended and so setting learning outcomes was challenging. Flexibility was allowed to accommodate students' experiences.

For incoming students to China, a change of HE culture in China is a key driver in attracting them. [Both secondary data \(Chinese MoE, 2015\) and staff interview narrative indicate that p](#)Promoting inbound student mobility has been regarded as part of a Chinese university’s international learning and teaching strategy. Many institutions make significant efforts to leverage teaching quality and partially integrate the traditional Chinese teaching system with Western learning methods. For example, [the staff interviewed from the case this university state that they](#) invites Western academics (e.g. US, UK, Canada) to teach both home and foreign students at their university. [The awareness of educational culture differences between home and host countries by decision makers at both central and institutional levels may facilitate the scope and scale of international students’ mobility.](#)

*Opportunity Value*

[Through the](#) action research, the UK case researcher gained sufficient experience from her students who lived, worked and studied abroad by solving ‘real students’ mobility problems’ in person. From her perspective, creating valuable opportunities [\(via careful across-institution curriculum design\) such as ‘credit-transfer’ and ‘double degrees’ -may motivate student mobility, such as ‘credit trasfer’ and ‘double degrees’.](#)

In the UK case, the first ‘credit-transfer’ scheme was introduced in 2009, allowing students to study abroad for a semester in their second year and opportunities were made available to all undergraduate students. This allowed students on three-year programmes and those with a UK work placement in their sandwich year to participate in the study abroad programme. To develop the credit-transfer programme, a flexible, semester-based module structure was proposed and a single trusted partner was chosen to introduce an English programme for students with no foreign language.

Members of the UK-based team, [including the UK case action researcher for this study](#), worked at the French partner for six months (funded by Erasmus) to implement the new programme and have delivered a module on it every year since. An increasing number of students now complete three semesters abroad, sometimes on three different continents.

An important extension of this strategy was a focus on the development of ‘double degrees’, in which students join the final year of a partner institution’s degree and graduate at the end of this year, before returning to their home institution to graduate a second time. This provides a tangible outcome valued by students and ~~lends~~ credibility to their activities, particularly important as tuition fees increased. [This value has been confirmed by students through their personal reflections on different occasions \(e.g. peer-to-peer learning workshops organised by the action researcher\).](#)

To ~~further~~ widen ~~further~~ the appeal of ‘study abroad’, internships were introduced into exchange schemes as ‘experiential education’ (Steinberg, 2002). Students were originally forced to choose between studying abroad or gaining work experience in the UK. Now, almost half of students on “exchange” are on a scheme combining work and study. This was achieved by working with existing international partners to develop new schemes and selecting new partners for the internship opportunities they offer.

In China, [staff interview evidence indicates](#) while large numbers of Chinese students study at Western Universities for degrees as long term academic sojourners, short-term mobility increased as well, such as summer schools for university students (especially in the first and second year), short training programmes (e.g. mini MBA) and one-semester exchange programmes. As a new trend, [according to the Chinese](#)

[professor](#), outbound Chinese student mobility tends to be more short-time oriented and more diversified than before. [She claimed:](#)

*[“China now is truly international oriented, intercultural knowledge is critical for university students. Many HE institutions make great efforts to provide more diversified opportunities encouraging more students ‘go global’, such as short-term programme”](#)*

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The evidence suggests that, for this short-term oriented outbound student mobility, the main purpose is to develop inter-cultural awareness and enhance awareness of global citizenship. For example, in one Chinese Mini MBA programme delivered in the author’s institution, none of the students had been to the UK before. One Mini MBA student claimed that:

*‘Seeing is believing. Many things I saw are different from what I thought (about British culture) before. I wouldn’t know that if I did not come here to the UK)’.*

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China is the country with largest population in the world. There are still large numbers of Chinese students (their family) cannot afford the expensive tuition fees studying abroad. Such short-term student mobility programmes have provided great opportunities which enable and encourage more Chinese student developing their inter-cultural knowledge and enhancing their employability skills.

**Personal Development**

~~R~~The responses from all interviewees - ~~the students, staff and parents -~~ indicate that self-driven motivation played an important role motivating ~~foreign~~ students to ~~travel~~ to China. The key drivers connected to personal development include 1) gaining cultural and social capital; 2) seeking personally rewarding experiences; 3) maximising educational and employment opportunities. Our findings show that

studying overseas ~~not just~~ reinforces not only a students' ~~s~~ global mindset, but also their sense of intellectual awareness. One inbound exchange student in China mentioned that he was '*much more confident*' ~~he would in~~ finding a job after finishing his studies in China with 'developed global competences'. For outbound Chinese students mobility, studying abroad brings them educational and personal benefits in relation to the acquisition of knowledge, cultural awareness, English language proficiency and development of skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving. After analysing the interview data, it wasis discovered ~~Our findings indicate~~ that the majority of Chinese students become more confident and their ability to get on with people was is enhanced. They managed d unpredictable situations better and be~~ame~~ more mature. The following quote illustrates the mobility benefits for Chinese students studying abroad:

*I rarely spoke to foreigners when I was in China. Now I won't be afraid to talk to foreigners. Opening a bank account, cooking and shopping, washing clothes... I had to deal with all those things after I came here. They used to be my parents' business- tough at the beginning, but you will learn eventually.*

*Outbound student (interviewee - China)*

The majority of Chinese students believed that studying abroad had brought many benefits for their career development. They felt more confident and ~~had a better~~ ability to coped better with difficulties and solving-and solve problems. These students ~~we interviewed~~ believe ~~d~~ that studying abroad surely enhanced their employability skills and helped them finding jobs ~~in the future~~. One Chinese student interviewee described himself as 'a problems solver!' (student interviewee 2); ~~his~~ His parents appraised him '*much more independent*' (Interviewee 2 parents); ~~and his~~

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[tutor \(accompanying their exchange students in the UK institution as a visiting scholar\)](#)  
[claimed that this student was 'more competence and resilient' \(staff interviewee\).](#)

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Similarly, study abroad students in the UK were encouraged to reflect deeply on their management of such experiences. To enhance the 'authentic-learning' approach, post-return 'Maximising Employability' sessions, as recommended by Kruse and Brubaker (2002), were organised [by the UK action researcher](#). Some students struggled to realise the value of challenges they had overcome, slipping into negativity because they had not entirely enjoyed their experience abroad. Students who had thoroughly enjoyed themselves could find it even more stretching. [Based on analysis of the -the UK action research dataer's participating experience.](#) These sessions helped students to 'unpack' (Gardner et al, 2009) their experiences, positive and negative, and translate them into evidence of the 'additional critical global competences' employers seek (Diamond et al, 2011), such as adaptability, resilience, self-reliance and an ability to work internationally with many different people.

Students are transformed by their international exposure, which is a 'life-affirming learning experience' [as some students confirmed in the peer-to-peer learning workshops](#). The tangible effects on their confidence, global outlook and employability are marked:

*Before my placement in Germany, I was content to finish university and find employment within my hometown, Newcastle. Returning from the placement, I knew that there was no going back to a simple life in Newcastle for me. I moved to London to find a job in the corporate world. My international experience allowed me to obtain long term secondments within my company's offices in Zurich and Miami. Six years later, I have transferred my life to Switzerland where I work internationally for the world's largest Corporate Insurance Broker.*

Outbound student (interviewee – UK)

### Family Support

During the interviews, both parents' and students' responses both confirmed and illuminated that outbound Chinese mobility was clearly driven by family support, both financially and mentally. This finding is not recognized in the Western student mobility literature. Currently, financial support from parents still plays a key role in driving Chinese students studying abroad. Due to fast economic growth in China, increasing numbers of Chinese families, especially the middle class, are willing and can afford to send their children to study overseas. As opposed to European countries, where students can seek financial support from different institutions and special programmes such as Erasmus, Chinese outbound mobility is largely financed by their parents. Chinese parents have realised that their children face more challenges than ever before in the job market. Better To better prepare their children in advance has become a target goal for many Chinese parents. One parents emotionally stated: *"We only have only one child. The purpose of making money is to support our son. We want our child to feel unconditional love"*.

In addition to financial assistance, mental support from the family is vital for outbound mobility, especially in the early stages. Chinese students normally lack independence. Studying and living in a different environment causes anxiety and discomfort (Quan, Smailes and Fraser, 2013). To overcome these barriers, Chinese parents play a crucial role in encouraging their children 'going mobile'. One mother we interviewed reflected how she persuaded her daughter to engage in a four-month exchange programme:

*My daughter is well protected. She had never left China on her own before she went to the UK. She was so nervous when I encouraged her to apply for the exchange programme. I promised to communicate with her on a daily basis via WeChat...we did! I spoke to my daughter every day when she was in UK.*

*(Interviewee /mother--- China)*

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The China case reveals that family support, both financial and mental~~support~~, are key drivers for Chinese student outbound mobility, especially for those students who lack of individual confidence and are over protection at home country.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aims to explore how countries practise student mobility programmes differently, and how to learn from one another. By analysing the contextualised cases in the UK and China, our findings reveal that undergraduate student mobility is closely linked to national supports; institutional strategy, family support and students’ own self-driven motivations (see Table 3). To support better student mobility and sustain the balance between inbound and outbound student mobility, ~~these two~~<sup>three</sup> countries can learn from each other by enhancing family supports (emerged from China case) and the institutional good practice (~~ass~~ in the UK context).

Table 3: Areas of good practice in two countries

	Regional/National Support Policies	Family Support	Institutional Innovation	Personal Motivation
China	MoE policy links student mobility to university performance	<b>Strong financial and emotional support to children</b>	Limited	Self-motivation combined with family and institutional push
UK	EU Erasmus+ programme	Limited	<b>Retro marketing, scaffolding, buddying system, open days, pre-departure briefing, peer-to-peer learning, debriefs</b>	Limited

Our findings with respect to the student ~~international~~ mobility in different country contexts have revealed ~~the several~~ influentialkey themes, ~~which influence SM~~. For instance, we argued that process familiarity; specific communication; opportunity

value and a personal development approach (See Table 2) are crucial in facilitating mobilitySM. ~~Nevertheless, there isare~~ limited literature which illustrates these areas in details. In addition, our findings place emphasis on the influence of 'national educational culture' ~~relevant to mobilityin terms of SM~~. Policy makers in the Higher Education industry in ~~botheither the UK and or~~ China need to promote student mobility in a more strategic fashion to develop students' cultural capital (Oleksiyyenko, Cheng and Yi, 2013) and enhance their multi-cultural capabilities (Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015).

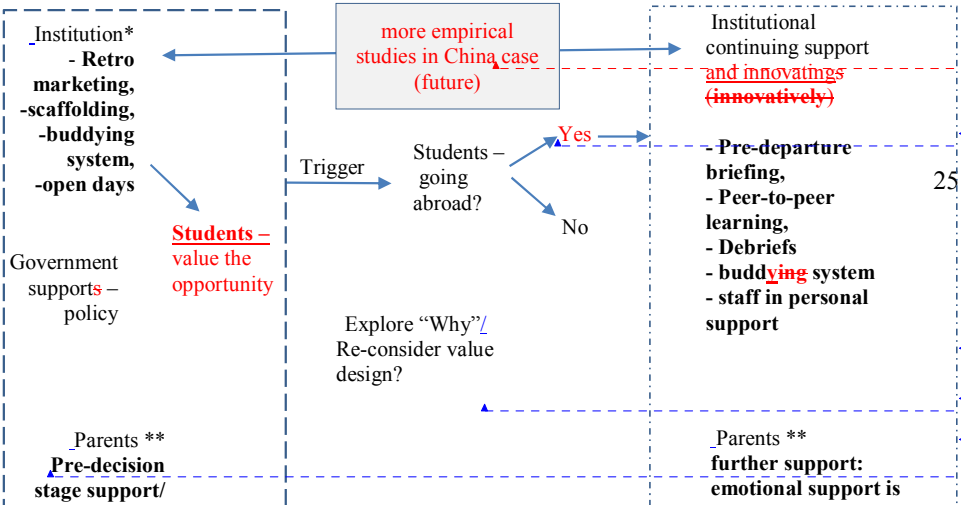
Importantly, the potential influence and value of family support is clear from the Chinese case, ~~wherethe only one in which~~ it emerged as an explicit theme. Inbound student mobility responds to a combination of Chinese government support, Chinese HE institutional support and students' self-motivation. However, outbound mobility is mostly influenced by family support (Waters, 2006). We suggest that the individual benefits of studying abroad – personal development, enhanced employability etc - can in turn drive support from the family, both financially and emotionally. This finding clearly provides empirical support for Bolton and Nie's (2010) and Daly's (2011) arguments from a stakeholder perspective, which claims that ~~multiple-~~ stakeholders, including parents, are exerting profound influence on students' higher education decisions-making choices. The 'parental choice' in an international education market clearly has impact on students' mobility (Waters, 2005). These can be maximised through the development of valuable opportunities providing credit transfer, a double degree and other employability enhancements along with an educational culture which helps students identify their learnings from challenging experiences. The

universities in the UK could consider more the role of the family in supporting internationally mobile students.

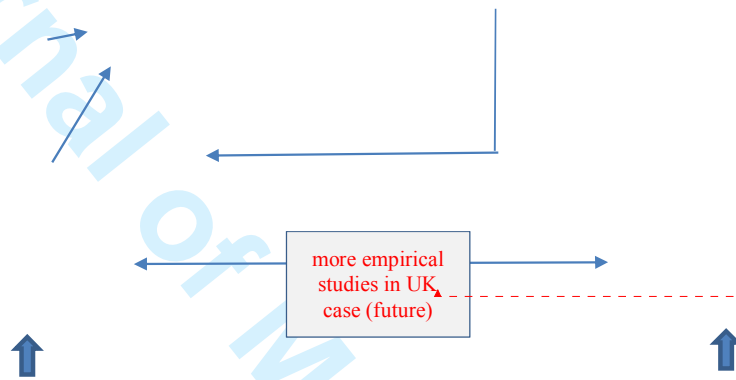
In the UK case, the growth in outward mobility was driven by institutional policy behind the structure and process of recruiting and supporting students, which in turn produced a focus on building the valuable opportunities for individuals described above and highly motivating communication. These findings provide indications for institutions that determine to promote and manage their student mobility efficiently (Daly et al., 2005). The variety of mechanisms utilised in the UK case reveals that adequate strategies at institutional level play a pivotal role in supporting students' mobility (King and Findlay, 2010). While Chinese universities focus on incentives to attract inbound students, they are less concerned with supporting 'exchange' mobility as part of home studies. Most outbound students are self-funding and engage in full-time study abroad on their own initiative. The decision makers at Chinese HE institutions should be aware of the importance of the student mobility for home students and learn from our UK case to encourage and motivate more Chinese students taking part of SM activities with strong institutional supports.

In conclusion, we ~~our~~ developed a theoretical model (~~in-f~~Figure 1)-below showing the trajectory of managing international student<sub>s</sub>-mobility by combining the UK and Chinese cases.

**Figure 1: A dynamic model of international student mobility**



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~~Having discussion in our prior literature~~As discussed earlier, it is crucial to understand how stakeholder groups might have a potential impact on international student mobility. Our findings support this assertion.~~provide empirical support in China case. Nevertheless, due to China is in transition, including its higher education system reform.~~ Many institutional innovations in supporting British student mobility in the UK case can be learned by Chinese universities in promoting and managing Chinese students' international mobility with the consideration of country context.

The key contribution of our study is to examine practices of student mobility in different country contexts. Our findings provide new insights for national policy makers; institutional strategic decision-makers and parents in terms of how to promote and better support student mobility. It is evident that the next generation, as global citizens, are facing unprecedented challenges. ~~The Our~~ case findings suggest if government and institutions attempt to encourage or attract more students to study

abroad, better understanding, more assistance and support are required in considering the contextualised situations in different countries.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study relies entirely on subjective, qualitative data collected through a variety of methods and not designed to be directly comparable. The countries are represented by single case studies of different types. For this reason, it avoids the aim to generalise and conclusions are instead **transferable**. O’Leary (2005) judges the integrity of research in part through applicability outside one’s immediate frame of reference, proposing that *“lessons learned that may be germane to a larger population, a different setting or another group”* (p.75) demonstrate transferability, rather than generalisability.

Our study focused on UK and China as countries in transition. This research would be developed by adding other ‘countries in transition’ in different regions, such as Ukraine. Ukraine’s diverse population is pulled in two opposite directions - East and West – with tragic results. Ukraine’s system of higher education is going through a period of transformation at a time of economic austerity. It has been undergoing transition from the Soviet style highly centralised system to an integrated European system (Shaw et al., 2012). tragic results. The government effort to harmonise the system of education with European counterparts started off by joining the Bologna process in 2005. Since then initiatives have been implemented with the aim of cultivating the Humboldtian traditions of enhancing the quality of teaching and research in autonomous universities. The internationalisation of the system requires not only the adoption of best practices, but also increasing the opportunity for student mobility through full participation in various mobility arrangements (West and Barham, 2009). The recent elaboration of the Erasmus programme enabled students

outside of the European Union to participate. Student mobility is seen as an extra tool for the transition of Eastern European systems of higher education, adapting them to Western institutions. —However, Western European students are historically not interested in studying in Eastern Europe (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). ~~At the same time, Eastern European students experience difficulties with the approval process as well as provision of financial support.~~

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