Undergraduate Students' Intercultural Transitional Competence Development and Habitus Change During Academic, Social, and Ethnic Cultural Transitions

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Abstract

During the transition to higher education (HE), students will encounter various challenges in academic, social, and ethnic aspects. They need to adjust to the self-directed and self-regulated way of academic learning, build new social networks, live independently, and have international contact. Most previous studies treated student transition as induction in a certain period or development in a linear way. Nevertheless, the lived experiences of students are diverse and on a continuous becoming process. Since the construct of habitus and its change can manifest that transition-as-becoming proposition due to their dynamism and fluidity, this study aims to investigate student transition through the lens of habitus. Besides that, prior research laid more emphasis on the institutional influences than students' agency on their transitions. This study, however, considers students as active masters of their transitions and explores what competence they mobilize to influence their habitus. The qualitative research method was adopted, during which I collected and analyzed documentation, observation data, and interview data from 68 undergraduate students and 11 staff at X University, a Sino-foreign cooperative university (SFCU) in Eastern China. This SFCU represents a complex multicultural university context and is convenient for sampling. In findings, first, I identified diverse components and processes of students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Second, I found out four types of habitus change: infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing of students, which rendered their transitions as being-becoming, assemblage and dis-assemblage, and rhizomatic. Third, I conceptualized intercultural transitional competence (ITC) as students' capacity to transition to intercultural contexts actively and effectively. It had five dimensions: multiplistic sensitivity (MS), intrinsic proactivity (IP), strategic flexibility (SF), relativistic inclusivity (RI), and dialectic reflexivity (DR). Further, I related students' ITC to their habitus hysteresis and change. In summary, this study generates theoretical contributions to the student transition literature by employing habitus to manifest transition as becoming and conceptualizing ITC as students' agency in navigating transition. Practical implications for HE institutions to facilitate student transition and students to develop ITC to direct habitus change are put forward in the end.

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Introduction

Transition to higher education (HE) is full of excitement and challenges. In their emergent adulthood, undergraduate students will learn to take on more roles and responsibilities. They will explore and establish their identity and seek for autonomy and freedom (Arnett, 2004). They face many possibilities but also have to deal with multiple difficulties in the new learning environment. They shall abide by academic requirements and adopt self-directed learning methods (Picard & Masdonati, 2017). In addition, as the campus becomes more internationalized and multicultural nowadays, undergraduate students have to acculturate themselves into the unfamiliar sociocultural environment, overcoming culture shock and building new social connections.

Student statistics worldwide show that the transition to higher education is not always easy. For example, in the academic year 2014-2015, there were over 1.7 million undergraduate students in the UK, however, 6% of first-year students discontinued their studies (HESA, 2016). The retention rate of first-year students in the US was 78% in 2010 (Burkholder & Holland, 2014). In Chile, albeit access to higher education had tripled over the last 30 years, more than 50% of undergraduate students did not complete their program in 2016 (Santelices et al., 2016). Due to the increscent economic returns to education and the expansion of higher education, the number of enrolled undergraduate students in China increased from 2 million in 1990 to 28 million in 2018. Nevertheless, Chinese students faced various transition frictions. Previous studies revealed that they were susceptible to depressive and anxiety symptoms as well as sleep (Wu et al., 2021) and self-regulation problems like smartphone addiction problems (Chi et al., 2022).

In order to understand student transition at the micro level better, I will introduce the research background concerning the HE internationalization at the macro level first and then Sino-foreign cooperative universities (SFCUs) at the meso level in the following two sections. The trend of HE internationalization gives birth to SFCUs, which pose new challenges for students during transitions. Chinese public universities often manage students in a stricter way. Also, they provide a familiar learning and living environment for its major population – Chinese students. Whereas, SFCUs use English as the teaching language and adopt the educational system offered by foreign partner universities (Zheng & Kapoor, 2021). They are more flexible in terms of student management and accommodate people with more diversified cultural backgrounds. I choose one SFCU as the research setting of this study for the sake of exploring the dynamic and complex transition experiences of students, which are short of investigation in existent studies.

Higher education internationalization

HE internationalization has great cultural value and denotes the necessity for the (inter)cultural transformation as a response to both the changing external context (e.g., society, community) and internal demands (Jiang, 2008). The widely accepted definition of internationalization is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, p. 11). "Process" indicates internationalization is a continuing evolutionary effort. The triad of "international, intercultural and global dimension"

implies international and intercultural relationships among and within different nations and cultures.

HE internationalization efforts are intensified in various institutional strategies (e.g., curriculum and program design, partnership establishment, staff recruitment, and management, etc.) (Stafford & Taylor, 2016) as well as international educational collaborations (Knight, 2007). Since the 1990s, transnational higher education (TNHE), which denotes "the delivery of programs overseas by a parent institution either operating directly or in association with an international partner" (Stafford & Taylor, 2016, p. 625), has prospered in Asia. In general, TNHE institutions in Asia import more human resources and programs from abroad than they export (Huang, 2007), especially from the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and some European countries (Mok & Xu, 2008). Moreover, they mainly take three approaches towards TNHE: a government-regulated approach (e.g., China and Korea), a market-oriented approach (e.g., Hong Kong), and a transitional approach from a government-regulated approach to a market-oriented one (e.g., Japan) (Huang, 2007). Albeit driven by government initiatives, Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrated their own interests and innovations in adopting a variety of internationalization approaches (Zha et al., 2019). Based on case studies of two Chinese universities, Zha et al. (2019) found they preferred certain international activities like bilingual courses over others and practiced certain internationalization initiatives rather than others.

Nevertheless, HE internationalization is a double-edged sword. It brings opportunities and, at the same time, incurs challenges and crises for countries, institutions as well as individuals like staff and students. On the one hand, HE internationalization

brings in plenty of benefits in economic, academic, social, and cultural aspects. At the national level, exporting and importing countries can generate income and gain competitiveness in the global market (Knight, 2004; Yang, 2008). Moreover, they are able to enhance educational practices and capacities and form strategic alliances (Fang, 2012; Knight, 2004). At the institutional level, exporting HEIs can get revenues and a higher profile and reduce government spending (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006) while importing HEIs can boost up their educational and innovation systems with lower costs (Guimón & Narula, 2020). In addition, international collaborations contribute to HEIs' academic reputation, research engagement, cross-cultural exchanges as well as "innovation and improvement of quality in courses, management, and governance" (Fang, 2012, p. 9). At the individual level, HE internationalization concentrates on students' competence development and benefits them economically (e.g., cost-saving due to study and living at home), academically (e.g., international curriculum), and socioculturally (e.g., multicultural environment and experiences) (Dai, Matthews, et al., 2020; Fang, 2012).

On the other hand, there are multiple challenges in launching and running transnational institutions and programs at the national or institutional level. With regard to the recognition of a joint degree, there are mainly four obstacles: national legislation, transparency and coherence of the degree certificate information, quality assessment and accreditation, and the responsibility of all the involved institutions (Hou et al., 2017). What is more, it is imperative to ensure the quality of transnational education, including enrollment and management of domestic and international students (Ma & Zhao, 2018) and teaching and learning (Bovill et al., 2015). Based on 122 self-appraisal reports

submitted by Chinese-foreign cooperation second-tiered colleges (i.e., institutes affiliated with Chinese universities) and programs to the Ministry of Education (MOE) of China in 2017, Hu et al. (2019) summarized four factors that impacted the quality of TNHE in China: "low foreign language proficiency among students; shortage of a sustainable supply of highly qualified teachers; low quality of curriculum design and implementation; and deficiencies in institutional regulations" (p. 310). Yang (2008) also pointed out the significance of the cultural appropriateness of the adapted foreign programs and pedagogy. It demands combining the Western or global template with the Chinese perspective, values, and local context and experience in Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programs (Yang, 2008).

The ubiquitous win-win scenario of internationalization was criticized by Lumby and Foskett (2016), who warned of two cultural orientations of internationalization: relativism (i.e., the cultural homogeneity aiming for either an inclusive or a "world-class" culture) and differentiation (i.e., the heterogeneity of distinctive cultures supposed to be sustained). "World-class" in the conceptualization of internationalization reflects Western cultural values and cultural homogeneity. Since most international rankings adopt aspects of Western, especially American and British, research university models, the promotion of the world-class status of HEIs will fall into the aggrandizement of "high" culture or "the adoption of a supra-culture that subsumes all" (Lumby & Foskett, 2016, p. 102). This simplistic view of internationalization neglects intertwined and complex cultural and power relativities that exist in the HE field. Moreover, the differential stance signals power relations and "exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 34). The difference, as claimed by Gudykunst (2005), provokes strangeness and

demarcation. In this respect, HE internationalization could reinforce the demarcation between different cultures and even connote the superiority of the new culture (Lumby & Foskett, 2016).

Sino-foreign cooperative university

In order to promote inbound international student mobility, provide a domestic learning platform for students who seek international education, and transform the HE system to be more internationalized and globally competitive (Mok & Han, 2016), developing countries in Asia like China, Vietnam, and Indonesia have established different types of TNHE since the 1990s, including branch campus, franchises, twinning, articulation, online and distance learning, study abroad and exchange programs, and so forth (Huang, 2003).

Different from other Asian countries, only joint ventures are permitted in running schools in China, and partnerships must be accredited by Chinese authorities (Knight, 2007). In 2003, the Chinese government enacted the *Regulations on Chinese and Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* that required all foreign institutions or companies to collaborate with a local provider (MOE, 2003). Under the national framework named *Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools*, the MOE of China and local governments regulate and monitor those partnerships (MOE, 2003). By 2020, there were 2,332 Sino-foreign joint-run educational institutions and programs in China (MOE, 2020). Among them, SFCUs with the independent legal status amount to nine. They are: University of Nottingham-Ningbo, Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist

University United International College, Xi'an Jiaotong- Liverpool University, Shanghai New York University, Kunshan Duke University, Wenzhou-Kean University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, and Shenzhen MSU-BIT University.

On the whole, more SFCUs offer subjects in Science, Engineering, and Economics, such as Applied Mathematics, Economics, Computer Science and Technology, Biological Science, Environmental Science, and so forth (Ren & Tian, 2020). They also provide different articulation programs: "2+2", "3+1", or "4+0" (i.e., years of study on campus in China + years of study in a foreign partner university). Moreover, the ratio of Chinese undergraduate students who choose to study abroad after graduating from SFCUs always exceeds that in other Chinese public universities (Ren & Tian, 2020).

SFCUs represent complex international HE contexts where students are likely to undergo academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions simultaneously. Previously, most students used to learn for good grades and get instructions from teachers. Whereas, SFCUs advocate the self-directed and self-regulated way of academic learning (Zhu et al., 2020). That means students have to adjust their learning habits to keep up with the pace of academic study at SFCUs during the academic transition. In terms of the social cultural transition, students who used to have simple social relationships with people in the local community will build new social networks at SFCUs. Moreover, since SFCUs create a multicultural environment that accommodates people from different nations, students are expected to have intercultural integration (Li, 2020) and make meaning of their own cultural identity (Sussman, 2000) during the ethnic cultural transition.

Facing these disparities and complexities during transitions to the SFCU, some students may be slow to or do not take action to fit in with its study and life while others strive to adapt their learning and sociocultural norms and practices to the new environment or negotiate with it to achieve a balance (Torres et al., 2009). What is the mechanism underlying those students' different performances and engagement on the surface? What long-lasting and profound changes take place in students themselves that manifest transition as becoming, that is, a perpetual series of fragmented movements involving lifelong fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience (Gale & Parker, 2014)? The commonly used tools to evaluate student transition, such as academic performance (Pu et al., 2021), sense of belonging (Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2018; Pedler et al., 2022), satisfaction with the academic study and/or sociocultural life (Meng et al., 2018; Wong & Chapman, 2022), perceptions of self-efficacy (Sotardi & Brogt, 2020), and so forth, fail to answer these two questions because they merely reflect students' short-term achievement or attitude.

In contrast, the thinking tool of "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977), that is, a system of lasting and transposable dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977), can foresee transition as a long-lasting becoming process (Gale & Parker, 2014) since it integrates past experiences and actions (Bourdieu, 1977) of students and can permeate into their present and future (DiMaggio, 1979). More importantly, various habitus changes and interactions with the field add insights into the mechanism underlying students' frictions, persistence, and practices. They also imply students' resilience and flexibility in navigating transitions. Previous studies depicted how students experienced habitus hysteresis and negative transition outcomes like marginalization and dropout (Tinto, 1998) or strove to adapt

their learning and sociocultural habitus to the HE field (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021) or reconcile with it (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Xie & Reay, 2020). As Katartzi and Hayward (2020b) argued, transitions to HE is a dynamic process "that has at its core habitus negotiation and (trans)formation, alongside capital accumulation and mobilization" (p.306). Therefore, in this study, I employed the construct of habitus along with field and capital to crystalize students' dynamic and various transitions in lived realities.

Previous research either analyzed students' habitus change during transitions to HE without referring to what factors enabled that change (Holton, 2015; Lehmann, 2014) or predominately focused on external factors that influenced students' habitus (Gartland & Smith, 2018; Neergaard et al., 2020). Detailed descriptions will be given in the Literature Review part "habitus and student transition" (p.28). Since students are recognized as agentic masters of their transitions and habitus change in this study, it focuses on what competence students mobilize instead of being passively influenced by others or the SFCU to change their habitus. Considering students' cultural transitions to the multicultural context of SFCU, I refer to the concept of intercultural competence (IC), which implies students' agency in dealing with intercultural encounters in a proper and effective way (Deardorff, 2009). Scholars have evidenced the positive relationship between students' IC and academic and sociocultural transitions (Lenkaitis et al., 2020; Penman & Ratz, 2015; Senyshyn, 2019; Shaw et al., 2015; Woolley, 2014; Zazzi, 2020), but none of them explore the relationship between IC and habitus. Thus, I aim to fill in the research gap in this study.

The development of students' IC and international perspectives is advocated by HEIs that perceive internationalization as a strategic priority (Cheng et al., 2016). Jooste and Heleta (2017) suggested that HEIs cultivated globally competent students who were "ready to function, work, succeed, and make a difference in a constantly changing, diverse, and complex world" (p. 46). Since staff and peers at SFCUs come from different cultural backgrounds, students shall be interculturally competent when communicating and interacting with them. IC is usually perceived as a set of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude or manifests in a variety of cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998). In addition to the widely acknowledged interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives, this study introduces a person-environmental (Gilbreath et al., 2011) or, to be more precise, student-institutional interactive (Denson & Bowman, 2015) perspective of IC. It denotes students' ability to negotiate between their norms and practices and those of the HEIs (Holmegaard et al., 2014). Moreover, this study conceptualizes IC as a dynamic state of being. Similar to student transition, it is on an ongoing process of development without an ultimate end.

Literature Review

Based on the phenomenon of HE internationalization, the challenging transitions of students to SFCUs during which their habitus will remain in hysteresis or change, and the importance of students' IC development during transitions, three strands of theories: student transition, habitus and student transition, IC and student transition in existent literature will be reviewed in this part. In summary, research gaps identified in the student transition theory lead to the exploration of the latter two.

Student transition

Students' transition to HE is mainly a cultural one (Gregersen et al., 2021). The new environment not only confronts students with a composite of diverse people, who constitute and influence their sociocultural life, but also attempts to impart to students an academic culture different from that in the previous educational context (Wang & Bai, 2021). Students' cultural transition can be defined as "a period in-between moments of stability" (Ivins et al., 2017, p. 245), which is initiated by reciprocal and dynamic processes between different cultural systems and navigated by students to achieve a sustainable fit with them (Ecclestone et al., 2009; Hviid & Zittoun, 2008). It is composed of significant life events that enable students to deliberate on their perceptions of themselves and the world (Volet & Jones, 2012).

The cultural transition of students takes place between different ethnic, social, as well as academic cultural systems. In other words, students will undergo three types of

transition in ethnic, social, and academic aspects when entering and studying in HEIs. Previously, they used to learn for good grades and get instructions from teachers. They also had simple social relationships with people from the same region or ethnic cultural background in the local community. Whereas, after entering HEIs, students have to adopt the self-directed and self-regulated way of academic learning (Zhu et al., 2020) for one thing and cope with challenges embedded in the new sociocultural context (Tawash et al., 2021) for another. Their mindset shall be altered from a simple and stable one to a complex and flexible one (Dweck et al., 2015).

The cultural transition of students is complex because of two reasons. There are complicated and demanding aspects of ethnic, social, and academic cultural transitions, which pose greater challenges and solicit more efforts from students to manage. Moreover, all these cultural transition processes are full of fluidity and diversity.

Multiple aspects of student transition

Firstly, differences between ethnic cultural systems can lead to students' ethnic cultural transition in terms of intercultural communication (God & Zhang, 2019), intercultural contact (Taguchi et al., 2016), and cultural identity (Sussman, 2000). A considerable number of relevant research paid attention to the group of international or immigrant students in particular since they had frequent intercultural contact and were susceptible to culture shock (Dinara, 2019; Elemo & Türküm, 2019; Sobré-Denton, 2011; Wang, 2020; Zheng, 2017). Batterton and Horner (2016) compared the change in ethnic and national identities of American and international undergraduate roommates over one

semester at three American universities. In general, these students were struggling with their identities in different ways as discoverers, ambassadors, and negotiators (Batterton & Horner, 2016).

Moreover, the anticipated transition processes or outcomes are usually sociocultural adaptation (Yu et al., 2019), psychosocial adjustment, and acculturation (Makarova & Birman, 2015). For example, Kim and Okazaki (2014) investigated the cultural adjustment of 10 South Korean adolescents who studied in the US without the companion of their parents. These students underwent pre-departure ambivalence, an initial sense of vulnerability, and eventually a sense of re-engagement during the ethnic cultural transition (Kim & Okazaki, 2014). Based on the analysis of 29 peer-reviewed articles, Makarova and Birman (2015) demonstrated a positive association between the bicultural orientation of ethnic minority students and their school adjustment during cultural transition. Those students' assimilative attitudes could contribute to their academic achievement, psychological adjustment, and acculturative behaviors (Makarova & Birman, 2015).

Secondly, disparate social cultural systems can lead to students' social cultural transition, which distinguishes from ethnic cultural transition with an emphasis on the socialization process of students and their social networking in the new social cultural environment regardless of whether the ethnic culture is homogeneous or heterogeneous. It manifests in aspects of independent living (Thompson et al., 2021), social identity, belonging, interaction, and integration (Brunsting et al., 2018; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2018) of students. For instance, Kashima and Pillai (2011) explored the social identity development of 140 Asian students. The need for cognitive closure (NCC) played an

important role in their identification and connection with different peer groups during the social cultural transition (Kashima & Pillai, 2011). Krause and Coates (2008) examined the online self-managed peer and student-staff engagement of 3,542 undergraduate students in Australian universities and provided suggestions for the improvement of student experiences.

Some researchers paid particular attention to the social cultural transition of students in the underprivileged and underrepresented racial and sexual orientation groups like mixed-race college students (Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Renn, 2003) and LGBT students (Vaccaro, 2012). Boatswain and Lalonde (2000) explored what social labels Black Canadian students preferred and their personal meanings of these labels. Moreover, they verified the association between their label preferences and social identity development (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). In the study carried out by Renn (2007), LGBT student leaders and queer activists increased public LGBT identity and merged gender and sexual orientation identities with their leadership identity.

Thirdly, different academic cultural systems, such as domestic versus international universities and high school versus HE, can result in students' academic cultural transition (Ivins et al., 2017). Teaching and learning approach (e.g., lecture plus tutorial), teaching and learning style (e.g., student-centered teaching, student-led and independent learning, critical thinking, learner autonomy, collaboration, etc.), and assessment methods play important roles in students' academic cultural transition (Wang & Bai, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). In the study of Wang and Bai (2021), Chinese students in Sino-Australian 2 + 2 joint programs reported several differences in academic cultures in their home (Chinese) and host (Australian) universities. First, tutorials were added as a supplement

to lectures in the Australian university. Second, the Australian academic culture stressed "dialogic knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, open-ended and autonomous learning" while the Chinese teaching approaches were more "didactic, structured, textbook- and test-based, with lecturers often spoon-feeding students" (p. 862). Third, the assessment format and method adopted at the Australian university were more diversified and real-life oriented. It argued that more efforts were needed to facilitate the academic acculturation of these students (Wang & Bai, 2021).

Furthermore, students' academic cultural transition is evaluated either by virtue of academic performance and achievement like retention, persistence (Tinto, 1997, 1998), grade, and degree or academic learning experience (Sheridan & Dunne, 2012) and perception like commitment (Wilson et al., 2016), turnover intention, and satisfaction (Rocconi et al., 2020). Gabi and Sharpe (2019) investigated student persistence in HE, which was viewed as an alignment between the pre-entry attributes, goal commitments, effort of students, and institutional experiences (Tinto, 1997). Their study revealed student persistence was determined by students' decisions to stay and complete their academic studies (Gabi & Sharpe, 2019). Moreover, the interaction between students' personal factors, including academic engagement, optimism, and positive relationships, and the environment where the institution played a central role, contributed to successful student persistence (Gabi & Sharpe, 2019). With a focus on international students in the US, Neena et al. (2019) testified the positive impact of their self-efficacy, namely confidence in their ability to adjust to a foreign culture, on their academic satisfaction and lower turnover intentions to leave the university. The adjustment variables, including

coping, cultural adjustment, and organizational support mediated that relationship (Neena et al., 2019).

Transition processes and scholarly debates

Apart from various aspects, student transition has different processes. Students are susceptible to transition shock, namely culture shock (Bennett, 1977), usually at the beginning of the transition. Ivins et al. (2017) considered the transition of transfer students from one academic culture to another as a form of culture shock. They also referred to transfer shock as a process starting from a decline in academic performance and proceeding to recovery in the following semesters (Ivins et al., 2017). The empirical study conducted by Belford (2017) was an example. Most of the international student participants who lived and studied in Melbourne for a few years encountered culture shock and felt some kind of discomfort due to unfamiliar cultural norms in the social and academic environment within the first year of transition (Belford, 2017). Nevertheless, they gradually recovered via social interaction and friendship building (Belford, 2017).

The ethnic or social cultural transition process of students can be represented by the U-/W-curve model (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) . Following this multistage wave, students will step into the honeymoon stage first, which is filled with novelty and positive feelings (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). The subsequent experience of stark differences will make them fall into the hostility stage rapidly (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). With continuous efforts, students are expected to "recover and recognize the humorous nature of the incongruities between the cultures" and "feel in sync with the cultural milieu and

its rhythms, rituals, and rules" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, pp. 23-24). Notwithstanding that, when they return home, students are likely to feel ambivalent since the cultural norms and context shift again. Hence, they will undergo the reentry culture shock downside and try to reintegrate into the home culture in the final stage of resocialization (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Based on the quantitative study on 510 participants aged between 16 and 29 who had studied abroad, Kranz and Goedderz (2020) affirmed that the reentry problems were negatively connected with the commitment to home culture and positively with the other two home-culture related identity formation processes: in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. In addition, Sussman (2000) proposed a cyclical framework of cultural transition, starting from identity salience to sociocultural adjustment, cultural adaptation, and repatriation. These model and framework mainly explain the ethnic or social cultural transition process of cultural sojourners while neglecting the academic aspect.

Tinto's (Tinto, 1975, 1997) Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College and the later modified Model of Student Persistence encompass both academic and social cultural transitions of university students. The pre-entry attributes (i.e., family background, individual attributes, prior schooling) lead to personal intentions, goal and institutional commitments (Tinto, 1997). Then these commitments influence students' institutional experiences in academic and social systems and, subsequently, their academic and social integrations (Tinto, 1997). Through students' effort, these integrations finally result in educational outcomes of dropout or persistence (Tinto, 1997). Braxton et al. (2000) adopted this model to analyze the impact of active learning on the departure (i.e., dropout) process of college students. The results showed that three active learning

behaviors: class discussion, higher-order thinking activities, and exams that were limited to knowledge of facts, affected the students' social integration, institutional commitment, and intention to return (Braxton et al., 2000). Moreover, Adisa et al. (2019) constructed a three-stage scaffolding model of international students, which was composed of the stormy (i.e., struggling in the storm of the new academic and social climates), acclimatization (i.e., getting used to the new climates) and functioning (i.e., performing well in a similar way as the host students) stages of academic progress. Notwithstanding that, these models demonstrate a linear analytic path that "may not capture the full complexity of the phenomenon" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983, p. 225) and the heterogeneity of students.

The transition process of students might be explicated through the lens of experiential or transformative learning as well. In the experiential learning cycle, Kolb (1976) listed four stages: concrete experience, observation and reflections, formation of concepts and generalizations, and testing of concepts in real situations. It holds the perspective that learning is the process rather than the outcome of transforming experience, which "results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). Campbell (2012) conducted a case study of the "buddy project" in an intercultural communication class. It was designed to offer social support to international students in the first few months of their sojourn and, meanwhile, to complement the experiential learning of host students (Campbell, 2012). Prior to the buddy project, the majority of host students acquired knowledge about international students based on what they saw directly (Campbell, 2012). Whereas, through the experiential learning in the buddy project, the host students were able to

understand the values and reasons behind what they saw (Campbell, 2012). Krajewski (2011) also carried out a case study on the task set for culturally mixed groups of students – Intercultural Sydney. As a way of experiential learning, it allowed students to better understand their cultural identities, establish new relationships, and develop intercultural competence (Krajewski, 2011).

The transformative learning theory also sheds light on the transition process. It posits that students/learners with critical reflection will experience transformation in response to significant life events (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000). The transformative learning process is spiral, evolving, and recursive (Taylor, 1997). "New or revised interpretations of the meaning of one's experience" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222) can generate deeper understandings subsequently. Lilley et al. (2015) investigated the process of global citizen learning of students with reference to the transformative learning theory. The capacities of students' global mindset, including social imaginary, reflexivity, relationality, and criticality, contributed to global citizen learning in transformative changes (Lilley et al., 2015).

There are some scholarly debates on student transition in existing literature. Firstly, much research supposes transition to be a process full of "ruptures" (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008) and risks (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Clayton et al., 2009). In the empirical study conducted by Katartzi and Hayward (2020b), students with vocational backgrounds confessed to misrecognizing their worth and having academic struggles during their transition to university. Furthermore, their transition frictions, including epistemic and pedagogical frictions, were closely related to the teaching, learning, and assessment regimes prevailing in the HEI (Katartzi & Hayward, 2020b). Whereas, other researchers

argue that students' cultural transition to and within HEIs is more than a problematic period full of crises (Gale & Parker, 2014). Ecclestone et al. (2009) maintained that "transition can lead to profound change and be an impetus for new learning" (p.2). Even some difficulties and challenges can contribute to successful transitions. Additionally, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) summarized several positive aspects of international students' transitions, including growth, perseverance, sense of belonging, and so forth.

Secondly, the underlying assumption of successful student transition is that only by adjusting and conforming to the values and norms of the HEIs can students achieve academic success and personal growth. Otherwise, they will be deemed as vulnerable or in deficit. However, apart from the choice of adapting to a new culture, students can also negotiate and reconcile complexities without altering the original identity and disposition to achieve a state of equilibrium (Torres et al., 2009). Identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity (Ting-Toomey, 2005) between individuals and contexts, which is fluid and perceived or performed in dynamic ways (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). For instance, Zhao (2020) interviewed 23 Chinese international students who showed an increase in their patriotism and a sense of national identity when studying at an American public university. Instead of losing their national identity, they negotiated it and encountered another "Chinese self" (Zhao, 2020).

Thirdly, the majority of student transition research either adopts the transition-as-induction approach or the transition-as-development approach (Gale & Parker, 2014). The former takes on an "institutionalist" view (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018) and focuses on the engagement and adaptation of students into a new institutional/disciplinary context at the initial stage, namely during the induction or in the first year or semester of HE

(Sheridan & Dunne, 2012; Zhang, 2021). For example, Sheridan and Dunne (2012) examined the academic reflective journals kept by 36 undergraduate students, which related to their learning in the first semester of the first year in an Irish university. They found that students began to transform into student identity and, meanwhile, had difficulties in adapting to the new teaching approach – lecture as well as the more complex group work (Sheridan & Dunne, 2012). Many students felt stressed during the academic cultural transition (Sheridan & Dunne, 2012). In a word, the authors failed to acknowledge the academic cultural transition of students as a prolonged integral process more than the initial phase.

The transition-as-development approach pays attention to the transformation of students in terms of maturation stages and identity (Gale & Parker, 2014) from an individualist point of view (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018), which is often depicted in a linear way like the transition-as-induction approach (Gale & Parker, 2014). Sussman (2000) generalized four types of identity shifts during the cultural transition: subtractive, additive, affirmative, and intercultural identity shifts. Both external environmental affordances and internal individual attributes can facilitate development in transition. Kahu et al. (2020) carried out a qualitative longitudinal study on first-year undergraduate students in Australian universities and generated four individual pathways to student engagement: well-being, emotion, self-efficacy, and belonging. Moreover, Yu et al. (2019) conducted a survey with 726 international students from Hong Kong public universities. Results showed that English language proficiency, social support, as well as a low level of perceived discrimination had strong correlations with two types of cross-cultural adaptations: psychological and sociocultural adaptations (Yu et al., 2019). Also,

the proficiency in the local dialect and contact with local students further fostered sociocultural adaptation (Yu et al., 2019).

Compared with them, the transition-as-becoming perspective (Gale & Parker, 2014) considers transition as a permanent and dynamic state of being rather than a periodic or linear occurrence (Quinn, 2009). Amundsen (2021) reconfigured it as being-becoming, namely a symbiosis between present and future, momentary stabilization of being and constant transformation of becoming something else. It is a nonlinear, iterative, fluid, and irregular self-differentiation process composed of significant life events that enable students to deliberate on their perceptions of themselves and the world (Volet & Jones, 2012). The granularity of lived experiences of students, which "entangle with other events in an emergent unfolding" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1256), are valued through the lens of transition as being-becoming. It shifts the focus from a deficit model of students who shall adapt to the university to the need for the university to change and attend to the realities of students (Volet & Jones, 2012).

Engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy, Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018) also conceptualized student transition as assemblage, namely "an emergent, temporarily stable yet continually mutating conglomeration" (p.1258) or a sophisticated whirl that drew elements like people, relationships, emotions, spaces, and expectations into its orbit and made them fit in an arrangement. Amundsen (2021) also pointed out the coexistence of dis-assemblage in student transition. Contrary to assemblage, it demonstrates the temporarily unstable configuration of disconnecting elements emerging in students' lived realities. Both assemblage and dis-assemblage blur the boundaries between inside and outside, students and institutions. Different transition aspects and

elements can intertwine/assemble or detach/dis-assemble in complex and ongoing ways. In the study carried out by Xie and Reay (2020), rural students in Chinese elite universities kept a compartmentalized fit, that is, a congruence with academic learning (assemblage) while an incongruence with social activity and life (dis-assemblage). The relationships, emotions, expectations, skills, time, and space involved in transition (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018) unfold in flux and continuous assemblage and dis-assemblage in an active (re)making of students' lived experiences (Amundsen, 2021).

In addition, Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018), Gravett (2021), and Amundsen (2021) activated the concept of rhizome put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to characterize student transition. If being-becoming symbolizes its ongoing and evolving characteristic while assemblage and dis-assemblage indicate a holistic view of surrounding elements and dynamic relationships, the rhizomatic nature of student transition manifests the multiplicity and diversity not only of experiences but also of the self (Gravett, 2021). With various entryways and exits, rhizomes can move in any direction and level in nonlinear ways. That acknowledges divergent and ceaseless movements, ruptures, and connections of heterogeneous student transitions (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018).

However, these research on transition as being-becoming, assemblage and dis-assemblage, and rhizomatic either remained at the conception stage (Gravett, 2021) or focused solely on first-year (Gravett & Winstone, 2021; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018) and indigenous non-traditional students (Amundsen, 2021). The latter two also stressed the importance of recognizing the complexity and multiplicity of students' experiences through fragments of specific incidences and circumstances rather than generating

patterns and commonalities. In my viewpoint, they are subject to the specificity problem and remain ambiguous about what exactly changes in students themselves in a long-lasting and profound way. To further crystallize these transition characteristics that reveal the dynamic and heterogeneous "self" and identify certain patterns for educational research and practice in general, I will introduce the thinking tool of "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977) in the next section "Habitus and student transition" (p.28).

Fourthly, the dominant discourse in student transition literature is on how the university intervenes to "fix" the assumed problems of passive students (McKay et al., 2018) and "save" them from possible negative outcomes such as attrition, dropout (Tinto, 1975), and mental health problems (Cage et al., 2021), leading to successful results such as academic achievement, upward social mobility, and identity transformation (Hou & McDowell, 2014). Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018), for instance, explored how the learning environment aided 52 international business students in achieving a sense of belonging during the transition. According to their finding, tutor facilitation, experiential learning, and formative assessment strategies contributed to students' formation of autonomy, communities of practice, group cohesiveness and co-dependency (Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2018). Zhang (2021) investigated how web-based mediated learning prepared college students for the first-semester academic cultural transition at a Chinese university by supplementing their in-class learning. According to the empirical study carried out by Sotardi and Brogt (2020), among 233 first-year undergraduate students at a public university in New Zealand, rehearsal strategies (e.g., highlighting text to aid memorization) had a positive influence on state anxiety and academic self-efficacy while elaboration strategies (e.g., comparing, paraphrasing, peer teaching) had a strong positive

influence on academic self-efficacy. Also, state anxiety was negatively related to both task grade and academic self-efficacy (Sotardi & Brogt, 2020). Inkelas et al. (2007) verified that first-generation students who participated in Living–Learning Programs perceived a more successful social transition to college than those who did not.

Except for the support offered by the learning environment, what efforts students make by themselves and how they exert agency are crucial. Agency means the "power to originate actions for given purposes" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In other words, it shows the ability of students to make choices and take action based on these choices out of the free will to bring differences to their lives (Martin, 2004). Some scholars, albeit with a student-centered perspective, concentrated on students' personal characteristics, psychological needs (Wilson et al., 2016), or self-efficacy (Kyndt et al., 2019) during the transition. They acknowledged the role of students' innate psychological factors in transition but failed to explain what specific agentic abilities they utilized to accomplish that. In the following four paragraphs, I will introduce concepts of self-regulated learning, student engagement, and the constructivist-developmental theory. They allude to students' agency but cannot fully capture it in student transition as becoming in academic, social, and ethnic aspects.

The concept of self-regulated learning exhibits an emphasis on students' agency. According to Bandura (1997), self-regulation expands "freedom of action and enable[s] people to serve as causal contributors to their own life course by selecting, influencing and constructing their own circumstances" (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2002, p. 446). Self-regulated learning is conceived as a process during which students manage their thoughts, actions, and feelings for the sake of academic success (Pintrich, 1995; Zimmerman &

Schunk, 2011). It comprises metacognition (i.e., awareness of one's thinking), cognition, strategic action (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating), and motivation (Flynn et al., 2020; Hardy III et al., 2019). During self-regulated learning, students are able to cognitively think about what and how they learn (De Bilde et al., 2011), understand their capacity in academic study, and carry out metacognitive strategies for academic success (Paris & Paris, 2001) out of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Plenty of empirical studies examined the self-regulated learning of students merely in respect of academic cultural transition. For example, Flynn et al. (2020) studied how students applied self-regulated learning to self-paced graduate business communication courses by adopting the model of three cyclical phases: preparatory, performance, and appraisal (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2002). Although there was no clear correlation between self-regulated learning, self-paced learning environment, and student performance, they confirmed the critical role of student predisposition in the three cyclical phases and highlighted the importance of support in guiding students through that (Flynn et al., 2020). Zhu et al. (2020) investigated the online learning attitudes, interactions, intention, and self-regulated learning capability of 94 university students in a blended course. They found that four self-regulatory factors (i.e., intrinsic orientation, performance orientation, self-management, and metacognitive awareness) and attitudes towards online learning predicted students' continuous intention to learn online (Zhu et al., 2020). The perceived online interactions mediated that (Zhu et al., 2020).

The theory of student engagement implies students' active involvement and efforts (agency) in purposeful activities that are contributive to desired learning outcomes (Krause & Coates, 2008). In the conceptual framework of engagement, Kahu (2013)

explicated three aspects of student engagement: affect (i.e., enthusiasm, interest, belonging), cognition (i.e., deep learning, self-regulation), and behavior (i.e., time and effort, interaction, participation). The antecedent influences include structural ones of university (e.g., culture, curriculum, assessment) and student (e.g., background, family), and psychosocial ones of the university (e.g., teaching, staff) and students (e.g., motivation, skill, identity, self-efficacy) (Kahu, 2013). Some proximal consequences consist of academic learning and achievement as well as social satisfaction and well-being while distal consequences incorporate retention, work success, lifelong learning, citizenship, and personal growth (Kahu, 2013). However, empirical studies on the academic cultural transition of students at the beginning of HE still occupy a dominant place in the student engagement literature. Based on a longitudinal study of first-year university students, Kahu et al. (2020) interpreted how the university and student factors interact to influence student engagement via four pathways: self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and well-being, in the educational interface. Moreover, Kuh et al. (2008) unmasked the influence of first-year student engagement on their college grades and persistence.

The constructivist-developmental theory indicates students' agency in a developmental process (Kegan, 1982, 1994). It describes the interrelationship among cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains of individual development from simple to complex (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Moreover, it consists of five orders of consciousness: impulsive, imperial, socialized, self-authoring, and self-transforming, representing meaning-making structures with increasing sophistication (Abes & Jones, 2004). The meaning-making structures are assumptions that determine one's perceptions

and organizations of life experiences (Kegan, 1994). Based on that, Abes and Jones (2004) generalized three meaning-making structures: formulaic, transitional (from formulaic to foundational), and foundational. They demonstrate an increasingly complex and stronger filter between contextual influences and lesbian college students' perceptions and constructions of their sexual orientation and other identities (Abes & Jones, 2004). In the first category, students tend to be more passively shaped by contextual influences while in the last category, students define their identity actively with strong self-authorship (Abes et al., 2007). Self-authorship indicates the ability to "coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and interpersonal states" (Kegan, 1994, p. 185). Students with the transitional meaning-making structure filter external influences on identity inconsistently (Abes & Jones, 2004). However, the constructivist-developmental theory falls into the transition-as-development category, which follows a linear path.

All in all, it entails more investigation into academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions of students, respectively, and recognition of them as neutral and dynamic processes in becoming, during which students can employ agentic competence to manage challenges with various coping strategies and generate different outcomes. In the section of "Intercultural competence and student transition" (p.38), I will introduce the concept of IC to showcase students' agency in transition.

Habitus and student transition

Habitus occupies a crucial part in students' transition to HE. It is a system of lasting and transposable dispositions that integrates past experiences and actions (Bourdieu, 1977) and can permeate into the present (DiMaggio, 1979). Moreover, it displays the power of adaptation to the outside world (Bourdieu, 1993). This adaptation is constant and always in the process of completion with no finality (Reay, 1998). Compared with the widely used evaluation tools of student transition, such as ephemeral perceptions and performance, habitus manifests the "self" (Gravett & Winstone, 2021) of students in an ongoing constructive way. In addition, habitus change can manifest student transition as a becoming process. Habitus negotiation and transformation are at the central place of student transition to HE, which is a dynamic becoming process pertaining to coping and going on in the field (Katartzi & Hayward, 2020a).

The following two subsections "The construct of habitus" (p.29) and "Habitus, habitus change, and student transition" (p.34) aim to elaborate on the construct of habitus first and then discuss existent research on habitus and student transition, including habitus directly related to transition, and habitus and its change during the transition. The first subsection summarizes certain characteristics of habitus and further explicates the reason for claiming habitus to be a desirable embodiment of transition as becoming (Gale & Parker, 2014). The second section attempts to uncover research gaps existing in empirical studies on habitus and cultural transitions of students.

The construct of habitus

Habitus is a construct first put forward by Bourdieu (1977). It is conceived as "a set of embodied dispositions, inclinations, values, and norms that shape and guide students' practices" (Katartzi & Hayward, 2020b, p. 305). According to Gale and Parker (2014), the conception of student transition as becoming is "a perpetual series of fragmented movements involving whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience" (p. 737). It ontologically blurs presence and impermanence and is influenced by the "emergent and reciprocal interplays of identity, agency and structure" (Amundsen, 2021, p. 3). Habitus can help to better understand that by virtue of its several characteristics: compiling collective and individual trajectories, interplaying between past and present, and being structured and structuring (Reay, 2004).

Habitus is a compilation of both the collective history of family, community, society, and individual history (Bourdieu, 1990a). At the collective level, there are more general notions of habitus like familial habitus and institutional habitus (Reay, 1998). Familial habitus consists of a deeply rooted system of experiences, perspectives, and predispositions that family members share. Institutional habitus reveals the influence of a certain cultural group or social class on individuals' behavior via intermediate institutions (i.e., organizations) (McDonough, 1997). Reay et al. (2001) constructed institutional habitus from aspects of educational status, organizational practices, and cultural and expressive characteristics of institutions (i.e., organizations). Lee (2021) further elaborated on the concept of institutional habitus in terms of the location of institutions (i.e., organizations), the university's position in global and national university rankings,

the quality and quantity of career support, and the social class and ethnicity of students and staff.

This study focuses on the habitus at the individual level, which is more complex, diversified, and fluid than that at the collective level (Reay, 2004). It contains the individual history and, meanwhile, reflects the collective history of class and family where individuals own membership. Nevertheless, within the same cultural group, different members can have heterogeneous habitus (Bourdieu, 1993). For instance, Balmer et al. (2017) pondered on the individual trajectory of each medical student and the collective trajectory of them as a group. In the finding, 19 medical students differed in the individual trajectory, with heterogeneous dispositions directing their ability to seek resources and shaping their behaviors in various ways (Balmer et al., 2017). Whereas, their collective trajectory showed similarities in that the social space harmonized their experiences in aspects of open-mindedness and personal initiative (Balmer et al., 2017). Forsberg (2017) also discovered middle-class students in India possessed different individual dispositions toward international mobility plans while a shared habitus in the middle-class group toward transnationalism. In a word, the fluidity and permeability of habitus can capture the transition-as-becoming approach, which also acknowledges the flux, multiplicities, and singularities of students' experiences and mobility patterns in dynamic compositions (Gale & Parker, 2014).

Habitus not only inherits collective and individual histories but also extends to the current circumstances (Reay, 2004). These circumstances are "not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier

socializations" (Reay, 2004, p. 434). Habitus is permeable and responsive to the complex interplay between the past and present. In that, habitus indicates a prolonged structuring and restructuring process of individuals' dispositions and experiences. It can render student transition as becoming that perpetuates throughout the whole life (Gale & Parker, 2014). In the study carried out by Clark et al. (2011), students exhibited habitus shaped by their experiences prior to as well as within the university. Additionally, their habitus affected their success in finding graduate work and settling into the workplace (Clark et al., 2011).

Habitus is not only a "structured structure" but also a "structuring structure", that is, being shaped by and shaping the context where it is situated (Bourdieu, 1977). On the one hand, habitus is structured by "the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81). Field is also a construct proposed by Bourdieu (1977), which represents an objective structure replete with conflicts and competitions beyond the geographical space. Habitus is continually produced and reproduced, structured and restructured by the field (DiMaggio, 1979). On the other hand, habitus structures the perceptions of as well as actions in the field. It contributes to making the field a meaningful world "endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 44).

However, more previous research put emphasis on the habitus structured by the field instead of habitus structuring the field from the lens of agency. With regard to habitus and agency, Bourdieu (1990a) argued, albeit allowing for individual agency, habitus still predisposed individuals toward certain ways of behaving. The field continuously

conditions habitus and subjective habitus is a product of the objective field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). However, an increasing number of scholars nowadays accuse reproduction theorists of such overly deterministic explanations (Jenkins, 2014). In their opinions, those perpetuate a view that the underprivileged are always subject to the symbolic domination ingrained in the field due to a habitus lacking in intelligence (Rancière, 1991), reflexivity (Hattam & Smyth, 2015), or agency.

A few studies alluded to students' habitus and their agency, but neither the agency nor its relationship with habitus was clearly and systematically explained. For example, Green (2007) pointed out students could recognize and take into account social and educational realities so as to reshape their expectations and make changes. They actively made sense of the new environment as well as its demands and prevented themselves from being passively reproduced by the HE field. Additionally, Emer and Joanne (2012) identified students' agency in sorting out different options and evaluating potential alternatives through a conscious process. That was possibly based on multiple habitus of students over a longer period of time (Emer & Joanne, 2012). Jones and Masika (2021) implied the link between the internal agency development, including employability skills and professional identities, and the evolving habitus of first-year undergraduates without further elaboration on that.

Furthermore, numerous previous studies associated students' habitus with capital, especially cultural capital, in the field of HE. Capital, habitus, and field, as the thinking tool of Bourdieu (1977), interact to generate practices. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital has three forms: objectified (e.g., books and pictures owned), embodied (e.g., long-lasting dispositions of the mind), and institutionalized (e.g., educational

qualifications obtained). Gaddis (2013) examined the mediating effect of habitus in the relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement. For young adolescents, the proper use of capital received from the family, community, and previous experiences helped them develop habitus to navigate and achieve success (Gaddis, 2013). Ivemark and Ambrose (2021) identified three types of adjustment profiles of first-generation university students: adjusters, strangers, and outsiders. Their different levels of habitus adaptation resulted from the acquirement of different amount of cultural capital throughout their life course (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021).

In a word, habitus is dynamic and malleable instead of fixed and inert. It showcases the tension between individual agency and social forces (Joseph, 2020) and plays a crucial role in transcending the duality between them (Reay, 2004). Its characteristics strike a chord with the transition-as-becoming perspective. By exploring the habitus and habitus change of students, this study hopes to recognize the student transition as a becoming process in practice.

Habitus, habitus change, and student transition

A good number of empirical studies draw connections between students' habitus and cultural transitions. They either examined how habitus directly related to cultural transitions (Leese, 2010; Xu, 2021) or focused on students' habitus and its change during cultural transitions. Classified into the first category (habitus relating to cultural transitions), the study carried out by Meuleman et al. (2015) inquired about the habitus of non-traditional students (i.e., first in family, rural, and international students) and its

impact on their social and academic cultural transitions to the first year of HE. In the end, it advocated a move away from the dominant discourse that non-traditional students should "adapt" to the HEI. Moreover, it appealed for the cultural change of HEIs to embrace the habitus of non-traditional students and facilitate their transition (Meuleman et al., 2015). Roksa and Robinson (2017) associated students' habitus with the transition to HE through the quantitative research. They measured habitus from two aspects: the congruency of students' expectations with those of their parents and the consistency of their expectations over time (10th and 12th grades). The result showed habitus benefited the transition of all students equally regardless of their high school backgrounds (Roksa & Robinson, 2017).

With regard to habitus during cultural transitions, some studies generally described the academic, professional, working-class, middle-class, or communal habitus during students' cultural transition to HE, during HE, or from HE to the labor market (Benkwitz et al., 2019; Bormann & Thies, 2019; Jo et al., 2009). For example, by comparing interviews with urban and middle-class students with those with rural and underprivileged students, Liu (2021) discovered the former group of students had more sophisticated understandings of the job market, more confidence in exerting their agency, and more strategic future plans. In addition, these dispositions manifested their middle-class habitus and contributed to their better performances during the job search (Liu, 2021). Blackmore et al. (2017) investigated 13 Chinese accounting graduates' transition experiences from HE to the labor market in Australia. According to their findings, these students showed emergent professional habitus and accumulated social capital through networking (Blackmore et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in existent literature, much emphasis is laid on one habitus status – hysteresis (Weng, 2020) of students during cultural transitions. According to Bourdieu (1977), hysteresis was the disruption caused by the "structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them" (p. 83). In other words, perceptions and practices prior to tertiary education, which is "governed by the past conditions" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 62), can inhibit students from utilizing opportunities to transition to HE. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) compared those students to "fish out of the water" while others with a habitus compatible with the HEI to "fish in the water", that is, they taking the surrounding environment for granted without feeling the weight of the "water".

Some researchers regard habitus hysteresis as a negative mismatch that needs to be redressed. Usually, it is a consequence of students' deficit and maladaptation. For example, Weng (2020) discovered that communities of practice and habitus in exerting agency could expedite students' academic discourse socialization. However, adhering to the habitus of the teacher-led cultural practice of learning, some Chinese international students respected and passively received instructions from authoritative figures like teachers (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Therefore, they were unable to exercise agency to achieve the essential competence and central participation in the HEI (Weng, 2020). As pointed out by Qing (2017), there was a mismatch between the working-class habitus of rural undergraduates and that of elite universities during academic and social cultural transitions. That led to awkward initial university experiences and conflicted identities of these students (Qing, 2017). On the contrary, researchers like Matsunaga et al. (2020) interpreted the concept of hysteresis in a positive way. Focusing on a group of international students, they contended that hysteresis encounters represented "initiation of

alternative actions and capacity to embrace learning opportunities" (Matsunaga et al., 2020, p. 5) rather than a label of deficit.

Apart from that, some empirical studies shed light on students' dynamic habitus change during cultural transitions. In general, students can reconcile different experiences and cultures to achieve a "toned" habitus (Jin & Ball, 2020) or adapt to the HEI and transform their habitus (Xie & Reay, 2020). In Katartzi and Hayward's (2020a) study, habitus transformation of students with vocational background was embodied in "changing field dynamics and the socializing force of pedagogical regimes" (p.310). Focusing on a group of working-class students studying in Chinese elite universities, Jin and Ball (2020) discovered that they tried to enhance reflexivity in an effort to transcend the inexorable and deterministic class domination enforced by the institutional meritocratic culture. But their reflexivity was restricted by the unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capitals in the HEI. Jin and Ball (2020) concluded it as a "toned habitus" of those working-class students, which enabled them to achieve a certain degree of self-emancipation and transcendence of class domination but not to the full extent.

Habitus transformation means students strive to embrace and adapt to the new HE environment while reshaping the original habitus. It can promote self-confidence and social mobility, whereas at the same time, incur hidden injuries such as the inferiority of the social class origins (Granfield, 1991). Based on a four-year longitudinal study of working-class students, Lehmann (2014) found they transformed habitus through developing new dispositions and tastes toward a range of issues, such as food, politics, and future career. Nevertheless, many students claimed that this transformative process

made relationships with former friends and parents more difficult, which reflected their complex feelings of allegiances to or dismissal of working-class roots (Lehmann, 2014).

Habitus transformation can be driven by individual aspirations and motivation as well as external pressures and forces (Jin & Ball, 2021). According to Xie and Reay (2020), during academic and social cultural transitions, rural students in Chinese elite universities could transform their habitus successfully by accomplishing both academic and social fit. Whereas, it was unnecessary for them to complete the habitus transformation. A compartmentalized fit, that is, students' habitus congruent with the HEI in terms of academic learning but not social activity and life, would also take effect. Notwithstanding that, Jin and Ball (2021) warned those working-class students might achieve success by chance in the HEI and probably struggle with the cultural discontinuity in society in the future.

What is more, a handful of existent research refers to the external influences like pedagogical interventions on habitus during cultural transitions of students. For instance, Gartland and Smith (2018) explored the impact of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) vocational courses on students' habitus. They disclosed the hierarchical college system and students' access to it would affect their habitus, self-perception, and learner identity (Gartland & Smith, 2018). In the study conducted by Neergaard et al. (2020), pedagogical nudging techniques challenged students' habitus and enabled the emergence of an entrepreneurial habitus during the academic cultural transition. This transition was mainly a transformative learning process.

However, similar to the student transition literature, there is still a lack of elaboration on what competence students utilize as a manifestation of their agency in

leading habitus toward a more positive direction. The concept of intercultural competence (IC) can help to fill in the gap, which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Intercultural competence and student transition

What agency students utilize to smooth their cultural transitions (Volet & Jones, 2012) remains a research gap in the student transition and habitus literature. Klemenčič (2017) regarded students' agency as their competence to affect learning environments and pathways. Some previous research mentioned student agency but lacked a competence-based comprehensive analysis of it during student transition. For example, Mukhamejanova (2019) found six international students exerted their agency to negotiate their study and adjust to the life in Kazakhstan actively. With regard to their circumstances and goals, these students did not solely adapt to the host environment but learned from it and tried to transform it (Mukhamejanova, 2019). In Baxter's (2019) study, 34 Rwandan students were also found to employ agency when navigating their overseas education experiences in the US. Jean-Francois (2019) enumerated several intercultural strategies that international students made use of to accomplish social and academic integration into an American university campus, such as friendship development, student organization participation, employment, voluntary opportunities seeking, faculty and peer support and consultation, and so forth.

Intercultural competence (IC), namely the capacity to interact appropriately and effectively with culturally different others in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006), can shed light on student transition. With reference to the data collected from 210

Chinese students in Belgium, Meng et al. (2018) identified that direct intercultural contact, through the mediation of global competence comprising skills and attitudes, could promote the accumulation of students' bonding and bridging social capital (social cultural transition). Moreover, Lyubovnikova et al. (2015) verified the indirect association between students' task reflexivity and academic performance (academic cultural transition) through the mediation of intercultural sensitivity. In the next two subsections "Intercultural competence theories and models" (p.40) and "Intercultural practices and student transition" (p.51), I will review the literature on IC and its relationship with student transition in detail.

However, students' habitus is never related to IC in existent literature. A few scholars only referred to students' habitus in certain intercultural situations. For instance, Matsunaga et al. (2020) examined what intercultural group work experiences six international students had with local students at Australian universities and how they negotiated the embedded normative practices with them. They discovered it was the habitus that enabled those international students to ponder over their group practices critically and take leadership opportunities as an alternative (Matsunaga et al., 2020). Through studying a group of Australian undergraduates in an outbound mobility program, Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015) suggested intercultural challenges (e.g., language barrier, unfamiliar food and weather, homesickness, cultural misunderstanding, etc.) in those students' daily life could potentially provide the impetus for the transnational and cosmopolitan habitus development.

Intercultural competence theories and models

Competence is equated with a set of knowledge, skills, and motivation, including understanding, relationship development, satisfaction, effectiveness, appropriateness, and adaptation (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Culture is conceived as a collective of "attitudes, values, beliefs, rituals/customs, and behavioral patterns into which people are born, but that is structurally created and maintained by people's ongoing actions" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, pp. 6-7). In this respect, IC is conventionally regarded as one's capability to interact appropriately and effectively with others in possession of different cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations toward the world in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006). It is on a continuous ongoing process of development that individuals cannot ultimately or fully achieve. Similar constructs are global competence (Hunter et al., 2006), cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008), intercultural effectiveness (Hammer et al., 1978), intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005), etc. Some researchers also proposed constructs like intercultural leadership competence (Chen & An, 2009) and intercultural conflict competence (Ting-Toomey, 2009) based on the IC concept. Kramsch (1999) criticized that intercultural literature relied heavily on cross-country differences. It "not only homogenizes cultures within a nation, but perpetuates the self/other binary" (Luo & Chan, 2022, p. 2). Interculturality can take place between people with diverse backgrounds beyond national or ethnic background.

The dichotomies of emic-etic and general-specific categories of IC exist in current literature (Dai, 2018). The emic perspective entails an insider position within a particular boundary of time and context, whereas the etic view pursues an explanatory and

applicable model from an outsider standpoint (Bennett, 2009). Yum's (2012) study on communication competence from a Korean perspective embodies the former. Chen and Starosta's (1996) intercultural communication competence (ICC) model is representative of the latter. Some other scholars attempt to bridge the gap between etic-emic viewpoints. Bennett (2009) suggested employing emic categories for the culture one intends to understand after successfully navigating certain etic "maps". Ting-Toomey (2005) claimed the identity negotiation theory to carry both emic and etic meanings. People can learn personal and group identities in intercultural encounters by virtue of identity knowledge, negotiation skills, and mindfulness.

The general type of IC presents as universal for all cultural groups while the specific one highlights certain competence in typical intercultural contexts and circumstances (Dai, 2018). As representatives of the latter, Gudykunst (1998) explicated how to manage anxiety and uncertainty to acquire communication effectiveness in particular and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) discussed face negotiation during specific situations of intercultural conflicts. There are controversies on both sides. Some scholars like Bennett (2014) criticized the universal one that sacrificed local diversities and would possibly essentialize cultures while others pointed out the generalization problem of the contextual specific one. A handful of scholars tried to blur the boundary between general-specific IC constructs. According to Piątkowska and Strugielska (2017), IC was a complex system and its meaning construction was an interplay between the universal embodiment and the relativistic context.

What is more, intercultural scholars from Western and Eastern countries diverge on IC components and models. Generally speaking, Western practice is inclined to prioritize

knowledge and skills; on the contrary, Eastern practice tends to focus on the value or moral of individuals (Chong & Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2015) through a collectivistic lens (Spitzberg, 1994). Gao's (2014) "*Zhi xing he yi*" model integrated knowing (zhi) and doing (xing) based on Chinese traditional philosophy of the Mind, namely *xin xue* in Chinese. The knowing dimension comprised knowledge, awareness, and critical thinking while the doing dimension comprised attitudes, skills, and strategies. Xiao and Chen (2009) argued that Western models of IC could not be applied to Chinese people because they centered on individuals and emphasized the process control and the intended goal achievement. Therefore, they departed from a Confucian perspective to analyze the communication and moral competence of Chinese people. However, the West-East duality is neither reliable nor rigorous because salient cultural disparities even exist within Western and Eastern groups (e.g., Europe versus North America in the Western group, the Middle East versus Asia in the East group, etc.) and other cultures like African culture are unfortunately excluded.

In resonance with different conceptualizations of IC, various IC models emerge. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) divided them into five categories, which had overlaps and implied either a set of fixed components or the linear development of IC. In other words, they fail to capture the essence of multi-layered culture and diversified individuals (de Hei et al., 2020) and, more importantly, the fluidity and dynamism of IC. The first category is the compositional model that illustrates components without explicating the relationship among them. Howard-Hamilton et al.'s (1998) intercultural competence components model is an example, which comprises aspects of attitudes, knowledge, and skills without indicating any association between them. In comparison, the second

category of co-orientational models indicates the interaction between cognate components in pursuit of shared meanings and mutual understandings (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In the worldviews convergence model, Fantini (1995) shows the interrelations between use/pragmatics, form/symbol systems, and meaning/semantics.

Third, the developmental model puts emphasis on the time and process of intercultural interaction, and the fourth adaptational model stresses the interdependence of multiple interactional components via modelling the adjustment process (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). King and Baxter's (2005) intercultural maturity model can be deemed as a developmental model that explicates how interactants progress through initial, intermediate, and mature levels with the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects developed. The relative acculturation extended model put forward by Navas et al. (2005) is a representative of the adaptation model. Lastly, the causal path model explicates especially causal interrelations among components (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Arasaratnam's (2006) model of intercultural communication competence demonstrates two distinct theoretical paths that lead to competent interactions.

Assessment tools of IC bloom based on voluminous IC constructs and models, the majority of which follow the positivism paradigm and rely on participants' self-report data. Some examples are Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) (Fantini, 2009), Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer et al., 2003), and Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) (Lee Olson & Kroeger, 2001). Apart from that, assessment tools that translate Western practices into the Chinese context are worth noting here. Peng et al. (2015) proposed the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese college students (AIC-CCS) to assess college students' IC in the Chinese context. There were six

measurements in total: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness. Few scholars adopt a constructivist perspective in IC research. Piątkowska and Strugielska (2017) viewed IC from a constructivist complex systems approach, that is, "understanding is constructed by learners influenced by context" (p. 1171). But neither the constructive approach nor the complex dimensions of IC was explicitly described.

IC contains not only intrapersonal and interpersonal but also person-environmental (Gilbreath et al., 2011) aspects, which is seldom clarified in existent literature. The person-environmental interactive perspective acknowledges the agency and experience of individuals embedded in the nested, interconnected, and structured system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Distinctive from the interpersonal communication perspective that highlights different national, ethnic, or regional cultures (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017), it emphasizes a fit (Deng & Yao, 2020) or reconciliation (Kim, 2007) between the culture of students and the HEI. Students have to use IC to negotiate their cultural norms, values, and experiences with the culture and demands of HEIs (Holmegaard et al., 2014). In the following section, existing IC theories and models will be classified into intrapersonal, interpersonal, and person-environmental perspectives that lay emphasis on component, developmental process or both. It helps to uncover the scant attention paid to the dynamism and person-environmental perspective of IC in existent literature.

Intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives of intercultural competence

Theories and models of IC that take an intrapersonal perspective mainly focus on the self-related components and development, such as knowledge, attitude, skill, motivation, identity, and so on. In the intercultural positioning system, Bennett (2009) stressed that the crucial initial step is to "locate ourselves, develop cultural self-awareness through understanding our own cultural patterns and frame of reference" (p.127). A great number of IC theories and models fall in the intrapersonal-component category. The common classifications are knowledge-skill-attitude and cognitive-affective-behavioral aspects. For instance, Byram (1997) formed the IC model with five components: interpreting/relating skills, discovery/interaction skills, knowledge, critical cultural awareness, and attitudes. In their interculturality and intercultural communication competence model, Dai and Chen (2015) included affective (i.e., openness, relational self-concept, active empathy, and mutual appreciation), cognitive (i.e., cultural knowledge, critical cultural awareness, cultural integration, and intercultural perspective), behavioral (i.e., interaction skills, identity negotiation, rapport building, and creative tension), and moral abilities (i.e., mutual respect, sincerity, tolerance, and responsibility). Also, the reciprocity and mutuality between these abilities would contribute to the establishment of harmonious intercultural relationships (Dai & Chen, 2015).

Some other scholars explore IC in an intrapersonal-developmental way, namely with both procedure and optimal outcomes. The developmental IC model of Bennett (1986) showcased the intrapersonal development from ethnocentric stages, including denial, defense, and minimization, to ethnorelative stages, including acceptance, adaptation, and integration. In addition, Griffith et al. (2016) proposed a conceptual model of approach

(i.e., attitudinal), analyze (i.e., cognitive), and act (i.e., behavioral). Each stage consists of several sub-dimensions: tolerance for ambiguity, cross-cultural self-efficacy, and positive cultural orientation under the approach dimension; self-awareness, social monitoring, perspective taking/suspending judgment, and cultural knowledge application under the analyze dimension; behavioral and emotional regulation under the act dimension.

In comparison, fewer IC theories and models adopt an interpersonal perspective in both component and development categories. Deardorff (2009) appealed for more relational IC models beyond the individual ones. One example in the interpersonal-component category is the co-cultural theory. Orbe and Spellers (2005) drew a matrix with three preferred outcomes (i.e., separation, accommodation, and assimilation) on the horizontal line and three communication approaches (i.e., non-assertive, assertive, and aggressive) on the vertical line. In addition, in the anxiety/uncertainty management model of IC, Hammer et al. (1998) depicted the linear causal flow from four antecedents: interpersonal saliencies, intergroup saliences, communication message exchange, and host contact conditions, to attributional confidence and/or anxiety reduction, and finally to satisfaction.

Furthermore, there is a multitude of theories and models of IC departing from both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives. Some examples of both IC perspectives in the component category are Berry et al.'s (1989) attitude acculturation model and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi's (1998) face-negotiation theory. The model for face-negotiation theory contained four components. Mindfulness, knowledge, and interaction skills constituted intrapersonal dimensions while the facework competence criteria represented the interpersonal perspective (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Many more scholars

viewed intrapersonal and interpersonal components of IC in a developmental way. As Griffith and Harvey (2001) constructed in the intercultural communication model of relationship quality, cultural understanding and communication competence influenced each other. They predicted relationship quality directly or indirectly through cultural and communication interactions (Griffith & Harvey, 2001). The process model of IC (Deardorff, 2006) embodied the process orientation of individuals' attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills to desired internal and then external outcomes in the interaction. Also, in the relational model of IC, Imahori and Lanigan (1989) correlated intrapersonal constructs (i.e., motivation, skills, and knowledge) of both sojourner and host-national with interpersonal outcomes like intercultural effectiveness, relational satisfaction, intimacy, etc. in a causal path.

The person-environmental perspective of intercultural competence

Most previous studies analyzed the utilization and development of IC from an intrapersonal growth and/or interpersonal communication perspective. Nonetheless, the person-environmental interaction perspective of IC is of the same significance. According to Deardorff (2009), situating IC within environmental contexts was fundamental to the understanding of the complexity of IC. This study mainly focuses on the student-institutional (Denson & Bowman, 2015) interaction, which might elicit interests-contents fit, needs-supplies fit, demands-abilities fit, and/or values-culture fit (Etzel & Nagy, 2021) between students and the HEI. From this perspective, IC can be deemed as students' ability to negotiate their personal interests, needs, demands, and

values with the contents, supplies, abilities, and complex culture of the HEI to achieve a balance. This negotiation mechanism can help students make reasonable choices and achieve an "academic match" with HEIs (Laing et al., 2005). Additionally, it enables HEIs to realize the changing "pattern of students' engagement" (Yorke & Thomas, 2003, p. 72) in HE.

A handful of existing IC theories and models consider the impact of the environment/system. Rathje (2007) incorporated both interpersonal and cultural contextual elements in the coherence-cohesion model of IC. In the communication accommodation theory and model, Gallois et al. (2005) framed the cyclical development of intergroup and interpersonal initial orientation, psychological accommodation, behavior tactics and perceptions attributions, and evaluations and future intentions within the socio-historical context. Oetzel's (2005) effective intercultural workgroup communication theory also took the situational features into account along with intrapersonal factors (e.g., self-construal, face concerns, etc.) and group communication processes in an outcome-based interactional process. Another example is the multilevel process change model of IC (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). The antecedent factors comprise system-level factors (e.g., degree of institutional support) as well as interpersonal-level and individual-level factors (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). These factors lead to change process factors like managing the surrounding environment and subsequently to outcome factors, including system-level, interpersonal-level, and personal identity-change outcomes (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

Nevertheless, all of them referred to the environment/system as an isolated influential factor and were unable to embed the person-environmental interaction into the

dimension of IC. The organizational IC model constructed by Chen and Du (2014) put the person-organization interaction at a conspicuous place in IC development, but they equated individual factors with organizational factors and failed to indicate how individuals and the organization interacted with each other utilizing these factors.

The ecology of human development theory put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1979) can help to better understand the person-environmental interaction. It argues individuals' identity is developed in an interactive process between personal characteristics and the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems of societal settings where they are located (Torres et al., 2009). The microsystem is the proximal and immediate setting that contains individuals. Interrelations among microsystems create the mesosystem. The exosystem does not contain but impinges on individuals while the macrosystem exerts the most distal influence on them. These systems are interdependent and reciprocally interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Previous studies often drew links between students' multiple identities, especially the oppressed ones, and the ecological environmental systems. For instance, Renn (2003) applied the Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) model to analyze mixed-race college students' identities. However, Renn (2003) failed to indicate whether those students exerted any agency or competence during the identity-environmental interaction.

The person-environment fit theory, which connotes the degree of compatibility or alignment between individuals and their environment (Cable & Edwards, 2004), can shed light on the person-environmental interactive perspective of IC as well. Eccles et al. (1993) proposed in the stage-environment fit theory that the optimal development of students resulted from a good fit between their needs and the affordances provided by the

school environment. In addition, Cable and Edwards (2004) summarized two types of person-environment fit: supplementary fit, namely an alignment between the characteristics (e.g., culture) of individuals and the environment, and complementary fit, which occurred when the individual or environment provided what the counterpart wanted. Take some empirical studies as examples; Bui et al. (2021) found that the student-university alignment could foster international students' psychological adjustment. Deng and Yao (2020) carried out a six-month longitudinal study on 428 freshmen in a Chinese university. They revealed that the relationship building with instructors and the student-university fit mutually benefited each other and the latter contributed to students' general socialization (Deng & Yao, 2020).

Selvarajah (2000) described alignment as a means of balance sought. If there is a balance between the attributes (e.g., culture, goals, etc.) of a student and the HEI, the student is expected to have satisfaction, psychological well-being (Shafaei et al., 2018), and high grades (Rocconi et al., 2020). On the contrary, a poor fit could lead to dissatisfaction, high stress, and low performance (Kulik et al., 1987). In the face of a person-environment misfit, individuals would either act upon or adapt to the environment. IC literature usually takes on the latter view and reckons adaptation as a dynamic process resulting from constant interactions between individuals and their environment (Hamad & Lee, 2013). For instance, Nolan and Morley (2014) verified the relationship between certain person-environment fit dimensions and cross-cultural adjustment of self-initiated expatriates.

However, with the primary attention paid to the result of the person-environment fit, most previous studies fell short of an analysis of individuals' competence during the

person-environmental interaction process. An exception is Kudo et al.'s (2020) three-stage ecological and person-in-context conceptual framework. It recognized students' agency and ascribed the development of students' intercultural relationships to it as well as three kinds of environmental affordances. The situated agency of students and institutional affordances (e.g., fiscal and human resources, program and class, extra-curricular activities, etc.) led to the interactive stage of intercultural relationship development (Kudo et al., 2020). Students' cosmopolitan agency along with interpersonal affordances (e.g., trips, meetings, etc.) made intercultural relationships reciprocal while their creative agency combined with individualized affordances (e.g., family visit, accommodation renting, etc.) contributed to the intercultural relationship unity (Kudo et al., 2020).

Intercultural practices and student transition

To summarize practical applications of IC in HE, a systematic review of 126 empirical studies containing keywords of both IC and student transition is conducted. These selected journal articles were all peer-reviewed and published between 2010 and 2021. In total, five themes emerge: 1) IC and its dimensions (e.g., language ability, intercultural sensitivity, etc.) during/as transitions; 2) intercultural experiences during/as transitions, including engagement, integration, adaptation, adjustment, and acculturation; 3) intercultural relationships during/as transitions, which comprise group work, network, and partnership; 4) external influence (e.g., classroom, study abroad program, online discussion, culture, etc.) on IC during/as transitions; 5) internal influence (e.g., self-

efficacy, attitude, emotion, personality, etc.) on IC during/as transitions. This generalization helps to sort out existing intercultural practices for one thing and imply latent research gaps for another. In summary, intercultural practices are interchangeably used with transition terms and lack an in-depth exploration of the correlation between IC and students' habitus change during cultural transitions.

Under the first theme, there are numerous articles focusing on various dimensions of IC during cultural transitions, including IC components like language ability and constructs like reflexivity and sensitivity. For instance, based on interviews with 24 Chinese students in a British university, Simpson (2017) witnessed their working in a foreign language, relationships with teachers and other students, and skills developed during academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Lilley et al. (2015) tested the global mindset of university students who had mobility experience (cultural transition). In conclusion, a global mindset comprising social imaginary, reflexivity, relationality, and criticality appeared to be both facilitators and manifestations of student change (Lilley et al., 2015). It could generate global citizen learning as well.

A great number of empirical studies attached importance to the development of IC and its dimensions and hence regarded it as transition. Hou et al. (2020) explored students' transition path of cultural awareness in a transnational internship project. In the end, these students acquired professional knowledge and soft skills, such as cross-cultural awareness, interdisciplinary communication, and social networking skills (Hou et al., 2020). In Senyshyn's (2019) viewpoint, the IC development of international students played an important part in their transition to HE. Also, he identified several manifestations of IC development as transition: anticipation and desire to engage with

domestic peers, personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness (Senyshyn, 2019). With a sample of 3,070 students at German higher education institutions, Zimmermann et al. (2021) traced their development of multicultural effectiveness (i.e., multicultural self-efficacy, metacognitive intercultural competence, and intergroup anxiety) and proved the positive impact of international student mobility (ISM) selection and anticipation on it.

Empirical studies categorized to the second theme, on the one hand, involve general intercultural experiences during the transition. God and Zhang (2019) examined both Chinese and Australian students' experiences and understanding of intercultural communication at an Australian university. According to their finding, intercultural challenges in comprehension and conversation were experienced and intracultural practices were taken during ethnic and social cultural transitions (God & Zhang, 2019). In a similar way, Streitwieser and Light (2018) conducted research on international students' conceptions of intercultural experiences at an American university. In conclusion, they described four international experience conceptions of international students during the social cultural transition: observing, interacting, participating, and embracing across three features – being in the other culture (exposed to vs. immersed in), relating to the other culture (detached-conserving vs. integrated-transforming identity), and learning in the other culture (seeing vs. questioning) (Streitwieser & Light, 2018).

Some studies treated the intercultural experiences of students as transition, that is, students experiencing various academic, social, and ethnic cultural elements in a transition process. For example, Du and Jackson (2018) examined the intercultural experiences of eight mainland Chinese undergraduates who studied and relocated to

Hong Kong. They underwent intercultural experiences mainly as an academic cultural transition from EFL (English as a foreign language) to EMI (English as a medium of instruction) and their English learning motivation fluctuated but remained at a high level (Du & Jackson, 2018). With a focus on 30 medical students from different cultural backgrounds, Templeman et al. (2016) analyzed their intercultural experiences of sociocultural and academic adjustment with regard to complementary medicine (CM). The former included issues of familial use of CMs, western culture, alienation of traditional CM use, and fitting in while the latter incorporated issues concerning international differences, different practices and paradigms, epistemological frameworks, and power relations (Templeman et al., 2016).

On the other hand, a multitude of previous studies concentrated on specific intercultural experiences, such as engagement, integration, adaptation, adjustment, and acculturation, in a developmental transition process. For instance, Spencer-Oatey et al. (2017) used the survey and interview data to evaluate Chinese students' intercultural integration into the British university community, which consisted of academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Bittencourt et al. (2021) mapped 10 Brazilian students' intercultural adaptation to a public university in the US and emphasized the important role of co-national groups. Here, intercultural adaptation also manifested in academic, social, and ethnic cultural aspects. Li and Peng (2019) reckoned acculturation of international students to computer-mediated communication in the host country as social and ethnic cultural transitions through social media.

The third theme encompasses research topics of intercultural relationship, partnership, group work, and network during or as transitions. One article tracked the

evolution of the intercultural relationship between a domestic Australian student and an international student from Vietnam during their first year of university life (Bennett et al., 2013). Decker et al. (2015) examined differences in the preference for group work (PGW) among American and Chinese students during the social cultural transition. Chinese students' PGW reflected collectivism in light of consideration of what others think, extrinsic motivation, and the need for achievement (Decker et al., 2015). Moreover, Taha and Cox (2016) found four networks (i.e., friendship, work, advice, and support relationships) of international students during the transition to a British university. They further investigated co-national factors and the evolution of those networks (Taha & Cox, 2016).

The intercultural relationship can also be deemed as transition, particularly when it goes through change and development. H điot et al. (2020) explored how students develop learning relationships in intercultural and multi-disciplinary environments. They summarized three types of learners: co-national, bridge-building, and cross-national learners, whose relationship development underwent academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions in the face of academic program in-groups, cultural in-groups, as well as discrimination and bias (H điot et al., 2020). In a similar manner, Bennett et al. (2013) tracked the intercultural relationship development of students before entering the university, at the first contact, and in the first three weeks. They discovered the evolutionary relationship and emerging connectedness between students and predicted future possibilities for the relationship development (Bennett et al., 2013).

In light of the forth theme, according to the meta-analysis conducted by Zhang and Zhou (2019), existing strategies to promote learners' IC, namely external influences on

IC, comprised overseas immersion and pedagogical interventions. The latter incorporated four types: culture-based teaching materials, classroom activities, teaching strategies, and integrated intercultural programs. Walsh (2010) discovered factors including the supervisory style, social and work-related interaction norms created a "microclimate", which affected overseas research experiences (cultural transition) of students in the UK. By evaluating an extracurricular program, Daddow et al. (2020) confirmed encounters during the cross-cultural transition had positive effects on students' well-being and cross-cultural learning. Brunsting et al. (2018) detailed increases in the perceived intercultural competence, interactions with culturally different students in class, social support, and campus belonging of international undergraduate students after completing an academic and cultural transition course in the first semester of study at an American university.

Online learning yields benefits for students' IC development as well, such as collaborative online international learning for university students in border areas (King de Ramirez, 2021) and virtual intercultural learning activity applied to Australian and Hong Kong undergraduates (Hyett et al., 2019). While some researchers claimed experiences abroad were not necessarily helpful to cultivating deeper levels of IC (Root & Ngampornchai, 2013), others maintained the duration and depth of programs mattered. DeLoach et al. (2021) verified the positive correlation between program duration and undergraduates' global awareness. The program depth, namely the degree of interaction with the host culture, positively influenced global awareness only when the destination country was a non-English speaking one. Student participants in the study carried out by Liang and Schartner (2022) regarded culturally mixed group work as both challenging

and rewarding. It was beneficial for students' IC development but could impact their open-mindedness negatively if without staff guidance (Liang & Schartner, 2022).

Last but not the least, a handful of empirical studies draw connections between students' IC or cultural transitions and certain internal psychological factors like self-efficacy, emotion, and personality. For example, Yusoff (2012) demonstrated self-efficacy, together with the perceived social support from friends and significant others, predicted the psychological adjustment of international students. According to Brisset et al. (2010), attachment intimacy and trait anxiety of both Vietnamese international students in France and local French students were moderated by psychological distress and related to their adaptation process.

To summarize, the majority of empirical studies on IC focus on what external factors influence it while neglecting what IC can have an impact on. Previous systematic reviews also analyzed external influences, such as texts and activities in intercultural learning (Heggernes, 2021), cross-cultural training (Sit et al., 2017), intercultural learning supported by technology (Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020), positive learning experience (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014) on students' IC. More importantly, it entails an investigation into the relationship between students' IC and habitus change.

Research questions

Based on the research background and literature review, this study probes into three main research questions together with two sub-questions:

1. What are components and processes of students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions at SFCU?
2. How do students' habitus hysteresis and change manifest their transitions as becoming?
3. What IC dimensions do students agenticly mobilize during their transitions?
   3.1. How do students' IC dimensions develop during transitions?
   3.2. How does students' IC relate to their habitus hysteresis and change?

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research method that helps explore a social phenomenon and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to it in depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the complex social phenomenon is undergraduate students' transitions at SFCU. Students make meaning of transitions through their habitus change, which may be enabled by their IC development. It is conducted under the social constructivism paradigm that seeks understanding and develops subjective meanings of objective facts by soliciting and querying multiple varied views and experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007). These understandings and meanings are not imprinted on individuals simply but negotiated through historical, social and cultural norms as well as interactions with others complicatedly (Creswell, 2007). Social constructivists develop or generate theories or patterns of meaning rather than beginning with existing theories.

Since no existent theories can answer the research questions of this study as elaborated in the Literature Review part, the qualitative method used in this study is mainly the grounded theory approach. It guides the collection and analysis of the major data source – interviews. Starting with inductive data, grounded theory is dedicated to constructing theories through "iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). It has four foundational pillars: all is data; emergence of categories, relationships, theory, and research design; constant comparative analysis; theoretical sampling (Johnson & Walsh, 2019). Theoretical sampling means the researcher chooses which to sample next based on the emerging categories and his or her incremental understanding of the developing theory (Morse, 2010). The grounded theory

method also involves abduction, which is an inferential reasoning for finding the most plausible theoretical explanation for the observed data (Charmaz, 2014). It is "a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers invoke when they account for a surprising or puzzling finding" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200).

Research setting

I selected X University as the research setting because of two reasons. For one thing, X University is the largest SFCU in China. It represents a typical case of HE with a high degree of internationalization in terms of the number of international students and staff; international activities like exchange and articulation programs; international partnerships and projects (Knight, 2004), to name but a few. It creates a complex and multicultural context where students are likely to undergo academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions simultaneously. Moreover, since X University upholds student-centered education, students are meant to develop IC and change habitus by themselves. In a nutshell, I am able to find answers to research questions in this specific context. For another, I have worked and studied at X University for five years. My experiences and interpersonal relationship in this setting can assist me with conducting the research. It is easy for me to recruit participants and access documentation.

X University offers 45 undergraduate programs, 39 master's programs, and 16 doctoral programs in four Academies: Academy of Film and Creative Technology (AoFCT), Academy of Pharmacy (AoP), Academy of Industrial Technology (AoIT), and Academy of Future Education (AoFE); five Schools: School of Advanced Technology

(SAT), Design School (DS), School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), International Business School Suzhou (IBSS), and School of Science (SS); and one College: Entrepreneur College (Taicang). Except for AoIT and AoFE, they all enroll undergraduate students, the majority of whom are Chinese.

In a similar manner to other public universities in China, X University enrolls Chinese undergraduate students from Mainland China mainly through *gao kao*, the university entrance examination in China. Nevertheless, starting from 2018, X University implements the comprehensive evaluation admission system and takes into account students' performance in high school in addition to their test scores in *gao kao* in Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces. In the academic year (AY) 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, X University also recruited approximately 500 to 600 Chinese undergraduates who received offers from overseas universities but were unable or unwilling to study abroad because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These overseas universities must rank in the top 150 or the program must rank in the top 50 in recent two years in QS/THE/US NEWS World University Rankings (X University, 2021b).

Apart from that, it has other features resembling some English-speaking overseas universities like the fenceless campus and English-medium instruction (EMI) in teaching and learning. It also adopts the quality assurance system of British universities and offers the "2+2" articulation program for Chinese undergraduate students to study at its British partner university in their last two years. In AY2021-22, 1,002 students joined the "2+2" articulation program, accounting for 23.53% of the total number of registered second-year students at X University (X University, 2021a). Approximately 70% of its academic

staff are from 50 countries other than China all over the world. In a word, students will encounter new academic and ethnic cultures in this international learning environment.

X University also offers a supporting system composed of academic advisor, development advisor, external mentor, and buddy programs to students (X University, 2019). This system can guide students' study and personal growth. Other student supporting offices include the mental health and development center, career center, one-stop student service center, and student organization support office. They welcome students who seek help voluntarily. Students can join in a variety of student clubs (organizations) on campus. In AY2020-2021, there were 161 student clubs in total at X University. They provide important platforms for students to socialize and develop social skills. Students will undergo social cultural transition at X University.

Research method

Data collection

I collected the qualitative data from three sources: interview, observation, and documentation. The interview data from Chinese and international undergraduate students were used to answer research questions. The interview data from academic and administrative staff, observation data, and a portion of documentation (posts of events and news on X University's website and WeChat official account) were used for the data source triangulation. Other documentation, including UNESCO statistics, Chinese government policy, university policy and student statistics were used to introduce the research background and setting. Table 1 shows all collected qualitative data.

Table 1 qualitative data collection

Data collection	**Sample**	**Detail/Date**	**Number of document/observation/interview**
Documentation	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics	inbound (2019), outbound (2019), international student mobility (2015-19)	3
	Chinese government policy	Ministry of Education, The State Council Information Office	11
	University policy (AY2020-21)	1. Student Administration	7
		2. Program and Degree	6
		4. Support and Resources	7
	Student statistics (AY2019-20; 2020-21; 2021-2022)	1. X University Student Recruitment Data	3
		2. 2+2 Articulation Statistics	3
		3.1 Semester1 Undergraduate Enrollment Statistics before Year1 Program Choice	3

		3.2 Semester2 Undergraduate Enrollment Statistics (AY2019-20, 2020-21)	2
		4. International Student Statistics by Nationality	3
		5. Gender Statistics	3
		6. 2+2 Application Statistics (2020, 2021 Entry)	2
		7. Student Club List (AY2020-21)	1
	Posts of events and news on X University's website and WeChat official account (AY2019-21)	media reports, posts of interviews with students, alumni, and teachers	20
	LAN010 course (AY2020-21)	module handbook	1
Observation	LAN010 course online (AY2020-21)	2021/3/30, 2021/4/2, 2021/4/9, 2021/4/30	4
	Student club activity	2021/11/10	1
Interview	Chinese and international undergraduates	1st round-2020/9-12	34

	Chinese undergraduates	2nd round-2021/5-11	34
	Academic and administrative staff	3rd round-2021/6-9	12

Interview

I used both purposeful and snowball samplings to recruit student participants for the semi-structured interviews. I conformed to two general criteria for sampling: the criteria of similarity (i.e., undergraduate students who enroll in X University and are at least 18 years old) and the criteria of variation (i.e., diversity based on gender, year of study, and School/Academy/College of X University). In addition, the snowball sampling helped me to identify more candidates of interest from participants who have been interviewed already (Creswell, 2007). Before the sampling and data collection started, I got ethical approval from the university's Research Ethics Committee. Each interview participant received the Participant Information Sheet and signed the Consent Form at the beginning of each interview.

Theoretical sampling plays a crucial role in the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014). I initially sampled 26 Chinese undergraduate students in the first semester of AY 2020-21 (September to December 2020) and theoretically sampled another 34 Chinese undergraduate students in the second semester of AY 2020-21 and the first semester of AY2021-22 (May to November 2021). The emerging but incomplete categories or ideas in the initial sampling guided the further data collection in the theoretical sampling. The

latter functioned to elaborate and refine theoretical categories identified in the former. This process came to an end when the theoretical saturation was achieved (Charmaz, 2014), that is, no new categories or properties emerged from interviews with students.

In total, 60 Chinese undergraduate students from different Schools, College, and years of study participated in interviews. There were 16 from SAT, seven from DS, 12 from SHSS, 13 from IBSS, 11 from SS, and one from Entrepreneur College (Taicang). Thirty-one, 15, seven, and five student participants were in their first, second, third, and forth year of study, respectively. The remaining two just graduated from X University. Among them, 39 were female students and 21 were male students. They came from different provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions of China, including Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Anhui, Fujian, Guangdong, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Henan, Hebei, Shandong, Hubei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Chongqing, Shanghai, Beijing, and Xinjiang. The variety of student participants' backgrounds can render the exploration of their cultural perspectives and experiences more exhaustive.

There were 53 one-on-one interviews and two focus group interviews with five and two participants in each. Fifty-five interviews were conducted face to face while the other five were completed through WeChat voice calls with a duration of 30-120 minutes. Detailed demographic and interview information is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 Information of Chinese undergraduate student participants

Participant No.	Gender	School/College	Year of Study	Interview Approach	Time and Date for Interview	Hometown (province, city)
BP1	F	IBSS	graduate	WeChat voice call	3pm-5pm on 20/9/2	Jiangsu, Zhenjiang
DP2	F	DS	Y4	Face-to-Face	10am-11:26am on 20/9/3	Zhejiang, Zhoushan
BP3	F	IBSS	Y3	Face-to-Face	5:20pm-6:33pm on 20/9/14	Liaoning
AT4	M	SAT	Y4	Face-to-Face	2:00pm-3:13pm on 20/9/16	Jiangsu, Nanjing
AT5	M	SAT	Y3	Face-to-Face	1:20pm-2:16pm on 20/9/17	Jiangsu, Suzhou
DP6	F	DS	Y4	Face-to-Face	1:20pm-2:33pm	Sichuan, Chengdu

					on 20/9/18	
AT7	M	SAT	Y2	Face-to-Face	2:10pm-3:11pm on 20/9/18	Guizhou, Anshun
BP8	F	IBSS	Y3	Face-to-Face	10:24am-12:07pm on 20/10/14	Fujian, Fuzhou
SP9	M	SS	Y2	Face-to-Face	1:04pm-2:00pm on 20/10/14	Anhui, Hefei
BP10	F	IBSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	1:38pm-2:50pm on 20/10/16	Hubei, Jingmen
AT11	F	SAT	Y2	Face-to-Face	9:55am-10:40am on 20/10/19	Jiangsu, Taizhou

DP12	F	DS	Y4	Face-to-Face	1:20pm-3:30pm on 20/10/19	Xinjiang
HSS13	F	HSS	Y3	Face-to-Face	1:00pm-2:43pm on 20/10/20	Heilongjiang, Harbin
BP14	M	IBSS	Y2	WeChat voice call	1:38pm-2:56pm on 20/10/26	Chongqing/Yunnan, Kunming
BP15	F	IBSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:03am on 20/10/27	Shanxi, Taiyuan/Tianjin
AT16	M	SAT	Y3	Face-to-Face	3:00pm-3:58pm on 20/10/28	Guangdong, Guangzhou
SP17	F	SS	Y2	Face-to-Face	1:30pm-2:34pm	Sichuan, Neijiang

					on 20/11/3	
AT18	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	3:00pm-3:45pm on 20/11/4	Jiangsu, Nantong
SP19	F	SS	Y3	WeChat voice call	3:30pm-5:20pm on 20/11/7	Jiangsu, Wuxi
DP20	M	DS	graduate	WeChat voice call	6:06pm-7:06pm on 20/11/8	Shaanxi, Yulin
HSS21	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:19am-11:09am on 20/11/11	Jiangsu, Nanjing
HSS22	F	HSS	Y4	Face-to-Face	5:06pm-5:56pm on 20/11/17	Hubei, Xianning

BP23	F	IBSS	Y3	Face-to-Face	2:00pm-3:10pm on 20/12/14	Tianjin
AT24	M	SAT	Y2	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:09am on 20/12/16	Jiangsu, Nantong
BP25	F	IBSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:09am on 20/12/23	Shenzhen
HSS26	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:00am on 21/4/1	Jiangxi, Shangrao
SP27	F	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:00am on 21/4/1	Jiangsu, Wuxi
EC28	F	EC (Taicang)	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:00am on 21/4/1	Zhejiang, Taizhou

HSS29	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:00am on 21/4/1	Zhejiang, Taizhou
BP30	F	IBSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	10:00am-11:00am on 21/4/1	Tianjin
SP31	F	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:00-2:15pm on 21/4/20	Sichuan, Chengdu
DP32	F	DS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:00-2:15pm on 21/4/20	Guangdong, Guangzhou
HSS33	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:55-3:00pm on 21/4/21	Shaanxi, Xi'an
DP34	F	DS	Y1	WeChat voice call	8:00-8:40pm on 21/5/10	Liaoning, Fushun

HSS35	M	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	4:10-5:15pm on 21/5/11	Beijing
HSS36	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:35pm on 21/5/12	Xinjiang
AT37	M	SAT	Y2	Face-to-Face	9:23am-10:17am on 21/5/14	Henan, Puyang
AT38	F	SAT	Y2	Face-to-Face	10:17am-10:46am 21/5/14	Zhejiang, Wenzhou
SP39	F	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:50-2:40pm on 21/5/17	Jiangsu, Suzhou (Changshu)
AT40	F	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	9:56-10:30am on 21/5/18	Zhejiang, Shaoxing

AT41	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	11:09am-12:01pm on 21/5/18	Shandong, Weihai
BP42	M	IBSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:55-2:48pm on 21/5/18	Henan, Zhengzhou
DP43	F	DS	Y1	Face-to-Face	3:00-3:49pm on 21/5/18	Shaanxi, Xi'an
BP44	M	IBSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	11:04-11:58am on 21/5/19	Shandong, Jinan
SP45	M	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	11:04-11:58am on 21/5/19	Jiangsu, Suzhou
AT46	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:29pm	Shandong, Taian

					on 21/5/19	
SP47	F	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:45-3:12pm on 21/5/19	Anhui, Huangshan
AT48	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	3:13-3:42pm on 21/5/20	Jiangsu, Suzhou
HSS49	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	4:21-4:50pm on 21/5/20	Liaoning, Shenyang/Tianjin
SP50	F	SS	Y2	Face-to-Face	6:39-7:56pm on 20/12/17	Shanghai
HSS51	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	10:00-10:36am on 21/5/25	Jiangsu, Nanjing

SP52	F	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	1:34-2:08pm on 21/5/25	Jiangsu, Suzhou
SP53	M	SS	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:16-2:52pm on 21/5/25	Jiangsu, Suzhou
BP54	F	IBSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:51pm on 21/5/26	Jiangxi, Xinyu
AT55	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:36pm on 21/5/28	Henan, Luoyang
AT56	F	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-3:26pm on 21/5/31	Beijing
AT57	M	SAT	Y1	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:36pm on 21/6/2	Liaoning, Panjin

HSS58	F	HSS	Y1	Face-to-Face	3:00-4:39pm on 21/6/11	Jiangsu, Suzhou (Taicang)
HSS59	F	HSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	2:00-2:38pm on 21/10/26	Jiangsu, Suzhou
BP60	M	IBSS	Y2	Face-to-Face	5:00-5:3pm on 21/11/2	Hebei, Handan

Note: School of Advanced Technology (SAT), Design School (DS), School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), International Business School Suzhou (IBSS), School of Science (SS), Entrepreneur College (EC) (Taicang); Participant (P); Year (Y); Male (M); Female (F).

Apart from that, I got eight international undergraduate students involved in the first round of interviews in the first semester of AY2020-21 (September to December 2020). They were from different years of study, Schools, and Academy at X University. The majority of them came from Asian countries, which represented the overall population of international undergraduates on campus. Six of them had interviews via WeChat voice calls while another two had face-to-face interviews. The interview duration ranged from 45 to 87 minutes. Their information is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Information of international undergraduate student participants

Participant No.	**Gender**	**School**	**Year of Study**	**Interview Approach**	**Time and Date for Interview**	**Nation**
IHSS1	F	HSS	Y2	WeChat voice call	10:30am-11:56am on 20/11/6	Thailand
ISOFTA2	F	AoFCT	Y3	WeChat voice call	3:30pm-4:28pm on 20/11/6	Philippines
IAT3	M	SAT	Y2	WeChat voice call	2:00pm-2:59pm on 20/11/8	Indonesia
ISP4	F	SS	Y2	WeChat voice call	10:10am-10:55am on 20/11/10	Philippines
IAT5	M	SAT	Y3	Face-to-Face	2:00pm-3:27pm on 20/11/14	Tajikistan

IBP6	F	IBSS	Y2	WeChat voice call	1:00pm-1:54pm on 20/11/16	Thailand
IAT7	M	SAT	Y3	Face-to-Face	2:00pm-3:21pm on 20/11/17	Venezuela
IDP8	M	DS	Y3	WeChat voice call	5:50pm-7:00pm on 20/12/10	Pakistan

Note: Academy of Film and Creative Technology (AoFCT), School of Advanced Technology (SAT), Design School (DS), School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), International Business School Suzhou (IBSS), and School of Science (SS); Year (Y); Male (M); Female (F).

Moreover, 11 academic and administrative staff holding different positions at X University engaged in the third round of interviews from June to September 2021. Interviews with staff at X University were meant for the data triangulation of student interviews from the important others' perspectives. These staff participants were academic staff from the Language Center and administrative staff (i.e., development advisor, student club staff, student center service staff, and psychological counselor) from the Student Affairs Office. They all took part in the face-to-face interviews with a

duration of 35-66 minutes. Two of them were international staff while others were Chinese staff. They had worked at X University for one to 11 years.

Table 4 Information of staff participants

Participant No.	**Gender**	**Position**	**Interview Approach**	**Interview Duration**	**Nation**
LAN1	M	Language Center teacher	Face-to-Face	58min	The UK
LAN2	M	Language Center teacher	Face-to-Face	35min	The UK
LAN3	F	Language Center teacher	Face-to-Face	45min	China
LAN4	F	Language Center teacher	Face-to-Face	40min	China
DA1	F	Development Advisor	Face-to-Face	1hour	China
DA2	F	Development Advisor	Face-to-Face	40min	China
DA3	F	Development Advisor	Face-to-Face	1hour6min	China
DA4	M	Development Advisor	Face-to-Face	43min	China

SC1	F	Student Club staff	Face-to-Face	50min	China
SS1	F	Student Service Center staff	Face-to-Face	45min	China
PC1	F	Psychological Counsellor	Face-to-Face	51min	China

Note: Male (M); Female (F).

During interviews, I asked not only prepared questions based on predetermined research questions but also open questions that emerged in concomitant with the responses of interviewees (Bryman, 2016). Examples of some prepared questions with undergraduate students are: What academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions have you undergone since the start of the university until now? Have there been any profound or lasting changes in your dispositions, habits, traits, or mindset during these transitions? If yes, what are they, and how have they been changed? What intercultural competence do you develop during those transitions? Does your intercultural competence influence changes in your dispositions, habits, traits, or mindset? If yes, how? Some examples of interview questions with staff are: What is your impression of undergraduate students at X University? How is their engagement in classes or activities you see or hear of? What intercultural competence do you think they do/should have? What did/will you do to facilitate their transition and intercultural competence development? The complete list of interview questions is attached in the Appendix.

What is more, interviews were conducted in a conversational manner. This helped alleviate interviewees' tension and made them more comfortable and willing to talk. In

order to reduce language barriers as well as enhance the accuracy of the communication, the language used when interviewing Chinese undergraduate students and staff was Chinese (Mandarin) while English with international undergraduate students and staff. The interview transcripts were transcribed by the software iFlytek translator and then proofread by myself.

Observation

Direct non-participant observations were carried out in four online courses of LAN010 Introduction to Intercultural Communication. The permission was gotten from the module leader prior to the observations. Also, the module leader introduced me as the researcher and my research project to all the registered students in the first class and got their consent. These four courses took place on March 30th, April 2nd, 9th, and 30th in 2021. They focused on topics of 1) working with international students; 2) essay planning workshop; 3) culture shock; 4) Hofstede. The first and forth classes started at 11 am, and the second and third classes started at 1 pm. They all lasted for almost two hours. Around 20 undergraduate students, including two international undergraduates, attended each class. The teaching format was composed of lectures, group discussions in the break-out room and chat box, video watching, and so on.

Apart from that, I conducted a direct non-participant observation on one student club culture festival on Nov 10th, 2021. It started from 2 pm and ended at 6 pm. During the festival, more than 120 student clubs, including functional organizations, community service council, recreational council, academic council, sports clubs, and art

organizations, set booths on campus to introduce their clubs and played games with students passing by. There were also flash shows of singing, dancing, instrument performance, and opera shows all given by students at the festival. Through this observation, I intended to collect data from the student sample and deepen my understanding of the student culture created by themselves in order to answer the research questions.

Documentation

First of all, three documents of UNESCO displayed the statistics of inbound internationally mobile tertiary students by continent of origin in 2019, outbound internationally mobile tertiary students by host region in 2019, and internationally tertiary student mobility worldwide from 2015 to 2019. These documents helped to showcase the research background at the international level.

Second, there were 11 documents of the Chinese government, including the Ministry of Education (MOE) of China (Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools) and the State Council Information Office (SCIO). Documents collected from the MOE of China comprised *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China (1995), Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (2003), Implementation Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (2004),* and so forth. One document – *China's International*

Development Cooperation in the New Era (2021) was collected from SCIO. These documents provided national-level information for the research background and setting.

Third, at the institutional level, I selected 20 student academic policies of X University in AY2020-21 to get a fundamental understanding of X University as the research setting for this study and its regulations on student management. There were seven student administration documents, six program and degree documents, and seven support and resources documents. They covered Policy on Student Conduct and Discipline, Code of Conduct for Online Education, Policy on Student Attendance and Engagement, Program Choice and Transfer Policy, Final Year Project Regulations, Policy on Undergraduate Student Work Placement, Students Complaints Procedure, Guidelines on Student Representation on University Committees, Policy on Awarding of Academic Scholarships, Progress of Students, and so on.

Besides that, 20 documents of student statistics in AY2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-2022 from X University and 20 documents of news and events posted on its official website and WeChat account from 2019 to 2021 were collected. The student statistics included undergraduate recruitment data, "2+2" articulation statistics, semester one undergraduate enrollment statistics before year one program choice, and international student statistics by nationality in AY2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-2022, semester two undergraduate enrollment statistics in AY2019-20 and 2020-21, and "2+2" application statistics in 2020 and 2021 entry, student club list in AY2020-21. In addition, I sorted out the overview and media reports of X University, news about student activities (e.g., student club culture festival) and contests, and posts of interviews from students and teachers concerning online learning and teaching, and outstanding students and alumni

from the university's official website and WeChat account. These documents also enabled the accumulation of detailed information about the research setting and the sample - undergraduate students in it.

Last but not the least, I got the module handbook of LAN010 Introduction to Intercultural Communication from the module leader. This course was taught in the second semester of AY2020-21. The module handbook introduced the basic information of LAN010, such as the credit value, programs on which the module was shared, delivery schedule, module leader and contact information, along with educational aims, learning outcomes, assessment details, syllabus and teaching plan, and some further information. It helped to represent an example of the language curriculum at X University, which aimed to enhance the intercultural communication awareness and ability of Chinese undergraduate students in the second semester of their first year of study. It was particularly relevant to the research sample and could contribute to answering the research questions.

Data analysis

In order to analyze the interview data, I adopted the three-step coding processes (i.e., initial-focused-theoretical coding) of the ground theory method (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser et al., 1968). It emphasizes the role of researchers in constructing codes, defining what they see as important and what they think is happening, and interpreting tacit meanings in a more emergent way (Charmaz, 2014). It follows the methodological approaches of the classic objectivist grounded theory of Glaser et al. (1968). The word-by-word, line-by-

line, and incident-by-incident initial coding is succeeded by a higher level of synthesis and abstraction in the focused coding. Moreover, it takes on the relativist epistemology without "a variable analysis that produces abstract generalizations separate from the specific conditions" (Charmaz et al., 2017, p. 417). The researcher's position, standpoint, voice, and analysis are put at priority. The resulting theory comes from the researcher's subjective interpretation of the existing structural conditions and interactions with participants.

First, I availed of the initial coding to analyze each data source word by word and line by line and came out with initial codes. Subsequently, during the focused coding process, the most significant or frequently emerged codes were sifted from substantive initial codes to form focused codes. Finally, theoretical codes were generated based on focused codes. In the meantime, the documentation of events and news on the university's official website and WeChat account, observations, and interviews with staff were used to triangulate the interview data collected from students. Throughout the whole process, I adhered to the comparative analytical method (Krueger, 2014), that is, constantly comparing data, codes, categories, and themes. Figure 1 shows the data analysis process.

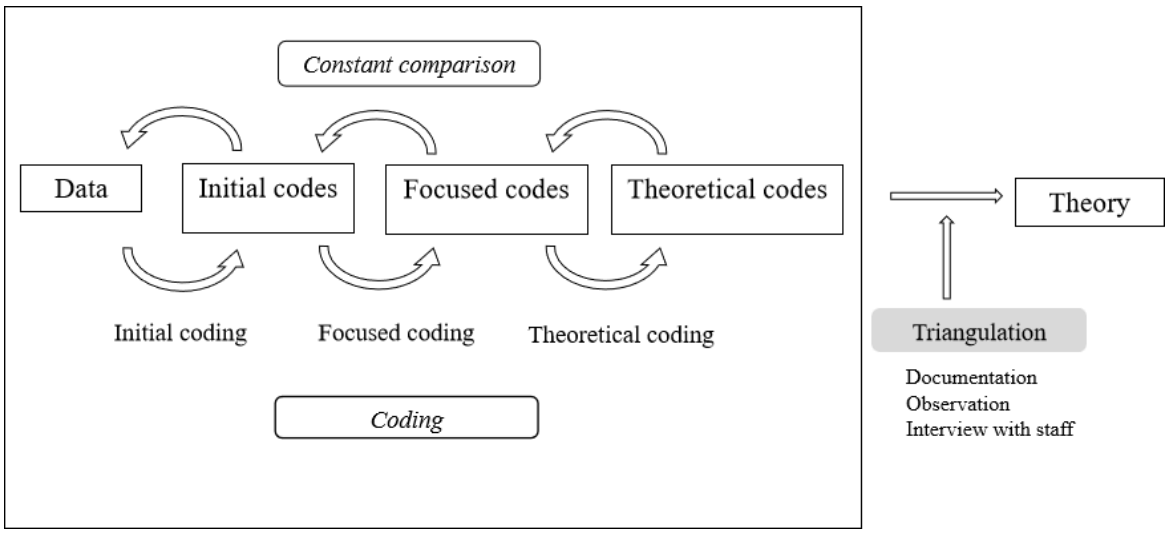


Figure 1 The data analysis process

With regard to the second research question about students' habitus hysteresis and change, there were 60 initial codes (e.g., translate English learning materials to Chinese and study in a way like before, etc.), 14 focused codes (e.g., habitus infusing, habitus aligning, assemblage between habitus and social transition components, dis-assemblage between old and new habitus and transition components, time and space catalyze habitus evolvement, capital interacts with habitus evolvement, etc.), and three theoretical codes (i.e., habitus infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing: transition as being-becoming; intertwined and detached academic, social, and cultural transition components and habitus: transition as assemblage and dis-assemblage; habitus evolvement in the HE field catalyzed by time and space: transition as rhizomatic).

For the first sub-question about students' IC dimensions under the third research question, I generated 45 initial codes (e.g., be conscious of one's cultural identity and sexual orientation, adhere to one's regular daily routine without being affected by delinquent others, think of commonalities in different cultures, etc.), 16 focused codes

(e.g., have consciousness of personal traits, cultural transitions, and identity, determine goals and choices by oneself, adjust oneself through various strategies, reflect on personal opinions, cultural transitions, and competence dialectically, stay objective and neutral toward cultural differences, etc.), and five theoretical codes (i.e., multiplistic sensitivity, intrinsic proactivity, strategic flexibility, relativistic inclusivity, and dialectic reflexivity).

For the second sub-question under the third research question, which focuses on the relationship between students' IC and their habitus hysteresis and change, I generated 51 initial codes (e.g., poor IP leads to academic habitus hysteresis, etc.), nine focused codes (e.g., ITC and academic habitus hysteresis, etc.), and four theoretical codes (i.e., lack of or poor ITC and habitus hysteresis, weak ITC and habitus infusing, Enhanced ITC and habitus aligning and transcending, lopsided ITC and habitus retrogressing). The full coding schemes are attached in the Appendix. Furthermore, results drawn from the interview data were reviewed by several reviewers from the Independent Progress Assessment Panel (IPAP) and academic journals. These peer reviews aided in probing into the data analysis and enhancing its credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition, I adopted content analysis to answer the first research question, which pertained to students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. I figured out 11 transition components (e.g., EMI teaching approach, collective dormitory life, multicultural atmosphere, etc.) in total. I also employed content analysis to deal with the documentation of UNESCO statistics, Chinese government policy, X University policy and student statistics. Content analysis is of particular value for reviewing and sorting official documents (Silverman, 2011). I used it to identify the presence of statistics and the frequency of words and phrases (Krippendorff, 2004) in each document and draw

inferences from them. The analysis results served as international-, national-, and institutional-level information for the research background and setting.

Credibility and trustworthiness

The researcher will confront the fundamental issue of credibility and trustworthiness in doing the qualitative research, that is, whether its findings reflect the reality and can be trusted by the readers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Following the strategies recommended by Creswell and Poth (2006), I made efforts to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Firstly, I corroborated evidence through triangulation. Different and multiple data sources (i.e., documentation, observation, and interview) were taken into consideration in tandem when designing this study. During the data collection, I sought evidence of corroboration and triangulation to shed light on a perspective or theme.

The second strategy is that the researcher shall clarify his or her biases, perspectives, experiences, and orientations that he or she brings to the study, which might shape the interpretation of the data and approach to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2006). In this study, I wanted to disclose my understanding of that based on my sexual orientation, gender, educational and cultural background, previous employment relationship with and current enrollment status as a student at X University.

As a heterosexual, I could not fully understand and experience the difficulties and harsh situations faced by non-heterosexual students. Moreover, as a Chinese female, I was prone to treat some traditional values and beliefs of Chinese culture as normal since I was brought up and lived in Chinese society for over three decades. I was also used to the

learning and teaching style typical of Chinese education and Chinese students. Thus, I might take it for granted that all Chinese students were homogeneous in terms of their learning habits, mindset, behaviors as well as strenuous transitions. Based on my employment relationship with X University prior to my enrollment as a student in it, I was likely to assume that students at X University must recognize the importance of intercultural competence and actively develop it because of the multicultural environment.

Furthermore, I kept reminding myself to stay unbiased and open-minded toward the research participants and data during the collection and analysis processes. In addition, I critically reflected on my own working and learning experiences in the multicultural environment of X University, and previous undergraduate and postgraduate education received in Chinese, British, and American contexts in order to better understand the research participants and interpret the data in a comprehensive and unbiased way.

Thirdly, it is suggested that the researcher shall solicit "participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell & Poth, 2006, p. 261). This member checking approach aims to seek feedback from the research participants by displaying and explicating to them the collection and analysis of the data as well as the interpretations and results generated by the researcher. In this study, I shared with several research participants the final codes and themes instead of the raw data and transcripts. Those research participants gave comments and feedback on them and my interpretations. Also, they offered some suggestions on what might be missing or misinterpreted.

Fourthly, I followed the recommendation of keeping "a prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field" (Creswell & Poth, 2006, p. 262). During the four-year

study on campus, I utilized the opportunity to take part in various student activities and get access to multiple classes so as to observe students' behaviors on campus. At the same time, I observed their states via WeChat Circle of Friends and posts.

According to Glesne (2016), it is inevitable that the researchers, regardless of their roles, will develop relationships with the participants. As a Ph.D. candidate and former employee at X University, I had no direct impact on undergraduate students. Since the Academy where I studied has not recruited any undergraduate students yet and the position that I occupied previously was irrelevant to student affairs, including recruitment, academic performance, extracurricular activity, psychological well-being, and so forth, I was neither involved in the assessment of students nor associated with student affairs directly.

Besides that, I had the data and research process peer debriefed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by colleagues and other Ph.D. candidates in the same Academy, who were familiar with but not directly involved in this study. Moreover, I presented the research design and process, including data collection and analysis, to the audience in the university's research symposium and to reviewers in the annual progress review and IPAP. These peers, audience, and reviewers asked questions regarding research methods and results while I gave explanations and kept written accounts of these peer debriefing sessions.

Last, it is vital to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study by generating a rich and thick description (Geertz, 1973). I tried to provide descriptions as interconnected, detailed, and abundant as possible. As soon as the data was collected, I started the analysis process by taking into account the transcripts and written memos at the same time. The memos contained plentiful descriptions, such as of the conversational

manner, body language and silence, atmosphere and environment, my feelings and reflections, to name but a few. They contributed to the richness and thickness of the data description.

Ethics

This study got the ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of X University – University Ethics Committee (UEC). The following paragraphs highlight several important ethical considerations in this study, which are recommended by Miles et al. (2013).

Prior to interviews, I shared the Participant Information Sheet with each participant and reached an agreement on some expectations, including the study topic, the purpose of the interview, approximate interview duration, voluntary participation of the participant, confidentiality of the material from the participant, anonymity of the participant, benefits accrued to the participant, possible disadvantages and risks, and so forth (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

At the beginning of interviews, I reiterated the study purpose and information. A consent form was provided to each participant to sign. It informed participants that they were voluntary and free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason or getting their rights affected during the interview. Moreover, participants could ask for access to the information they provided and request the destruction of it at any time. I then got oral permission from participants to start and record the interview. During the interview, I made efforts to avoid harming the interests of participants and keep the latent risk to a

minimum level (Miles et al., 2013). Also, I strove to manage interviews and relationships with participants based on honesty and mutual trust (Miles et al., 2013).

In the end, I stressed again the confidentiality of material and the anonymity of participants. Their rights would be assured throughout the study. Apart from that, a 30-yuan gift was offered to each interview participant upon completion of the interviews as compensation for their time and efforts. Other benefits that participants could receive from interviews included gaining insight or learning from the conversation, getting their voice heard, improving personal practices, enhancing the policy or program that they were involved with, taking action effectively toward recurring problems, and so on (Miles et al., 2013).

As the researcher, I would gain from the interviews as well. I could learn from the interview and gain more insights into the study. Besides that, I was able to reap research rewards, such as dissertations, journal articles, or books, that benefit the research field as well as myself in terms of reputation, funding, and career path (Miles et al., 2013). In a word, the reciprocity, namely "the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 50) between participants and researchers, is fundamental in interviews.

Finding

In this Finding part, I will first analyze various aspects and divergent processes of students' complex academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Second, I will examine habitus hysteresis and change of students, which manifest these transitions as becoming. Third, I will conceptualize ITC as students' ability to transition to new academic, social, and ethnic cultural contexts. It has five dimensions and develops in a dynamic manner. I will measure ITC and transition of different student groups and the relationship between ITC and transition. Moreover, I will investigate how ITC relates to students' habitus hysteresis and change.

The complex academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions of students

Not only various aspects but also dynamic processes render academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions of students as navigation through complexities.

Various components of different transitions

Based on interviews with students, I identified several components of their academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions, respectively (shown in Table 15).

Table 15 components of academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions

Cultural transition	Components
Academic	EMI teaching approach (only for Chinese undergraduate students)
	student-led learning style
	research engagement
	diversified assessment methods
Social	collective dormitory life
	extra-curricular activity
	social skill
	social connection and belonging
	social identity
Ethnic	multicultural atmosphere
	intercultural contact and communication

Academic cultural transition

First of all, students' academic cultural environment changes in an enormous way from Chinese to English-medium instructed (EMI) teaching approach (only for Chinese undergraduate students), from teacher-led to student-led learning style, from mainly exam-based to diversified assessment methods, and involves more research activities. The majority of first-year students referred to the challenge brought by the EMI teaching approach. The language for teaching and learning and daily communication that they

used to have in high school and prior was Chinese. When switching to EMI teaching and learning, they found it "challenging" (AT41), "difficult" (AT57), and "taking some time to get accustomed to" (AT37). A few students would like to "take shortcuts", such as using translators to understand the teaching content in class and complete assignments after class, buying and reading Chinese version textbooks instead of the English ones distributed by the university, joining in group discussions or group work with other Chinese students and communicating in Chinese. That seemed to some students the assistance in easing their academic transition while to other students and most academic staff inappropriate behaviors and bad habits. It also distanced Chinese students from international students to some extent because of their language use in class.

Almost all students mentioned the student-led learning style in the university, which was distinct from the teacher-led one that they used to conform to in previous educational stages. The student-led learning style attaches great importance to the leading role of students rather than teachers in class. Also, it stresses the autonomy of each student and the collaboration among them during the active and deep learning process. In contrast, the teacher-led teaching and learning style puts teachers at the center and students at the peripheral. Traditional pedagogical methods are often used by teachers to instruct students in a unidirectional indoctrinated way. Student AT7 described the student-led learning style as "a mode to let students develop freely. It pays no attention to the dogmatic and formalistic way of learning. Students develop in aspects that they think are suitable and interesting." Student DP12 also found her relationship with teachers and attitude toward academic study totally changed in the student-led learning style:

> Previously, the only thing I should do was study hard in the traditional Chinese educational phase, which was examination-oriented. But at university, things and people I face turn out to be more complex and I need to negotiate with them. When discussing with teachers, the hierarchy in status is not as obvious as before. Students can have equal statuses as teachers. Although teachers take certain positions and have rich experience, students can query teachers when having some ideas. In a word, it should be an equal negotiation process rather than a dominating judging process (DP12).

Several of them referred to the diversified assessment methods, including assignments, course work, academic and non-academic competitions and contests in addition to exams, that manifested the long-term orientation and holistic education embedded in the university's academic culture. In high school, student SP53 longed for the diversified evaluation system in the university. After entering X University, he found that even students with unsatisfactory grades would be outstanding if they organized student club activities well. Another student illustrated:

> That is the reason why I love academic study at university. It does not determine students' academic achievement merely based on a few exams. During the learning process, there will be different assignments. I think the weekly assignment provides me with a good way to review and summarize what I have learned systematically. Questions and tasks in it are the essences of the whole week's learning materials (AT7).

Nevertheless, a couple of students complained that coursework and assignments were "too much" (time-consuming) or "without clear guidelines or assessment criteria" (confusing). They also set deadlines in the midterm or reading week before examinations, which, according to students AT5, SP17, and HSS49, made students feel "pressured", "painful", and "depressed". It warned universities and academic staff to constantly adjust

the volume and time arrangement of assessment methods based on students' feedback and situation. The aim of assessment should not sacrifice for its means, and diversity should not bring about burdensome.

With regard to research activities, only a few students who had research interests or experiences mentioned that. For example, student BP10 intended to participate in some research projects at university because she wanted to polish her resume to apply for postgraduate study in the future. Student HSS36 recalled her exciting research experience in the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) project organized by X University every summer vacation. She introduced the SURF project focusing on grassroots governance was led by a teacher from the Department of China Studies. It was a national project in the Suzhou Industrial Park. They also pointed out that many academic staff that provided research opportunities and organized research activities in the university favored senior or experienced students over freshmen and novices, which implicitly created an unequal demarcation between students and put the less experienced in a disadvantaged place.

Social cultural transition

The sociocultural context that surrounds students also becomes more diverse, with people coming from different regions and societies. Most first-year Chinese students considered the collective dormitory life as the first step of their social cultural adaptation and independence cultivation. Leaving home and parents, they had to take care of themselves and try to get along with other roommates who possibly came from different

regions of China and had disparate lifestyles. Student AT48 said he used to have a regular daily routine and healthy lifestyle. However, impacted by his roommates, he had to stay up late. After some bargaining and discussion, they turned to undergo "a mutual adaptation process" in terms of dormitory life. Another student BP3 also stressed the difficulty in taking care of herself and dealing with many issues in daily life independently, including what to wear and eat every day, how to get along with roommates, and where to live after moving out of the dormitory because:

> I am not getting along well with my roommates. They chat in their local dialect, which I cannot understand, in the dormitory. They can speak Putonghua, but they choose to speak the dialect. I assume they do not want to communicate with me intentionally. I do not want to speculate on them. But their way of communication seems to me very unfriendly (BP3).

Diverse extra-curricular activities, including student club activities, competitions and contests, seminars, workshops, and so forth, flourish on campus and leave a deep impression on nearly all students. In that, universities and relevant staff had better pay more attention to how students transitioned in those activities and what measures to take to facilitate and promote that. Both students SP9 and DP43 pointed out that there were many opportunities and extra-curricular activities on campus that students could seize and engage:

> I can see a variety of posts and news of competitions and contests on campus. I follow some of those WeChat official accounts. University life is splendid. It is more than achieving high scores and doing research (SP9).

> I notice students around take part in some extra-curricular activities. Since they account for an important part of university life, I feel I can spare some time to participate in more extra-curricular activities this semester. It would be fun (DP43).

These extra-curricular activities, especially those of student clubs, test students' social skills in organizing activities, running student clubs, competing in contests, dealing with interpersonal conflicts, and so on, for one thing, and facilitate their social connection and belonging for another. Student AT56 alluded to her social cultural transition and social connection at university. She underwent a transition from "being immersed in a state of individualism before to adjusting myself to get along with other students like those in the student club now". Moreover, she realized that "patterns of social connection with students in the student club and roommates in the dormitory are quite different and there are big cultural differences among students and our ways of social connection". Students AT11 and HSS49 shared their experience of gaining social skills in the student club:

> The most important and salient thing is that I have made a lot of good friends in the student club. Moreover, I have improved my capability to deal with things. Albeit in a small student club, we have to take charge of certain activities at university. There is only a few administrative staff in our student club, and most of the time, I, as the chairperson, have to think and do things by myself. Therefore, my social skills in coping with things are enhanced (AT11).
>
> I was an organizer before. Of course, my ability was enhanced. I continued my way of coping with things. Moreover, I gained experiences constantly when dealing with some unexpected incidents and difficulties that I did not encounter before (HSS49).

Another student AT57 not only improved social skills but also established social connections in extra-curricular activities. As the chairperson of a student club, he met many outstanding students like other student club chairpersons and vice-chairpersons and learned from them. In addition, he cooperated with "comrades who shared the same thoughts with me and could carry out tasks together with me". His social connection and organizational ability were thus enhanced.

Furthermore, the development or negotiation of social identity during the social cultural transition was significant for university students. In my interviews, a group of students showed great concerns about their underprivileged social identities, including their sexual orientation identity as lesbian and bisexual and their gender identity as female. Some of them became more confident and receptive of their sexual orientation and gender identities because of the close relationships with and emotional support from other student club members, some of whom are sexual majorities and/or males. As one student put it:

> We have the same belief. We are intimate friends and comrades. Getting along with club members, I become more self-consistent, accepting things that I did not accept before and accepting the imperfect me…Those heterosexual students join in our club without much hesitation. They understand the minority "others" and treat them very well (BP25).

They perceived the campus climate as generally reliable and trustworthy. In addition, they felt that their identity was accepted, supported, and could be expressed. Student BP25 was the chairperson of the student club aiming for diversity (e.g., LGBT, gender equality, anti-bullying). She was thrilled to meet some university staff who were

generous to help with their activities and some students who were willing to hear their voices. A member of this club said:

> It is incredible that our university allows and protects student clubs under social pressure. I feel my identity is accepted without much pressure (HSS33).

Notwithstanding that, these students could not completely prevent themselves from biased viewpoints or unfriendly behaviors of others on campus. They declared to witness a great number of prejudiced comments posted online by some anonymous students. Universities (sometimes enforced by local authorities) also set strict regulations or impede student activities that involve sensitive topics. The aforementioned student club aiming for diversity had to avoid sensitive words like sexual minority to get the university's approval for carrying out activities.

Moreover, students referred to the pressure and experience of inequality from family and society that inherited and were embedded with traditional cultural norms and values. Non-heterosexuality is reckoned as shameful and immoral not only for individuals but also for their families in Chinese traditional culture, which emphasizes *chuan zong jie dai*, namely the continuity of the family line. This sense of inability emerged when they confronted their parents. They were conscious of their parents' conservative thoughts and could predict their reactions. Additionally, they introspected that their parents evaded or opposed the topic, perhaps because they were afraid of criticism from older members of the family or rumors from their colleagues in *dan wei*, namely in-system working units in China. "Face" is of great significance in Chinese culture, which means dignity. In light of that, some of these students confessed their inclination to conceal and repress their marginalized sexual orientation identity. They attempted to protect it from their family

and others on and off campus, waiting for a more appropriate time in the future to voice out. Additionally, they denounced the traditional gender role expectations and the inferior status of women in society.

Ethnic cultural transition

With regard to the ethnic cultural transition, some students referred to the multicultural atmosphere on campus, which took shape in the number of international students and teaching staff, English-Chinese bilingual signs and posters, and both Chinese and Western festivals. Student SP17 stressed the multiculturalism and freedom of X University due to her access to diverse cultural elements on campus. These cultural elements, according to student DP43, consisted of international students and staff as well as Western festivals like Christmas. Student HSS49 added that "the language on various slogans, banners, posters, and screens on campus being English-Chinese bilingual or English" showed the international and multicultural characteristics of the university.

However, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ratio of international students and teaching staff on campus had dropped. Many students said the campus atmosphere turned much less multicultural and international because their contact with ethnic culturally different students and staff was quite limited. The majority of newly enrolled students even did not have any intercultural contact and communication. They perceived it as a small pity though, because they were concerned about academic achievement more than the multicultural experience.

During the online course LAN010 Introduction to Intercultural Communication, I observed only a few students actively engaged in class and group discussions. The module leader was unsatisfied with the online course engagement and had to call students names to answer questions. When asking student interviewees about the possible reasons for such passive engagement, they referred to the "boring teaching contents", "lack of interest", and "uselessness for future study". It indicates the utilitarianism orientation of students, which prioritizes major and professional curriculum that influence their development explicitly (e.g, future study and career) over co-curriculum that nurtures their growth implicitly (e.g., intercultural sensitivity, communication skills, global citizenship, etc.).

Despite that, there was still a handful of students paying attention to their ethnic cultural transition and discussing their intercultural contact and communication experiences. Student DP12 recalled a construction project she joined with a teacher and other students in a course, during which she met Indian children who lived in the Slumdog and did not go to school. As a child who grew up in a city in China, she supposed all children would go to school and live in safe places. But in that project, she realized children from different countries and family backgrounds had disparate needs and conditions for living and schooling. "(Intercultural) communication is crucial to help understand the issue first", said student DP12. Student BP10 participated in an online mindfulness leadership workshop, which turned out to be her intercultural communication experience as well:

> This workshop invites different guest speakers to deliver a speech every week. Last semester, a professor of Psychology from Harvard University gave us a lecture. He joined in an ashram and meditated in India before. I think this pluralism is wonderful (BP10).

Transition shock, adaptation, negotiation, and experiential stages

The majority of student interviewees confessed to encountering culture/transition shock at the beginning of academic and social cultural transitions. They were caught in a dilemma between their previous learning and social cognition and behaviors and new ones advocated by the university. In addition, they were likely to suffer from negative emotions, such as confusion and anxiety, and even wanted to drop out of the university. For one thing, some Chinese students felt lost because of a huge gap between their previous teacher-led learning style and non-EMI teaching approach and current student-led and EMI ones during the academic cultural transition. For instance:

> Compared with high school, student management in university is loose. It is a challenge for me to plan and make full use of so much time…In the first month, I did not go out a lot or take part in any student club activity. I felt very upset and bored. Also, the teaching contents were so many and taught so fast that I wanted to drop out of the university and repeat the study in high school (AT46).
>
> I find it difficult to adapt to the EMI teaching approach. My poor English language ability impacts my grades negatively. The difficulties I have in the academic study are all related to the language problem (BP3).

For another, certain students claimed to be shocked by other students' way of having social connection and belonging while others treated those as normal during the social cultural transition. Both students AT18 and DP43 mentioned the entertainment life of certain students, composed of having midnight supper, drinking alcohol, and going to the

pub. Student AT18 was shocked and opposed to this way of social life, “I suppose only idle people in society or students from vocational schools would live such a life.” But student DP43 considered it more dialectically, “those students are probably more ‘socialized’. These activities are not bad. Maybe they have a quicker social cultural transition.”

After a certain period of immersion and adjustment, most students can recover from the social culture shock at a faster speed than from academic culture shock. They mainly negotiate with the social culture without much need to adapt. That is probably because living habits among Chinese students are not too diverge to reconcile. Also, they can easily and rapidly build social ties and form friend circles in extra-curricular activities and student clubs. For example, student HSS21 expressed, “There are plenty of extra-curricular activities at university, which facilitate my social cultural transition. It is hard to stand still and make no progress here.”

In contrast, it takes students a longer time to understand and adapt to the academic culture of the university. On the one hand, students have limited access to professional courses and research opportunities while having plenty of basic language courses and general education during the first year because of the university’s educational system. On the other hand, the adaptation to academic study at university is more demanding in terms of self-regulation and autonomy, especially for students who transition from Chinese public high schools. A handful of first-year students including student SP39 struggled in academic cultural transition. She still felt lost, not knowing what she liked and what her learning objective was, at the end of first year. She also hoped someone in the university could instruct and regulate her to increase efficiency like in high school. Some senior

Chinese and international students grappled with transition challenges in the following years of academic cultural transition as well:

> I only feel anxious before the exam, and I do not study much after class. I do not make plans because I am unwilling to push myself. I always feel lost recently (HSS13).
>
> Since I entered X University, I have to adjust a lot. There are a lot of assignments with deadlines very close together. So it is hard to manage the time (IHSS1).

With reference to the ethnic cultural transition, hardly any Chinese or international undergraduate student in interviews confronted culture/transition shock and subsequent adjustment. According to them, the ethnic cultural transition was an experienced rather than a transformed process. Since Chinese students were in the majority on the campus of X University and the COVID-19 pandemic intensified this situation, they mainly felt the multicultural atmosphere in an implicit way and their intercultural contact and communication remained superficial, as one student put it:

> Opportunities for intercultural communication are quite few actually. Intercultural communication in the student club is superficial. Most of the time, international students hang out with international students and Chinese students hang out with Chinese students (BP8).

International students underwent the ethnic cultural transition in an experiential way because of their educational or cultural background. Students IHSS1, ISOFTA2, IAT3, ISP4, IBP6, and IDP8 were from Asian countries, inclusive of Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Pakistan, which were near China or shared a similar Confucian culture like China. Most of them attended international or bilingual high schools that equipped them with global visions or provided Chinese language education. Students IAT5 and IAT7 studied in a high school with an international diploma in Guangzhou, China for

over three years before entering X University. Therefore, they got to know diverse cultures or Chinese people and language before entering the university and might deepen their understanding along with the following years of study and living. Their ethnic cultural transition was generally experienced more than transformed.

Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, a handful of students pointed out that the dormitory arrangement and some student activities (using only Chinese language) restricted the intercultural contact between Chinese and international students. These might lead to the surface instead of deep intercultural learning of students.

The initial transition shock and subsequent adaptation, negotiation, or experiential processes during different cultural transitions demonstrate that student transition is non-linear and heterogeneous. In the next section, I will analyze students' habitus hysteresis and change to further illustrate transition as becoming.

Habitus hysteresis and change rendering students' transitions as becoming

Four types of students' habitus change: infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing, together with hysteresis, interact with the HE field as well as multiple academic, social, and ethnic cultural transition components. They enable students' transitions to be a rhizomatic being-becoming process replete with assemblages and dis-assemblages.

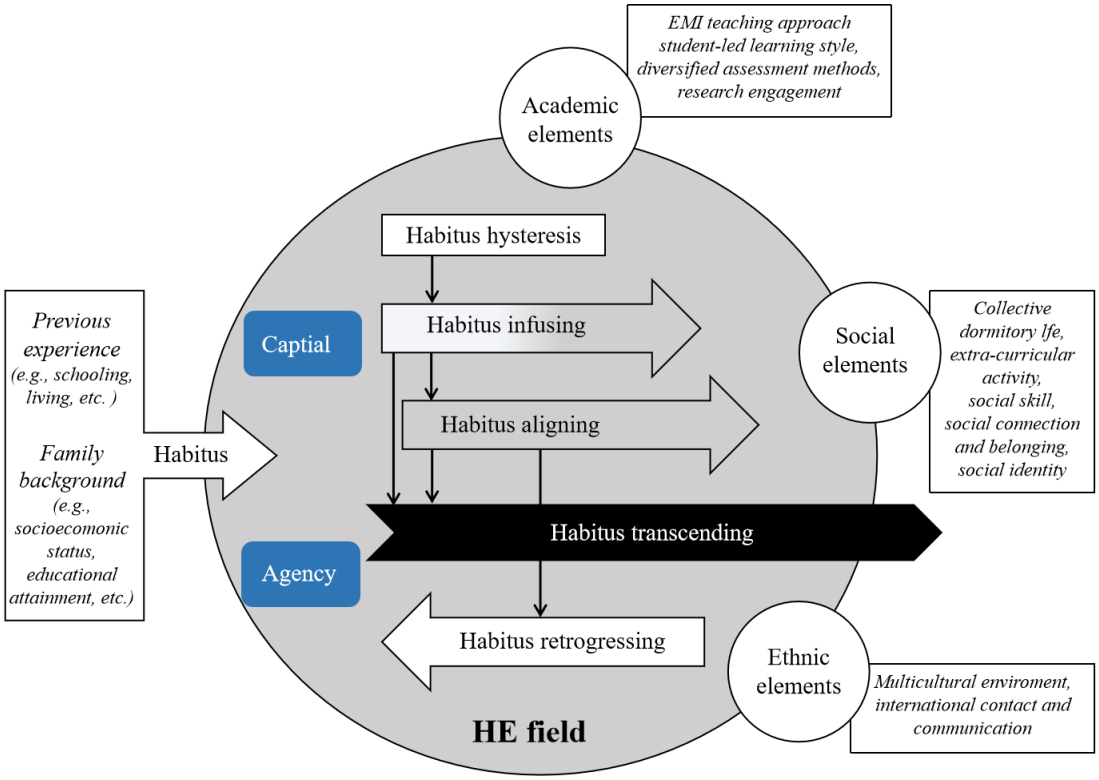
Habitus infusing is a process of being structured more than structuring, which is filled with uncertainty and sometimes struggle. Students retain their original habitus

gained in family and previous schooling while getting infused by the new institutional habitus. They either actively engage or are passively coerced by the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 2005) (i.e., institutional regulations and norms) in the field to blend previous and current learning orientations and practices. In the habitus aligning stage, students are able to adapt to university study and life and gain a new habitus matched with the HE field. It is a mixture of constant adjustment and a relative stable state of habitus. The temporary interpersonal harmony and/or person-environment fit (Kulik et al., 1987) at present may give rise to the subsequent adjustment, reconciliation and balance between habitus and the field.

Students are also likely to transcend or retrogress their original habitus. In this respect, they mainly undergo a drastic intrapersonal change of disposition, aptitude, personality, or mindset beyond the goals and expectations of the HE institution. The difference is that students who display a transcending habitus often feel self-content and have a strong motivation to structure the surrounding environment, whereas, students who reveal a retrogressing habitus find their change unsatisfactory or choose to distance themselves from the bothering outside so as to protect their inner self.

Intermingled with different academic, social, and cultural components and capital, habitus and its change render transition as assemblage and dis-assemblage of inside and outside things, properties, relations, and affections of students. The habitus evolvement embodied in four types of change and old-new habitus conflict and supplement is nourished and shaped by the HE field and, in the meanwhile, it progresses in dynamic ways ceaselessly like rhizomes. Students' agency takes effect during habitus change and

transitions. Figure 2 shows the framework of habitus change, transition components, capital, and agency in the HE field, which is generated from findings.



Note: higher education (HE)

Figure 2 The framework of habitus change, transition components, capital, and agency in the HE field

Habitus hysteresis, infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing: transition as being-becoming

Students encounter habitus hysteresis due to a mismatch or clash between their dispositions and the demands and expectations of the HE field. Some student interviewees confessed that they remained completely incompatible with the academic culture for a certain period of time. They did not listen to or attend class and took shortcuts to complete assignments. They were always enforced by deadlines to study and suffered from negative feelings and attitudes.

On the whole, Chinese undergraduate students seldom encountered social habitus hysteresis due to the familiar social living environment. A small proportion of them had that problem mainly because they ran into some unhappy social contact or interpersonal conflicts in the past. For example, student SP39 talked about her unpleasant experiences in senior high. She used to hang out with certain male students because she thought they were straightforward and easy to get along with. However, one male student made up stories about her. That shocked and dispelled student SP39 from making close friends anymore. Likewise, student SP50 transferred to a primary school in Shanghai from Anhui when she was in the 3rd grade. She felt quite self-contemptuous at that time. A female classmate was overbearing and made her feel even more helpless and weaker. Also, her desk mate, a male student, laughed at her and called her “village girl” and “outsider”. Student SP50 said she was very sad at that moment because of her classmates’ regional discrimination.

Habitus infusing means students start to be shaped by the HE field. Their old habitus formed in the past encounters challenges at present. This transition process is often accompanied by ambivalent attitudes, repetitive struggles, and anxieties about not getting aligned or adapted yet. For example, one junior student BP3 claimed to be still struggling with the language problem at university. When immersed in a learning environment where English was the teaching language, she had to transfer from her native language (Chinese) habits to the new ones. That remained the source of her anxieties. Another student AT40 showed ambivalent attitudes toward international students. On the one hand, she appealed to the university to increase the ratio of international students on campus. On the other hand, she confessed her unwillingness to share the dormitory with them because "there could be huge differences between international students and me in terms of living habits". It implies that under the influence of the multicultural atmosphere and internationalization aims of the university, student AT40 looked forward to experiencing cultural differences but could not fully embrace them. Her primary habitus acquired in the local community composed of co-nationals and stereotypes of other cultures set barriers to developing a cosmopolitan habitus (Dai, Lingard, et al., 2020) of herself.

There is a slight discrepancy between these two cases of habitus infusing. Students like BP3 keep being infused by and struggling with the institutional norms at present but will probably initiate self-differentiation like habitus aligning in the long run. With the awareness of the lack of linguistic/academic capital (due to previous schooling and family background) and anxiety about the habitus-field misfit, they endeavor to accumulate valued capital and change habitus continuously to fit into the field. Whereas,

students like AT40 do not sense an underlying habitus-field mismatch and the necessity to acquire field-specific capital. They are unlikely to initiate self-differentiation but repeat the endless being-becoming infusing cycle.

On the contrary, students whose habitus aligned with the HE field removed disorientation and achieved a sense of fit-in. Student AT48 shared his story of habitus transitioning from infusing to aligning. He faced transition shock at the start of the university when accessing vast information and different people and then struggled with self-regulation problems. After recovering from them, he felt better and got accustomed to university life. Students may also transform their habitus beyond institutional norms and expectations. For instance, the interpersonal contact on campus enabled student BP14 to broaden his horizon. He further transcended his original habitus by reflecting on his thoughts and dialectically thinking about others' opinions:

> I have contacted a lot of different people since the start of the university. After thorough communication with them, I get to know diverse views towards the world and love. Sometimes I find my horizon is expanded concomitantly. I will also try to understand their views. No matter what their attitudes towards love, between the same or opposite sexes, they enable me to consider there is no absolute black-or-white judgment on all things. I have become more willing to accept some but not all of their ideas (BP14).

The separation of habitus aligning and transcending clarifies certain ambiguities that remain in the conventional wisdom of "habitus transformation". Most current research indicates a habitus transformed in accordance with the HE field, not a complete subversion of the habitus (Bourdieu, 2005). That transformation is no longer bounded by the particular constitution of individual habitus (Adams, 2006) but is still fashioned by

the field. It follows the habitus aligning process, and the result is most often an aligned/adapted habitus, such as rural students transforming their habitus to better adapt to the urban field (Chen, 2022) and look like their urban counterparts (Li et al., 2021). Habitus transformation here falls into the dominant discourse of habitus as constantly structured by the field and structuring itself to adapt to the field.

Conversely, some scholars refer to the dynamic responses of students, resulting in a transformed habitus that constantly negotiates with rather than conforms to the field. That actually represents habitus transcendence, which is managed by students to confront the dominant power of the field resiliently. In the study by Dai, Lingard, et al. (2020), some international students revealed their durable habitus in compartmentalizing the demands of the new HE field, resisting change, and retaining their original habitus. Abrahams and Ingram (2013) depicted the chameleon habitus of students that shifted and created a third space when negotiating with different fields. Reflecting on the above-mentioned sample of BP14, he disclosed his homosexual orientation bravely and engaged in the student club activities aiming for diversity (e.g., LGBTQ+, gender equality) actively on campus, which represented a field dominated by the heterosexual majority and overwhelming discrimination and biases against the sexual minority. His habitus transcending process denotes the possibility of a habitus both being structuring and becoming unbounded by the field.

There were also some students alluding to retrogressing from the previous dispositions of self-absorption, openness, and optimism to the current ones that they regarded as unsatisfactory or self-protective. For example, student BP15 mentioned that

she used to focus on her inner thoughts. However, she was always stimulated by things outside now and could no longer recapture inner peace:

> In the first year, I still concentrated on what I thought from the inner heart. But I retrogressed in the second year. I feel I no longer focus on my inner thoughts. I often check WeChat messages and receive the stimuli of new things outside. I do not know why I become so. Those things are eye-opening but indeed disturb my inner thoughts (BP15).

Another student AT56, in contrast, paid more attention to her inner feelings than the outer world. She described her habitus as retrogressing from an outgoing and active one when she studied in a high school in the US to an indifferent and passive one at present. She would no longer make friends with others easily or care about them a lot but merely concentrated on her inner feelings and states. According to Wacquant (2016), since habitus is not necessarily congruent with the cosmos it evolves or unified inherently, it incurs varying degrees of tensions and crises and is subject to permanent change. Habitus retrogressing deepens that understanding and adds insights to the back-and-forward movements of "multiplicities composed of heterogeneous singularities" (Sotirin, 2012, p. 99) in dynamic transitions like rhizomes.

These diverse habitus changes of individual student or different students render transition as being-becoming. Habitus infusing represents present-becoming, namely present individuation that involves all combinations inhabiting itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and encounters, tangles, or clashes with the new one or field. Habitus aligning and transcending orient to becoming-other that presupposes breaking out of old dispositions and attitudes to "bring into being that which does not yet exist" (Deleuze & Guattari,

1987, p. 174). In other words, new habitus replace the old habitus of students. Furthermore, as mentioned above, students may meander their habitus through infusing to aligning (AT48) or transcending (BP14), or through aligning to retrogressing (AT56). It manifests students' dynamic, fluid, and reiterative navigation of habitus and transition. The metaphor of waterfall (Amundsen, 2021) fails to capture the situation of habitus retrogression since it implies a uni-directional flow of transition.

Intertwined and detached academic, social, and ethnic transition components and habitus: assemblage and dis-assemblage of transition

In general, students' habitus interact with academic transition components. Almost all students mentioned the transition from the teacher-centered to the student-led learning style, which lingered on their academic habitus for years. Several of them pointed out the diversified assessment methods, that is, assignments, course work, academic and non-academic competitions and contests in addition to exams, enlightened their long-term orientation and holistic view on education. These academic transition components and habitus constitute an assemblage. For instance, student AT11 named keywords like "major, knowledge, self-regulation, and adaptation". Another student DP12 enumerated "course, behaviors, phenomenon, standpoints, backgrounds" in her narration of academic habitus change:

> Previously, I could only tell the story simply without knowing the reason behind it. But after taking this course and studying at university for several years, I realize one can only

> understand others' behaviors and phenomena by genuinely considering their standpoints and backgrounds (DP12).

Students' social habitus are intermingled with transition components. Keywords related to social habitus change include "more profound social cognitions, more mature interpersonal relationships, a comfortable way of social connection, and a fitted social circle", for example:

> I have become more careful about my words and expressions during conversations. That is based on the typical people I face. I shall first know them and know what to say to them. Different people might have disparate responses to me (AT41).
>
> When I first entered the university, I felt quite unaccustomed. In high school, I always went around with my friends in groups together. I have to get used to being alone at university. Now, I have adapted to that and felt quite comfortable studying with friends sometimes as well (SP17)..

The cultural environment that surrounds students is diverse, with people coming from various national and ethnic cultural backgrounds. There emerges an assemblage of cultural transition components of international contact and communication and students' cultural habitus. Student AT7 said he could shift communication patterns and mindsets in different cultural contexts so as to fit in them. Albeit from a small underdeveloped city and ordinary family and without intercultural experiences prior to university, AT7 claimed to have no difficulty meeting new people and making friends with them because he was open to cultural differences and took the initiative to make interpersonal contact. That indicates the cultural capital and intercultural skills acquired in the HE field can form an assemblage with the changed habitus to take a satisfying position despite the original disadvantaged family background and social class. Nevertheless, Jin and Ball

(2021) warned that the habitus transformation of those working-class students might be imaginary. Reproduced as meritocratic agents who merely "reinforced symbolic domination of class" (Jin & Ball, 2021, p. 8) in the HE field, they probably achieved success by chance and would struggle with cultural discontinuity in society in the future.

On the contrary, habitus hysteresis showcased a dis-assemblage between students' habitus and transition components in the HE field. Several students indicated their misalignment with the university in terms of the EMI teaching, course, and assessment:

> My behaviors are almost the same as those who study in Chinese public universities. In the environment of this university, I do not deliberately prevent myself from adapting to it, but I still use Chinese to study and interact with others (DP2).
>
> Even if teachers gaze at me, I do not know what I am doing. I am easy to get distracted. Sometimes I do not know what to discuss about the topic in class. No one else starts to speak, so I shy away from starting to talk…I am writing assignments like making up stories (DP34).

Habitus can also distance from previous orientations, emotions, or relations and incur a dis-assemblage. The above-mentioned student BP15 felt disconnected from previous orientations of self-absorption with inner peace to current ones constantly stimulated by new things and information outside. The habitus of student AT56 was detached from outgoing and active dispositions to indifferent and passive ones, which was linked to key components like "unpleasant home-stay experiences", "major depressive disorder", "going through puberty abroad without the company of family members", and so forth :

> I was more outgoing and proactive when interacting with others before. Now I turn more passive and indifferent. I do not think the interpersonal relationship is pertinent to me anymore. I used to look forward to making friends and caring about them a lot. Now, even if I like the person very much, I will not make friends with him or her. I only concentrate on my own now (AT56).

There were some examples showing a mixture of assemblage and dis-assemblage of students' habitus and transition components. Habitus infusing implied a situation in which the dis-assemblage between students' habitus and transition components in the HE field were gradually but not fully replaced by assemblage. Further, in different components of the same transition aspect, assemblage and dis-assemblage could co-exist. The individual student might have disparate habitus changes in components of social living, social activity participation, and social tie building. Several students aligned with social living at the outset while transcending their way of social connection wholly. Student SP50 referred to her habitus hysteresis in social connection, "I always look forward to joining the group and realizing the group's value. But most of the time, I find myself distanced from the group and become lonely" while habitus aligning in terms of becoming the leader of a student club and organizing activities actively. This complicated sense of assemblage and dis-assemblage relates to social capital and skills in the field. The compartmentalized fit between field and habitus (Xie & Reay, 2020) may result from the lack of or possession of particular social capital and skills valued by the field, such as the capacity to develop and deal with interpersonal relationships in collective groups and organizing student club activities.

Habitus evolvement in the HE field: rhizomatic transition

Habitus evolvement is embedded in and interacts with the HE field, which influences and structures habitus infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing in turn. The assemblage and dis-assemblage of habitus and transition components in the HE field also indicate the existence of agency and multiplicities. They envisage student transition as rhizome that relies on the "soil" of the HE field and, in the meantime, grows in multiple ways and directions without an ultimate end.

The HE field consists of plenty of academic, social, and ethnic elements, relationships, and agents. They can nourish students' agency in making use of them and accumulating capital or let students feel unaccustomed and incur habitus hysteresis. Some students confessed to remaining completely incompatible with the academic culture and were always enforced by deadlines to study while other students referred to the importance of doing things on their own. Some keywords were "taking the initiative, self-management, self-regulation, self-determination, self-efficacy, independence, sense of responsibility, and individual willingness". Albeit appreciating the free and open atmosphere of the university, students emphasized the role of agency in transitions:

> It is necessary to take the initiative and be self-disciplined at university. It creates a relaxing and free atmosphere. We students shall depend on ourselves particularly (BP8).
>
> If we want to make accomplishments or improve life on campus, we shall rely on our own (SP9).

A number of prior research stressed the role of agency and reflexivity in shaping the habitus transformation of students (Chen & Tian, 2021; Jin & Ball, 2020, 2021; Li, 2013; Li et al., 2021). Reay et al. (2009) called it reflexive habitus. Students in my interviews

also demonstrated a high level of reflexivity towards national and educational cultures, peer relations and pressure, student management, social changes and biases as well as their own habits, identity, personality, and growth. Their critical thinking about external things and information and internal self and changes led to the ceaseless evolvement of a reflexive habitus. Student DP43 dialectically reflected on the acceleration of social transition she experienced at university, “it connects us with the society, becoming far-sighted or short-sighted and having good or bad habits.” Student AT4 considered transition as a slow and ceaseless process. Reflecting on his previous struggle with academic study and conflicts with his parents, he realized he underwent a “not so drastic but enduring” habitus change.

Time and space in the HE field are catalysts for habitus as rhizomes. In her study, Xu (2021) considered time as a form of cultural capital that students had unequal access to along class lines. It was sedimented in students’ habitus and hence inclined them towards certain career preferences and strategies over others. In this study, students underwent habitus infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing across time. The catalyst of time functioned in a positive direction like the aforementioned case of student AT48 (aligning) or a negative one like the case of student BP15 (retrogressing).

Moreover, space catalyzes the rhizomatic habitus evolvement. Xing et al. (2022) investigated how international research students struggled for academic publishing and strove to negotiate tensions across fields and over time. Hsieh (2020) depicted the evolving habitus (modification and improvisation) of international students across different HE fields. Both students AT56 and HSS58 had their habitus evolved along with the shift of space. They studied abroad in the US in senior high and returned to China for

university study. The change in the educational field and people in it let them confront and deliberate on external cultural differences and internal transitions. Student AT56 experienced habitus retrogression whilst student HSS58 stuck to and even transcended her habitus gained in the US:

> I stick to my positive attitude. I feel like praising others even more than before. Chinese people are conservative about praising others overtly. I was not accustomed to that (praising others) when I first came to the US. But I feel it is wonderful to say good words about others once I adapt to it (HSS58).

The first shift of the field (China to the US) altered the habitus of student HSS58 but the second shift (the US to China) did not. She transcended habitus from her intrinsic motivation and willingness rather than being influenced by the field. That challenges the over-emphasis on the habitus reproducing dominant structures in the field (Huang, 2021). Ivemark and Ambrose (2021) also mentioned the impact of cultural capital accumulated during early socialization and contact with social environments on students' habitus adaptation. Student HSS58 gained capital comprising language ability, cultural norms and values, cross-cultural study experiences, social networks, global horizons, etc., during transitions between different educational and national fields. However, the previously accumulated capital was not always privileged or useful in the newly entered field. The old and new capital intertwined and detached, enabling habitus to evolve in different directions ongoingly: from hysteresis to infusing and aligning in the US and from infusing to transcending back in China.

Intercultural transitional competence (ITC) representing students' agency in transitions

The concept of ITC is defined as students' capacity to transition to different intercultural (i.e., academic, social, and ethnic cultural) contexts where they interact with culturally diverse people properly and motivate personal growth effectively. It contains five dimensions: multiplistic sensitivity (MS), intrinsic proactivity (IP), strategic flexibility (SF), relativistic inclusivity (RI), and dialectic reflexivity (DR).

These five dimensions not only constitute ITC in a dynamic way (shown in Figure 11) but also are developmental themselves during students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Usually, MS emerges at the beginning of students' ITC development. Under the influence of IP, SF, and DR, students are likely to undergo a transition from MS to RI. There is reciprocity between IP and SF. In other words, students' IP initiates their SF and SF facilitates IP. They mutually contribute to each other. Furthermore, DR interacts with the other four dimensions of ITC.

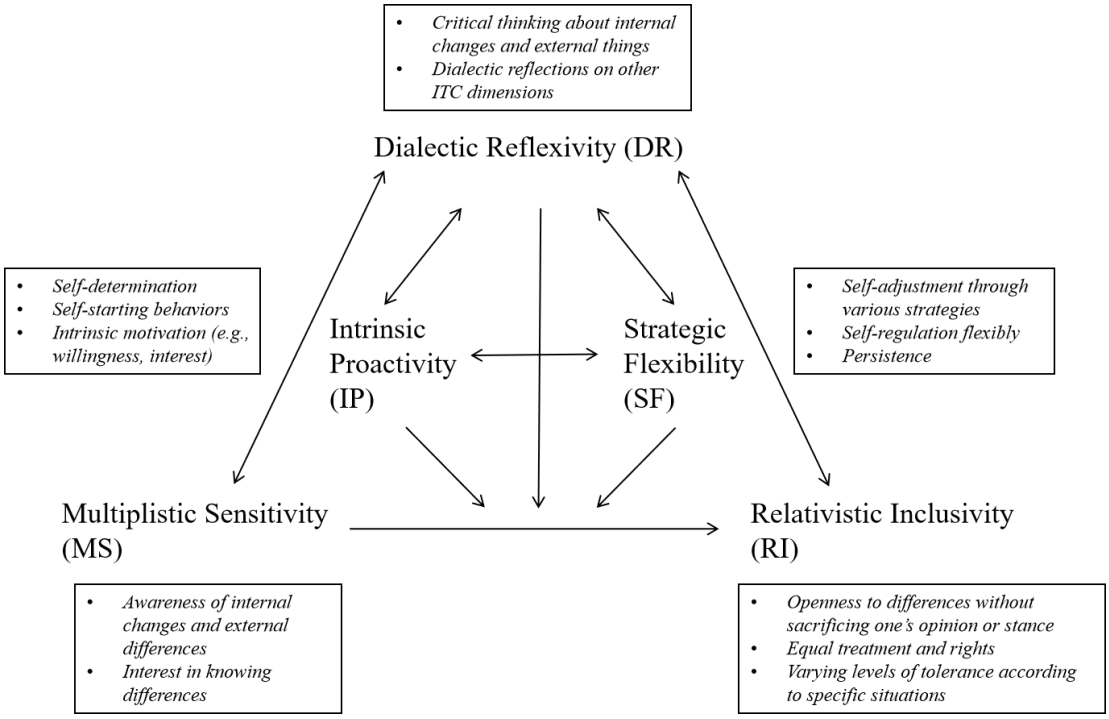


Figure 11 ITC model

ITC dimensions and development

MS means students are aware of both internal changes and external differences resulting from various academic, social, and ethnic cultures. They also have an interest in knowing different cultures and people. IP connotes students' self-determination in making choices and setting goals as well as self-starting behaviors in making and carrying out plans and seeking resources out of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, they have the willingness to take the initiative. SF shows students' ability to regulate and adjust themselves through various strategies. In addition, they persist in dealing with external

cultural differences and challenges flexibly. Students with DR will reflect on personal opinions, cultural transitions, and competence dialectically for one thing and critically think about external cultural differences and influences for another. Students with RI are able to stay objective and neutral toward cultural differences, have basic understandings and respects for different opinions and people, and treat them fairly without discrimination and prejudices. Besides that, they are supportive of cultural integration or compatibility.

Multiplistic sensitivity

According to interviews, students are sensitive to their personal transitions and characteristics regarding personality, sexual orientation, and social class. What is more, they are aware of external differences among national, regional, and educational cultures of staff, peers as well as educational institutions. Therefore, it is depicted as multiplistic. MS indicates a keen awareness in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and person-environmental aspects. It manifests the initial stage of students' ITC development during all three transitions as well.

Some students described their personal traits and cultural transitions and confessed their sexual orientation in interviews. That indicated they had consciousness of their inner state and changes. For example, as a gay, student BP14 was aware of his differences from the majority of (straight) people in society. As a Chinese student on an international campus, he was also conscious of his salient Chinese cultural traits and a strong patriotic feeling. Student AT24 was sensitive to his transition from high school to university, "In

high school, I could promptly or obviously realize what tasks I completed and what knowledge I learned no matter whether these tasks and knowledge were required by other people or myself…Currently, it is hard to say whether I am becoming better or worse compared with that in high school. I sense I am still in a trial-and-error phase in this period of time."

Apart from that, the majority of student interviewees described external ethnic cultural differences generally in respect of customs, eating habits, consumption, time orientation, class involvement, and so on. For instance, student AT16 met an international student from Zambia in a class in the first year. He guessed that punctuality might not be important or valued in Zambian culture since that international student often came late for class but never felt ashamed or regretful. Student SP17 also found that her Korean friend's consumption behaviors were different from hers, "He (Korean friend) comes to China and buys things in a way like people from Shanghai [the economically developed city in China] consume in Yunnan [the economically underdeveloped area in China]. He always rents cars and travels around with his friends and has high consumption." These two students might fall into stereotypes or essentialism by ascribing particular behaviors of international students to their home culture rather than their personal habits and characteristics. In contrast, students BP23 and IAT3 compared Chinese and international students in a more objective way:

> It is possible that international students have much less academic pressure than us. When they join the exchange program and study here, they do not care much about their academic results. But they get involved in other activities actively…Chinese students are probably under pressure currently because of certain academic study deadlines and are

> unable to participate in extra-curricular activities...Sometimes it is easier to get along with international students since they are more open-minded and do not care about certain trifles. When working with Chinese students, I will feel released in that they have a high sense of responsibility (BP23).
>
> They [Chinese students] are hard-working. When we are discussing something, they do not really talk …The international students are more active even though there are more Chinese students in the class (IAT3).

By comparing teachers from China and other countries, student AT5 discovered that the teaching style and requirements of international teachers were quite different from those of Chinese teachers. The former were fonder of interactions in class and encouraged students to answer questions while the latter always talked by themselves in class and stopped as soon as the class was over. It seemed to AT5 that Chinese teachers would like students to communicate with them after class while international teachers wanted to have more communication in class.

Among the Chinese student group, quite a lot of them mentioned the regional disparity in China, typically the gap between the south and north, big and small cities, which was embodied in students' eating habits, lifestyle, educational standard, and inclusiveness. For example, student SP17 was from Sichuan province and sensed an apparent gap between a student from Shanghai and herself in terms of English speaking and writing at the start of the semester. She attributed that to the regional disparity in English education, "it (English education) is not attached great importance to in southwestern areas in China, such as Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou provinces. Students there including me have poor oral English". Moreover, she was used to eating spicy food in Sichuan while students from Shanghai had super sweet food. Student AT46 called

himself “northerners” different from other “southerners” in certain ways of living, such as taking a nap in the afternoon.

A handful of Chinese students also distinguished themselves from others in terms of the level of socialization and attitudes toward certain social phenomena. Student AT5 described himself as “bookish, naive and sometimes behaving like a child” in contrast to other students in the university, who “are more socialized and behave like adults”. Student AT11 compared peers in terms of their attitudes toward the issue of sexual orientation. In her high school and prior, students showed no respect in words toward homosexuals. But in X University, students she met were easygoing with that issue and did not consider sexual orientation as a big problem. Gradually, AT11 became more inclusive herself and “feel it is good to let people be themselves as they want”.

Further, almost all students attached great significance to academic cultural disparities in different universities as well as in different educational stages, such as high school education versus HE. According to them, the university gave them more freedom and independence during the academic cultural transition compared with other Chinese public universities and high schools. Student DP12 regarded high school education as “exam-oriented with rigid class and instructor systems” in contrast to the free and flexible university education. Student SP52 also implied the rigidity of other Chinese public universities by enumerating their morning and evening self-study, morning exercises, and courses that required rote learning, whereas, “X University has a relatively high level of openness and inclusiveness”. Student SP19 took part in the “2+2” articulation program and had studied at both X University and the British partner university (L University). She compared these two universities:

> I remember a video that recorded the speech delivered to us students by the principal of L University. He said any form of discrimination toward race and gender and sexual harassment was forbidden at university. He also declared if you wanted to participate in some activity where someone discouraged you because of your gender, age, sexual orientation, or race, you should report to the university directly. Maybe some Western countries are more advanced or better developed in these cultural aspects. I did not hear such a speech at X University though (SP19).

More importantly, students with MS exhibited an interest in knowing internal state, changes, and external differences among cultures and people. For instance, student BP8 mentioned some interesting experiences when talking about national English education with students from other countries, "In China, we call it examination-oriented education. Students from Turkey and Thailand said their English education was examination-oriented as well." Thus, she realized the importance of having an interest in cultures outside because "it can lead to communication and new understandings". Student AT57 found regional cultural differences quite interesting and "cultural differences do not necessarily mean contradictions". He came from the Northeast of China and spoke the dialect there. To his surprise, his roommates imitated him and could speak the dialect now.

Intrinsic proactivity

Along with the increase in MS toward more cultural differences, students are likely to initiate IP, taking self-starting actions based on self-determined decisions. Proactivity means the ability to take the initiative in a future-oriented way to change or improve a

situation to one's advantage (García-Almeida & Cabrera-Nuez, 2020). It is described as intrinsic because student interviewees exhibited self-determination and self-starting behaviors during intrapersonal, interpersonal, and person-environmental interactions out of intrinsic motivation, such as willingness and interest.

For one thing, self-determination means one chooses or values acts out of internalized motivations and autonomous control. In possession of it, students would acknowledge their agency in the complex multicultural context of the university and set directions for their cultural transitions. A handful of students mentioned they made decisions on what program to study in, what academic resources to use, and what extra-curricular activities to join in. For example, student SP9 joined a student club and entered a robot contest, which was "quite interesting". He also declared that he took part in extra-curricular activities with certain purposes, "It will be meaningless if it is just for fun. I do not want to waste my time on that." That indicated his self-determination in selecting and making use of extra-curricular activities. Student AT38 showed her self-determination in not taking part in the "2+2" articulation program and continuing her academic study at X University. Because she wanted to study in the US instead of UK (the destination of the "2+2" articulation program) and considered it not worthwhile spending some time to adapt currently. Moreover, student HSS21 planned to be a teacher in the future, hence, she decided to study something academic and keep it systematic currently.

For another, students conducted self-starting behaviors without being explicitly instructed or required. They sought resources and participated in academic and non-academic activities proactively. Both students AT16 and IHSS1 showed IP in the academic aspect. Student AT16 would review the learning contents he did not apprehend

after class. In addition, he asked other students questions that he was unable to solve and helped them if they had questions. When having questions, student IHSS1 directly asked teachers in class or emailed them after class. As an international student, she also took opportunities to talk with Chinese people at the university and supermarket to improve her Chinese language skills. Further, students made plans proactively and out of intrinsic motivation. They figured out several approaches to making schedules and keeping daily routines like calendar reminders and to-do lists. Student HSS51 learned from peers to mark all deadlines on the calendar on the mobile phone, which would remind her of things to finish ahead of time. Another student SP17 detailed that:

> I found the calendar template on Xiaohongshu online. I can mark all deadlines this month on the calendar, which reminds me of the time for submission. In addition, I write a to-do list every day. Otherwise, I will be in a mess and not know what to do. Based on the to-do list, I will finish the most important thing first and other things step by step. I become self-consistent accordingly (SP17).

The self-starting behaviors of students, to some extent, were based on their self-determination. For instance, student AT37 took the initiative to participate in extra-curricular activities. After the self-determination stage - "evaluating what benefits they might bring", he joined them and encouraged his friends to join in as well. Student BP1 "decided to make some changes and enrich experiences not for some utilitarian purposes", so she devoted herself to more social activities. Moreover, students' self-determination was often facilitated and perpetuated by virtue of self-starting behaviors, as student BP44 claimed:

> I decided to try things in different cultures and had the chance to communicate with one of our international teachers last semester. He encouraged me to join the "2+2" articulation program to experience the living environment and culture of England. My spoken English is poor, so I communicated with him slowly and was sometimes unable to express my meaning appropriately. But I still communicate with international teachers actively, including this British teacher and another teacher from the Netherlands. I realize my aptitude for exploring rather than avoiding new things (BP44).

What is more, willingness and interest played important roles in students' IP. Several student interviewees revealed their willingness and interest when taking the initiative in making decisions or participating in some academic or student club activities. For example, student AT7 claimed to have an interest in the electric circuit. During the period of program choice, he compared and analyzed different programs and chose Electric Engineering "out of willingness and interest". Student DP20 selected his program out of interest as well. He loved doing graphic design, making it a hobby and spending a lot of time on it. Besides academic study, student interviewees alluded to the importance of interest, an intrinsic motivation, in extra-curricular activity participation. Student SP47 reflected:

> I take part in some student club activities. It is based on my interest or consideration of their positive impacts on my professional study (SP47).

Strategic flexibility

Flexibility stands for students' continuous adjustment of their cognition, behaviors, and emotions in order to keep an inner balance, adapt to the new cultural context or reconcile it with the previous one, and maintain relationships with other people. It is

described as strategic since student interviewees referred to numerous strategies when exerting flexibility, such as transferring programs, shifting focus from extra-curricular activities to academic study or setting priority, quitting some insignificant hobbies, reducing the use of electronic devices, seeking emotional support from others, reading books, shopping or doing exercise to get relaxed, to name but a few. SF and IP have reciprocal relationships and mutually reinforce each other to contribute to the development of ITC. Based on MS "I know I am good at certain subjects", student BP8 mobilized IP and then SF in certain subjects, "I am more active in subjects like marketing and business. I am learning to manage my time and strength accordingly".

Many students struggled between academic study and extra-curricular activities to achieve a balance. Student BP10 described how she dealt with many conflicting things at the same time and succeeded in maintaining a balance between student club activities and academic study. In general, she was able to shift focus periodically:

> Many unexpected things happened that month that interrupted my original plans. For example, the student club is required to post tweets suddenly and enhance promotion. So I always felt ambivalent at that time. However, after I balanced them well later, I feel I do not have to force myself so hard. I can do anything whenever I am willing to and feel happy about it…I will shift my focus from student club activities to academic study and basically keep my pace as before (BP10).

International student IAT7 also referred to the issue of balance. Previously, he was more into various activities on campus. In the third year of study, he attempted to achieve a balance between activity participation and career preparation.

Further, student interviewees enumerated certain strategies to adjust themselves. For example, student AT24 used to be anxious and have “emotional illnesses”. Gradually, he adjusted himself through intrapersonal psychological construction and interpersonal communication, “I cope with such kind of bad emotion well and devote myself to something meaningful now. Sometimes I will have a talk with my parents to pour out my feelings. I will also chat with my friends. But most of the time I solve the problem by myself”. Both students HSS51 and IBP6 mentioned their strategy for dealing with negative attitudes and quick recovery from that. Student HSS51 arranged things on hand in order, “ I will write all things down and figure out which one is more urgent. Then I will do it first”. When overwhelmed by too many things at the same time and unwilling to do any of them, she would stop all things on hand and divert to something else that she was more interested in. Afterward, she could come back to deal with things on hold one by one with a fresh mind. It usually took “one night to recover from negative attitudes and continue the work”, said student HSS51. Student IBP6 also chose to “cut off everything, stopping doing any work and just giving time to relax and chill and get ready to start again”.

Self-regulation is an essential aspect of SF. It denotes students regulate themselves according to different periods of time and levels of energy. Student AT18 defined his self-regulation as “not letting myself play all the time, regulate and manage myself”. He claimed to have a strong crisis awareness, “If I find I have wasted time after a certain period of time, I will make adjustments immediately”. Another student AT48 explained how he managed to be self-regulated again after a period of struggle and self-adjustment:

> In the beginning, before the midterm of the first semester of the first year, I felt I was quite self-regulated. Whereas, after some time, I underwent a period of time of struggle. Now I am reducing the use of the mobile phone and other electronic devices. I feel I have adjusted myself (AT48).

Further, students with SF revealed a high level of persistence in the face of external cultural differences and challenges. They endeavored to overcome difficulties. Student AT55 recalled his experience of coping with difficulties in the competition. He had to stay up late and overcome obstacles. Finally, he got through it and took some time to relax. Another student BP3 insisted on communicating with international teachers despite that her poor English language ability "brought about a sense of resistance". She showed both SF and IP by saying:

> It is possible to have this sort of feeling and action. I have concerns about that as well, but I think I have to say and ask this question. No matter how poor my oral English is, I really want to know the result and get things done (BP3).

It is hard to judge whether students shall have positive emotions and attitudes toward self-adjustment, self-regulation, or persistence, such as being optimistic about adjusting or regulating oneself to fit in with the study and life in the new environment, having a sense of achievement after persisting in finishing the difficult task, or mixed or even negative ones while exerting SF. Often the case was students had complicated feelings during the process. Student BP15 depicted it as "a bittersweet feeling" when keeping staying up late to finish an assignment within six weeks.

Notwithstanding that, one definite thing was that students with poor SF, including self-adjustment and self-regulation problems, lack of persistence, procrastination, and

inertia, were susceptible to external impacts and negative feelings. For instance, student AT5 confessed to incurring inertia easily. Because no one in this university strictly regulated students anymore, sometimes he failed to get up early and missed the morning classes. Moreover, his passion for preparing lessons before class always faded away since the start of the semester, which implied a lack of perseverance and continual motivation of him. Student SP17 disclosed a huge problem of herself "procrastination and being lazy". She ascribed that to the low minimum passing score set by the university that she could easily achieve. Although she realized that "students polarize especially in second, third, and fourth years of study. It depends on students themselves to overcome this problem", she still did not adjust her attitudes and behaviors. Another student HSS22 had the intention to adjust his pace but felt extremely uncomfortable and found it hard to put it into practice, "I was really tired at that time (dealing with issues in the student club) and spent almost a year adjusting myself".

Dialectic reflexivity

DR means students reflect on not only their own judgments, beliefs, practices, and inner changes, but also the campus atmosphere, educational system, activities as well as certain social issues, such as feminism and manpower, involution in the educational field, and so forth in a dialectic way, namely critically thinking them from different frames of reference. Compared with MS, students with DR exhibit a more in-depth and thorough mind processing of multiple phenomena they are conscious of. MS is reckoned as the prerequisite for DR and DR further deepens the understanding of the information gained

through MS. Like student AT4 pointed out, “dialectically think about news or information rather than believe them immediately”.

For one thing, students with DR embodied acute insight into the intrapersonal aspect like their opinions and biases, personality and habits, cultural transitions, and competence. Take some students as examples. Student HSS35 showed DR on his personal traits and experiences, “My personality is that I care about others too much. That might be related to my childhood experience. I kind of lack self-confidence because of that”. Student SP50 critically reflected on herself, “I am the sort of person who does not consider others’ value or truly feel they are valuable. I think that is because I care about myself too much”. Moreover, student AT4 dialectically thought about personal transition, “My transition is uncomfortable both mentally and physically. I think it is a long journey that does not come to an end quickly. I think each person lives his or her life in a continuous way of raising the pain threshold”. An international student ISOFTA2 pondered on her experiences as a third-culture kid and interactions with culturally different others:

> I am kind of like a nomad that cannot belong to just one specific group, cultural group. I am just in between. There was a challenge in terms of making friends, but I was able to overcome it through joining different activities and events where I did what I liked to do and met different people who were not like me. So at least we share something other than culture. I think this is really something that helps me along the way (ISOFTA2).

For another, students with DR critically thought about external cultural differences and influences resulting from interpersonal and personal-environmental interactions, such as peer relations and comparison, friend selection and circle, intercultural contact,

campus climate, student management and cultivation, and their influences on themselves. Several students showed their DR by considering the social connection with other Chinese or international students on campus. Student AT41 regarded university as a small society, “When entering this society, it is necessary and appropriate to reflect on things that I do not do very well and reasons why I have conflicts with others. It demands reflections on how to make arrangements and coordinate interpersonal relationships well”. Additionally, student SP17 reflected on the benefits of intercultural contact with international students, “it can not only help me improve my language ability but also let me know more about their cultures. I might promote multiculturalism as well and make people more inclusive”.

Other students critically thought about the student management of the university and personal growth in the campus climate. On the one hand, student BP54 criticized the loose student management of the university, which aggravated the polarization among students. On the other hand, she praised that “the university indeed treats students as young adults”. Student AT55 emphasized “experiencing the process in the campus climate” rather than chasing some utilitarian outcomes, “Winning a prize or having a paper published is ephemeral and just a by-product. Although it will be recorded in my resume, whether I genuinely accomplish that or make it a permanent ability of mine is of greater significance. If it cannot be transformed into a capability of mine, I will not have sustainable development”.

What is more, a handful of students raised certain social issues: educational involution, feminism, and masculinism. They shared their insightful thoughts on the heatedly discussed social topics nowadays, which implied their DR. For example, student

DP43 talked about the issue of "educational involution" through a story, "a student signed up for the language course, and his roommates in the dormitory all followed him to sign up. When asked why they signed up for the language course, they said it was because their roommate had signed up and taken the course". She learned from the story that some students were forward-looking and proactive while others followed the trend blindly and got involved in the involution. Another student SP53 raised the issue of feminism and masculinism. He noticed fierce fights among people concerning that online and critically thought that "they are merely raising the flag and shouting out for their team loudly without much consideration on this issue. If they really devote themselves to this movement, they shall demonstrate their thoughts or thinking processes on that. Therefore, they can convince people by reasoning. Otherwise, they easily get people upset by only saying a slogan and repeating this propaganda".

Some students critically contemplated the inequality and discrimination toward the sexual minority group. They revealed dialectic reflections on the deeply rooted social traditions and cultural norms and appealed for equity and diversity. Like student SP31 argued, "People in the LGBTQ group are as diverse as the majority in society. Some of them are good while some are bad. I just want others to treat them as normal". They also considered social tag, change, and inclusiveness critically. For example, student SP31 and DP32 pointed out that in big cities like Chengdu and Guangzhou, sexual minority groups were more accepted and respected compared with those in small cities and underdeveloped rural areas. Besides that, certain students discussed the issue of "labeling". Some of them expressed their dislike for the socially constructed demarcation

or label, while others elaborated on the positive aspect of the social label and distinction dialectically:

> Being labeled is advantageous for us. It promotes the development of our group. With the label, we can be seen by others at least. Also, people in possession of the same social label can form a strong sense of identity (EC28).
>
> I think individual consciousness can never be independent of social consciousness. Even if I regard myself as a homosexual, asexual or other, society will not make so many classifications. If I tell people in society I am a lesbian, they can understand. Social distinction is at least the first step to be recognized (BP30).

Apart from that, students sometimes reflected on other dimensions of ITC: MS, IP, SF, and RI. Therefore, DR plays an important role throughout the developmental process of ITC. For example, student BP15 indicated the impact of DR on her IP. She was unwilling to make friends before because she thought it was hard to find matched ones. Now she changed her mind and met more people because "they are not necessarily intimate but helpful to me". Another student HSS58 mentioned women's power and gender equality. She stressed the importance of MS as a prerequisite to changes, which indicated her DR on MS:

> I realize the women's power, which strengthens my consciousness of my gender identity and empowers me. I pay attention to the equality issue and read books about feminism. Feminism is not meant to give women more power; rather, it seeks more equality for women or makes women realize their differences from men and latent inequality problems. I realize them so that I can make changes. Many people are unconscious of inequality problems. Thus, they always stay with them. Consciousness leads to changes (HSS58).

Relativistic inclusivity

IP, SF, and DR, enable the transition of students from MS to RI. Inclusivity means students are open to and neutral toward cultural differences. They treat all people equally regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical or mental health, and so on. They also appeal for equal access to resources and opportunities for all. Nevertheless, RI indicates that students are open to but do not necessarily agree with all opinions or give up their own standpoints. Additionally, their levels of tolerance for differences varies dependent on specific people, context, and interpersonal and person-environmental interactions. For example, student HSS13 knew a lesbian student who had a girlfriend and thought that was cool, "no matter what she experiences, she is a brave girl to be herself". However, she later found that lesbian student was impolite and always shouted at others, hence, she kept a social distance from that student. Student DP12 also maintained that one should allow the existence of different voices without sacrificing one's own opinion or stance, as she argued:

> When I stand in others' positions, I will interpret things from a different angle. I do not change my attitude and standpoint, but I can understand others' behaviors (DP12).

The majority of students claimed to stay objective and neutral toward cultural differences. They allowed the co-existence of different cultures and opinions. Also, they neither promoted nor expelled different people and cultures. The fundamental retainment of other people's rights was the first priority. They stuck to not intervening or depriving of that even though their words and deeds were biased. According to student BP25, it was important not to impose her opinions on others. Otherwise, she would be the same as

those prejudiced people. “I think it is okay not to accept or understand others, but you should not attack them. This is their life. If you can just stand by without any attack, they can feel much less pressure”, said student BP25. When confronting people with biased opinions, student AT38 thought the only thing she could do was to suggest instead of forcing them to change because “I have no right to intervene in others’ perspectives and habits”.

Further, a good number of students stressed the fundamental understanding and respect for different opinions and people even if one had no substantial knowledge of them. In their opinions, treating others and their culture equally and non-judgmentally was of great significance. For example, student BP60 thought cultural differences were acceptable and was not very surprised at them. He stressed that culturally different people should respect the cultural norms and practices of each other. International student ISP4 also showed RI toward people from different cultural backgrounds. She would not judge people based on where they come from, “the more respectful to different people and their perspectives, the more knowledgeable can I be of the world and its differences”. Moreover, student HSS58 advocated women having mutual respect for each other, “even though you do not know her, you should not denigrate or disregard her. Instead, you shall keep a respectful attitude”.

It is interesting to find that some students showed respect for others because they thought the things they were doing were irrelevant to them or they had very limited interpersonal interactions. As student AT16 claimed, “I will respect others’ habits and hobbies to some extent, but I will not go too close to them. I think their existence will not have much impact on me, so I feel it is unnecessary for me to go against them”. On the

contrary, some students showed respect for others because they regarded it as the right thing to do that represented justice and equity. For instance, student SP19 wanted to not only help the minority group but also let more people know that equality deserved promoting and existing, “I hope more people reduce bias toward the minority group and no longer treat people in it as abnormal”.

Many students in the minority group or from the student club aiming for diversity and equality stressed the importance of treating different people fairly without discrimination and prejudices. They also empathized and voiced for the disadvantaged minority group. Student BP44 argued that one’s sexual orientation was just like his or her taste. People must not discriminate but view it properly. Student AT55 also thought that the rights of people in the minority group should be protected, “what I am against is the discrimination itself”. As a lesbian, student HSS26 appealed for egalitarianism and hoped all people treat her as normal. She did not put any social tags on herself and welcomed others to come to know her. Nevertheless, she would not stand out and show off her sexual orientation deliberately. Another lesbian student EC28 endeavored to devote her strength to both vulnerable groups: female and LGBTQ. Feeling that people in society had a low level of inclusiveness toward them, she tried her best to improve that situation.

A handful of students also supported cultural integration or compatibility. They advocated for thinking of commonalities in different cultures, transmitting cultures, or keeping one’s inherited cultural traditions and new cultural norms compatible. For example, student BP3 hoped to integrate and accept both cultural aspects, namely Chinese and British cultures, on the SFCU campus. Student AT4 explained the cultural compatibility he upheld, “My principle is that we shall maintain our traditional Chinese

cultural roots with a history of five thousand years. We should hold tight to our cultural foundation without forgetting or discarding it. Based on that, we can accept other cultures". Student BP8 found international students knew very little about China after contact with them. Therefore, she anticipated international students to adapt to the environment at X University and to transmit the Chinese culture to them.

The intercultural atmosphere and contact played an important role in ensuring or increasing RI. As student DP6 indicated, teachers from a variety of countries just like Chinese people from different cities and regions of China, thus, she did not feel an apparent cultural gap or anything special. Student BP15 thought inclusivity was related to one's horizon, "Now I might think I have seen and known all things around me. But what if I see something different? Some time ago, my roommate also talked with me about how disparate people were surrounding us. But after knowing them, I can accept them". Likewise, student SP17 attributed her increased inclusivity to the contact with more things and people, especially those who differentiated mentally and physically, at X University.

For some students, positive attitudes and feelings like willingness, empathy, and interest were key elements of RI. Student HSS22 claimed to have a high level of acceptance, "I am willing to learn other cultural systems and patterns. I will take those into my database and try to understand them...I can relate to and empathize with issues like race and colonization. I have a strong interest in feminism, colonialism, and racialism. I am willing to learn about differences and stay with them...I have a respectful attitude". In contrast, student BP8 said she suffered from forming RI when discussing political issues with students from Hong Kong and Taiwan. She even tried to avoid such

topics in order to stay in harmony with them and keep the group work going. That revealed the doctrine of the mean and collectivism shared by Chinese society (Gao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2011). People had better make compromises and not stand out. Being modest is a virtue and keeping social relationships in tune is the top priority. It also implied the heterogeneity of students' social and ethnic cultural transitions under the influence of RI.

Five dimensions of ITC not only constitute ITC in a dynamic way but also are developmental themselves during students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. In general, students enhanced MS, IP, SF, and/or DR during the academic cultural transition while MS, IP, SF, DR, and/or RI during social and ethnic cultural transitions. Additionally, they had more growth in ITC dimensions during academic and social cultural transitions than ethnic cultural transition. That was related to different transition components (as shown in Table 15) offered by the university or important others like staff and peers. As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic, dormitory arrangement, and some student activities (using only the Chinese language) restricted the intercultural contact between Chinese and international students, which might further lead to their superficial experiences and limited growth during the ethnic transition.

During the academic transition, numerous students referred to their increased ITC. For example, student BP54 referred to her increased MS and IP in the aspect of the EMI teaching approach. She raised the awareness of the meaning of the language course and, in the meanwhile, became more active and brave to speak English in class. Both students HSS35 and AT11 alluded to their increased ITC in the aspect of student-led learning style. Student HSS35 mentioned his transition period, during which his IP, typically

interest and self-determination, was starting to increase whilst student AT11 improved both SF ("adjusting myself to be more self-regulated") and IP ("seeking help from teachers and some outstanding students in professional studies in particular"). Student BP10 displayed an increase in MS, SF, and DR. Reflecting on her experiences in high school and at the start of the first year of university, she adjusted and turned more accepting of her own study pace and efficiency now, "I become more self-accepted. I still have study plans and take it easy with disturbances. I enjoy my pace now".

A few students aimed for research engagement out of interest. They showed the growth of IP in seeking research opportunities or accumulating research experience through curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curricular activities during the academic cultural transition. The aforementioned student HSS36 took part in a SURF project. She confessed to having no idea about doing research prior to university. Whereas, her interest in research and self-starting behaviors in research engagement gradually emerged and increased after entering the university.

During the social cultural transition, quite a few students developed their ITC. For instance, student HSS21 tended to adjust herself to the collective dormitory life. For her, SF was necessary to develop so as to better fit in with others', namely roommates', pace of life in the collective dormitory. In respect of extra-curricular activity participation, students like DP43 and SP45 increased their MS, IP, DR, and/or RI. Student DP43 changed her mind to spare some time to take part in various activities rather than focusing solely on the academic study in the second semester of the first year. Nevertheless, she regarded student club activities as part of but not the whole of her university life. Student SP45 also used to be an academic-oriented student and did not

want to join the student club. But after knowing the university in depth, he began to accept the student club culture and chose one student club, where he got in contact with many friendly peers.

In the student club, students usually had to organize a variety of activities and took on the daily management work. Their IP and SF would be employed and further refined to accumulate more social skills. Student BP25 described herself as “lazy and easy to procrastinate” before but “more calm and prompt in seeking solutions” with an enhanced ability to deal with emergencies in the student club now. Similarly, student HSS49 improved social skills and accumulated “experiences in dealing with difficulties that occur suddenly and I never encountered before” during activities.

Further, many students enhanced ITC when forming social connections and seeking social belonging in student clubs or other contexts on and off campus. Some of them wanted to step out of their comfort zone while others would rather find a comfortable way of social connection and a social circle that they could fit in well. Student BP60 represented the former. He did not participate in many student club activities and dared not talk with peers even though he longed to make friends at the start of university. Afterward, he decided to step out of his comfort zone and turned braver in making social connections, such as asking for peers’ contact information and chatting with those who sat close to them in the language class. In contrast, student AT4 used to be active in making interpersonal relationships. Now he treated peers in the student club with the same (indifferent) attitude toward work, “keep it (social connection) at a steady level”. Even if others persuaded him to make friends and take part in some activities actively, he no longer built social connections easily.

With regard to social identity, student BP42 mentioned the increase in his RI and DR in the student club. He could not accept homosexuality but became more inclusive now because of a lesbian friend he made in the student club, “Before, I would regard that as inappropriate. However, I do not think it is abnormal now. Everyone has his or her own thoughts that are different. They might have things or people they like. They make choices by themselves. We outsiders cannot decide for them but should show them respect. I am more open-minded than before and can accept more differences”. Another two students, one gay and the other lesbian, raised MS, DR, IP, and/or RI toward their own social identity. Student BP14 sensed a gradual change in himself, “Previously, it [social identity as gay] was probably in my sub-consciousness. It becomes salient for me and self-sustained after entering university”. In the face of people with biased views, student DP32 said she would try to argue with them but not make much effort now. Also, she no longer felt upset if she was unable to change their views, “Different voices always exist and they have no great impact on me anymore. In the university, if others do not touch [the topic of sexual minority], I will of course not refer to [my social identity as lesbian]. But if they do, I will not mind talking about that”.

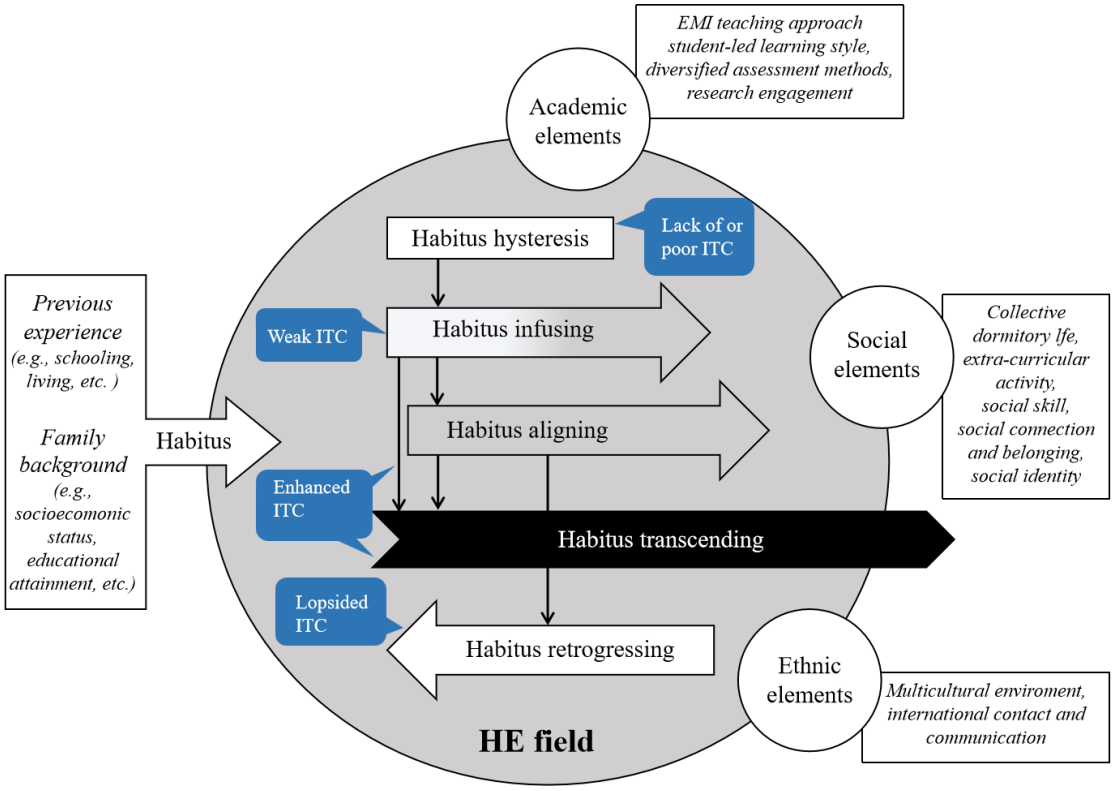
During the ethnic cultural transition, students like AT11 not only manifested RI but also complicated his DR toward the intercultural situation where unintentional offense might occur. Considering the possibility of saying or behaving in an offensive way when interacting with people from different ethnic cultural backgrounds, student AT11 sometimes refrained from intercultural communication to avoid such embarrassing situations, “Actually, I am more than willing to interact with people from other ethnic cultures. But it really needs some thorough thinking about whether [the intercultural

communication] will bring about [negative] effects". Besides that, student DP6 cultivated MS and IP through intercultural contact and communication on campus while student BP8 showed the tendency to step out of the comfort zone constituted by co-national students. With the reinforcement of IP, typically in the aspect of self-determination, student BP8 attempted to embrace more intercultural contact:

> I am more willing to study abroad by myself. Because I know Chinese students are prone to huddle together. I want to avoid that situation, so I intend to go abroad by myself. I shall let myself step out of the comfort zone (BP8).

ITC and habitus hysteresis and change

Figure 3 shows the relationship between students' ITC and habitus hysteresis and change in the HE field based on Figure 2. Students' mobilization of ITC manifests their agency and their developed ITC becomes the capital they accumulated in the HE field. In summary, the lack of or poor ITC, especially IP and SF, often results in academic or social habitus hysteresis. Weak ITC, including MS, IP, SF, and/or DR, will incur an academic habitus infusing and weak ITC, including MS, IP, SF, DR, and/or RI, can lead to social or ethnic habitus infusing. Moreover, habitus aligning and transcending in three cultural transitions might result from enhanced ITC dimensions while habitus retrogressing is related to the lopsided ITC, which has enhanced and worsened dimensions coexisted. Student interviewees cited in this section are almost the same as those in the previous section "Habitus hysteresis and rendering students' transitions as becoming" in order to show the relationship.



Note: higher education (HE), intercultural transitional competence (ITC)

Figure 3 The framework of habitus change, transition components, and ITC in the HE field

Lack of or poor ITC and habitus hysteresis

According to interviews, the lack of or poor ITC, particularly in dimensions of IP and/or SF, of students often led to their *academic habitus hysteresis*. For instance, student DP2 mentioned above displayed a shortage of IP (intrinsic motivation and self-determination). She was always motivated by the deadlines and did not engage in

academic study actively, thus, she remained incompatible with the academic culture and "do not have much change [in habitus]", which implied an academic habitus hysteresis. In a similar manner, the aforementioned student DP34 implied her lack of IP (intrinsic motivation) and the consciousness of the importance of SF. She was often forced by deadlines to study, only completed mandatory assignments, and basically never answered questions asked by the teacher randomly in class. Also, she assumed she could "gradually and naturally adapt to life without the need to learn something on purpose". Therefore, she experienced an academic habitus hysteresis. Student SP39 even looked forward to being motivated and regulated by others instead of taking the initiative on her own, "If the university or teachers regulate me in a systematic way, I will raise my study efficiency". In addition to poor IP (self-determination) and SF (self-regulation), student HSS13 with academic habitus hysteresis revealed too many concerns about her study and certain negative feelings like anxiety and confusion:

> Sometimes I have the consciousness to study but fail to take action…I will find something to do every day, but I do not make the schedule. If I list things I have to do these days, I will push myself too hard (HSS13).

Student SP50 also had poor IP and SF together with negative attitudes, so she was stuck in the academic habitus hysteresis. She was unable to finish reading any book and often felt meaningless. Moreover, she was unwilling to talk with international teachers who taught professional courses because "discussing in English was quite difficult". Plagued by anxiety and negative attitudes, she always spent too much time on a single thing and did not know what was exactly on her mind.

During the social cultural transition, the lack of or poor ITC dimensions like IP, SF, and/or RI would result in *social habitus hysteresis*. For example, the above-mentioned student SP39 showed a social habitus hysteresis because of an absence of IP, SF, and RI in the social aspect. She was not proactive in building or maintaining relationships with peers and did not intend to make any adjustments. Also, she confessed, "the level of my inclusivity is not high. I cannot accept the sexual minority at all. I think it is quite abnormal". Student SP50 had poor SF and IP in respect of social connection, so she incurred a habitus hysteresis. She often failed to adjust herself and possessed negative feelings and attitudes toward social connections. Moreover, she lost the intrinsic motivation to have a try proactively. She even hypnotized herself to recognize the "good sides" of the isolation and marginalization from the main group:

> Without the class collective, I am not forced to study together with other students in one classroom. In addition, it does not seem weird if I am always alone. Sometimes I might feel sad that no one knows my thoughts. Nevertheless, it will not matter if I try to make myself less sensitive (SP50).

Weak ITC and habitus infusing

Habitus infusing was related to weak dimensions of ITC. Here, "weak" denotes an ITC level better than "poor" and worse than "enhanced". For instance, albeit with IP, student BP3 had weak SF in adapting to the EMI approach to teaching and learning, thus she retained *academic habitus infusing* in general. Although student DP6 claimed to improve IP and balance between academic study and student club activities, she was still struggling with self-regulation and had to adjust herself periodically. That implied a

habitus infusing rather than aligning or transcending during the academic cultural transition:

> At that time, I was worried about whether I could coordinate things well in the student club. In the first year, I balanced academic study and student club activities. After that, I balance my program directions. My SF is decided by each period of time and my adaptation is prone to be periodic (DP6).

Several students, including SP19, HSS21, and AT37, also had a relatively weak SF. Both SP19 and HSS21 confessed their problem of procrastination that had negative impacts on their academic study and habitus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, student SP19 incurred severe procrastination problems and got accustomed to downloading and watching all the recordings sent by teachers only one week before the exams. After returning to campus and taking classes onsite, she tried to adjust her habits to finish watching the class recordings every week. Student HSS21 always procrastinated and had to hurry up to finish the assignment every day during the pandemic. “I have to adjust myself gradually”, said student HSS21. Likewise, student AT37 experienced a decrease in his SF because of online learning during the pandemic:

> I had full attendance for almost all courses in the first semester of the first year. Nearly all the teachers whose classes I took knew me because I was more active in class. That motivated me to attend classes. However, during the pandemic, if I get up a little late, I will think about not attending the class (AT37).

Student AT18 numerated his self-starting behaviors, such as attending seminars and reading books relevant to professio[1]nal studies. Whereas, he had weak self-determination in what major to select, “That is a difficult choice for me. I am still hesitating about what to study, Business or Computer Science. I want to work with other

people instead of by myself like a typical science geek". Another two students DP20 and BP23 had both weak IP and SF during the academic cultural transition. Nonetheless, their situations were disparate. Student DP20 disliked the subject of Mathematics but favored other design courses. Therefore, he showed no IP or SF in studying Mathematics but endured it until the end of the university. In the meantime, he devoted more time and interest to the Design class. Student BP23 was so occupied with things in the student club that she barely paid attention to academic study or made study plans. As she expressed:

> I think my plan is not a good one. The student club occupies too much of my time, especially when I have to organize some big events and activities. I dedicate myself to the student club. I need some time to adjust and spare more time for academic study (BP23).

If students had weak MS, IP, SF, DR, and/or RI in social cultural transition, they would probably experience *social habitus infusing*. For instance, student AT5 made light of the social connection, "I am not keen on social networking and do not make friends on purpose. I only ask student sitting beside me in class for contact information if I have academic problems to consult them. Probably I just meet them once and will not ask them for help in the future. We may still be strangers". He reckoned social networking as meaningless but did not reject all opportunities for social contact. In general, he showed a weakness in IP and social habitus infusing. Similarly, student AT18 was indifferent to social connection but could not prevent it from affecting him. Additionally, he struggled with an unhealthy lifestyle when living with other roommates in the dormitory. Overall, he had social habitus infusing due to the deficiency in IP and SF:

> I do not take the initiative to know people. It is perhaps that I sit together with other students as a group, so I exchange my contact information with them. I do not ask for that

> purposefully…I am a little lazy. All my roommates live unhealthy lives. I also do not regulate myself so much (AT18).

Although student HSS35 was sensitive to and reflected on his personality and weaknesses (e.g., losing interest very easily, lacking self-confidence), he employed very limited IP or SF to adapt to the new social environment or transform his habitus. As a consequence, he remained in the habitus infusing stage during the social cultural transition. On the one hand, he was often impacted by others, "If I live together with others, my behaviors will be largely affected. My original thinking patterns will not change, but my living habits will be influenced by others to a great extent". On the other hand, he tended to retreat from trying new things, "Every time I enter a new environment, I will try new things randomly. Ultimately, I will gradually restrain myself and return to the original state". Likewise, student HSS22 was conscious of his long adaptation process to the new social living environment. In the meanwhile, he felt reluctant to take any action or adjust himself actively. Hardly did his weak IP and SF lead MS to RI toward social living. Hence, he mainly displayed habitus infusing in this social transition aspect.

Student HSS13 did not indicate strong or weak IP and SF during the social cultural transition. Nevertheless, she revealed strong negative feelings resulted from the over-sensitivity to family issues and too much thinking about some social phenomenon. She took a part-time job because she wanted to prove herself to and be economically independent of her coercive mother. However, she encountered many difficulties during the work and turned critical of the unequal social status as well as disrespectful people in society. In the end, she quit the part-time job with her social habitus infused.

Unlike the examples mentioned above, several first-year student interviewees, including HSS51, SP52, and BP60, did not show an obvious unwillingness to take action (IP) or make the adjustment (SF). Neither did they lack the awareness of (MS), thoughts about (DR), or openness toward different social cultures (RI). Whereas, according to them, it entailed more time and practice to examine and further enhance their ITC dimensions to completely adapt or transcend their habitus during the social cultural transition.

In terms of the *ethnic habitus infusing*, student AT5 displayed MS toward cultural differences between Chinese and international teachers. Despite that, he felt reluctant to live with international students, "I am not inclined to live with some international students because I am afraid of huge cultural differences between us. What if they disturb my normal work and rest? However, in terms of academic study, I am willing to study and communicate with them. In aspects of eating, clothing, housing, and transportation, I think I get along with local students better". That manifested his weak IP and RI as well as the consequent habitus infusing during the intercultural contact. In the same vein, student AT40 implied her weak RI and an infused rather than aligned or transcended ethnic habitus. On the one hand, she suggested increasing the ratio of international students on campus, whereas, on the other hand, she was unwilling to share the dormitory with them because "there could be huge differences in our living habits".

The case of student AT37 was a little different. He newly entered the university and just started to get immersed in the multicultural atmosphere. Therefore, he was undergoing ethnic habitus infusing recently. According to him, intercultural contact and

communication with peers from different countries had a subtle influence on his mindset and viewpoints. Nevertheless, it entailed more time to adapt.

Enhanced ITC and habitus aligning and transcending

With regard to the *academic habitus aligning*, the previously mentioned student AT11 increased her MS, IP, and SF during the academic cultural transition. She turned more self-regulated and proactive in seeking resources from teachers and peers, thus, she achieved academic habitus alignment. Student BP10 strengthened her SF and succeeded in balancing different extra-curricular activities and academic study. More importantly, she came up with a useful strategy of shifting focus periodically and a comfortable way of working and relaxing. In addition to SF, student HSS22 displayed MS (i.e., awareness of one's own interest and willingness) and IP (i.e., strong self-determination and resolute self-starting behaviors). They together contributed to his academic habitus aligning:

> I think the traditional public universities might not be suitable for me because of their pedagogy and possible interpersonal contact. X University has greater inclusiveness and better attitudes. I think I am quite sensitive to the environment, including physical, academic, and cultural ones…I always give earnest suggestions and feedback to teachers. Also, I wrote emails to our program director last week to ask whether I could transfer the program because it seems to me irritating…The Linguistics class is optional and I have been interested in that since very early. Thus, I choose all Linguistics courses in the English Department (HSS22).

The DR of student DP43 was given as an example in the preceding section "ITC dimensions and development" (p.130). Besides that, her MS, IP, and SF functioned to

facilitate the academic habitus aligning process. She was conscious that X University was different from traditional public universities since it offered a more internationalized platform where she could brainstorm with teachers. She also sought help from peers, searched for library resources and online courses by herself because "I am willing to learn", and sent emails to the academic advisor when she had problems with her major. In addition, she made a to-do list every day and was flexible with the schedule, "I will think about what I am going to do this week or in the long run roughly and then detail it into every day". The IP and DR of student BP54 were presented as examples previously as well (p.129, 137). Besides that, she showcased MS in the academic atmosphere of X University, which differed from the examination-oriented education she had before, and SF in recovering from a period of time of confusion by attending a language course and making plans. These dimensions of ITC enabled BP54 to align her habitus with the new academic culture.

In terms of the *academic habitus transcending*, the aforementioned student DP12 transformed her academic habitus with the equipment of MS, IP, SF, and DR. She was attentive to her deficiency in academic study. Moreover, she had strong determination, took action, and adjusted her focus actively to cope with that. She actively sought advice from teachers and senior students. Even if she might not get answers from the discussion directly, she was positive that she could at least get a better understanding of the issue. Further, she reflected on her thinking and "attempted to view things from more than one angle". Thanks to his MS, IP, and SF, student SP9 got his academic habitus transformed, as he argued:

> I learn a lot and broaden my horizon at X University. It is different from other universities and provides students with great free space…Now I still make academic study a top priority and prepare for future development...I practice speaking English with my roommates. I have a lot of things on hand, but I think I can overcome all difficulties (SP9).

Student AT16 also possessed MS, IP, and SF and achieved the academic habitus transcendence. He was conscious of the difference between high school and university education. Relied on MS, he was clear about learning goals at university and able to make decisions and take action proactively out of intrinsic motivation. In the meanwhile, he flexibly adjusted his study and rest, as he put in Chinese "*zhang chi you du"*, which meant a balance obtained by loose and tight self-management alternatively.

Regarding *social habitus aligning*, student interviewees got their habitus aligned with the new social culture by enhancing one or more ITC dimensions. For example, student DP43 confessed she had social phobia in the past, "I felt quite nervous before the first team-building in the student club. I supposed other members had already formed a small group and would not engage me in". Whereas, she found that if she took the initiative (IP) to talk, the establishment of social connection became easier and her social phobia would disappear, "I find it is not so hard to make friends if I start to talk. So I am not afraid of interacting with other people anymore". Student BP42 also referred to his change in the aspect of social connection. He turned more brave and proactive (IP) in trying new things and having interpersonal communication. Concomitantly, he became more outgoing, open-minded, and accepting of individual and social cultural differences, which indicated his habitus aligning. Another student AT48 succeeded in recovering from the transition shock that he encountered at the start of the university and then

overcoming self-regulation problems by utilizing SF (mentioned in the previous section p.126) and IP (e.g., setting up a new student club and being the chair of another student club). Based on IP and SF, two students AT46 and SP53 were able to adapt their habitus to the independent way of social living and social connection at university, respectively.

What is more, student AT24 was sensitive (MS) to the different characteristics of various students, some of whom were devoted to internship, commercial competitions, and social networking more than academic study. He acknowledged (DR) that everyone lived in their own way and seldom compared himself with others around. In addition, he decided (IP) what student club to join and made plans for the work in the student club. Therefore, he obtained social habitus alignment. Besides the aforementioned SF, student BP10 had strong IP, DR, and RI. She found most extra-curricular activities awesome with high quality that could assist with her application for postgraduate study in the future. Thus, she participated in various extra-curricular activities and projects to learn new things and earn awards from them. Also, as a leader of a student club, she turned to tolerate other members' mistakes instead of complaining about them like she did before, "I think mutual understanding is the most important thing for teamwork. How to be a good leader and motivate the team seem to me soft powers". These ITC dimensions together contributed to her habitus aligning with social activities, "I feel like a fish in the water".

In possession of all dimensions of ITC, students like AT41 and AT11 aligned their habitus with the collective dormitory life or social connection on campus. Realizing that "after entering university, students should be more independent, freer, and have more thoughts. Interpersonal relationships become more complex", student AT41 attended to

his wording and spared some time to hang out with his roommates. Even if having conflicts, he was willing to have a talk with them to reconcile or solve the problem. Growing up in a small city, student AT11 thought she might not be so open-minded before. After entering the university, she found others had high inclusivity and became more proactive in daily life. She was willing to interact with peers and go to new places and always considered the potential consequence before interpersonal communication.

To accomplish *social habitus transcendence*, student BP23 relied on MS toward the gap between her personality and the unfamiliar social environment and mobilized SF and DR to locate a proper way of social connection and enhance RI. Besides RI, student DP12 exhibited a high level of IP in participating in social activities and DR toward social issues, which together assisted with transcending her social habitus. Student AT4 succeeded in the social habitus transcendence by virtue of IP, SF, and DR. He not only critically thought about but also determined and adjusted his social networking to a milder way. Another student SP19 enhanced MS, IP, DR, and RI. She was sensitive to distinctions in societies, actively joined in various extra-curricular activities, treated and respected others in society fairly, and reflected on the inclusiveness of society, “I think an obvious sign of social progress is inclusiveness. I see some members in our student club cannot accept [LGBTQ], and neither can some parents. I hope we make efforts to voice for [LGBTQ] and raise the social acceptance for them when we become parents”. In possession of MS, SF, DR, and RI, student HSS58 was able to transcend her social habitus as well. She realized student groups were diverse due to their disparate social, familial, and educational backgrounds. She adjusted herself to the new social environment at a fast speed. In addition, she strengthened her personal power as a female

by means of critical thinking and maintained a grateful attitude toward others despite external negative impacts.

In addition, students AT7, BP8, and BP25 transcended their social habitus by virtue of all dimensions of ITC. Student AT7 was conscious of his personal traits, curious about new things, proactive in making new friends out of intrinsic motivation, and open to social cultural differences. Moreover, he could get familiar with the new environment quickly and had thorough reflections on his way of social connection, “I think the happiness I have while staying with friends is temporary. Now I do more things by myself to obtain a sense of achievement”. Student BP8 was sensitive to and interested in various social cultural differences, including those among student clubs as small social groups. She was proactive in experiencing the organizational culture of the student club and participating in club activities. What is more, she adjusted her way of social connection in the new university environment, reflected on interpersonal communication, and possessed high acceptance and empathy for different others. As the chairperson of a student club appealing for diversity and equality in society, student BP25 had insights into social issues, made efforts for social fairness, respected discrepancies, and in the meanwhile, improved her management skills and adjusted her way of social connection.

Further, a handful of students got their *ethnic habitus aligned*. Besides MS toward differences among ethnic cultures, student AT16 utilized SF to accustom himself to the unfamiliar context. Moreover, he showed DR on the necessity to step out of the comfort zone, “We have to step out of the comfort zone. Even when we study at L University, we have to jump out of our small circles of co-national friends. Thus we can have a better intercultural experience”. Student AT7 acquired ethnic habitus aligning as a consequence

of all dimensions of ITC. He was sensitive and open to ethnic cultural differences and had thorough reflections on them. More importantly, he was able to shift communication patterns to align with different ethnic cultural contexts, “I do not differentiate between students from different countries. I can shift different communication patterns to interact with them”. In the same vein, student BP23 possessed all dimensions of ITC and aligned her habitus with the environment that incorporated diverse ethnic cultures and people inherited them. As she put it, those cultures and people brought her new knowledge and fresh ideas. She felt curious and thought the ethnic habitus aligning process was meaningful.

In terms of *ethnic habitus transcendence*, the aforementioned student DP12, with ample DR on ethnic cultural issues, transitioned from MS to RI and accomplished ethnic habitus transcendence. Both students BP14 and HSS58 employed MS, DR, and RI to transcend their ethnic habitus. Student BP14 argued he never had adaptation problems in any new ethnic cultural environment. He also reflected and put emphasis on the national cultural confidence and the formation of one’s own cultural identity. Similar to him, HSS58 turned more confident about her own values and practices no matter in which ethnic (i.e., American or Chinese) cultural context. In other words, she was able to transcend her ethnic habitus rather than align it with any specific ethnic cultural context.

Lopsided ITC and habitus retrogressing

The lopsided ITC meant students had certain dimensions like MS and DR increased while other dimensions like IP, SF, and RI decreased simultaneously. The consequence

seemed to them was a habitus retrogression. Two relevant cases of students BP15 and AT56 were discovered from all the interviews. Although they were few in number, they revealed significant information that was worthy of mention here. Student BP15 implied her habitus retrogressing was related to an enhanced MS in external information while a weakened SF in maintaining inner peace:

> I think previously in the first year, I still concentrated on what I thought from the inner heart. But I retrogressed in the second year. I feel I no longer focus on my inner thoughts. I often check WeChat messages and receive the stimuli of new things outside. I do not know why I become so. Those things are eye-opening but indeed disturb my inner thoughts (BP15).

The above-mentioned case of student AT56 (p.111), in contrast, paid more attention to her inner feelings than the outer world. Her increased DR in internal and external contradictions and decreased RI and IP in cherishing and establishing new interpersonal relationships could explain her retrogression from active to passive dispositions.

Discussion

This study examines components and processes of students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions, habitus hysteresis and change, dimensions and development of ITC, as well as the interplay between them. First, to fully acknowledge the complexity of students' lived realities (Gravett et al., 2020), this study simultaneously investigates students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. They are different from each other in light of components and processes.

The academic cultural transition consists of the EMI teaching approach, student-led learning style, research engagement, and diversified assessment methods. In previous studies, the EMI teaching approach posed challenges for students and could cause great anxiety and stress (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Sultana, 2014). According to Yang et al. (2020), students who were cultivated by the teacher-oriented and teacher-dependent educational system had low expectations and motivation to adapt to the student-led learning at university. However, in this study, students were generally positive toward the EMI teaching approach and enthusiastic about the student-led learning style in spite of some difficulties and challenges. Similar to the findings generated by Tran (2011), a few Chinese students in this study felt frustrated about the diversified assessment methods probably because they got accustomed to being assessed through examinations solely (Leedham, 2014).

During the academic cultural transition, most undergraduate students endeavored to change their mindsets from passive to active ones and adapt to the academic study at SFCU. Therefore, they underwent substantial transformations during the academic

cultural transition. Resonating with the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000), it is a continuous and iterative process that may become lifelong learning rather than disjointed periods in students' life as claimed by previous studies (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008).

On the contrary, the social cultural transition of almost all undergraduate students seemed to be reconciled instead of transformed. Although a few of them encountered culture shock in their early campus days by exposure to certain student subcultures or social phenomena, they promptly recovered from it. Most Chinese students could negotiate and balance disparities and complexities in a comfortable manner. Probably it is because they are in the majority and their living habits in the familiar Chinese social context are not too diverse to reconcile. For most international students, their social life on campus was greatly restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This inevitable external influence might explain their untransformed social cultural transition.

The social cultural transition includes aspects of collective dormitory life, extra-curricular activity, social skill, social connection and belonging, and social identity. Living in the collective dormitory was a challenge for most Chinese undergraduate students. All students thought highly of extra-curricular activities at university, through which some of them attempted to improve their social skills while others sought social connection and belonging. According to Xie (2018), diverse student activities at SFCUs also facilitated students' adaptation to studying and living abroad later.

What is more, undergraduate students mainly experienced ethnic cultural transition in terms of the multicultural atmosphere, intercultural contact and communication. In

general, their contact and communication with people from different ethnic cultural backgrounds were limited, and their cultural identities thereby remained intact. The COVID-19 pandemic and cross-border restrictions were the major reasons. For Chinese students, the local living environment might reduce the acculturation stress brought about by a multicultural learning environment. They were unable to experience ethnic cultural transition in a way like in a "real" multicultural context, such as in a foreign country. They might overestimate their ethnic cultural transition in line with their expectations.

Theoretical implications

Habitus change contributing to the student transition theory

Together with habitus hysteresis, different forms of habitus change – infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing – enrich the theoretical base of habitus. They also challenge the conventional wisdom of student transition that prioritizes the adaptation to HEIs. Other possibilities like habitus infusing, transcending, and retrogressing during the negotiation with HEIs are foreseeable and shall be fully understood.

Bourdieu (1977) and a great many other researchers regarded habitus hysteresis as a negative mismatch that entails being redressed (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Qing, 2017; Weng, 2020). Very few researchers like Matsunaga et al. (2020) interpreted the concept of hysteresis in a positive way. They contended that hysteresis encounters represented "initiation of alternative actions and capacity to embrace learning opportunities" (Matsunaga et al., 2020, p. 5) rather than a label of deficit. I hold the same opinion in this

study and consider habitus hysteresis symbolizes a student-university misalignment rather than a lopsided deficit of students. Likewise, habitus retrogressing is not students' fault. It exactly evidences that habitus change is a complex, iterative, and becoming process. In the life courses of individuals, coming back and forth or going up and down in transition is nothing but normal (Gravett, 2021). The onus is on the university to recognize the nature of students' growth and provide support to them if needed.

Habitus infusing means the mixture of students' habitus with the new environment. It implies a period full of confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, discomfort, and struggle. It is similar to but not the same as the notion of "cleft" habitus (Bourdieu, 1999). Ivemark and Ambrose (2021) described students with cleft habitus as Strangers, who had one foot in their original environment and another in the new university environment. Part of their habitus (dispositions) align with the university while other parts not. It is a split process with emotional injuries, a division against the self (Bourdieu, 1999). Nevertheless, habitus infusing tends to be an immersion process. New elements in the environment permeate into and tangle with the self rather than split it. In contrast, students experience habitus aligning by fully engaging themselves with others in the environment. They are likely to make compromises, reconcile, and balance constantly during the process. Nevertheless, the outcome is always an overall interpersonal harmony and/or person-environment fit (Kulik et al., 1987). Ivemark and Ambrose (2021) described this kind of students as adjusters, who could quickly overcome challenges and develop self-efficacy. In addition, they held positive attitudes toward their overall transition experiences.

Students are also able to transcend their habitus. In this respect, they mainly undergo a drastic intrapersonal change of disposition, aptitude, personality, or mindset regardless

of institutional concerns and expectations. That strikes a chord with what Mills (2008) discovered among marginalized students, who developed a transformative habitus by exerting agency to create opportunities, find alternatives, and make efforts to transform situations. They were not bound by institutional norms and values but paved the way for themselves (Mills, 2008). Lehmann (2014) also explored the habitus transformative process of university students. Although they developed new dispositions and gained cultural capital, they still felt ambivalent about allegiances or dismissals of their working-class roots and sometimes perceived themselves as cultural outsiders (Lehmann, 2014). I would rather consider that as habitus infusing or on the way to habitus transcendence.

This study connects habitus hysteresis and change with academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Very limited attention was paid to that in prior research. Although Xie and Reay (2020) examined the compartmentalized fit between students' habitus and the institutional habitus in the aspect of academic learning and campus life, they oversimplified students' habitus at the two ends: hysteresis and transformation. Moreover, they failed to take into account the ethnic cultural transition of students. The embeddedness of habitus hysteresis and change in three cultural transitions helps to fully express the transition-as-becoming proposition in HE research. Becoming is an emergent, constitutive, and evolving movement, which concerns the "continual production of differentiation" and describes the "immanent unfolding of the self" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1262).

Scholars like Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018), Gravett (2021), and Amundsen (2021) proposed transition metaphors like rhizome and waterfall, however, they either remained in the conceptual stage or focused on a small number of students in particular,

whose narrations could only reflect individual transition experiences rather than the whole picture. By bringing together existent transition metaphors and Bourdieu's thinking tool of habitus, this study conceptualizes a theoretical framework of habitus change, transition components, capital, and agency in the HE field (as shown in Figure 2) relied on a comparatively larger student population from diverse cultures on an internationalized campus. It contributes to capture what profound and long-lasting changes take place in students' lived realities and uncover the mechanism underlying their superficial performance and engagement.

Academic, social, and ethnic habitus hysteresis and change may "combine together in complex configurations that seem momentarily stable" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1258). They can interplay or mutually benefit each other. They can also come apart and no longer fit together, such as habitus hysteresis in social connection while habitus infusing or aligning in activity participation of certain students in this study. This assemblage and dis-assemblage (Amundsen, 2021) embedded in students' habitus change envisage transition as a sophisticated web with interlinks and loopholes. Students forge webs of what goes on inside and outside HEIs in an arrangement (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018) or disarrangement (Amundsen, 2021). Their habitus combines individual histories and trajectories with those of their family, school, and other collectivities in a constantly changing manner. The ongoing weave of the web (habitus) and the interchangeability of interlinks and loopholes, assemblage and dis-assemblage (habitus change) demonstrate the mutability of student transition.

Different forms of habitus change challenge the normative understanding of student transition that searches for homogeneous pathways or "rites of passage" (Tinto, 1998) to

success. The metaphor of rhizome symbolizes the "diversity and multiplicity of not just experiences but of the self" (Gravett, 2021, p. 1512). Rhizomes have various entryways, exits, and connections. With internal structures and logic, they grow in non-linear pathways and are "subject to recursive iterations which produce often accidental becomings" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1261). Like the rhizome, habitus incarnates the "self-experiences" of students and is always in the middle without reaching its destination (Gravett, 2021). Its diverse changes reveal student transition as a rhizomatic becoming process. Being structured and structuring the soil (HE environment), they spread in different directions and turn into different forms continuously. This refutes the notion of linear and homogeneous student transition, which has fixed turning points.

Furthermore, the habitus change has neither the start nor the end by integrating past and present experiences and actions (Bourdieu, 1977) of students. Hence, they deviate student transition from induction and linear narratives and embody the evolving and dynamic nature of it as becoming. Amundsen (2021) compared transition-as-becoming to the waterfall, which was flowing and self-differentiating into bubbles, trickles, mist, etc., all the time. Like waterfall, habitus effectuates self-differentiation. It also keeps being changed by and changing the environment. Students vary in terms of their habitus and habitus change. Additionally, within an individual student, habitus and habitus change vary in different transition aspects and processes. This variation is in a perpetual movement like a waterfall that keeps flowing without stop. However, the metaphor of waterfall (uni-directional flow) cannot explain the reiterative nature of transition embodied specifically in habitus retrogressing. I recommend viewing student transition as ever-flowing water instead, which proceeds in multiple entryways and exits.

ITC contributing to the student transition theory

In addition, this study explores how students manage complex transitions and dynamic habitus change by conceptualizing ITC. In existing student transition literature, external influences enforced by HEIs outweigh students' internal influences. Further, empirical studies on the latter either emphasize certain psychological factors like self-efficacy (Kyndt et al., 2019) or ambiguously indicate students' agency. These include "study" (e.g., study skills and time management), "effort" (e.g., motivation and commitment), and "culture" (e.g., feelings of belonging). Bowles et al. (2014) summarized these as student-centered enablers of a successful transition to HE. It combines students' abilities with psychological elements. ITC may address this gap since it manifests students' agency in navigating different components and processes of academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions in a dynamic manner. It reorients the dominant discourse of student transition from an institution-centered to a student-centered one. Apart from influences from the university side, students can manage their transitions actively and effectively.

ITC is defined as students' ability to transition to intercultural situations, which accommodate various academic, social, and/or ethnic cultural components, in a proper and effective way. It has five dimensions: MS, IP, SF, DR, and RI. MS means students are aware of both internal changes and external differences resulting from various academic, social, and ethnic cultures. Usually, it emerges at the beginning of students' ITC development. IP connotes students' self-determination and self-starting behaviors in

making and carrying out plans and seeking resources. This strikes a chord with the theory of student engagement (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021; Krause & Coates, 2008) but prolongs students' motivation and involvement until later years of university life. SF shows students' ability to regulate and adjust themselves through various strategies. It resembles the concept of self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 1995; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011) but emerges not only in students' academic cultural transition but also in their social and ethnic cultural transitions. Students with RI can transpositionally consider and respect disparate viewpoints and behaviors with great empathy, and those with DR will reflect on multiple things concerning personality, cultural transition, social phenomena, and so on.

ITC is in transition itself. Not only can five dimensions separately evolve into stronger ones, but also they jointly enable ITC to develop on a continuum without an ultimate end. The transition from MS to RI resonates with the intermediate-to-mature level of intercultural maturity development (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Whereas, ITC does not develop in a linear way as depicted in the intercultural maturity or constructivist-development theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994). With interlinked dimensions, ITC evolves in a dynamic and fluid way. It also problematizes previous IC studies, which attached importance to certain fixed aspects of IC, such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998), while neglecting its vitality and fluidity. Moreover, ITC differs from existent IC constructs and models in that it emphasizes the capacity of students under the particular circumstances of three cultural transitions to SFCU. Therefore, this study adopts the grounded theory method to generate a new theory of ITC instead of employing existent IC constructs and models.

Associating students' ITC with three cultural transitions captures the perpetual fluctuation of transition as a process of becoming (Gale & Parker, 2014). ITC is not bound to the period and field of HE but extends to one's lifelong journey. It can profoundly empower intercultural personhood and global citizenship (Volet & Jones, 2012) in the long run. What is more, a person-environmental perspective is added to the widely accepted interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives of IC. Related to students' academic and social cultural transitions, the person-environmental perspective emphasizes students' negotiation with or adaptation to the HEI. The interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives refer to the communication between students and others in HEIs and their intrapersonal development, which connect with students' ethnic and social cultural transitions.

ITC also helps to explain students' agency in habitus hysteresis and change (as shown in Figure 3). The lack of or poor ITC dimensions will lead to habitus hysteresis and any weak ITC dimensions will result in habitus infusing. What is more, the enhanced ITC can contribute to habitus aligning or transcending of students while the lopsided ITC (combination of weak and enhanced dimensions) will lead to their habitus retrogressing. Hardly any Chinese undergraduate students related RI to their academic habitus or transition in interviews. Students' absolute repudiation and criticism of their previously experienced academic culture (i.e., Chinese traditional education) or ignorance of the possibility of integrating their former learning habitus with that of the HEI (Thomas, 2002) may be the latent cause for that.

In summary, the discussion of students' transitions, habitus change, and ITC in the HE field alludes to the complex interactions between field, habitus, and cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1990b). Various aspects of academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions embedded in the HE field impart to students its institutional culture and norms and exert influence on them. Students' transition processes and practices are constantly structured by the HE field. If there is a disjuncture between their habitus and the institutional habitus, they will remain in habitus hysteresis or get their habitus infused by the institutional culture and norms. They can also reconcile the mismatch in a more active way through habitus aligning or transcending. Moreover, students have the ability and initiative to shape their habitus. They develop ITC as embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990b) and utilize ITC to influence their orientations and practices. They are conscious of cultural differences, actively engage in various activities and implement strategies, employ critical thinking, and hold inclusiveness towards the underprivileged. This accumulated cultural capital not only nurtures students' habitus but also helps the HEI build a good academic reputation and become more inclusive and open to diversity.

Practical implications

With regard to the practical implications of this study, HEIs including SFCUs shall transform their understanding of students' transitions and habitus change, and implement effective strategies to facilitate their ITC development and continuous transitions in the long run. Gravett (2021) suggested a new paradigm to re-theorize the approach to understanding students' transitions as becoming. Based on it, I figured out practical implications regarding students' habitus and its interplay with the field (as shown in Figure 4). The left column in Figure 4 shows the traditional paradigm of student

transition and habitus while the right column shows the new framing of student transition and habitus according to findings. All these efforts shall be based on a thorough understanding of transition characteristics through the lens of habitus change and its interplay with the field. Students are heterogeneous and agentic, whose transitions are dynamic and continuous. The HEI shall play a supportive role as a facilitator rather than a dictator.

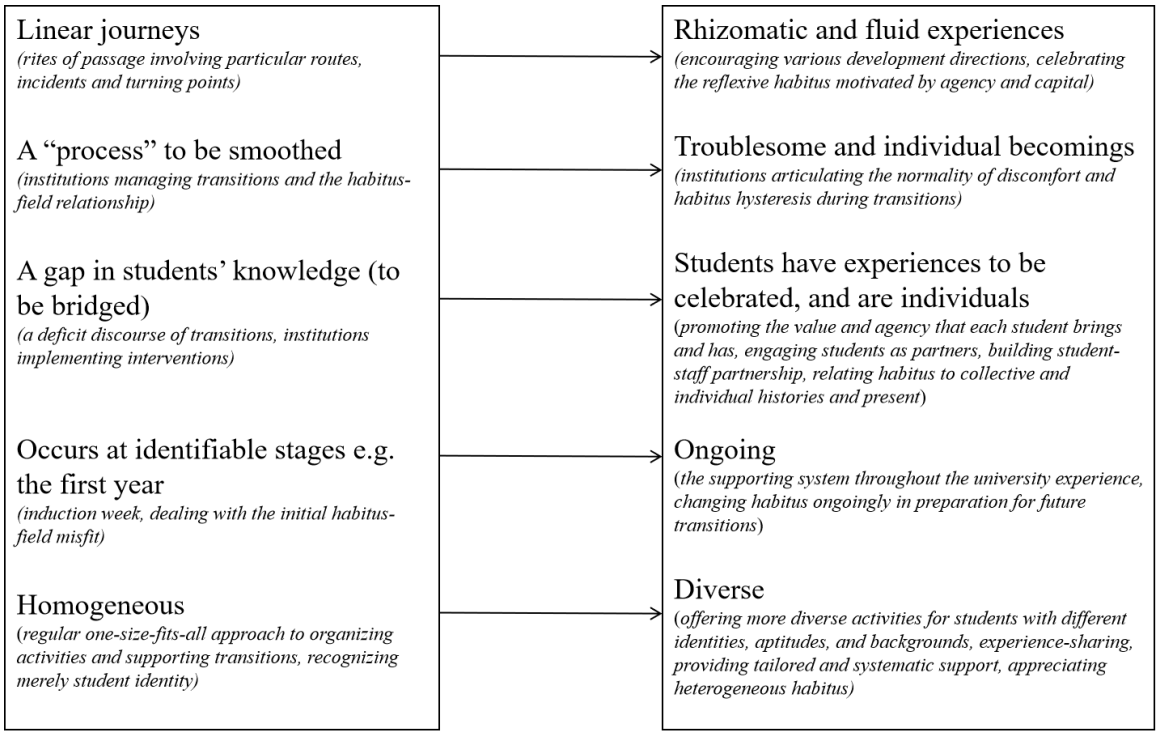


Figure 4 The shift from a traditional to a new framing of student transition and habitus (partly adapted from Gravett (2021))

In the traditional paradigm, students' transitions are regarded as rites of passage that involve particular routes, incidents and turning points. One implication will be for HEIs to gain a new understanding of the rhizomatic and fluid experiences of students that reflects their various development directions and celebrates their reflexive habitus.

Practically, they can activate various kinds of resources, curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curricular activities to stimulate students' agency and strengthen their critical thinking skills. It is beneficial to offer extra assistance for first-year students to become accustomed to the EMI teaching approach. Similar to Han's (2022) finding in an SFCU, prior English proficiency and motivation of students influenced their EMI learning experiences at X University. In that, academic staff shall take students' language ability and motivation into consideration when designing and delivering courses with tailored pedagogical strategies. Some first-year students in interviews were confused about what the student-led learning style was and how to mobilize that. To help students acquire academic capital, HEIs shall explicate the student-led learning style by giving students more practical advice and guidance, such as promoting student role models who adopt student-led learning. HEIs could offer more research opportunities for students in lower grades to arouse their research interests and enhance their research ability at an earlier stage. Moreover, diversified assessments must be organized in a more systematic way and introduced to students more clearly. A few students complained that the deadlines for many assessments were squeezed into a limited time period, and their requirements were somewhat ambiguous. The aim of assessment should not sacrifice for its means, and diversity should not bring about redundancy.

In addition, more diverse extra-curricular activities shall be encouraged and enriched to engage students, improving their social skills and strengthening their social connection and belonging. HEIs must make efforts to create a more inclusive and equal environment so that the social identity of underprivileged students can be better protected. On the one hand, university administrators must be willing to listen to and address underrepresented

students' concerns. In this study, the Student Affairs administrators play an active coordinator role and offer students valuable suggestions on adjusting their activities and avoiding sensitive words like sexual minorities so that at least the baseline of the community could be reached. Mutual respect along with effective communication is demanded between administrators and students. On the other hand, university leaders may complicate their perceptions of student activism and engagement. Better promotion of mutual understanding between students with different identities, reduced bias and discrimination, and more effective approaches that equip students with more ethnorelativist perspectives through curriculum and co-curriculum are thus called upon.

HEIs had better create more opportunities for intercultural contact and communication among students as well. For example, they can revise the dormitory allocation policies and curriculum arrangement to better integrate Chinese and international students (Hang & Zhang, 2022), which many student interviewees claimed intentionally or unintentionally hindered their contact with other cultures and students. Furthermore, they shall enhance the multicultural atmosphere by bringing in more international staff, students, partnerships, projects, activities, and other resources (Knight, 2004).

Instead of the old-fashioned thinking of student transition as a process to be smoothed or a gap to be bridged, HEIs shall articulate the normality of discomfort and habitus hysteresis during transitions through teaching programs, induction activities, and promotion documents (Gravett, 2021). Moreover, HEIs could step back from their dominant positions in managing student transition and the habitus-field relationship through interventions. It is essential to revisit the static policy framing that stresses

barriers to access as well as transform the institutional cultural norms and practices and pedagogical regimes "in the direction of epistemic inclusivity and pedagogical flexibility" (Katartzi & Hayward, 2020, p. 2378). The value brought by students and their agency and becomings shall be celebrated. Past experience has told us that engaging students as partners and building a student-staff partnership were beneficial to student transition (Ollis & Gravett, 2020). It also suggests relating students' habitus (change) to their collective and individual past and present, such as taking into account their previous schooling when designing the curriculum. In this study, students who completed senior high overseas found it hard to adapt to the math course in the foundation year while those who completed senior high domestically did not.

Since student transition is ongoing more than certain identifiable stages like the first year. Apart from the induction week focusing on the habitus-field misfit at the inception of transition, it is crucial to offer and improve the supporting system, incorporating various resources and supportive staff and advisors, throughout the university experience. Students will confront different problems and misfits and continuously change their habitus along the transition path. HEIs had better attend to their needs in a timely manner and facilitate their growth so as to prepare them for future transitions like in the workplace. One important thing to keep in mind is that their transition and habitus change are not homogeneous but diverse. Traditional one-size-fits-all approaches to organizing activities and supporting transitions are no longer feasible or effective. Institutions can offer more diverse activities for students with different identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race), aptitudes, and backgrounds (e.g., social class, socioeconomic status, ethnic culture). In their study, McCoy and Winkle-Wagner (2015) evidenced that summer

institutes supported students of color to develop a scholarly habitus by fostering confidence, cultivating a passion for scholarship, and identifying as emerging scholars. It is meaningful to involve those students in experience-sharing. More importantly, institutions shall provide tailored and systematic support to meet different students' demands, appreciating their heterogeneous academic, social, and ethnic habitus instead of treating them in the same way in light of their student identity.

In the meantime, HEIs shall facilitate students' ITC development. Concurring with Zhu and Feng (2021), this study suggests that ITC courses shall be carried out or improved to target students' real situations and needs during academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. It is also feasible to integrate ITC into subject courses and let students realize the importance of ITC. Compared with the professional knowledge students have to apprehend for the sake of their future careers, ITC is the soft power that can benefit students in the long run.

Students should improve their ITC from the five aspects to smooth their academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions as well as achieve habitus alignment or transcendence. They should raise their awareness of internal and external changes while keeping their MS in check. Overly-sensitive people have difficulty extricating themselves from culture shock, self-doubt, or other negative emotions. IP and SF are also important. Students learn to make self-determined decisions and conduct them out of intrinsic motivation, such as interest and willingness. They must concurrently and constantly adjust their thoughts and behaviors and stay self-regulated to maintain a state of equilibrium. Based on MS, IP, and SF, Chinese undergraduate students, in particular, should form and strengthen their RI, not only in social and ethnic cultural transitions but

also in the academic cultural transition. They shall adopt certain strategies to reconcile and integrate the old and new academic cultural values and practices; otherwise, they will suffer to get rid of the old traditional one, which is, in fact, not completely dispensable. If they open-mindedly embrace their previous learning experiences and habitus and blend them with the expectations and institutional habitus of the HEI, they can relieve themselves from the concern of complete assimilation and reduce stress. It is necessary for students to frequently reflect on themselves and the external world to nurture critical thinking in both academic study and sociocultural life.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, in order to amplify the diversity of the research sample, I engaged both international and Chinese undergraduate students. The number of international undergraduate students who participated in interviews was smaller than that of Chinese undergraduate students. Whereas, it reflected the overall student population well. Chinese undergraduate students took the majority at X University. In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and cross-border restrictions, international students' access to campus was more limited than Chinese students'. Therefore, the exploration of transition and habitus hysteresis and changes relied more on the Chinese student sample. In the future study, I will try to get more international students involved who are able to return to campus and have transition experiences.

Further, this study takes place in a single HEI – X University. As an SFCU, it is quite special. On the one hand, it resembles HEIs in some Euro-American countries in terms of the fenceless campus and EMI in teaching and learning. It also adopts the quality assurance system of British universities and offers the "2+2" articulation program. On the other hand, it enrolls the majority of undergraduate students from Mainland China through *gao kao* like other indigenous HEIs in China. The hybrid nature of SFCU shares similarities with and, in the meantime, differs from HEIs in China and other countries. Albeit that, the issues investigated in this context may be generalized to other HEIs that accommodate students with different cultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnic, sexual orientation, etc.) and/or introduce EMI, international partnerships and projects to promote internationalization at home (e.g., TNHE in China, etc.).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore students' academic, social, and ethnic transitions on the international campus of SFCU, how their habitus (change) manifestes those transition as becoming and how they mobilize ITC as an agentic power to influence their habitus (change). The qualitative research method is adopted because it can help to understand the phenomenon of "transition in the HE field" and the meaning that students ascribe to it in depth. X University, the largest SFCU in China founded by one Chinese and another British parent universities, is the research setting. The research sample consists of undergraduate students at X University, who occupy the majority of the student population on campus, constitute the mainstream of student culture, and have abundant transition experiences.

This study finds out diverse components and processes of undergraduate students' academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions, respectively. Their habitus remain in hysteresis and change (i.e., infusing, aligning, transcending, retrogressing) ongoingly during these transitions. Moreover, students are active participants rather than passive receivers. They employ ITC, that is, the capacity to transition to different intercultural (i.e., academic, social, and ethnic cultural) contexts where they interact with culturally diverse people properly and motivate personal growth effectively, to manage their transitions and master their habitus change. The construct of ITC contains five dimensions: multiplistic sensitivity (MS), intrinsic proactivity (IP), strategic flexibility (SF), relativistic inclusivity (RI), and dialectic reflexivity (DR) that interact with each other and develop continuously. The investigation into habitus and ITC renders student transition as a becoming process replete with dynamism and diversity.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study substantiates the transition-as-becoming perspective by referring to the concept of habitus. Habitus hysteresis and diverse changes manifest the changing "self" of students and embed three transition metaphors: being-becoming, assemblage and dis-assemblage, and rhizome into their lived realities. Interactions between habitus, transition components, and the HE field uncover the mechanism underlying students' superficial performance, engagement, and perceptions of their transitions. Further, the conceptualization of ITC contributes to the student transition literature by explaining what agency students exert on their habitus during transitions. ITC differs from existent IC models due to its five dynamic dimensions and the interplay between them and academic, social, and ethnic aspects of student transition. The developed ITC turns into students' accumulated capital that is beneficial for practices and position-taking in the HE field. In summary, the holistic picture of three cultural transitions, habitus, and ITC upgrades the understanding of transition as becoming and student-led.

Practically, this study informs international HEIs inclusive of SFCUs of the means to facilitate students' transitions and nurture their habitus and ITC development. Students can also benefit from its findings to reflect on their capacity building, habitus change, and personal transition. Taking place in a period of world health and humanitarian crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, this study witnesses how the global and local HE fields live through the turmoil and transform their traditional ways of teaching and learning. As Li (2020) put it, "With the world marching into more uncertainty and anxiety, educational institutions' role becomes essential" (p.169). The lifelong learning as well as the cultivation of global citizenship and intercultural personhoods of students are

shared missions not only of SFCUs in China but also of educational institutions aiming for internationalization worldwide.

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Appendix one: consent form

CONSENT FORM

知情同意书

Title of Research Project:

Intercultural Competence of
Undergraduate Students in
the Context of International
Higher Education Institution

项目名称：

国际高等教育机构背景下本
科生的跨文化能力

Please initial box

Researcher(s): Yang Hang

研究人员： 杭洋

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [ ] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

本人确认已于[　　]阅读并了解了该项目相关研究信息，并已从项目负责人处得到考虑、提问的机会，且得到满意答复。

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.

   本人知晓对该项目的参与为自愿，且可以随时退出，无需任何理由，同时权利不会受任何影响。

3. I understand that I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

   本人知晓可随时要求获取或销毁所提供的个人信息。

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

   本人同意参加此项研究。

Participant Name　　Date　　Signature

参与者　　日期　　签名

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
知情同意书提供者	日期	签名

Researcher	Date	Signature
研究人员	日期	签名

The contact details of lead Researcher (Principal Investigator) are:

项目负责人的联系方式如下：

Yang Hang (杭洋), Email: yang.hang19@student.xjtlu.edu.cn, Mobile: 17351106112

Appendix two: participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Research Project Title**

   Intercultural Competence of Undergraduate Students in the Context of International Higher Education Institution

2. **Version Number and Date**

   Version Number: 1

   Date: 2020/8/3

3. **Invitation**

   You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask the researcher if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives and doctor if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

4. What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to investigate what undergraduate students' intercultural competence is in the context of international higher education institution, how their intercultural competence develop during four years of study and what institutional factors influence it.

5. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen because you are at least 18 years old and are student or staff in Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU).

6. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

7. What will happen if I take part?

1) **Observation:** If you consent to take part, you will be observed during the whole class.
2) **Interview:** If you consent to take part, you will be invited to undertake an interview with the researcher. This interview will focus on your understandings and perceptions of intercultural competence and take you 45-90 minutes.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantage or discomfort. If you should experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of the research that this should be made known to the researcher immediately.

9. What are the benefits for taking part in this study?

1) **Observation:** Although there are no immediate benefits for you, it is hoped that this study will provide an overview on how undergraduate students participate in courses concerning intercultural competence development. Results will be shared with you in order to inform your future development.
2) **Interview:** It is anticipated that you will benefit personally from the opportunity to discuss with the researcher. The data collected from this study will inform the development of the international higher education institution which will ultimately support and promote undergraduate students' intercultural competence.

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let the researcher know via yang.hang19@student.xjtlu.edu.cn and the researcher will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to the researcher with, then you should contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Sub-Committee on ethics@xjtlu.edu.cn. When contacting the Research Ethics Sub-Committee administrators, please provide details of the name or description of the

study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make."

11. Will my participation be kept confidential?

The data of this study will be collected through the observation or interview. All the information that the researcher collect from you will be kept strictly confidential and stored in a form protected by passwords and other relevant security processes and technologies. The data will be stored until October in 2023.You will not be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications.

Data collected may be shared in an anonymized form to allow reuse by the research team and other third parties. These anonymized data will not allow any individuals to be identified or identifiable.

12. What will happen to the results of the study?

Results of the study will be published. You will not be identified in any report or publication unless you have consented to being so. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the study, please ask the researcher to put you on the circulation list.

13. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them.

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

You can contact the researcher Yang Hang, IR Floor 9, Institute of Leadership and Education Advanced Development (ILEAD), South Campus, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, No.111 Ren'ai Road; Email: yang.hang19@student.xjtlu.edu.cn; Mobile: 17351106112.

Appendix three: interview protocol

Interview questions for students

1) What academic cultural transitions have you undergone since the start of the university life?
2) What social cultural transitions have you undergone since the start of the university life?
3) What ethnic cultural transitions have you undergone since the start of the university life?
4) Have there been any profound or lasting changes in your dispositions, habits, traits, or mindset during these transitions? If yes, what are they and how do they change?
5) What intercultural competence do you develop during those transitions?
6) Do you use intercultural competence to cope with transition shock and challenges? If yes, how?
7) Does your intercultural competence influence those profound or lasting changes in your dispositions, habits, traits, or mindset? If yes, how?

Interview questions for staff

1) What is your impression on undergraduate students at X University?
2) How is their engagement in classes or activities you see or hear of?
3) What intercultural competence do you think they do/should have?
4) What did/will you do to facilitate their transition and intercultural competence development?

Appendix four: coding scheme

Table 1 The coding scheme for habitus hysteresis and change and transition

Initial codes	Sub-theme	Theme
Examples: do not listen to or attend class and take shortcuts to complete assignments; translate English learning materials to Chinese and study in a way like before; remain marginalized from the mainstream social culture on campus	Habitus hysteresis	Habitus hysteresis, infusing, aligning, transcending, and retrogressing: transition as being-becoming
Examples: endeavor to organize student club activities but always feel stressed and meaningless; want to see more international students on campus but be unwilling to share the dormitory with them	Habitus infusing	
Examples: adjust to the academic culture of the university and keep up with its pace; adapt to a new cultural environment easily	Habitus aligning	
Examples: have more profound social cognitions; have more mature interpersonal relationships; have more harmonious coexistence with the environment	Habitus transcending	

Examples: be used to focus on one's inner thoughts but now often stimulated by external things	Habitus retrogressing	
Examples: academic habitus develops and fits in with the institution in terms of student-led learning style, diversified assessment methods, and research engagement or transcends beyond institutional norms and requirements	Assemblage between habitus and academic transition components	Intertwined and detached academic, social, and cultural components and habitus: transition as assemblage and dis-assemblage
Examples: social habitus adapts to the institution in terms of collective dormitory living, extra-curricular activity, social connection and belonging or transforms beyond common social recognition	Assemblage between habitus and social transition components	
Examples: cultural habitus gets enhanced through international contact and communication as the institution expects or develops beyond institutional expectations	Assemblage between habitus and cultural transition components	
Examples: feel disconnected from previous orientations of self-absorption with inner peace to current ones constantly stimulated by new things and information outside	Dis-assemblage between old and new habitus and transition components	

Examples: habitus gets infused by social connection while habitus aligns with student club activities	A mixture of assemblage and dis-assemblage of habitus and different transition components	
Examples: habitus hysteresis confronting the academic culture and always enforced by deadlines to study; taking initiative, self-management, self-regulation, self-determination, self-efficacy, independence, sense of responsibility, and individual willingness	The HE field influences habitus and agency	Habitus evolvement in the HE field catalyzed by time and space: transition as rhizomatic
Examples: reflexivity towards national and educational cultures, peer relations and pressure, student management, social changes and biases as well as their own habits, identity, personality, and growth	Reflexivity contributes to habitus evolvement	
Examples: habitus changing along with time; habitus evolving along with the shift of space	Time and space catalyze habitus evolvement	

Examples: accumulated capital like language ability and cross-cultural study experiences valued by the new field and enabling habitus aligning; some old and new cultural capital detached and enabling habitus evolvement to be transcending	Capital interacts with habitus evolvement	

Table 2 The coding scheme for ITC dimensions

Initial codes	Focused codes	Theoretical codes
Examples: be conscious of one's cultural identity and sexual orientation; be conscious of one's personality and changes	Have consciousness of personal traits, cultural transitions and identity	Multiplistic sensitivity
Examples: be conscious of cultural differences between Chinese and foreign teachers, Chinese and international students, university and high school, SFCU and Chinese public universities, and among different student clubs	Have consciousness of external cultural differences	
Examples: have interest in knowing different physical and humanistic cultural environments; have interest in knowing teachers or students from different cultural backgrounds	Have interest in knowing different cultures and people	
Examples: determine academic and life goals by oneself; choose major and program by oneself	Determine goals and choices by oneself	Intrinsic proactivity

Examples: make study, internship and activity plans due to one's need and interest; seek academic and language learning resources out of interest and need	Make plans and seek resources out of intrinsic motivation	
Examples: be willing to participate in some academic or student club activities actively; be willing to devote time and energy in the major	Have willingness to take the initiative	
Examples: adjust one's mentality and state through seeking support from peers, going shopping, doing exercises; adjust one's study and rest to be regular by following role models or studying in the library	Adjust oneself through various strategies	Strategic flexibility
Examples: regulate oneself according to different periods of time and levels of energy; balance between study and play	Regulate oneself flexibly	
Examples: adhere to one's regular daily routine without being affected by delinquent others; shift patterns of	Adopt various strategies to deal with external cultural	

communication with culturally different people	differences and challenges flexibly	
Examples: be optimistic about dealing with study and life challenges; have a sense of achievement when regulating myself to finish the difficult task	Have positive attitudes toward adjusting or regulating oneself	
Examples: reflect on one's opinions and biases; reflect on good and bad sides of one's personality and habits; analyze one's personal growth and competence from different aspects	Reflect on personal opinions, cultural transitions and competence dialectically	Dialectic reflexivity
Examples: contemplate on the different national and educational cultures, intercultural problems, friend circle, campus climate, and their influences on oneself	Critically think about external cultural differences and influences	
Examples: allow the co-existence of different cultures and opinions; neither promote nor expel different people and cultures	Stay objective and neutral toward cultural differences	Relativistic inclusivity
Examples: understand different opinions but do not change one's own;	Have basic understanding and	

have respect for culturally different others and their rights	respect for different opinions and people	
Examples: think of commonalities in different cultures; transmit cultures; keep one's inherited cultural traditions and new cultural norms compatible	Support cultural integration or compatibility	
Examples: treat people without discrimination; empathize and voice for the disadvantaged group	Treat different people fairly without discrimination and prejudices	

Table 3 The coding scheme for habitus hysteresis and change and ITC

Initial codes	Focused codes	Theoretical codes
Examples: poor IP leads to academic habitus hysteresis; poor SF leads to academic habitus hysteresis	ITC and academic habitus hysteresis	Lack of or poor ITC and habitus hysteresis
Examples: Lack of IP, SF, and RI leads to social habitus hysteresis; poor IP and SF lead to social habitus hysteresis	ITC and social habitus hysteresis	
Examples: IP but poor SF lead to academic infusion; weak IP and SF lead to academic infusion	ITC and academic habitus infusing	Weak ITC and habitus infusing
Examples: MS but weak SF lead to social habitus infusion in social activity; weak IP and SF lead to social habitus infusion in social life	ITC and social habitus infusing	
Examples: Weak RI leads to ethnic habitus infusion; weak IP and RI lead to ethnic habitus infusion	ITC and ethnic habitus infusing	
Examples: MS, IP, and SF lead to academic habitus aligning; MS, IP, SF,	ITC and academic habitus aligning and transcending	Enhanced ITC and habitus

and DR lead to academic habitus transcending		aligning and transcending
Examples: IP, DR, and RI lead to social habitus negotiation; MS, IP, SF, DR, and RI lead to social habitus transcending	ITC and social habitus aligning and transcending	
Examples: MS and DR lead to ethnic habitus adaptation; MS, IP, SF, DR, and RI lead to ethnic habitus transcending	ITC and ethnic habitus aligning and transcending	
Examples: Increased MS and/or DR and social habitus retrogressing; decreased IP, SF and/or RI and social habitus retrogressing	ITC and social habitus retrogressing	Lopsided ITC and habitus retrogressing