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## **An Ethnography of Taiwanese International Students' Identity Movements: Habitus Modification and Improvisation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Many studies focus on Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation issues inside and outside educational settings in the West. A strong emphasis has been placed on identifying Chinese-speaking international students' problems and solving them through educational programs, pedagogies, and curricula. This emphasis potentially categorizes these students as a cohort that, in particular, have issues learning and living in Western societies, a categorization that ignores identity as complex and context-dependent. Drawing on a Bourdieuan poststructuralist perspective, this 18-month-long study documented the experiences of nine Taiwanese international students at different Australian universities before, during, and after their 1-year postgraduate education in Australia. This study compared their experiences and highlighted the complexity of identity movements. The findings present habitus modification and habitus improvisation, two notions developed from a Bourdieuan perspective. In conclusion, this study encourages reassessment of the standard notions of adaptation and prompts further exploration of how international students use their overseas experiences in the home context.

**Keywords:** adaptation, habitus, identity, international students, movement

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Much of research on Chinese-speaking international students has focused on the stereotypes that Western students hold against these students or the intervention programs that can help international students adapt to the West and Western higher education (Hendrickson, 2018; Matera et al., 2018; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Smith &

Khawaja, 2011). Such research has concluded that interventions allow Chinese-speaking international students to reach and stay in a status of adaptation. However, there has been little research into how the sociopolitical context influences an individual's adaptation, a research direction suggested by Ward (2013). She indicated that future research on an individual's identity adaptation should seek to understand how individuals perceive and articulate themselves in the processes of adaptation and under what conditions the adaptation fails to be adaptive. The context thus becomes the focal point in understanding the complex process of adapting to multiple identities.

Studies on Chinese-speaking international students focus on the several identities that these students create and modify as appropriate to successfully adapt to the context abroad and home. Their role as non-native English-speaking students (NNSs) is one of the predominant identities that educational researchers focus on, in particular, identifying and addressing the learning issues of NNSs in Western higher education. The main causes of their learning and acculturation problems are attributed to the Chinese-speaking international students' culture of origin and nonnative English. For example, the influence of the Confucius heritage culture has been pointed out as the reason for the these students' passive and memorization-based learning style (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Yu, 1984). Chinese-speaking international students are likely to be perceived as uncreative, uncritical, and rigid learners by the West. This study argues that it is natural for Chinese-speaking international students to have problems integrating with the English-speaking higher education system due to cultural and language barriers. However, this viewpoint has not been widely explored.

Other recent studies have concentrated on homecoming Chinese-speaking international students, mostly documenting the positive progress that these students felt they have made in terms of their English and intercultural communication skills (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Hao & Welch, 2012; Xuan, 2014). From these studies on Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation and the pattern of their identity development, they have implicitly encouraged the conclusion that these students, despite the learning difficulties encountered, will eventually lead to positive personal and professional developments after graduation.

While this study acknowledges that identity research should not give up on patterning Chinese-speaking international students' adaptation and the facilitation of adaptation, the paradigm shown from previous studies might have ignored the complexity of context-dependent, cross-border identity development. Chinese-speaking international students' individual differences, such as family backgrounds and personal overseas experiences, and the use of their experiences in identity development, were not considered. It potentially risks treating the data from Chinese-speaking international students as a collective entity and ignores the complexity within this group.

Going beyond the focus of recent studies, this study concluded that, based on their overseas experiences, Taiwanese international students have different definitions for what it means to be a good English speaker. Drawing on a poststructuralist Bourdieuan theoretical framework, this study investigates how Taiwanese Chinese-speaking international students attending Australian universities

worked on, and adapted to, different identities across contexts and over time. Universities, particularly those in Australia, can improve their policies by being more culturally inclusive of Chinese-speaking international students by taking into consideration the complexity of how these students' identities work.

## **English-Speaker Identity Shaped by Context**

### *The Role of Standard English in the Cross Straits*

As the English language has been identified as one of the key factors influencing Chinese-speaking international students' experiences in overseas education, this study begins by understanding English education in the Cross Straits (China and Taiwan). Specifically, it focuses on the role of standard English and the meaning of becoming a good English speaker in this region.

Due to the spread of English as a lingua franca, the many varieties of English that characterize diverse learners' first languages and cultures have received significant attention from English teacher educators, teachers, and learners in different educational contexts in the past decade (French, 2005; Hino, 2012). Attempts have been made to include varieties of English into English as a second language curricula and teaching materials to create an awareness that English is not monolithic and to equip learners with communicative competence, helping them to effectively communicate in a variety of situations in the globalized world (Bieswanger, 2008; Sung, 2016). Regardless of these attempts, the varieties of English other than native ones are not yet well-perceived or recognized by English teachers and learners. The increasing importance of "different Englishes," particularly those other than British and American English, appears to be still only marginally reflected in English as a second language curricula and teaching materials (Bieswanger, 2008). The majority of English teachers and learners in nonnative English-speaking countries still show unquestioning submission to "native speaker norms" (Buckingham, 2014). Indeed, native speaker fallacy is clearly prominent in the Cross Straits, where the acquisition of standard English, perceived as British and American English in the Cross Straits (He & Zhang, 2010; Lai, 2008), is still perceived to be the ultimate goal of English teaching and learning by the teachers and students (Cheng, 2013; Chien, 2014).

Despite being the largest Chinese-speaking society in Asia, learning standard English has officially become a compulsory education in the Cross Straits. To achieve high standard English literacy, English education in the Cross Straits tends to separate English and Chinese in English language education based on teaching schedules, subjects, or instructors. In addition, English monolingual textbooks are used, and European-looking native English speakers are hired in the English education system. This suggests a strong desire for acquiring native and standard English, even though English has always remained as a subject at schools, rather than a tool in life.

## ***Identity Studies***

Identity studies on Chinese-speaking international students for the past 15 years have placed much emphasis on identifying and solving their learning issues. Their culture of origin and nonnative English-speaking (NNS) identity have been proposed to be the causes for their mismatch in the native English-speaking West and its educational context. Because of their NNS backgrounds, Chinese-speaking international students have been portrayed as students who lack intercultural competence and Westernized epistemology in educational settings (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1996; Cadman, 1997). They are more likely to experience discrimination, language frustration, and sociocultural isolation due to their ethnicity and NNS identity (Lowinger et al., 2014; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Their shorter length of stay in the host countries, lower English proficiency, and fewer cultural contacts with locals are believed to be the major reasons for their lower level of adaptation (Lun et al., 2010; Paton, 2005). Furthermore, the level of Chinese-speaking international students' English proficiency is proven to be the deciding factor for their nonadaptation in the West. In view of this factor, recent studies on these students have focused on solving these students' language problems through pedagogical, curricular, and administrative support both inside and outside classrooms. For example, teachers in the West are recommended to use more activities that prompt greater intergroup conversations between Chinese-speaking international students and local students (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Previous identity research on Chinese-speaking international students has shown these students have been treated as one entity (Koehne, 2005) with several predictable "problems" that Western academic institutions must deal with. What is currently known in the discourse about Chinese-speaking international students tells us that inner and personal identities are influenced by external contexts. Several studies also underline the importance of investigating the multiple identities that Chinese-speaking international students need to undertake to adapt to the West (e.g., Gomes et al., 2014; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Koehne, 2005). However, this knowledge will always remain incomplete without investigating how these students internalize overseas experiences and rework multiple identities in the home and abroad contexts and over time. The internalization of study abroad experiences and the identity transformations undergone will shine more light on why particular contexts make some Chinese-speaking international students adaptive and some nonadaptive.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To capture the fluidity of Chinese-speaking international students' identity movements, this study focuses on contexts and time points. This study covers several critical moments when the Taiwanese participants experienced identity negotiations, identity struggles, the internalization of overseas experiences, and identity reconstruction at different stages of their overseas education. A poststructuralist approach unveils more areas to explore regarding how each student deals with multiple identities in different contexts. Therefore, it brings more student-centered varieties of identity movements, rather than a linear process of identity formation.

The Bourdieuan thinking toolkit, consisting of field, habitus, and capital, is the theoretical framework that this study adopted for analysis. This toolkit allows the flexibility of investigating how Chinese-speaking international students' identities move in different social spaces and at different time points. It is important to note that Chinese-speaking international students' identity adaptation cannot be understood without taking all these three notions into consideration. There are three key concepts that we will discuss.

### **Cultural Capital**

For Bourdieu (1986), there are three types of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital, each of which can be transferred, inherited, or accumulated. Economic capital refers to the objective forms of monetary assets, such as money and property. Cultural capital, the main type of capital that this study focuses on, refers to an individual's educational background. In the context of this study, receiving their higher education overseas is a type of cultural capital. Social capital refers to one's ability to network with others. In the pursuit of cultural capital, people will inevitably experience identity changes (Moore, 2008). This interrelationship sheds light on Chinese-speaking international students' identity movements before and after completing their Western education.

### **Habitus and Hysteresis Moments**

Habitus is how Bourdieu framed identity. It is defined as people's subjectivity, which is always in the process of reconstruction and internalization under people's awareness (Bourdieu, 1990; Lawler, 2014). Hysteresis moments, meaning a lag of time when a person's old habitus cannot catch up with a new context (Bourdieu, 1977), are the critical moments that this study examines to understand the formation of Chinese-speaking international students' habitus in Taiwan, internalized, embodied, and used for understanding themselves and the world. During hysteresis moments, this study concentrates on how Chinese-speaking international students modify their old habitus for adaptation to the West.

The idea of adaptation is divided into two notions in this study: habitus modification and habitus improvisation. The former means the new meanings of new identities are internalized by Chinese-speaking international students as a result of the conflict between the participants' new experiences in Australia and their old assumptions. The latter indicates that overseas experiences are deliberately used to improvise advantageous identities in the home context. Anchoring these two notions around Bhabha's "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), the Chinese-speaking international students in this study are considered as those with habitus mobility. Through overseas education, Chinese-speaking international students are exposed to both Eastern and Western cultures, which creates this third place where the members see both opportunities and challenges. For outsiders, completing their education overseas means overcoming and adapting to the West. For Chinese-speaking international students, they are both insiders of the East and outsiders of the West, i.e., they have "outsider within" status (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015, p. 153).

## **Field Integration and Doxa**

Bourdieu's (1998) notion of "field" needs to incorporate habitus in order to understand the relational philosophy between a person's internalized habitus and the context in which they act. Field is a dynamic environment where its members compete for membership and higher positions (Moore, 2008) with various forms of capital. Every field has its unique ideologies, which Bourdieu (1977) described as "doxa," a naturalization of arbitrariness. These doxa are shared and valued by its members. Chinese-speaking international students are aware of the competition and doxa that they will need to face upon the completion of overseas study. It is inevitable that they will be embroiled in field competition where newly graduated Chinese-speaking international students may struggle to become members of their fields (Bourdieu, 1993).

## **METHOD**

To capture international students' identity movements in different contexts, it requires a set of methodology with longitudinal data collection to examine "the impact of variables on international students' adaptation over time (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 710). The methodology also needs to incorporate researchers' reflexivity to enhance the trustworthiness of empirical evidence, which "engage(s) with participants and enrich(es) the quality of the research" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 46). These are the methodological gaps that need to be addressed.

### **Participants**

We recruited participants through placing advertisements on the websites of a number of Taiwanese student associations in Australian universities. The selection criteria aimed to achieve as much balance as possible in terms of the participants' gender, study major, and English proficiency. This study followed the participants' 1-year master's programs by coursework to capture the identity movements throughout their overseas study. This study uses four participants' quotes to explain findings due to the word limit for this publication. Nine Taiwanese international students consented to participate in this 18-month study—five female and four male students in their 20s, majoring in different fields. They were all Sydney-based and categorized as English-competent users according to their IELTS academic results (scored Band 7 in overall performance). Their English-learning background and motivation for overseas education met the study criteria as described in the literature review—that is, students from the Cross Straits who aimed for high competency in standard English and were in pursuit of both fluent English and overseas higher education for a more promising future back home.

### **Research Question, Data Collection, and Analysis**

The research question is: How did the participants' identity move throughout their overseas education in Australia? To answer this question, this study is designed as an ethnographic study with both data from interviews and observations. The data

collection included several rounds of semistructured, audiorecorded interviews before, during and after their overseas study. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin in a one-on-one and face-to-face setting in order to provide the Chinese-speaking international students with the most comfortable way to describe their feelings (Wierzbicka, 1999). The contents were transcribed and translated by a qualified translator. In order to enhance the breadth and depth of data, and the acknowledgment that people's experiences can sometimes be difficult to reveal and describe with language (Polkinghorne, 2005), it is necessary to also spend time engaging, observing, and documenting the lives of the participants outside classrooms. Hence, data collection in this study also involved four quarterly visits to the participants' personal social activities and their residences to capture the fluidity of the participants' Australian experiences, and how these experiences might influence the participants' perception of self and others. The focus of the engagement will be on the participants' unspoken data (Tedlock, 1991), such as their interactions with non-Taiwanese residents in Australia. This study also recorded my reflexivity when engaging with the participants. The purpose was to achieve the validity of data by bringing in the verisimilitude of these lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011).

The semistructured interview data collected at different stages of this study used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis is both exploratory and inductive. As I found some prominent patterns and interesting discrepancies in the data, I conducted a deeper search of a suitable theoretical framework to interpret the "keyness" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) of these patterns and discrepancies in answering the research question. The analysis of data, which includes both field notes and interview transcripts, started with grouping the data into categories of positive feelings about self, negative feelings about self, and interactions between participants and significant others (e.g., Australian classmates or fellow Taiwanese students), inside and outside the classroom setting. I then organized categorized data for review thematically by what occurred, who was involved, and the outcomes, to identify the associations and patterns in relation to the research question (Ritchie et al., 2014).

### **Researcher's Positionality**

To add credibility to this study, it is necessary to include how my positionality, namely my "values and views may influence findings" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 42). Positionality is defined as the researcher's gender, social status, and educational and cultural backgrounds that function as the "marker of relational positions" (Maher & Tetreault, 1993, p. 118). Although my educational and cultural backgrounds are similar to the participants, our financial status differs and the difference may influence my analysis of the collected data. Most participants are from upper middle-class families in Taiwanese society. For example, Participant A's family runs a real estate business in both Taiwan and China, and Participant B's family owns several hotels in Taiwan. They both grew up in Taipei City, where they were entitled to adequate educational resources. Therefore, their more privileged background meant that they did not need to work for money and were taught by native English-speaking teachers in diverse private, institutionalized and tailored English language programs from childhood.

In contrast, my lower middle-class family background brought me a different English learning experience in Taiwan. Coming from a family where life was always hand-to-mouth, I needed to study hard to receive institutionalized English education. Furthermore, I worked part time to support myself as well as my family once I reached high school. This financial discrepancy between the participants and I did elicit feelings of frustration and jealousy after some interviews and engagements with the participants.

I took my positionality into account during data collection and interpretation. Although I did not reveal how I had felt to them, I did document my feelings about the participants' responses in my field notes. Both the spoken data of interviews and unspoken data of my reflection in the field notes were included and utilized in the construction of subsequent interviews and engagements. This inductive establishment of interview topics and engagement foci was to "seek further clarification of any ambiguity that occurred" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 44). Despite our different family backgrounds, the participants and I shared similar study experiences, as I had also been a Taiwanese international student in Australia. However, my positionality occasionally conflicted with the participants' feelings and judgments regarding studying in Australia. I documented all the spoken and unspoken data as well as my agreements and disagreements, creating a multi-voiced narration, which provides more "factual evidence" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282) to "tell it as it is" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 44) to the readers.

## **RESULTS**

The participants used habitus modification and habitus manipulation as two ways of reworking their identities due to the evolving relationship between habitus and field when they went across Australian and Taiwanese contexts.

### **Habitus Modification**

The Taiwanese job market is a field characterized by conflicting power dynamics between homecoming students and locally educated Taiwanese. The capital these participants gained from Australian universities and the habitus developed from the English-speaking West are highly regarded in the home context. However, such power relations are not linear. As Maton (2008) reminded us, it is the relation between an individual's habitus and the circumstances they face that decides who is in the higher power position. To further understand the discursive changes throughout the participants' overseas experience, this study concentrates on the habitus modification when Participants A and B were at critical moments, or "third space" moments (Bhabha, 1994, p. 53) of interpreting their changes before and after Australia. The data explains how they challenged doxa with newly acquired overseas experiences. They modified their habitus with the goal of becoming a more native-like English user through engaging with native speakers only. This misconception was internalized into their habitus from their English education in Taiwan, where native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are considered the true owners and teachers of English. It wasn't until their arrival in Australia that they found their years of learning



English from NESTs in Taiwan and their competent IELTS results did not reflect their actual English competency in Australian academic or social life. During their first hysteresis, their old habitus couldn't match the field they were in, which was exemplified by their experiences of feeling "left out" at an early stage of their study when they tried to understand the lecturers, and when they couldn't participate in conversations with other Australian classmates.

I feel more stressful when I speak English to native speakers because I simply cannot speak English as fast as they can. I once had a discussion with three other (English) native speakers. I couldn't cut in because they spoke so fast and one (person) spoke after another. I felt like I was left out. —Participant A (June 15, 2014)

Like my lecturer: when she is talking to me, I can totally understand what she means. However, sometimes I feel like she slows down or is making her English easier for us (non-native English speakers) to understand. There was a time when a native English-speaking student posted a question to my lecturer in front of everyone. Maybe it was because of that student's accent, but I couldn't quite understand what s/he was asking. However, my lecturer responded to the question right away. And then they started a sort of conversation in class. That was the experience in which I felt that I couldn't actually understand native speakers when they were really being native speakers, speaking in English. —Participant B (April 30, 2014)<sup>1</sup>

However, they did not resist habitus modification. Instead, they internalized and embraced the frustration of being a linguistic and cultural outsider in the Australian English-speaking world, even after a decade's worth of English learning. Facing difficulties blending in with local Australian students, their alternative was to turn to other non-Chinese, NNSs. They found confidence and comfort when they spoke in English to other international students. This experience reshaped who they thought they could become in their identity as an NNS. For example, Participant A made the following comparison.

[...] Before studying in Australia, the first picture of English native speakers that came to my mind would be a white person, and he/she can only speak English. [...] For many Taiwanese, as long as the person is white, we will assume that that person must be an English native speaker, or at least fluent in English. (October 28, 2014)

The doxa influenced these two participants to think that they could become a native-like English user through learning native English from NESTs. This doxa and Taiwan's social space forced them to learn native English. In another sense, the English varieties spoken by other NNSs were considered wrong. The doxa they

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted in Mandarin and later translated to English. In Mandarin, the pronouns of he and she are neutral and pronounced as "ta." When the participant did not specify the gender of the classmate, I have used s/he.

brought from Taiwan's context was challenged by the robust friendships with other international students and the expansion of their non-Chinese-speaking social network. They were exposed to many "non-standard" English varieties—the wrong English, as they had been told. Through daily interactions, these participants realized and internalized the idea that being a "functional" English user with limited and nonnative English language would be more practical than pursuing an unattainable "native-like" English level. By using English as a lingua franca with other international students for 1 year, their initial definition of a good and fluent English user evolved. For example, Participant A commented:

A really good English user can describe his/her thoughts in detail with his/her limited English. [...] For me, it's all about if the user can clearly express his/her ideas with whatever English he/she has. So, if he/she can do it, I will call that person a fluent English user. Fluency is not about speed. Instead, it's about how effectively you can deliver your ideas in English. — Participant A (October 28, 2014)

This realization was associated with the participants' acknowledgement that improvement in their English could not solely be measured by the results of institutionalized English tests; rather, the true functionality of their limited English had to be measured in an actual real-life English-speaking context. In the excerpt, Participant A's new definition of a good English user has nothing to do with the nativeness of language as many other Taiwanese students would have defined it before coming to Australia. After engaging with other non-Chinese, NNSs for 1 year, Participant A emphasized how far an individual can communicate with other non-Chinese speakers with their "limited" English. The realization and acceptance of limitations in terms of improving their English was vital for their doxa, but also challenging because they had moved to understanding how vastly different people from around the world speak and use English in communication. This was one of the third space moments where these participants internalized the identity of being a "limited" NNS and started to question the doxa.

### **Habitus Improvisation**

Bourdieu (2000/1997, p. 151) used "feel for the game" to describe those social agents whose ability to master field rules correlated with being creative in identity construction. The identity "cracks" (Arber, 2000, p. 60) between being Taiwanese international students in Australia and homecoming students from Australia create a third space that encourages these homecoming students to deliberately improvise desirable identities. This deliberateness enhances doxa and field stratification.

Participants C and D linked their economic capital to easy admission to Australian universities and had thus erroneously assumed that studying in Australia would be as easy as admission. They considered Australian higher education to be a purchasable commodity. When they found the mismatch between reality and their own imagination, the difficulty of performing their current identity was revealed as in following example given by Participant C.

[...] I feel tired. Why should learning be so tiring here? [...] I don't like it here. I cannot adapt to the culture here. It's boring here and people are distant. You know, they (Australians) are pretty hard to become friends with. [...] (I chose Australia) simply because the study duration only lasts for one year. Most of the Taiwanese people I know in Australia are here only for getting the degrees. No one is interested in their culture or English. I once attended a catch-up activity hosted by TSA (Taiwanese Student Association). We (Participant C and other Taiwanese students) all feel like it's pretty easy for us to be accepted by their best universities as long as we have money. —Participant C (May 5, 2014)

Participant C generalized their difficulties as if a majority of Taiwanese students were also having similar issues. Whatever they perceived about Australians inside their classrooms would be erroneously generalized as if Australians and Australian education in general fit with their descriptions. Like Participant C, many expected that their Australian universities would use the same teaching style (one-way teaching) they had experienced in Taiwan. The values of engaging with other students inside and outside classrooms were neglected or misinterpreted.

Participant C's opinion on Australian teaching, Australian students, and their Australian university was based on the presupposition that their economic capital would automatically be exchanged into the amount of cultural capital they were lacking. While Bourdieu's idea of the linkage between economic capital and cultural capital (overseas higher education in this case) is true (Dillon, 2014), the process of obtaining the cultural capital (credentials and English language) is more about spending time and also a commitment. While it was true that these participants' economic power would enable them to obtain master's degrees from Australian universities, the ability to conduct cross-cultural communication and the acquisition of professional knowledge requires time, immersion, and commitment.

These participants' identity movements took place again after graduation. The data uncovered an interesting contrast between people who found that they were free from rules and those who deliberately used Australian experiences to improvise Westernized identities that they needed, but had never existed. History taught them that homecoming students from the West are highly regarded in Taiwan. As the deliberateness of habitus improvisation is manifested when returning to Taiwan, it is foreseeable that the newly forged identities will enhance social stratification. Two participants used the same expressions "have drunk Western ink" (have studied in the West) to describe their predictable position after graduation. "It's a universal fact in Taiwan that people who have drunk Western ink will be better, especially in English. [...] I know this is a stereotype" (Participant C, Oct 31, 2014). "They would think my English must be fluent because I've drunk Western ink before" (Participant D, December 20, 2014).

When I asked about their strengths compared to Taiwanese at home, they both used the expression of "have drunk Western ink." Their use of this expression indicates their deliberateness in perpetuating the stereotypes of their status as even more misleading. In these participants' hysteresis, I learned that they were disappointed by not being able to improve their English to a native speaker's level

because Australia was not as they had imagined, i.e., being full of English native speakers on and off campus. Through their hysteresis, they clearly saw the wide gap between Taiwanese people's imaginations of the West and reality. This realization became their niche in reshaping an advantageous identity that the Taiwanese job market is generally expecting. The following excerpt explains how Participant C was planning to shape their own discourse and make their identity more believable.

I won't even tell people that my English is "fluent" because deep in my heart I know I have just made small progress. [...] I also believe my experiences of interacting with English speakers will become one of my indispensable advantages. I know they might not be much, but it's like my English progress—I am the only one who knows the secret. —Participant C (October 31, 2014)

This excerpt from the interview reveals that Participant C was fully aware that the norm of being recognized as a fluent and cross-cultural speaker of English in Taiwan's society has been long-established. However, the essence of this norm remains unspecified, and hence they can play with it.

## DISCUSSION

This section is dedicated to the implications of using habitus modification and habitus improvisation in the studies of Chinese-speaking international students. The use of Bourdieuan habitus destabilizes the research patterns that we've seen for the past decades. By focusing on the relations between Chinese-speaking international students' habitus, capital, and field, the findings identified two habitus movements. This invites us to rethink the idea of "adaptation" used in previous studies on international students. To understand these students' overseas experiences and the use of these experiences, it is imperative to dive into the relational structure between changing habitus, the use of symbolic capital, and the occupation of field.

### **Being Adaptive Abroad, but Nonadaptive at Home**

Habitus modification took place when Chinese-speaking international students encountered an identity crisis where their Taiwanese cultural capital couldn't be proportionally transferred to the Australian field structure. The participants started to question the ideas of becoming fluent in English by studying abroad, which was the doxa they had carried from Taiwan. In their hysteresis moments, they experienced multiple identity crises. As Bourdieu (1977) indicated that crisis is necessary for social agents to question doxa, these participants' modified habitus resulted from embracing their anxiety when they occupied two spaces—being an outsider in Australia and an insider in Taiwan (Maton, 2008).

The anxiety for occupying this outsider within status (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015) is heuristic. Participants A and B started to question some of the doxa they inherited from their home context, such as becoming fluent English speakers by studying abroad and NESTs' teaching being more authoritative than NNESTs. The impetus behind these participants' habitus modification and doxa challenge was the

identification of a mismatch between their newly developed idea of what it means to be an English speaker from Taiwan. They internalized the idea that they could only be considered successful when they could speak English natively. Gradually, it became “the representation of truth” (Bochner, 2012, p. 540). Their habitus was infused with a new layer of meaning. Bourdieu (1977) reminded us that social agents’ habitus is continuously being structured. These participants were, in fact, under the influence of another doxa, exerted from Australian higher education. Compared to before, they felt more comfortable with who they were, what they believed in, and what they were doing as Taiwanese English speakers.

### **Being Nonadaptive Abroad, but Adaptive at Home**

Habitus improvisation is one of the observed strategies that some homecoming Chinese-speaking international students employ to maintain their monopoly and exclude other people (Bourdieu, 1993). There has been an implicit practice in which non-homecoming students are reduced to less English-speaking and internationalized than homecoming Chinese-speaking international students. Homecoming Chinese-speaking international students bring home a symbolic violence under which cultural capital holders are recognized and authorized to exert power to decide the truth (Bourdieu, 2013). This study supports what Moore (2008, p. 101) observed—that is, symbolic violence is “purely arbitrary.” What this study argues further is that the logic and values brought back home by homecoming Chinese-speaking international students, whether they are close to the true Australianese or not, have become the norms that are influencing other prospective Chinese-speaking international students.

From Participants C and D, it appeared that the norms surrounding who can be recognized as a fluent English user are established by introducing more ambiguity. Taiwan’s society, as they described themselves, holds the universal belief that those returning from the West can speak good English. It is the stereotype and “erroneousness” that returnees impose on other Taiwanese. In other words, the field doxa could be deliberately pushed out of the field and then upon nonfield members in order to expand the believability of their discourse. This is why Bourdieu (1977) never rules out the possibility that people’s habitus could be calculative, and we, as social agents, are actually unconscious about the norms and rules that we have accepted for so long.

### **CONCLUSION**

Following a Bourdieuan theoretical framework, this study provided a process-focused identity study to encourage studies on Chinese-speaking international students to rethink the notion of adaptation. The participants’ identity movements were followed for 18 months across both Taiwanese and Australian contexts. By attaching importance to the hysteresis moments where the participants struggled to adapt to new identities, habitus modification and habitus improvisation were the phenomena discovered in their constantly evolving cross-border identity movements. Some participants with modified habitus developed resistance to the old field ideologies, leading to difficulties in rejoining the Taiwanese society. On the other

hand, the homecoming students that deliberately improvised their identities based on the home context's stereotypes, had a smooth reintegration with the home field. This study argues that existing doxa and hierarchy are thus strengthened, preventing other homecoming students with modified habitus from taking up advantageous positions.

From the findings, this study also drew two very different boundaries on what it means to be English-speaking for the participants. Previous studies (e.g., Gill, 2007; Hendrickson, 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) tended to treat international students' adaptation as a status that can be reached through purposefully designed modules or by completing overseas education. This determinist research direction risks losing the dynamics generated by the relations between capital, habitus, and field. This study has identified the importance of understanding how much overseas studying experiences might differ and how these capitalizable experiences could contribute to different identities in cross-border contexts. While much focus has been placed on the design of programs that facilitate so-called "adaptation," such as enhancing integration with local students, the future research direction that this study wishes to open up is to investigate how Chinese-speaking international students, or international students in general, balance adaptation and nonadaptation abroad and at home. I expect that this future research direction will contribute to deep conversations over a number of significant topics, such as the nonadaptation that Western universities' adaptation programs might have caused after international students return home, or the readaptation programs that Western universities might be able to provide before international students return home.

While studies on international students are often focused on identifying the best strategies for students' adaptation, it is also of utmost importance to acknowledge that the ability to be comfortable, adaptive, and nonadaptive in different contexts should be one of the attributes that international students need to acquire. A major limitation of this study is in the diversity of the participants. Because of the limits in time and capability, this study was not able to track students from different cultural backgrounds. If future research could address this limitation, the findings are expected to be more insightful, especially in the studies on international students after completing higher education overseas.

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