The complexity within the same cohort of international students–Three Taiwanese

students' identity transformations

Abstract:

Although the complexity of Chinese-speaking international students' (CHISs) identity

transformation has been emphasized in previous research, there is a perceived linear and

causal pattern between studying abroad and being intercultural. This pattern of thinking

results in the risk of treating all the CHISs as the same in each cohort of students. Drawing on

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, this auto/ethnographic study followed three Taiwanese

international postgraduate students' lives over one year to elucidate the complexity of their

identity transformation. The findings suggest a variety of identity changes resulting from the

participants' evaluation of their past, present and future situations.

Keywords: international students, habitus, identity, complexity

Introduction

For the past decade, studies on Chinese-speaking international students' (CHISs)

identities progressed in two distinct directions. One examined the identity changes that

happened in students' lives in the west (see, for example,Gill, 2010; Gu, Schweisfurth, &

Day, 2010; Hsieh, 2006; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), while the other studied changes in

international students' identity in their post-study lives, after they had completed their

overseas education in the English-speaking countries and returned home (see, for examples,

Cuthbert, Smith, & Boey, 2008; Hao & Welch, 2012; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Wang, 2010; K. Yan & D. C. Berliner, 2011). Despite the difference in the stages of life that international students' identity development is examined, both research directions emphasize the "complexity" in the relational pattern between identity and context.

This study argues that a linear pattern, in which the completion of western higher education is connected with the acquisition of interculturality, can be perceived from previous studies. In this study, interculturality is defined as a process in which CHISs develop an understanding of positioning their self with others through regular engagements and negotiations across cultures and over time. This definition is based on "mutual understanding and interaction" (T. Kim, 2009, p. 395) in the "forging of respectful, equitable links between individuals and groups from different cultural (and linguistic) backgrounds" (Jackson, 2018, p. 213). However, the Australian Government's official guide to intercultural education, *Good Practice Principles in Practice: Teaching Across Cultures* (Leask & Carroll, 2013), sees interculturality as a competence that can be acquired and taught rather than a process that requires time and commitment. The guide clearly links interculturality with English proficiency, which implies that interculturality can be measured. The authors, however, believe that understanding CHISs' interculturality needs to go beyond English language proficiency and pay more attention to the students' "complex experiences, stories, and origins" (Dervin, 2016, p. 33).

This study examines identity transformation and the resulting perceptions of interculturality in Taiwanese CHISs through their higher education journey in Australia. Studies on international students' lives in the west tend to orient their learning and adaptation issues in the west (see, for example, Lun, Fischer, & Ward, 2010; Paton, 2005; Shih & Brown, 2000), whereas research on post-studies lives showcase intercultural changes in these students in Chinese-speaking societies (such as, Gill, 2010; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). These studies treated CHISs as one homogenous group of students and created a relational pattern, linking the completion of western higher education with the acquisition of interculturality. They also suggested that CHISs could become more intercultural solely by studying and living in an English-speaking context. This relational pattern and research direction ignore the diversity among CHISs and implicitly treat all CHISs as a homogeneous cohort. The argument raised here is also shared by Hannerz's (1999) concern over the uncritical misinterpretation of multiculturalism and Dervin's (2011) plea for a change in qualitative inquiry for international students' identities.

To bring scholarly attention back to the "complexity" of international students' identity transformations, Hannerz (1999, p. 401) suggested a "processual" research method to "bring people back in" and to stop fixating on a generalized identity transformation pattern. Similarly, Dervin (2011, p. 38) also pleaded for a "liquid" approach to focus on individual differences and enhance identity studies' analysis depth. Having adopted their suggestions,

this study works with a rearticulated, post-structuralist Bourdieuian notion of habitus as the theoretical framework and autoethnographic reflexivity in an investigation of three Taiwanese international students' identity transformations throughout their overseas education in Australia.

Literature review

Towards a process-focused and reflexive CHISs' identity study

Studies on CHISs in the recent decade have acknowledged the complexity of identity transformations. These studies, however, treated CHISs as a homogeneous group and assumed that studying in the west could only lead to positive outcomes in interculturality. Some empirical studies, such as Moores & Popadiuk (2011) and Yan & Berliner (2011), used CHISs' learning experiences abroad at designated time points to highlight the overall challenges and the positive experiences that CHISs had in western higher education. The identities that manifested in these academic discussions were the "products" of the identity transformations at particular time points. Therefore, the findings of these studies might not actually help educational researchers to capture a more complete range of international students' personal and professional developments, especially in their post-studies lives.

Some studies (Gill, 2010; E. Kim, 2012) have urged that CHISs' learning experiences and their post-study developments at home should be delineated from the "process" of their identity developments rather than the "products" of these developments. However, these

process-based studies assumed that studying in the west was equal to being intercultural before identity development. For example, Gill's (2010) research question assumed that Chinese returnees already had intercultural understanding gained in the UK and were using it in their homecoming identity developments. Kim's (2012) study patterned international students' identity developments and generalized that all developments would eventually lead to the phase of integration and internationalization. These are the examples showing that CHISs have been commonly treated as a homogenous group and that diversity within this cohort has been ignored.

While researchers are celebrating international students' newly developed intercultural competence, this study is concerned with the new cultural fundamentalism developing from the so-called interculturality or multiculturalism that CHISs have developed through completing higher education in the English-speaking west. The findings from studies that focus on the identity transformation in CHISs' post-study lives at home have revealed the positive relationship between studying in the west, being westernized and being better off in their post-graduation lives at home. For example, Gill (2010) confirmed Kim's (1988) model of stress-adaptation-growth with the data from eight participants, concluding that all the participants obtained "qualitative changes" in terms of "sense of self, ways of seeing and perceiving the world, values, and (work-related) ethics" (p. 372). She further contended that her participants were intercultural, which was the key element that distinguished these

returnees from local graduates in job markets. Previous studies like Gill's not only prove that culture has always been understood to be connected with power (Hannerz, 1999), but that acquiring an identity as a returnee from the west can lead to better employability (Li, 2012).

While recent research on international students put their focus on understanding these students' post-study lives to enhance the quality of education provided by western universities, the research direction could create a gap between people who are educated in the west and those who are not. In the case of CHISs in Australian higher education, interculturality might be seen as a symbolic status which could be automatically aligned with graduation. Such alignment is enhanced by the "solid approach" (Dervin, 2011, p. 39) in previous research. CHISs' identity studies might have been stalled in a broad topic of acculturation where CHISs were ultimately acculturated through overseas education experience.

Even though the complexity of identity transformation is acknowledged by previous research, a linear pattern between studying abroad and being intercultural has emerged from the findings. One of the contradictory examples is Gu and colleagues' study (Gu et al., 2010), in which the researchers claimed that their findings "challenge(d) the notion that international students' intercultural adaptation is linear and passive" and acknowledged that "a complex set of shifting associations" exists between various factors (p.20). However, Gu and colleagues' study still concluded with the statement that "despite the challenges embedded in the

academic and social conditions, most international students managed to change, adapt, develop and achieve" (p.20). One of the fundamental reasons for this sort of arbitrary conclusion could be the lack of depth in data analysis. As Dervin (2011) pointed out, some studies uncritically used students' perceivable utterances and their experiences of changing between cultures as evidence of identity transformation. To focus the research lens back on the complexity of identity transformation in higher education, this study aims to provide identity transformation evidence that is empirically "processual" (Hannerz, 1999, p. 401) and "liquid" (Dervin, 2011, p. 38). A processual cultural research approach destabilizes the notion that having completed western higher education equates becoming intercultural. Identity studies should not be trapped in 'othering', if interculturality has been understood as a cross-cultural notion about "changing, co-creating, resisting and manipulating" (Dervin, 2011, p. 40). In other words, current studies on international students' post-study lives might be implicitly 'othering' those students who did not study abroad by stressing the interculturality that the returning international students tend to possess with their personal cross-border experiences. Instead, the researcher's positionality, namely the "biases" (Dervin, 2011, p. 49), need to be acknowledged and included in data analysis as an approach to liquefy CHISs identity studies. This study also includes much of the researcher's autoethnographic reflections which will be further explained in the methodology section.

With the knowledge that existing research views CHISs as a homogenous group, this

study attempts to highlight the complexity within the same CHIS cohort by focusing on CHISs' internal identity negotiation. Studies on international students' identities are obligated to address the issues that are relevant to the negotiations of how these students (re)work multiple selves with their cross-border experiences when it comes to context crossing moments. These negotiations, although triggered by the objectivity of context, are also actively carried out by the subjectivity of these international students. Hence, research on CHISs' identity needs to take these students' personal encounters into data analysis as well. However, the studies on the international students' initiatives in reworking new identities after overseas education have so far only reached the "surface of discourse" (Dervin, 2011, p. 38). The findings that we have about how CHISs use their international education experience after graduation are limited to the words from these students to the researchers after they had graduated.

Theoretical framework: Bourdieuian habitus

This study compares how three Taiwanese international students perceived themselves compared to others before, during and after their Australian education. Our argument is that identity transformation is both conscious and unconscious. Bourdieu's habitus explains the unconscious part of identity transformation. The working definition of habitus (both singular and plural forms) in this study is defined as a social agent's thinking system in which socially generated, long-term dispositions are stored without intentional

memorization and utilized under the level of consciousness (Bourdieu, 1990; Lawler, 2014). To capture the versatility of habitus, one needs to incorporate it with the notions of capital and field. Among Bourdieu's (1986) economic, cultural and social capital, this study focuses on the transferability of the academic capital, a conceptualized form of cultural capital (Dillon, 2014; Moore, 2008), namely the academic credentials/qualifications that these Taiwanese international students obtain from Australian higher education. In the pursuit of Australian academic capital, Taiwanese students' habitus are continuously structured and covered by new layers of meaning depending on present and future circumstances. They would encounter hysteresis moments (Bourdieu, 1977) where their old habitus are incompatible with social and educational space in Australia for a certain period.

From a Bourdieuian point of view, it is in the hysteresis moment where the students' habitus are redeveloped unconsciously overseas when their expectation meets the reality in the west. When the time point changes to the homecoming moment, when their collective role changes into returnees, identity studies on international students need to engage with issues about how the reality they found out about themselves meets the expectation at home. Bourdieu (1992, p. 97) defined field as "a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions." In this study, field is a stratified, social structure in which Taiwanese students need to use their habitus to act and compete for positions. It is reproduced in both educational settings and workplaces after graduation. We need to incorporate habitus and

field to understand the relational philosophy between how a Taiwanese returnee utilizes internalized habitus in the pursuit of academic capital to meet doxa, the "naturalization of arbitrariness" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164), and compete for hierarchical positions in the field. The society at home expects returnees from the west to possess high English language proficiency and high intercultural competence. Faced with these stereotypical expectations, Taiwanese students, as members who grew up in the Taiwanese context, are aware of the coming and taking of these expectations. This is where the authors need to work with Oakeshott's agency (1975). For Oakeshott, agency is "the starting point of doing" (p. 32). When Taiwanese international students are about to become returnees, they are both physically and psychologically moving back to the home context, whose expectations of them they have a deep understanding of. A Taiwanese student's "understanding of the components of the world he inhabits" (Oakeshott, 1975, p. 32) enables him to have the power and choice to reconstruct a performed self, which is also the reflection of his consciousness.

Previous studies (Gill, 2010; Gu et al., 2010; Hao & Welch, 2012) described international students' and returnees' identity reconstruction as an unconscious encounter and habitus replacement. There remains an empirical dearth that international students' post-study identities could also be the reconstruction with consciousness and hence deliberateness. To understand how Australian-educated Taiwanese students' habitus redevelopment turns into agency utilization, we need to understand their use of Australian higher education

experiences outside of Australia. As identity and agency are in a reciprocal relationship (Danielewicz, 2001), international students' collective post-study identity is more than simply taking up the role as a returnee from the west. It has more to do with how these overseas experiences are consciously utilized in post-studies identity reconstruction.

Methodology

Locating this study

Dervin urged the qualitative research on international students' identities to be more critical about the spoken data that researchers collect from the participants, arguing that it is important for researchers to "implicate" (Dervin, 2011, p. 40) themselves in data collection and analysis for a stronger interpretation of inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity. By doing so, researchers do not simply take what the participants said as evidence. As discussed in the literature review, previous research tends to collect and categorize CHISs' overseas experiences. Such a "solid" approach falls into an othering and culturalist epistemology in which it treats international students (or returnees) as one homogenous group and local graduates as the other. As a former international student from a financially and educationally lower-middle class Taiwanese family, my bias against those Taiwanese international students who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds was not only acknowledged, but also utilized as one of the lenses for the unspoken data, namely the reason behind why the participants have said something. Therefore, my bias against the participants' higher financial

and social backgrounds served as an awareness of ensuring that they were given "fair treatments" (Dervin, 2011, p. 49) in data analysis.

The authors locate this study in between autoethnography and ethnography (henceforth auto/ethnography). The autoethnographic part of this study is its "context-conscious" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010, p. 3) method and also its usefulness for understanding the "topics of diversity and identity" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 14). The ethnographic part of this study lies in its provision of the access to immediate interactional situations that are not available through interviews (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). The data in this auto/ethnography consists of stories told by the participants and my reflections on these stories. Therefore, the data involve many sensitive, inner and vulnerable issues that were teased out by the auto/ethnographic connectivity between self and others. I included my autoethnographic reflections on some participants' comments after the asterisk sign (*) in the findings section.

Data collection and analysis

Twenty-four participants voluntarily joined this research after seeing the recruitment advertisement posted on major TSA (Taiwanese Students Association) websites. These three participants were chosen because 1) their study duration (one-year postgraduate programs by coursework) fits the one-year data collection approval of this study, 2) they majored in different academic fields in three different Australian universities, which are the members of the Group of Eight (The academic alliance that consists of eight prestigious universities in

Australia). The participants were given Chinese pseudonyms in this study: Hui-Ting (female, 24, TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages]), Fu-Guo (male, 25, IT [Information Technology]) and Yi-Ping (female, 22, Applied Linguistics). The data collection included three semi-structured, audio recorded interviews for each participant and my regular social engagements with the participants throughout their studies in Australia. The interviews lasted for 60–90 minutes and the social engagements were two to four hours long for each visit. Both the interviews and social engagements were audio recorded and the recorded data encompasses over 200 hours of transcripts in total. The recorded social engagements were treated as field notes, which include the participants' comments on their Australian lives and future plans when we had dinners or gathered on weekends during my visit. The field notes also include my reflections on the comments made by the participants, creating the multivocality (Mizzi, 2010) of this study. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed in the data analysis, in which we labelled and categorized participants' feelings, experiences and opinions into positive, negative and changing category until reoccurring patterns were found and later interpreted with the theoretical framework delineated in the last section.

Reliability and trustworthiness

The narrator's credibility contributes to the reliability of this auto/ethnographic study (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The more the narrator has similar experiences shared by the

research participants, the more "factual evidence" (p. 282) the researcher can provide to the readers. To ensure the trustworthiness of data analysis, this study adopts the triangulation (Denzin, 1978) of different data sources (e.g., interviews and field notes), peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and prolonged engagement with the participants (Jones, 2009). The two data sources from semi-structured interviews and engagements were recorded in transcripts which were accessible for the participants to examine the accuracy of records throughout the one-year data collection. The analysis was then presented at two relevant conferences in both Australia and New Zealand for peers to verify the external validity of our findings.

Findings

The findings are presented according to the three themes identified in the data analysis, including: habitus modification, habitus extension and habitus improvisation. Hui-Ting's data represents habitus modification. While Fu-Guo and Yi-Ping might have experienced both habitus extension and improvisation, Yi-Ping provided more salient data explaining her improvised habitus.

Habitus modification

Habitus in this study refers to CHISs' present identities that are structured by their past and present circumstances, meaning that the participants' identities will be continuously changing, with new ones taking over old identities, making old identities "unintentionally

forgotten" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). Habitus modification in this study is theorized based on this notion. It is a habitus change in which CHISs scrutinize their past embodied identities in their home context and modify them with newly acquired meaning at the present in the Australian context.

Hui-Ting's story explains how her habitus was modified through engagement experiences outside the classroom. Hui-Ting came to Australia to study TESOL in order to develop her teaching career in secondary education in Taiwan. She held a belief that her English proficiency and teaching competence could be closer to English native speakers by completing a higher degree at a prestigious Australian university.

In Hui-Ting's case, her experience of using English as a non-native speaker in her non-academic job in Australia invited her to review many difficulties of working on building a native-like English teacher identity—an identity that people at home expected her to adopt. Before Hui-Ting came to Australia for her studies in 2014, her English major background and teacher identity represented the academic capital that she had in English education and the habitus in which she believed herself to be an authoritative figure among Taiwanese English users. In one of our catch-ups, she commented on what counts for native English.

"For example, I [am] very like you [who] is Chinglish. Anything that can be directly translated from Chinese into English could be Chinglish because native speakers will not put in this way."

Taiwan's education system and society instilled the paradoxical idea into Hui-Ting that her English could be "naturalized" by receiving higher education and living in the English-speaking world. Under these past circumstances, being an English educator in Taiwan carried the obligation of being able to speak native English and teaching only a native form of English to students (Lai, 2008).

In the Australian context, her habitus, which was influenced by Taiwan's doxa, was challenged as she realized that becoming native-like in English was pretty much an unachievable goal in her lifetime. This realization came with much frustration as a non-native English user in the Australian academic field. Her identity as a non-native English user was internalized and embraced, which inspired her to question the paradox of becoming a native English speaker by studying abroad. Her close engagement with Australians, and other non-Chinese speakers in Australia, through the network of working as a part-time barista at a coastal café, gave her a new meaning with regards to English learning.

> I remember the two European travelers at my hostel when I was travelling in
> Melbourne. I was convinced that my English was better than theirs. They
> looked just like typical white people in Taiwanese people's eyes. They
> couldn't speak much English, but they just used their limited English to
> communicate with Australians. In contrast, I've learned English for more

than 10 years, and I knew my English was better than theirs (the European

travelers). However, I was too afraid of showing native speakers my

imperfect English. I guess it's because of my culture that always tells me to

hold back my imperfection. This experience teaches me perfection is made

from showing imperfection, which means to keep using my grammatically

incorrect English until I learn how to use the correct one. […] if you want to

be a great English user […] (the key) is to keep making mistakes and the

knowledge of English is within those mistakes you made.

(Hui-Ting, interview, 09/30/2014)

*"This is dangerous," I said to myself. As a former teacher myself, I want my students to be able to use what they have learned at school and smoothly and seamlessly connect themselves with a future employment trajectory. Who she is now triggers a lot of deep thoughts on the stratification in Taiwan's ESL market. She is upset because she realized how long she has had unrealistic expectations and requirements imposed on her without questioning them. I know her anger could be a great driving force for her to become an even better teacher—not another Taiwanese English teacher who has returned from overseas and would like to be seen as a native-like English user and teach nothing but textbook English. However, a deeper concern in my heart is "Can she even fit in back home?"

(Author, field notes, 09/30/2014)

My concern further indicates how Hui-Ting might have imagined the difficulties of

working on her identity as a homecoming TESOL professional in Taiwan, after internalizing

a new meaning of English learning into her habitus. Her previous English teacher identity in

Taiwan's education field provided her with a membership of the group where she enjoyed

being an authority with English-speaking academic capital in English learning and teaching.

However, it did not give her the "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990 [1980], p. 66) when

compared to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). The use of "feel for the game" in this

context is an expression coined by Bourdieu and refers to the suitability of her habitus and the

target field—the academic field in Taiwan. Her experiences of engaging with English-

speaking Australia led her to a point where she would challenge the doxa in her habitus

regarding how English should be learned and taught. Her English teaching ideology went

beyond the doxa and experienced a functional English variety in English-speaking Australia.

With her newly modified habitus, she started to re-think what else she wanted to become,

besides an English teacher.

In my reflection, my worry about Hui-Ting fitting in back in Taiwan's English education

system could be because her new idea of accepting English varieties in learning and teaching

is exactly what Taiwan's English education is lacking. Hui-Ting's habitus modification

indicated to her that the potential achievement of being a native-like English teacher is

unrealistic and unnecessary because the nativeness of her English was understood as being

irrelevant to her teaching. Hui-Ting gave an example of this in our dinner catch-up by saying

"I was born to be a native speaker of Chinese, but I do not think I am a better Chinese language teacher than, let's say, an Australian who learns good Chinese." (Hui-Ting, field notes, 06/23/2014). To me, this was in many ways a protest against the identity that Taiwan's English education field had forced her to adopt.

> *"I was pushed to study English hard. I became an English major student at a teacher's university and naturally became an English teacher. My ideas of what I should do with English are "according to the plan." After living in Australia and using English in real life, I reflected on these ideas and seriously had no answer because that plan is not even my plan. That's what my family and society wanted me to become."*
>
> (Hui-Ting, field notes, 06/23/2014)

Hui-Ting is no longer confined and absorbed by the "game (i.e., Taiwan's TESOL field)" (see Bourdieu, 1998). Her habitus went through modification and the doxa of becoming fluent in English by studying abroad was challenged because of her close engagement with Australian society.

Habitus extension

The finding of habitus extension illustrates how Fu-Guo unwittingly matched his perceived progression with the doxa of being a homecoming student. This finding reveals how Fu-Guo's old habitus was extended rather than modified. Bourdieu's habitus of finalism (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 72-73) provides a comprehensive understanding about how Fu-Guo's perceived progression is related to the doxa in Taiwanese society. For Bourdieu, people's

current practices are determined by past experiences, and also the "reproduction" of the field

structure they are situated in. Understanding the progression and strengths Fu-Guo perceived

would provide us with a different insight into the doxa that the Taiwanese society has been

imposing on him to eventually become his habitus and more importantly, how he extended

his habitus by matching his perceived progress with Taiwan's doxa.

Fu-Guo explicitly felt like he had benefited from the Australian context in terms of the

progress of his professional and personal development despite little contact with non-Chinese

speakers. Compared to how he has lived his Australian life, it is believed that his perceived

progression was the reflection of Taiwan's doxa. His self-claimed and newly acquired

strengths after studying in Australia mirrored how much he was trapped by these

misrecognized beliefs of doxa. Instead of examining the progressions he made before and

after Australia, he unconsciously compared himself with locally educated Taiwanese.

> *When competing with other Taiwanese job seekers, I believe the title of my*
>
> *(Australian) university is my strength. Perhaps it will be more useful than*
>
> *my English. To be honest, I don't even think English will be my strength.*
>
> *[…] I think it could be the way I think. I learned how to think like westerners*
>
> *do. You know, I became proactive in questioning others' ideas and giving my*
>
> *own ideas. Unlike many students from Asia, I won't be quiet and shy in*
>
> *terms of dealing with problems. Whenever they (Asian students) had*

questions, they never asked questions in class. They remained quiet and then

discussed them with their friends after class. I do not like this. This is

passive. I try to learn by following the westerners' way, which is to be active.

The major reason for Fu-Guo's feeling of being "better" was because he felt more westernized, and hence "better". By using this fact of being an owner of Australian academic capital, Fu-Guo could justify and persuade himself that he had been "westernized." As far as the intercultural ability is concerned, it no longer requires time, commitment and engagement as long as he brings back this "been there and done that" fact. This was the way he fit himself to the returnee's field in Taiwan—by showing others that he fits into the mold that the general public might expect.

Excluding not being able to acquire more spoken English, Fu-Guo generalized what he saw in class about how Australian and Chinese students addressed questions as a stereotype that all Australian students are proactive in learning and asking questions in class. To meet expectations and demonstrate his improvements after Australian higher education, Fu-Guo arbitrarily linked his direct way of asking questions with a "westerners' way" of "dealing with problems". He believed that as long as he changed his passive way of addressing problems in class, he could become westernized because he has "learned how to think like westerners." Being able to think like native English speakers is an idea of what Taiwan looks

for from homecoming students. Furthermore, his statement about what he has become was a justification and persuasion for himself to take up the assigned identity upon his return. Apart from the influence of Taiwan's doxa, it is also possible that there is personal interest involved. Like the transferability from cultural into economic capital, a westernized way of thinking was a form of cultural capital for Fu-Guo because it was his way to prove his higher professionalism over other Taiwanese IT professionals.

Habitus improvisation

The habitus improvisation of this study is developed from Bourdieu's (1977, p. 79) notion of "virtuosos" and Oakeshott's (1975) notion of agency to indicate that some social agents are "free" from the shackles of social rules, and are capable of "improvising" upon the known rules because of their stronger sense of the game. The main feature of habitus improvisation is the deliberateness of manipulating overseas experiences to create an advantageous position in field competition. The major difference between habitus improvisation and habitus manipulation lies in the fact that the former is an act of identity manipulation out of conscious judgement whereas the latter is an unconscious identity change through socio-cultural assimilation over time. I focus on the moments when Yi-Ping found her niches, which she improvised based on her fragmented overseas experiences, recreated the overseas habitus that Taiwanese society admires, and adopted different identities than the one she had in Australia.

When people feel they have found effective ways of doing something with their new form of capital, this understanding gives them the feeling of being free from field rules (Oakeshott, 1975). When Yi-Ping knew that she was about to graduate from a prestigious Australian university, her understanding of Taiwanese people's historical stereotypes about homecoming students from the English-speaking west, and her desire to become the expected identity, strengthened her sense of virtuosity. It is her "understanding of situation" and her "use of this understanding" that reflects her consciousness of doing. Some CHISs might unconsciously feel that they have become more proficient in English and more advanced in professional development, or think more outside-the-box and have become more westernized, in comparison with the Taiwanese at home. This could be explained by how these students already had the idea that homecoming students are advantageous in every aspect at work, even before their own overseas studies in Australia. This objective meaning outruns their conscious intention and is also found to be likely to become aggressive if some Taiwanese students are purposely seeking identities in line with the objective meaning.

Yi-Ping was more deliberately creating a westernized identity that never existed. She believed that Taiwanese students returning from the English-speaking west will be more highly regarded. She understood what she wanted, her powers, and Taiwan, the world she inhabited. Before she graduated, it was her "starting place" (Oakeshott, 1975, p. 19) of improvising the expected identity. It is foreseeable that the newly forged identities will only

enhance the existing divide between local and returning students in Taiwan.

> *"When comparing to locally educated Taiwanese, I think my English is better than theirs. It's a universal fact in Taiwan that people who "have drunk western ink" (have studied in major English-speaking countries) will be better, especially in English. [...] People in Taiwan normally think that if you finished your higher education in English-speaking countries, your English has to be above the average. I know this is a stereotype."*

(Yi-Ping, interview, 10/31/2014)

Yi-Ping's use of "have drunk western ink" indicates her deliberateness of making the stereotypes and arbitrary opinions on her status even more misleading. In Yi-Ping's hysteresis, I learned that she was disappointed about not being able to improve her English to a native speaker's level because Australia was not what she imagined as being full of English native speakers, both on and off her campus life. Through her hysteresis, she clearly saw the wide gap between Taiwanese people's imaginations of the west and the reality. This realization became her niche in reshaping an advantageous identity that the Taiwanese job market is generally expecting. The following excerpt explains how Yi-Ping was planning to feed her own discourse and make her identity more believable.

> *"I won't even tell people that my English is 'fluent' because deep in my heart I know I have just made small progress. [...] I also believe my*

experiences of interacting with English speakers will become one of my

indispensable advantages. I know they might not be much, but it's like my

English progress— I am the only one who knows the secret."

(Yi-Ping, interview, 10/31/2014)

*I see a big and historical network, in which members know their hidden

rules of how to play the game easily and eventually win whatever they have

been chasing for. I indirectly ask Yi-Ping if she thinks what she is doing is

cheating. She says she is not the only one who is creating and maintaining

overseas students' "positive images".

(Author, field notes, 10/31/2014)

My observation led to Yi-Ping's revelation that there is a discourse known and used by

many homecoming students in securing higher positions. My unawareness of the existence of

this discourse was due to my family's lower socio-economic status in Taiwan. Yi-Ping's

cultural capital created a more useful/powerful returnee identity within this discourse. Her

starting place of utilizing virtuosity in reshaping a new identity based on people's existing

stereotypes, skillful avoidance, and the exaggerated interpretation of her professional

development in Australia, was creating the image that she was closer to what was perceived

as appropriate than other job seekers.

It also appeared that the norms surrounding who can be recognized as a fluent English

user is established by introducing more ambiguity. Taiwan's society, as she described herself, holds the universal belief that those returning from the west can speak good English. It is actually the arbitrariness that returnees impose on other Taiwanese. In other words, the field doxa could be deliberately pushed out of the field and then upon non-field members in order to expand the believability of their discourse. This is why Bourdieu (1977, pp. 8, 76) never ruled out the possibility that people's habitus could be calculative, and we, as social agents, are actually unaware of the norms and rules that have been accepted by us for so long.

Implications

Three significant implications could be drawn from the findings of this study for education researchers who share the same interest in CHISs' identity construction and educators and administrators in western universities who face the influx of CHISs every year.

Moving away from the dichotomy

Echoing Dervin's (2011) plea for liquefying the studies on CHISs, we encourage scholarly attention to move away from the dichotomy between CHISs and English-speaking local students and between homecoming CHISs and local students. Both CHISs' internal identity negotiation and contextual influential factors should be included in future CHISs' identity research and more in-depth qualitative inquires on CHISs' professional identity development and their use of power position in the home context.

Educating the use of power position across context

The findings indicate that CHISs' financial and academic mobility does create a more powerful position for them in the home context. Bourdieu (1996 [1989]) indicated that educational institutes are the crucial agencies where powerful cultural capital is produced and bestowed upon their members to use. Considering that, we strongly encourage western universities to develop tailored initiatives for nurturing CHISs as world citizens who think and act in a respectful, intercultural and just manner.

Providing proactive support to international students at critical moments

CHISs' internalization and interpretation of overseas experiences is crucial in identity development and this study found three forms of transformation in habitus. We advise university educators to develop on-going intervention programs to support CHISs' negotiability of English-use engagements in international contexts. Specifically, the findings show that CHISs are exposed to English-use experiences with speakers from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This indicates that the development and implementation of intervention programs should engage English as Lingua Franca (ELF) theories and practice. CHISs' English user identity could be more promisingly constructed through sociocultural engagements with other non-native English-speaking international students.

Conclusion

From this study's data, three participants experienced three different identity transformations upon the completion of their higher degree education in Australia. Although

an individual's identity decision is heavily influenced by the field structure, the individual

freedom of choosing what identities to put into practice needs to be acknowledged

(Marginson, 2014). The findings from past research implicitly developed a relational, linear

pattern in which CHISs would all transform from culturally eastern into intercultural

individuals through living and studying in the English-speaking west. What this study wishes

to highlight is the complexity among CHISs through a close examination of their educational

experiences and how these three Taiwanese students chose to deal with the challenging work

of establishing an identity.

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