

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

UNDERSTANDING THE CHINESE EARLY CAREER SELF-  
INITIATED EXPATRIATES IN HUNGARY

Insights from a two-step-migration pathway and alternative career  
trajectories

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Department of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource  
Development

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## CHAPTER I.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Self-initiated expatriation is a term used to describe self-motivated people who temporarily transfer their primary home to another country on their own, using their own resources (Dorsch et al., 2012; Finaccord, 2014; Hussain and Deery, 2018). The perception of self-initiated expatriation as temporary, with the intention of returning to the home country, or permanent, or moving on in professional careers to other countries. Self-initiated expatriates are those who take the initiative to relocate overseas (Andresen et al., 2014; Tharenou, 2015).

Some scholars have defined self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) as an employee who voluntarily migrates for employment opportunities and career development for the sake of their careers (Andresen and Biemann, 2012; Carr et al., 2005; Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), whereas others have defined them more generally. Briscoe et al. (2009) define SIEs as ‘individuals who travel abroad (usually as tourists or students), but who seek work as they travel and are hired in a foreign location’ (Briscoe *et al.* 2009).

The shift from university to an early career will likely impact their self-perception of employability and their potential to enter the international employment market (Donald *et al.*, 2018). Opinions about what constraints career mobility in early-career self-initiated Chinese expatriates vary. It has been suggested that the prominence of Chinese cultural values, demography, and career/life phases influence migration decisions. Accordingly, Chinese SIEs transitioning from education to the workforce is a significant career move that should be complemented by career boundarylessness demographically and contextually, while one of the core parts of the definition of SIE is ‘initiative’, it is highly context-dependent (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). The contextual and structural factors affecting SIE’s labour integration are mainly dependent on their host country’s employment structure.

The main target locations of Chinese SIEs are Anglo-Saxon and economically advanced Asian countries, and there is a considerable amount of literature on middle-aged Western expatriates (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012; Yao *et al.*, 2014; Crowley-Henry, 2012). However, there has been a scant discussion of the elements influencing a decision to undertake a self-expatriation outside the Western hemisphere (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010). Cultural values vary significantly between Confucian and English-speaking or Western European countries (Makkonen, 2016; Kemp and Rickett, 2018), while the Chinese involution cycle influences

how self-initiated expatriation is perceived and determined. Because of financial constraints, many of them have compromised by choosing a semi-peripheral country like Hungary (Primecz and Li, 2022b).

Hungary is highly suitable as a host country because of the growing relationship between China and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Hungary. This has intensified with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which opened a new chapter in their relations (Turcsányi et al., 2019). Furthermore, as Chen and Ugrósdý (2019) observe, China and Hungary have set an example for friendly cooperation between countries under the '17+1 Cooperation' platform, which was established based on the shared agreement between China and Central and Eastern European Countries; such semi-peripheral countries receive a relatively large number of students from China, and study programmes mostly in English attract Chinese applicants. Indeed, in Hungary, the number of self-initiated Chinese students rose by 73% in 2019 compared to 2014. Since 2019, they have been the second-largest international student community after Germans, and the primary group among self-initiated non-European students; as of 2022, Chinese students continue to hold the second position among international students in Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020, 2022). However, the Hungarian language is not spoken outside of Hungary, and it is an isolated linguistic system, so learning Hungarian is hardly transferable to other countries.

Knowing the significant numbers and fastest-growing group of Chinese early career SIEs, begs the question of whether Chinese students, who moved to Hungary to study, will remain, return to China, or choose a third country for their employment. Other significant questions include their chances after such temporary mobility, along with whether they face differing career difficulties from those in their native countries. Staying in Hungary remains an alternative strategy for lower-middle class Chinese SIEs, despite involution in their home country. These are important issues to examine, as is whether or not self-expatriating to Hungary from a position of socioeconomic inferiority through the SIE route is an optimal strategy. Besides, the role of credentials (i.e. Chinese and Hungarian) in career development is presented by the different career advancement and challenges when the SIEs are pursuing a cross-border career.

While career development can be regarded as the one major motivation for SIEs to go abroad, there has been surprisingly little discussion on SIEs' career trajectories from a



longitudinal perspective. To address this research gap, the dissertation aims to advance the understanding of how the career trajectories of Chinese students graduating in Hungary have developed, how plans are executed when possibilities meet reality in their early career period, and what are the career advancements and challenges that Chinese self-initiated expatriates with both Chinese and Hungarian credentials face in the early stages of their careers. Therefore, this dissertation is unique in the sense that it combines the plans and testimonies of graduates and their actual early career moves.

### *1.1. Relevance of the research*

Theoretically, after analysing the related multi-disciplinary research results on the early career of active expatriates in recent years, it can provide academic valuable information on early career management. Specifically, on the one hand, the research provides a definition of early career self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), as well as identifying specific criteria and characteristics that are relevant to early career SIEs. On the other hand, this study is important for understanding the protean and boundaryless careers of early career self-initiated expatriates and immigrants, the main theoretical contribution of this paper is the conceptualisation and exploration of early career Chinese SIEs' career trajectories and challenges, based on constructivist grounded theory. In addition, the research provides insights into the career development and capital of SIEs from the same country but with diverse backgrounds and credentials.

Practically, it offers a focused examination of the experiences and challenges faced by early career SIEs, highlighting the impact of cultural and contextual factors on career mobility, which is valuable to graduates and employers. The results can help graduates start their careers on an upward trajectory, and provide insight for employers into the pre-employment psychological contract and career mindfulness, enabling organisations to support self-initiated expatriates as much as possible. This research also has practical implications for policymakers in Hungary and its immediate vicinity by a better understanding of early career SIEs' career decisions and challenges with similar socioeconomic status individuals.

Considering that early career SIEs of Chinese origin comprise a substantial part of the global SIE population (Finaccord, 2014; InterNations, 2021), empirical research on Chinese SIEs is essential. Therefore, this dissertation is a context-rich empirical research, that aims to

fill the gaps in the Sino-Hungarian literature, even in Semi-periphery countries, because there is limited research on the SIEs' career trajectories in Hungary.

## *1.2. Structure of the dissertation*

This is an article-based thesis, which consists of four individual scholarly articles as subsections, and each subsection has been contextualised and synthesises the article, including an introduction, literature review, methodology, main findings and discussion sections. Providing a thoughtful arrangement and presenting a concise summary of each at the outset can be enlightening. Therefore, this article-based thesis be presented in a logical and coherent sequence by using the “two-step-migration pathway and alternative career trajectories”, which connected the concept of the expatriation between international graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates.

In addition to the conclusion, this dissertation summarises the key findings of the individual articles and how they contribute to the overall research. The topic of self-initiated expatriation is complexity, along with many aspects, for instance, career, adaptation, challenges, and resilience. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the research, it is essential to break down the research process into distinct components. As I progressed through the research process, it became apparent that each subsection of the research had its own subtopic, which I subsequently published in various journals.

I have organised my dissertation into three distinct chapters to ensure an overview of the research process (Figure 1). The first chapter provides an overview of the research problems, the purpose of the thesis and the research questions, it also gives a brief description of the individual articles and how they contribute to the overall thesis. Subsequently, the positioning theory and philosophical background were presented to give a better academic understanding of the results. The next subsection is the literature review, which provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and theoretical framework of the self-initiated expatriation and career trajectories, including cultural reproduction and cultural mobility, cultural, social and career capital theories, terminology of the self-initiated expatriation, the early career of international graduates' self-initiated expatriation, early career self-initiated expatriation, career advancement and challenges for self-initiated expatriates, overview of the early career expatriate experience in Hungary. It also demonstrates how the research contributes to the existing knowledge in the field.

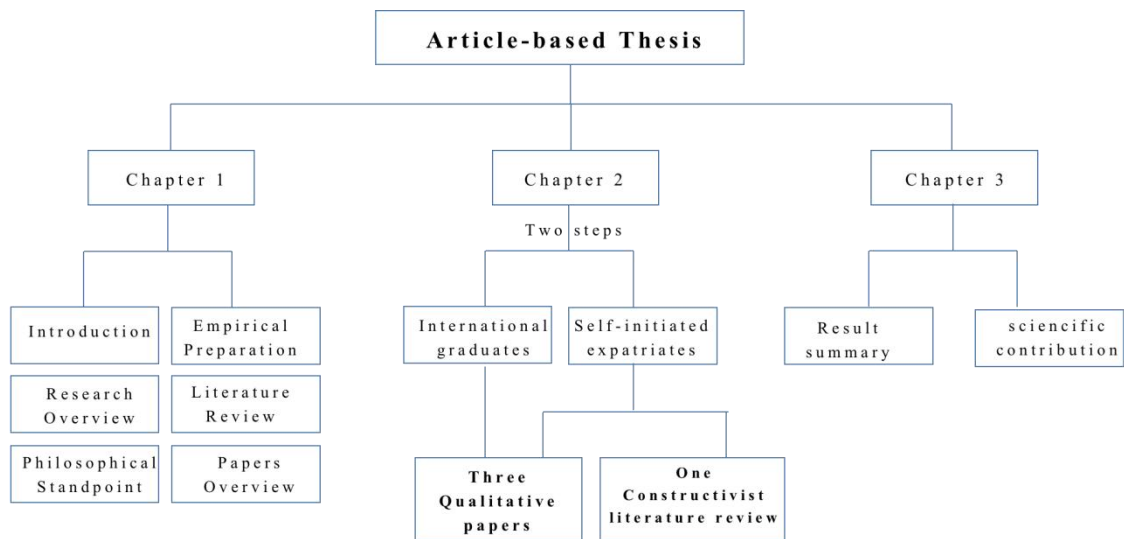


Figure 1. Structure of the dissertation  
(Source: Author conceptualisation)

The second chapter consists of four papers, each of them highlighting a crucial part of the research. The papers have been selected and put in order to represent the research I have worked on during my doctoral studies in the Doctoral School of Business and Management. In order to understand the first step of self-initiated expatriation for Chinese students, the first article applies cultural mobility theory and explores students' family backgrounds and motivations for pursuing tertiary education in Hungary, along with semi-structured narratives.

Then the rest of the three articles regarding the second step of self-initiated expatriation, particularly on their career trajectories. The second paper is a literature review article, on the early career SIEs, and after searching the terminology of self-initiated expatriation, this paper primarily discusses early career self-initiated expatriates' personal career motivations, behaviours, and the phenomenon's relevance to the global workforce, and provide information about the management of early career SIEs with a future research agenda to address the knowledge gap identified in this review and apply the findings to practice. The third is an empirical article. Drawing on constructivist grounded theory, this paper explores the career trajectories of self-initiated Chinese expatriates, who migrated to Hungary to study and evaluate their career options abroad.

The fourth paper is also empirical research. This paper employs the thematic analysis, and applies theories of self-determination theory, and career capital theory to investigate the subjective early career success of Chinese SIEs in Hungary, who possess diverse credentials. It also examines the influence of Hungarian education on Chinese SIEs in terms of their

career trajectories in Hungary and beyond. Ultimately, the concluding section of the dissertation encompasses the final chapter, wherein the research findings are expounded upon as a whole.

## 2. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

### *2.1 Research Framework and outline*

This is an article-based thesis, which consists of four individual scholarly articles as subsections, and each subsection has been contextualised and synthesised the article. Providing a thoughtful arrangement and presenting a concise summary of each at the outset can be enlightening, this thesis be presented in a logical and coherent sequence by using a “two-step-migration pathway and alternative career trajectories”, which connected the conception of the expatriation that followed the two-step pathway from being international students to early career self-initiated expatriates, in addition to highlights the importance of comparing the career outcomes of Chinese SIEs with Chinese and Hungarian credentials.

The doctoral dissertation will be built on four papers, two of which have already been published and the other two are submitted to journals and they are in the pipeline. The two published articles have been included in the dissertation and are recorded in the MTMT database, one was published in *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* (Q2), and the other is published in *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review* (MTA “A”). Exact references:

1. Li, X. & Primecz, H. (2023). A qualitative exploration of the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students in Hungary. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 9(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v9i1.814>.

2. Li, X., Primecz, H., & Paget, A. L. (2023). Understanding the Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Review and Directions for Future Research. *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review*. 54(5), 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2023.05.02>

Two further articles are currently in the pipeline. The first paper, titled "Career Trajectories of Self-Initiated Early Career Chinese Expatriates in Hungary: Two-step Migration pathway perspective?" was submitted to *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review* in September, 2023, and received a minor revision decision. The second paper, titled "Does Local Education Matter in Semi-periphery country? Comparative Analyses of Early

Career Chinese Self-initiated Expatriates in Hungary" was submitted to *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* (Q1), and it is under revision now.

## 2.2 Research Goal

Maxwell (2009) and Saunders et al. (2019) distinguish three types of research goals: personal, practical, and intellectual goal (see Figure 2). Personal goals stem from the researcher's individual needs, curiosity, or career advancement. Practical goals focus on achieving a specific outcome or addressing a particular need. Intellectual goals aim to comprehend a context, meaning, or process, identify unanticipated phenomena, or develop causal explanations. It is crucial to articulate all three goals in a study for a well-rounded research approach. Through my doctoral research, I followed their proposal and defined my research goals as personal, intellectual and practical and the specific goal could be seen in the following boxes. While each goal had its unique focus, they often overlapped, and my motivations and beliefs influenced the validity and interpretation of my work, especially in qualitative and exploratory research.

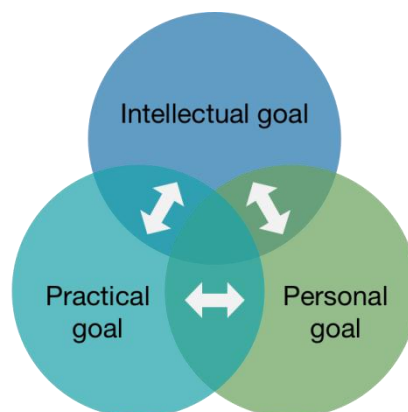


Figure 2. Research Goal

(Source: based on Maxwell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2019; revised by the author)

**Intellectual goals**

- To explore and understand the “two-step-migration pathway” over time and alternative career trajectories;
- To have a better overview of the experiences of Chinese graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary;
- To investigate the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students mobile to Hungary;
- To understand the early career self-initiated expatriation experience, examine the different choices of the career trajectories of Chinese international graduates;
- To analyse the career advancement and challenges, local education role of the Chinese early career self-initiated expatriates with different credentials (Chinese and Hungarian local credentials) in Hungary.

**Practical goals**

- To better understand the experiences and challenges faced by Chinese graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary;
- To identify factors that contribute to their career advancement or hinder their career development
- To provide insights and recommendations for improving the experiences and opportunities for this group of expatriates in Hungary and beyond;
- To help the organization at interpreting cross-cultural challenges and addressing them with tailor-made and practical solutions;
- To experiment, obtain experiences, and learn from them.

**Personal goals**

- To gain insights into the career paths of international graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates;
- To identify key factors and important stages in their career development process;
- To present comprehensive and nuanced findings in my PhD dissertation;
- To enhance my own understanding of the subject matter through research;
- To incorporate my own perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by Chinese early career self-initiated expatriates, while avoiding bias towards my personal situation.

**The main question:**

**What are the career options, subjective success and challenges for Chinese early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary?**

**This question is further divided into sub questions:**

- What are the socioeconomic status and primary motivations of Chinese graduates in Hungary?
- What are the career options, including self-initiated expatriates, of Chinese graduates in Hungary and Europe?
- How do early career Chinese SIEs with varying credentials evaluate their career success?
- How to define local education beneficial for the host country's (Hungarian) employment market?

Table 1 Link between research questions and the papers

<b>What are the career options, subjective success and challenges for early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary?</b>	
<p>One is the theoretical literature review. In order to have a better understanding of international graduates and the early career self-initiated expatriates from an academic perspective, the literature reviews give an overview of the meaning behind it. Based on the systematic and constructive literature review, the current understanding of early career self-initiated expatriates is complex and influenced by a combination of individual, social, and contextual factors, including personal aspirations, family support, career opportunities, and cultural differences, and the need for further research to inform policy and practice in supporting and leveraging the potential of this group of expatriates.</p>	
<p>The research purpose of the articles is to explore and understand the “two-step-migration pathway” over time, including the experiences of Chinese graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary. understanding the career options, advancement, and challenges for early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary requires research, exploration, and a willingness to seek out resources and support. Therefore, the qualitative research methodology, including semi-structured interviews, observation, textual analysis of publicly available testimonies, and a research diary is needed for the empirical papers. This methodology can understand the career options for Chinese international graduates in Hungary deeply and explore the career trajectories, advancement and challenges that are available to Chinese early career self-initiated expatriates, with Chinese credentials and Hungarian credentials.</p>	
<b>What are the socioeconomic status and primary motivations of</b>	Utilising the constructivist grounded theory conducted by Charmaz (2020) to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews with Chinese international

<p><b>Chinese graduates in Hungary?</b></p>	<p>graduates, and Chinese early career SIEs. By conducting qualitative research, it became possible to comprehend the deep early career SIEs' career options, advancement and challenges. In the first place, a qualitative exploration of the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students in Hungary needs to investigate. Over time, those Chinese students become graduates in Hungary, they need to encounter their career choices and need to utilise their cultural accumulation and credentials to seek career trajectory in the job market based on their willingness and situation.</p>
<p><b>What are the career options, including self-initiated expatriates, of Chinese graduates in Hungary and in Europe?</b></p>	<p>The shift from university to an early career impact the self-perception of employability, so investigating the challenges and advancements that Chinese self-initiated expatriates with both Chinese and Hungarian credentials face in the early stages of their careers is crucial, and it is also important to consider the role of local education and other contextual factors in understanding the experiences of early career SIEs in the host country.</p>
<p><b>How do early career Chinese SIEs with varying credentials evaluate their career success?</b></p>	<p>Together, these articles provide a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of Chinese graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary, from their motivations for pursuing education and work opportunities in Hungary to their career trajectories and the factors that contribute to their career advancement and challenges.</p>
<p><b>How to define local education beneficial for the host country's (Hungarian) employment market?</b></p>	

### 3. PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT

#### *3.1 Sociological Paradigms*

Several models have tried to describe paradigms in organisation theory; Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic difference has gained the most attention since it precedes significant advancements in the field. For analysing social science, Burrell and Morgan's (1979) ontological differentiation between the assumptions of social-science research that takes objective versus subjective assumptions, and the sociology of radical change versus regulation as two axes of difference, they defined four paradigms in relation to ontology,



epistemology, human nature and methodology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979): the functionalist, the interpretive, the radical humanist, the radical structuralist are demonstrated in Figure 3.

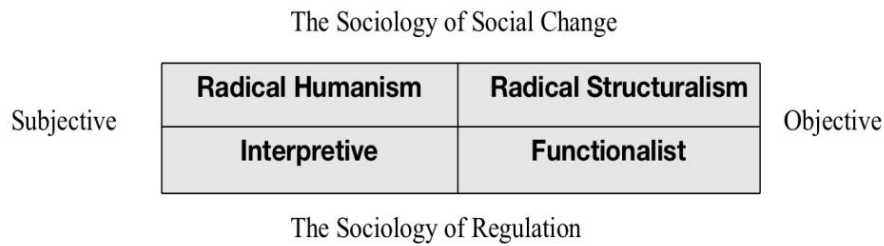


Figure 3. Four Paradigms for the Analysis of the Social Theory

First, the functionalist paradigm attempts to explain social integration, solidarity, social order, and reality from a standpoint that tends to be realist, positivist, deterministic, and nomothetic in the sociological positivism paradigm. As problem-oriented, functionalism seeks answers to practical issues and is "typically devoted to a philosophy of social engineering as a foundation for social change" (Burrell and Morgan 1979). Second, interpretivism seeks explanations within the domain of individual consciousness and subjectivity to comprehend the fundamental character of the social world at the level of subjective experience; it emphasises the lived experiences and the individual interaction with social reality (Hatch and Yanow, 2003; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Thirdly, from a subjectivist perspective, the radical humanism paradigm is dominated by ideological superstructures with interactions, which seeks to identify the ideological blinders that render humans helpless and to provide how they might reclaim a feeling of agency. Fourthly, the radical structuralist paradigm is derived from an objectivist perspective, which views change as a natural and inevitable condition of organisational existence resulting from the clash of competing binary.

### *3.2 Organisation Theory as a Positive and an Interpretive Science*

Two distinct research approaches in the social sciences generate distinct empirical studies. One is an objectivist–realist perspective motivated by positivist thought of the 19th century and logical positivism of the early 20th century. The other is a constructivist–interpretive perspective influenced by 19th- to 20th-century phenomenological, hermeneutic, pragmatic, symbolic interactionist, ethnomethodological, and critical theoretical philosophies and ideas. Two positions have been extensively described in philosophical literature and organisational studies.

On the one hand, Donaldson (2003) characterised organisational theory as a positive science and proposed the functionalist paradigm, which assumes that society has a real, concrete existence, a systematic character, and is directed toward producing order and regulation. Environment-driven scientific approaches verified and confirmed these positive but conventional assumptions. The functionalist paradigm assumes that society has a real, physical existence and a systematic nature and is geared toward developing order and control, and the paradigm seeks to analyse society in a manner that generates valuable information.

On the other hand, interpretive researchers propose that the social world cannot be comprehended in the same manner as the natural and physical worlds. A large number of interpretative scholars were certain that the social and natural worlds should be ascertained in different ways, including conversation and event analysis (Garfinkel, 1967, 2006), symbolic interactionist (Goffman, 1959), and dramaturgic analysis (Burke et al., 1969). Interpretivism focuses on the lived experience and socially constructed reality utilising writing and storytelling when recounting organisational realities from an interpretive viewpoint in organisation studies. According to Hatch and Yanow (2003), organisational theory is a science of interpretation in which the social world has a tenuous ontological standing.

### *3.3 Interpretivism*

Since the 1980s, researchers have contested the dominance of positivist methodology in the social sciences and promoted interpretative approaches, which attach meanings to social structures and consider their interpretations as reflecting aspects of intersubjectivities, lifeworlds, etc. Interpretive research is "directed by the researcher's thoughts and emotions about the world and how it should be researched" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

"Knowledge is relevant to certain circumstances—historical, temporal, cultural, subjective—and exists in different forms as representations of reality (individual interpretations), " according to the interpretative paradigm (Benoliel, 1996). Interpretivism put forwards "objective reality cannot ever be grasped" and embrace many interpretations and modes of knowing. It is only via representations that I become aware of it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The interpretative paradigm emphasizes identifying and describing the significance of human experiences and acts (Fossey and Harvey, 2001).

To comprehend social interactions, interpretivism prioritizes qualitative research approaches that centre on the views, motives, and reasoning of persons above quantitative

facts. Interpretivism argues that access to reality occurs through social creations, including language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Yanow, 2015).

There are three primary interpretive sociological methods (Williams, 2000). First is hermeneutics, which refers to the philosophy of interpretation and understanding. Hermeneuticists originally used various methods to get at the meaning of these texts, such as examining the meaning of words and phrases from the document in other works from the same period and analysing the social and political background.

The second is phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Phenomenology is a sort of social action theory that focuses on the investigation of people's worldviews. Understanding diverse points of view often necessitates using distinct research methodologies and reporting formats. Phenomenological research techniques try to study the subjective impressions of the individual being examined. Ethnographic researcher immerses themselves in a social culture for a lengthy period in order to participate in, observe, and document the lives of the culture being researched and its social members in their natural environment. This offers the researcher two roles: generating insights based on their unique involvement and persuading the scientific community that behaviour applies to various contexts (Schwandt, 1994).

The third is symbolic interaction, which recognizes symbols as culturally developed social objects with common meanings and as a tool of reality construction. The Self is a core conception in symbolic interactionism, which permits humans to calculate the outcomes of their actions.

## 4. PREPARATION OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### *4.1 Choice of interviewees*

To explore the career paths of Chinese early career SIEs in Hungary, it is crucial to understand their perceptions of their credentials, career considerations, opportunities, challenges, and long-term career plans. This research also takes into account the socioeconomic status and motivations of these individuals for relocating to Hungary, which can partially determine their career plans. As graduates in Hungary, they are at an intersection period in their life course. Additionally, compared to Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials, those who studied in Hungary may face different career advancement and challenges.

To fully understand their career trajectories over time, this research adopts a two-step expatriation pathway and includes interviewees in different phases of their self-initiated expatriation period. Before delving into the empirical research, it is relevant to discuss the different phases of graduates' transition into their early careers. Therefore, this research selected three types of interviewees at different stages. One phase is about Chinese students in Hungary and their lived experiences, the second phase Chinese students who came to Hungary to study and started to work, the third phase Chinese SIEs in Hungary, who arrived in Hungary merely for work purposes including some who have Hungarian credentials and who do not.

The three empirical papers have three distinct samples. The first article is built on 26 interviews. The second empirical article includes online interviews and observations of the interviewees' public blogs. The third empirical article covers 22 new interviews. This data collection phase took place from the end of September to the end of October 2022, and the sample was different from the second phase because the research was to seek out Chinese early-career SIEs with both Chinese and Hungarian credentials.

#### *4.2 Methodology*

A qualitative interpretive approach was adopted because this enables the researcher to discover unforeseen facts (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011). The approach recognises that individuals give their meanings to events and situations. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study of people's accounts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being examined (Crotty, 1998). I maintain that a qualitative study design is the most appropriate method for addressing research questions in this case because the study is exploratory. Based on my international experience and network, it appears that the topic has not been previously researched by other scholars.

Selecting a research paradigm that aligns with one's beliefs about reality is essential for a robust research design. Interrogating these beliefs ontologically at the outset can reveal various epistemological and methodological options. Researchers who use constructivism-grounded theory and thematic analyses in qualitative research do not arrive at a conclusion or resolution quickly or easily regarding their understanding of truth and reality. Rather, they are influenced by cultural context, which shapes their perspective on the research, the creative forces involved, and the meaning of truth. Constructivism is a research paradigm that refutes

the existence of an objective reality, instead maintaining that realities are constructed socially in the mind, and as many such constructions exist as there are individuals, though many constructions will be shared (Lincoln and Guba, 2013). The research is conducted from a social constructionist perspective. The author believes that constructivism is the most suitable approach to answer the research question, as individuals create their realities by interpreting their experiences in innumerable unique ways (Burr, 2003).

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *5.1 Terminology of the self-initiated expatriation*

In the 21st century, the knowledge economy, technological innovation, migration flows, specialisation, work values, and labour markets have all changed dramatically with the development of a globalized economy. This has profoundly affected the individual career development of employees and the organisational career management of companies (De Cuyper, 2019; Yang and Chen, 2020). SIEs are different from corporate-assigned expatriates, who have more autonomy to choose their career location, and the SIEs leverage their stronger cross-cultural adaptability to build their career capital during the expatriate experience and thus achieve career success (Kanstrén and Suutari, 2021; Paik et al., 2017; Wongsuwan and Na-Nan, 2022). At the same time, as SIEs are not supported by organizations, their characteristics play a critical role (Lauring and Selmer, 2018) in their organizational success and eventually in their career.

Scholars have paid attention to the concepts and contents related to expatriate employees. The employment scope of self-initiated expatriate careers not only refers to the current enterprise organisation but also includes different positions, professions, functions, roles, countries, and cultures (Martin et al., 2019). SIEs are across the boundaries of different employers (enterprises) globally in pursuit of maximising their own interests and career development (Bernardo and Salanga, 2019; Chattopadhyay, 2019; Utam et al., 2020).

Koekemoer and Crafford (2019) revealed that employees under the traditional career model might be employed by one or a few life organisations. Based on the specific skills the organisation needs to develop, organisations provide employees with career management plans through career ladders to help individuals develop their careers. And the concepts of the boundless career and the expatriate career came into being at the same time, and they had much in common in the connotation. Redondo et al. (2021) believed that in the volatile career

model, employees manage their careers and make career decisions based on their career choices. The main criterion for judging career success is psychological success, that is, subjective success. Under this career model, a better understanding of organisational attitudes in the ever-changing career environment will increase the importance of employer stereotypes of talented employees and avoid additional risks to the business in terms of employee commitment and intention to leave. Therefore, the development of the volatile career model is not constrained by a specific career path or organisation but follows the inner will, which is similar to the early career self-initiated expatriate career trajectories.

From the macro perspective on the policy of self-initiated expatriates, governments have established publicly supported initiatives to return highly qualified expatriates, some of whom developed pluralistic, multi-cultural perspectives while overseas (Cohen, 2009). According to studies, cosmopolitan, national, ideological, and communal attitudes have a significant impact on their decision to emigrate or return (Cohen & Kranz, 2015). Sahoo et al. (2022) showed that local, national, and regional support indirectly and significantly affects expatriate performance through expatriate participation; meanwhile, perceived risk moderates the relationship between perceived organisational support and local state support through expatriate participation. In terms of global HRM, Hong and Kim (2019) examine the direct impact of the subsidiary's local country image, and the moderating effect of family support policies on the subsidiary's attractiveness based on sustainable HRM compared to subsidiaries in the United States and Vietnam. Empirically, it is found that family support policies can be a crucial strategy to overcome the less popular host country image of emerging market subsidiaries, thereby improving the long-term sustainability of subsidiaries (Nobrega and Felix, 2021).

The SIE community is predominantly male in general, but female self-initiated expatriates are a significant part of the community. Female SIEs shared career progression, financial and adventure motivation to work abroad, and they might face culture, networking and mentoring challenges. Thus, an organisation needs to be prepared to support female talent with specific policies (Osman et al., 2022). Bastida (2018) explored the effect of gender contingency on the effectiveness of expatriates. Research shows that women are underrepresented in international assignments. Additionally, the research focused on specific aspects of effectiveness based on women's perceptions of their work. Furthermore, only a few

of them include male expatriates, which further weakens the possibility of expatriate gender comparisons.

From the meso-level view, external professionals, for instance, institutional or organisational support should be brought in as needed to support the success of the SIEs (O'Byrne, 2018). Isakovic and Whitman (2019) studied the direct effects of organisational support and adjustment on retention willingness, work engagement, and the mediating impact of the adjustment on the SIE of low-skilled women in the United Arab Emirates. The results found that perceived organisational support and job adjustment had a significant, positive, and direct impact on retention and willingness to participate. Besides, the job adjustment of SIEs moderated POS to engagement and retention willingness to a certain extent influence. Siyal et al. (2021) examined how inclusive leaders foster innovative work behaviours and creativity in their employees. Finally, they found that inclusive leadership positively impacts innovative work behaviour and creativity through a comprehensive analysis of diversity.

At the middle level, the professional value of SIEs is mainly reflected in the professional behaviours of enterprise organisations such as job investment, professional toughness and lifelong learning, and it can predict job adaptation and job performance. The professional value of SIEs is mainly reflected in the professional behaviours of enterprises, such as job investment, professional toughness and lifelong learning, and it can predict job adaptation and job performance (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). Abbas et al. (2021) used structural equation modelling and attempted to expand knowledge in the field of expatriate management by explaining the prejudicial behaviour of local employees. The results show that when expatriates perceive discrimination, it will have a negative impact on their work attitude, and the trust generated by the local government can mediate this impact. A series of strategic analyses also indicate that expatriates are allowed to integrate or divide the work and family fields. This research shows how expatriates can positively interact with people in the work and family fields to build and maintain better positions and family relationships while they live in other countries. In addition, companies should develop work and family policies that take into account the preferences of expatriates and their families to integrate or separate work and family domains.

Cultural adaptation is the main reason affecting the work performance and success rate of SIEs. Noman et al. (2020) used qualitative methods to conduct semi-structured interviews

with expatriate workers in different Chinese organisations in Pakistan. Empirical findings showed that the biggest challenges facing Chinese expatriates in Pakistan are cultural differences and language barriers in work and non-work factors, but study skills can facilitate the cultural adaptation of expatriates. Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) adopted an occupational perspective to examine the psychological factors associated with the career success of SIEs, and the empirical investigation results indicated that occupational adaptability is positively correlated with performance and adaptability. Psychological availability mediates the relationship between occupational fitness and performance and adaptation. However, supportive supervision of organisations did not moderate the relationship between occupational fitness and performance or adjustment.

O'Byrne (2018) discussed the importance of cultural intelligence to expatriates and provided relevant suggestions to help expatriates improve their performance. First, HR professionals are advised to screen cultural intelligence when selecting expatriates actively. Second, it is essential to cultivate the cultural wisdom of expatriates comprehensively and continuously. Liao et al. (2021) examined the influence of antecedents on intercultural competence and intercultural adaptation, as well as the mediating role of intercultural adaptation on the performance of expatriates. The findings confirmed the positive effects of emotional intelligence and cultural adaptation on intercultural competence and the positive effects of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence on intercultural adaptation.

There are also returnees with expatriate experience who feel that only at home they can maximize their career potential. Ellis et al. (2020) conducted qualitative research based on interviews with self-directed New Zealanders back home, they compared pre- and post-repatriation data to understand repatriation expectations and experiences, and the findings showed a strong alignment between expectations of return and their repatriation experiences, recognising the importance of individual institutions and the impact of the repatriation. Remennick (2022) explored multiple returnees who return home after working in other countries around the world. Most returnees believe that only at home can they maximise their career potential. They show a strong national identity, culture, and filial piety.

### *5.2 The early career of international graduates' self-initiated expatriation*

Global and multinational organisations consider international graduates an immediate supply of labour and a group devoted to work because they gained sociocultural capital and



qualifications from their host country while studying (Chellaraj et al., 2008; Farivar et al., 2019). Therefore, the international student experience is vital in adapting to a foreign country during graduate studies, as well as exposure to an international setting, which influences their decision to relocate (Bozionelos et al., 2015). Understanding the performance, suitability, selection, and development of international graduates' early careers has been regarded as the key to international human resource management (IHRM) and training development (Israel and Cohen, 2022), although younger employees are enthusiastic about changing career boundaries from the emerging new social structures compared with more generic skills and older employees (Currie et al., 2006). Farivar et al. (2019) indicated that sociocultural and working conditions have the potential to affect foreign graduates' career mobility; their findings encouraged international graduates to stay in the host country after graduation, even if their initial aim was to leave.

There is evidence that there is a direct relationship between foreign education and improved employment outcomes. International education has a "signalling effect" on graduates, providing them with advantages such as English proficiency, solid content knowledge, awareness of international standards, and advanced soft skills, making graduates more appealing to employers and increasing their chances of securing employment (Abimbola et al., 2016; Jonbekova et al., 2021; Pham, 2020; Wiers- Janssen, 2007; Wu et al., 2020). When international graduates entered the employment market, they started their career trajectories, which are different from their professional positions. For instance, in the early stages of their careers, SIEs have more ambitions for mobility and may gain international experience on the entry-level professional road. Tharenou (2003) conducted a study on 213 young entry-level occupations (average age 23), using social cognitive career theory, taking age, gender, and marital status into consideration; she concluded that these early career SIEs had high levels of personal agency and were less influenced by their families. With worldwide options, their openness to foreign professions increased.

Although many young foreign students often have social circles, they are perceived as temporarily staying in the host country and adopt according to strategies when they encountered difficulties. From an economic perspective, a competitive employment market with limited positions (Abimbola et al., 2016; Nachatar Singh, 2020), and high salary expectations in comparison to those offered in the market (Hao et al., 2016), make it difficult for graduates to obtain post-graduate employment. In terms of socioeconomic factors,

Chinese SIEs need to recognise the differences between the host and home countries and to adapt, not least by accepting the fact that Chinese culture is built on Confucianism, whereas Western countries have an alternative tradition that places more emphasis on the individual and their rights and desires (Woronov, 2015). Especially when it comes to self-initiated expatriation, Al Ariss (2010) pointed out that the education and abilities of SIEs were insufficient to overcome organisational and structural hindrances, impeding their full integration into the job market. Egilsson and Dolles (2017) explored the experiences of talented young Icelandic footballers in their transition to foreign countries and showed that problem-focused coping strategies were more effective than emotional ones.

### *5.3 Early career self-initiated expatriation*

While numerous studies have compared company-initiated international assignments and inter-organizational moves between self-initiated expatriates and assigned expatriates (AEs) (Selmer et al., 2016; Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari et al., 2017), recent research is now extending beyond such comparisons to include a more comprehensive range of global careers, particularly focusing on the experiences of SIEs (Inkson and Thorn, 2010; Al Ariss and Jawad, 2011; Doherty et al., 2011; Crowley-Henry, 2012, Brewster et al., 2021). SIEs comprise a diverse group with varying levels of education, language skills, cultural knowledge, and professional experience, and they may encounter unique challenges while adapting to a new country (Machado, 2022). Vaiman et al (2015) suggest that SIEs bring unique skills and experiences to the workplace and that organisations can benefit from attracting, retaining, and developing SIEs as part of their global talent strategy. Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) have investigated the impact of personal and professional development, including the skills and experiences that individuals gain, the growth in their self-confidence, and how they can leverage their international experiences to enhance their careers.

There is a growing body of literature on the topic of early career self-initiated expatriates. For early career self-initiated expatriates, international experience can provide a valuable opportunity to gain cross-cultural experience and broaden their skill sets, but they must also navigate the challenges of adjusting to life in a new country (Pereira et al, 2016; Wechtler, 2018). Inkson and Myers (2003) confirmed that the transition to life in a new country can be a critical period, as they seek to build their professional networks and establish their careers while also adjusting to a new culture. From the contextual and organisational perspective,

Goštautaitė et al. (2020) put forward there is a negative correlation between the intention to initiate self-expatriation and the level of career and community embeddedness in one's home country. According to Felker (2011), organisations are missing out on the potential benefits of Eastern European human capital in the context of SIEs, suggesting that there may be unexplored opportunities to gain a competitive advantage. Individually, Pereira et al. (2016) demonstrate that the young, skilled, and mobile SIEs, tend to rely on their resources and information to secure employment opportunities. Baluku et al. (2018) investigated the early career self-initiated expatriates' diverse career paths, highlighting the significance of flexibility and personal initiative. The study findings indicate that early career SIEs should prioritize enhancing their flexibility and career orientation in their job choices.

#### *5.4 Career success and challenges for SIEs*

Career success refers to the overall achievement and fulfilment of professional goals, it differs from career advancement, which essentially highlights the progression of a person's career (Laud and Johnson, 2012; Bowles et al., 2019). Career success is a multifaceted concept that encompasses objective and subjective career success (Arthur et al., 2005; Briscoe et al., 2021). Objectively, it refers to tangible outcomes of moving up the organisational hierarchy and societal status, such as promotions or increased responsibilities, whereas subjective career success refers to personal perception or assessment of their own career fulfillment, which is of particular importance to SIEs, due to their strong intrinsic career motivations and psychological perceptions of careers (Harrison et al., 2019; Waxin and Brewster, 2020; Madi et al., 2023). Cao et al (2012) concluded that the career success of SIEs is positively influenced by important career capital factors, namely a protean attitude towards their career, career networks, and cultural intelligence, with cultural distance acting as a moderator. In our framework, we included subjective measures of career success to account for the challenges in defining early career success for Chinese SIEs. By considering their subjective perceptions of career success, we aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how SIEs' career capital influences their career development.

Early career self-initiated expatriates can bring unique perspectives and energy to their new home, but they may also face obstacles in establishing their careers. Researchers have studied the career opportunities and challenges faced by early career self-initiated expatriates, including the impact of their move on their careers, their access to professional networks, and

how they can overcome barriers to career advancement. McNulty and Brewster (2017) highlighted the potential of SIEs for management and leadership development, suggesting that their experiences can help them develop valuable skills such as adaptability, intercultural competence, and leadership, which are highly sought after by organisations.

However, self-initiated expatriates still face some challenges. Jonbekova et al. (2021) revealed that international graduates encounter employment challenges due to various factors such as socioeconomic and cultural considerations, and intergenerational conflicts. Seok-Young and Jang (2021) investigated the lack of support from the organisations, making the embarrassing situation for early career SIEs. Waxin and Brewster (2020) examine the influence of host country factors, such as culture, language, social networks, and work opportunities, on the career trajectories of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). According to their findings, host country characteristics play a crucial role in determining the career outcomes of SIEs. The authors emphasize the significance of language proficiency and social networks in enabling career progression and fostering a sense of belonging in the host country.

For the early career SIEs, they are aware of repatriation, confusing their career road. Milne (2001) claimed that young SIEs with characteristics of better qualified and fitter, and want to possess more skills when they choose to return. However, returning early-career researchers display higher degrees of parochialism, as seen by stronger community dispositions and patriotic loyalty, as well as geographically constrained employment search (Israel and Cohen, 2022).

### *5.5 Overview of the early career expatriate experience in Hungary*

Chinese SIEs mainly target Anglo-Saxon and economically advanced Asian countries. While there is a considerable amount of literature on middle-aged Western expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012; Yao et al., 2014; Crowley-Henry, 2012), there has been little discussion of the large number of Chinese applicants who aim to study in Hungary. Hungary as settlement destination for the Chinese middle-class couples, , discovering that the primary motivation is driven by factors such as favorable living conditions, desire to provide their children with a joyful childhood, highlighting the significance of migration for escaping the educational pressure, intense competition, and economic burdens associated with the upbringing of children in China (Beck & Gaspar,2023; Beck & Nyíri, 2022).

While students have limited access to the employment market, a large number of Chinese professionals seek employment in Hungary. Li (2020) provides a detailed analysis of the push and pull factors that influence Chinese individuals to move to Hungary. Push factors include social and economic changes in China, leading to a highly competitive employment market. Pull factors include the accessibility of Hungarian education system and a relatively easy access to its employment market compared to other EU and Western countries. However, Chinese students encounter various obstacles, including language barriers and potential exclusion (Primecz and Li, 2022a), as well as individual academic issues regarding “invisible academic performance in the classroom” (Li, 2020). Li and Primecz (2023) describe the socio-economic status of students who eventually enter to this market, and argue that Hungary is a compromise choice for lower middle class and working-class Chinese families, not a country attraction. Furthermore, Li and Primecz (2021) use exploratory-qualitative methods to investigate the future dilemma of Chinese students: their *in-betweenness*.

In Hungary, the number of self-initiated Chinese students saw a significant increase, rising from 725 in 2014 to 2,776 in 2019, and then slightly decreasing to 2,377 in 2022 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022). Since 2019, Chinese students have become the second-largest international student community in Hungary, following Germans, and remain the primary group among self-initiated non-European students. As of 2022, Chinese students continue to hold the second position among international students in Hungary. As Chinese early-career SIEs represent a significant and fast-growing group, it is worth exploring whether Chinese students who moved to Hungary choose to remain, return to China, or select a third country for employment.

### *5.6 Local education and foreign credentials*

Previous literature has explored the influence of host country nationals and its cultural characteristics on the career development of SIEs (Cao et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2021; Waxin and Brewster, 2020), and knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing between SIEs and organisations (Papa et al., 2020; Shao and Ariss, 2020; Singh et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is limited research on factors beyond local credentials and education that affect early career SIEs. The existing literature mainly focuses on establishing a positive correlation between local education and employment prospects in the host country (Van der Lippe and Lippényi,

2019). Arifa et al (2022) concluded that there is positive correlation between local education and career development expectation abroad for the early career-stage academics.

Furthermore, researchers have examined the outcomes for employees holding foreign qualifications in their home countries. It transpires that foreign credentials may have no impact on securing employment in their country of origin, leading to a certain degree of mismatch and underemployment (Dustmann et al., 2016; Risberg and Romani, 2022). Nardon et al (2021) show that many professional women with foreign credentials experienced underemployment, which pushed them towards lower-skilled or less stable positions.

## 6. OVERVIEW TO THE FOUR PAPERS

### **1<sup>st</sup> Paper: A qualitative exploration of the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students in Hungary**

Based on the “two-step-migration pathway”, higher education experiences is crucial for analysing the motivation for expatriation to Hungary. Besides, education has gradually become a crucial element in attaining higher socioeconomic status, so it is vital to understand such students’ socioeconomic backgrounds and motivation for studying in Central-Eastern Europe. Thus, after searching the literature on culture reproduction by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), career capital by DiMaggio (1982), and some context-related literature on the Bologna Process and educational mobility with respect to Hungary, this paper applied cultural mobility theory, this article explores students’ family backgrounds and motivations for pursuing tertiary education in Hungary.

The research questions necessitated a qualitative methodology and semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted with twenty-six Chinese students studying in Hungary as a data collection method. This was augmented by observation before and after the interviews, which was noted in a research diary. And a purposive sampling method was applied to create the most reliable sample. Regarding the data analyse the process, I adapted elements of the grounded theory (G.T.) approach for the data analysis, as summarised by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Interviews and research diary notes were the basis of the data analysis. The first phase, open coding of data, involved the naming and categorisation of phenomena through close examination. This was followed by axial coding, with the explicit aim of understanding the data more deeply. Finally, selective coding was applied, whereby more abstract analysis was

conducted, and the grounded model was constructed from the empirical data, named constraints of reality, educational desires and self-expression values.

The results indicate that three important factors influenced lower-middle-class Chinese students' choices to study in Hungary: the constraints of reality, educational aspirations, and a desire for self-expression. Working-class or lower-middle-class families were required to make compromises for their children to study abroad because their financial means limited the opportunity for international study. Therefore, education in a relatively low-cost country like Hungary became an option. This research contributes to current theories of educational mobility by offering fresh understandings of students with a lower-middle socioeconomic status, the influx of working-class Chinese students into Hungary, as well as the relationship between upward social mobility and studying internationally. The recommendations for policymakers in China and Hungary made in this paper enable the development of practicable strategies for enhancing learning environments, producing positive educational outcomes, fostering equitable education systems, and ameliorating the impact of a lower socioeconomic background on educational and social mobility.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Paper: Understanding the Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Review and Directions for Future Research**

The self-initiated expatriate who finds work outside of their home country is a significant topic and extant research on the self-initiated expatriation currently resides across different disciplines, forming a relevant topic for theoretical and practical contribution. Global and multinational enterprises' labour demands for foreign graduates are consistent with young graduates self-initiating international work opportunities (Doherty, 2010). In the field of career management, the SIE groups (Suutari and Brewster 2000, Tharenou 2003) are the most relevant management field to explore. Early career self-initiated expatriates can be a source of competitive advantage for organisations because they are flexible, devoted to work and open to experiencing new things (Kemp and McLoughlin, 2022). This review analyses academic articles published on self-initiated expatriates (SIE) with a special focus on early-career expatriates.

Acknowledging the value of both functionalist and interpretivist approaches, the multiparadigm strategy was chosen (Primecz, 2008; Primecz et al. 2023). Relying on functionalist principles, the first author began with a systematic approach to identify key

articles from multiple disciplines, searching three journal databases, namely Web of Science, Google Scholar and Proquest Thesis database between 2003 and 2022 with the following keywords: immigration, early career expatriates, entry-level position, international graduate student, student affairs professionals, motivation, challenges, resilience, repatriation, culture adaptation. The literature search was completed in two waves. In the first wave, 1703 academic publications were identified by keyword search, including journal articles, theses, books, book chapters, and conference papers. The VOSviewer software was used to study the literature related to the career of expatriates in the field of global career management from an empirical perspective through literature statistics and econometric analysis methods (Andersen, 2021). Therefore, the VOSviewer software was utilised to scan global expatriates' long-term career development paths and research progress in the first place. In the second wave of literature search top-ranked publications in international management and business were scrutinized, which was conducted by the third author. The journal selection on their international ranking and their significance in the researched field (Tüselmann et al., 2016). Therefore, core IB journals, namely International Business Review (IBR), Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS), Journal of International Management (JIM), Journal of World Business (JWB) and Management International Review (MIR) were considered. Furthermore, based on the chosen research topic two highly relevant journals were added to the selection, where the majority of the articles in this area are published, namely Career Development International and Journal of Global Mobility.

In the end, inspired by the analysis of qualitative scholars in related fields, this research adopts the interpretive approach in order to delve into the content of the identified articles more deeply. This exploration plays a critical role in promoting the selection and in-depth development of research topics in the management field as well. Our first analysis of these papers showed a plethora of cross-disciplinary notions and terminology (e.g. job, employment, occupation, career; immigration, self-initiated expatriate; early career, young graduate, entry-level position). Abstracts (including titles and keywords) of 81 articles were reviewed by the first and second authors, and based on the content of the abstracts and title, they agreed to read 22 articles in full text. The reading and coding of full-text articles were done by the first author, and it led to the elimination of six articles, which proved to be irrelevant when the content of the full text was thoroughly investigated. The selected 16 articles were coded, and in order to ensure full coverage of published articles in the chosen



topic further articles were searched for. By using snowballing strategy, the first author followed references and cites to these publications during the full-text analysis until no new relevant publications were found. The qualifying publications were evaluated and subsequently analysed based on particular research that addressed the issues. The study was carried out by thoroughly reading full texts. Eventually, 19 articles were identified as key articles of early career SIEs. As a result of the coding process and elaboration in depth on the interplay analysis among different levels and formulation three main themes emerged, which was validated by the second author.

In terms of coding schemes, authors organised analysis at the contextual, organisational, and individual levels using various coding processes. The early career SIE has then been explored from a range of viewpoints, which synthesises the following theoretical models from the research evaluated into a complete field map. Finally, a research gap may be identified in the kinds of literature.

In this paper, we discuss early career self-initiated expatriates' personal career motivations, behaviours, and the phenomenon's relevance to the global workforce. First of all, it is found that among the structural factors, the main reason that affects the work performance and success rate of SIEs in their early career is their cultural adaptability to different national structures. Besides, the organisational level plays a key role in helping SIE in the early career transition to new cultural adaptation, especially through the intervention of organisations in the adjustment period (Hippler et al., 2014). This demonstrates the role of psychological availability as a means of psychological engagement for SIEs and their host-country national colleagues during work and interaction adjustment processes. This view is consistent with the conclusions of Jannesari et al. (2017). Lastly, an individual's ability to adapt to the expatriate culture is the main factor that affects his mission success rate, which is also the main reason for reducing expatriates' turnover intention.

There are some points worth reflecting on in the previous literature. Firstly, summarising the above structure, organisation and individual level, to explore the post-COVID-19 epidemic influences on the early career SIEs' attitude and behaviour, it is very important to manage and develop the subsequent career of SIEs in the early career. Secondly, individuals who lived in a foreign country as teenagers regard themselves as international, have higher openness to different cultures, have greater international job preferences, travel

and future orientation, and have lower settling-down inclinations (Selmer and Lam, 2003). Since there is a lack of this kind of literature which compares early career SIEs to those who are born in the local country. Therefore, it is advisable to analyse how adult third culture kids (ATCKs) view their future ability to complete international tasks. Thirdly, future research can address differences between young and older employees, and the organisation's concentration may be most relevant to the initial development of receptivity.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Paper: Career Trajectories of Self-Initiated Early Career Chinese Expatriates in Hungary**

This paper explores the career trajectories of self-initiated Chinese expatriates, who migrated to Hungary to study and evaluates their career options abroad. It applies theories of social and cultural mobility, after describing the early career of international graduates' self-initiated expatriation, uncovered the relative merits of three potential career choices, namely whether to return, remain in Hungary, or move to another European country.

This research employs a constructivist grounded theory method by analysing the semi-structured interviews of 22 Chinese graduates, considering their careers abroad. The data came from two sources: semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author, and then further data was collected from publicly available sources, such as social media, blogs and observation of the Chinese community in Hungary, which collectively constituted the initial data. Regarding sampling development, the initial criteria for these potential participants were needed to screen whether the person fits the criteria of a Chinese SIE, who was educated in Hungary. Personal contacts were utilised to identify and approach individuals who fitted the required profile (Doherty, 2013): (a) their initial intention and their expectation at the time of the interviews was for a temporary move; (b) they have legally moved and are legally residing and working in the host country; (c) the move to the host country was of their own free will rather than due to factors that may have forced them to flee their countries of origin, such as civil war, persecution, due to political beliefs, or famine; (d) the reason for their movement — that is, they entered Hungary as a student — and have initiated their employment afterwards.

In the data analysis phase, the three steps of analysis described by Charmaz (2006, 2020) — line-by-line coding, axial coding and theoretical coding — are grouped around the researcher's description of the analysis in this section. Firstly, for building the initial codes,

the texts of the transcriptions were read and, for each phrase or paragraph, a remark was provided using terms that summarized the information/concept investigated. While reading the interview transcript, a logbook was created that noted each respondent's views of the content and the direction of the reading. Secondly, axial coding was developed to recompose data and give coherence to the emerging analysis, highlighting its dimensions and properties within a context, allowing for more precise explanations that respond to the phenomenon with questions of when, where, why, who, how, and with what results, so as to write the studied experience in a more comprehensive manner. Thirdly, classification (theoretical codes) provided the comparison of categories on a more sophisticated level because it "provides the researcher with the logic to arrange his investigation and a means to build and enhance the theoretical links that urge him to compare the categories" (Charmaz, 2020).

The findings reveal ambiguity in the advantages and disadvantages of each of the potential choices, including repatriation, remaining, and moving to another European country. The situation is even more problematic for women, who experience considerable pressure to start a family, preferably in China, no matter whether they repatriate or move to other European countries. While research participants made significant investments in their education when they decided to study in Hungary, it is not obvious that their financial, emotional, intellectual, and social investments pay off. The first group, the returnees, face uncertainty when their degrees are evaluated against other foreign degrees, especially in comparison with Anglo-Saxon and Chinese degrees, which are viewed more positively in China. The hope to return home with valuable degrees is, therefore, unclear. The second group, early career SIEs working in Hungary, face other difficulties. While their degrees are accepted in the Hungarian employment market, they always have disadvantages, compared to local employees, due to language barriers. The third group, the advantageous career seekers entering new countries, face double difficulties: their degrees are less known and accepted and they have numerous disadvantages, including language barriers, lack of social capital, and difficulties in understanding a new context, culture, and rules.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Paper: Does Local Education Matter? Comparative Analyses of Early Career Chinese Self-initiated Expatriates in Hungary**

While numerous studies have compared company-initiated international assignments and inter-organizational moves between SIEs and assigned expatriates (Selmer et al., 2016;

Suutari et al., 2017), recent research is currently extending beyond such comparisons to include a more comprehensive range of global careers, particularly focusing on the experiences of SIEs (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014; Brewster et al., 2021; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Primecz, 2023). Among this group, early career SIEs are considered by global and multinational organisations as an immediate supply of labour and a group devoted to working because they are flexible, devoted to work and open to experiencing new things, and have unique characteristics that set them apart from other expatriates (Pereira et al., 2016; Wechtler, 2018). This group is characterised by its youth (Yao et al., 2014), lack of financial resources (Israel and Cohen, 2022), and limited experience in international work environments (Wechtler et al., 2023). It is, therefore, necessary to discuss the career trajectories of SIEs from a longitudinal perspective, with their early-career period as a starting point (Li et al., 2023).

Previous literature has explored the influence of host country nationals and its cultural characteristics on the career development of SIEs (Singh et al., 2021), along with knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing between SIEs and organisations (Shao and Ariss, 2020; Singh et al., 2022). The literature mainly focuses on establishing a positive correlation between local education and employment prospects in the host country (Van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2019). Nevertheless, there is limited research on factors beyond local credentials and education that affect early career SIEs and SIEs to semi-periphery countries. Therefore, our intention is to address the gap in the literature regarding the decision-making processes and outcomes of Chinese individuals, when choosing to pursue career opportunities in semi-peripheral countries, such as Hungary.

This research focuses on the outcomes associated with career success among Chinese SIEs in Hungary and examines the role of Chinese and Hungarian credentials in the career development of such individuals and how these impact their opportunities and mobility in the job market. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to and outcomes of education in East Central Europe and for early career SIEs in the context of semi-peripheral countries, our study aims to address the following research questions: (1) How to define local education beneficial for the host country's (Hungarian) employment market? (2) How do early career Chinese SIEs with varying credentials evaluate their career success?

The purpose and scope of the research align with thematic analysis, since extended and immersive cross-cultural experiences require individuals to move beyond their culturally engrained attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. The subjective nature of global mobility experiences requires qualitative researchers to maintain reflexivity and awareness of their own experiences and preconceptions throughout the research process (Primecz, 2023). To develop the sample, specific criteria were established to identify potential participants, who met the characteristics of early career Chinese SIEs. Personal contacts were used to identify and approach individuals, meeting the following requirements (Doherty, 2013): (a) their initial intention was to move temporarily; (b) they legally moved to and resided in the host country as Chinese citizens; (c) the move was voluntary, not due to factors such as persecution or civil war; (d) they had fewer than five years of work experience, or were below 35 years old. Additionally, participants met a criterion relevant to SIE status by holding Chinese or Hungarian credentials before joining the Hungarian job market.

The findings reveal two distinct types of early-career Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials in Hungary: those using their Hungarian experience as a stepping stone for long-term career mobility and those who perceive it as beneficial for their career objectives. Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials can also accumulate career capital, but their futures remain more uncertain. The findings also reveal the impact of gaining qualifications in Hungary, for Chinese SIEs with different credentials did not have a clearly defined career path.

## CHAPTER II.

### 7. Frist Paper: A qualitative exploration of the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students in Hungary

#### *7.1 Abstract*

Surprisingly little research has been conducted on Chinese students in Hungary, despite their growing number. Education has gradually become a crucial element in attaining higher socioeconomic status, so it is vital to understand such students' socioeconomic backgrounds and motivation for studying in Central-Eastern Europe. Applying cultural mobility theory, this article explores students' family backgrounds and motivations for pursuing tertiary education in Hungary. Twenty-six narrative interviews were conducted and analysed using grounded theory method. The results indicate that three important factors influenced lower-middle-class Chinese students' choices to study in Hungary: the constraints of reality, educational aspirations, and a desire for self-expression. Working-class or lower-middle-class families were required to make compromises for their children to study abroad because their financial means limited the opportunity for international study. Therefore, education in a relatively low-cost country like Hungary became an option. This research contributes to current theories of educational mobility by offering fresh understandings about students with a lower-middle class SES, the influx of working-class Chinese students into Hungary, as well as the relationship between upward social mobility and studying internationally. The recommendations for policymakers in China and Hungary made in this paper enable the development of practicable strategies for enhancing learning environments, producing positive educational outcomes, fostering equitable education systems, and ameliorating the impact of a lower SES background on educational and social mobility.

Key words: Chinese students, Hungary, socioeconomic status, motivation, qualitative research

#### *7.2 Introduction*

The relationship between China and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Hungary, was not well developed until approximately ten years ago. Since 2011, the Chinese-CEE relationship started to intensify with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which wrote a new chapter in their relations and in which both parties lost traditional trade partners and perceived opportunities for economic growth through cooperation (Turcsányi et al., 2019). Chen and Ugrósy (2019) stated that China and Hungary increased their bilateral cooperation after signing the 17+1 Cooperation Initiative.

In the two decades between 1998 and 2019, the number of international students enrolling in degree programmes outside their home countries rose from 1.95 million to 7.03

million worldwide. Thus, the number of Chinese students engaged in studies abroad rapidly increased by 720 percent globally, making China the largest country of origin for international students worldwide, and this significantly influenced global higher education (Education in China, 2021).

The main target locations of Chinese students are Anglo-Saxon countries and more economically developed ones (i.e., Japan and South Korea). Similar patterns can also be observed in Germany, where the number of Chinese students has grown rapidly, but the requirement of being able to speak German of several universities has limited this growth (German International Student Statistics, 2020). Although Hungary has a relatively small number of Chinese students compared to English-speaking countries, and there was a very small number of Chinese students at Hungarian universities before 2013, they are now the fastest-growing group of international students. For this reason, the CEE countries, including Hungary, receive relatively large numbers of Chinese students, and it is mostly the English-language programmes that attract them. Their number rose by 73% in 2019 compared to in 2014 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020), as can be seen in Figure 4.

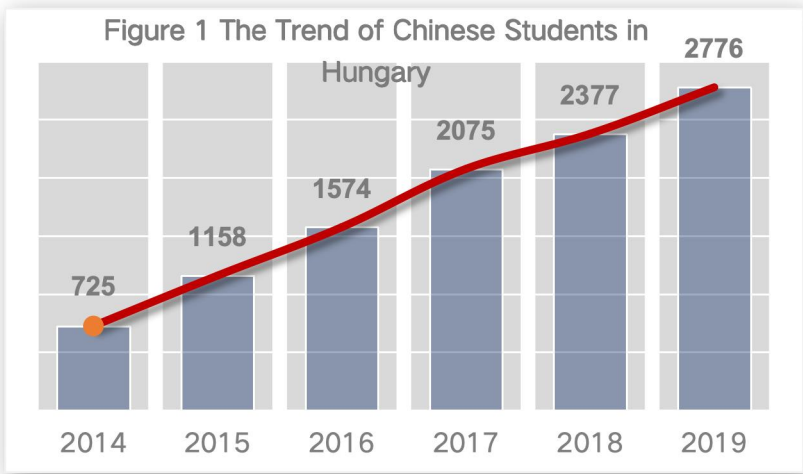


Figure 4. Number of Chinese Students in Hungary  
(Source: Hungarian Statistical Office (2020))

Chinese students constituted Hungary's second-largest international student population (after Germans) in 2019 and the largest group of non-European international students in Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020). Education is a crucial element in attaining higher socioeconomic status (Zhu, 2020), and it is vital to understand the socioeconomic status of the significant numbers of Chinese students in Hungary since this

influences their learning outcomes, as do the kinds of economic, social, and cultural capital they possess. Knowing this, policymakers at the institutional and governmental levels could adopt useful strategies for enhancing learning environments, producing positive educational outcomes, fostering equitable education systems, and ameliorating the impact of SES on educational attainment and mobility. Moreover, it is also essential to reveal what motivates Chinese students to choose Hungary as a place to pursue their studies because Hungary was not always a typical target country for international student mobility, especially not from China.

Based on narrative interviews with 26 Chinese students in Hungary, this article examines the social, economic, and cultural capital of the group. It also aims to uncover the major motivational factors which cause Chinese students to choose Hungary. The first part of the article outlines cultural mobility theory as a theoretical framework and is followed by a detailed presentation of the data collection process and analysis. The findings and discussion reveal that the majority of Chinese students in Hungary have a working and lower-middle class background that influenced their choice of country. Ultimately, this empirical investigation illustrates that Chinese students often compromise by studying in Hungary, as Anglo-Saxon and Western countries are unaffordable. The choice of Hungary is thus a pragmatic one, and it is not a dream destination.

This article contributes to theories of cultural mobility because it provides new understandings of the trajectories of lower-middle socioeconomic status students. The study finds that migration to Hungary involves upwardly mobile individuals through the Hungarian education. This study offers insights for policymakers in China and higher education institutions in Hungary and its immediate vicinity, not least by increasing understanding of the different social statuses of students and how to promote equal opportunities in education and society to improve educational attainment.

### *7.3 Theoretical Framework: Cultural Mobility*

The number of students studying abroad is steadily growing, and this contributes to the internationalisation of universities – a process that, by necessity, involves sociocultural adaptation and accumulation (Savicki, 2008). This phenomenon needs to be investigated in depth. With globalisation and knowledge proliferating across the world, international educational mobility is regarded as an effective means of increasing intercultural



understanding and cultural accumulation (Messelink et al., 2015). There is a debate between proponents of cultural reproduction (CR) and cultural mobility (CM) theories (Blaskó, 2003; Breen et al., 2009; Zhu, 2020). Breen et al. (2009) demonstrated that more privileged students have greater cultural capital that can be transformed into educational gains; hence, cultural capital is viewed as a mediator between educational achievements and origin (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In contrast, CM asserts that underprivileged students are more likely to benefit from cultural capital that compensates for their disadvantages (DiMaggio, 1982; Harvey et al., 2016).

#### ***a. Cultural Reproduction***

International educational mobility has risen among (upper)-middle-class students. Regarding the phenomenon of cultural reproduction, Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) argue that parents from the upper-middle classes support their children by ensuring that they receive the most prestigious education, and in contemporary societies, international education contributes to cultural reproduction in these families. Thøgersen (2016) also indicated that middle-class families send their offspring to Western Europe to obtain higher cultural capital, even though a Western education does not always pay off economically.

Education has been seen as a top priority by Chinese families. Many people in China regard educational resources as an instrument for changing their lives and climbing ever higher on the social ladder. Most Chinese parents believe that better education will contribute to their children's professional status and give them more opportunities to get a decent job with higher socioeconomic status (Wang et al., 2014). Following Bourdieu's analysis, Lee (2011), Waters et al. (2011), and Xiang and Shen (2009) highlighted that students with a well-educated family background reproduce their class advantage. Wang (2021) undertook Bourdieusian analysis of the middle-high sociocultural capital of Chinese international graduates who study in the United States and concluded that parents put effort into their child(ren)'s educational attainment.

#### ***b. Cultural Mobility***

Cultural mobility theory was proposed by DiMaggio (1982), who argued that parents in the lower-middle class adopt the same strategy, making efforts to pursue a similar approach to accumulating cultural capital through schooling, as well as encouraging their children's educational success in order to achieve upward mobility. Several other scholars have arrived

at similar conclusions (Daloz, 2013; Harvey et al., 2016; Lu, 2015; Wong et al., 2015). The emphasis on the importance of education in poverty alleviation indicates its relevance for helping low and middle-lower socioeconomic status (SES) families escape the vicious poverty cycle.

For people of low and middle-lower socio-economic backgrounds, schooling is a means of achieving their ambition for social mobility (Boyden, 2013; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). Parents from working-class backgrounds may adopt strategies similar to those of the middle classes, supporting their children to achieve educational success through parental effort (Devine, 2004). In particular, people from a principally working-class background push themselves to acquire skills, thus leading to educational success (Goldthorpe, 2007). Since working-class families consider postsecondary and higher education to be a risky use of their resources, they desire greater certainty about educational success when they invest in higher education (Lynch & Riordan, 1998).

An equal distribution of cultural capital in the population would lead to lower educational inequality. Therefore, cultural mobility should be promoted across social classes and benefit students who are from disadvantaged families. Crul et al. (2017) concluded that immigrants with poor education may become steeply upwardly mobile by studying how they can overcome obstacles through education. Meng (2020) pointed out that the modernisation of China has resulted in growing competition for a good education, in combination with the global trend of ‘intensive mothering’, which has led to increased attention on education among Chinese parents, especially mothers. At the same time, educational attainment is socially structured; middle-class families fight to prevent their children from dropping out of relatively advantageous positions in society, while working-class parents, perceiving the significance of education equally, are more realistic but also invest heavily in their children’s education.

Promoting educational equity is one of the main ways for the Chinese government to secure low and middle-lower-SES students’ academic paths. By this means, scholarship-based support by the government that contributes to the success in international mobility could lead to a more successful career trajectory; and eventually, it could potentially create greater economic prosperity for the nation (Chui, 2013). In addition, Chinese students are influenced by China's ancient Confucian tradition of seeing education as a fundamental cultural value

(Woronov, 2015). Lee (2014) also argued that immigration policy reduces the poverty rate and increases the cultural capital of the second generation.

There is evidence that working class parents have high expectations about their children's higher education, although they lack economic, cultural, and social capital (Kipnis, 2011; Sheng, 2014). Khattab (2015) explained that cultural capital is a result of aspirations, expectations, and achievements in child-rearing practices, whereby members of the dominant class acclimatise their children to a particular work ethic and orientation towards education and employment, as manifested in their aspirations, expectations, and achievements. Parents in a worse economic situation and with less cultural capital will find it more difficult to support their children to develop a different and better social and economic destiny than their own.

A growing number of lower-middle-income families support their children's studies abroad, following the rules of the global education hierarchy. Chen & Ross (2015) demonstrated that Chinese students' beliefs in a global education hierarchy are reflected in their choice of universities and majors, as well as their perceptions of academic quality. Lörz et al. (2016) differentiated students' motivations for pursuing education abroad at various phases of the life stage. For instance, some students who would like to study abroad might avoid it because they lack financial support, have poor language skills, or low self-esteem.

### *c. The Bologna Process and educational mobility with respect to Hungary*

Internationalisation activities in many European nations are dependent on the higher education institutions themselves and the policies and plans of the central government. The Bologna declaration of 1999 was designed to create comparable degrees across the forty-eight countries that signed up to the related policy and practice changes under the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) umbrella. In 2012, countries in the EHEA established and implemented international educational mobility initiatives.

Additionally, the European Commission's (2017) 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture' initiative aims to increase educational mobility and improve cross-border collaboration. Several countries in Europe reported that strategically addressing students' incoming mobility on the national level had enhanced their overall student population. Eleven European countries reported that their entire higher education system is associated with an internationalisation educational mobility plan (European Commission,

2017). In this regard, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a new act, which amends the 2011 Higher Education Act. The amendments added new requirements regarding the names of foreign higher education institutions, the requirement for bilateral agreements between Hungary and the foreign higher education institution's non-European Economic Area (EEA) country of origin, the provision of higher education services in the country of origin, as well as additional registration requirements (European Commission, 2018).

Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds attend different types of institutions and courses with varying modes of study. Students from the working class are over-represented in lower-prestige courses that predominantly result in unclear professional outcomes (Fehérvári et al., 2016; Nyüsti, 2018). Some of the Chinese students who study in Hungary are regarded as disadvantaged in terms of cultural capital, although there is little literature regarding the situation in Central and Eastern European countries (Li, 2020). Hungary aims to attract more Chinese students and supports around 500 per year with the *Stipendium Hungaricum*, which attracts international students by implementing multilateral agreements for international students to study in Hungary that cover their tuition fees and funding housing/living costs. Additionally, there is a growing number of fee-paying Chinese students.

Li and Primecz (2021) suggested that Chinese students studying in Hungary contribute to the development of beneficial networks between Hungary and China. Hungary, a non-English speaking nation, is seeing an increase in Chinese students for a variety of reasons: (1) the *Stipendium Hungaricum* scholarship promotes proficiency in both English and Hungarian, a critical component of international educational mobility; (2) the majority of Hungarian educational institutions offer language-training programmes to assist international students who do not meet language requirements to begin their academic studies and thus provide a 'bridge', with particular emphasis on incoming Chinese students, in relation to becoming acquainted with the necessary academic skills and adjusting to the local culture; (3) the Hungarian education platform promotes academic mobility to other European regions and the entire world through programmes such as the CEMS Master's in International Management (CEMS). Little research has hitherto attempted to determine the SES of Chinese students in Hungary. This study addresses the following questions: (1) What is the socioeconomic status of Chinese students in Hungary? (2) What economic, social, and cultural capital do they possess? And (3) what are their primary motivations for choosing Hungary?

#### 7.4 Methodology and Data

The research questions necessitated a qualitative methodology. Consequently, semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted with twenty-six Chinese students studying in Hungary. This was augmented by observation before and after the interviews, which was noted in a research diary. Following the guidelines for narrative interviews, life stories were collected about the respondents' experiences in Hungary (Kvale, 1996; Rosile et al., 2013). The interview covered events and considerations before arrival, including formative education; previous higher education (if any); the motivation for moving to Hungary to study; and the interviewees' experiences and plans for after they complete their studies. This article, however, focuses on the first part – namely, their family backgrounds and their motivations for studying in Hungary.

A purposive sampling method was applied to create the most reliable sample. The sampling procedure aimed to ensure maximum variation among the interviewees (cf. Horváth & Mitev, 2015). The first author, a Chinese doctoral student in Hungary, contacted Chinese students at different universities in Budapest and other university towns in Hungary (Pécs, Debrecen, and Szeged) and asked her contacts to introduce her to Chinese students at the chosen university. Most of the interviewees were not in personal contact with the interviewer before the phase of data collection, but the first author could relate to the experiences of her new contacts relatively easily. Thereafter, semi-structured face-to-face narrative interviews were conducted by the first author in Mandarin. The participants' demographic information can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2. Participants' demographic information

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Overall Sample (N=26)</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	14	54%
Female	12	46%
<b>Education Level</b>		

Bachelor	13	50%
Master	9	35%
Ph.D.	4	15%
<b>Study location</b>		
Budapest area	10	38%
Non-Budapest area	16	62%
<b>Major</b>		
Humanities	9	35%
Science	9	35%
Medical field	8	30%
<b>Financial Sources</b>		
Tuition fee-paying	15	58%
Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship	11	42%
<b>Age</b>		
Average age	23.8	/
Max value (year)	29	/
Min value (year)	17	/

The respondents gave informed consent before the interview, and all interviews were recorded with their permission. They lasted 60–90 minutes and were conducted at the end of November 2019. The interviewer visited the interviewees at their homes, in a quiet café, or in study rooms in dormitories. The audio data were converted to written transcripts in Chinese, and NVivo 9 software was used to assist with data analysis by coding categories.

The author adapted elements of the grounded theory (G.T.) approach for the data analysis, as summarised by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Interviews and research diary notes

were the basis of the data analysis. The first phase, open coding of data, involved the naming and categorisation of phenomena through close examination. This was followed by axial coding, with the explicit aim of understanding the data more deeply. Finally, selective coding was applied, whereby more abstract analysis was conducted, and the grounded model was constructed from the empirical data. After open coding, axial and selective coding were applied. Extracts from the open and axial coding are presented in two tables in the Appendix (Tables 2 and 3), and selective coding is presented in Figure 5.

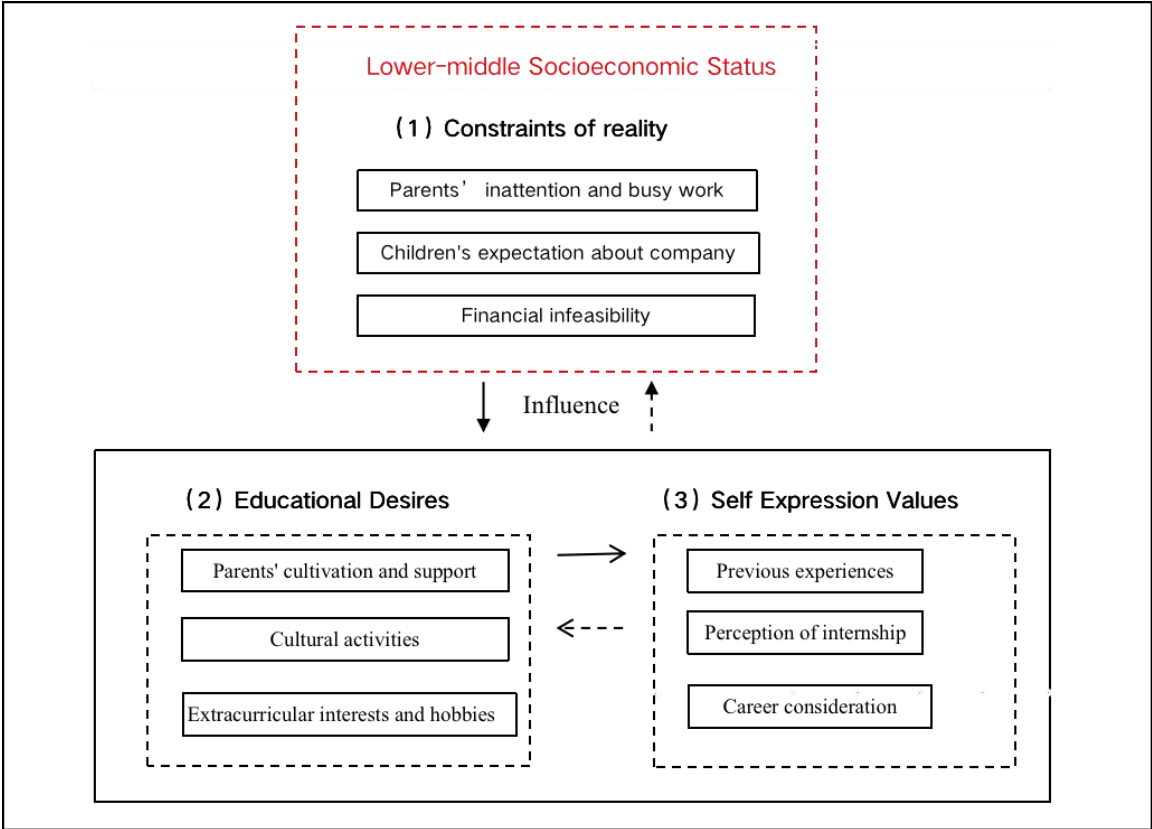


Figure 5. Selective coding  
(Source: Author conceptualisation)

*7.5 Findings and Discussion*

The majority of interviewees described their family as lower middle class. The financial conditions of their parents were weak compared to the Chinese average, while the parents' education and occupation were also indicative of low social status. Beyond that, the geographical location of their home and the cultural consumption habits of their family reinforced the finding of low status; moreover, childhood hobbies and extracurricular activities contributed to their upward mobility, according to interviewees.

Although many of the interviewees were aware of their disadvantageous social situations, they were determined to change their socioeconomic status by studying. Chinese parents sent their children to Hungarian universities, ultimately aiming to enhance both their individual and familial cultural capital on their return to China. Their international studies represented a conscious step towards their economic, social, and cultural advancement. Consequently, the respondents were committed to working hard, and in most cases, their parents had not supported them economically while they were growing up.

*d. The social, economic, and cultural background of Chinese students studying in Hungary*

The narrative interviews directly addressed family background from the outset, and most interviewees voluntarily shared information about their parents, their occupation, and childhood memories. There was only one interviewee who seemed to want to avoid providing direct information about his family background: he concealed such details and excused this on the grounds that he was too busy to care about his parents. The remaining 25 interviewees explained that the limited economic resources in their childhood had resulted in limited access to education. Although family income was a very sensitive topic, some interviewees shared information about this openly and directly with the interviewer. While the main focus of the study was cultural capital rather than economic status, explicit expressions, unconscious comments, and observations of interviewees' outfits and personal circumstances made their social class visible. Indeed, some interviewees even mentioned poor housing conditions in their childhood. One respondent openly described his family's poverty, elaborating on his parents' working-class jobs, which had resulted in their low or maximum mid-level socioeconomic status.

*I definitely would say I am from a poor, poor family... It is true, my father is a blue-collar worker, his wages are too low, and he was transferred to another sector. My mother has never had a job her whole life; yes, she is a housewife. My mother sacrifices herself and has cared for me and my father all her life. (Interviewee 9)*

Some participants migrated within China before emigration; the geographical location of their birthplace and childhood was also mentioned in some cases. These were rarely upscale neighbourhoods but rather rural areas. While some interviewees came from metropolises,



such as Shanghai, with local Hukou (户口, cadastral management), they still originated from relatively disadvantaged areas and confessed that their families were not wealthy:

*As regards previous work, my father was a teacher who taught physics in high school, and my mother ran her own small manufacturing business, but she has sold the product line already. Although I was born in Shanghai, I would not say every person from Shanghai is rich.* (Interviewee 16)

Although family economic resources played a fundamental role in educational trajectories, many interviewees admitted that their parents had cultivated, supported, and, in particular, invested in their educational paths, even though their parents' education level was mainly secondary and only rarely tertiary, and sometimes less than average. Moreover, every participant explicitly claimed that having support with their education from their family impacted their choice to study abroad and pursue education in Hungary.

Most participants indicated that their parents expected that their international education would contribute to their upward social mobility and that their studies abroad would be a way of accumulating different forms of capital (Harvey et al., 2016; Lu, 2015; Wong et al., 2015). Perhaps surprisingly, however, Interviewee 23 turned down an offer from a famous British university and opted for a scholarship from a non-Budapest university to further her doctoral studies; the primary reason was that the tuition fee was so high in Britain that she feared putting more of a financial burden on her family. Thus, the Chinese cultural logic of filial piety remained a moral imperative in most interviewees' transnational choices.

Children appreciated their parents' investments and sacrifices for their education. Family affirmation helped the students feel more confident about their transitional experience abroad; their families supported their educational endeavours, in spite of their families' everyday fiscal challenges. The most important form of support was encouragement in their English-language education. One interviewee remarked on how his mother had concentrated on his English skills since childhood, even though she was a labourer and did not speak English. Another interviewee acknowledged the investment in her English language studies of her parents:

*Although my mother does not speak English very well, she helped me get in touch with an English environment very early on; I started taking English classes in the third grade of*

*elementary school. Actually, it was quite difficult for me at that time, but I really appreciated that my mother put pressure on my education. (Interviewee 21)*

Another statement by an interviewee exemplified his family's focus on English studies:

*My dad created an outstanding environment for me; for instance, he encouraged me to listen to the English radio every morning. (Interviewee 3)*

The other aspect of educational support was the encouragement to study further. An interviewee described his father's concern about his further studies, despite his family's location in a socially disadvantaged area:

*Believe it or not, China attaches a great deal of importance to education, which is essential for boosting economic capital. You know, my parents are successful 'North drift' (北漂, 'beipiao'), which means they immigrated and survived in Beijing, eventually. But my family was still out in the 'fifth rings' (五环, 'wuhuan') – that is, far away from the central area, like in a suburb. However, my father still wanted me and my naughty brother to get educated because he figured that education and being equipped with knowledge would be helpful to our careers and achieving our dreams. (Interviewee 23)*

Another interviewee explained that her parents attached great importance to education, despite the fact she was a girl in an environment in which there was 'more attention to boys' (重男轻女, 'zhongnanqingnv'); her parents had deposited money into an education fund and encouraged her to continue her doctoral studies abroad. She was really grateful for the educational support from her family, while another interviewee highlighted the role of her grandmother in her cultural development; she was taught how to write calligraphy, which is considered to be part of the privileged knowledge of the well-educated elite:

*My grandma has been a great influence on my mother's generation and me. What I want to emphasise is that education is very crucial to our personality development. And my grandparents taught me how to write calligraphy, which has had a great influence on my current writing. (Interviewee 13)*

Beyond that, supporting children's extracurricular interests and hobbies – for instance, dancing, playing an instrument, sports, singing, art, and so on – was typical among economically fragile families. While these extracurricular activities might be characteristics of

middle-class families in most societies, families with high educational expectations of their children tried to provide middle-class educational support so their children could achieve higher socioeconomic status. These attempts often caused financial burdens for the families. However, most families invested more in purely academic activities and less in extracurricular ones. Last but not least, such hobbies had eased the situation of Chinese students in Hungary: one interviewee highlighted her experience with learning to play musical instruments. Her mother had fostered her extracurricular hobbies:

*Neither my father nor my mother is well educated. Even though she was under economic pressure, my mother still invested in an extracurricular pursuit [for me] – the Chinese dulcimer (扬琴, ‘Yangqin’) – in my childhood. I remember that after three years I was educated by a famous tutor, and she encouraged me to reach a high level of skill on the dulcimer, and my mother continuously supported me. (Interviewee 9)*

Well-off households may have schedules for participating in cultural activities and interact in a process of ‘concerted cultivation’ that elicits children's abilities and talents, while parents in the lower classes and disadvantaged families depend heavily on ‘the accomplishment of natural growth’, and encourage their children to develop naturally within their boundaries and allow them to develop spontaneously (Lareau, 2002). However, in China, education is regarded as fundamental and is prioritised during childrearing by parents of varying socioeconomic classes; they instil Chinese characteristics in their children via their cultivation in a purposive process, rather than permitting their spontaneous development.

This approach is described by the self-expression values of the Inglehart–Welzel cultural map, which indicate a strong focus on subjective well-being; this signals a change in child-rearing values away from hard work towards creativity and tolerance (Haerpfer et al., 2020). However, our respondents were often left unattended when parents were busy with work, and several interviewees spoke of their vulnerability. One interviewee even explained that their parents’ lack of work-life balance had resulted in neglect.

*As my parents were busy at work, they did not spend too much time with me, I felt that they wanted to be with me, but the reality is they needed to work hard for a living. (Interviewee 3)*

Several other interviewees also complained of parents’ inattention and focus on business.

*My dad had a small agricultural business, which was quite far from home – six hundred kilometres away. I remember my parents didn't always stay with me and my younger brother when we were young. Instead, my grandma took care of us.* (Interviewee 2)

*My parents were running a small business. They were not with me much from when I was young, you know, they were busy making money to support the family, then I went to boarding school in junior high, and I was only home at weekends.* (Interviewee 10)

This explanation is based on the perspective of children's expectations of their parents rather than the traditional viewpoint of an adult-centred and dominated childhood. Some interviewees were extremely dissatisfied with their parents:

*My childhood was unaccompanied. I lived alone, without the care of any elders. That is the reason I did not study well at my primary and secondary school. Actually, we don't talk a lot, as they only care about their own business.* (Interviewee 22)

Most interviewees revealed that they did not develop the habit of engaging in cultural activities, such as visiting museums, theatres, and so on. However, several interviewees showed great interest in cultural activities when they were teenagers. A few interviewees remained uninterested in culture, as they had not experienced this in their childhood. Many other interviewees initiated their own cultural studies and became well-informed about art. One interviewee became a huge theatre fan when he was studying for his bachelor's degree in China.

From this sociocultural perspective, studying abroad seems to be a step towards increasing intergenerational social mobility. Interviewee 13 from a non-Budapest university provided an interesting quotation that illustrated his views about Chinese students with a poor socioeconomic background who dream of studying in Hungary:

*Take me as an example; I come from a rural area in China. My dad couldn't work for physical [medical] reasons; thus, my mom was the only one to support the family. In fact, not all students who go abroad are from wealthy families: the [structure of the] Chinese population does not mean that all people are at the top, for sure. Many extremely ordinary families like us, children from low- and middle-income conditions, dream of going abroad, which means that coming to Hungary is an opportunity for [them].* (Interviewee 13)

He added that the fact that he studies abroad, although not in a highly celebrated British or American university, gives him a unique chance for social mobility:

*I may not need to use the knowledge [I would have got from going] to a high-level university in Britain or the United States. What I have learnt at the Hungarian university has enabled me to find a very good job in my area. Personally, that is: different situations apply to different people. (Interviewee 13)*

The number of Chinese students in Hungary is small in comparison to Hungarian students and to Chinese students in Anglo-Saxon or other Western countries. Interviewees of lower-middle socioeconomic status were determined to study abroad and believed that their studies would contribute to their mobility. Students and parents expected that studying abroad would help them build their social and cultural capital. Parents typically support their children to continue their education, despite their own lack of economic and cultural resources. Parents primarily and equally encourage their children throughout their education, and both children and parents anticipate a high rate of return on their investment in the former's future.

#### ***4.1 Reasons for studying in Hungary***

The family background of the interviewees was working class or lower-middle class. Families made efforts to secure their children's future by encouraging them to study abroad. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate why Hungary was a target country when choosing international mobility. Some previous (practically derived) perceptions about working experiences and specialised courses impacted the interviewees' choices, but the main reason for studying in Hungary was its financial feasibility.

The previous practical perception of work experience also influenced interviewees' decisions; specifically, some participants had encountered a working environment at a time when they lacked good credentials and wanted to pursue further education abroad, but their choices were limited by their financial constraints. One interviewee explained that she had worked as an English teacher and she was considering broadening her horizons and strengthening her future opportunities through obtaining a master's degree.

*I worked as an English teacher in the northern part of China for three years, during which time I helped lots of local students to improve their English knowledge so they could pursue their dreams [of going] abroad. After my teaching, I started questioning whether I should go abroad to broaden my horizons and gain international experience*

*rather than stay in my small hometown for my whole lifetime. And I am sure that I can benefit from the international environment in Budapest. (Interviewee 1)*

Additionally, complicated life situations, such as educational diversions and personal challenges, had made some interviewees' lives difficult, and one way of escaping was to study abroad.

*My personal experience is more complicated, I did not graduate from junior high school, and I went to a joint program that secondary school and college as a social candidate. (Interviewee 22)*

Indecision and dissatisfaction with work situations were also decisive factors in choosing to study abroad. A Hungarian university education and the associated studies represented a lot more than just obtaining a specific degree; this meant practical academic achievement, diversified attitudes and values, increased language skills, and so on.

*I did three kinds of jobs before I came to Hungary; each job lasted for 3-4 months, which was an experience that frustrated me a lot. I paid more attention to my career trajectory than my emotional well-being. I had to apply to a university in Hungary in order to maximise my academic competitiveness on the job market. (Interviewee 3)*

Another student enrolled in a 'lower-ranking' university after a summer internship, as he realised that he would be an assembly line worker if he did not improve his qualifications. In agreement with his mother, he decided to study abroad rather than continue his education in China.

*My initial [period of] study abroad came at the end of my internship. You know, it was really hard and tiring to do manual work without any stimulation. My mother and I both realised that I would have no bright career if I did not choose to study abroad. (Interviewee 11)*

While the decision to study abroad was rather straightforward, it was difficult to find an appropriate place due to financial constraints, but Hungary seemed to be affordable to even less fortunate candidates. Needless to say, the relatively generous scholarship scheme was a great help for many students in relation to pursuing their dreams of studying abroad. One might assume that there would be a clear socioeconomic distinction between students who receive a scholarship and those who self-finance their studies in Hungary, but the present

study could not identify this. Eleven self-funding students affirmed that they had considered the financial burden on their families when asked about their reasons for choosing Hungary. One interviewee was very explicit about the financial problems that his family was facing, even though he was a self-financed student in Hungary:

*I understand our family was poor during my childhood, and I do need to take into consideration my parents' financial capacity. I did not consider the USA or other countries that have good opportunities and resources. I think Hungarian education is affordable for me and my family. (Interviewee 22)*

As a self-funding student, Interviewee 4's initially chose a British university, but she changed her mind after considering the tuition fee:

*The UK has always given everyone the impression of [providing a] high-quality education. I dreamt of going to England for two years after studying in Hungary. However, the tuition fee was increased after the plan to leave the European Union, so I needed to consider my financial capacity. (Interviewee 4)*

Two other interviewees practically acknowledged that although they were ambitious to study in the US or the UK, they needed to consider the financial reality, and they wanted to support their studies on their own, not with a student loan. The tuition fee for medical schools is high all over the world, but there are considerable differences among countries in this respect and living costs also vary. In terms of the tuition fee in the medical field, two interviewees who had been in Hungary for the last ten years confirmed that the tuition fee in Hungary is much lower than in the United States, while the quality of education, medicine, and professional opportunities are considered equal by Chinese students.

Finally, although some Chinese students who study in Hungary might be academically less talented and have weaker English than international students in Anglo-Saxon countries, participants regard Hungarian higher education as a good opportunity when considering their career prospects. A direct question about the three most important reasons the respondents are pursuing studies in Hungary revealed that worries about their future career and financial constraints were the most important. A large majority of the Chinese students were realistic and reflected on their opportunities and potential future gains, therefore, they use self-expression to pursue educational and career prospect. One interviewee spoke of her initial source of motivation to study in Hungary.

*I became qualified through my Chinese master's degree ... but I don't want to be a statistician all my life. What I hope is that I can have my own project team within five to ten years, step by step. (Interviewee 23)*

Cost-benefit analysis had shaped the interviewees' decision to study in Hungary. One interviewee from a small town in western China wanted to achieve a respectable social position in the future. She mentioned that she had done research on Hungarian education before moving and found that there were many Nobel Prize winners from Hungary, so the education level in Hungary must be acceptable. Likewise, another interviewee acknowledged the quality of education at his university.

*I need to consider my future and the reasons for studying in Hungary; one is the university's connections, and the other is an important factor – I think the Hungarian agricultural profession is among the most developed in Europe, so I chose to do my agricultural bachelor's in Hungary. (Interviewee 13)*

Another interviewee is a veterinarian. He mentioned the current situation in the veterinary industry in China and that he wanted to be a high-level veterinarian:

*China is a big agricultural country, but the development of veterinary science is completely different from that of the European veterinary field. You know, municipal veterinary practice is basically different from that in towns. Hence, I started to understand foreign education systems and considered going abroad at that time. [...] I value the accumulation of experience and improvement in my ability. (Interviewee 8)*

The quotations above help verify the argument of Hansen and Thøgersen (2015) that the Chinese state has developed policies concerning students' individual courses of study according to a framework of national development. Furthermore, other interviewees came because specific majors – such as a combination of law and market policy in the form of an 'economic policy major' – were appealing and not to be found in other countries. The respondent wanted to return to their homeland to work in their field or to serve as a bridge between China and CEE when they graduated. The reputation of certain Hungarian universities was considered to be high, and this attracted some students.

*After searching the official website, I found that economic policy was very suitable for my interests, and combined my bachelor-level legal studies and current market policy.*



*The courses mainly focus on legal provisions and concepts. The first consideration must be [that the course is] in line with my interests and future career plans. (Interviewee 3)*

Another interviewee had chosen to work with an anti-cancer research team in an institution because of his academic interests. Meanwhile, another interviewee had paid attention to practical work: he mentioned that his university was in an important industrial town in Hungary and that the metallurgical industry was the focus of his interest. Moreover, another interviewee explained his choice as being due to his career plans as a curator:

*I want to become a curator to help artists in the near future. My career plan is currently the only motivation. (Interviewee 6)*

The above quotation demonstrates the respondent's strong self-expression. It is also worth mentioning that the choice of location was mainly made by the students themselves, and their parents had supported their children's international studies. This represented a transformation of the traditional familial hierarchy. One interviewee explained this directly:

*I made the decision to study law in Hungary. Actually, my father was initially worried about my safety as a lawyer. But this time, I just mentioned it to him, and he finally agreed. (Interviewee 7)*

Overall, the interviewees with a lower-middle socioeconomic background were determined to study abroad. They believed that their studies would contribute to their mobility and that their socioeconomic status would increase. Their parents also encouraged their children. Students made a decision about which country to apply to, but this was constrained by financial matters; several students had made a compromise by choosing to study in Hungary instead of in the UK or the USA. Initially, fee-paying and scholarship students seemed to be distinct, but deeper investigation revealed that they were in a similar socioeconomic situation and were limited by financial constraints.

## *7.6 Conclusions*

There are three crucial factors for Chinese students from lower-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds who study in Hungary: the constraints of their SES, educational aspirations, and their desire for self-expression. Their parents' preoccupation with work and concomitant inattention and students' expectations about their parents' financial support and presence contributed to the constrained reality of educational aspirations. Although these

constraints existed, the parents had aspirations for their children, which can be seen in their cultivation of cultural activities and hobbies at an early age. On the other hand, career aspirations were managed during this relatively early period of development.

This study has highlighted that the socioeconomic status of Chinese students studying in Hungary is lower than that of those studying in Anglo-Saxon or other Western countries. Students and their parents expected that studying abroad would increase their social and cultural capital. Parents usually encouraged their children to continue studying, although they themselves were short of economic and cultural capital, and typically supported their children's international studies. Those with scholarships and tuition-fee payers were not socially distinct groups because both were financially constrained. While the students dreamt of studying in Anglo-Saxon countries, most of them compromised by choosing Hungary. Some of them were fortunate to find specialised courses that were not widely available, but most of them made their decision based on conscious or unconscious cost-benefit analysis, and Hungary seemed to be a reasonable choice.

From a theoretical perspective, this study provides a new understanding of the trajectories of students with a lower-middle-class socioeconomic status and identifies factors that determine their international mobility. By distinguishing those with a lower-middle SES from those with working-class backgrounds, student flows into Hungary can be better delineated, as can the aspirations of these two distinct groups. These findings are also relevant for Chinese employers since they will enable them to create new strategies for analysing prospective employees' accumulation of Hungarian credentials and their relevance in the labour market. Furthermore, beyond developing a better understanding of the challenges that Chinese students face, the results of this study are relevant for Hungarian higher education institutions and national policymakers. Ultimately, the findings may enhance the capacity of institutions to create diverse learning environments for Chinese students, while policymakers can use them to ameliorate the impact of students' different social statuses by fostering more equitable international education systems.

One limitation of the research is that it concentrated on students' socioeconomic backgrounds and motivations as applied to international higher education in Hungary and did not include international students from other countries who may find themselves in similar situations. Follow-up studies of other Chinese students in Central Europe are invited to generate further empirical evidence about the transformative nature of studying

internationally. Moreover, further study is needed to examine the nature of the accumulation of intercultural benefits (and challenges) for Chinese students in Hungary and the wider vicinity.

## 8. Second Paper: Understanding the Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Review and Directions for Future Research

[Pályakezdő expatrióták, különös tekintettel a nem vállalati kiküldöttekre (self-initiated expatriates; SIE). Szakirodalmi áttekintés és jövőbeli irányok]

### *8.1 Abstract*

While the literature on self-initiated expatriation is well-established in management, no systematic investigation has yet been conducted to explore the specificities of early career expatriation. This review article aims to identify and analyse publications that uniquely focus on self-initiated expatriates, who decide to start their career abroad, either with little or no prior work experience. After identifying relevant publications in this specific research field, the authors discuss the personal career motivations and behaviours of early career self-initiated expatriates and the relevance of this phenomenon for the global workforce. The contributions of this article are twofold. First, they integrate the relevant research findings from recent decades on early career self-initiated expatriates. Second, they provide information about managing early career SIEs and propose a future research agenda to address the knowledge gap identified in this review and apply the findings to practice.

**Keywords:** *literature review, early career self-initiated expatriate, future agenda, multiparadigm literature review, functionalist approach, interpretivist approach*

### **Absztrakt**

A nem vállalati kiküldötteknek (self-initiated expatriates; SIE) bejáratott irodalmuk van a menedzsmentben, azonban a pályakezdő önzdeményező expatrióták sajátosságaival eddig még senki sem foglalkozott. Jelen összefoglaló cikk célja, hogy azonosítsa és elemezze azokat a publikációkat, amelyek kifejezetten erre a csoportra fókuszálnak, azaz azokra, akik úgy döntenek, hogy külföldön kezdik pályafutásukat, beleértve a munkatapasztalat nélküli vagy a csekély szakmai tapasztalattal rendelkezőket. A kutatási terület releváns publikációinak azonosítása után a szerzők megvitatják a pályakezdő expatriáltak személyes karriermotivációit és viselkedését, valamint e jelenség relevanciáját a globális munkaerő szempontjából. A szakirodalmi áttekintés kétoldalú. Először is integrálják az elmúlt évtizedek pályakezdő önzdeményező külföldiekkel kapcsolatos releváns kutatások eredményeit. Másodszor, tájékoztatást nyújtanak a pályakezdő SIE-k kezeléséről, és jövőbeli kutatási menetrendet javasolnak az áttekintésben azonosított tudásbeli hiányosságok kezelésére, és az

eredmények gyakorlati alkalmazására. Különös hangsúlyt fektetnek a karriermotivációjuk, viselkedésük és a globális karrierhez való hozzájárulásuk megértésére. A cikknek két fontos hozzáadott értéke van: először is integrálja az elmúlt évtizedek releváns kutatási eredményeit a pályakezdő expatriótákról; másodsor, a jövőbeli kutatási irányokat azonosítja.

**Kulcsszavak:** *szakirodalmi áttekintés, pályakezdő expatrióta, jövőbeli kutatási irányok, multiparadigmikus szakirodalmi áttekintés, funkcionalista megközelítés, konstruktivista megközelítés]*

## 8.2 Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the development of a globalized economy, the knowledge economy, technological innovation, migration flows, specialisation, work values, and labour markets have all changed dramatically. This has profoundly affected the individual career development of employees and the organisational career management of companies. The growing number of professionals who seek global careers beyond their home country (Hajo et al., 2019) makes it necessary to investigate expatriation, with a specific focus on self-initiated expatriation. It is assumed that an increasing number of young graduates within self-initiated expatriates are deciding to start their careers in new countries. This article focuses on their specific characteristics.

There are two distinct sets of academic research: one focusing on self-initiated expatriates independently of their career stage or age, and the other focusing on early career professionals. SIE literature focuses on a range of topics, including motivation (Thorn, 2009), adjustment (Begley et al., 2008; Peltokorpi & Jintae, 2009; Meurer et al., 2019), career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008; Al Ariss & Jawad, 2011), career development (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Brewster et al., 2019), and repatriation (Chiang et al., 2017; David et al., 2020), while the literature on early career professionals deals with topics such as seeking challenging opportunities (Dries et al., 2008; Thorn, 2009; Baluku et al., 2018), career development (Pereira et al., 2016) cultural adaptation (Wechtler, 2018), repatriation (Goštautaitė et al., 2020), career advancement (McNulty et al., 2016), and career challenges (Waxin & Brewster, 2020). While there are overlaps between the two distinct sets of academic research, early career self-initiated expatriates have not received the necessary attention. This article aims to fill this gap by investigating the specific characteristics of early career SIEs, their motivation to start their careers abroad, and their impact on global HRM.

As a theoretical introduction we review the terminology of self-initiated expatriation in general, and Doherty's (2013) three level of analysis in particular, to clarify the definitions and concepts used. Next, we explain the methodology of literature search and selection: we adopt a multi-paradigm approach, which includes a systematic review and co-occurrence analysis of a large database with functionalist principles as the first wave, and an in-depth investigation of a smaller, focused set of articles applying qualitative text analysis following interpretivist epistemology as the second wave. Our findings highlight that early career self-initiated expatriates are not a sporadic phenomenon in employment, and their presence has an impact on different countries at the macro level. Organizations need to develop strategies to effectively harvest the benefits of unique skills and knowledge of young professionals who seek employment outside of their home countries. Finally, personal motivation and cultural adaptation require further attention at the individual level.

### *8.3 Theoretical Introduction and Framework*

#### 8.3.1 Self-initiated Terminology

Expatriation is a term introduced for experts who are sent for international assignments by their employers, mainly for a limited time period, to distinguish company-assigned and self-initiated expatriates (Tharenou, 2015) described self-initiated expatriates, as expatriation is their own choice, they seek employment and their move is self-funded. Consequently, SIEs are characterised by self-initiated international relocation, regular employment, intentions of a temporary stay, and skilled qualifications (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). While "self-initiated expatriation" is a well-defined term in literature, there is less clarity around the term "early career SIE". The lack of a uniform definition makes it difficult to identify early career SIEs. However, we can ensure that early career self-initiated expatriation is a starting point of their career (newcomer), not merely their first job as an expatriate. Therefore, this literature review addresses various young individuals who choose to undertake an international career path and analyses early career self-initiated expatriates' personal career motivation, behaviour, and relevance to the global workforce.

SIEs are different from corporate-assigned expatriates who have more autonomy to choose their career location. SIEs leverage their stronger cross-cultural adaptability to build their career capital during the expatriate experience and thus achieve career success (Kanstrén & Suutari, 2021; Paik et al., 2017). As SIEs are not supported by organizations, their personal

characteristics play a critical role in their organizational success and eventually in their careers (Lauring & Selmer, 2018). SIEs cross the boundaries of different employers (enterprises) globally in pursuit of maximising their own interests and career development (Bernardo & Salanga, 2019; Utam et al., 2020).

Organisations offer career management plans to assist individuals in developing their careers, based on the specific skills the organisation needs to cultivate. These plans often involve career ladders. The concepts of boundless careers and expatriate careers emerged simultaneously and share similar connotations. According to Redondo et al. (2021), in the volatile career model employees manage their own careers and make decisions based on their career aspirations. The main criterion for judging career success is psychological success, that is, subjective success. In this career model, gaining a better understanding of organisational attitudes in the ever-changing career landscape can enhance the importance of employer perceptions of talented employees and avoid additional risks to the business in terms of employee commitment and intention to leave. Therefore, the development of the volatile career model is not constrained by a specific career path or organisation but is rather driven by personal aspirations, much like the self-initiated expatriate career trajectories observed in early career stages.

### 8.3.2 Three levels of the self-initiated expatriate research

Doherty (2013) proposes the organising framework for SIEs that includes the following levels: micro level (individual and psychological experiences), meso-level (organisational benefits and potential losses) and macro level (socio-economic processes).

At the macro level of analysis, the most important discussion of SIEs pertains to their contribution to the host country, the potential loss of talents in their home country, and the specific consideration of repatriation. More specifically, it examines whether SIEs' experience, skills and international network gained during their foreign exposure will be useful for the home country (Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Krantz, 2015). At this level, global resources and flow of talent are under scrutiny (Doherty, 2013). Migration and self-initiated expatriation are difficult to distinguish at this level, and their consequences are often inseparable. Furthermore, the study of gender self-initiated expatriation has revealed an interesting difference between company-assigned and self-initiated expatriation that has consequences at the macro level. Women are less likely to be sent abroad by their employers

(Tung, 2008), but they might choose to pursue self-initiated expatriation when faced with a glass ceiling (Wechtler, 2018). Overall, the SIE community is predominantly male. However, female self-initiated expatriates make up a significant part of the community.

At the meso-level of analysis, discussions about SIEs mainly focus on the fact that company-assigned expatriates aim to pursue organizational goals during their international assignment, while SIEs are individualistic and their personal motives might or might not contribute to the organizations. They are nonconformist, self-reliant, self-directed, and proactive (Mayrhofer et al., 2008). At the same time, the professional value of SIEs has been acknowledged (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010), and the challenges of integration have been investigated as a decisive criterion for the potential of SIEs' contribution to their organization (Abbas et al. 2021). When SIEs perceive discrimination or prejudicial behaviour among local employees, this has a negative impact on their work attitude, while they can bring their unique expertise and skills to their host organization when they establish positive interaction with co-workers. Gender differences have also been identified at the meso-level (Bastida, 2018). Isakovic and Whitman (2019) examine the direct effects of organisational support and adjustment on retention willingness, work engagement, and the mediating impact of adjustment on self-initiated expatriation among low-skilled women in the United Arab Emirates. The results show that perceived organisational support (POS) and job adjustment has a significant, positive, and direct impact on retention and willingness to participate. Additionally, the study found that the job adjustment of SIEs moderated the relationship between POS and work engagement and POS and retention willingness, to a certain extent. Siyal et al. (2021) examine the impact of inclusive leadership on fostering innovative work behaviours and creativity among employees. Through a comprehensive analysis of diversity, they reveal that inclusive leadership positively impacts innovative work behaviour and creativity.

Micro level discussion is concerned with individual characteristics and motives which foster self-initiated expatriation, and push and pull factors have been identified (Doherty, 2013). Al Ariss and Jawad (2011) elaborate on the complex system of decision-making factors that lead to international mobility, as it is influenced by professional status, education, economic resources and social networks. Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) discuss the career success of SIEs from psychological perspectives and conclude that occupational adaptability is positively correlated with performance and adaptability, whereas psychological availability



mediates the relationship between occupational fitness and performance and adaptation. However, supportive organisational supervision does not moderate the relationship between occupational fitness and performance or adjustment. Cultural adaptability is also considered a key factor, and there are also returnees with expatriate experience who feel that they can maximize their career potential only at home. Ellis et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of a strong alignment between return expectations and the actual repatriation experience, recognising the importance of individual institutions and the impact of the repatriation. Remennick (2022) analyses the experience of multiple returnees who return home after working in other countries around the world. Most returnees believe that only at home can they maximise their career potential. They show a strong national identity, culture, and filial piety.

#### *8.4 Methodology*

In terms of analysis methods, to date, the literatures have been mainly data-driven and from the functionalist approach (Cilesiz and Greckhamer, 2020; Roulston and Bhattacharya, 2018; Symon et al., 2018), so it appears to have led to a lack of in-depth analysis of constructivist perspective when it comes to the context-rich analysis of unexplored phenomena. Qualitative research is receiving increasing attention for its effect on key empirical, conceptual, and theoretical contributions (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010; Primecz, 2020; O’Kane et al., 2021; Richardson, 2021). Moreover, paradigm reflexivity and openness towards new paradigmatic and methodological approaches are required to explore novel fields of inquiry. For instance, Wechtler (2018) revealed new elements of SIE research using qualitative research from blogs and enriched by feminist and existentialist reflections.

Acknowledging the value of both functionalist and interpretivist approaches, multiparadigm strategy was chosen (Primecz, 2008; Primecz et al. 2023). Relying on functionalist principles, the first author began with a systematic approach to identify key articles from multiple disciplines, searching on three journal database, namely Web of Science, Google Scholar and Proquest Thesis in the database between 2003 and 2022 with the following keywords: immigration, early career expatriates, entry-level position, international graduate student, student affairs professionals, motivation, challenges, resilience, repatriation, culture adaptation. The literature search was completed in two waves. In the first wave 1703



In the second wave of literature search top ranked publications in international management and business were scrutinized, which was conducted by the third author. The journal selection on their international ranking and their significance on the researched field (Tüselmann et al., 2016). Therefore, core IB journals, namely International Business Review (IBR), Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS), Journal of International Management (JIM), Journal of World Business (JWB) and Management International Review (MIR) were considered. Furthermore, based on the chosen research topic two highly relevant journals were added to the selection, where the majority of the articles in this area is published, namely Career Development International and Journal of Global Mobility.

As timeframe we set the period between 1997 and 2022, as the term ‘overseas experience’ used by Inkson et al. (1997) can be considered a foundation of the self-initiated expatriation phenomenon, accordingly, this review covers over 20 years, which is a common time frame used for the IB reviews. In this second wave Scopus and Web of Science were chosen as search engines and looked for ‘self-initiated expatriate’, and ‘early career’ as key words. By including only full-length research articles 621 matched any of the search phrases, as both would be relevant to our research question, that provided the basis to our research. By comparing the two search results 81 fundamental articles were identified, where both search terms appeared or the title indicated relevant content.

However, there is still a lack of in-depth analysis on the careers of self-imitated expatriates in the field of global career management. Therefore, inspired by the analysis of qualitative scholars in related fields, this research adopts the interpretive approach in order to delve the content of the identified articles more deeply. This exploration plays a critical role in promoting the selection and in-depth development of research topics in the management field as well. Our first analysis of these papers showed a plethora of cross-disciplinary notions and terminology (e.g. job, employment, occupation, career; immigration, self-initiated expatriate; early career, young graduate, entry-level position).

Abstracts (including titles and keywords) of 81 articles were reviewed by the first and second author, and based on the content of the abstracts and title, they agreed to read 22 articles in full-text. The reading and coding full text articles were done by the first author, and it led to eliminate six articles, which proved to be irrelevant when their content of the full text was thoroughly investigated. The selected 16 articles were coded, and in order to ensure full

coverage of published articles in the chosen topic further articles were searched for. By using snowballing strategy, the first author followed references and cites to these publications during the full-text analysis until no new relevant publications were found. The qualifying publications were evaluated and subsequently analysed based on particular research that addressed the issues. The study was carried out by thoroughly reading full texts. Eventually, 19 articles were identified as key articles of early career SIEs. As a result of the coding process and elaboration in depth on the interplay analysis among different levels and formulate three main themes emerged, which was validated by the second author.

In terms of coding schemes, authors organise analysis at the contextual, organisational, and individual levels using various coding processes. The early career SIE has then been explored from a range of viewpoints, as shown in Figure 7, which synthesises the following theoretical models from the research evaluated into a complete field map. Finally, a research gap may be identified in the kinds of literature.

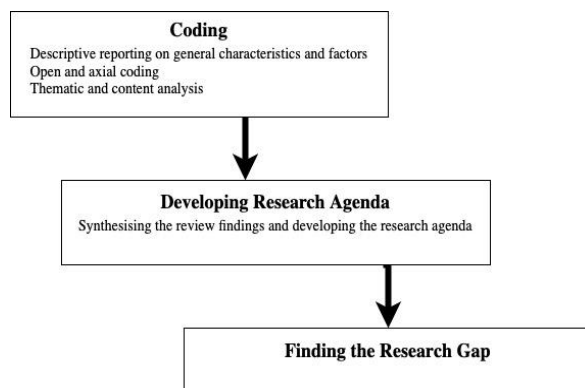


Figure 7. Process for coding and developing research model

(Source: Author conceptualisation)

### 8.5 Findings

The rapid development of globalisation has encouraged international companies to show interest in the growth of job mobility and relocation of employees and to meet global labour demand. These companies highly depend on expatriate employees to manage their operations abroad and in other cities (Shortland and Perkins, 2022). Many globally relevant work experiences, such as corporate and self-initiated expatriates, as well as novel forms of corporate global workforces are analysed by the personal choices, challenges, and careers associated with development (Shaffer et al., 2012). The structure and types of expatriate

employees are complex and diverse, such as gender differences, differences in early occupation and professional SIEs, differences in the country or length of time of expatriates, and differences in the field of expatriates. Many scholars have conducted on the structure and occupational characteristics of early career SIE. Based on the literature analysis and coding from the interpretivist view, the research model could be demonstrated as following Figure 8.

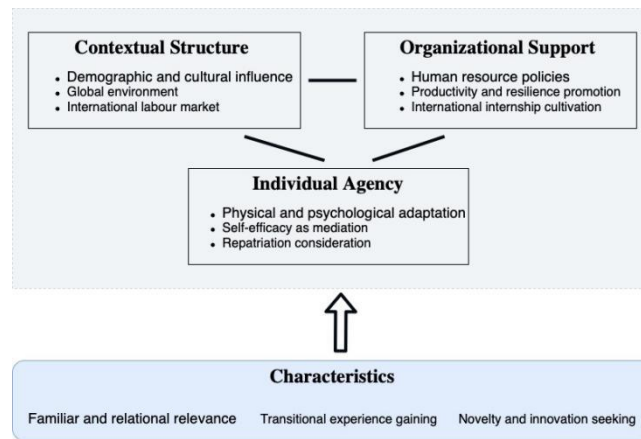


Figure 8. Research model  
(Source: Author conceptualisation)

### 8.5.1 Early career self-initiated expatriates' characteristics

Young foreign students often have larger social circles and are generally given greater opportunity for self-disclosure, and they are also perceived temporary staying in the host-country. Knowing the characteristics of early career SIEs is beneficial for global HRM, and their characteristics can be summarised and analysed by the familial and relational relevance, transitional experiences gaining and novelty and innovation-seeking.

The relevance of familial and relational links in expatriation is evident early in one's career and is moderated by personal circumstances after graduation (Tharenou, 2003). Young students are unlikely to be married, however, if they have a high attachment to parents, friends and community, they should be less receptive to working abroad than if they have a low attachment. The early career SIEs regarded their mobility as gaining transitional experiences. Linguistic and cultural skill shortages, as well as financial constraints, are impediments for young self-initiated employees in their early career path (Kristensen, 2004).

On the one hand, McCoy and Masuch (2007) described an ethnographic investigation of women's experiences in the early years of their work in non-regulated occupations, utilising

their transferrable abilities throughout this transitional time. On the other hand, young westerners in good positions in developed countries, with defined professional and growth goals, who have opted to become mobile (Doherty, 2013). Therefore, young SIEs, who are more self-directed learners, rely heavily on technology for collective consensus and acceptance from their social groups since they have a strong feeling of belonging to a peer group, which is echoed by Shaw and Fairhurst (2008).

Dries et al. (2008) has mentioned early career SIEs' main motivation is seeking challenging opportunities to move abroad. For early career SIEs, they want to pursue novelty and innovation. SIE in the early career has stronger mobility ambition and may gain international experience on the entry-level professional road (Fourage and Ester, 2007). Although only 12.6% of the sample population aged 18-24 in Europe have considered moving to another country in the next five years, SIE in the early career thinks that longer international work experience can gain experience from a long period of perspective. Thorn (2009) used a quantitative methodology to conclude that chances for travel and adventure, as well as job advancement, are important sociocultural and economic motives for young self-initiated expatriates.

Women in early career are motivated by challenge and ambition because they perceived their SIE experience as an opportunity "brimming with unlimited possibilities" (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007). Inkson and Myers (2003) did an exploratory qualitative research on the young New Zealanders self-initiated expatriate, and the result demonstrated that the motivations are looking for a different way of life, excitement and partner influences, rather than work-career phenomenon. The findings also showed that SIE experience brings benefits but the process is unpredictable and complex, therefore, it requires greater self-direction, internationalisation and flexibility. Tharenou (2003) conducted a study on 213 young entry-level occupations (average age 23 years) using social cognitive career theory, taking age, gender, and marital status into consideration, the early career SIE had strong personal agency and less relational family influence, with worldwide options, and their openness to foreign professions increased.

Table 3 The summary of articles on the early career self-initiated expatriate

	Perspective	Author	Year	Principle findings	Journal
<b>Characteristics</b>	Familiar and relational relevance	Tharenou	2003	Strong personal agency and less relational family influence	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology
	Transitional experience gaining	McCoy and Masuch	2007	Utilising transferrable abilities	Comparative Migration Studies
	Novelty and innovation seeking	Inkson and Myers	2003	Different way of life, excitement and partner influences	Career Development International
		Thorn	2009	Cultural exposure, travel, and a desire for adventure	Career Development International
<b>Three levels</b>	Contextual structure	Doherty et al	2010	Geographical factors and site preference	Career Development International
		Goštautaitė et al	2020	Adversely linked with home country career and community embeddedness; feedback decreases SIE intention	Career Development International
		Jonbekova et al	2021	Socioeconomic and cultural factors, intergenerational clashes, and scholarship program regulations	Higher Education
	Organisational support	Joardar	2011	Task-based and relationship-based group acceptance activity	International Journal of Cross Cultural Management
		Makkonen	2017	The employability of newcomer self-initiated expatriates in China: an employers' perspective	Asia Pacific Journal Human Resource
		Felker	2011	Individuals work in positions below levels of credential education and capability; information gaps and insufficient searching preparation; lack of organisational support	International Journal of Training and Development
		Oh	2016	Adjustment to working in organizations, resulting in socialization outcomes and mediating effects on the relationship	Asia Pacific Education. Review
	Individual agency	Weedon	2012	Professional expertise and academy as an insular host culture	International Review for the Sociology of Sport

	Pereira et al	2016	U-curve model does not operate in the early career SIEs; regarded change as a chance to expand their knowledge and abilities	Journal of International Management
	Egilsson and Dolles	2017	Problem-focused coping strategies have been more effective than emotion-focused strategies	Journal of Global Mobility
	Baluku et al	2018	Importance of flexibility and personal initiative.	Journal of Global Mobility
	Seok-Young and Jang	2021	Embrace cultural diversity and entrepreneurship; involvement in training programs, and a supportive work environment	Career Development International
	Milne	2001	possess more skills when repatriation	New Zealand Medical Journal
	Wechtler	2018	Escape, confrontation with reality, identity reconstruction, purpose of expatriation	Career Development International

### 8.5.2 Three levels on analysing the early career SIEs

This literature review summarises previous research on the early career SIEs from the view of the structural aspect, organisational and individual agency. The summary showed above in Table 3.

#### 8.5.2.1 Contextual structure

The contextual and structural level that affects SIE's labour integration mainly represents the employment structure of the country. The factors at this level are complicated, such as a series of transnational conventions, international regulations, national legislation, and even multilateral auxiliary clauses in some cases. This paper reviews the related literature of SIE from the structural level, and many scholars have conducted relevant research.

Firstly, demographic and cultural factors play an important role in early career SIEs' career trajectories. Doherty et al (2010) illustrated that geographical factors are significant for SIE since they take into account time, distance, and the possibility of to return the home



country regularly, and they include data from both the country of origin and the host country might be beneficial in determining the size and type of national disparities, including the influence of language ability and site preference. However, security concerns operating as a deterrent to the home country would be informative. Goštautaitė et al. (2020) explain that self-initiated expatriation intention is adversely linked with home country career and community embeddedness and that developmental feedback decreases SIE intention.

Secondly, the global environment and international labour market are the structure of young SIEs' mobility. From the contextual factor on the labour market, there are information asymmetries between graduates and employers, i.e., graduates feel more employable but are less employable in the market owing to rivalry for graduate positions and a conflict of resources (William et al., 2018). Jonbekova et al. (2021) conducted qualitative research on 45 Kazakh expatriates and concluded that international scholarship alumni who have a positional advantage, face difficulties in their transition to the job market due to socioeconomic and cultural factors, intergenerational clashes, and scholarship program regulations.

#### 8.5.2.2 Organisational support

The organisation has a critical role in assisting the self-initiated expatriates to transition to the new culture, particularly through interventions during the adjustment periods from the institution or organisation, therefore, organisational views of graduates abroad are essential (Shen and Herr, 2004; Hippler et al., 2015). At the organisational level, it mainly means that multinational companies and human resources managers should provide training and support related to expatriates for early-career SIE candidates, and can also send local employees to help early-career SIE communicate in the host country. There are many related types of research on the early SIE at the organisational level. Makkonen (2017) investigates western newcomer self-initiated expatriates (NC-SIEs) with no prior work experience in cross-cultural career contexts from the perspective of employers, and the findings show that both organisational and contextual drivers define the value of individual ability and skill.

It is necessary to formulate an organisational plan and support different types of talent with specific policies by using SIEs as one of the ways of talent development to motivate expatriates in the global economic trend. Joardar (2011) applied expectancy violation theory to demonstrate that a change in a foreign newcomer's task-based and relationship-based group acceptance will occur when the newcomer's performance and cross-cultural adaptability do

not confirm the group's expectations, which results in the workgroup functioning properly. Oh (2016) proposed personal-organizational (P-O) fit theory to demonstrate the importance of international graduates' formal learning, intended informal learning, and unintended informal learning experiences in influencing self-initiated newcomers' adjustment to working in organizations, resulting in socialization outcomes and mediating effects on the relationship.

Felker (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with 22 young, well-educated Eastern Europeans who relocated to Western Europe in quest of professional growth chances. The findings revealed that individuals work in positions below their levels of credential education and capability due to information gaps and insufficient searching preparation; meanwhile, organizations are not fully utilizing the available human capital offered by Eastern Europeans, implying untapped opportunities to gain a competitive advantage through human capital. Recognising that various variables impact foreign students' future aspirations and that these plans differ from person to person, it becomes evident that career service support should be offered to the international graduate student population.

The students' career placement not only necessitates fundamental job search abilities but also intersects with their professional specialities. And for institutions, graduates' prior work performance, cognitive ability, and social skills were regarded more by the institution than students' academic knowledge (Adler and Sacco, 2003). Therefore, international internships boost students' intercultural conversational skills, multicultural working experiences, and intercultural understanding, enhancing students' intercultural competency and cultivating students with global perspectives (Xiaochi, 2012). Eventually, international student communities and coordination between career counselling and placement centres are recommended.

#### 8.5.2.3 Individual agency

Baluku et al. (2018) investigated the early career self-initiated expatriates' diverse career paths, emphasizing the role of flexibility and personal initiative. When it comes to job choices, the results show that early career SIEs should focus on improving their capacity to be flexible and career orientation. Wechtler (2018) adopted a new approach to examining the motivations of single childless female SIEs deciding to work abroad, and she claims that there are four main reasons for opting for self-initiated expatriate career, escape, confrontation with reality, identity reconstruction, and purpose of expatriation.

One of the most important factors affecting SIE's completion of tasks in the early career is individual cognition. SIE, who is in the early stage of his career, is the main factor that affects his mission success rate and reduces the turnover intention. International graduate students bear the physical and psychological costs to follow their ambitions through international education, with the ultimate objective of achieving their own career goals (Leong and Chou, 1996; Shen and Herr, 2004).

Physically, graduates overseas need navigate the system, understand the language, and get access to information in order to succeed in the academic and professional communities (Shen and Herr, 2004). Because of the short term of overseas assignments, Pereira et al. (2016) demonstrate that the U-curve model does not operate in the early career SIEs' research setting; consequently, evaluating the duration of time for expatriate adjustment is critical. They examined young, highly qualified and mobile self-initiated expatriates are prefer to rely on their own resources and information to find a position in the employment market.

Seok-Young and Jang (2021) used a mixed-method approach to explore how young Korean SIEs adapt to work. Personal attributes, such as willingness to accept cultural diversity and entrepreneurship, participation in training programs, and a supportive work environment, are positively related to social and cultural adaptation in the process of job transformation. Therefore, organisations should create an environment conducive to learning, encourage learning in the workplace, and recruit employees with the characteristics required for an assignment. Therefore, when selecting SIEs, organisations should create a learning support atmosphere to facilitate workplace learning and seek out expatriates with appropriate characteristics.

Psychologically, when the SIEs in their early career perform expatriate tasks, their expatriate cultural adaptability is the main factor affecting their task success rate, which is also the main reason for reducing expatriates' willingness to leave. Egilsson and Dolles (2017) explored the experiences of talented young Icelandic footballers in their transition, and the result showed that problem-focused coping strategies have been more effective than emotion-focused strategies. In contrast, Weedon (2012) investigated the transitional acculturation experiences of migrant young footballers. The findings suggest that professional expertise and academy as an insular host culture assist young SIEs in coping with cultural challenges when they experience emotion-related culture shock in the host country.

Cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) is an essential factor affecting whether early career self-initiated employees can successfully complete tasks. The research basis of expatriate acculturation comes from the fields of sociology and anthropology and mainly emphasises the process of gradual change and adaptation of behaviour and psychology after individuals enter a heterogeneous culture within a time and task consideration (Luef, 2020).

Self-efficacy takes a mediated role and is typically associated with a protean attitude and is used to accomplish desired professional objectives (King, 2004). Bernardo et al. (2019) investigate 669 young people and their career attitudes in the Philippines using the four-factor structure of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes scale. This study aims to examine the component structure, association with related constructs, and psychometric qualities of the protean and boundaryless career scales in the early career SIE. The study assessed career adaptability, career optimism, perceived professional expertise, and cultural intelligence, and found internal consistency across four component scales.

Repatriation is also an essential topic for early career SIEs. Milne (2001) claimed that young SIEs with characteristics of better qualified and fitter, and want to possess more skills when they choose to return. When compared to their co-nationals who choose to stay abroad, returning early-career researchers display higher degrees of parochialism, as seen by stronger community dispositions and patriotic loyalty, as well as geographically constrained employment search (Israel and Cohen, 2022).

### *8.6 Discussion*

First of all, it is found that among the structural factors, the main reason that affects the work performance and success rate of SIEs in their early career is their cultural adaptability to different national structures. Besides, the organisational level plays a key role in helping SIE in the early career transition to new cultural adaptation, especially through the intervention of organisations in the adjustment period (Hippler et al., 2014). This demonstrates the role of psychological availability as a means of psychological engagement for SIEs and their host-country national colleagues during work and interaction adjustment processes. This view is consistent with the conclusions of Jannesari et al. (2017). Lastly, an individual's ability to adapt to the expatriate culture is the main factor that affects his mission success rate, which is also the main reason for reducing expatriates' turnover intention.

At the macro level, it is necessary for countries to formulate relevant public support measures for early career SIE. By holding regular social etiquette classes, relevant institutions in different countries actively invite employees of the host country, local teachers or government departments to make suggestions on how to strengthen the interaction between self-initiated expatriates and locals, and take measures according to the actual situation. Train communication etiquette and skills for early professional SIE. People should not regard different cultures, religions and values as a scourge, but we should adapt to the diversity of the world, and avoid misunderstandings caused by improper communication with the host country's personnel. Finally, let the early professional SIE know how to respect the host country's personnel and culture, and take the economic interests as a measure to achieve a win-win situation.

Secondly, organisations should also pay attention to employees' cross-cultural adaptation when improving their job satisfaction and retention intention in the early career SIE. Good cross-cultural adaptability can effectively improve the job satisfaction and retention intention of expatriates. In terms of general adaptation, business organisations can edit some life guides of the host country or collect some documentaries of the host country for employees to watch and learn, so as to help expatriate employees understand the weather, climate, customs, legal system and so on of the host country (Sahoo et al., 2022). Meanwhile, before SIEs go abroad, colleagues who have worked on foreign projects should introduce the actual situation of foreign life in detail, put the difficulties and problems ahead, and express themselves through their own experiences to enhance the vitality and credibility of training early professional SIE.

Finally, at the micro level, it is necessary to fully understand the work habits and work objectives, and it is not always possible to maximise the economic benefits as the only value standard for the work. In the event of a conflict, people should not blindly work or complain, but need to explain the reasons for working with a professional attitude and technology and pass some work concepts of SIE employees to the host country personnel through training.

### *8.7 Future Research Directions*

The research on early-career SIE has been acknowledged by several authors. However, there are some points worth reflecting on the previous literature, which provides directions for subsequent research in related fields. Methodologically, more comprehensive and diversified research methods should be adopted in the future. Therefore, forthcoming research should

employ diverse research methods to reveal the complex phenomena. The cross-level research method can be used to combine the influences at the individual level and the organisational level for analysis. From the content perspective, four directions could be found in the following paragraph.

Firstly, summarising the above structure, organisation and individual level, to explore the post-COVID-19 epidemic influences on the early career SIEs' attitude and behaviour, it is very important to manage and develop the subsequent career of SIEs in the early career (Abdalla and Al-Zufairi, 2020).

Secondly, individuals who lived in a foreign country as teenagers regard themselves as international, have higher openness to different cultures, and have greater international job preferences, travel and future orientation, and have lower settling-down inclinations (Selmer and Lam, 2003). Since there are lack of these kinds of literature which compares early career SIEs to those who are born in the local country. Therefore, it is advisable to analyse how adult third culture kids (ATCKs) view their future ability to complete international tasks. ATCKs see themselves as the truly competent source of expatriate talent based on their international experiences as children and their ability to adapt to the social culture in a chameleon-like fashion (Westropp et al., 2016). Therefore, the difference between early career SIEs with local and international credentials is also a relevant issue which needs further exploration.

Thirdly, this finding does not occur for the older counterparts, therefore, future research can address differences between the young and older employees, and the organisation's concentration may be most relevant to the initial development of receptivity.

### *8.8 Conclusion*

Through this review and analysis, this paper reviews and proposes the future research direction from a multi-disciplinary perspective, hoping to help and promote the success rate of SIEs' assignment in early career in enterprise management. It is urgently called for filling the current knowledge gap in the field of professional assignment and management. In this paper, not only the related literature of early career SIEs is summarized and analysed from the structure, organisation and individual level, but also the follow-up prospect of early career SIEs is analysed from the macro-level, intermediate-level and micro-level. It is believed that the cultural adaptability of early career SIEs can make themselves generate more enthusiasm and sense of belonging to the enterprise organisation. Only in this way can the relevance and

applicability of studying the motivation and challenges of expatriates be tested in different countries and backgrounds.

With the continuous improvement and implementation of the economic development strategies, management scholars and practitioners need to pay attention to their own knowledge reserves and professional abilities, and recognize the necessity of effective research and practice in the field of career management at macro, intermediate and micro levels. However, with the continuous progress of society, the trend of economic globalization will continue to deepen, and the enterprise management part of SIE will become more and more perfect. Therefore, it is hoped that this review can provide a direction for a smart, detailed, and diverse expansion in the field of internationally self-initiated expatriate management.

## 9. Third Paper: Career Trajectories of Self-Initiated Early Career Chinese Expatriates in Hungary: two-step migration pathway perspective?

### *9.1 Abstract*

This paper explores the career trajectories of Chinese self-initiated expatriates who relocated to Hungary for study and evaluates their career prospects abroad. By examining the two-step migration pathway, it uncovers the relative merits of three potential career choices, namely whether to return, remain in Hungary, or move to another European country. This research employs a constructivist grounded theory approach with semi-structured interviews with 22 Chinese graduates. Additional qualitative data, such as observation, textual analysis of publicly available testimonies, and a research diary complement the study. The findings reveal ambiguity in the advantages and disadvantages of each potential choice. The empirical material suggests that women face even greater challenges in this regard, as they experience considerable pressure to start a family, preferably in China. As a result, their self-initiated expatriation intentions are often played down. It also shows the difficulties of transferring social, cultural and career capital into a new environment.

**Keywords:** Self-initiated Expatriates, Early-Career Expatriates, Chinese Expatriates, Hungary, Career Trajectories, Agency

### **Absztrakt:**

Ez a tanulmány a kínai önszerveződött kivándorlók karrierútjait vizsgálja, akik tanulmányok céljából költöztek Magyarországra, és értékeli karrierlehetőségeiket külföldön. A kétlépéses migrációs útvonal megvizsgálásával feltárja három potenciális karrierlehetőség viszonylagos előnyeit: visszatérni, Magyarországon maradni vagy egy másik európai országba költözni. Ez a kutatás konstruktivista megalapozott elméleti megközelítést alkalmaz, 22 kínai végzett hallgatóval készült félstrukturált interjúkon keresztül. A tanulmányt kiegészítik további minőségi adatok, mint például megfigyelések, nyilvánosan elérhető tanúvallomások szövegelemzése és egy kutatási napló. A eredmények azt mutatják, hogy minden potenciális választás előnyeiben és hátrányaiban bizonytalanság van. Az empirikus anyag arra utal, hogy a nők ezen a téren még nagyobb kihívásokkal néznek szembe, mivel jelentős nyomás nehezedik rájuk, hogy családot alapítsanak, lehetőleg Kínában. Ennek eredményeként az ő önszerveződött kivándorlási szándékaik gyakran háttérbe szorulnak.



Emellett rámutat azokra a nehézségekre is, amelyekkel járhat a társadalmi, kulturális és karrier tőkének az új környezetbe történő átültetése.

**Kulcsszavak:** Önkezdeményező kivándorlók, pályakezdő külföldiek, kínai expatriates, Magyarország, karrierpályák, ügynökség]

## *9.2 Introduction*

Self-initiated expatriates are typically understood as professionals moving from the Western European or Anglo-Saxon countries to any other countries of their choosing, be it another Western or Anglo-Saxon country, or a developing country (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). Definitions mainly focus on the intention to work, with individuals moving from a developing country to a Western country often labelled as migrants, while Westerners relocating to other countries are typically referred to as self-initiated expatriates, regardless of their employment or work integration goals. Consequently, a large proportion of global mobility is excluded when self-initiated expatriation is examined. This study focuses on Chinese self-initiated expatriates who pursued employment opportunities in Hungary after having studied abroad. This investigation is specific because it considers Chinese mobile professionals as self-initiated expatriates who face visa restrictions that limit their international mobility, unlike many Western professionals.

Self-initiated expatriation enhances global careers with international experience (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Donald et al., 2018; Kanstrén & Suutari, 2021). While this could be accurate for Western self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), self-initiated expatriation from China may have a distinct effect, especially for mobile professionals from lower middle-class backgrounds, with limited social and cultural capital, where higher education only incrementally increases their prospects. This paper discusses how social and cultural capital increases for lower middle-class Chinese self-initiated expatriates, the limitations they face in deciding where to relocate, and how they can potentially enhance their social and cultural capital by choosing Hungary, located on the global semi-periphery, but still in the European Union.

This paper aims to contribute to the theories of self-initiated expatriation, particularly on the two-step migration pathway theory (Hawthorne, 2010). After defining terms and reviewing theories on career capital and two-step migration, the context of Chinese SIEs in Hungary and its influence on the theories are explained as an important element. Research

questions focus on career options, career challenges, and potential cultural and social capital accumulations of Chinese SIEs. To answer the research questions, 22 Chinese early career SIEs in Hungary were interviewed, observed and their social media testimonies collected. The qualitative data were analysed in a constructivist framework. The next section presents the findings on agency in early career trajectories, including the agency of repatriation, the agency of remaining and agency of mobility, followed by the discussion. The final section summarises the paper's conclusion.

### *9.3 Theoretical Framework and Research Context*

#### 9.3.1 Cultural, social and career capital theories

As part of the discourse of modernisation in China, students are encouraged to accumulate cultural and social capital via overseas tertiary education at both the individual and macroeconomic levels (Li, 2020). International student mobility can help students accumulate multiple forms of capital, such as human (Becker, 1964; Dustmann et al., 2011), social (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), cultural (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and economic (Lu, 2015, 2018; Wong et al., 2015). Career capital – knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom – is a key asset for career pursuit, especially in early stages and influenced by international mobility (Kanstrén and Suutari, 2021). Educational institutions and context[s] influence it greatly (Donald et al., 2018).

Accumulating such forms of capital is perceived as extremely important, especially in early career stages. Al Ariss (2012) argues that by acknowledging the contextual character of professions, SIEs may obtain a more nuanced view of international careers in their respective geographical, historical, institutional, and organizational contexts. This is why context-rich in-depth investigation is needed. Bamberger (2020) suggests that SIE can provide international students with an opportunity to develop a cosmopolitan identity by accumulating mobility capital. Upward mobility benefits individuals by allowing them to accumulate cultural capital, which is not only limited to those from affluent backgrounds (Daloz, 2013; Wong et al., 2015). Dimaggio (1982) also notes that cultural capital is a means of upward mobility.

#### 9.3.2 Self-initiated expatriation and early career trajectories

Self-initiated expatriation is widely discussed in the management literature (Dorsch et al., 2012; Finaccord, 2014; Hussain and Deery, 2018; Li et al., 2023). Self-initiated expatriation may be temporary or permanent. Some expatriates intend to return to their home country,

while others move on to other countries for their professional careers. Self-initiated expatriates are those who take the initiative to relocate overseas (Andresen et al., 2014; Tharenou, 2015). The boundary between SIEs and other people with international experience is unclear, despite scholars' repeated attempts to clarify the various definitions (Andresen et al., 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Some scholars have defined a SIE as an employee who voluntarily migrates for employment opportunities and career development (Andresen and Biemann, 2012; Carr et al., 2005; Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), whereas others have defined them in more general terms. Briscoe et al. (2009) define SIEs as 'individuals who travel abroad (usually as tourists or students), but who seek work as they travel and are hired in a foreign location.' Both employability and learning are key elements of boundaryless careers, which SIEs are pursuing (Dorsch et al. 2012).

While career development can be regarded as the one major motivation for SIEs to go abroad, there has been some discussion on SIEs' early career trajectories (Pereira et al, 2016; Wechtler, 2018; Li et al., 2023). Researchers have examined the career prospects and obstacles encountered by early career SIEs who may bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm to their new location. SIEs may encounter challenges in building their careers, including difficulties in accessing professional networks and overcoming barriers to career advancement. McNulty and Brewster (2017) suggest that SIEs could play a role in management and leadership development, as their experiences can enhance valuable skills such as adaptability, intercultural competence, and leadership, which are sought after by organisations (Li et al., 2023).

However, early career SIEs encounter various obstacles. Waxin and Brewster (2020) examined the influence of host country factors, including culture, language, social networks, and work opportunities, on SIEs' career paths. They found that host country characteristics are critical in determining the career outcomes of SIEs. The authors highlight the importance of language proficiency and social networks in facilitating career advancement and cultivating a sense of belonging in the host country. Seok-Young and Jang (2021) examine the lack of organisational support, which can lead to awkward situations for early career SIEs. Jonbekova et al. (2021) show that international graduates face employment challenges due to factors such as socioeconomic and cultural considerations, as well as intergenerational conflicts. Overall, the transition from university to an early career is expected to influence their self-perception

of employability and their prospects of entering the international employment market. (Donald et al., 2018).

### 9.3.3 Two-steps migration for international graduates' self-initiated expatriation

The transition from university to an early career is likely to affect how SIEs view their employability and their ability to enter the global job market (Donald *et al.*, 2018). There is evidence that foreign education is linked to better employment prospects. International education has a “signalling effect” on graduates, providing them with advantages such as English proficiency, solid content knowledge, awareness of international standards, and advanced soft skills, making graduates more appealing to employers and increasing their chances of employment (Abimbola et al., 2016; Jonbekova et al., Pham, 2020; Wiers- Janssen, 2007; Wu et al., 2020). Hawthorne (2010) coined the term “two-step migration” to describe the phenomenon of former international students seeking employment in their host country instead of returning home after graduation. This contributes to the host country’s employment market by providing educated workforce. When international graduates enter the job market and start their career, they differ from local candidates. For instance, early-career SIEs have more mobility ambition and may seek entry-level professional opportunities to gain international experience (Fourage and Ester, 2007). Tharenou’s study (2003) on 213 entry-level workers (with an average age of 23) concluded that early-career SIEs had high levels of personal agency and were less influenced by their families. The study used social cognitive career theory, taking age, gender, and marital status into consideration.

Global and multinational organisations consider international graduates an immediate source of labour and a group devoted to work because they gained socio-cultural capital and qualifications from their host country while studying (Chellaraj *et al.*, 2008; Farivar *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the international student experience is crucial for adapting to a foreign country during graduate studies and gaining exposure to an international setting, which in turn influences their decision to relocate (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2015). Understanding the early career performance, suitability, selection, and development of international graduates has been recognised as crucial for international human resource management (IHRM) and training development (Israel and Cohen, 2022). Younger employees are more enthusiastic to change career boundaries within emerging new social structures, compared to older employees who may prioritise more generic skills (Currie *et al.*, 2006). Farivar *et al.* (2019) suggest that

foreign graduates' career mobility can be influenced by socio-cultural and working conditions; their findings motivated international graduates to remain in the host country after graduation, even if they originally planned to leave.

Although many young foreign students often have larger social circles, they are perceived as temporarily staying in the host-country and adopt coping strategies when they encounter difficulties. From an economic perspective, a competitive employment market with limited positions (Abimbola et al., 2016; Nachatar Singh, 2020), and high salary expectations in comparison to those offered in the market (Hao & Welch, 2012), make it difficult for graduates to obtain post-graduate employment. Chinese SIEs should recognise and adapt to socioeconomic differences between the host and home countries. Al Ariss (2010) notes that, particularly in the context of SIE, the education and abilities of SIEs may not be enough to overcome organisational and structural barriers, which hinder their full integration into the job market. In conclusion, the perception of early career SIEs' temporary stay in the host country prompts the adoption of coping strategies to navigate difficulties.

#### 9.3.4 Chinese SIEs in Hungary

Chinese SIEs mainly target Anglo-Saxon and economically advanced Asian countries. While there is a considerable amount of literature on middle-aged Western expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012; Yao et al., 2014; Crowley-Henry, 2012), there has been little discussion of the large number of Chinese applicants who aim to study in Hungary. Hungary as settlement destination for the Chinese middle-class couples, , discovering that the primary motivation is driven by factors such as favorable living conditions, desire to provide their children with a joyful childhood, highlighting the significance of migration for escaping the educational pressure, intense competition, and economic burdens associated with the upbringing of children in China (Beck & Gaspar,2023; Beck & Nyíri, 2022).

While students have limited access to the employment market, a large number of Chinese professionals seek employment in Hungary. Li (2020) provides a detailed analysis of the push and pull factors that influence Chinese individuals to move to Hungary. Push factors include social and economic changes in China, leading to a highly competitive employment market. Pull factors include the accessibility of Hungarian education system and a relatively easy access to its employment market compared to other EU and Western countries. However, Chinese students encounter various obstacles, including language barriers and potential

exclusion (Primecz and Li, 2022a), as well as individual academic issues regarding “invisible academic performance in the classroom” (Li, 2020). Li and Primecz (2023) describe the socio-economic status of students who eventually enter to this market, and argue that Hungary is a compromise choice for lower middle class and working-class Chinese families, not a country attraction. Furthermore, Li and Primecz (2021) use exploratory-qualitative methods to investigate the future dilemma of Chinese students: their *in-betweenness*.

In Hungary, the number of self-initiated Chinese students saw a significant increase, rising from 725 in 2014 to 2,776 in 2019, and then slightly decreasing to 2,377 in 2022 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022). Since 2019, Chinese students have become the second-largest international student community in Hungary, following Germans, and remain the primary group among self-initiated non-European students. As of 2022, Chinese students continue to hold the second position among international students in Hungary. As Chinese early-career SIEs represent a significant and fast-growing group, it is worth exploring whether Chinese students who moved to Hungary choose to remain, return to China, or select a third country for employment.

Previous research has investigated the macro and socioeconomic drivers of turnover among intra-country migrant workers, as well as personal, financial, and knowledge-related motivational factors (Carr *et al.*, 2005; Doherty *et al.*, 2012). But people and organisations must interact and accept their interdependencies to guarantee the long-term health of the professional ecosystem (Modise, 2016). Additionally, it is recognised that demographic factors also influence mobility. Age is usually decisive (Selmer and Luring, 2010) and reflects the expatriate’s seniority and work experience. Therefore, most Western expatriates are between 30 and 40 years old (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). Moving from college to early employment is especially likely to impact self-initiated experiences (Donald *et al.*, 2018).

The current paper aims to address the research inquiry by advancing the understanding of career trajectories of Hungarian-graduated Chinese students and how their plans are executed when they face reality. This paper is unique in that it combines the plans and testimonies of students and their actual early career moves. It reveals that the investment in foreign studies can sometimes lead to unique career opportunities for individuals, but in other cases, newly graduated employees face limited career options. The paper aims to explore

whether international mobility limits or facilitates career progression, as the following research questions indicate:

(1) What career options are available to Chinese graduates in Hungary, including self-initiated expatriates?

(2) What motivates individuals to make diverse choices within the context of their careers?

(3) What career opportunities and challenges does they face in Hungary across diverse options?

#### *9.4 Methodology*

While positivist, constructivist, and critical research traditions provide different approaches to the study of expatriation (Primecz, 2020, Szkudlarek *et al.*, 2020), positivism continues to dominate in social sciences and management research more broadly (Cilesiz and Greckhamer, 2022; Roulston and Bhattacharya, 2018; Symon *et al.*, 2018). Yet, non-mainstream approaches, such as constructivist and critical studies, provide more accurate insights, when it comes to the context-rich analysis of unexplored phenomena, while qualitative research approaches provide an obvious route to context-rich analysis, as they seek an “emic” understanding of the specific professional phenomena under investigation (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010; Hennink *et al.*, 2011; O’Kane *et al.*, 2021; Symon *et al.*, 2018; Richardson, 2021).

The subjective nature of individuals’ experience of global mobility (Scurry *et al.*, 2013), and the role of qualitative researchers demands reflexivity, displaying awareness of their own experiences and preconceptions throughout the process. Wechtler (2018) suggests that diaries and blogs are rich personal accounts of lived experiences, as they are affective, spontaneous and not distorted by memories. Additionally, the author believes that cross-cultural challenges and the future career directions of Chinese early career SIEs are essentially personal matters. The research design is presented in Figure 9.

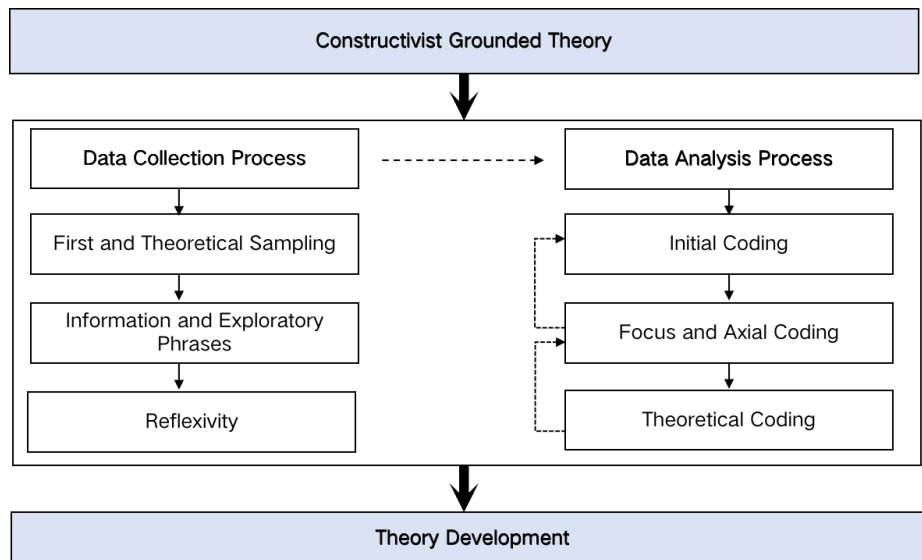


Figure 9. Methodological Structure

(Source: First author's conceptualisation)

Table 4 shows the characteristics of the sample, including their majors, gender distribution, and length of work experience in Hungary after graduation. The participants' average age was around 30, which is younger than the average age of other studies on expatriate populations, as the sample consisted of early-career SIEs.

Table 4. Research participants and their demographic data

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Educational level	Major	Work experience in Hungary
F1	Female	33	Master	Economics	3
F2	Female	29	Master	Economics	3
M3	Male	29	Master	Economics	2.5
F4	Female	27	Bachelor	International Relations	2
F5	Female	29	Master	Environment	3
F6	Female	28	Bachelor	Arts	3
F7	Female	29	Master	International Business Law	2
M8	Male	31	Master	Veterinary Medicine	2
F9	Female	34	Master	MBA	2
M10	Male	30	Bachelor	Smelter Engineering	3
M11	Male	30	Bachelor	Mechanical Engineering	3
M12	Male	30	Bachelor	Agronomy	2
F13	Female	29	Master	International Economics and Business	2
M14	Male	29	Master	Medicine	2
M15	Male	35	Ph.D	Biomedical Science	3
M16	Male	33	Ph.D	Dentistry	2
M17	Male	31	Master	Public Health	2
F18	Female	31	Master	Economics	2
M19	Male	33	Master	Public Health	3
M20	Male	30	Bachelor	Economics	2.5
F21	Female	33	Ph.D	Medicine	1
M22	Male	31	Ph.D	Medicine	2



The data for this study was collected from two sources. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author. Secondly, further data was collected from publicly available sources, such as social media, blogs and observation of the Chinese community in Hungary. Collectively, these sources provided the initial data for the study. All research participants agreed to give interviews and provide further data about their life in Hungary, and they submitted informed consent forms. All interviews were audio-recorded digitally, with their permission, and lasted 60-90 minutes. The anonymity of research participants was guaranteed.

The first author's position as a female Chinese doctoral student in Hungary, who has been living there for more than five years, influenced the research process in multiple ways. The author's insider status helped in quickly approaching the participants and establishing trusting relationships. To recognize the value of a shared language in building relationships and minimise misunderstandings caused by translation, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin. To prevent the loss of meaning through translation, the transcripts were kept in original form for analytical purposes. Transcripts were forwarded to interviewees before the data analysis, allowing them to review and edit the transcripts for accuracy and privacy (Kaur *et al.*, 2009), thereby ensuring credibility and legitimacy.

The audio data were transcribed into written Chinese and analysed using NVivo software for coding and categorisation. To minimise biases, the researcher kept a reflective research diary during both data collection and data analysis processes (Lincoln and Guba, 2017; Charmaz, 2006, 2020), as suggested by Whyte's (1993) detailed reflective method. The diary assisted the researcher in recording her research experience, including first impressions, second thoughts, instantaneous interpretations and overwhelming feelings.

To develop the sampling criteria, the initial step was to screen potential participants and determine if they meet the criteria of being Hungarian-educated Chinese SIEs. Personal contacts were utilised to identify and approach individuals who fit the required profile (Doherty, 2013). The criteria included: (a) initial intention and expectation of a temporary move at the time of the interview; (b) legal residence and employment in the host country; (c) voluntary move without forced displacement due to factors such as civil war, persecution, political beliefs, or famine; (d) entry to Hungary as a student with subsequent employment initiation. Participants also meet a criterion that some authors consider relevant to SIE status:

none had acquired the host country’s citizenship, and none had any international work experience before arriving in Hungary.

In the data analysis phase, the three steps of analysis described by Charmaz (2000) – line-by-line coding, axial coding and theoretical coding – are grouped around the researcher’s description of the analysis in this section. The first author analysed the data in Chinese and only translated relevant quotations.

Firstly, for building the *initial codes*, the texts of the transcriptions were read and, for each phrase or paragraph, a remark was provided using terms that summarized the information/concept investigated. While reading the interview transcript, a logbook was created that noted each respondent’s views of the content and the direction of the reading. Secondly, *axial coding* was developed to recompose data and give coherence to the emerging analysis, highlighting its dimensions and properties within a context. This allowed for more precise explanations that respond to questions of when, where, why, who, how, and with what results of the phenomenon, resulting in a more comprehensive description of the studied experience. Thirdly, *classification* (theoretical codes) provided the comparison of categories on a more sophisticated level because it “provides the researcher with the logic to arrange his investigation and a means to build and enhance the theoretical links that urge him to compare the categories” (Charmaz, 2020). The constructivist grounded theory approach was employed to ask Chinese SIEs participants the three connected research questions through interviewing procedures. This resulted in the inductive identification and development of ideas from the data. Extracts of three levels of coding and theoretical coding are presented in Figure 10.

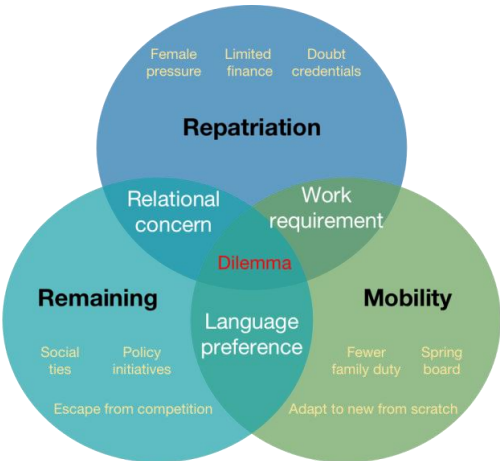


Figure 10. Agencies of Chinese Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriate in Hungary  
(Source: First author's conceptualisation)

## 9.5 Findings and discussion

The participants had three options for their early career after studying in Hungary: repatriation, remaining, or moving to another European country. However, regardless of the career choice made, the participants faced both career benefits and challenges.

### 9.5.1 Agency of Repatriation

One of the initial concepts that emerged was the importance of familial relationships related to Confucianism, compared to the attachment to the host country. Many participants viewed the return to their home country as a long-term plan, primarily driven by their strong family ties. Ten participants acknowledged that, despite having severed social contacts in China and needing to repair professional relationships, they had strong relationships with family members there. F13 expressed a strong desire to return to China, stating: “My heart will always be with my parents.” Consequently, family duties emerged as a significant topic, linking participants to their country of origin:

*My parents are the most central element of my life. I have been away from my parents for more than four years, and I feel terrible about being so far away. But I had to leave to work on the other side of the globe. (F13)*

One noticeable concern among female participants was starting a family, which reflects the norms in China and reveals an intriguing common thread. As in the West, the age of marriage and first births is increasing: in China, the average is around 29 (United Nations, 2013). However, the pressure to marry and have children is outstanding and a single woman over 30 is considered “an old maid” and unlikely to find a companion. She feels the pressure to get married, as there is high expectation for women to do so in China. Several times in her social media posts, she reflected on her in-betweenness by mentioning the dilemma of whether to return or stay, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. F1 explains a similar situation:

*I am over thirty years old and have been in a relationship with my boyfriend in Hungary for more than two years; my family desires that we return to China. (F1)*

While it is impossible to draw conclusions from all female SIEs' concerns about starting a family, the results indicate a consistent pattern about the expectations of women to focus on marriage and potential childbearing, instead of pursuing a career, especially in a foreign country.

However, some dilemmas in Chinese SIEs' repatriation exist. Firstly, international graduates' career mobility encourages them to stay in the host country or relocate to other countries after graduation. Some of the Chinese SIEs interviewed recognised their socio-cultural status and limited financial resources, which restricted their ability to stay in the host country, which echoed Farivar *et al's* (2019) findings. M12 indicated:

*As you know, I am from a rural part of China and come from a low-to-middle-income family. My father, in particular, was unable to work due to physical limitations, and my mother was the sole provider for the family. Despite my desire to remain abroad, at least in Hungary, where I may transform my socio-cultural capital, I must choose to return to China with my family and support them. (M12)*

The first author had already interviewed M12 about international education and was well aware of his predicament and dilemma. M12 aspired to work for a non-profit organisation that promotes Chinese culture globally. Nevertheless, his plans were hindered as he had to return to his hometown.

Secondly, participants regarded studying or working "abroad" as preferable to studying in China, since a foreign degree could potentially provide them with a stable career in the ever-growing competitive Chinese labour market. In the wake of the COVID-19 restrictions, China has observed a rise in the number of highly qualified Western employees, who have returned to China. This has resulted in the devaluation of foreign degrees. F5 specifically expressed:

*Ironically, the present labour market has declined. When I arrived at a university in Hungary six years ago, I believed that many overseas students of my age would have found greater employment opportunities than their Chinese counterparts. However, many individuals, like myself, could not find acceptable employment following graduation (F5).*

After completing a master's degree, F5 faced a nine-month job search in the Chinese labour market. During this time, she remained in Hungary without financial support, which

caused significant psychological stress. The first author maintained frequent contact with F5 on social media and noticed several posts indicating that she was on the verge of an emotional breakdown, expressing doubts about her skills, expertise and international experience.

Qualifications from lesser-known Hungarian universities are frequently subject to doubt. After the COVID-19 pandemic, many SIEs returned to China, and seven participants revealed that they lacked career advantages compared to local graduates and Western-educated professionals, even reporting lower career capital (Kanstrén and Suutari, 2021). Two respondents (M3 and M8) noted that a Hungarian degree does not guarantee a decent job, since they faced difficulties during online job interviews:

*The interviewer distrusts my credentials and skills since I am not a graduate of a top institution; I cannot tolerate this because of the common misconception that individuals from Anglo-nations are superior to non-Anglo countries. (M3)*

Several interviewees also questioned the value of skills and knowledge gained while they studied abroad.

#### 9.5.2 Agency to Remain

Social capital was developed through various social events and participation in study groups. Additionally, many networks were formed through non-work-related events. The individuals who had previous experience with expatriation had realised it was crucial to proactively establish social networks. Thus, SIEs need to develop simultaneous membership with local groups, as evidenced by F1 who developed social networks via participation in cultural organisations and activities:

*I discuss progress with friends and may also learn from my peers. For instance, I joined the 9<sup>th</sup> district community last year to get acquainted with the local culture. On the one hand, the community is in desperate need of foreign assistance; on the other hand, it provides me with an opportunity for engagement. (F1)*

F2 honestly described the whole psychological transition from estrangement to adaptation to the local culture:

*In the early stages of my time in Hungary, I had little contact with my local Hungarian colleagues. However, I gradually observed some changes in myself after*

*being repeatedly invited to their homes and meeting their parents. Closer friendships with Hungarian colleagues marked a new era and way of life for me here. (F2)*

The SIEs who spoke Hungarian were inclined to stay in Hungary due to their language proficiency, which can serve as the foundation for accumulating social capital, and ultimately developing career capital in their career paths. M10 explained that his socialisation in Hungary involves going out with locals and noted Hungarian drinking culture shapes their social lives. He described his friendships and collegiality with peers who speak Hungarian and talked extensively about them and his active involvement in cultural and community activities.

The SIEs aimed to become proficient speakers of Hungarian by take advantage of Hungarian lifestyle gradually. Some interviewees, who had already spent considerable time in Hungary, chose to stay and secure a job. They based their decisions on recent experiences and, most importantly, virtual networks connected to work and friendship. M22 reported that he enjoyed the company of his colleagues, both formally and informally. Meanwhile, the first author's research diary indicated that M22 viewed their happiness as a reflection of his social capital, as evidenced by his social media posts.

The respondents showed a strong desire to escape the competitive work environment in China and achieve psychological satisfaction in Hungary. Many of the Chinese SIEs acknowledged that they had heavy workloads and high levels of peer pressure while working in China. In contrast, staying in Hungary made F21 aware of the possibility of being temporarily free from such constraints and she appreciated the sense of relaxation and psychological well-being, rather than focusing on competition:

*I could feel my heart calming down as I stepped away from China's competitive environment. After years of involvement in Hungarian work and life, I have gained a new perspective on the world, and my heart is becoming more peaceful. (M12)*

The work visa programme is a public policy initiative that provides opportunities for individuals to work and live in other European countries. Six respondents decided to wait nine months to search for employment options in Hungary, after not being hired immediately after graduation. This strategy may motivate them to remain in Hungary

during the early stages of their employment search. However, twelve interviewees without Hungarian language skills stated their fears about “fitting into” the Hungarian job market as their primary concern because of language barriers.

### 9.5.3 Agency of Mobility

The positive impact of international experiences on career success has been documented in literature (Kraimer et al., 2009; Suutari *et al.*, 2018). However, self-initiated expatriation is a transitional process, and individual factors, such as self-efficacy, can moderate one’s interest in pursuing such experiences (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2015). SIEs cannot rely on organisational help after their expatriation, so they must take the initiative to explore the multicultural context. As a result, early career SIEs may choose to relocate to another country.

The early career SIEs regarded their mobility as gaining transitional experiences. Cultural exposure, travel, and a desire for adventure were major motivators. The consideration of non-work-related support for SIEs is also important for human resource management (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). It is well-established that younger individuals have more international mobility because they have fewer family responsibilities (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). As a result, age-associated perceived duties and responsibilities have emerged. The majority of male respondents (M12, M20) indicated that the optimal period for self-initiated expatriation is age-dependent:

*I was young and single, and I could choose the life I wanted, so I moved to Germany after graduating from Hungary, and you know what, I do not believe I would have made the same choice if I had a family (M12).*

*I am still young, so challenging myself is a wonderful experience (M20).*

Respondents regarded mobility to another European country as a means of speeding up their career development. After conducting a strategic analysis of employment opportunities in their respective fields, many individuals with strong credentials identify Germany and Northern Europe as desirable destinations. Obtaining education or work experience in Hungary is a logical springboard to access more job opportunities and social resources. F1, who completed an internship during her studies in Hungary, is getting ready to move to

Denmark, where she sees an opportunity for an enhanced career trajectory and a new life. This move has also led her to settle down in Denmark with her boyfriend.

Career success is not just the result of one big breakthrough, but rather a series of incremental steps and opportunities that build upon one another. F21, a PhD candidate, has spent over a decade studying in Europe. She recently shared vacation pictures with her boyfriend, acknowledging the benefits of exploring new cultures, even at the age of 33. In addition, she emphasized the importance of not only obtaining a doctorate, but also having the opportunity to work with a well-known academic supervisor. She expects this collaboration to serve as a springboard for her academic career in the long run.

Other important drivers included seeking adventure, and immersing themselves in a global culture, so as to gain a cosmopolitan identity. For early-career SIEs, this means pursuing novelty and innovation, and it appears that youth enhanced serendipity, whereby opportunities and adventures arise unexpectedly. By venturing beyond their comfort zones and connecting with a different culture, M3 and F21 regarded change as an opportunity to expand their knowledge and abilities:

*I have a worldwide perspective on international affairs. For instance, I rarely thought about migrants and ethnicity. They are naturally integrated into the international affairs that are currently on my mind. (M3)*

*Compared to my former friends in China, I currently have a global consciousness. I am brave enough to travel to another European country for work and enrich my skills. (F21)*

However, the participants who made the decision to relocate due to their career goals may still face dilemmas. Graduates often perceive themselves as more employable than they actually are, leading to information asymmetries between them and employers in the job market (William *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, they need to navigate the system, understand the language, and get access to information in order to succeed in the professional communities. M10, who had a Hungarian-speaking internship and had assimilated to Hungarian culture as a consequence of living in Hungary, was confronted with the decision of moving to another European country.



*If I travel to another European country, I may only use Hungarian sometimes in the future. (M10)*

Despite announcing his intention to move to Germany on social media over a year ago, M10 has yet to settle on a new destination within the EU. F13 elaborated upon the same dilemma, stating that she would not be able to use the Hungarian language elsewhere.

Because of the loss of socio-cultural capital, the U-curve model in cross-cultural psychology, which describes the stages of cultural adjustment, typically characterised by initial excitement, followed by disillusionment, and eventual adaptation, does not apply to early-career SIEs and their adjustment process occurred over a shorter period of time, with many cycles of honeymoon phases (Pereira *et al*, 2016). Chinese SIEs must adjust to a new environment from scratch. When early-career SIEs conduct overseas activities, their expatriate cultural adaptation is the most important element in determining their success. F1 admits that she will need time to adjust to her new surroundings and begin a new life with her boyfriend.

*As you know, I adore the lifestyle in Denmark; after interning here, I discussed our future plans with my boyfriend, and we decided to go to Denmark to make a living. However, because we have no relationships with anybody in Denmark, we must restart our life. (F1)*

The findings show that Chinese early-career SIEs in Hungary benefit from their career trajectories, but the process is unpredictable and complex. Many Chinese SIEs faced a tripartite dilemma of repatriation, remaining and moving to a Western European country, none of which is free of certain downsides. Therefore, solving this dilemma requires great self-direction, interest in internationalisation and flexibility.

## *9.6 Discussion*

All participants admitted the value of higher education to their personal development, future career and life aspirations. However, many participants demonstrated a feeling of *in-betweenness* (Li & Primecz, 2021) and still faced career ambiguity when they were in the transitional period. Navigating the dilemma of repatriation, remaining or mobility requires a careful consideration of the linguistic, cultural, and professional factors that shape Chinese early-career SIEs' personal and professional lives.

The decision whether to repatriate or remain is heavily influenced by relational factors, particularly family concerns. In contrast to earlier Western studies that suggest expatriates develop a multiple identity through mobility, this study found that Chinese early-career SIEs have a strong desire to maintain their cultural identities. A key value of filial piety related to Confucianism (Kohonen, 2005), substantially influences their career drive. The enduring social bonds and relationships of Chinese culture led some early-career SIEs to view their academic knowledge, cultural experience, and social networks as valuable assets they could contribute to their current employment in China. At the same time, when Hungary revealed its true reality with its relatively small employment market and limited potential, it often lost its attraction for young Chinese professionals.

The decision between repatriation and mobility is heavily influenced by work requirements, particularly for Chinese SIEs who have complex career aspirations and face varying opportunities. While the Chinese SIEs interviewed in this study regarded mobility as a potential springboard for career advancement, many of them faced limitations when working in other European countries, which ultimately led them to consider returning home, despite their initial desire for mobility.

The decision between remaining and mobility were often influenced by actual language proficiency. Hungarian-speaking graduates may choose to remain in Hungary because they can utilize their unique skills which might not be valued elsewhere in the world. Additionally, they may have developed a unique network in their host country. English-speaking SIEs or adventure-seeking individuals, who are interested in navigating diverse global contexts, may be less motivated to remain in Hungary where they may only be able to fulfil their career aspirations partially.

### *9.7 Conclusion*

This context-rich empirical investigation provides evidence that Chinese early-career SIEs rarely follow the two-step migration pathway (Hawthorne, 2010) identified in Anglo-Saxon countries such as Australia and observed in several other Western contexts. Eventually, only a small proportion of young professionals remain in Hungary after graduation, mainly those who studied in Hungarian and whose unique language skills could not be utilized in other contexts. Another group of Chinese early-career SIEs sought employment in other European countries with limited success, and their Hungarian education was rarely fully

recognized in these new countries. Repatriation was a logical option for many, even though their education in Hungary seemed a way out from their low socio-economic status. However, this exact social background later hindered them from finding education and employment in Anglo-Saxon or in other Western countries.

In addressing the complex dilemma faced by Chinese graduates, including early-career SIEs, some recommendations emerge. Firstly, organisations and policymakers in Hungary should recognize and provide support for the unique challenges associated with the transitional period experienced by the Chinese individuals, including proactive measures on the linguistic, cultural, and professional supports. Additionally, recognising the influence of language proficiency, strategies can be developed to retain Hungarian-speaking graduates by emphasizing the value of their unique skills and networks, while simultaneously providing opportunities for English-speaking SIEs to navigate diverse global contexts within Hungary.

This study provides practical advice for enhancing our knowledge of the professional problems and decisions encountered by early-career SIEs. However, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study did not explore the resiliency tactics used by the respondents when confronted with these challenges. Therefore, future research could examine such techniques from individual and community perspectives. Secondly, due to the exploratory character of the study, the sample size was limited and cannot conclusively indicate whether the respondents' experiences are representative of Chinese early-career SIEs in other cultural contexts. Therefore, future research is needed to further explore this topic. Thirdly, further exploration is required to delineate the distinctions between resiliency tactics and coping mechanisms across various choices. Additional demographic characteristics, such as education level and age, could potentially influence the perceived career paths of SIEs and may warrant further investigation in future studies. Lastly, the social and cultural capital accumulated by early-career SIEs may not easily transfer to employment and, therefore, the difference between early career SIEs and professional employees is crucial and requires further exploration.

## 10. Fourth Paper: Does Local Education Matter in Semi-periphery country? Comparative Analyses of Early Career Chinese Self-initiated Expatriates in Hungary

### *10.1 Abstract*

**Purpose:** This study investigates the subjective early career success of Chinese self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in Hungary, who possess diverse credentials. It also examines the influence of Hungarian education on Chinese SIEs in terms of their career trajectories in Hungary and beyond.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This article employs the thematic analysis by semi-structured interviews of 26 Chinese SIEs in Hungary, including eight with Chinese credentials; five with Chinese and Hungarian credentials, and thirteen with Hungarian ones.

**Findings:** The findings reveal two distinct types of early-career Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials in Hungary: those using their Hungarian experience as a stepping stone for long-term career mobility and those who perceive it as beneficial for their career objectives. Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials can also accumulate career capital, but their futures remain more uncertain. The findings also reveal the impact of gaining qualifications in Hungary, for Chinese SIEs with different credentials did not have a clearly defined career path.

**Research limitations:** This research does not address the career motivations and coping strategies of Chinese early career SIEs, and did not directly observe the participants, partly due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Social implications:** The results can help graduates start their careers on an upward trajectory, and provide insight for employers prior to employing an individual, enabling organisations to support SIEs as much as possible.

**Originality:** This research provides unique insights into an under-examined area, namely the subjective career success of self-initiated early-career Chinese SIEs, who are from the same country, but possess diverse backgrounds and credentials. Consequently, it offers a nuanced understanding of the impact of credentials from home countries and host countries on the perception of career success.

**Keywords:** Comparative analyses, Early career Chinese SIEs, Hungary, Career success, Local education, Thematic analysis

## *10.2 Introduction*

While numerous studies have compared company-initiated international assignments and inter-organizational moves between SIEs and assigned expatriates (Selmer et al., 2016; Suutari et al., 2017), recent research is currently extending beyond such comparisons to include a more comprehensive range of global careers, particularly focusing on the experiences of SIEs (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014; Brewster et al., 2021; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Primecz, 2023). Among this group, early career SIEs are considered by global and multinational organisations as an immediate supply of labour and a group devoted to working because they are flexible, devoted to work and open to experiencing new things, and have unique characteristics that set them apart from other expatriates (Pereira et al., 2016; Wechtler, 2018). This group is characterised by its youth (Yao et al., 2014), lack of financial resources (Israel and Cohen, 2022), and limited experience in international work environments (Wechtler et al., 2023). It is, therefore, necessary to discuss the career trajectories of SIEs from a longitudinal perspective, with their early-career period as a starting point (Li et al., 2023).

Previous literature has explored the influence of host country nationals and its cultural characteristics on the career development of SIEs (Singh et al., 2021), along with knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing between SIEs and organisations (Shao and Ariss, 2020; Singh et al., 2022). The literature mainly focuses on establishing a positive correlation between local education and employment prospects in the host country (Van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2019). Nevertheless, there is limited research on factors beyond local credentials and education that affect early career SIEs and SIEs to semi-periphery countries. Therefore, our intention is to address the gap in the literature regarding the decision-making processes and outcomes of Chinese individuals, when choosing to pursue career opportunities in semi-peripheral countries, such as Hungary.

This research focuses on the outcomes associated with career success among Chinese SIEs in Hungary and examines the role of Chinese and Hungarian credentials in the career development of such individuals and how these impact their opportunities and mobility in the job market. This paper is organised into five sections. The conceptual framework comprises of outlining the theories of self-determination career capital, while integrating relevant literature on early career SIEs, career success, local education and foreign credentials, and the

specific context of Chinese SIEs in Hungary. Subsequent sections on methods highlight the facts that 26 Chinese early career SIEs in Hungary have been interviewed, and thematic analysis was employed in the data analysis. The fourth section details the findings, including subjective career success and the effect of having Hungarian qualifications in Hungary and China. Finally, the last two sections summarise this article's contributions, and limitations, while highlighting future directions of possible research.

### *10.3 Theoretical framework and Literature review*

#### 10.3.1 Theoretical framework

##### 10.3.1.1 Self-determination theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological theory that explores human motivation and personality development, focusing on the fundamental psychological needs and regulatory motivations (Olafsen and Deci, 2020). It focuses more on the innate psychological needs behind human behaviour and the conditions that support the development of autonomous and self-determined individuals (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), than material purchases (Battaglio et al., 2022; Manganelli et al., 2022). SDT proposes that when these basic psychological needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, meaning they will engage in and even enjoy activities for their own sake (Wörtler et al., 2020).

Within this framework, human growth and well-being are contingent upon the fulfilment of three fundamental psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2020). SDT recognises the presence of extrinsic motivation, including integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation and extrinsic regulation, which is driven by external factors such, as rewards, punishments, or social pressures (Good et al., 2022; Ryan and Deci, 2020). By investigating these regulatory motivations and their connection to specific motivations, such as SIEs' motivations, researchers can gain insights into the underlying mechanisms driving expatriates' motivations. Understanding these motivations could help predict their future behaviour, commitment, and the potential impact of these motivations on the expatriate's experience (Despotovic et al., 2022; Madi et al., 2023).

### 10.3.1.2 Career capital theory

The career capital theory suggests that an individual's career advancement and success can be enhanced by cultivating a distinctive and valuable set of skills, knowledge, and experiences (comprising of knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom), which are highly desirable in the job market (Kanstrén and Suutari, 2021). These also prove to be a crucial element in establishing and sustaining a career (Inkson and Myers, 2003). The more diverse and valuable an individual's career capital, the greater the opportunities for career progression, job security, and earning potential (Hill and Hult, 2017).

International mobility can help students accumulate multiple forms of capital, such as mobility and human, social, cultural, and economic capital (Wong et al., 2015), which significantly influences the development of career capital, as these can provide individuals with the opportunity of gaining new experiences, learning new skills, and expanding their professional network. Moreover, by working and living in different countries and cultures, SIEs can broaden their perspective, gain new skills and knowledge, and build a network of international contacts. Naturally, this can enhance their career capital and increase their chances of success.

### 10.3.2 Early career self-initiated expatriates

Although early career SIEs have not achieved considerable attention from a theoretical perspective (Li et al., 2023; Wechtler et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2016; Wechtler, 2018), some literature that mentions their the career development (Inkson and Myers, 2003; Goštautaitė et al., 2020). Pereira et al. (2016) demonstrate that the young, skilled and mobile SIEs tend to rely on their own resources and information to secure employment opportunities. Donald et al (2018) concluded that the shift from university to an early career will likely impact their self-perception of employability and their potential to enter the international job market. Baluku et al. (2018) investigated the early career SIEs' diverse career paths, highlighting the significance of flexibility and personal initiative. This study's findings indicate that early career SIEs should prioritize enhancing their flexibility and career orientation in their job choices. Li et al. (2023) employed a mixed methodology to conduct a literature review focusing on personal career motivations and behaviours among early career SIEs; their findings provide insights into the implications of such motivations and behaviours on the levels of the structure, organization, and individual.

### 10.3.3 Career success for SIEs

Career success refers to the overall achievement and fulfilment of professional goals, it differs from career advancement, which essentially highlights the progression of a person's career (Laud and Johnson, 2012; Bowles et al., 2019). Career success is a multifaceted concept that encompasses objective and subjective career success (Arthur et al., 2005; Briscoe et al., 2021). Objectively, it refers to tangible outcomes of moving up the organisational hierarchy and societal status, such as promotions or increased responsibilities, whereas subjective career success refers to personal perception or assessment of their own career fulfillment, which is of particular importance to SIEs, due to their strong intrinsic career motivations and psychological perceptions of careers (Harrison et al., 2019; Waxin and Brewster, 2020; Madi et al., 2023). Cao et al (2012) concluded that the career success of SIEs is positively influenced by important career capital factors, namely a protean attitude towards their career, career networks, and cultural intelligence, with cultural distance acting as a moderator. In our framework, we included subjective measures of career success to account for the challenges in defining early career success for Chinese SIEs. By considering their subjective perceptions of career success, we aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how SIEs' career capital influences their career development.

### 10.3.4 Local education and foreign credentials

Previous literature has explored the influence of host country nationals and its cultural characteristics on the career development of SIEs (Cao et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2021; Waxin and Brewster, 2020), and knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing between SIEs and organisations (Papa et al., 2020; Shao and Ariss, 2020; Singh et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is limited research on factors beyond local credentials and education that affect early career SIEs. The existing literature mainly focuses on establishing a positive correlation between local education and employment prospects in the host country (Van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2019). Arifa et al (2022) concluded that there is positive correlation between local education and career development expectation abroad for the early career-stage academics.

Furthermore, researchers have examined the outcomes for employees holding foreign qualifications in their home countries. It transpires that foreign credentials may have no impact on securing employment in their country of origin, leading to a certain degree of mismatch and underemployment (Dustmann et al., 2016; Risberg and Romani, 2022). Nardon



et al (2021) show that many professional women with foreign credentials experienced underemployment, which pushed them towards lower-skilled or less stable positions.

#### 10.3.5 Overview of the early career expatriate experience in Hungary

International students are clearly a valuable asset. Yet, some Chinese students studying in Hungary are disadvantaged, due to their cultural capital (Li and Primecz, 2023). Li and Primecz (2021) propose that Chinese students studying in Hungary can help establish beneficial networks between Hungary and China. Li (2020) identified primary factors that influence Chinese students' choice of the Hungarian education system, including class inequality and the modernization process from the Chinese perspective, state policy perceptions, institutional, and community influence from the Hungarian perspective. However, Chinese students encounter various obstacles, such as language barriers, exclusion (Primecz and Li, 2022a), and academic challenges related to their "invisible academic performance in the classroom" (Li, 2020).

Li and Primecz (2021) employed exploratory-qualitative methods to explore the unique dilemma for Chinese students as to whether they stay or leave in Hungary after completing their studies in Hungary. There is little available literature on the expatriation in Central and Eastern European countries (Li, 2020) and there is currently a gap in the literature on the engagement SIEs in their careers, particularly in a host country with foreign and local credentials. Nonetheless, this literature offers valuable insights into the experiences of SIEs in the early stages of their careers and can provide guidance for policy and practice aimed at supporting individuals, who make such a move.

Missing out on the potential benefits of Eastern European human capital in the context of SIEs, suggesting that there may be unexplored opportunities to gain a competitive advantage (Felker, 2011). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to and outcomes of education in East Central Europe and for early career SIEs in the context of semi-peripheral countries, our study aims to address the following research questions: (1) How do local education beneficial for the host country's (Hungarian) employment market? (2) How do early career Chinese SIEs with varying credentials evaluate their career success?

## 10.4 Methodology

### 10.4.1 Research design

Qualitative research methods are particularly useful for context-rich analyses, as they seek to understand the unique perspectives of the individuals or groups being studied (O’Kane *et al.*, 2021; Richardson, 2021; Primecz, 2020, 2022). The purpose and scope of the research align with thematic analysis, since extended and immersive cross-cultural experiences require individuals to move beyond their culturally engrained attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. The subjective nature of global mobility experiences requires qualitative researchers to maintain reflexivity and awareness of their own experiences and preconceptions throughout the research process (Primecz, 2023). Therefore, the subjective career success for early career Chinese SIEs is a fundamentally personal matter. The research design is presented in Figure 11.

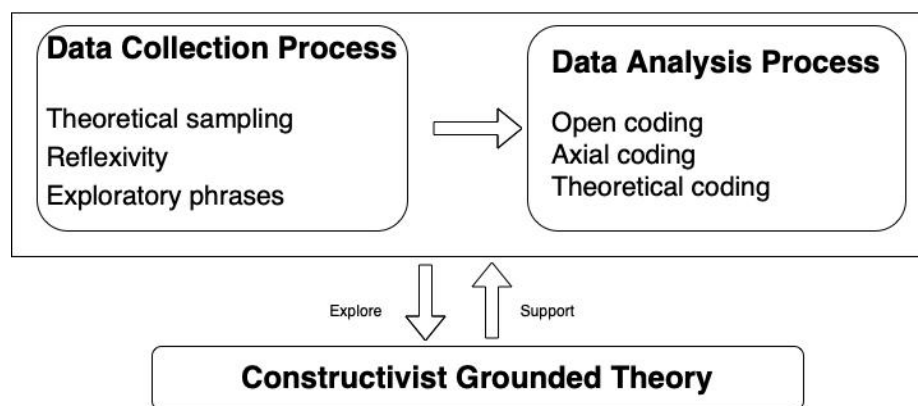


Figure 11. Methodological Structure  
(Source: First author's conceptualisation)

### 10.4.2 Participants and sampling method

To develop the sample, specific criteria were established to identify potential participants who met the characteristics of early career Chinese SIEs. Personal contacts were used to identify and approach individuals who met the following requirements (Doherty, 2013): (a) their initial intention was to temporarily move; (b) they legally moved to and resided in the host country as Chinese citizens; (c) the move was voluntary, not due to factors such as persecution or civil war; (d) they had less than \* years of work experience and were below 35 years old. Additionally, participants met a criterion relevant to SIE status (McNulty and Brewster, 2017) by holding both Chinese or Hungarian credentials before joining the

Hungarian employment market. Table 5 displays the sample's characteristics, including gender distribution, major, and length of work experience before and during their stay in Hungary. The average age of early career SIEs with Chinese credentials was approximately 30 years old, which is two years older than those with Hungarian credentials. Nonetheless, they are still younger than other expatriate populations as they were early career SIEs.

Table 5 Research participants and their demographic data

Credentials	Interviewee	Age	Gender	Educational level	Major	Length of working experience in China	Length of working experience in Hungary	Company type
Chinese	M1	31	Male	Ph.D	Finance	0.5	3	International company
	M2	26	Male	Master	Philosophy	0	1	Research centre
	M3	32	Male	Ph.D	International Relation	1.5	1.5	International company
	F4	33	Female	Master	Management	3	3	Freelance consultant
	M5	29	Male	Master	Finance	1	3	International company
	M6	32	Male	Master	Finance and Technology	2 (Japan)	4	International company
	F7	29	Female	Master	Finance	0.5 (France)	3	International company
	M8	30	Male	Master	International History	0	1.5	Research centre
Chinese and Hungarian credentials	F9	30	Female	Master	International Business and Management	0	4	International company
	M10	33	Male	Master	Finance	2	3	Chinese company
	F11	34	Female	Master	Artificial Intelligent Management	0	5	International company
	F12	27	Female	Master	Finance	0	4	International company
	F13	32	Female	Master	Finance and Technology	1	5	International company
Hungarian	Length of working experience in Hungary							
	F14	25	Female	Bachelor	International Relation	2		Chinese company

F15	30	Female	Master	International Relationship	1.5	Local company
F16	32	Female	Master	Linguistics	4	Local company
M17	28	Male	Bachelor	Mechanical engineering	3.5	Local company
M18	25	Male	Bachelor	Science	1	Local company
M19	31	Male	Ph.D	International relationship	2	Research centre
M20	33	Male	Ph.D	Biomedical Science	3	Research centre
M21	31	Male	Ph.D	Dentist	2	Local hospital
M22	25	Male	Bachelor	Engineering	1	Local company
M23	28	Male	Master	Economics	3.5	International company
F24	27	Female	Bachelor	Physicist	2	Local company
M25	27	Male	Master	Nutrition	1	Local company
M26	28	Male	Bachelor	Smelter engineering	4	Local company

#### 10.4.3 Data collection and analysis methods

The first author conducted online semi-structured interviews to gather data, with all research participants agreeing to participate and provide further information about their experiences in Hungary, having submitted informed consent forms. Each interview, lasting between 60-90 minutes, was digitally audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The anonymity of research participants was ensured.

The research process was influenced in multiple ways by the first author's position as a female Chinese doctoral student in Hungary, who has been living there for over five years and maintains continuous online and offline contact with Chinese people in Hungary. The author's insider status helped to establish a trusting relationship with the participants and allowed for a quick approach. To leverage the value of a shared language in building relationships and minimize any translation-related misunderstandings, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the official language of mainland China. The transcripts were kept in their original form to preserve their meaning and avoid any loss due to translation, thereby enabling credible analysis. Before the data analysis process, transcriptions were shared with the interviewees to verify the content and remove any information they did not wish to disclose (Kaur et al., 2009), which further ensured the credibility and legitimacy of the study.

The audio data collected during the interviews were transcribed in written Chinese, and NVivo software was employed to assist with the analysis of the data through coding and categorization. To minimize biases, the researcher maintained a reflective research diary throughout the data collection and analysis processes (Lincoln and Guba, 2013; Charmaz, 2006, 2020). The diary served as a tool for recording the researcher's experience, including first impressions, second thoughts, immediate interpretations, and intense emotions.

To analyse the data, the researcher followed Charmaz's (2006, 2020) three-step approach: line-by-line coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. The first author analysed the data in Chinese and only translated potential quotations. In the first step, the researcher read the transcript and provided a remark for each phrase or paragraph, using terms that summarized the investigated information or concept. The researcher also created a logbook to note each respondent's views of the content and direction of the reading. The second step involved developing axial coding to recompose the data and give coherence to the emerging analysis. This step highlighted the dimensions and properties of the data within a context and allowed for more precise explanations that answered questions of when, where, why, who, how, and with what results.

The third step involved theoretical coding, which provided a more sophisticated level of categorisation and allowed for the comparison of categories to build and enhance theoretical links. Using the constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher asked Chinese SIE participants the three connected research questions, resulting in the inductive identification and development of ideas from the data. Table 6 presents extracts of the three levels of coding and theoretical coding.

First order codes	Second order codes	Main themes	
Strong educational background	Chinese credentials	<b>Different credentials</b>	
International experience			
Normal credentials			
Self-efficacy and ambition			
International graduates	Hungarian credentials		
Securing prestigious positions	Stepping stone	<b>Subjective success</b>	<b>career</b>
International companies			

Individual career growth		
Finance and technology		
Career aspirations	Positive perception	
Career capital accumulation		
Boost the resume		
Building networks	Cultural and social accumulation	
Cultural understanding		
Language understanding		
Enhancing employability	Positive impact	<b>Local education</b>
Credential recognition		
Language proficiency		
Social networks		
Social science graduates' challenges	Uncertain future	
Competition with locals		
Competition with international SIEs		
Balancing family and career		
Pressure to return to China		

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Table 6 Code system

Source(s): first author's compilation

### *10.5 Findings*

Chinese SIEs with different credentials exhibit different perceptions and understandings of subjective career success, which they define for themselves. There are two distinct groups of Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials: the first group, comprising of individuals with better education than the second group, viewed their career trajectory in Hungary as a stepping stone towards opportunities in international companies in other European countries. In other words, these individuals see their experiences in Hungary as a strategic move to gain international exposure and expand their professional networks. They intend to leverage their education and internships to secure more prestigious positions in international companies and further advance their careers.

The second group of Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials consists of individuals who have average or below average credentials in China, but are highly ambitious and have high-levels of self-efficacy, meaning they progress well in Hungary. These individuals perceive studying and working in Hungary positively as it is seen as more advantageous for their career advancement compared to working in China. They recognise that their education and work experience in Hungary provide them with opportunities to accumulate cultural and social capital, which they believe will enhance their future career prospects. Despite facing challenges, such as cultural adaptation and language barriers, they remain determined to build successful careers in Hungary and to potentially exploring further opportunities within Europe.

Local education in Hungary does not offer a clearly defined career path for Chinese SIEs with average credentials; however, it does provide opportunities and diverse paths for their career development. Still, Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials, despite having to some degree assimilated culturally and socially, still face an uncertain future, especially if they have a background in the Social Sciences. Highly qualified Chinese SIEs may not find it necessary to obtain local credentials.

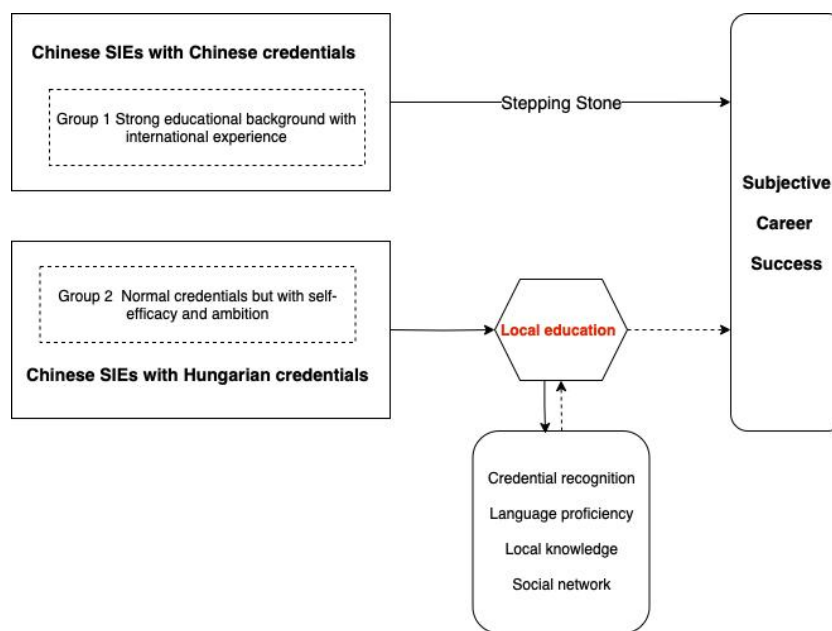


Figure 12. Subjective career success for Chinese SIEs with different credentials  
(Source: First author's conceptualisation)

### 10.5.1 Diverse perception of career success

Subjective career success pertains to an individual's personal perception and evaluation of their career progress and achievements. These subjective assessments consider personal

fulfilment, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and alignment with personal values and goals. Recognising the subjective nature of career experiences allows for a more holistic understanding of their career development and the unique factors that shape their perceptions of success. The credentials of the early career self-initiated expatriate can have a significant impact on their experience; by studying subjective career success for Chinese SIEs in Hungary, this section provides unique insights into the career experience of SIEs from China, but with different educational backgrounds and credentials.

10.5.1.1 “Stepping stone” and “Positive perception”: Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials

The participants made a clear connection between age and individual characteristics and career progression. It seemed that youth reinforced the importance of seeking out adventure and challenges. A significant portion of participants (10/13) stated that their decision to move to Hungary was influenced by the timing of their careers. It was the “right time”. As individuals grow older, however, they tend to accumulate a greater number of roles and responsibilities and feel a stronger sense of obligation. Indeed, younger individuals tend to have greater international mobility, in part because they have fewer family responsibilities to consider.

Working overseas provides a transformative experience that contributes to internationalisation and gives professional knowledge, skills, and capacity to contribute to individual career growth for early career SIEs. M2 and F12 indicated that:

*It was an opportune moment in my life, as I was at a young age and not yet tied down in matrimony. I highly doubt I would have made the same choice if I had already started a family. (M2, 26)*

*Being youthful, I find it to be a valuable opportunity to give myself opportunities to challenge in the world. (F12, 27)*

Many multinational companies have a presence in Hungary, providing opportunities for Chinese graduates with Chinese credentials to work for them. In doing so, SIEs with Chinese credentials may bring valuable skills and knowledge from their education and previous work experience in China — Chinese SIEs are more likely to be employed in international businesses if they possess international credentials.



## Stepping stone

The first author interviewed participants who received their higher education in China and found that there are two typical types of early-career Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials in Hungary. The first group comprises of graduates from esteemed universities in China, who aspire to achieve long-term professional mobility across various European countries. They plan to leverage their experience working in international companies in Hungary as a stepping stone for their career progression. Seven of them had prior international exchange or internship experience before coming to Hungary. F12 indicates that her international experiences have taught her how to gain self-awareness and develop a strong sense of personal independence:

*I believe that my participation in the international exchange program has helped me become more patient and mature. The numerous situations I encountered during the program have contributed to this growth. (F11, 27)*

Most of them were focused on securing employment in the finance and technology sectors in Hungary. M1 and M5 stated:

*I am from a top university in China – its ranking is approximately 10th in China – I hold multiple degrees and certificates from top universities in China and gained international exchange opportunities in the U.S., when I was in my bachelor's and master's studies. Before coming to Hungary, I had already planned my future career and was seeking new professional opportunities in stock market research under the guidance of professors I met in the United States. I believed that my Chinese credentials [...] and international experience would be highly valued here in Hungary. (M1, 31)*

*My Chinese credentials have proven to be extremely valuable in my professional pursuits in Hungary. Having graduated from a top university in Shanghai with a degree in computer science has given me the strength to apply for an internship at Morgan Stanley. However, I was initially concerned about the possibility of not being able to secure a full-time position here. After consulting and communicating with peers in my network before coming here, I found that it is relatively straightforward to secure a formal job in the Hungarian department of this company. I plan to gain a relevant title*

*and then return to a top internet company in China, which is easier for me than staying with this company in China. (M5, 29, male)*

Within this group, there are two Chinese SIEs who focus their research on international and East European regions within specific institutional and contextual settings. Additionally, one member of the group has the primary responsibility of cultivating and strengthening connections between China and Hungary. Interviewees with Chinese credentials may feel they have a stronger sense of their identity, as they may feel that they can maintain a connection with their home country.

### **Positive perception**

The other group is made up of SIEs who have high self-efficacy and seek long-term career goals, despite having studied at an average university in China. These participants regarded their work experience in Hungary as a potential first step towards other European countries or staying in Hungary and they seek out opportunities to grow their careers and build their professional networks, which can lead to personal growth, and a sense of fulfilment, despite the challenges they may face in their new environment.

Five participants confirmed that they had pursued their education in the Hungarian system while living abroad. They acknowledged that local credentials can serve as a significant asset for them in terms of enhancing their employability. This demonstrates to potential employers that the expatriate has the necessary skills and knowledge to work in the local context and can lead to increased career advancement and a greater likelihood of success in the employment market, even if they eventually return to China.

F9 graduated from an average university in China, but dropped out of education, when she arrived in Hungary. Six years ago, she joined an international company located in Hungary as an intern and was promoted to hold an associate title three years ago. Despite her desire to return to China due to personal reasons, she holds a deep appreciation for the time she spent in Hungary.

*One of my greatest accomplishments has been securing a position with a global firm in Hungary. I have been able to utilize my skills and expertise to contribute to the company's success and growth. This job has not only benefited me professionally, but also provided me with everything I have desired in recent years. Despite the challenges*

*and stress that came with the process, I persevered and have successfully advanced my career. To be honest, I would not have had such a fantastic opportunity if I had remained in China. (F9, 30)*

M10, a 33-year-old male, previously taught English in China for two years before moving to Budapest to join a Chinese-Hungarian company. He stated that his reason for relocating to Hungary was to enhance his career prospects and boost his resume, opportunities that were not available to him in the Chinese job market. He stated that for men from working-class families, the pressure to earn more money and support their families is significant, and this affects their career decisions. He indicated that having local credentials can be helpful for personal and professional integration into the local culture and society.

F12 confirmed that she expatriated to Hungary for her career.

*Due to the unpredictability of advancement within the company, I enrolled in a part-time MBA program at a local university as it presented the simplest path for me to attain a promotion. (F12, 27, female)*

Our study revealed that individuals working in these fields tend to have lower levels of education and experience compared to their Hungarian counterparts. However, due to their ambition and willingness to learn, they are promoted more rapidly. This is partly attributed to the fact that local employers recognise the value of Hungarian credentials, which equate to those of Hungarian employees. While local Hungarian credentials can be helpful, it is also important to consider the specific requirements of the job and industry. Depending on the job requirements, employers may place more value on international experience, language skills, or other qualifications.

#### 10.5.1.2 Career capital accumulation: Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials

International graduates represent an instant source of workforce and a dedicated group of employees, owing to their acquisition of sociocultural capital and qualifications from their host nation during their studies. Individuals can increase their career success and progress by building a diverse set of skills, knowledge, and experiences that are valuable in the job market. Accumulating career capital can be regarded as a form of human and socioeconomic capital, similar to educational attainment. The more diverse and valuable an individual's career capital, the greater number opportunities they will have for career advancement, job security, and

earning potential. Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials have the unique experience both in Chinese and local culture, they understand local culture better and have the necessary social network in Hungary as well.

By gradually accumulating cultural capital through their education in Hungary and transforming it into career capital in their career paths, Chinese international graduates in Hungary can leverage their education to become competitive and professional in the Hungarian job market and see it as a route to achieving greater career aspirations. Some interviewees mentioned that this changed their career trajectory. M22, a 25-year-old man, was raised in a working-class family and did not receive much financial or career support from his family. Despite this, he feels empowered and equipped to face his future after studying and living as an expatriate in Hungary. Likewise, M17 stated:

*You are well aware of my educational background and experiences, as we talked about it during our interview three years ago when I was pursuing my Bachelor's degree in Hungary. Since then, I must say that my study experience in Hungary has been invaluable in shaping my career. It has completely transformed my professional life and opened up new opportunities for me. Thanks to my Hungarian credentials, I have secured high-level positions in the field of mechanical science. Additionally, I have been able to utilise my knowledge to help Hungarian companies in expanding their mechanical technology to the Chinese market. (M17, 28)*

Furthermore, Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials have an easier time finding employment, as they are more likely to have established networks and a better understanding of the local job market. With the support of a local network, they improved their job search strategies and developed the necessary skills to make successful transitions in their early career. During the process of the job-seeking, F15 benefited from her international education in Hungary.

*After failing to complete my doctoral studies, I searched for a job in Budapest by using my master's credentials here [in Hungary]. During my six years of study in Hungary, I have been able to create a strong network and establish valuable connections. Thanks to the job information provided by my local peers, I was able to secure a suitable position in this institution as a Master's student specializing in international relations, otherwise, I would be got to mad if I encountered this situation. (F15, 30)*

M23 expanded on these benefits by highlighting that networking with locals has been beneficial for his career development.

*I am grateful for my study experience in Hungary, as it allowed me to quickly adapt to the local culture despite only being here for two years during my Master's studies. As I work in the financial department, having an open mind and strong networking skills is crucial. I regularly attend events hosted by various parties, including my leaders, strangers, and non-profit institutions, and I make it a point to meet as many people as possible. This is a stark contrast to the social events I used to attend in China. (M23, 28)*

Finally, the Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials are likely to have a better command of the local language, which can greatly enhance their ability to navigate the work environment:

*As a physicist, I am particularly proud of my progress in the Hungarian language. During our interview three years ago, I shared with you the difficulties I faced as a freshman due to language barriers. But now, my proficiency in Hungarian has not only enabled me to have deeper connections with the local community and gain a deeper understanding of the culture, but it has also opened up new professional opportunities for me. (F24, 27)*

Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials are likely to have a better understanding of local cultural norms and values, which can make it easier for them to adjust to their new environment and build relationships with others. M19, who is 31 years old, holds a double doctorate from Hungary and stated that:

*The need for individuals who possess a thorough knowledge of both Chinese and Hungarian cultures is beneficial for establishing community and association which I am doing right now. That provides numerous exciting career prospects for me in this association. (M19, 31)*

#### 10.5.2 Local education: no clear career path

Local education for Chinese SIEs with different credentials can have a mix of positive outcomes and areas of ambiguity. On the positive side, Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials, combined with local education, can benefit from a deeper understanding of credential recognition, language proficiency, local knowledge and social networks. However, there are also areas of ambiguity and potential challenges for Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials,

which leads to uncertainties and obstacles in terms of a dead-end career for Social Science graduates, competition with both local and international candidates, and familial expectations, especially for women. Furthermore, some of them might have any options just to remain in underemployment in Hungary.

#### 10.5.2.1 Positive impact: Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials

On the positive side, Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials, combined with a local education can benefit from a deeper understanding of Hungarian culture, language, and customs. F13 graduated from a Chinese university with a general undergraduate degree and had no international exchange experience. She began her career at the bottom position of a large Chinese-Hungarian company. During the interview, she mentioned that she was promoted after obtaining a Hungarian Master's degree in Innovative Technology and Finance.

Three of the Chinese SIEs confirmed that being partly educated in Hungary significantly enhanced their cultural adaptation. M6 demonstrated his preparedness for working in Hungary by showing familiarity with the procedures involved in obtaining residency and work permits, which enabled him to efficiently navigate the administrative aspects associated with securing a position. Some found that acquiring a local education made it easier for them to understand and navigate different social norms within the host country.

*When working in China, my objective is to efficiently conclude meetings, as time and efficiency are highly valued. However, after collaborating with my classmates here [in Hungary], I have come to understand the importance of building rapport before diving into the main agenda of the meeting. This includes engaging in casual conversation, such as discussing weekend plans or sharing a coffee, to establish a more conducive atmosphere for effective communication. (F11, 34)*

Clearly, local education equips them with specialised knowledge and skills that are relevant to the specific context, empowering them to make substantial contributions to the local community and establish meaningful connections with local stakeholders, which facilitates Chinese SIEs with Chinese credentials' integration and acceptance in Hungary. Acquiring local education, including learning Hungarian, proves beneficial for Chinese SIEs as they pursue their work or research. However, the language barrier presents a significant challenge for Chinese SIEs, who initially possess Chinese credentials. M8 studied

International History at a joint China-foreign university located in China and most research fields were focused on Hungarian history.

*I have dedicated considerable effort to improving my Hungarian language skills with the aim of building stronger connections with my colleagues and avoiding any sense of alienation. Despite the challenges posed by language barriers, these difficulties have motivated me to work even harder and showcase my abilities. (M8, 30)*

#### 10.5.2.2 Uncertain future: Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials

Although local education offers certain advantages, such as cultural familiarity, specialised knowledge, and local recognition, for Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials, there are uncertainties regarding the compatibility of their credentials and potential limitations. Many Social Science graduates face dead-end careers, along with competition from local and international candidates, and familial expectations. Therefore, it is crucial for those early career Chinese SIEs to navigate these complexities effectively and to proactively address any ambiguities, so as to maximise the benefits of their local education and mitigate its potential challenges.

A dead-end career refers to a job that does not align with one's educational qualifications, skills, and interests, one that, in other words, offers limited opportunities for professional development, advancement, and job security. One of the most significant obstacles faced by Chinese SIEs is the issue of job mismatch among graduates, who have majored in Social Science, but face difficulties and limitations when it comes to finding a job in the Hungarian market, which matches their professional skills and interests. Employability is significantly different from subject, with graduates with academic specialisations expecting greater employability than those who have studied more general degrees. Because the possession of adequate generalist credentials was not enough to be allowed to work in her chosen profession, F16 decided to make a career change.

*I was major in linguistics as a Master's student, you know, it is not easy to find a suitable job to teach local people English as a foreigner. So, I had to choose my current job as a secretary in a company under the time pressure of a visa. (F16, 32)*

Possessing an unappreciated or underappreciated professional background also leads to a confusing situation in the Hungarian job market. Because she was not fully recognised and valued, F14's long-term career aspirations were hindered.

*My major is in International Relations and I am unsure of how to find a corresponding job, despite having some internship experience with international organizations in Hungary. I am very worried about my future career. (F14, 25)*

However, interviewees with Hungarian credentials also faced difficulties in obtaining work visas after graduation, as they may be seen as less desirable by potential employers compared to local graduates. Therefore, having citizenship is a requirement for the participants, who commented that having only nine months to find suitable employment after graduation is a challenge. Employers prefer that expatriates have a non-permanent residency status, so that they would be as much as possible out of the responsibility of institutions, such as social security. M23 stated that

*From the political perspective, politicians do not want people who are temporary residents or have no citizenship [...] which influences the election, they prefer permanent immigrants. (M23, 28)*

M22 stated the following quotation:

*I have faced some challenges with discrimination, as there can be a bias against international graduates and foreigners in the job market. (M22, 28)*

Despite staying in Hungary for 13 years to study dentistry and acquiring 3 years of career experience, M21 continues to encounter obstacles and remains at a disadvantage, when compared to local graduates:

*One of the most significant faced by Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials is the intense competition for job opportunities. As a foreigner, I often find myself competing against both local talent and other expatriates, which can be intimidating. (M21, 31)*

Finally, family is a significant aspect of life that can impact an individual's employment-related choices (Las Heras et al., 2020). Family support for repatriation has a significant correlation with an expatriate's intention to return home (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). For SIEs, family encouragement to return to their hometown has a positive impact on their intention to do so, which, in turn, predicts their decision to leave their current job within the next few months. Specifically, nine out of thirteen participants, who were only children,



found it difficult to meet their familial obligations. Unlike Chinese SIEs in the United States, who have the desire to remain in the country with expectations from their parents (Cho, 2013), Chinese SIEs in Hungary are focused on building self-efficacy and aim to return to their home country with high-level professional experience.

The present findings suggest that Chinese SIEs have a strong desire to maintain their cultural identity. Filial piety, being a crucial aspect of Confucianism, represents an essential virtue and responsibility to show respect, obedience, and care for one's parents and elderly family members.

*At this stage in my life, my parents are of utmost importance to me. At times, I feel guilty for being so far away from them. They have made numerous sacrifices for me, but now I am working on the other side of the world, leaving them behind. The pressure can become overwhelming at times, to the point where I just want to abandon my job and return to China. (F14, 25)*

*My parents sacrificed and laboured to raise me into who I am now, and that was their duty as parents. But now, I have to ensure that they are well-cared for and able to have a comfortable and stress-free retirement. (M18, 25)*

Parents have a crucial influence, especially on women's decisions to return. One female participant spoke about her desire to secure a job in Hungary after graduation, in order to gain an advantage in China's competitive job market after repatriation, but she mentioned that her parents were against the idea of her working abroad. Another Chinese SIE with Hungarian credentials shared a similar situation, saying: *"If my parents want me to return home immediately after graduation, then I will go back."*

F16 has a proactive personality and a love for adventure. With her English teaching experience in Hungary, she stated that she would pursue a long-term career there if it were not for her family responsibilities, particularly her single status at this age.

*As I am growing older [at the age of 32], I feel constant pressure from my family to get married. My parents do not wish for me to stay abroad for an extended period and have mentioned that other people my age are already married. As a result, I plan to return permanently after my current posting. (F16, 32)*

## *10.6 Discussion*

This research reinforces the relevance of existing theories, as well as discussing the application of SDT and CCT in understanding the experiences and career trajectories of Chinese SIEs with different credentials in Hungary. SDT is mainly useful in highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and psychological perception in motivating Chinese SIEs to pursue their goals in the semi-periphery context, particularly in Hungary, while CCT supports Chinese SIEs' different strategic move for international exposure to enhance their career prospects, and the result of their high ambition and self-efficacy for subjective career success. They diligently accumulate cultural and social capital, recognising its instrumental value in navigating cross-cultural settings.

Chinese SIEs with strong Chinese credentials exhibit autonomy in their career decisions. They view their international experiences in Hungary as a means to autonomously shape their future careers in other European countries. Chinese SIEs with lower Chinese credentials demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy, indicating their expectation in their competence improvement. They believe that their experiences in Hungary contribute to their competence, which will benefit their careers. Although some of the Chinese SIEs with Hungarian credentials have uncertain future, they still have strong perception on the cultural and social accumulation. This aligns with the findings related to the features of subjective career success and development (Arthur et al., 2005; Briscoe et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the study provides evidence challenging the assumption that local education in European semi-peripheral countries is similar as in Anglo-Saxon or Western European countries, but provides evidence that with strong credential from China similar opportunities and diverse paths for career development is possible for motivated early career SIEs. The particularities of semi-periphery countries for career opportunities for Chinese early career SIEs compared to other countries can be distinct. Because of emerging markets, some semi-periphery countries offer a wider range of job opportunities for Chinese SIEs with different credentials rather than attracting the high ranking credentials to Hungarian industry. However, semi-periphery countries can also present challenges, which leads to the difficulties of Chinese early career SIEs' adaptation in Hungary.

Last but not least, the challenges and opportunities discussed above may not apply uniformly to all semi-periphery countries, as the economic and social conditions can differ

significantly among them. Chinese early career SIEs should consider their personal career objectives when choosing to work in semi-periphery countries.

### *10.7 Conclusion*

This study provides an important exploration of the early career subjective successes faced by Chinese SIEs with both Chinese and Hungarian credentials. It can be concluded that Chinese SIEs have different goals, when it comes to their careers and face distinct career successes depending on their credentials. Additionally, Hungarian education does not offer a clearly defined career path for Chinese SIEs with average credentials, but it does provide opportunities and diverse paths for their career development. This research provides unique insights into an under-considered area, namely the subjective career success of self-initiated early career Chinese expatriates, who are from the same country, but have diverse backgrounds and credentials. This study also provides practical implications for the examination of the experiences and challenges faced by early career SIEs, which is valuable to graduates and employers alike.

This study is exploratory in nature and limited in scope, undertaken primarily to address what we believed to be an existential issue in the current literature on business expatriation. However, there are three limitations to this study. Firstly, it does not address the coping strategies of Chinese SIEs in the early stages of their careers. Secondly, due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, both researchers and participants were constrained in their ability to interact, and other qualitative interpretive methods, such as participant observation, may have been more suitable to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences. Thirdly, variations exist in the majors of credentials received across different countries. Interviewees in Hungary tend to acquire more science-oriented majors. Yet, in China, the majority of credentials obtained are in Social Sciences or are joint honours degrees. This disparity may pose challenges in terms of employability and career development opportunities.

Future career research may apply the framework developed in this article to SIEs' career motivations and coping strategies. Moreover, the management of non-EU citizens working in Hungary requires a reframing of their contribution to the job market and offering them more support. It would be especially fruitful to compare these findings with the experiences of

skilled migrants in countries, such as the UK and the USA, where diversity is more explicitly encouraged.

## CHAPTER III.

### 11. Summary of the results

To comprehensively understand the career trajectories of the Chinese early career SIEs in Hungary over time, this research utilises a two-step expatriation pathway and alternative career trajectories. The following chapter summarises the findings and answers to the research questions that were raised at the beginning of the study. Each main aspect of the research was published as a paper, which enabled the researcher to reflect on their work at every step of the process. In the subsequent section, there is an overall summary of the four papers and the conclusion of the research.

### 12. Conclusion of the research

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the career trajectories of Chinese self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in Hungary over time, this study was conducted as exploratory research. The research uses a two-step expatriation pathway to illustrate the career progression of Chinese SIEs in Hungary, starting from their graduation to early career stages. The study covers topics such as career options, advancement opportunities, and challenges faced by these individuals.

**What are the career options, subjective success and challenges for early career self-initiated expatriates in Hungary?**

**This question is further divided into sub questions:**

- What are the socioeconomic status and primary motivations of Chinese graduates in Hungary?
- What are the career options, including self-initiated expatriates, of Chinese graduates in Hungary and in Europe?
- How do early career Chinese SIEs with varying credentials evaluate their career success?
- How to define local education beneficial for the host country's (Hungarian) employment market?

In order to provide a comprehensive and insightful examination of the subject matter, this thesis adopts a thoughtful arrangement and presents a concise summary of each section at the outset. By doing so, it aims to enlighten the readers and facilitate their understanding of the research findings. The thesis be organised in a logical and coherent sequence, following the framework of the "two-step migration pathway and alternative career trajectories." This framework establishes a connection between the concept of expatriation and the specific

journey taken by individuals from being international students to becoming early career self-initiated expatriates. By exploring this pathway, the thesis shed light on the various stages, challenges, and opportunities that arise during the career development process of these individuals.

Furthermore, the thesis places significant emphasis on comparing the career outcomes of Chinese self-initiated expatriates with individuals holding Chinese and Hungarian credentials. This comparative analysis is of utmost importance as it provides valuable insights into the unique experiences and potential differences faced by self-initiated expatriates based on their educational backgrounds. By employing this framework and comparative approach, the thesis aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. It seeks to highlight the complexities and variations within the career trajectories of international graduates and early career self-initiated expatriates. This not only enriches the existing body of knowledge but also contributes to a more comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing career development in this specific context.

Overall, the thesis aims to provide a logical and coherent analysis by utilising the "two-step migration pathway and alternative career trajectories" framework. By examining the career outcomes of Chinese self-initiated expatriates in relation to their different credentials, the thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in this unique career path.

### 13. Contribution to the science

Theoretically, after analysing the related multi-disciplinary research results on the early career of active expatriates in recent years, it can provide academic valuable information on early career management. Specifically, on the one hand, the research provides a definition of early career self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), as well as identifying specific criteria and characteristics that are relevant to early career SIEs. On the other hand, this study is important for understanding the protean and boundaryless careers of early career self-initiated expatriates and immigrants, the main theoretical contribution of this paper is the conceptualisation and exploration of early career Chinese SIEs' career trajectories and challenges, based on constructivist grounded theory. In addition, the research provides insights into the career development and capital of SIEs from the same country but with diverse backgrounds and credentials,

Practically, it offers a focused examination of the experiences and challenges faced by early career SIEs, highlighting the impact of cultural and contextual factors on career mobility,

which is valuable to graduates and employers. The results can help graduates start their careers on an upward trajectory, and provide insight for employers into the pre-employment psychological contract and career mindfulness, enabling organisations to support self-initiated expatriates as much as possible. This research also has practical implications for policymakers in Hungary and its immediate vicinity by a better understanding of early career SIEs' career decisions and challenges with similar socioeconomic status individuals.

Considering that early career SIEs of Chinese origin comprise a substantial part of the global SIE population (Finaccord, 2014; InterNations, 2021), empirical research on Chinese SIEs is essential. Therefore, this dissertation is a context-rich empirical research, that aims to fill the gaps in the Sino-Hungarian literature, even in semi-periphery countries, because there is limited research on the SIEs' career trajectories in Hungary.

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## APPENDIX I - Coding

Table 1 Examples of open coding

Open coding	
<b>Lower-middle socioeconomic background</b>	<i>I definitely would say I am from a poor, poor family... It is true, my father is a blue-collar worker, his wage is too low, and he was transferred to another sector. My mother never had job during her whole life, yes, she is a housewife. My mother sacrifices herself and has cared for me and my father all her life.</i>
<b>Parents cultivation and support</b>	<i>Although my mother does not speak English very well, she let me get in touch with an English environment at a very early stage.</i>
<b>Extracurricular interests and hobbies</b>	<i>Neither my father nor my mother is well educated. Even though they were under economic pressure, my mother still invested in extracurricular interests—the Chinese dulcimer (扬琴, ‘Yangqin’) in my childhood.</i>
<b>Cultural activities</b>	<i>When I was a child, I pleaded with my parents to buy me a piano; they got into debt to buy the piano. I played it for a time and then got bored, but my parents encouraged me to continue practising. To be honest, my parents wanted me to pursue the piano as a hobby rather than as a potential profession. But it helps me a lot to cope with study-related pressure.</i>
<b>Parents’ inattention and busy work</b>	<i>When I was a kid, I never saw my father during the daytime for many years; he came home very late every day. This is my impression of him. In fact, I had very little contact with him in my childhood, so I personally feel that it is the reason why I was afraid to communicate with boys.</i>
<b>Children’s desire relating to parents’</b>	<i>My childhood was unaccompanied. I lived alone, without the care of any elders. That is the reason I did not study well during my primary and secondary schooling.</i>

<b>company</b>	<i>Actually, we don't talk a lot, as they only care about their own business.</i>
<b>Previous practical perception for working experiences</b>	<i>I did three kinds of job before I came to Hungary, each job lasted for 3–4 months, which was an experience that frustrated me a lot. I paid more attention to my career trajectory than my emotional wellbeing. I had to apply for a university in Hungary in order to maximise my academic competition in the job market.</i>
<b>Internship perception</b>	<i>My initial foreign study came at the end of my internship. You know it was really hard and tiring to do manual work without any stimulation. My mother and I both realised that I would not have a bright career if I did not choose to study abroad.</i>
<b>Financial feasibility</b>	<i>I understand our family was poor in my childhood, and I do need to take into consideration my parents' financial capacity. I did not consider the USA or other countries that have good opportunities and resources. I think the Hungarian education is affordable for me and my family.</i>
<b>Scholarship opportunities</b>	<i>My parents had already offered me support for my master's degree, so I was embarrassed to ask again for support for doctoral study. I got an offer from the United Kingdom, but the major consideration was finance. Thus, I accepted the scholarship from Hungary.</i>
<b>Consider career path</b>	<i>I need to consider my future; one reason for studying in Hungary is the university's connections, the other is an important factor – I think that the Hungarian agricultural profession is among the most developed in Europe, so I chose to do my agricultural bachelor's in Hungary.</i>

Table 2 Axial coding

<b>Axial coding</b>	
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Lower-middle socioeconomic background

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Educational desires	Parents' cultivation and support
	Extracurricular interests and hobbies
	Cultural activities
Self-expression values	Previous practical perception of working experience
	Perception of internship
	Consideration of career path
Reality-based Constraints	Parents' inattention and engagement with work
	Children's expectation of company
	Financial feasibility
	Scholarship opportunities

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## APPENDIX II - Profile of the interviewees

### Article 1- Interviewees description

Interviewee	Place	Age	Gender	Father Occupation	Mother Occupation	Study Fee Status	Educational level	Major
I1	Budapest	27	Female	Accountant	Repeionist	Tuition fee-paying	Master	Humanities
I2	Budapest	23	Female	Self-employer	Self-employer	Tuition fee-paying	Master	Humanities
I3	Budapest	23	male	Teacher	Teacher	Tuition fee-paying	Master	Humanities
I4	Budapest	19	Female	Teacher	Teacher	Tuition fee-paying	Bachelor	Science
I5	Budapest	23	Female	Worker	policewoman	Scholarship	Master	Science
I 6	Budapest	22	Female	Artist	Teacher	Scholarship	Bachelor	Humanities
I7	Budapest	23	Female	Staff	Staff	Tuition fee reduction	Master	Humanities
I8	Budapest	25	male	Staff	Teacher	Tuition fee-paying	Bachelor & Master	Medical field
I9	Non-Budapest	28	Female	Worker	Housewife	Scholarship	Master	Humanities
I10	Non-Budapest	24	Male	Self-employer	Self-employer	Scholarship	Bachelor	Science
I 11	Budapest	24	Male	Worker	Staff	Tuition fee paying	Bachelor	Science
I12	Non-Budapest	21	Male	Farmer	Staff	Scholarship	Bachelor	Science
I13	Non-Budapest	24	Male	Not work	Worker	Tuition fee paying	Bachelor	Science
I 14	Non-Budapest	23	Female	Teacher	Teacher	Scholarship	Master	Humanities
I 15	Non-Budapest	23	Male	Teacher	Accountant	Scholarship	Bachelor & Master	Medical field
I 16	Non-Budapest	29	Male	Teacher	Worker	Tuition fee reduction	PhD	Medical field
I 17	Budapest	27	Male	Tax officer	Retired	Tuition fee reduction	PhD	Medical field

I18	Non-Budapest	25	Male	Teacher	Staff	Tuition fee-paying	Master	Science
I 19	Non-Budapest	25	Female	Worker	Teacher	Tuition fee-paying	Master	Humanities
I 20	Non-Budapest	21	Male	Self-employer	Self-employer	Tuition fee-paying	Bachelor	Science
I 21	Non-Budapest	17	Female	Driver	Self-employer	Tuition fee reduction	Bachelor	Humanities
I 22	Non-Budapest	27	Male	Teacher	Officer	Tuition fee-paying	Bachelor & Master	Science
I 23	Non-Budapest	27	Female	Worker	Self-employer	Scholarship	PhD	Medical field
I 24	Non-Budapest	25	Male	Teacher	Self-employer	Scholarship	PhD	Medical field
I 25	Non-Budapest	23	Female	Bank assistant	Worker	Scholarship	Bachelor	Medical field
I 26	Non-Budapest	23	Male	Worker	Teacher	Scholarship	Bachelor	Medical field

### Article 3- Interviewees description

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Educational level	Major	Work experience in Hungary
F1	Female	33	Master	Economics	3
F2	Female	29	Master	Economics	3
M3	Male	29	Master	Economics	2.5
F4	Female	27	Bachelor	International Relations	2
F5	Female	29	Master	Environment	3
F6	Female	28	Bachelor	Arts	3
F7	Female	29	Master	International Business Law	2
M8	Male	31	Master	Veterinary Medicine	2
F9	Female	34	Master	MBA	2
M10	Male	30	Bachelor	Smelter Engineering	3
M11	Male	30	Bachelor	Mechanical Engineering	3
M12	Male	30	Bachelor	Agronomy	2
F13	Female	29	Master	International Economics and Business	2
M14	Male	29	Master	Medicine	2
M15	Male	35	Ph.D	Biomedical Science	3
M16	Male	33	Ph.D	Dentistry	2
M17	Male	31	Master	Public Health	2
F18	Female	31	Master	Economics	2
M19	Male	33	Master	Public Health	3
M20	Male	30	Bachelor	Economics	2.5
F21	Female	33	Ph.D	Medicine	1
M22	Male	31	Ph.D	Medicine	2

Article 4- Interviewees description

Credentials	Interviewee	Age	Gender	Educational level	Major	Length of working experience in China	Length of working experience in Hungary	Company type
Chinese	M1	31	Male	Ph.D	Finance	0.5	3	International company
	M2	26	Male	Master	Philosophy	0	1	Research centre
	M3	32	Male	Ph.D	International Relation	1.5	1.5	International company
	F4	33	Female	Master	Management	3	3	Freelance consultant
	M5	29	Male	Master	Finance	1	3	International company
	M6	32	Male	Master	Finance and Technology	2 (Japan)	4	International company
	F7	29	Female	Master	Finance	0.5 (France)	3	International company
	M8	30	Male	Master	International History	0	1.5	Research centre
Chinese and Hungarian credentials	F9	30	Female	Master	International Business and Management	0	4	International company
	M10	33	Male	Master	Finance	2	3	Chinese company
	F11	34	Female	Master	Artificial Intelligent Management	0	5	International company
	F12	27	Female	Master	Finance	0	4	International company
	F13	32	Female	Master	Finance and Technology	1	5	International company
Hungarian	Length of working experience in Hungary							
	F14	25	Female	Bachelor	International Relation	2		Chinese company
	F15	30	Female	Master	International Relationship	1.5		Local company
	F16	32	Female	Master	Linguistics	4		Local company
	M17	28	Male	Bachelor	Mechanical engineering	3.5		Local company

M18	25	Male	Bachelor	Science	1	Local company
M19	31	Male	Ph.D	International relationship	2	Research centre
M20	33	Male	Ph.D	Biomedical Science	3	Research centre
M21	31	Male	Ph.D	Dentist	2	Local hospital
M22	25	Male	Bachelor	Engineering	1	Local company
M23	28	Male	Master	Economics	3.5	International company
F24	27	Female	Bachelor	Physicist	2	Local company
M25	27	Male	Master	Nutrition	1	Local company
M26	28	Male	Bachelor	Smelter engineering	4	Local company

## PUBLICATION LIST OF THE AUTHOR

### Peer-reviewed journal articles:

1. Li, X. & Primecz, H. (2023). A qualitative exploration of the socioeconomic status and motivations of Chinese students in Hungary. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 9(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v9i1.814>
2. Li, X., Primecz, H., Paget, A. L. (2023). Understanding the Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Review and Directions for Future Research. *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review*. 54(5), 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2023.05.02>
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4. Li, X. & Primecz, H. (2021). The Future Plans and Dilemmas of Chinese Students Studying in Hungary: A Narrative Analysis. *Society and Economy*, 43 (04), 1-17 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1556/204.2021.00015>
5. Primecz, H & Li, X. (2021). Magyarországon tanuló kínai hallgatók társadalmi háttere és belépési nehézségei [Social background and entry difficulties of Chinese students studying in Hungary]. *Educatio*. 12(04): 713-721. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2063.30.2021.4.12>
6. Li, X. (2020). Chinese Students Choosing Hungarian Tertiary Education: A Systematic Review. *East Asia*. 37, 317–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-020-09333-y>

### International conference presentations:

1. Li, X. & Primecz, H. (2023). Transitioning from University to Early Career: Exploring the Career Perceptions and Employability of Chinese Self-Initiated Expatriates in Hungary. International Association of Cross-cultural Competence and Management (IACCM) conference, Naples, Italy, October.
2. Li, X., Primecz, H., Paget A. L. (2023). Understanding the Early Career Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Review and Directions for Future Research. European Academy of Management (EURAM) Conference, Dublin, Ireland, June.
3. Li, X. (2021). Cross Cultural Research of Identity Construction and Learning Shock: A Grounded Theory of Chinese Students in Hungary. Nordic Academy of Management. Online, December.
4. Li, X. (2020). Literature Review on the Factors that Chinese Students Pursuing Higher Education in Hungary. A steam on Migration / Identity / Power: Integration and Cross Cultural Management Challenges (EURAM). Dublin, Ireland, December.



5. Li, X. (2019). International mobility and cultural reproduction: The case of Chinese students in Hungary. The Pre-Forum Session of Shanghai Forum 2019 - Global Governance and Asia from the Perspective of the CEE Countries. June, Budapest, Hungary.
6. Li, X. (2019). Chinese Students Tertiary Educational Mobility and Stratification in Hungary. The Inclusion, Mobility, and Multilingual Education Conference: Exploring the role of languages for education and development. Bangkok, Thailand, September.
7. Li, X. (2018). Sojourner and Social Stratification. The 8th Conference of the Chinese Association of Social Psychology. Yunnan Province, China, July.