

Understanding Career Construction and Acculturation Strategies Among Chinese International Students in Australia

Katrine Sonnenschein

To cite this article: Katrine Sonnenschein (29 Dec 2023): Understanding Career Construction and Acculturation Strategies Among Chinese International Students in Australia, Journal of China Tourism Research, DOI: [10.1080/19388160.2023.2298676](https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2023.2298676)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2023.2298676>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 29 Dec 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 25



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Understanding Career Construction and Acculturation Strategies Among Chinese International Students in Australia

Katrine Sonnenschein 

Department of Leadership and Organizational Behaviour, BI Norwegian Business School, Trondheim, Norway

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the career adaptability and the acculturation of Chinese international hospitality students, enrolled in an Australian university. Furthermore, the study explored how their career adaptability and acculturation are related. The methodology included a thematic analysis of 19 semi-structured interviews with Chinese international hospitality students enrolled at a Southeast Queensland Australian University. The results showed that the career adaptability (career control and career concern) were driven by the students' own agency or family influences. Furthermore, I found that the students were either host or home culture oriented, and they acculturated mainly through work/internships, socializing and group work at university. Finally, I found that acculturation has an impact on international students' career adaptability, and that the students' career adaptability also affects their acculturation.

了解中国留学生在澳大利亚的职业发展与文化适应策略

摘要

本研究之目的在于调查在澳大利亚大学就读的酒店管理专业中国留学生的职业适应能力以及文化适应能力。此外，本研究探讨了他们的职业适应能力与文化适应能力之间的关系。研究方法包括的主题分析，是对昆士兰东南部某所澳大利亚大学19名酒店管理专业中国留学生进行半结构化访谈。研究结果表明：职业适应能力（职业控制和职业关注）受到学生所有机构或家庭影响。此外，研究者还发现学生们或留学国文化导向或母国文化导向，他们主要通过工作/实习、社交和大学小组工作来适应澳大利亚文化。最后，研究者发现文化适应力对国际学生的职业适应能力有影响，学生的职业适应能力也影响其文化适应能力。

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 March 2023

Accepted 13 December 2023

KEYWORDS

Career construction theory; career adaptability; acculturation; international students; hospitality education

关键词

职业发展理论; 职业适应能力; 文化适应力; 留学生; 酒店管理教育

1 Introduction

Individuals need to actively construct their careers to become successful in their career and this construction starts already during their university education. Career construction – understood as ‘the process of proactive and adaptive career development over time’ (Rudolph et al., 2019, p. 1) reflects the way in which individuals make sense of who

CONTACT Katrine Sonnenschein  katrine.b.sonnenschein@bi.no  Department of Leadership and Organizational Behaviour, BI Norwegian Business School, Nydalsveien 37, Trondheim, Oslo 0484, Norway

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

they are and who they want to become, and how they make career decisions to achieve their goals (Savickas, 2002). It has been argued that career construction involves both willingness and ability to adapt (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Perceptions of control and concern for career are important aspects of this process.

Individuals purposefully design and construct their careers by dealing with social expectations regarding career preparation, career choice, career success, etc (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009). To be able to integrate personal needs with social expectations requires concern for one's career and perceptions of career control (Savickas, 2002, 2005). Although the role of agentic self-management of one's career is often argued to be increasingly important (Rodrigues et al., 2015), Sullivan and Al Ariss (2021) suggest that considering the impact of social norms upon individual agency when making decisions about one's career requires more attention. The current study demonstrates that international students' career construction was formed by both themselves and their family members. Whereas some students were more under influence from their family regarding their choice of studies and pursuits of career goals others were more agentic.

Further, as careers become more dynamic and complex, more dimensions need to be taken into consideration when constructing a career (Chudzikowski, 2012). For example, Chudzikowski (2012) argues that individuals need to think not only about *what* they want to do but also *where* to do it – geographically and culturally. Acculturation strategies – (i.e. the strategies that sojourners use to meet the challenges of living in a new culture (Guan et al., 2018) – are therefore likely to play an important role in the process of career construction, particularly for young people. The experience of being displaced from their home culture and of being exposed to diversity is likely to change their cultural and personal outlooks (Brown et al., 2012), attitudes, perceptions and feelings (Shafaei et al., 2016). Specifically, international students may undergo major psychological and sociocultural changes while studying overseas in cultures very different from their own (Weihua & Wang, 2011). However, the literature has not focused much on the effect that these acculturation strategies have on their career adaptabilities (Guan et al., 2018). Career adaptability has been defined as 'readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role, and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions' (Savickas, 1997, p. 254).

Literature asserts that acculturation strategies – both home and host culture orientation – have an impact on international students' career adaptability (Guan et al., 2018). The fact that international students often interact and socialize with students coming from their own culture, other international students and domestic students facilitates their cultural adaptation and career development. According to Guan et al. (2018), international students' home culture orientation may lead to difficulties in acculturating to the host culture, which may demotivate them to engage in career exploration activities and impede their career adaptability. The authors explored the impact of international students' acculturation on their career adaptability (Guan et al., 2018), whereas the current study identifies that international students' career adaptability equally has an influence on the way that they acculturate. For example, students who had concern and control over pursuit of future career in Australia would choose an acculturation strategy that made them assimilate into the host culture. Hence, the current paper contributes to

the current understanding of factors influencing career construction of the students (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2019; Savickas et al., 2009). Firstly, I demonstrate the importance of both agency and structure. Secondly, I pinpoint the continuous interplay between career adaptability and acculturation strategies (Guan et al., 2018).

A particularly suitable empirical context to explore these relationships is the one of Chinese international hospitality students in Australia. Many Chinese students choose to study abroad, and particularly in Australia, hoping to increase their chances of a successful career in the future, whether at home in China or in Australia (Barber et al., 2013; Davis & Mackintosh, 2011). I selected hospitality management because it was the sixth most popular degree among Chinese international students in business and commerce in Australian higher education in 2016.

In the recent years, there has been an increase in Chinese graduates returning to their homeland, attracted by booming business opportunities in China (Nachatar Singh, 2020; West, 2014). However, attracting graduates back to China can be a challenge due to lower salaries, working conditions, gender attitudes, etc. At the same time, Australia (as well as other host countries such as the US and Canada) would like to attract skilled migrants and the overseas studies could therefore be considered a pathway to settlement (West, 2014). These different driving factors influence Chinese international students' decisions in choosing to stay in the host country or return to their homeland.

To make the career construction and acculturation easier for Chinese international students, work integrated learning in their host or home country could assist the students in this process. Robnsson et al (Robinsen et al., 2016). suggests that university and industry need to collaborate more closely to prepare students for their future work life and provide them with realistic expectations. In particular, host universities need to help facilitate international students' internships since they often have difficulties gaining access to companies in their host country, particularly due to their low confidence or shyness and lack of connections. Furthermore, because of visa regulations and language barriers, international students are often rejected by employers and thus cannot undertake internships in local companies/hotels (Mackaway et al., 2014). Patrick et al. (2008) suggest that the host university may also assist international students in finding an internship in their home country, which might be useful for those students wanting to return to China after their graduation in their host country.

Research questions

What do Chinese international hospitality students, enrolled in an Australian university, do to construct their careers and how do they acculturate? How are their career adaptability and acculturation related?

2 Literature review

2.1 Collectivist versus individualist career norms

A suitable context to explore the interplay of structure and agency in career decisions is that of Generation Y in China. Generation Y were born between 1981 and 2000 and they are said to be very independent and agentic in their career decisions (Kong et al., 2020). Unlike previous generations' acceptance of collectivist values, the Generation Y is

characterized by their individualism (Xiang et al., 2010). They prefer enjoyable and challenging jobs with high salary and excellent benefits (Kong et al., 2020). Due to China's one-child policy, young employees tend to be more self-centered and less responsible than previous generations. Furthermore, economic reforms in China since the 80s led to changes in the employment system under the Planned Economy, where the government assigned jobs to university graduates. Now the young generation has gained freedom to pursue their own career paths and at the same time they have encountered more pressure to compete on the labor market for opportunities to realize their career goals. This development can explain the new generations' more self-awareness and self-confidence in career management compared to previous generations. For example, they would demand more from their managers and would be more likely to initiate career changes (Xiang et al., 2010).

At the same time, China is known to be driven by collectivist values and strong expectations of family and social norms. Parents in China are recognized as having an essential influence on their children's careers (Zhang et al., 2015) and Gribble and Li (The Australian, 3 July 2013) argued that employment outcomes are a crucial factor for Chinese students and their families when considering study abroad options. Pringle and Mallon (2003) have claimed that in the investigation of a person's career success, the specific cultural context needs to be taken into consideration. Career achievement cannot only be looked at through the lens of an individualist culture. The authors argued that in collectivist cultures, individuals belong to a group, and benefits to individuals are less important than the collective advantages to the extended family. Because family relationships are the foundations of identity, they must be considered in the evaluation of career success (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Furthermore, Ghosh and Fouad (2016) have suggested that Asian American students do not necessarily make career-related choices based on their interests, but rather on influential factors from family. In contrast, according to Young (1994), most parents from North America (and, I would add, other Western countries) do not want to influence their children's career choice as it is considered an individual right.

2.2 Career construction and factors influencing it

Career construction theory addresses how individuals construct meaning of their occupational experiences. The focus is not on the individual's work experience from university to retirement, but rather on the patterning of these experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story of the individuals past memories, present experiences and future aspirations (Savickas, 2005). To construct meaningful careers, individuals need resources and capacity to adapt. Career adaptability can be conceptualized as a form of human capital contributing to career decision self-efficacy (Duffy & Blustein, 2005) and includes exploration of self and environment (looking for opportunities); planning of the future and deciding (Savickas, 1997). Individuals are able to accumulate this human capital (i.e. resources) as they gain experience and exposure (Brown et al., 2012), and are able to use it to help them construct desired careers (Johnston, 2018). Career adaptability can also be seen as a self-regulatory mechanism. More specifically, Savickas and Porfeli (2012) see the construct as embracing the attitudes, behaviors and competencies related to career construction. These authors argue

that the career adaptability ‘shapes the actual problem-solving strategies and coping behaviors (i.e. adapting) that individuals use to synthesize their vocational self-concepts with work roles’ (Savickas & Porfeli, 2004). The concept has been operationalized as involving career concern, control, curiosity and confidence. Concern about the future relates to the outlook on and preparation for what the future may bring; control reflects the extent to which individuals feel responsible and act with agency in the desire to shape their careers. Curiosity encourages individuals to explore possible selves and possible situations. Finally, confidence reflects the self-efficacy beliefs that one is capable of designing a desired future and career. To understand what adaptive resources are needed to manage a successful career construction for international students, I next focus on the role of acculturation strategies for career construction (Eggerwein et al., 2004).

2.3 Acculturation strategies

Home culture orientation and host culture orientation are the two strategies that travelers use to deal with the challenges of living in a new culture. ‘Home culture orientation helps individuals maintain and identify with their own cultural heritage, whereas host culture orientation motivates individuals to participate in and identify with the host society’s culture’ (Guan et al., 2018, p. 229). Four types of acculturation strategies have been identified based on the combinations of both strategies. A high home culture orientation combined with a high host culture orientation leads to integration. A high host culture orientation combined with a low home culture orientation results in assimilation. Finally, a low host culture orientation combined with a high home culture orientation leads to separation. When rejecting both cultures it results in marginalization (Guan et al., 2018).

Integration can only be voluntarily chosen and successfully adopted by minority groups when the majority in the society has an inclusive approach toward cultural diversity. For example, prejudice and discrimination have an impact on the minority groups’ well-being and integration (Berry, 1991). According to (Harrison & Peacock’s, 2010) study, students of the home culture relied on stereotypes regarding Chinese international students. For example, Chinese international students were perceived as collectivists (described as excluding and unfriendly); and as having extreme work orientations and poor English language skills. They were perceived as a threat and host students were afraid of sharing academic and social spaces with them. The host students were reluctant to interact voluntarily with international students and this phenomenon can be described as ‘passive xenophobia’. Chinese international students may face discrimination not only at the host university, but while searching for internships and part time jobs. The literature claims that international students often have difficulties gaining access to companies in their host country, particularly because of their poor English language skills, their lack of knowledge of the local workplace culture, and their lack of a network (Gribble & Li, 2013; Mackaway et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2008).

Those successfully adopting the integration strategy experience less stress and adapt better to the new culture where they are settled than those choosing marginalization, assimilation or separation strategies (Berry, 2005). Guan et al. (2018), Berry (1997), and Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) also confirmed that when immigrants are involved in both cultures (integration), their acculturation is more successful and leads to better

well-being. In contrast, when individuals experience cultural conflicts, their acculturation process may sometimes result in separation or marginalization (Berry, 1991). Studies have demonstrated that integration is the most effective acculturation strategy among young immigrants, and in particular Chinese students in the U.S., Canada and Australia (Berry et al., 2006; Neto et al., 2005). However, Weihua and Wang's (2011) study of Chinese students in Germany demonstrated that separation is the second most preferred acculturation strategy after integration which might be explained, among others, by the passive xenophobia in the host culture as described above.

3 Methodology

To address my research question, I designed a research method consisting of semi-structured individual interviews. Furthermore, it is an interpretative study that treats the interviewee as a knowledgeable agent and permits the multiple ways of understanding the world (Hammersley, 2013). I adopted purposive and snowballing sampling strategy to identify suitable interviewees (Neuman, 2006). It was important for me to talk to international students studying in a host country and learn about their perceptions and reflections regarding their career and acculturation in a social and cultural context. I chose to study Chinese hospitality students studying in Australia. Some students were recruited on campus – for example, in computer laboratories and outside examination rooms after exams. Some of these students volunteered to be interviewed and also referred the researchers to their classmates.

I collected 19 semi-structured interviews with Chinese second-year ($N = 9$) and-third year international students ($N = 6$) enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (awarded majors International Tourism and Hotel Management and Hotel Management), and Chinese international postgraduate students ($N = 4$) in the Master of Business (awarded major International Tourism and Hotel Management) at a Southeast Queensland university. One of the Master of Business students had already graduated and was completing a Master of Business in Human Resource Management. Six were male and 13 were female. The students were between 18 and 31 years of age. Approximately seven to ten main questions were asked of all respondents, but the flow of each interview was unique. The duration of the interviews was between approximately one hour to one and a half hour. The interviews were auto recorded and transcribed fully.

My data analysis was overall deductive as I wanted to maintain focus on the purpose of my research. Therefore, codes, categories, and themes were based on concepts drawn from the theory from career construction and acculturation. To begin the analysis, I created both open codes and theory-based codes. These codes were generated into categories based on the components of the theoretical framework, which were then sorted into theory-based themes. For example, codes such as 'work experience in hospitality' and 'no parent control, but support' were generated into the category of 'Agency' which belonged to the theory of 'concern and control over pursuit of studies and future career' (cf. Table 1) (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2008). The following themes from career construction theory and acculturation theory emerged: 'concern and control over pursuit of studies and future career', 'host culture orientation' and 'home culture orientation'. As stated in the theoretical section, p. 5–6, career adaptability is operationalized as involving career concern, control, curiosity and confidence. However, in my coding process, I found more data that

Table 1. Summary of themes and categories.

Themes	Categories
Concern and control over pursuit of studies and future career	Agency Family's influence
Host culture orientation	Internship and work experience in Australia and/or internationally Socialising and networking with other domestic and international students Working with other domestic and international students
Home culture orientation	Internship and work experience in China Friendship, group work and networking with other Chinese students

generated themes relating to the concepts of concern and control rather than to those of curiosity and confidence. Most of the codes regarding curiosity and confidence described students' curiosity regarding their learning experience at the Australian university and their confidence regarding their development of English language skills rather than their curiosity and confidence regarding their career management. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that I have been biased in the coding process by my deductive approach, when I was analyzing data with the theoretical perspective of agency and structure. This approach might have led to the prevalence of codes related to 'control' and 'concern'. The coding process was done manually highlighting codes in different colors.

To secure validity of my approach (Denzin, 1978) I have used different theoretical perspectives during the interpretation of the data (e.g. theory triangulation) (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). Different concepts were used to explain the data: career construction and acculturation. Finally, according to Creswell (2013), it is important to build trust with respondents, and check for misunderstandings between the researcher and respondents. Language differences between the interviewer and interviewees increased potential misinterpretations. In this study, neither the interviewer's nor the interviewees' first language was English and misunderstandings could have occurred during the interviews. However, I reported the transcripts to the respondents to test for accuracy, which was a way of overcoming the potential misunderstandings in the interviews. Additionally, to protect their anonymity, I used abbreviations of the students' names (e.g. MA, SH). I have retained the original grammar and syntax of the interviewees in the quotes to ensure the credibility of the findings.

4 Findings

The data showed that both agency and structural factors influence on the career construction of the students. Furthermore, it demonstrate that career adaptability and acculturation are closely intertwined and important elements of career construction. . . I first present my findings (this section) and develop a model (Figure 1) to illustrate the intertwinement in the discussion (next section).

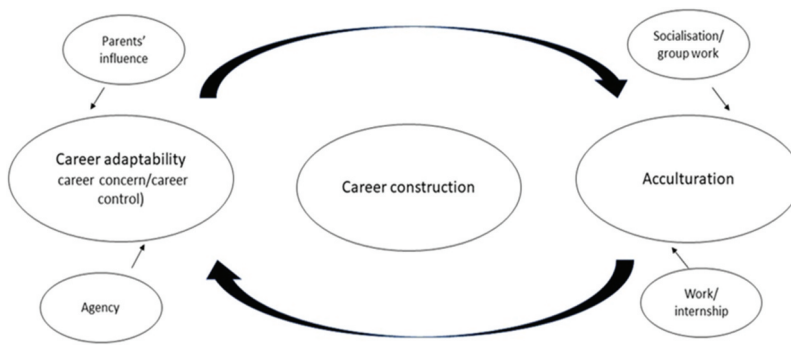


Figure 1. Career adaptability and acculturation model for international students.

4.1 Concern and control over pursuit of studies and future career

4.1.1 Agency

The respondents considered how they could craft a career that would make them happy and would be accepted and approved by their parents. They reflected a lot about the important skills and attributes for the hospitality industry they acquired while studying abroad, and they thought about career development, as well as shared knowledge about their future career. All my respondents were concerned about living up to their own goals. For example, MA dreamt about opening her own boutique hotel in the future, and she understood that the Gold Coast in Australia would be a strategic place for her to study to get closer to her dream. She explained:

I was thinking because Australia is a choice country, I mean at least Queensland or Gold Coast is so my goal was like I know there's going to be opportunities to work in hospitality like restaurant or hotel, resort, casinos.

More generally, my respondents understood that it was important to be clear about what one wanted to achieve because the decisions would impact their happiness and their performance. This was highlighted by CO, who argued that 'loyalty for not only the company you work for, but also for the goal you set for yourself' was important.

To have control over a career can mean many things. I found that career control can be implemented by the individuals' agency, their parents or other influencers. For example, MA was clearly the driver behind her actions and she knew what was needed and she sought opportunities to enrich her own career. She explained:

I think it's important that you have at least a little bit experience before you graduate, before you try to find a full-time job so people know (...). That's why I didn't want to just study. I also want to work.

Also, 8 other students (JI, KE, SH, KI, CI, JO, JY and AL) showed lots of autonomy in their career choice and SH even opposed her relatives' opinion about doing a major in hospitality. She said her parents helped her choose the country, but family was against her studying hospitality.

4.1.2 Family's influence

Interestingly, when thinking about career, many of the respondents considered not only their own goals and desires, but also those of parents. About ten students (a little more than the half) were at least partly influenced by their family in their choice of study program, destination of study and future career. For example, MI planned to combine her wishes with the expectations of her parents. Even though her parents wanted her to stay in Australia she considered returning to China to be close to them in their old age. She reasoned that because she was the only child, she would like and need to be close to them:

And also, the thing is I'm the only child in my family. In the future, so my parents will get older and I need to consider about the health, the situation. And I think if I am in Australia, that means I need to fly nine hours and also I need to get to Brisbane to take the plane also from Hong Kong to my hometown. That takes a lot of time. So if there is something happens, I really can't care about that. So in the same country it will be maybe better.

CO reflected on what he needed to do to achieve his career goal, he seemed to be more concerned about not disappointing his father with his career choices. For example, he emphasized that he chose to study abroad to be able to learn critical thinking, which his father believed was crucial for success but hard to learn in China. Similarly, he decided to focus on finance, because 'the finance job probably would be very important for this in order to achieve this goal' [take over his father's business]. Also, JE was very concerned about living up to his father's expectations regarding his career path. The father's friend would be able to help him enter the tourism business in his home city. JE explained:

'Before I enrolled in the international tourism, I just doing human resource, and my father is talking about you can just do study the international tourism . . . And my father's friend maybe can help me. So, I just started doing the tourism.'

Summing up, I observed that thinking about future career was fueled by the mixture of own concern and concern of the parents.

For some of my respondents exhibited their parents seemed to be in control over their careers (CO, JE). Their parents chose their study program and the country where they were going to work in the future. For example, CO admitted that his parents, mostly his father, influenced the choice of his degree and the location. To the question about what had influenced his choice of studying tourism and he answered:

'So I think the study at University . . . with major in hospitality will help my father and maybe help me after I graduate.'

These respondents experienced challenges as they developed their ideas about desired careers and the best way forward if their ideas did not correlate with those of their parents. For example, MI had a clear idea how to advance her career and actively pursued her chosen path, in her case work for Procter and Gamble. But because her path was not really appreciated by her parents, she was made to change it. Her parents wanted her to begin a master's in education instead of working. She explained:

Because my father said maybe in more than society, if you have a master's degree, it will be better to get a better job and a better life. So, I already enrolled in the P&G that time but my father still thinks maybe a master's degree will be better so I quit the job.

The students interviewed had reflected on and prepared for their careers, which demonstrates that they acted with agency. However, it appeared that some of the students were more under the influence of parents and other relatives than others in choosing their study program and career. Only a few students seemed to be fully under the career control of their parents, which means that the parents chose the hospitality program for them and exerted a strong influence on their future careers (CO, JE), whereas others were partly under parents' influence.

4.2 Host culture orientation

4.2.1 Internship and work experience in Australia and/or internationally

The data demonstrated that the students with host culture orientation acculturated through seeking internships and part-time jobs during their studies. Five of them had jobs in hotels, such as housekeeping, reception, and sales. Nine had jobs in restaurants, cafés, retail establishments, and take-away shops. Only two students did not have any work experience in Australia (JO and RI). Although most of students tried to get relevant hotel jobs, not all had luck with finding jobs within this field, due to fierce competition. JO, who already worked, explained:

'So, I don't know how to really find a job like the situation of now. But I try to be positive. I try to use the knowledge which I studied for university to apply and so on.'

Regardless of difficulties, the students used their part-time jobs to learn relevant skills. JE reflected on how he learnt to communicate in English through his part-time jobs at 7–11, which would benefit him in his future career in Australia:

'I learned how to communicate ... in English ...'

4.2.2 Socializing and networking with other domestic and international students

Host culture-oriented students (MA, HE, CI, JO, JE, JY) mainly had friends among other international or domestic students. MA claimed that she had several international friends:

'... Not so many local students in my class but a lot of other countries like international, like the other two I was having coffee, one is from France, another one is from Switzerland.'

They also avoided contacts with other Chinese students because they wanted to improve their English. HE explained:

'I don't want to get really close with Chinese friends. I mean they are nice people, but I need to learn something I need. So that's why I'm still living in the homestay.'

It was a reason for many to choose homestay, as well.

4.2.3 Working with other domestic and international students

Host culture-oriented students (MA, JA, HE, EL, KE) preferred working on assignments with other international students or domestic students, and they had positive experiences working with other nationality groups. MA preferred working with Western students in group assignments and she deplored that there were too many Chinese students only speaking Chinese in class:

‘So I had no choice but to have a group of Chinese students. And when there are only Chinese students, of course they prefer to speak Chinese.’

Only 8 out of the 17 students who were working in Australia successfully formed friendships with and/or worked in study groups with local and other international students. These numbers demonstrate the difficulties for Chinese international students to form friendships with other nationality groups due to linguistic and cultural barriers, even though they regularly met different nationalities at university and their job. Interestingly, out of the total of 19 students, only 7 wanted to remain in Australia after the completion of the studies. Six of them were the students who both had work experience in Australia and were actively seeking to socialize and work on assignments mainly with local and other international students.

4.3 Home culture orientation

4.3.1 Internship and work in China

I observed that students with home culture-orientation chose to undertake an internship or work experience in their home country. There could be various reasons for that. For example, the growing economy in China and a job market that was improving. Furthermore, the experience of rejections in their search for internships/part time jobs in Australia could also be a reason. MI had had several internships in hospitality during her bachelor studies in tourism management in China. MI was going to start another postgraduate degree in Australia and then apply for permanent residency, because her parents wanted her to remain there. However, she would have preferred to work in China. She explained:

‘Australia is a developed country, but China’s economy is growing rapidly. I think China would be a stronger country and that it will have stronger economy in the future. So maybe career development will be better in China.’

A. planned to undertake an internship in China hoping it would help him find a job in China later. CO was confident that he would return to China after his graduation because he had the possibility to work as an assistant in his father’s business related to the hospitality industry. Others, he would work as a shift manager of a hotel. Also, SH had done an internship in an international hotel in China, and she considered returning to China after the completion of her studies in Australia. Although she had some part-time jobs in Australia in cafés and restaurants, she had received several rejections from job applications to big hotels in Australia. These rejections might have explained her considerations about returning back to China. Some students chose to undertake an internship in China due to the difficulty obtaining relevant work experience in Australia and because they wanted to prepare themselves for their future career in China. Overall, five of them who had internship/work experience in China also wanted to work in China after the completion of their studies.

4.3.2 Friendship, group work and networking with other Chinese/Asian students

Home oriented students mainly found friends among Chinese or other Asian students. CO, KI, RI, A., MI, KE and AL had mainly Asian friends. For some of the students, cultural and linguistic barriers were the reasons for not socializing as much with local and international students from outside China/Asia. KI claimed:

‘It’s not easy make friends with locals. It’s not easy make friends with different color, like this.’

CO was a bit disappointed about this situation, since he would have liked to mingle more with Western people and thus get a different experience:

‘... If all your classmates or most of your classmates are Chinese, then what’s the point of coming all the way to Australia?’

Interestingly, the same four students (CO, MI, KI, and A.) who had work and internship experience in China or who planned an internship experience in their home country, also found it difficult socializing with local and other international students. Most of their friends were Chinese or Asian students. Another interesting finding was that all of these students wanted to return to China immediately after the completion of their studies or after some time. These findings indicate that their acculturation in Australia through local and international friends and local internships was difficult, and that could be one of many reasons they did not plan careers in Australia.

5 Discussion

My analysis of the data shows that career adaptability and acculturation reflect the interplay between agency and structure and reciprocal interrelatedness. I graphically illustrate my model in [Figure 1](#) and discuss the model below.

5.1 Career adaptability (career concern and career control)

While my findings, that future employment outcomes for students are important, are not surprising (The Australian, 3 July 2013); I observed that parents often took control when making the decision to invest in their children’s careers and study abroad degrees. While study abroad was generally considered a good investment in a future career, the reasons for selecting specific programs and locations reflected the outcome of a negotiation between the agent (the student) and their family. Many of the students had been actively exploring possibilities of desired careers. I observed that both the career concern and career control was shared between the interviewees and their family members. Many of the students expressed their concern about social expectations and the possibility of satisfying them. Often they had adapted their own aspirations to those of their family members. A little more than half of the students were at least partly influenced by their family in their choice of study program, destination of study and future career. In contrast, a little less than half showed a high degree of agency in their career choice and decided to oppose to the family expectations. Therefore, I see that the interplay between the agent and the structure is very present.

My findings correspond to the argument by Turner et al. (2003), according to which social expectations play an important role in career construction of young people in particular. Also, the specific cultural context needs to be taken into consideration to understand the individual's career decisions (Forte, 1999; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). In collectivist cultures like China, parents have an essential influence on their children's careers (Zhang et al., 2015). The data also show me that due to the fact that the students are born under the one-child policy, they sometimes feel an obligation to live close to their parents when they are growing old, even when the parents do not demand it. Despite this collectivist context, the current young generation (Generation Y) feels more autonomous than previous generations and is often characterized as ambitious, demanding, self-centered and career-oriented (Kong et al., 2020; Lynton & Thøgersen, 2010). These descriptions of Generation Y explain why almost half of the students who are representing this young generation have a lot of agency while constructing their career. The literature also emphasizes a high level of confidence of Generation Y (Xiang et al., 2010) regarding their career management compared with previous generations. Interestingly, this characteristic was not predominant in my data analysis.

5.2 Acculturation

Similarly, there are many factors influencing the acculturation approach taken by an individual; the availability of options and exposure to different stimuli are two very important ones and can shape the adopted strategy (Berry, 1991). The data show that six out of seven students who were sure they wanted to remain in Australia actually had work experience there and socialized and worked on assignments mainly with local or international students. These facts demonstrate that only a few students successfully adopted a host culture orientation with an integration (high home culture orientation combined with a high host culture orientation) or assimilation strategy (a high host culture orientation combined with a low home culture orientation).

The other students, who did not find relevant internship or work experience in Australia, and who were not able to socialize or network very much with local and other international students, wanted to return to China immediately after the completion of their studies or after some years of work in Australia. One explanation for their decision to return to China could be the lack of opportunities to engage deeply and profoundly with the host culture, which made it difficult for them to acculturate to that culture. According to Harrison and Peacock (2010), Chinese international students may face passive xenophobia from the part of the host students which may inhibit their acculturation. Furthermore, they may feel discrimination while searching for internships and part time jobs due to limited capability of English language skills, cultural knowledge and lack of network (Gribble, 2014; Mackaway et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2008). Another reason could be that their parents wanted them to pursue their career in China. For some of these students, it could be argued that they choose a separation strategy (low host culture orientation combined with a high home culture orientation). Studies have shown that integration is the most effective acculturation strategy among Chinese international students, but they often choose separation as a preferred strategy (Berry et al., 2006; Neto et al., 2005; Weihua & Wang, 2011).

5.3 The interrelation between career adaptability and acculturation

Career construction is shaped by both career adaptability and acculturation strategies (Guan et al., 2018). In trying to understand the nature of the relationship between adaptation and acculturation, I found that they are reciprocally inter-related. That means that career adaptability expressed through career control and career concern is likely shaping adopted acculturation strategies, and the chosen acculturation strategies simultaneously influence the approach to career concern and control (see Figure 1). Only limited literature has discussed the interplay between career adaptability and acculturation when discussing career construction (Guan et al., 2018). My data shows how the focus on either home culture or host culture will influence the willingness of individuals to engage in certain strategies to help them achieve desired future career outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2019; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Guan et al. (2018) mainly looked at how acculturation has an impact on international students' career adaptability. This pattern was also present in the current study. For example, students facing difficulties in acculturating in Australia (finding internship, part time jobs and local friends), would decide to look for a job in China after graduation. In this case, their initial acculturation strategy of assimilation or integration in their host country seemed difficult and had an impact on their career concern. They chose to look for job in China instead of Australia.

Moreover, I identified that the way in which students construct their careers, with home or host culture orientation, is influenced by their career adaptability. For example, students who had concern and control over pursuit of future career in Australia would acculturate into their host culture. In this case their career adaptability influenced their acculturation strategy of assimilation/integration.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Responding to the call for more research combining agency with contextual factors (Creed et al., 2009; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019), I investigated the role of structure (social expectations and norms) on individuals' career adaptability and acculturation strategies. Culture, understood as 'the symbolic system made up of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge' (Forte, 1999), plays a vital role in the early career decisions of my respondents, embedded in a collective cultural context. The specific cultural context needs to be taken into consideration when investigating career achievements of members of collective cultures (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Also, given the specificity of China's collective culture, future research should explore to what extent similar patterns can be observed among representatives from more individualist cultures, and whether these also are driven by influences from others such as parents or significant others.

6 Limitations

One of the limitations of my design is the fact that I only collected the data at one point in time. Since data that are collected longitudinally are better suited to chronicling events as they unfold, longitudinal studies would be more appropriate for acculturation since it is in constant change (Emmel & Hughes, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). I have focused only on Chinese students studying in Australia and not on international students from other countries. However, I consider the current study to be theoretically generalizable, since family influence on career is a phenomenon not only in China, but also in many other collectivistic cultures.

7 Conclusion

I set out to investigate how Chinese international hospitality students enrolled in an Australian university acculturate, and how their career adaptability is related to their acculturation. Through the qualitative inquiry, I found that the career control and career concern are driven by the students' own agency or others' influences. On the one hand, I explained the relatively high influence on the career adaptability by family as a cultural factor stemming from China's collectivism. On the other hand, the culture of the Generation Y explains why the young generation of today's China sometimes shows agentic behavior in their career construction. I argued that career construction should not only be seen through the lens of individual agency, but also from a structural perspective. Secondly, I found that the students were either host or home culture oriented, and they acculturated through work/internships, socialization and study groups at university. Finally, I concluded that acculturation has an impact on international students' career adaptability and that students' career adaptability also affects their acculturation.

8 Implications

8.1 Theoretical

I show that both career concern and career control reflect the interplay between the individual, their agency and the social structure in which they reside. Similarly, my data suggest that acculturation strategies reflect the availability of options and exposure to different stimuli, like socialization or lack of it in local culture; and the possibility to gain work experience in the host or home country. In highlighting this, I contribute to the current literature (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2019), by clearly pinpointing the continuous interplay between agency and structure. At the same time as parents in China traditionally always have had a significant influence on their children's careers (Zhang et al., 2015), the generation Y is now feeling more autonomous than previous generations (Kong et al., 2020; Lynton & Thøgersen, 2010). Finally, by developing my model of career construction as reciprocal interplay between career adaptability and acculturation strategies, I extend current understanding of factors influencing career construction (Guan et al., 2018). Whereas Guan et al.

(2018) investigated how acculturation influenced international students' career adaptability, I also identified that the way in which they acculturate, is influenced by their career adaptability.

8.2 Practical/Policy

The data showed that only very few students successfully adopted a host culture orientation through socializing and doing teamwork with other local and/or international students; and working part time/undertaking internships. To help the students' integration on campus, academic intervention in the group formation and facilitation of diverse teams amongst students is necessary (Sonnenschein, 2020). Both internship and paid relevant work experience may improve students' integration/assimilation in Australia which is crucial if they wish to pursue their career in this country after the completion of their studies (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). Therefore, the host university needs to assist international students to enter local companies and supervise/mentor them (Jackson, 2017; Mackaway et al., 2014).

Furthermore, it is recommended that Australian universities develop partnerships with Chinese hotels to facilitate students undertaking internships in these companies. By allowing students to take up internships in the Chinese companies, they will learn the required attributes needed for their future career if they wish to return to China after the completion of their studies.

It is a challenge for universities to assist students in finding internships. More staff resources are needed to make it possible for the university to assist and supervise the students' internships both in Australia and in China (Sonnenschein, 2016; Sonnenschein et al., 2019). Companies in China also need to assist the returned graduates in providing task clarity, career counseling, and repatriation training (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Sonnenschein et al., 2019; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Magdalena Markowska for her expertise and assistance throughout the project. Dr. Magdalena Markowska is Associate Professor in School of Business, Economics and Statistics at Umea University, Umea, Sweden. Her research interests include entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurial careers as well as issues of contextualizing entrepreneurship.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Katrine Sonnenschein is Associate Professor in Department of Leadership and Organisational Behavior at BI Norwegian Business School, Trondheim, Norway. She received her Ph.D. from Department of International Business and Asian Studies at Griffith University in 2016. Her research interests include career, professional socialization, and international education (E-mail: katrine.b.sonnenschein@bi.no).

ORCID

Katrine Sonnenschein  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6599-1509>

References

- Barber, M., Donnelly, K., & Rizvi, S. (2013). *An avalanche is coming: Higher education and the revolution ahead*. Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Berry, J. W. (1991). Understanding and managing multiculturalism. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 3(1), 17–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097133369100300103>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Constructing and expanding a framework: Opportunities for developing acculturation research. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 62–68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01095.x>
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant youth: acculturation, identity, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 55(3), 303–332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2006.00256.x>
- Bingham, A. J., & Witkowsky, P. (2022). Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis. In C. Vanover, P. Mihás, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: After the interview* (pp. 133–146). SAGE Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2008). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, A., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., & Deidre, H. (2012). The role of career adaptabilities for mid-career changers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3), 754–761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.003>
- Chudzikowski, K. (2012). Career transitions and career success in the “new” career era” *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81(2), 298–306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.10.005>
- Creed, P. A., Fallon, T., & Hood, M. (2009). The relationship between career adaptability, person and situation variables, and career concerns in young adults. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74(2), 219–229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.12.004>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Davis, D., & Mackintosh, B. (2011). *Making a difference: Australian international education*. University of New South Wales Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *Sociological methods: A source book* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Duffy, R. D., & Blustein, D. L. (2005). The relationship between spirituality, religiousness, and career adaptability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 67(3), 429–440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2004.09.003>
- Ebberwein, C. A., Krieshok, T. S., Ulven, J. C., & Prosser, E. C. (2004). Voices in transition: Lessons on career adaptability. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52(4), 292–308. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2004.tb00947.x>
- Emmel, N., & Hughes, K. (2012). Sampling in qualitative longitudinal research: A realist approach. *Timescape Methods Guides Series*.
- Forte, J. (1999). Culture: The tool-kit metaphor and multicultural social work. *Families in Society*, 80(1), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.639>
- Ghosh, A., & Fouad, N. A. (2016). Family influence on careers among Asian parent–child dyads. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 24(2), 318–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072715580417>
- Gribble, C., & Li, M. (2013, July 3). *Work experience vital for Chinese graduates as foreign credentials lose their lustre*. The Australian.
- Guan, Y., Lui, S., Jie Guo, M., Li, M., Wu, M., Chen, S. X., Xu, S. L., & Tian, L. (2018). Acculturation orientations and Chinese student sojourners’ career adaptability: The roles of

- career exploration and cultural distance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 104, 228–239. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.11.008>
- Hammersley, M. (2013). *What is qualitative research?* Bloomsbury Academic.
- Harrison, N., & Peacock, N. (2010). Cultural distance, mindfulness and passive xenophobia: Using integrated threat theory to explore home higher education students' perspectives on 'internationalisation at home'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6), 877–902. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903191047>
- Jackson, D. (2017). Exploring the challenges experienced by international students during work-integrated learning in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 37(3), 344–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2017.1298515>
- Jackson, D., & Bridgstock, R. (2021). What actually works to enhance graduate employability? The relative value of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular learning and paid work. *Higher Education*, 81(4), 723–739. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00570-x>
- Jassawalla, A., Connelly, T., & Słojkowski, L. (2004). Issues of effective repatriation: A model and managerial implications. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 69(2), 38.
- Johnston, C. S. (2018). A systematic review of the career adaptability literature and future outlook. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 26(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072716679921>
- Kong, H., Okumus, F., & Bu, N. (2020). Linking organizational career management with generation Y employees' organizational identity: The mediating effect of meeting career expectations. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29(2), 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2019.1616644>
- Lynton, N., & Thøgersen, K. (2010). *Working with Chinese generation Y*. Bloomberg.
- Mackaway, J., Winchester-Seeto, T., & Carter, L. (2014). Work-integrated learning and the “inclusive” challenge of preparing a diverse student cohort for the world beyond the academy. *Paper presented at the HERDSA Conference, Hong Kong, July 7-10*
- Neto, F., Barros, J., & Schmitz, P. (2005). Acculturation attitudes and adaptation among Portuguese immigrants in Germany: Integration or separation. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 17(1), 223–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097133360501700102>
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Toronto: Pearson.
- Neuman, W. L., & Kreuger, L. W. (2003). *Social work research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Patrick, C.-J., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL (work integrated learning) report: A national scoping study [final report]*. Queensland University of Technology.
- Phinney, J. S., & Devich-Navarro, M. (1997). Variations in bicultural identification among African American and Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 7(1), 3–32. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327795jra0701_2
- Pringle, J. K., & Mallon, M. (2003). D. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(5), 839–853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958519032000080839>
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C., & Ormston, R. (2014). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Robinsen, R. N., Ruhanen, L., & Breakey, N. M. (2016). Tourism and hospitality internships: Influences on student career aspirations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(6), 513–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2015.1020772>
- Rodrigues, R., Guest, D., Oliveira, T., & Alfes, K. (2015). Who benefits from independent careers? Employees, organizations, or both? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 91, 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.09.005>
- Rudolph, C. W., Zacher, H., & Hirschi, A. (2019). Empirical developments in career construction theory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 111, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.12.003>
- Savickas, M. L. (1997). Career adaptability: An integrative construct for life-span, life-space Theory. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 45(3), 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1997.tb00469.x>

- Savickas, M. L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 149–205). Jossey-Bass.
- Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.-P., Eduarta Duarte, M., Guichard, J., Soresi, S., Van Esbroeck, R., & van Vianen, A. E. M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004>
- Savickas, M. L., & Porfeli, E. J. (2012). Career adapt-abilities scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries” *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3), 661–673. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.011>
- Shafaei, A., Nejati, M., Quazi, A., & Von der Heide, T. (2016). ‘When in Rome, do as the romans do’ Do international students’ acculturation attitudes impact their ethical academic conduct? *Higher Education*, 71(5), 651–666. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9928-0>
- Singh, N. (2020). Challenges in obtaining employment in China: Lived experiences of Australian Chinese graduates. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 29(3), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416220947085>
- Sonnenschein, K. (2016). *Diverse stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Attributes Needed by Chinese Returned Graduates in the Hotel Industry in China* [Doctoral thesis]. Griffith University.
- Sonnenschein, K. (2020). ‘It’s important for us to know how to do Teamwork’: Perceptions of Chinese international hospitality students regarding teamwork skills. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 17(2), 309–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2020.1768191>
- Sonnenschein, K., Barker, M., & Hibbens, R. (2019). Benefits of work-integrated learning: Perceptions held by Chinese international students enrolled in an Australian university and managers in the Chinese hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, 31(3), 139–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2018.1487784>
- Sullivan, S. E., & Al Ariss, A. (2021). Making sense of different perspectives on career transitions: A review and agenda for future research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100727>
- Sullivan, S. E. & Ariss, A. (2021). Making sense of different perspectives on career transitions: A review and agenda for future research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(1), 1–17.
- Suutari, V., & Brewster, C. (2003). Repatriation: Empirical evidence from a longitudinal study of careers and expectations among Finnish expatriates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(7), 1132–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958519032000114200>
- Turner, S. L., Alliman-Brissett, A., Lapan, R. T., Udipi, S., & Ergun, D. (2003). The career-related parent support scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 3(2), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481756.2003.12069084>
- Weihua, Y., & Wang, S. (2011). An investigation into the acculturation strategies of Chinese students in German. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 2, 190–210.
- West, J. (2014). *Chinese International Students*. Retrieved from Asian Century Institute: <http://www.asiancenturyinstitute.com/migration/189-china-s-international-students>
- Xiang, Y., Ribbens, B., & Morgan, C. N. (2010). Generational differences in China: Career implications. *Career Development International*, 15(6), 601–620. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431011084439>
- Young, R. A. (1994). Helping adolescents with career development: The active role of parents. *International Journal of Offshore and Polar Engineering*, 42(3), 195–203. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1994.tb00934.x>
- Zhang, J., Yuen, M., & Chen, G. (2015). Career-related parental support for vocational school students in China. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 37(4), 346–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-015-9248-1>