



**The Moon and Sixpence: A Qualitative Study of the  
Professional Identity Development of Highly-educated  
Female Teachers at Primary/Secondary Schools in Beijing**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Institute of Education**

**Fei Lian**

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## **Declaration of Original Authorship**

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Fei Lian

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on how highly-educated female teachers (graduates with a Master or doctoral degree) identify with their job at primary/secondary schools in Beijing China as a product of Chinese involution (fierce competition by credentialism and perceived currently by youngsters regarding themselves as Chinese ‘involved’ generation) and further impacted by related educational policy like ‘Double reduction’ and Covid-19 pandemic.

This research applies a Bourdieu’s theory of field and its post-structural feminist extension to explore how factors, such as economic, social, institutional and gender possibly influence identity formation, their own perception of their current roles at school and their attitude towards teacher training and future career plans. The research is embedded in the paradigm of constructivist in terms of ontology as well as epistemology using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) on the basis. Thus, a small sampled sized group of female teachers who graduate with a Master or PhD degree and work more than 6 years at primary/secondary schools were selected and received three semi-structure interviews during data collection. The data are analysed from lens of institutional, interpersonal and personal level to see how policies, welfare, working hours, gender issues and teacher training and development impact teachers’ identity. Findings reveal that all participants show a decreasing passion towards work and hold relatively negative perception towards their professional identity and future development. Inadequate economic income, long working hours, gender/age bias and decreasing social status embedded in educational policies negatively shape teacher identity. Teacher identity in turn re-shape these teachers’ perception towards the above influential factors. The study also finds out that teacher identity is dependent not only on external factors but also

greatly on personal characters and experience in perceiving their professional identity. This research aims to extend understanding of highly educated teachers' working experience and bridge the gap of insufficient qualitative empirical studies on highly-educated female teachers. It also aims to make a significant contribution to knowledge by offering insights of these female teachers' identity trajectories and possible suggestions to local schools as well as administration of Education on professional training and teachers' welfare.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction of The Thesis

Inspired by W. S. Maugham's novel 'The Moon and Sixpence', highly educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools face a similar dilemma: whether to focus on professional development and work (The Moon) despite the disappointing socio-economic conditions, or to concentrate on daily concerns such as income and leisure time (Sixpence). This research uses the title of Maugham's novel metaphorically to describe the plight of these teachers. To be specific, this thesis focuses on how highly-educated female teachers (graduates with a Master or doctoral degree) identify with their job at primary/secondary schools in Beijing China. This is explored within the context of, and as a product of, Chinese involution (fierce competition by credentialism and perceived currently by youngsters regarding themselves as Chinese 'involved' generation) and further impacted by related educational policy like 'Double Reduction' and Covid-19 pandemic.

This research applies Bourdieu's theory of field and capital to explore how factors, such as economic, social and gender possibly influence identity formation embedding in their own perception of their current roles at school and their attitude towards teacher training and future career plans. The research is embedded in the paradigm of constructivist in terms of ontology as well as epistemology and as such uses an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Thus, a small convenience sample sized group of female teachers who graduated with a Master or PhD degree and work for more than five years at primary/secondary schools were selected and received three rounds of semi-structure interviews during data collection. The data were analysed from lens of institutional, interpersonal and personal level to see how

policies, welfare, working hours, gender issues, teacher training and career development impact teachers' identity as well as their attitudes towards further career development.

## **1.2 Personal Rationale**

'Oh, another day of work.'

'Why the wage is so little.'

'Sorry ladies, I am afraid someone has to help one pregnant teacher with her classes, who would like to have three more classes?'

'Today we cannot get off work on time, can we?'

These are parts of daily conversations I heard during my work at primary/secondary schools. Surely not all conversations were negative but indeed the atmosphere I felt at two schools I worked at could not be defined as positive. The fact perhaps is that based on my observations of teachers surrounding me, novice highly-educated teachers who enter into teaching career, were at first passionate but then turned out to be less self-powered after working for a few years. Personally, I had worked as a teacher at a secondary school for three years and a primary school for another three years after graduating with a Master's degree. The year I graduated met the beginning of higher recruitment standard in primary/secondary schools. Many highly-educated graduates found a job of teaching not in universities but at primary/secondary schools instead of which females occupy a large amount. I am one of them; I was recruited by a secondary school in my hometown and began my teaching life.

Usually, teachers at a secondary school begin their work at twenty past seven in the

morning (7:20am) and end their work at six o'clock in the evening (6pm) or even later, since correcting homework, lessons preparation and writing reflections of teaching or sometimes students' talk may occupy time. Working about ten hours a day now seems not to be a big deal for teachers at primary/secondary schools and the wages after tax deduction usually range from 5000 yuan to 10000 yuan (equivalent to 554.8-1109.6 pounds<sup>1</sup>) which cannot be regarded as a large number of money for survival in a big city like Beijing (Zeng et al., 2018). Moreover, according to my experience teachers who own authorised personnel (in China it is called Bianzhi, a symbol of stability of work) are not allowed to teach outside of school, and if found they will lose their jobs; at least when I was working as a teacher in Beijing, it is not allowed for teachers with Bianzhi to teach outside school. My peers/colleagues also told me that everyday they were too tired to do anything after work and even heading back to home was exhausting not to mention to teach extra lessons after work. So, they kept earning poor wages and worked for long hours, complaining but having no courage to change the status quo. I witnessed my colleagues who entered into this career the same year like me becoming less passionate, worried more about making a living and some quitting their job within three years; I witnessed some gender discrimination during recruitment but seemed to be ignored by everyone acquiescently; I witnessed work overtime without payment but everyone take it for granted. I had managed to discuss these issues with my peer colleagues and this process formed as a kind of pilot study which paved my way of preparation of interview questions and research themes of my current study. From the dialogue with colleagues I worked with, the fact is that these highly-educated female teachers who graduated from some top universities in China or abroad, with a Master's or doctoral degrees, are gradually less active and such negative status may badly influence class teaching whilst little research fully focuses on this topic<sup>2</sup>. What is worse is that I have experienced some surveys related to

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<sup>1</sup> The currency converter in this research adopts the currency rate of 1 RMB $\approx$  0.11 pounds, according to the real time exchange rate during the time when the thesis was written in 2023.

<sup>2</sup> This is explained in Chapter 3.

teachers' happiness index, most of my peer colleagues chose not to share their true feelings since they believe that nothing would be changed and they may get into trouble by sharing too many negative thoughts. When talking with them, I felt this is an issue which should be taken seriously and should not be neglected.

Reflecting on my own social trajectory, I find myself experience similar repertoire with research participants. My socio-analysis above reveals my similarities with the researched like my pursuit of higher education, choice of work and reflection of the work. I also find Bourdieu's theory especially field, capital and habitus provides useful perspectives of thinking in making sense of social space I was in and contradictory position I and my other colleagues came across working as a teacher at primary/secondary schools. To conclude, my experience of six years of working as a teacher provides me with an insider-view of how female novice teachers with a Masters or doctoral degree develop their professional identity in dealing with long working hours, lower wages and gender issues, like urge of marriage or gender discrimination. Also, my own experience enables me to interview this group of teachers as an insider-researcher which means these teachers might be more willing to share their true feelings instead of fake/less honest responses. My working experience pushed me to begin this research and my participants' support are energy which encourages me to finish this thesis and let their true voices be heard.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Questions**

From the data base CNKI, research on highly-educated teachers is increasing in recent ten years with more focus on the teacher training and teacher management of this cohort of teachers (Xiao, 2008; Yang, 2014; Yang, 2013; Xu, 2022; Xu & Chen, 2023)



whilst it is still less clear how highly educated female teachers, as a newly emerged marginalized cohort, feel about their everyday lived experiences i.e. being a female teacher in primary/secondary schools instead of higher educational institutes. As highlighted, the challenges of ‘invisible resignation’ are significant and connected to a lack of professional development, socio-economic and family support (Hu, 2015). This study hence seeks to explore the ways that these talented women navigate their experiences and the dilemma they are confronting during their formation of their teachers’ professional identity in their career development, so as to make clear the impact, not just on teaching but also the well-being and self-identity of the women included.

To address the research aims above, there are three research questions:

1. How do highly educated female teachers perceive and situate their role of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools in Beijing, China?
2. How do external factors (institutional and interpersonal factors) such as peer influence and family contribute in shaping the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?
3. How do factors such as gender contribute in shaping and being shaped by the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?

## **1.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

The findings aim to help explain the lived experience of these female teachers so as to feed into government and policy makers understanding of the impact of being a highly-educated female teacher. The research gives live and color to the teachers’ voices towards working hours and wages, while it also provides food for thought to

policy makers to improve relative policies on teachers' welfare. From a gender issue perspective, the findings to some extent reveal female teachers' consciousness towards gender discrimination and gender rights in which some phenomena, like compromise with discrimination, also offer possible further research on this issue. The study also hopes to suggest a new direction for the possible continuing professional training for this cohort of teachers including ITE (initial teacher education) and offer feasible advice to policies makers with regard to potential professional welfare so as to ease the 'invisible resignation' and job burnout in Beijing, China.

## **1.5 Contextual Introduction**

### **1.5.1 Context of Chinese 'Involution'**

The word 'involution' popped into Chinese public's eyes and soon became an internet sensation in 2020 (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021). The reason why 'involution' phenomenon gains such heat on internet as well as SNS in China is because China now is under a circumstance of interpersonal fierce competition (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021). As reported by CCTV (China Central Television), 'involution' is explicitly revealed as employees work from 9 am. to 9 pm. from Monday to Saturday or even Sunday (abbreviate as '996' form of work in China) to compete with others. Students study hard and compete with others to exceed their peers on scores. The standard of recruitment is therefore higher and higher to recruit better qualified employees (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021). To be specific in teachers' recruitment, dated back to 2015, recruitment of secondary schools had been leveled up that more graduates with a Master's degree chose to work at secondary schools in big cities and this ratio is increasing both in primary and secondary schools continuously with more doctoral graduates entering into Basic education (referring to primary and secondary schools in China) (Chen &Li, 2022). The data collected by

Chen and Li show that in 2015 the proportion of Master and PhD graduates in primary schools is 0.62% and this ratio raises to 1.59% in 2020. The proportion of highly-educated teachers in secondary schools in 2015 was 7.15% and in 2020 was 11.4% (Chen & Li, 2022). This data was collected nationwide and in big cities the ratio was even much higher self-evidently.

Generously speaking, ‘involution’ has become a topic that most Chinese citizens may face. It is described as a ‘making-out game’ (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021, p. 5) and ‘studying-out game’ (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021, p. 5) in which white-collars and workers compete for the quota and cannot end it up until abrupt death pushes one to quit the game (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021). Under ‘involution’, according to the report (2020) of CCTV, one needs to work harder to exceed others in order to gain limited resources. If this person works for 9 hours a day than another peer may work 10 hours fearing working less may lose his/her job. After the implementation of the ‘The Third Child Policy’ (A policy published in China which allows married women to give birth up to three children), female candidates without three children are even less competitive due to their long maternity leave, which is without doubt cannot compete with males’ working hours. To combat this negative and vicious competition, a group of employees as well as students choose the ‘Philosophy of Slacking Off’ (CCTV, 2020, as translated by, 2021, p. 9) which means ‘As long as I loaf on the job, I will feel as if I am retrieving my lost self-back’ (CCTV, 2020, as translated by Jha, 2021, p. 9). It is a phenomenon which is concerning and need to be changed. Besides gender discrimination and ‘involution’, there is also age limitation required by employers, asking job applicants should not be older than a certain age which normally is thirty years old or thirty five years old to narrow down the scope of qualified candidates (Liu & Su, 2024). CCTV at the end of the report (2020) also expresses a willing that people should face, doubt and change this phenomenon. My research is embedded in such context that the highly-educated

female teachers I interviewed are products of this phenomenon, victim of this phenomenon and now are experiencing being reproduced by it. In order to have more academic overview to learn evolution of ‘involution’ in China, terminology meaning of it is going to be elaborated in next paragraph.

The term ‘involution’ first appeared in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* expounding the difference between involution and evolution and furthermore forwarded the theory of involution (Kant, 1987). The definition was further developed by Goldenweise on a cultural level to describe culture. When reaching a certain status culture cannot further evolve and is trapped into a plight of making the inner-structure more complex (Yang et al., 2022). Then Geertz in his book *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (1963) further discussed ‘involution’ based on Indonesian agriculture in Java. The term was first introduced in China by Zongzhi Huang in the book *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (2000). He used marginal utility to explain ‘involution’ though according to Yang et al. (2022) this perception is to some extent a misreading of Geertz, Huang’s usage of ‘involution’ is one of causes of which the term ‘involution’ is being generalized and widely used nowadays. The precise definition of ‘involution’ as an academic term is heatedly discussed in China and Peng (2022) concluded that internet usage of this term is explicitly negative and superficial. The academic term of ‘involution’ should not neglect Chinese social-historic background, context transformation from western mode and creation for positivity (Peng, 2022). He emphasized academia should not just describe the problem but also should reveal the importance of the essence of ‘involution’ which is leading people to creation (Peng, 2022). Similar to his idea, Yang et al. (2022) gave a comprehensive view of ‘involution’ in Chinese education, disputing the point that Chinese education is experiencing ‘involution’. They believe that overview Chinese education is progressing stably, and the so-called ‘involution’ is anxiety brought by Utilitarianism (Yang et al., 2022). ‘Involution’ thus is concluded

as a result of individual anxiety in the process of development under an era of ‘knowledge-overloaded’ and hard work should not be labeled as ‘involution’ otherwise it is just anti-intellectualism (Yang et al., 2022). Hence, it can be seen that the definition of ‘involution’ in Chinese academia is dynamic and still under discussion (Peng, 2022). One thing sure is that Chinese scholars place their emphasis on the inner positivity of ‘involution’ not the superficial negativity.

Since this research focuses mainly on how highly-educated female teachers form professional identity thus the term ‘involution’ will not be re-defined but only used as a context. Yang et al. in article (2022) ‘Is Education Really Involved: A Critical Analysis Perspective’ briefly depicts students’ fierce competition, parents and students’ anxiety and teachers’ worry towards promotion but does not give further solutions or descriptions. I believe even though ‘involution’ is in its essence positive, people’s anxiety and inner mind activities based on this issue should not be neglected. Perhaps ‘involution’ does not exist in Chinese education but it also cannot be denied that according to Yang et al. (2022) that individual anxiety brought by fierce competition exists. Thus this research’s essence is to give detailed findings of how individuals as products of fierce competition, identify with their current work which is elaborated in the chapter of findings. To be specific the relationship between education and ‘involution’, educational inflation/credentialism will be elaborated in next part to see its development in China and the circle of producing and being reproduced by ‘involution’.

### **1.5.2 Educational Inflation and Credentialism in China**

Educational inflation or over-qualification in job market is not a unique phenomenon in China. In fact, with the expansion of higher education globally wide, a large

number of highly-educated graduates enter into labour market whilst the practical need for market cannot digest this surplus of potential employees (Shavit & Muller, 2001; Van de Werfhorst & Anderson, 2005; Bai, 2006; Van de Werfhorst, 2009; Guan & Blair, 2022). According to research implemented in USA, UK and India, many countries are experiencing educational inflation and credentialism in labour market (Ilchman & Dhar, 1971; Van de Werfhorst & Anderson, 2005; Van de Werfhorst, 2009; Green & Zhu, 2010). To be more specific, credentialism means graduates are assigned jobs according to their diploma. The job market is selecting potential candidates according to educational degree, regarding it not simply as a human capital (paying off skills of employees learned at school) but more of a cultural capital (Collins, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Van de Werfhorst, 2009; Guan & Blair, 2022). Educational degree, becoming a kind of credential and a proof of entering into labour market, works as a positional good due to the expansion of higher education (Van de Werfhorst & Anderson, 2005; Van de Werfhorst, 2009). Functioning as a positional good means that a child need more education to avoid downward mobility if the qualification has lost part of its value due to surplus supply (Collins, 1979; Van de Werfhorst & Anderson, 2005; Van de Werfhorst, 2009). Impact of credentialism, according to Guan and Blair's research (2022), can be huge both on graduates and the currently unemployed. Twentieth century has witnessed the devalue of educational credentials due to 'over-schooling', which labour market was not upgraded enough to be equal with (Van de Werfhorst, 2009; Bai, 2006; Kim et al., 2016). Moreover, the product of credentialism and expansion of higher education, namely educational inflation can lead to job burnout, low well being at work and even cognition decline according to Green and Zhu (2010). To conclude, people are trapped in a dilemma caused by educational inflation. The expansion of higher education on its bright side indicates that people can have more opportunities to pursue higher education whilst on its dark side, more highly-educated graduates have to face cutthroat labour market where degree as a credential is to some extent devalued because of surplus of highly-educated graduates.

China is also experiencing educational inflation and credentialism, which can be understood as a rudiment of ‘involution’ (Yang et al., 2022; CCTV, 2020, as translated by, 2021). It may be tricky to tell which appeared at first since the relationship between these two are of producing and being produced reciprocally and credentialism is actually part of ‘involution’. But the exact time of higher education expansion can be dated back to late 1990s (Bai, 2006). In 1999, accompanied with reform and opening-up policy, China set up a goal according to Martin Trow’s ‘mass higher education’ to expand enrolment of higher education institutions (Bai, 2006). According to Bai’s summary (2006) of Chinese government’s act on expanding higher education, the direct rationale behind was to boost Chinese economy effectively under the Asian economic crisis. Before, China was in the period of planned economy when people were assigned jobs (Kim et al., 2016). At this period of time, Chinese citizens were mostly not having a chance to universities and the enrolment rate of higher education was also scarce compared with current one. Strong wish to universities and higher education institutions finally were realised with the higher educational institutions’ expansion in 1999. It also contributes to a fact of tradition why Chinese parents are still willing to invest a lot in education to support their children though their children may easily reach their parents’ social stratification (Bai, 2006). It should be noticed that the research participants’ parents were people of that age who have less chance to universities/colleges and may be assigned jobs instead of hunting for jobs themselves like their children. It can be furthermore inferred that participants parents may have less knowledge of the impact of credentialism and job market compared with their children and thus can offer less help in offering useful information but they are supportive in investing children’s education. It turns out to be different from western views (2005) of parents who finish transition to higher education can equip their children with accurate value of that education (Van de Werfhorst & Anderson, 2005; Bai, 2006; Kim et al., 2016).

Back to Chinese process of educational inflation, the implementation of market economy needed Chinese government to change the status quo and with rapid growth in enrolment of higher education, the goal was reached earlier than planned, reaching 20 million students in higher education by the end of 2004, the largest higher education place in the world (Bai, 2006). More opportunities were offered to graduates, feeling free to choose a job they desired, a new value of self-realisation prevailed among youngsters at that time under the new mode driven by this American model of higher education: free charging, market oriented and combination of public-private (Bai, 2006; Kim et al., 2016). However, graduates were not flexible and competitive enough to meet market competence and skill need after leaving universities and labour market also lacked enough spaces for all these highly-educated applicants (Bai, 2006; Kim et al., 2016; Guan & Blair, 2022). In China, education is a tool to change one's life by empowering wealth, social status and power (Bai, 2006). It can be seen that Chinese traditional view of education functioning as human capital and a credential of 'elite' is nothing new and believed by many Chinese citizens for ages (Bai, 2006). This belief that a higher academic degree can guarantee a decent and well-paid job, was proved not to be feasible any longer in market economy era since the implementation of 'mass education' makes more people with at least a Bachelor's degree and the value of educational degree has been decreased. The key solution to it was according to some to lower expectation of jobs (Bai, 2006). The outcome of this is that many graduates who are not content with their jobs only have to choose to post-graduate study (Bai, 2006), a post-graduate study seems to be not only a pursuit of knowledge but also a way to escape from disappointing labour market and a hope to seek for a decent job. Just like Dore's prediction (1980) that a sudden expansion of higher education which is not equipped with a developed economic market may lead to the inflation of academic degree and people need to attain higher educational credentials in order to compete for a job, which used to be not asking for high academic degree (Dore, 1980; Guan & Blair, 2022). This phenomenon is lasting from the early twenty-first century until now that educational inflation is becoming more



severe and more graduates with a Master or doctoral degree have to lower their job expectation and more job-burnout issues emerge due to the imbalance between credential and job. All these issues together with unhealthy workplace competition and overtime work form the current internet heated discussion of ‘involution’. In next part, it is indispensable to introduce another two key factors which strongly influence participants’ choice of being a primary/secondary schools’ teachers - Bianzhi and Hukou in China.

### **1.5.3 Hukou and Bianzhi in Beijing China**

Hukou is a Chinese word which means registered permanent residence (Luo, 2012). It is similar to biometric residence permit (BRP) card which is also a way to manage population migration (Luo, 2012). The history of Chinese Hukou can be dated back to Xizhou dynasty (1046 BC-771BC) as a way to view population’s natural change (Li, 2011). The function of Hukou is also dynamic from population management to soldiers’ recruitment, community safety and taxation in Chinese history (Luo, 2012). Now Hukou functions still as a main method to population administration but also other forms like temporary residence permit are implemented to ensure residence’s rights (Li, 2011). Big cities like Beijing and Shanghai are believed to have more resources and better medical as well as educational resources so Hukou of big cities are greatly popular and desired by people from other places (Li, 2011). It is reported that owning a Beijing Hukou is more and more difficult since 2011 (Li, 2011). In order to compete for certain amount of Beijing Hukou, graduates choose to have post-graduate study, study abroad and other ways to gain a Hukou and welfare as well as better resources contained within it. There are totally eight ways of which entering into public institutions like primary/secondary schools is the one concluded by Li’s report (2011) for non-Beijing dwellers to settle down with a Beijing Hukou.

Accompanied with Hukou, public institutions like primary/secondary schools also endow employed staff with Bianzhi (authorized strength) meaning that wages, welfare and insurance are secured (Chen, 2010). According to participants' responses, Bianzhi can guarantee them better welfare and ensure job stability with Hukou. It is one of the reasons why they chose to be teachers at primary/secondary schools not universities since universities now in Beijing have less Bianzhi and teachers without a Bianzhi in universities are universal and its number increasing annually (Chen, 2010).

It can be seen that Hukou as well as Bianzhi work collaboratively as symbols of residential approval and a feasible method to secure employees' welfare. They also play as key factors in participants' job choices of this research according to my interviews. With 'involution' becoming extensive in China, competence between candidates is fierce and the recruitment standard of public institutions which can solve employees Hukou and Bianzhi without doubt will be higher. The phenomenon then leads to another one that more graduates with a Master/doctoral degree choose to enter into primary/secondary schools in order to settle down in big cities. A circulation of 'involution' in educational recruitment is hence formed.

#### **1.5.4 Research Context of Chinese School System and Teacher Training and Promotion**

In China, most primary/secondary schools are state run. There are three levels of the structure of Chinese educational system namely basic education, senior secondary school and higher education. Basic education includes six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school, which is compulsory for every child in China.

Then, there are two choices for junior secondary schools' graduates to choose either academic secondary schools or vocational secondary schools (Ye & Zhao, 2019). After graduation, there is national universities' entrance exams 'Gaokao' to enrol students to higher education. Normally according to participants' words in this research some state-run primary/secondary schools allocated most teachers with Bianzhi and local Hukou, of which the welfare should be equivalent and no less than civil servant's welfare .

For teachers working at state-run primary/secondary schools. The daily routine may vary from schools to schools, regions to regions. Taking Beijing as an example, at least for participants in this research, the schools they work at normally require them to arrive at school before 7:20 a.m. since there is morning reading at 7:20 a.m.. Most teachers arrive at school between 7:00a.m. to 7:15 a.m.. Normally primary schools' teachers finish their work at 4:30 p.m., if there is after school service, they need to leave school at 5:00 p.m. or even later. For secondary schools' teachers, the time of leaving school may be even 10:00 p.m. if there is evening self-study.

There is also one factor Chinese teachers at primary/secondary schools have which is maybe different from British teachers. Normally students stay in one room and subject teachers need to shift from one classroom to another to teach lessons. There is also one teacher in charge (head teacher) of one class to manage students and daily trivial stuff and is also responsible for this class's every students' safety at school. The work of a teacher in charge of a class (head teacher of a class) includes students' management, filling in forms of class information or students' information, allocating notice to students' parents, lessons teaching, students' moral education and helping to organise activities like school's sports games or festival celebration (Huang, 2022). Usually teacher in charge is taken by teachers who teach main subjects like math,

Chinese, English and other STEM or social science related subjects.

As for teacher professional development, in Beijing, every district has its own system and institution of teacher training. Teacher educators are also called ‘Jiaoyanyuan’ who are teacher researchers from either universities or experienced teachers who work excellently. They are responsible for novice teachers’ training as well as weekly activities like teacher subject teaching training, pedagogy research, test design and others which are related to teacher professional development. In Beijing, as the quality of teachers is rising, academic research such as essays writing is also considered in teachers’ promotion and salary allocation (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Also other factors like teaching years, years of working as a teacher in charge of a class (head teacher of a class) is counted when a teacher receives evaluation of promotion (Zhao & Liu, 2020).

### **1.5.5 The Influence of ‘Double Reduction’ Policy**

The ‘Double Reduction’ policy which was launched in China in 2021 means to relieve primary and junior secondary schools’ students’ burden from school and extra-curricula tutorial agencies (Mao & Huang, 2021). This policy does not abruptly appear but stems from the policy of burden reduction in 1990s (Mao & Huang, 2021). According to Mao and Huang’s research (2021), China has experienced totally four stages of burden reduction of students. The first stage is from 1978 to 1992 to correct wrong points like only emphasizing the importance of students’ scores but ignore progress from other perspectives; furthermore from 1993 to 2000, the policy stepped into the second stage which was to propel all-round education. The aim of this

education was that cultivating students' abilities are not just for tests or finding a job but beneficial for his/her whole life. The third stage (2001-2009) focused on course reform of primary/junior secondary schools and the fourth stage (2001-update) is the 'Double Reduction' policy ((Mao &Huang, 2021).

This student-oriented policy has positive influence on improving students' sleeping quality and physical as well as mental health. By improving the quality of homework arrangement, after-school service and teaching, students can indeed earn better quality of learning (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2021). But according to participants' answers of this research, after-school services make their working hours too long and payment they receive is little and not standardized. The policy indicates that schools should offer attractive after-school services and evening self-study, teachers can have flexible working hours (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2021). Flexible working hour is an option but according to the interviews I have had, still a amount of schools do not implemented this ordinance and nor do they offer teachers desirable payment. It can be seen that teachers' complaints towards long working hours after the implementation of after-school service exist and to some extent severely influence their initiative of working. Just like Zhu Xiao in the article (2022) indicates 'teacher is a subject restricted to school's administration and social culture who are influenced both by collective rationality and personal rationality' (Xiao, 2022, p. 2). Here Xiao defines collective rationality stands for government or authorities whose aim is more macroscopic whilst personal rationality is individual's pursuit of benefits which is microscopic (Xiao, 2022). There is one point which is worth noting that Xiao mentions the importance of letting collective rationality and personal rationality balance and be harmonious with each other is in need and should be promoted in implementing 'Double Reduction' policy (Xiao, 2022). Hence it can be inferred that highly-educated female teachers are a cohort of people who are also influenced by

collective rationality and personal rationality; on one hand, they should obey rules and regulations from school to execute the policy, on the other hand, little payment and long working hours make them feel frustrated. The more such voices revealed, as according to Xiao's theory of rationality (2022), the more comprehensive and humanized the policy will be. Interview data in this research also work as voice revealing and also contribute to make this policy more rational. Detailed analysis will be elaborated in the findings chapter.

### **1.5.6 Conclusion**

Based on a full elaboration of Chinese current labour market, the research aims to provide participants' personal and dynamic view of how highly-educated female teachers shape professional identity. The research therefore need open-ended questions and study on a specific group of participants to explore their personal, private and dynamic views. A paradigm of qualitative and method of using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) elaborated in chapter 4 are adopted to study further on individual's inner mind and views.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In chapter one, an introduction is unfolded about a brief introduction of the thesis, a general introduction of highly-educated teacher at primary/secondary schools in Beijing and how my personal experience steer my way to this research in chapter one. This chapter also includes the research questions this study aims to explore and potential contribution of the study bring to political decision making, teachers management and teacher training. This chapter furthermore gives a comprehensive introduction of research context like current social

and political background and key words like *Bianzhi* and *Hukou* which are Chinese unique system which play essential roles in shaping identity. It moreover includes introduction of teacher training and policies of job promotion which provides a better understanding of teachers' perception of their work in findings and discussion part. Chapter two is a conceptual and theoretical part. A definition of highly-educated teachers embedded in Chinese educational context is given. Two key concepts of identity and gender embedded within Bourdieu's field theory and post-structural feminist ideology are defined and discussed in this chapter thereof reveals the research gap that highly-educated female teacher at primary/secondary schools in China. Bourdieu's theory of field together with key concepts of capital and habitus are discussed to see how such concepts can be applied in understanding teachers' changing attitude and actions in the field of teaching. Furthermore, the relationship of Bourdian theory and gender study is elaborated to see how gender as a symbolic capital, a symbolic violence work to contribute to females' identity and work decision. Chapter three is a literature review focusing on the current issue of teachers' resignation and retention especially in China and how gender segregate female teachers' welfare and rights. This chapter also includes a review of studies related to highly-educated teachers' identity studies and female teachers' studies in China. Chapter four discusses the ontology, epistemology and methodology of this research while deciding IPA as a research method in order to see how personal experience, perception and formed beliefs shape and produce current identity. Chapter five is the findings part which show the data collected via three semi-structured interviews with seven participants. Chapter six is discussion part which elaborates the change of teacher identity and factors which influence highly-educated female teachers' identity and three main factors of social, economic and gender are discussed based on data collection. Issues like 'invisible resignation' and job burnout before and during pandemic are extracted to see participants' current dilemma. The last chapter concludes findings and contribution to knowledge and reflect on limitations of the research and implications to future research.

## **Chapter 2 Concepts and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is to introduce the definition of highly-educated teachers in this thesis, to define key concepts- identity and gender in this research as well as elaborate Bourdieu's theory of field, capital, habitus and extended gender theory which are applied in data analysis. The chapter begins with the definition of highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools in Beijing China to introduce this cohort of teachers emerging in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Then it is followed with a brief introduction focusing on the cause, the development, the definition and possible influential factors of highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools in Beijing.

In the next part, a discussion of identity development is introduced to picture a relatively comprehensive outlook of the concept identity. Furthermore after explaining the complexity of defining identity in literature review. Specifically teacher identity is discussed based on the previous discussion and review to define and refine this concept in this study. Following it, another concept, gender is discussed first with a brief introduction of how this term developed and its difference with sex. Then gender concept is discussed being embedded in Chinese context to see how culture and society contextualise the concept. Moreover, gender related studies with regard to female teachers are also discussed to see the current research themes and trends of this concept in teacher education in China. A conclusion is drawn after the discussion of the development of these two concepts and elaborate the definition of teacher identity and gender in this research.

The final part of this chapter concentrates on the elaboration of Bourdieu's theory of



field, capital and his theory related to gender. This part at first gives an introduction of the theory of field and the meaning of different capitals in shaping people's status, habitus and doxa. Then considering gender as an unavoidable symbolic violence, the development of gender analysis embedded in Bourdieu's theory of field is discussed to see how feminism adopts and develops Bourdieu's thoughts to analyse gender related issues.

## **2.2 Definition of Highly Educated Teachers at Primary/Secondary Schools in China**

Highly educated teacher is not a fixed term generally but changed with the needs of schools and educational system to meet policies requirements of teachers' quality. Highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools in the context of this study means teachers who graduate with a master or doctoral degree work at primary or secondary schools. This understanding is situated within the context that this cohort of teachers is a product of the expansion of higher education together with Chinese government's emphasis on improving teachers' quality (Xu & Chen, 2023). After less than two decades, the increase of the amount of highly-educated teachers is fast, in order to meet the national requirement of building a new type of high-quality and professional teachers' team (Xu & Chen, 2023; Wang, 2022). In 2003, the proportion of highly-educated teachers was only 0.15% of Chinese primary/secondary schools' teachers and this number has raised to 3.91% in 2020 (Xu & Chen, 2023). Developed regions such as Beijing and Shanghai have even larger proportion of highly-educated teachers which were 18.23% and 14.94% respectively by 2020 (Xu & Chen, 2023).

In Xu and Chen's article (2023), China is not the only country who has raised the bar

of teachers' recruitment. Many European countries such as France, Finland and Estonia also explicitly stipulate in policy papers that teachers at primary/secondary schools should complete a Master's degree equivalent education. Xu and Chen (2023) believe it is an inevitable trend worldwide for the increasing amount of highly-educated teachers. What is of concern is that some local governments have not yet provided comprehensive training systems and academic atmospheres to support this cohort of teachers' future development as well as sufficient support in face of these teachers' demands (Xu & Chen, 2023). Some teacher trainers at primary schools even hold either too much expectation or prejudice that highly-educated teachers are not good at teaching, which leads to problematic issues in developing these teachers future career development (Zhao, 2021). The welfare, personal self-recognition and external environment such as schools' atmosphere and rules all may influence a highly-educated teacher's perception of professional identity (Wang, 2022).

### **2.3 The Development of Identity**

Teacher identity is working as a framework to guide and construct a teacher in her/his daily action perception of work, which also predicts the level of the commitment to profession and resilience in face of challenges at work (Day, 2017 & Sachs, 2005, as cited in Ye & Zhao, 2019). For teacher identity in this study, this research is embedded within the ideology that teacher identity is being constructed and reconstructed hence is always in a state of being (Vinz, 1997, as cited in Ye & Zhao, 2019). Thus the research focuses on a dynamic change of teachers' perceptions towards their professional experience. Such dynamic process involves how they interact with others in the career and how they reflect on their work. Identity in this research is perceived as a dynamic, fluid one embedded within the aim of seeing how these teachers develop their perception through over three years of working (Giddens,

1991; Ye & Zhao, 2019). The research adopts an IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) method which enables participants' voice to be heard and emphasizes on how personal consciousness and individual's experiences influence their actions and beliefs. Moriah (2018), provides a definition of identity which focuses on participants' personal narrative perception and changing attitude towards teaching, providing inspiration of defining teacher identity in this research. Identity thus in this research is defined as an image of journey. It is dynamic, a trajectory of development and a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991). To analyse the deeper meaning of this process, Bourdieu's field theory is utilized for expounding deeper information. Before expounding the definition of teacher identity in this research in detail, a brief introduction to the development of identity as a concept is shown in the next section.

### **2.3.1 Definitions of Identity: Sociology vs Psychology**

Identity is an important concept since it permeates throughout a lifetime, influencing the individual interactions between interior mental worlds and the exterior worlds of languages and categorization (Hammack, 2015). As Anspal et al. (2012) assume 'identity is a key factor influencing the teacher's sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment and effectiveness.'(Anspal et al., 2012, p. 198) This multidisciplinary term anchors on the concept of sameness and differences. In the era of cultural pluralism, identity is a key concept in guiding people to tackle conflicts within individuals and in conferring rights through recognition and conceiving of a world of differences (Hammack, 2015). One of the issues which are difficult to define is the self. As Kagan (1992) illuminated, 'the primary concerns of student teachers were initially connected with self' (Kagan, 1992, as cited in Anspal et al., 2012, p. 199), therefore it is necessary to explore this term.

The self is regarded by many scholars as being ‘revealed personal narratives or life stories’ (Anspal et al., 2012, p. 198; Volkman & Anderson, 1998). It is shaped in a specific area, for example school environment (Anspal et al., 2012). Hence the self is always interpreted as a process which is personal, private and internal in a given context. As for identity, it is perceived by some scholars as seldom defined properly (Beijjard et al., 2004; Anspal et al., 2012). A common conception of the definitions of identity and self after years of debates is that ‘identity’ is about the differences and sameness that is associated with the inner world of psychological experience and, with the exterior world of languages and categorization, ‘Self’ however, is more likely to be a psychological process of individualization (Hammack, 2015). Before positing a particular theory and definition of identity in this research, it is necessary to categorize the development of identity since for academics, it is diverse in nature.

In the past decades, identity has become a key research concept in the field of sociology, psychology, ethnography and philosophy (Beijjard et al., 2004). The first statement of identity is said to date back to Rene Descartes’s famous dictum ‘cogito, ergo sum’ (‘I think, therefore I am’). It was later further perceived by Locke as perception of distinction or sameness(Hammack, 2015). The idea of the sense of identity in eighteenth century is viewed by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant as perception of sameness and diversity constructed in memory (Hammack, 2015). However, much of these discussions were connected to the question of the existence of good and to debates on notions of duality, of a physical and spiritual self. Studies of identity are firstly launched in the context of psychology and later replicated to the area of sociology. The achievements such as significance of memory, meaning, relationality as well as sameness and distinction in perceiving the world place great influence on foundational theorists of identity theory, namely William James and George Herbert Mead. Both of their theories of identity emphasize the core of

psychological processes for maintaining coherence and unity, but ‘diverged in the extent to which they either privileged the private world of interior thought (in James’ case) or the public world of symbolic meanings (in Mead’s case)’ (Hammack, 2015, p. 14).

With the development of identity theories, the two categories of emphasis in psychology or sociology respectively finally meet together at the idea of a narrative identity theory. The following two tables sort out the two lineages of the theoretical foundation of identity adapted from Hammack (2015), Ashmore and Jussim (1997).

Table 1: Mead’s lineage: emphasis on social interaction

Name	Year	Work or theory
Foote	1951	Individual personally appropriates a societally prescribed role.
Goffman	1963	Theory of stigma
McCall & Simmon	1966	Role identity
Stryker	1968	Identity theory: The way people think about identities and how identities become important is determined by social construction.
Tajfel & Turner	1979, 1986	Social identity theory: How social categorization impact human’s behaviors.

Thorne	2000	Narrative identity: Personal telling memory was deployed as lens to view personality development.
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Table 2: James lineage: emphasis on internal process of maintaining coherence

Name	Year	Work or theory
Erikson	1950	He integrated James and Mead's theories, contending that 1. Process of identity was pivotal at a moment in the level of individual. 2. Integrated inner psychological process with exterior social change
Marcia	1966	Identity status theory: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion
Cohler	1982	Narrative theory
McAdams	1988, 1990	Narrative theory: emphasis on big stories namely whole autobiographical narratives

In sum, according to Hammack (2015), the emergence of narrative identity enables a

bridge between James and Mead's theories of identity namely, social science and humanities. Narrative identity links 'the social sciences and humanities that emphasize individual cognition, social cognition, social categorization, and the power of language and discourse' (Hammack, 2015, p. 23). In 21<sup>st</sup> century, identity theories stepped into the era of post-modernism with pluralism of ethnic identity, sexual identity and identity politics. (e.g., Hall, 1996; Bauman, 1996), emphasis on the link between internal psychological process and exterior world categorization, post-modernism mainly views identity as discontinuity, multiplicity, fluid and dynamic:

They (scholars in twenty-first century) understand identity as an aspect of the person that develops over time (e.g., McLean & Pasupathi, 2012); a tool for individual and collective meaning-making (e.g., Hammack, 2010); a product of the modern project of social organization on the basis of categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual identity, religion, and the like (e.g., Warnke, 2008); and an opportunity for unity and division. (Hammack, 2015, p. 25)

### **2.3.2 Teacher Identity**

Teacher identity in general is perceived as dynamic and contextualised but varied from scholars in defining its continuity. According to Giddens (1991) people adjust their appearances and demeanour to different settings, which is supposed by some authors that, as a result, the self is broken up resulting in no inner core of self-identity. Later studies show that the case can be addressed as Giddens (1991) explains, 'as the maintaining of constants of demeanour across varying settings of interaction is one of the prime means whereby coherence of self-identity is ordinarily preserved' (Giddens, 1991, p. 100). Teacher identity is also argued by Meijer and Akkerman (2011) as both individual and social, continuous and discontinuous (Meijer & Akkerman, 2011, as cited in Ye & Zhao, 2019). Day et al. further points out the stability of teacher identity

is dependent on how teacher managing influential factors at different level (Day et al., 2006). Though there are debates on arguing the stability of teacher identity, one thing for sure is that it can be argued that identity development is characterized as an ongoing process, interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. (Gee, 2001; Beijjard et al., 2004; Anspal et al., 2012).

To be specific in the context of teacher education, it is suggested that teachers' professional identity or teacher identity is a dynamic process consisting of interaction between personal, institutional, professional and social factors (Ye & Zhao, 2019). Teacher identity also consists of the characteristics of being pervasive and ongoing since institutional factors such as policy reform within the context of schools or factors outside the school such as family may be dominant in a certain period of time and impact teacher identity (Day et al., 2007; Anspal et al., 2012). So teacher identity can be concluded as a process of construction and reconstruction, greatly depending on context (educational policies, culture and social rules) and circumstance a teacher is embedded in (school rules, preference from teacher educators and school atmosphere). However, different context may generate different process of identity formation given that teachers are living and working in different cultural constructed society. How Chinese teachers perceive their role as a teacher and what influential factors may shape their identity may be diverse from Western context. Based on Day et al.'s framework (2006) of understanding teacher identity as a stable and not fragmented process of managing or dealing with influential factors mentioned above. Ye and Zhao further conclude in the article (2019) that there are three levels of influence on teacher identity: institutional level, interpersonal level and personal level based on Chinese context. Ye and Zhao points out that Chinese teachers tend to be more restricted by examine culture thus focusing more on professional responsibilities (Ye & Zhao, 2019). And among interpersonal factors Ye and Zhao argue that with the rise of consumerism, the relationship between teachers and students' parents is



impacting more on teachers' perception of their career; the gap of parents' overwhelming and unrealistic requirements have made teachers difficult to meet public's expectation and mistakenly posit themselves as simply service-providers.

Zhang et al. also point out in the article (2021) that if applied teacher identity in the concept of Bourdieu's theory of field, teacher actually worked in the field of school with three dimensions (school environment, teacher related management and relationship with others in school), teacher identity can be perceived as a product of teachers' personal perception based on the capital they own in the field of school and interaction with policies, rules and others such as peers, headteachers and students. As a result, teacher identity can be referred as a dynamic and personal construction greatly affected by different capitals (such as gender, wages and social status) within the field of school (Zhang et al., 2021). In the light of mentioned empirical studies, the research adopted the framework of influential factors from Ye and Zhao (2019) to see how influential factors at three levels shape highly-educated female teachers in China and manages to analyse them from a view embedded in Bourdieu's theory of field.

Furthermore, for female teachers, personal factors such as gender are worth noting because it also plays an indispensable role in shaping female teachers understanding of self, in terms of being a teacher and further professional development in teaching (Fuller, 2013; Ye & Zhao, 2019). Fuller's analysis of headteachers' leadership (2013) points out that the gendered, raced and classed identities have an impact on people's status in different environment (family and workplace), which furthermore may influence people's access to different capitals. This thought can also be applied in explaining how factors such as educational, family background, welfare and gender may impact teachers' status in schools and how such status may influence their access

to capitals in the field of school reciprocally. This part will be elaborated later in the chapter on gender in teacher education.

Besides, it is also necessary to define and frame how teacher identity is manifested namely what aspects may reflect and show teachers' perception and attitudes. Teacher identity according to previous studies is manifested by many facets like attitudes, perception of the job image or description of daily work (Kelchtermans, 1993 & 2009). Teacher identity may contain many perspectives. In order to provide a clearer and relatively comprehensive explanation of teacher identity, the study intends to construct the manifestation of teacher identity within the frame of Kelchtermans's perception. Kelchtermans (1993, 2009) has proposed five aspects for teacher identity. The first is how teachers describe their role of being a teacher, referring to *self-image*, second one is one step further to evaluate their role of being a teacher, namely *self-esteem*; the third one is the motives for teachers to enter and stay in teaching career, which is defined as *job motivation*; *task perception* is the fourth one which deals with how teachers perceive or define their work. Last but not least, the fifth one is *future perspective* which is mainly about future anticipation, opportunities for development and further self-improvement in the career (Kelchtermans, 1993, as cited in Anspal et al., 2012). Such theory to some extent echoes and further classifies what mentioned above as teacher identity is produced and revealed through the process of personal perceptions based on individual background and daily interaction with policies, others in school and possible capitals a teacher has (Day et al., 2007; Anspal et al., 2012; Fuller, 2013; Zhang et al., 2021). In order to analyse sufficiently how different individuals perceive their role of being a teacher, given that teacher identity is to a large extent dependent on personal perception, recognition and context one is getting in touch with. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) points out, narrative writing can reveal growing professional identity perceptions in changing contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Anspal et al., 2012). Since the research questions mainly focus on the process and influential factors of highly-educated female teachers' professional

identity formation. Their perceptions towards being a teacher at primary/secondary schools and recognition towards gender issues are likely to differ with each other because of different biography, educational and teaching experience as well as family background, different schools' atmosphere and other life course experiences (Day et al., 2007).

Narratives in identity perception is a process of how people understand and construct meanings of self in relation to experiences and 'thus further their sense of identity' (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009, p. 559) Hence by utilizing narrative identity theory, which 'holds hope for integration and cross-disciplinary conversation' (Hammack, 2015, p. 26), Based on discussed ideologies I hope to encourage highly-educated female teachers to tell their experience as well as personal recognition as a teacher at primary/secondary schools via semi-structured interviews embedded within Kelchtermans's five aspects of teacher identity; integrate identity with emphasis both on individual biographical process of dealing with internal psychological process as well as exterior social life. Such framework of understanding teacher identity also contributes to my design of methodology and research methods in emphasising on personal lived experience.

Another key concept in this research is gender. The research underlines how social factors shape highly-educated female teachers' identity, teacher identity, just like social identity, is gendered, raced and classed, which furthermore may influence a teachers' working performance like teaching and career future development (Fuller, 2013). Bourdieu's theory of field to some extent at first gives less explanation of how gender works as an element or a capital in what Bourdieu called the game of field. Later the theory related to capital was developed by feminist scholars and Bourdieu

himself, working on the concept of symbolic violence (McCall, 1992). Analysis combines Bourdieu's capital theory with Chinese traditional view of yin and yang to give a detailed explanation of how gender influences identity and why gender factor as a symbolic violence (McCall, 1992) is absent for these female teachers embedded in Chinese context. The following parts will elaborate gender concept in a broader range and specifically discussed in Chinese context.

## **2. 4 Gender**

### **2.4.1 Nurture vs. Nature**

In the following sections, a brief discussion on gender studies development and gender embedded within the Chinese context will be explored to underpin the research questions on gender, and its role in contributing to the shape of identity. Gender is considered as a factor which may impact on female teachers in forming their professional identity as well as deciding their professional development. To define how gender possibly shapes teacher identity in this research, it is necessary to briefly reflect on – rather than attempt to get to the bottom of - the debate between nurture (how social norms and stereotypes shape and reproduce conformity to female and male) and nature (masculine and feminine behaviors as decided by hormonal process) (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Scholars who support the nature argue that a female's actions such as being good at caring, being the key family makers and physical weakness are based on biological genes while nurture supporters assert women behaviors are formed unconsciously and consciously by social norms and regularities (Eagly & Wood, 2013). The key point for debate is on whether human behaviors and their thinking are the effects of nature/the inherited genes or through nurture/socialization with the exterior environment and people (Griffin, 2017).

Feminist movements to a great extent influenced scholars (e.g., Shields, 1975; Unger, 1979) who were later allied with the nurture camp claiming challenges to the gender-as-nature views of Darwin (1871) and endowed more emphasis on gender (nurture) than sex (nature) in studies of feminism and gender inequality (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Later in the 1980s the supremacy of nurture explanation in psychology came to an end with more studies on the nature side because of scientific application of brain structure and tests on hormones (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Also the widely discussed journalistic article “Why Women Can’t Have it All” by Marie Slaughter opted to state aside from the impact of social expectations, maternal instinct is also critical in shaping women’s choice of work-life balance (Eagly & Wood, 2013; Slaughter, 2012). Therefore a more holistic and neutral view nowadays sees that the natural side (biological or genetic) does not separate with the social one (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Currently, gender is more often perceived and interpreted from a perspective of post-structural and a post-modern view. As Butler points out in *Gender Trouble* (1990), both gender and sex cannot be simply defined as naturally or culturally constructed. They are more like a performance to align with certain characters of being masculine or feminine (Butler, 1990, as cited in Haralambos et al., 2013). Current post-structural views endow ideas of gender as fluid and more complex, a process constructed contextually through interaction with others (Butler, 1990, as cited in Fuller 2013). It means that personal experience together with the context one lives in greatly influence one’s view of her/his gender identity and perceptions towards gender issues.

To explore individual’s various experience of being a female highly-educated teacher at primary/secondary school, the research drew from post-structural feminism as it highlights the intersection between the individual and different forms of power in society (Fuller, 2013; LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022). Post-structural

feminism highlights and addresses social structures, power dynamics and expectations within relationships, which impact females in their career choice and development. There are already studies which have discussed how structural forces and expectations may influence a woman's choice of career or social decisions (Weiler, 1988 as cited in LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022). Instead of reiterating the binary opposition, post-structural feminism highlights the power of socially contextualised strategies and women attributes such as being caring, sacrificing for family and compromise to meet career expectations. This perspective deconstructs hegemonic masculinity and considers how attributes related to maternity, such as caregiving and social assumptions about the role of the mother may disadvantage women in workplaces (Hurst & Smith, 2020 as cited in LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022). Women from the perspective of post-structural feminism use such strategies to contribute to incremental changes and improve social positioning (LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022).

All in all, in this research, the purpose is not to debate between nature and nurture but to see how exterior factors shape highly-educated female teachers. So the definition in this research adopts a more nurture and post-structural one. The view of nurture emphasizes a lens of what Wharton argues (2005) in the definition of gender that it is a 'system of social practice' (p. 7) in which gender distinctions are created as well as maintained and relation of inequality is organized. It means gender is a process state, occurring 'at all levels of social structure' (Wharton, 2005, p. 7), which enables us to see how social processes and social institutions such as workplaces and family reproduce gender. To be specific, female teachers are always perceived to be caring and caregiving and are expected by the society to sacrifice or compromise in face of inequity, for their professions without adequate compensation (Brown & Stern, 2018). Such finding is also true when analysing 'vocation of sacrifice' in teaching career (Tully, 2023).

Gender performance is constructed contextually and circumstantially (Butler, 1990, 2004, as cited in Fuller, 2013). It also should be highlighted that the lens does not exclude the potential power of nature on highly-educated female teachers especially in terms of child-rearing. Highly educated female teachers experience being females in a school context and being mothers or daughters or wives in a family context, which may cast either negative or positive influences on their perception of being teachers in primary/secondary schools as well (Fuller, 2013). The construction of gender under the current perception of post-structuralism indicates that such construction is complex due to different context (culture, family and society) and different personal narratives of gender which lead to different self-recognition of gender equity (Fuller, 2013). Post-structural feminism is well-suited to the research which focuses on highly-educated female teachers' individual lived experience in that it foregrounds local and contextual discourse, 'applied theory in practice, and acknowledges the truth as situated in individuals' experiences' (LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022, p. 2). To have a better understanding of what situation or social restrictions Chinese highly educated female teachers may encounter, the following part will elaborate traditional Chinese gender through the philosophical views of yin and yang as well as some of the main gender issues in current Chinese primary/secondary schools' context.

#### **2.4.2 Traditional Gender View in China: Yin and Yang**

The current gender issues in China are believed to have its origin embedded in a broader Chinese socio-cultural context (Leung, 2014). Gender inequality in China is persistent throughout Chinese history (Leung, 2014). The traditional view of Chinese relationships between husbands and wives were based on the interpretation of yin and yang from Taoism (an ancient native religion in China), originally a way of explanation of harmonized universe but later extended by Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as an underpinning for patriarchal governors (Shen & D'

Ambrosio, 2014). Some earliest concepts of yin and yang were found in Shangshu (Book of Documents) though firstly having little to do with gender, but more concentrating on power relations, later the original concepts yin (northern side of mountain with shades) and yang (southern side of mountain with sunlight) are extended with more meaning such as yin referring to negative, female and cold while yang as positive, male and warm (Shen & D' Ambrosio, 2014). This interpretation is unexpectedly in accordance with Pythagoras's words that 'There is a good principle that created order, light, and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman.' (De Beauvoir, 2010, p.5). The concepts are seen as a representation of gender relationship, a sustaining framework for patriarchal practices in China (Tie, 2012). Anyone who challenges it is regarded as being a risk to destroy the harmony (Leung, 2014). Though the concept of yin and yang is not simply a gendered one, there are still extensions of this idea on limiting females. Derived idioms that built on yin and yang deeply impinge on Chinese traditional views of family and still have a negative and profound power on females nowadays (Leung, 2014). For example, nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei (men are bread winners and women must take care of things in family) and nv zi wu cai bian shi de (women without knowledge are seen as a kind of virtue) (Leung, 2014).

It is worth noting that, though there were several laws and legislation rules on eliminating gender discrimination and biased views on females after the establishment of The People's Republic of China, current jokes and disrespect of unmarried women and women with a doctoral degree still exist and seem to be related with the traditional thoughts mentioned above (Li, 2015). A females choice of job is still greatly influenced by gender bias and traditional gender thoughts (Huang, 2022). As Huang argues in the article (2022), currently female graduates choose to work at primary schools mainly influenced by their parents (a symbol of patriarchal power) and social common sense that taking care of youth is a suitable role for female.



Though the proportion of females in primary/secondary schools is higher than males, but it is just reinforcing the gender inequity in that many schools are inclined to hire male candidates even if he is less qualified than his female counterparts (Huang, 2022). It is also disappointing to note that with efforts of government's legislation on eliminating gender inequality in recruitment, the unequal requirements towards females still exist in the recruitment of civil servants, company employers and teachers (Liu, 2015). As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the explicit and implicit gender discrimination are still severe in the recruitment of females in China (Liu, 2015). For example, Li in her article (2015) presents a survey carried out by Ministry of Labor and Social Security in 62 cities in China showing that there are still about 67% employing units have evidence of gender discrimination towards females and some even indicate that females are not allowed to conceive or give birth to children during the period of employment. To sum up, though there are relative laws to prohibit gender discrimination during employment, there is still evidence of gender discrimination existing. Female choice of work is also greatly influenced by traditional view of 'women homemaker, men bread winner' and parents' suggestions (representation of patriarchal social view).

## **2.5 Definition of Identity and Gender in This Research**

Based on discussion of the development of identity and gender, I opt to define teacher identity as historically, culturally and contextually constructed, where teacher identity construction is fluid, as well as dynamic to the change of surroundings and ongoing biographic experiences. It is a individual process of interacting between external society (institutional and interpersonal level)and internal understanding (personal level).

Based on the above introduction of the multiple definitions of identity, it is clear that there are overlapping ideas but with different emphasis. Therefore, to be specific I define teacher identity in this research as a combination as follow:

1. Teacher identity is socially, culturally, historically, gendered and contextually constructed, existing and interacting alongside with other identities in different fields (Fuller, 2013). The influential factors can be classified into three levels namely institutional, interpersonal and personal level (Ye & Zhao, 2019).

2. Teacher identity formation is a process of reflexive project. Highly-educated female teachers construct and reconstruct their perception of professional identity in changing contexts such as in classroom, educational reform and family via telling their stories as reflection of being a teacher . ‘We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 75)

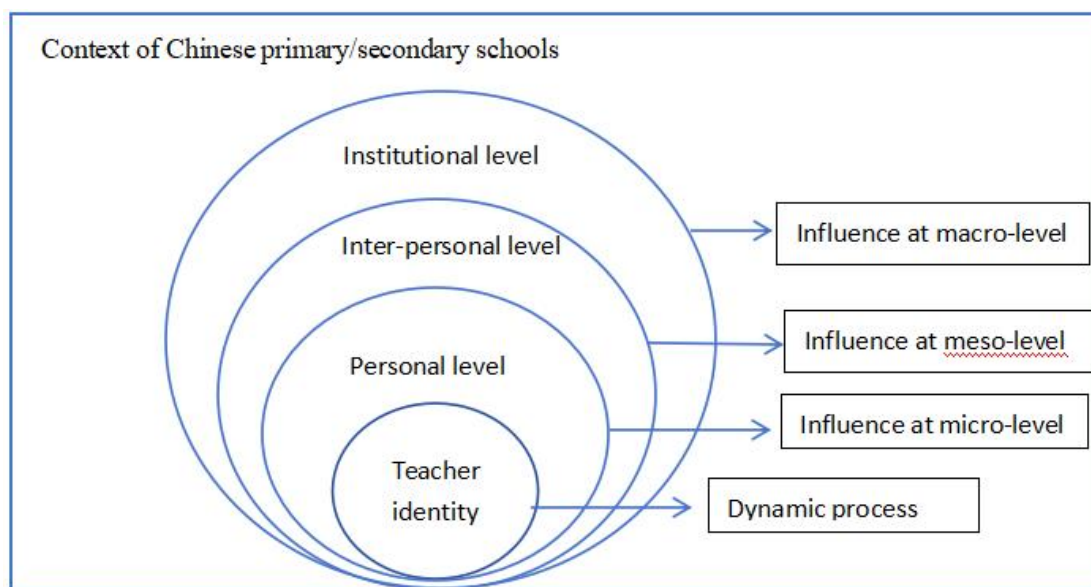
3. Teacher identity is a form of ‘trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 75). The construction of narratives about past experience is also a representation and interpretation of the present self. (Pasupathi& Hoyt, 2009)

4. Teacher identity process is dynamically reflected by highly-educated female teachers’ changing personal perception of the five aspects namely self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives in the primary/secondary schools’ context (Kelchtermans, 1993).

In short, teacher identity is defined as a dynamic and reflexive process, which is socially, culturally, historically, gendered and contextually constructed. It is interacting with other identities of an individual and reflected by a teacher’s

perception of self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives. The relationship of teacher identity with influential factors at personal, inter-personal and institutional level is explicitly shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Teacher identity in this research



Teacher identity in this research is perceived as how teachers understand their role, to cope with the environment and to manage daily work under the influence of external and internal factors at different level (Day et al., 2006, as cited in Ye & Zhao, 2019). According to Ye and Zhao (2019) influential factors which contribute to teacher identity can be summarised at three levels: the institutional level (social cultural context and policy context which contains regulations, school rules, norms and cultural cognition), interpersonal level (relationships with others like students, students' parents, principals and peers) and personal level (gender, age, biography, life experience and working experience).

Meanwhile, gender is defined from a lens of social construction: that is gender is nurtured through interactions within a social context. In teacher identity, gender works

as a personal influential factor which may contribute in shaping teacher identity and is defined as contextually, socially and personally constructed. Gender working as a form of symbolic violence is also vital in impacting female teachers' self-value and perception towards their work. To be precise, highly-educated female teachers construct their perception and reaction not only based on the social-cultural context they are in but, also may be impacted by personal factors like knowledge, educational and working experience as well as family background. See Figure 1.

Thus the study aims to discuss how different influential factors including gender, welfare and policies interact and interwoven with which other and shape highly-educated female teachers' identity. In the next part, Bourdieu's theory of field is discussed to see how this theory can be applied to analyse influential factors of teacher identity.

## **2.6 Bourdieu's Theory of Field, Gender and Identity**

### **2.6.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Field and Capitals**

This research employs Bourdieu's theory of field to analyse how economic, social status, educational background as well as gender impinge on the formation of highly-educated female teachers' identity in primary/secondary schools. Though Bourdieu's research was based on the French context, his theories still provide an open framework which enables empirical research in different contexts to study the interplay between agency and structure via macro concept (Murphy & Costa, 2016).

The central concept of Bourdieu's theory of field is the habitus and its relation with

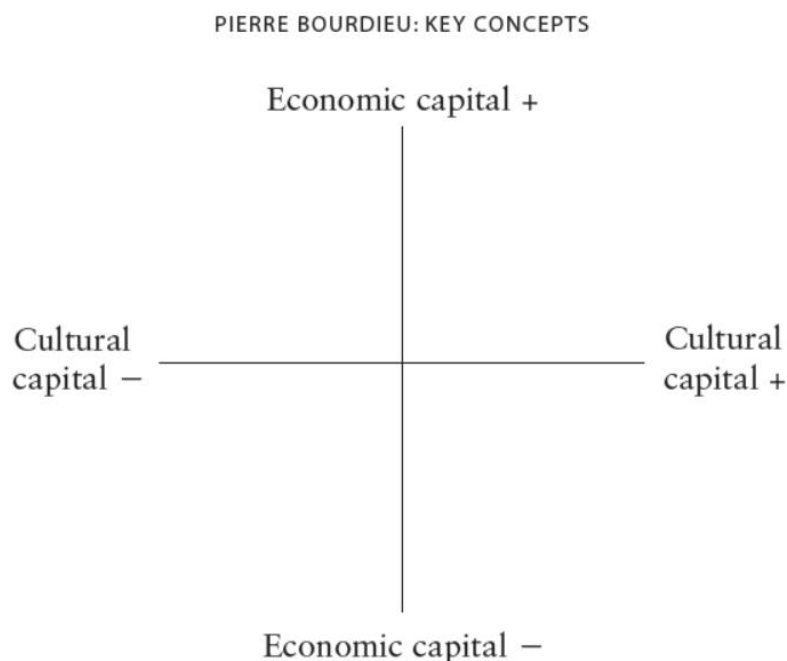
other key concepts of capital and field. For Bourdieu, social structure is not stable but a dynamic process constituted of cause and effect, influenced by his teacher, Merleau-Ponty who indicated 'phenomenal' structures as being 'embodied' in individuals' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 14), Bourdieu regards habitus as an 'operational site' of a structured structure and a structuring structure (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 14). Even the word 'habitus' itself is not a new and original word but previously is linked to writers like Aristotle, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (Grenfell & James, 1998). Compared with Foucault's work, Bourdieu's notion of habitus generates a more dynamic theory of embodiment (Grenfell & James, 1998). The completion of the notion is an ongoing and developing process. First as simply conditions of life in *Les Héritiers*, Bourdieu further develops the concept as a 'medium of inculcation and production of the cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Grenfell & James, 1998, p.15) Later this concept is perceived as an epistemological tool and a way to comprehend social activities (Grenfell & James, 1998).

Enigmatic as many scholars think, habitus is regarded as one of the concepts which are misunderstood, difficult to be defined and misused. Bourdieu himself defines habitus as 'a property of social agents' (Maton, 2008, p. 50). It is in Bourdieu's view structured by educational background, family upbringing and other factors which can be concluded as past and present circumstances (Maton, 2008). It is also a dynamic process of structuring because habitus will in turn help shape one's present and future practices (Maton, 2008). To conclude, habitus is used to explain how social structure and individual agency reconcile; how exterior social world and inner self help to shape each other (Maton, 2008). It is 'a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214). Similar to identity, habitus mirrors a person's perception, behaviour and attitude under the impact of exterior social world and her/his own

experience and recognition. It can be further inferred that to a certain extent one's identity reflects one's habitus and the two influence each other reciprocally.

For Bourdieu, habitus from an individual level which is both consciousness and unconsciousness, is actualized and realised in an objective world, which refers to another key concept, field. Habitus works and interacts within social space which in Bourdieu's view is defined as field (Bourdieu, 1986). Field in a word is structured different arenas of social life (McCall, 1992); is 'therefore a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 16). He used a football game as an analogy to explain this concept, discussing social life as a game. Unlike the physical concept of a force field which is deemed as a single entity, social field in Bourdieu's work is multiple with large fields and their sub-fields (for example photography and painting within art, primary/secondary schools within education). Field hence can be perceived as 'a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.16), permeating in every aspects of one's social life. Each field is like a game which means it has certain rules and logic to run be it a large one or a sub one (Grenfell & James, 1998). Bourdieu illustrated the diagram of a social field with emphasis on cultural and economic capital (see Figure 2). He reasons that field can be plotted by poles depicted in Figure 2. He puts economic axis vertical because it brings more power and status than the cultural one. (Thomson, 2008)

Figure 2 Diagram of social field



Adapted from *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* edited by Michael Grenfell, 2012, p.69

In the theory of field, doxa is another key concept which is dependent on habitus, meaning this kind of disposition is constructed through a person's past and present surroundings and experiences (Rimmer, 2017). Doxa is a "set of core values and discourses of a social practice field" being termed as taken-for-granted, self-evident and unquestioned truths in a society (Nolan, 2011, p. 205; Vakalopoulos, 2023). Phenomenologically it is perceived as a natural attitude. Doxa can be understood as a product of repeated interaction between subject and the external world, being constituted through repeated habitual experiences and perceptions of habitus (Nolan, 2011; Rimmer, 2017; Bourdieu, 20, as cited in Vakalopoulos, 2023). Natural attitude of people may share similarities but according to Weiss (2016), natural attitude of people are never identical (Weiss, 2016, as cited in Vakalopoulos, 2023). Vakalopoulos (2023) further argues that for the oppressed and less privileged, instead

of what Bourdieu depicted as resigned conviction, a less happy one of feeling (Bourdieu, 1981, as cited in Vakalopoulos, 2023), are aware of the inequity and difficulties; to a extent they are forced to accept the reality instead of taking realistic deprivation or other unfairness for granted and accepting such just less happily. In this sense, Vakalopoulos (2023) mentions a fact that agents may also have choices of not living in a life which is forced on them. Furthermore one's choices and actions against unfairness may also differ according to their different perceptions. He emphasises the importance of emotion in perceiving doxa, claiming that "Agents are existentially inseparable from the social positions they occupy and, simultaneously, characterize the socio-cultural conditions of their life-world" (Vakalopoulos, 2023, p. 264). The expansion of doxa provides strong theoretical support for the research of how highly educated female teachers construct their identity based on daily behaviors (habitus) and implicit or explicit norms.

After a brief introduction of habitus and doxa, it is also necessary to explain how capitals (shown in Figure 2) construct and influence the formation of habitus and furthermore doxa. Capital, another key concept in Bourdieu's theory of field is accumulated in certain fields such as field of education, field of sports and others. Bourdieu puts capital as a kind of token to exchange within a field, people own different and unequal amounts of capital when they enter into fields (Grenfell & James, 1998). The inherited wealth, family social network and cultural distinctions are what a person may originally hold when she/he enters into a field and thus is more possible to be a better player in field games (Grenfell & James, 1998). Capitals can be both material or immaterial resources. The first version of explanation of capitals range from political, personal and linguistic to functional, which includes more diverse forms than the current version (Grenfell & James, 1998). Later, three main forms of capital namely economic, cultural and social capital were distinguished but Bourdieu also argues that all these factors can be perceived as symbolic capital as



well (Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Ihlen, 2018). Since cultural capital for instance one's knowledge acquired through elite education can be apprehended as a form of symbolic capital and one's property representing richness can also be regarded as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Ihlen, 2018). It means other capitals may also function as symbolic capital. It also means resources one can utilise on the basis of honor and prestige. As a result, currently capitals are classified into four groups namely economic (money, salary and assets); social (social status, family and network); cultural (knowledge, aesthetic taste and cultural preferences) and symbolic (credentials, prestige, honor and recognition) (Moore, 2008; Ihlen, 2018). In discussing symbolic capital, Bourdieu claims that social inequality in a large scale is established through 'subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals', which is regarded as symbolic violence, a form of domination (McNay, 1999, p. 99). Later, there are also other factors which are concerned as a kind of capital such as gender, an issue which was seldom discussed in Bourdieu's work and parental social capital (Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2013). Like what is discussed above, people with advantaged capital have the superiority to advance more. For example, in the field of education children in a wealthy and highly-educated family are tended to be more likely to receive higher education than children in impoverished rural area. In order to systemize and give clear explanation, in 1986, Bourdieu summarized the relation of these three concepts as an equation:

$$[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$$

(Adapted from *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* edited by Michael Grenfell, 2012, p. 50)

This equation indicates that one's practice is a result of the relation between one's disposition (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital) within a certain social arena (field) (Maton, 2008). The process is perceived to be reflexive and (re)productive, attempting to break the dichotomy between subjective and objective dimensions of

the society (Murphy & Costa, 2016). To be specific in the field of education, Bourdieu believes interactions among field of school, social rules and other fields aim to better function the reproduction of cultural capital, thus he infers that the main capital in the field of education is not economic capital, social capital or symbolic capital but cultural capital which under some circumstance can be transformed into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997 as cited in Huang, 2019). But there is also exception of the exchange between cultural capital and economic capital, more cultural capital does not mean one can definitely gain more economic capital if credentialism and educational inflation are taken into account. Bourdieu's analysis of teachers (high cultural capital whilst low economic capital) and petty dealers (low cultural capital and high economic capital) to some extent also proves such statement and embodies current Chinese primary/secondary schools' teachers plight (Huang, 2019).

To be more detailed, teachers are a cohort of people who own strong cultural capital and are proud of such capital. But the situation in China might be different from what Bourdieu argued in that cultural capital is dependent on family background and forms social re-production since children from wealthier family easily access to more cultural capital and thus more possible to win the game and even decides one's academic development therefore reinforce the inequity of education (Fuller, 2009). To be specific, in Bourdieu and Passeron's book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1990), cultural capital refers to individuals' skills and dispositions such as knowledge they acquire from school, language skills, taste of art and values they gain in childhood. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is essential and economically oriented in his theory of field and is regarded as key essence to the reproduction of class in education (Fuller, 2009). So it can be said that cultural capital is greatly impacted by family background and is regarded as a kind of family legacy that determines which influences students' academic achievements as well as development that school environment may find it difficult to influence. As mentioned, Bourdieu placed his

research in French context so the perception of family influence on individual's academic achievements is also French contextualized rather than universal. In Chinese context, thanks to not expensive tuition fees and prevalent belief that learning can change one's social status, most students' parents are willing to invest in children's education despite they may not have quite strong family background (Bai, 2006). So unlike Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital which is perceived mainly as a family legacy (Murphy & Costa, 2016), Chinese contextualized cultural capital is less impacted by family's stratification and economic status or cultural heritage, it has formed a kind of habitus shaped by Chinese long-term traditional belief that learning can change one's fate. So, most parents in China endeavour to invest children's academic success (Bai, 2006). In fact, DiMaggio (1982), Jenkins (1992) and Goldthorpe (2007) challenges Bourdieu's idea on the overly deterministic nature of cultural capital on reproduction of class and influence of class on educational attainment. So do Sullivan (2001) in the research of testing the link between cultural capital and educational attainment. The research also shows that cultural capital works well as an explanatory term for a grand mechanisms of education but cannot be regarded as a theory to explain cultural reproduction.

Besides cultural capital and economic capital discussed above, social capital also plays an essential role in shaping teacher identity. It is regarded as social status, social network, civil engagement and community (Morrow, 1999). For Coleman, social capital is also productive and depends on resources from community relationship (Coleman, 1988; Fuller, 2009). Theorists believe that social capital is greatly linked with social networks and class and cannot be independent from economic and cultural capital (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1997 as cited in Huang, 2019). And one's social network and class is greatly impacted by one's family background as well as by gender to decide the accessibility to more social resources. In Huang's (2019) and Zhang et al.'s (2021) research, embedded in the theory of Bourdieu's theory of field,

teacher identity in Chinese school's context is believed to be embodied in habitus of daily teaching and teachers' perception and shaped by different forms of capitals and their personal experience as well as personalities.

As a result, the three key concepts of capital, habitus and field were applied in the research in order to see highly-education female teachers' transformation of habitus from being a post-graduate student to a teacher at primary/secondary school; how salary and welfare (economic capital), educational and family background (cultural capital) and gender (symbolic violence) help to shape highly-educated female teachers in Beijing's primary/secondary schools and how the postgraduate education (cultural capital) plus the socio-economic capital influences their perception of teacher identity and actions of work (habitus). It is also worth noticing that according to Bourdieu's theory the highly-educated female teachers in this research, though with lower salary, should be relatively competitive in social status since they have higher academic certificates. But the current phenomenon is that primary/secondary schools' teachers social status is also facing challenges in face of consumerism (Yan, 2006). So it is still not sufficient to elaborate the current invisible resignation since the gender and family factor is not fully explained. For female teachers, gender also potentially shape their perception of their roles as a symbolic violence. Being a female in career may also mean more challenges and bias regarding patriarchal discrimination and biological reproductive ability. So in the following part, the relation between theory of field and gender will be elaborated to see the role of gender as a factor of effect.

## **2.6.2 Gender and Bourdieu's Theory**

### **Developing Bourdieu's Theory in Gender Studies**

As discussed, Bourdieu's concept of field is perceived as a social network, within which individuals participate with certain capitals and compete with each other to

gain higher social status (Grenfell, 2008; Li, 2011). In keeping to the rules and regularities, individuals form habitus (structured propensity to think, act and feel), a kind of invisible and unconscious strategies to adapt their actions to specific fields (Li, 2011; Moore, 2008). Capitals (money, educational background, aesthetic taste and other forms of invisible property people own) decide social agents' social status (McCall, 1992; Moore, 2008). It is noticeable that gender is not considered to be a kind of capital. For Bourdieu, gender is first seen as sexual difference; seen as a kind of 'general, biological forces which obtains specificity from social class position' more like a normalcy and is 'not a form of capital' (McCall, 1992, p. 841). Bourdieu believed that gender primarily is an 'understanding of the objective structures and cognitive structures' which are hidden (Bourdieu, 2001, p. vii; Skeggs, 2004). In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and in the *Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu studied how 'sexual division of labour generates a sexually differentiated perspective on the world.' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 19) He explored sexual difference in his book *Masculine Domination* based on Kabyle in Algeria, conceptualizing gender initially as sexual difference and social identity derives firstly from sexual identity. He manifests how masculine domination by inscribing in social objective structure and hence turn out to be seemingly self-evident and natural (McNay, 1999). He added that children learn and experience 'wider structural features' 'entwined with physical and sexual presence' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 21). He further explained this idea by giving the example of boys being more scientific and girls more literal to indicate initial capital is neutral but shaped in the 'reconversion process by 'dispositions associated with gender,' resulting in a gendered form of cultural capital but still essentially defined by the associated field of occupation' (McCall, 1992, p. 842). For example, children form their identity by observing sexual division of labour first in the home. 'This is a dialectical process involving objectification in which some features become objectified over time and form the habitus' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 21) and their habitus formed during childhood in turn shape the sexual division of labour and made such division objectified and was beyond the family (Skeggs, 2004). Bourdieu sees family

as an illusion of normalization yet criticized by Silva (2004) that the conception of family is just based on his own perception (Skeggs, 2004). Bourdieu and Passeron in 1977 pointed out that gender attribution to students is also universal and dialectical. Ideas such as boys are good at science while girls good at literacy exemplify the dialect of transference of femininity from students to subjects and back to students, which finally form the habitus (Skeggs, 2004). Gender bias in Bourdieu's view is strongly hierarchical structured and symbolized by binary oppositions (Bourdieu, 2001; Skeggs, 2004). The logics of these dichotomies reinforce and underpin social fields yet he failed to some extent to analyse gender within these logics as a form of capital (Skeggs, 2004, p. 22). For Bourdieu, he focused on exploring the surface level of symbolic whilst gender to him is always hidden under the categories. According to McCall (1992) Bourdieu only elaborates gender as a secondary principle in constraining female habitus' (p. 845). Whether women internalize the inequality into habitus or opposition to the unfairness is furthermore developed by some feminists (McCall, 1992). Bourdieu's theory of field is construed as a habitus (a theory of subjectivity) located in the society. Such emphasis on structure and order potentially fail to address what is beyond the social namely unconsciousness, the contradictions and ambiguities (such as altruism, integrity and loyalty) rooted in individuals' mind (Skeggs, 2004). Yet these values are essential in the social reproduction especially gendered reproduction (Skeggs, 2004).

To conclude, Bourdieu's theory provide explanatory power to gender studies in that it links objective structures to subjective experience and his model of field and capital offer different perceptions of values and mobility and at last his methodological insights of reflexivity enables researchers to examine positions. However, there are also flaws in his theory being applied to feminism in that his conception of family is too personal (Skeggs, 2004). His emphasis on social reproduction through education is also criticised as deterministic and emphasis on structural social dichotomies ignore

ambivalence such as altruism and inform an insufficient support of feministic studies (Skeggs, 2004).

### **Extension of Gender as a Symbolic Violence**

Though Bourdieu's theory of field is critiqued as a lack of reflexivity and human agency, the notions of field and habitus offer possible explanatory power of how individuals' access to certain capitals in the field of family and education impact career progression (Fuller, 2013). In order to theorise Bourdieu's explanatory power on gender and feminism, female researchers aim to extend his theory with debates and discussions on gender as a form of capital (McCall, 1992; McNay, 1999; Skeggs, 2004; Fuller, 2013). McCall (1992) figures out that according to Bourdieu gender is a symbolic capital which is hidden and universal and thus as a secondary division. Femininity is mis-recognised as a natural, essentialised personality disposition via a successful act of legitimation (Skeggs, 2004, p. 23). Yet such explanation regarding femininity simply as mis-recognition is far from enough according to feminists. Based on the above points of view, Skeggs (2004) further argued that gender can work as cultural capital but with condition that it is symbolically legitimated and it is via class like middle-class. Gender cannot be simply perceived as a field or symbolic capital but can be a range of things from 'embodied disposition, a resource or a symbolically legitimate form of cultural capital' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 24). It means that based on different class, gender's negative influence and its benefits also varies. Bourdieu's theory was thus furthered by feminists (e.g. Lois McNay and Bridget Fowler) indicating that gender is a form of symbolic violence when compared with other forms of cultural capital such as educational qualification, when speaking of educated women there are still unavoidable bias and judges that females are less competitive than males or simple appearance bias for instance beautiful women equals to no brains (McCall, 1992; Fowler, 2003). This violence is dialectical and universal starting at a very early age to shape a female's habitus. The development of Bourdieu's theory of field to some extent proves that women's habitus (propensity of

actions) are not fully based on nature but influenced by symbolic violence, capitals and social field (Bourdieu, 2001). Therefore gender or to be specific femininity is not a known entity but inherently ambiguous, indeterminate, contradictory and unstable, it is constantly shifting during describing selfless social practices such as caring and hence it needs more careful empirical attention not just understanding of mis-recognition (Skeggs, 2004).

In a word, Bourdieu's theory provides class into feminist work which feminists argue and analyse to include women's labour or female domestic labour. Gender as a term in Bourdieu's study is fluid from a field at first, to sexual difference, to sexual identity which forms social identity. His theory was furthered by feminist like Skeggs, McCall and other feminists to re-consider gender especially femininity as a symbolic violence from which women receive less advantages than men and potentially contributes to shape unconsciousness and selfless practices like altruism and caring (Skeggs, 2004). In light of empirical as well as theoretical studies related to gender and social reproduction, relationship between women and education is more significant and clearer in arguing class, cultural identity, personal experience and social surroundings entrench in their identity. To avoid being too deterministic, post-structural feminists develop related conception regarding gender role/identity to link gender with social structure, discourse performed by females based on personal perception and social influence and embodiment (Paechter, 2010).

In light of the related research on Bourdieu and gender studies, in this research, based on the field of teaching, the study tends to define gender based on McNay and Fowler's perception that it is a symbolic violence which is according to them inherently ambiguous, indeterminate and unstable (McNay, 1999 & Fowler, 2003, as cited in Skeggs, 2004). Thus it can be understood that gender as a symbolic violence



is to some extent contextualized, empirical oriented and not simply a mis-recognition. Gender is working intertwined with personal trajectories, disposition, social structure and entrenched bodily personal feelings in face of gender inequity (Paechter, 2010). It contributes in shaping female highly-educated teachers in their daily practices especially practices with respect to actions like caring for students, altruism and submission to authorities unconsciously. More empirical attention needs to be paid when applying Bourdieu's theory to personal behaviours and practices (an embodiment of habitus) as well as understanding the cultural context. Hence in the next section, research related to Bourdieu's theory in Chinese context will be considered to see its development and application in China.

### **2.6.3 Bourdieu and Gender Theory in Chinese Context**

In the Chinese context, research on Bourdieu's theory of field within gender mainly focuses on using the theory to explain the gender bias deeply rooted in China. The overall trend of Bourdieu's theory on gender in China is classified as either a systematic, overall introduction or, comparison between Bourdieu's theory and feminist theory. Wen in the research (2015) points out that gender studies in China mainly focus on narrating females' personal experience but fail to further explain the relationships between agency and social structure. She argues that Bourdieu's theory somehow contributes in analysing Chinese women's plight in fight against impact of traditional norms and limited right of discourse. According to the Chinese database CNKI, the number of studies that apply Bourdieu's theory to gender is less than 20, and these are mainly theoretical discussion - very few are empirical studies. Moreover, the amount of research applying Bourdieu's theory to teacher's identity is less than 20 over the last ten years in China. So there are still spaces for teacher's identity in Chinese context to utilize Bourdieu's theory to explain the dynamic and unstable change in current social phenomenon.

Wen's research (2015) gave a comprehensive view in gender issue in China based on Bourdieu's theory. According to Wen's interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of habitus (2015), the allocation of capital in masculine dominated society impinges and negatively impacts on female habitus, which is profoundly rooted, unconscious and finally hinders the development of feminism (Wen, 2015). In the context of gender development in China, the traditional Chinese gendered views of yin and yang, the traditional restrictive ideas, such as women without knowledge being seen as virtue can be perceived as deeply rooted, which force social agents to obey when they enter into the field. It can be concluded that females in China are still socialized to focus on family and child rearing, and, although there are clear improvements in women education and social status, this gendered focus will still have an impact on their 'habitus' (Shen & D' Ambrosio, 2014). Just like McCall suggests, women who enter into a male dominated field have to act like men, choose to obtain masculine gendered capital and are subject to biased regularities (McCall, 1992) for example to follow the rules which is biased towards females or to adapt to stereotyped male dominated sports like football. Bohong Liu from Beijing University in a feminism session, also pointed out the negative influence of habitus on feminism so that some women, when entering into the male dominant field such as politics and academy, refuse to speak up for female rights because of the influence of male dominated regularities in the field (Wen, 2015). These empirical studies have also provided a hypothesis to this research to see whether highly-educated female teachers though receiving high cultural capital, still are influenced by this kind of negative habitus or not.

To conclude, this research explored how the power of gender as a form of symbolic violence, a rooted habitus in the Chinese context, accompanied with other economic and cultural capital under such symbolic violence help to shape highly-educated female teacher's identity. This research considers in terms of how it shapes

highly-educated female teachers in Beijing's primary/secondary schools, based on the fact that they are competitive in educational capital but end up with less self-efficacy in teaching field. So the findings are more individual than sociological.

#### **2.6.4 Bourdieu's Theory and Teacher Identity Studies**

Li and Li in the article "Retrospect and Prospect of the Application of Bourdieu's Theory in Education in China" (2023) gives a comprehensive conclusion and prospect of studies of Bourdieu's theory of field in Chinese educational context. According to the article (2023), the number of educational studies using Bourdieu's theory of field has increased since 2009. Currently Chinese educational researchers are trying to contextualise the theory to analyse phenomenon embedded in Chinese context. Main themes are concentrating using the theory of field to elaborate educational equity, the function of social reproduction and teacher-student relationship. From the chart this article shows, there are still few studies focusing on using theory of field to research teacher identity (Li & Li, 2023).

According to Chinese data base CNKI, the number of teacher identity research utilising Bourdieu's theory is small. Basically the studies focus on conceptualising, analysing and concluding certain factors which may affect teacher identity within a school context (Huang, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). These articles provide theoretical and contextual support in pointing out that teacher identity is based on teachers' personal perception of capitals they own and interact with external environment like educational policies and students as well as students' parents in the field of school. Such conclusion echoes the definition of teacher identity in this research that teacher identity is a product of self-perception and influence of external environment. Zhang et al. in the article (2021) concluded that the concept of field can be divided into three spaces namely physical environment (schools' atmosphere and facilities), power

capital space (policies, school rules and teacher evaluation and management) and space of teachers' personal contact (relationship with peers, headteachers, students and students' parents). The article provides a detailed explanation of how the theory of field can be applied in analysing kindergarten teachers' identity. However, it is a pity that the mentioned articles did not elaborate the methodology they used and no detailed explanation on sample size. These articles are more theoretical than empirical since they only generally analysed possible factors which may affect teacher identity without quantitative or qualitative data to support.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

To sum up, identity is defined on the strength of Giddens's identity theory (Giddens, 1991), a narrative and teacher professional identity defined by Kelchtermans (1993 & 2009). In this research, identity is defined as a dynamic and reflexive process steering teachers to changing perception of self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives is embedded through the whole research and semi-structured interviews. Interview questions regarding to how economic and cultural capital help to shape identity are included.

The other key definition of gender, as a symbolic capital by feminists furthering Bourdieu's theory, has plus meanings in Chinese context as indicated amply above. It can be said that gender as a symbolic violence influences females' habitus unconsciously. In Chinese context females are deeply influenced by two factors namely traditional gender view of yin and yang that women should care more about family and at a weaker social status than men as well as modern belief of fairness that women are equal to pursue career success as men after the foundation of People's

Republic of China. It seems that women status has been elevated now but new problems like recruitment discrimination and less maternal equipment still exist and become more severe after the launch of policies like 'The Third Child Policy'. Thus highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools are facing encouragement of gaining more knowledge and working hard but unsatisfied wages, discrimination due to imbalanced gender ration and anxiety of marriage and childbirth. It is worth noting that Chinese researchers pay more attention discussing on universities' teachers or female teachers in general (Yang, 2013 & 2014). The research gap is that little research is on how highly-educated female teachers who can/used to work in universities but end up working at primary/secondary school identify with their current professions.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review on Teachers' Career, Identity and Gender Issues**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter using inverted triangle to structure the literature review in terms of highly-educated teachers' professional identity. Firstly the chapter discusses the current broad trend of teachers' recruitment, retention and resignation in China and explores previous empirical studies to reason Chinese teachers' job burnout and existing potential phenomena like 'invisible resignation' in China. The introduction works as a foundation to provide a relatively comprehensive view of current Chinese labour market of teachers' recruitment and existing issues which may influence a teacher's career choice. Then the chapter elaborates the relationship between gender and teaching to see how gender as an influential factor may impact a teacher's career. This chapter furthermore reviews the current research on the topic of gender and teacher in China. At the end of this chapter, discussion is narrowed down to critically review what studies have been done with respect to highly-educated female teachers' in China and thus reveals the research gap and the necessity of doing this research.

### **3.2 The Trend of Teachers' Recruitment, Retention and Resignation in China**

Teacher shortage has become a major concern internationally costing a vast investment of money and time to meet the vacancies created (Kersaint et al., 2007). A boom in Chinese teachers' resignation emerged in the early 1980s (Zhai, 2010; Dai, 2017), first beginning with teachers leaving from workplaces in some rural and mountainous areas, then quickly the wave spread to urban cities including metropolises like Beijing and Shanghai (Zhai, 2010; Dai, 2017). Despite being

prosperous and with outstanding sources of financial and professional resources to attract excellent teachers, these metro cities have not escaped the increasing number of teachers' resignations (Zhai, 2010; Liu & Hao, 2013; Dai, 2017). According to a report (2013) by Xingchun Liu and Baowei Hao, Beijing has experienced a vast gulf between existing teachers' numbers and the number that is needed. It is suggested by the writers that the shortage of teachers now reaches approximately 20 thousand, with Haidian and Chaoyang districts experiencing the most severe shortages (Liu & Hao, 2013). Not only is the figure very high, the characteristics of the staff who are quitting are worth noting. Primarily, teachers between the ages of 35 to 40, with a higher-education background are more inclined to resign (Liu & Hao, 2013). Moreover, articles argue that younger teachers, less than 30 years old and male, also occupy a large proportion of those quitting from schools, either because it is a disappointment in terms of welfare and treatment or, because of expectations to have a better job. (e.g. Liu & Li, 2005)

Despite the fact that recruitment is enlarged and more improved treatment of teachers is implemented in recent decades, schools - especially primary ones in Beijing and other regions in China - have to cope with the unchangeable fact of unbalanced student-staff ratio (Liu & Hao, 2013). Interestingly the enlargement of recruitment in primary/secondary schools does not mean a declining of requirement. On the contrary, the standard has been being elevated all these years, partly due to the expansion of enrollment in higher education and surplus highly educated graduates (Xiao, 2008). Unfortunately, working at primary/secondary schools instead of universities may to a large extent negatively influence the passion of these novice teachers being devoted to their work (Zhou, 2018). It is no doubt a catalyst to the vicious circle of recruitment and resignation in China. Furthermore, the imbalance of recruitment and resignation is not unique in primary and secondary schools. Higher educational institutions have no escape from the trend (Deng, 2019). The number of teachers' departing in some

universities of Beijing in 2018 is nearly as twice as in 2016 (Deng, 2019). Related studies indicate that the amount of teachers resigning from the work is much larger than the numbers being recruited (e.g. Fu, 1996). Even worse, more qualified and experienced teachers choose to leave which is, beyond experts and administrator's expectation, a great loss to both schools and students (Fu, 1996) .

Besides the number of resignations Hu (2015) from Zhengzhou Institution of Education and Science indicates that numerous teachers are in a concerned state in relation to their health and well-being; which is called 'invisible resignation', namely though teachers currently work at schools, they in a status of job burnout, have lost passion and intend to resign. This status will without doubt impinge negatively on current teacher shortages as well as the student experience. He also points out this is having a negative impact on the development of teaching as a career as well.

### **3.3 Reasons of Teachers' Resignation and/or Poor Job Satisfaction**

Teachers' resignation is always perceived to be linked with less job satisfaction, feeling overworked, unattractive financial income and family burdens (Guarino et al., 2006; Zhai, 2010; Kelly et al., 2019). This research intends to mainly focus on the dynamic process of identity formation among primary and secondary schools' teachers, namely teachers in Chinese Basic Education (primary/junior secondary schools' education). The research themes so far in this area according to database like CNKI can be mainly classified into three groups of influence, namely social bias and authorities' high expectations (e.g. Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017; Huang, 2022), family burden as well as a shortage of financial support.



### **3.3.1 Social Bias and Authorities' High Expectation and its Impact on Mental Well-being**

In China, teachers are described as 'candles' metaphorically meaning they work just like a candle burning itself to provide light (Liu, 2013). It is perceived by the public to be a job which requires sacrifice and no desire of any payment (Liu, 2013). Therefore, teachers are imposed on with high expectations which finally results in overwork and unsatisfying salary based on those hours (Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017). Many complain that their daily time is fully occupied with teaching, preparing lessons, students' management, professional training and academic contests (Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017). The data collected by Xinhong Hu (2017) shows that the working hours for a senior secondary school's teacher is nearly 16 hours per day on average. Obviously, in terms of teachers' development, authorities focus more on teachers' professional improvement and their devotion to work while neglecting teachers' mental health (Hu, 2017). Moreover, studies point out that teachers are mentally tired when all these tough tasks meet bureaucratic management (e.g. Hu, 2017). A frustrated mental status and relatively less space for personal professional development undoubtedly discourage many young and well-educated teachers to lose their passion towards repetitive and dull tasks (Liu & Li, 2005). Meanwhile, external factors such as some students' parents and social media still demand teachers in Basic Education should work more and require less (Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017).

Based on this social bias, teachers' social status is being shackled through recent decades (Hu, 2017; Huang, 2022). Students' parents as mentioned above, is one reason which makes teachers face dilemmas, for instance one teacher in this research complained that if she arranged too much homework for students, some parents may sue her to district educational administration for physically punishing children. But if she did not, still some parents were worried that this teacher was too lazy to ignore

her duty as a responsible teacher. Teachers' resignation is also attributed to media increasing reporting of delinquent teachers (Huang, 2022). All these factors finally become parts of the multiple culprits which push teachers to quit their jobs.

It is moreover needed to point out that in Chinese metropolis such as Beijing and Shanghai, due to the expansion of postgraduates' enrolment, the standard of recruiting primary/secondary schools' teachers has also been elevated, which means a graduate with a Master or doctoral degree are more likely to teach in Basic Educational system (which refers to primary/secondary schools in China) instead of higher education (Xiao, 2008). Working at primary/secondary schools, instead of universities that are accompanied with economic and social declination, means relentless change of teaching pedagogy, lower salary, lower social status and high pressure from parents, which, as this research hypothesized, may negatively impact the professional identity of highly-educated teachers (Xiao, 2008). Many teachers become low self-empowered or even quit the job to seek for higher salary and social status in other careers or further academic development (Hu, 2015; Wang & Li, 2021). Some female highly-educated teachers have to compromise with the current situation, which is to some extent a waste of knowledge and put enrolment expansion in higher education as well as the efforts for the recruitment of highly-educated teachers in vain (Wang & Li, 2021). Presently, it is not just a phenomenon of China but a global one as well since the job market could not provide enough positions to graduates with higher academic degrees in some fields. (Aaron S & Sung Tae, 2017)

### **3. 3. 2 Shortage of Financial Support**

Research and practices have proved that occupational satisfaction and professional identity are always related to the income in that it is widely admitted 'income

mediates so many other important aspects of everyday life' (Fuller, 2009, p.7). The Chinese government has implemented several policies to increase teachers' salary (Liu, 2018). Now Chinese primary/secondary schools' teachers' salary is constructed of position salary, pay grade salary, performance-based salary and subsidies (Liu, 2018). The implementation of performance-based salary is one policy to ensure teachers with more work and better performance can receive better payment (Liu, 2018). However, as research indicates the performance-based salary greatly varies from different regions and even different schools, potentially causing inequity (Liu, 2018). Liu in the article (2018) points out that such allocation of salary may cause teachers from renowned schools or developed regions earn more and thus more highly-educated graduates may choose to work at such regions or schools, which cause educational imbalance. Moreover, it should be noticed that according to Zeng et al. (2018), though teachers' salary in regions like Beijing and Shanghai rise annually, which caused complaints that these regions' teacher salary is too high. However, compared with cost of living, teachers' salary in these two regions actually cannot fully meet the living cost needs. Zeng et al. (2018) indicates that when considering salary allocation and equity, it is also necessary to consider about price of commodities in one region; in fact teachers from Beijing and Shanghai, though may rank top on salary compared with teachers from other regions, still face the challenge of living cost due to high price of commodities. To conclude, for teachers' salary allocation, there are still issues to be solved like how to measure teachers' performance, how to avoid inequity in salary allocation and how to improve teachers' welfare. For teachers from developed regions like Beijing and Shanghai, though the salary has been increasing; compared with price of commodities, teachers' salary in these regions is still at a relatively lower level.

The fact is that teachers with a Master or doctoral degree, if working at primary and secondary schools, are still receiving less payment compared with other similar career

such as teachers in higher education institute or governmental clerks (Zhou & Wu, 2016). Zhou and Wu in their research (2016) argue that the increased rate of teachers' salary in primary and secondary schools is much lower than the growth rate of GDP. Taking Beijing as an example, the average income of primary and secondary schools' teachers compared with GNP per capita is even lower than most developing countries in the world, ranging from 0.7 to 1.01 (Zhou & Wu, 2016). The data indicates that teachers at primary and secondary schools cannot make a living simply by the salary and gradually develop side business such as Wechat sales (a brand new online selling which is held via a certain SNS in China where people can sell and advocate their commodities with simple processes) (Wang et al., 2018).

It seems that despite a higher requirement of teachers' educational background during recruitment of primary and especially secondary schools in Chinese metropolises, more and more graduates with a Master or doctoral degree have to face the reality that earning money by teaching scarcely meets the need.

### **3. 3. 3 Family Burden**

Previous data and questionnaires highlight that ironically, though female teachers may experience more difficulties or sexual discrimination in their careers , male teachers have stronger intention to resign as the salary of teaching is relatively low (Zhai, 2019; Chen, 2020). The males generally are found to believe this amount of money could not ensure them to afford their families influenced by a Chinese traditional idea of family, whereby the male is a bread winner while female is the homemaker (Drudy, 2005; Yang, 2012; Wu, 2018).

Female teachers are in the majority with respect to the state of 'invisible resignation'

which means that some of them are dissatisfied with the current policy or status but lack of the courage to leave (Hu, 2015). It is also worth noting that many of them are not just experiencing less development and opportunities but ‘widowed child-rearing’ (Xu, 2020) as well meaning that the aspiration and development are constrained and limited though plenty of opportunities are available (Fuller, 2009). The phrase ‘widowed child-rearing’ is a latest term which is used to indicate that the father of a family is always absent due to work or other causes and the mother becomes the only one who raise the child. Besides the social phenomenon which most females have to face in the dilemma of whether to choose work or family, educational policies also bring impact on female teachers work-life balance, especially after the ‘Double reduction’ (Xu, 2020). According to Huang’s research (2022) primary schools’ female teachers are facing a situation that they spend most of their time at school, working like a nanny while they do not have time to take care of their own children or do house chores. Most female teachers according to this study express that they chose the job for stability and time to look after the family whilst their spouse work at companies to earn income to support the family’s finance. Huang indicates her concern in the study (2022) that after the launch of ‘Double reduction’, primary schools’ female teachers are facing two burdens; on one hand, their salary is relatively low so that they can not be the bread winner of the family, on the other hand, their work-time is longer due to the policy asking teachers to provide after school service and more work to do. So they do not have time to look after their own family. Huang’s study (2022) not just reflects that educational policy has brought negative impact and more burden on teachers. Her study (2022) also reveals female teachers’ plight of lower salary and still are regarded as homemaker both due to gender and nature of work. Suffering from both external work pressure as well as family burden, be it a financial one or sexual unbalanced division of chores, this internal anxiety will unavoidably impinge on female teachers’ passion and efficiency of teaching.

### 3.4 Gender and Teaching

It is considered to be a global issue that education careers are seen as feminized in recent decades where the problem of imbalanced proportion of male and female teachers is still unsolved (UNESCO, 2003). A majority of female teachers are at primary level. Some countries like Brazil, the Russian Federation, Italy and Slovakia' women at primary/secondary schools form nearly 90 percent (UNESCO, 2020). The percentage of female teachers worldwide in 2020 is approximately around 66% (UNESCO, 2020). Chinese Governments and schools endeavor to increase welfare or lower the recruitment standard for men but still the number of men in teaching is small (Xu & Zhang, 2021). One of the culprits of this phenomenon may be attributed to teachers' low status and payment which is unattractive to men, the reason of which may be articulated by Lortie in a chauvinistic way (1975) that the structure of payment is 'front loaded', and its rewards for long years of service are described as 'delayed gratification' (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Drudy et al., 2005). He argues that 'this 'gentle incline' suits women more than men; men look for other positions within the education system' (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Drudy et al., 2005, p. 11). The phenomenon is not unique as the UK, other European countries and the US also experience it (Drudy et al., 2005). China though, being depicted by Western scholar Drudy et al. (2005) as a country that did not experience extreme gender imbalance at primary/secondary schools but which now shares the same situation (Gan et al., 2014; Wu, 2018). Chinese experts and many boys' parents are quite wary that less male teachers may impose a negative impact on students' growth, especially boys' (Gan et al., 2014; Wu, 2018). Due to historical reasons of preferring sons in China, boys outnumber girls in most regions especially rural areas; some parents blame their boys lag on there being no male teachers to impart knowledge such as assertiveness and masculinity (Yang, 2012; Gan et al., 2014; Javier, 2016; Wu, 2018). Some experts in China are pessimistically concerned that a shortage of male teachers may produce 'a generation of timid, self-centered and effeminate boys' (Javier, 2016, p. 1). Yang in

his study (2012) put forward that this imbalance may cause severe negative influences on students' mental health, school development and even the construction and development of society. For instance, he pointed out that boys may perform much better in a male teacher's class and vice versa. It may conclude from these articles that less male teachers seem to cause an inequality of education to some extent. Boys' poor behaviors and low scores are therefore related with their female teachers' partiality to girls, sounding eccentric but agreed by some experts worldwide (Drudy et al, 2005; Yang, 2012; Gan et al., 2014). Such contestation is expanded by some researchers in China that salaries in teaching career especially in Basic Educational period should be enhanced and authorities should consider more profitable welfare and lower standard than women to attract males to be primary or secondary schools' teachers (Gan et al., 2014). It is worth noting that this assertion ignores a simple and plain fact that a girl may also need maternal care and feel at ease in a female teacher's class, not just a boys' yearning for 'brave and manly teachers.' Evidently the relation between boys and a shortage of male role models is complicated by the impact of media and the absence of father influences. It should not therefore be all dependent on teachers, nor boys' performance - which is hard to prove to have a direct and sole connection with gender. Obviously, in these cases, feminization of teaching is used as a scapegoat for boys' misbehavior. Moreover, though male teachers occupy a small proportion in Basic Education, they are always in a higher position or with more chances of promotion than female ones (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Higher education seems more popular among men since the male teachers' number is much larger than that of primary and secondary ones (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013).

On the other hand, women teachers have experienced lower status and less space for promotion and now have to face unequal recruitment such as discrimination with respect to marriage or laboring, which is becoming prevalent initially in Chinese companies (Chen, 2020). Some companies may fire female clerks or refuse to hire

unmarried or nulliparous since their maternity leave may cause economic loss (Chan, 2012; Wu, 2018). Generally, the predicament of female teachers are normally classified into two areas namely gender discrimination in recruitment and workplaces along with horizontal and vertical segregation (Cameron, 2018).

### **3.4.1 Gender/Sex Discrimination in Recruitment and Workplaces**

Before a discussion on current gender discrimination in the educational field, it is necessary to define the term sex and gender. Though they are two complicated terms which are argued by many feministic experts, the 'grey area' in between is also the focus of much debate. The best summary of distinguishing these two is perhaps made by the anthropologist Ann Oakley. She referred 'sex' to the most basic physiological differences between men and women, while 'gender' is "culturally determined and highly variable" (Drudy et al., 2005). The current situation is that women with inborn sex and (re)production of gender are receiving discrimination as being different from men who are conceived as mentally and physically strong (Cameron, 2018). And such phenomenon is not unique in one nation but worldwide (Cameron, 2018).

The stereotyped cognition towards men and women always regards females with gentle characters, beautiful looking are those with stronger competitiveness (Salinas & Bagni, 2017). Despite launching a campaign for countries to agree on eliminating gender disparities at primary/secondary schools in 2005 by UNESCO, it is disappointing to see that these female graduates' knowledge and abilities are considered less by the employers (Salinas & Bagni, 2017). Companies and industries tend to hire males in certain workplaces because of the belief that men are usually much stronger and tougher (Zhou, 2014). Teaching compared with these is a career which requires knowledge and caring for the children or adolescents. However, there



is the same discrimination (Li, 2015). It is reported in China that explicit and implicit discrimination towards hiring women teachers is severe (Li, 2015). Despite the number of female postgraduates doubling in per year, many higher educational institutions and secondary schools still intend to hire male graduates especially in feminized subjects like English, mass-media, finance and journalism, while some even published the criteria in the document that only males are qualified in these workplaces (Li, 2015; Wu, 2018). Some schools also have explicit requirements on women's time of pregnancy and marriage (Li, 2015; Wu, 2018). Obviously there is a bias towards female teachers as well as female candidates yet practical implementations are not put forward to prevent this gender inequality. Ironically, Chinese schools are endeavoring to eliminate gender inequality by hiring more male teachers yet end up with a sacrifice of women.

Even for women who have successfully been hired by schools, there is gender discrimination (Wang, 2011). They are challenged by parents and social media for not being tough and assertive enough, which may impinge negatively on boys (Wang, 2011). It is ironic to see even academic articles argue that more male teachers are needed to solve the issue of being 'over-femininity' in schools (Wang, 2011). They have to face the burden from both family and work and sometimes without any support (Salinas & Bagni, 2017). Less female teachers have time to be devoted to research although they are required to do so, often because they are sacrificing their time for the caring of their own children or house chores (Salinas & Bagni, 2017). In Salinas and Bagni research (2017) on gender equality in Europe, they reported that women express more concern on family issues and have more conflicts between academia and family than men. Even Nordic countries which enjoy preferable gender equality policies have the same issues in keeping women staying in academia and teaching (Salinas & Bagni, 2017). Such claim is also found in Chinese female teachers at universities explaining their plight in juggling work and family (Yang,

2013 & 2014).

Pessimistically, the gender/sex bias and low status of women in feminized teaching profession does not evoke authorities and governments concern to implement strategies to prevent them from being worse. Instead, some opposite views have guessed: ‘...the increasing dominance of women in teaching has a negative effect on the professional status of the occupation, or that women teachers are to blame for the low status of the profession’ (Drudy et al., 2005, p. 14).

### **3. 4. 2 Horizontal and Vertical Segregation**

Though generally female teachers occupy in a large amount in primary/secondary schools, the exact proportion and gender imbalance varies between subjects and hierarchy (Arreman & Weiner, 2007; Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Men are found to be more in scientific subjects and some social science studies while language and some arts related subjects are mainly women who teach (Arreman & Weiner, 2007; Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Kreitz-Sandberg in her article (2013) described this imbalance of gender in various subjects as the horizontal segregation. It may imply a further message of stereotyped prejudice towards females learning science or simply the gender segregation of these subjects (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Yet the gender/sex discrimination in language and arts related subjects are no better but in fact, even worse to some extent (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). It may be considered that language subjects may have less discrimination towards women but the truth is that these subjects are the problems which are mentioned in the previous part (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). It is falsely considered by many, that a female teacher dominated class may influence boys’ passion towards learning this subject and even impose a bad influence on their growth. (Drudy et al, 2005; Yang, 2012; Gan et al., 2014) Hence, double

standards are implemented and it has become more difficult for female graduates in these subjects to find a decent job (Li, 2015; Wu, 2018). It means in a teaching dimension that even women with higher degrees or stronger abilities of teaching, employers in schools still tend to hire a man for the so called gender/sex balance. It seems that horizontal segregation is not simply the imbalance of gender in various subjects but also reflects and generates some problems derived from which unfair employment and discrimination towards female teachers are even more severe.

As for vertical segregation, the pyramid-shaped structure indicates that ‘the higher a position, the fewer women’ (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013, p. 446; Cameron, 2018). Female teachers dominated schools are usually referred to kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Higher education evidently does not experience a severe shortage of male teachers; on the contrary, it is the place where male teachers’ occupation dominates (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Kreitz-Sandberg in her article (2013) of interviewing educators with respect to gender segregation advocates for more women to participate into academia, still ‘there are examples of subjects within teacher education that demonstrate a consistent problematisation of gender, diversity, and power, which pervaded the curriculum and teaching process’ (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013, p. 454). Even countries such as Sweden which support women rights cannot be excluded from the issue of gender segregation in education (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013).

Whilst in China it is also disappointing to see that according to the sub-health research of higher education’s female teachers in Guangzhou China (2020), many female teachers and researchers have to face multiple challenges such as positional promotion, academic work, child-raising as well as other private family issues, some even have to give up their academic work for a sub-healthy condition (Lai et al.,

2020). China's yearly statistics on education also reports that despite a great improvement in narrowing the gap between women and men with higher professional titles, still women account for 15.8% less than men in higher positions (Wu, 2011). Women's lower numbers in higher positions is more often related to variants such as over-burden of family hence lack of time to do research, low achievement motivation and lack of successful female models (Wang & Miao, 2014; Chen, 2019). It can be seen that the case in China is not quite similar to that of Europe but indeed share similarities in facing multiple challenges from over work and family. Gender segregation and inequality is not a regional one but worldwide problems (Drudy et al., 2005).

### **3.5 Research on Highly-educated Teachers at Primary/Secondary Schools in China**

As mentioned in chapter 2, teachers' identity is dynamic and greatly dependent on macro factors (financial welfare, policies and schools' rules) and micro-factors (personal-recognition and family reasons) (Wang, 2022). The identity of a teacher in this research mainly deals with how female teachers perceive their role from the perspective of self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives dynamically (Giddens, 1991; Kelchtermans, 1993).

Currently according to Chinese data base CNKI, the number of journal articles and newspaper which talk about highly educated teachers are 515<sup>3</sup> but less than 200 focusing on highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools, not to mention female teachers in this cohort. Overall, the number of related studies is scarce.

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<sup>3</sup> The statistics are collected by 2021.

Though the increasing demand of highly-educated teachers at secondary schools and some primary schools in China is criticised by some scholars as a potential waste (Ma, 2017; Qing, 2019; Zhong, 2020; Luo & Wu, 2021; Zhao, 2021). There is still a great need on studies to explore how this trend may influence teachers, students as well as educational system in China.

The research themes of this cohort of teachers at primary/secondary schools are divided into mainly three aspects: discussion on the phenomenon and how to avoid 'brain waste' (Ma, 2017; Qing, 2019; Zhong, 2020; Luo & Wu, 2021; Zhao, 2021), discussion on teacher training for highly-educated teachers (Hui, 2000; Xu, 2022; Xu & Chen, 2023; Deng et al., 2023) and reflection on adaptation and identity (Deng & Xu, 2015; Zhou, 2017). It is clear to see that currently research on Chinese highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools mainly focus on analysing the phenomenon and discussing the future development of these teachers. Few articles discuss teacher identity formation, its interaction with influential factors and its possible impact on teachers' daily teaching and career development. For the phenomenon discussion, articles are mainly about introducing the current trend, exploring how to make the best use of these highly-educated teachers and current issues in these teachers' teaching and development. Like Zhao reports in the newspaper of Shanghai Education (2021), China is facing a trend of more and more doctoral graduates choosing to work at secondary or even primary schools. How to avoid 'brain waste' and provide sufficient support to these teachers are topics in need to be addressed. In this report (2021), Zhao points out that actually in many Western countries like UK, Australia and the US, highly-educated teachers occupy a large proportion. China is still at the beginning phase of recruiting highly-educated teachers into Basic Education (primary/secondary schools). But it is worth noting that recruiting highly-educated teachers is not a simple competition among schools (Zhong, 2020). There are issues like how to support these teachers in teaching, how to elevate

their sense of achievements and provide research support for their future development (Zhong, 2020; Zhao, 2021; Xu & Chen, 2023). However, most of the research still just clarifies issues in a general way without deeper exploration or empirical studies on how highly-educated teacher personally perceive their roles. No sufficient qualitative studies have been launched so far, on detailed research of these teachers' working experience and how it may affect their passion towards the career. Like Zhao and Fu (2018) argues, there is less emphasis on how teachers themselves perceive their roles, most research discusses teacher identity simply from an outsider perspectives without deeper exploration of teachers' own description and understanding of the work.

Furthermore, the number of studies on highly-educated teachers' identity is small. Research in this area reveals problems which may negatively impact highly-educated teachers' identity and working passion such as financial welfare, schools' environment and working pressure from too much expectation and lack of academic support (Wang, 2022; Xu & Chen, 2023). Though research highlights some main problems in influencing highly-educated teachers' passion of teaching. Like Wang discussed in the research (2022), the resources are mainly from interviews or reports collected from the internet (internet news reports, teachers' personal blogs and reflections). Since all these materials are accessible in internet so there is still a lack of materials on sensitive topics like how these teachers perceive wages and other welfare like gendered one. Though the article fail to include first-resourced interview data to support the discussion, it indeed reveals the direct influence of welfare and teachers' personal recognition on teacher identity and indirect influence brought by schools' atmosphere and policies. The current main issues in the research of this cohort of teachers is a lack of more exploration on individual lived experience in different regional context.

Moreover, there are almost no academic articles narrowing down to discuss highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools. Though there are articles discussing how ‘Third Child Policy’ may affect highly-educated female teachers in Higher Education (Yang, 2013; Qian & Kong, 2024). The results can not be fully applied to female teachers at primary/secondary schools since the working and welfare system between these two are still different.

To conclude, research on highly-educated teachers is increasing especially after 2010, the unavoidable trend of recruiting more teachers with a Master or doctoral degree is causing the whole educational system to rethink whether they have provided enough support to these teachers to avoid ‘brain waste’. However, there are still lack of empirical studies on highly-educated teachers’ personal recognition of their professional identity not to mention highly-educated female teachers related research.

### **3.6 Developing Gender Studies of Chinese Female Teachers and Chinese Highly Educated Female Teachers at Primary/Secondary Schools**

This part focuses more specifically on female teacher identity and development in Chinese context and elaborate related studies in detail to reveal the necessity of research on highly-educated female teachers’ identity at primary/secondary schools.

To be specific, according to Lin and Hong’s literature review (2017) on Chinese female teachers’ studies during 2004-2016 in CNKI (one of the largest academic database in China), there are 16 studies in total dealing with issues of feminized career,

teacher education, professional development and teacher identity, which is commented as a small number (Lin & Hong, 2017). Hongmei Chen launched research (2019) to explore reasons why female English teachers in universities are less optimistic in academia than their male counterparts and came out with conclusion that they are constrained by social restrictions such as discrimination of social science and an excessive emphasis on scientific research which is believed to be dominated by males. Personal restrictions such as family burden, low self-achievement and behaviours of conformity also to a great extent reflect the patriarchal social nurtured power on shaping these female teachers' identity (Chen, 2019). It is no surprise to see currently the focus on female teachers with a full-time master or a doctoral degree are still discussed in the context of university, those who enter into primary/secondary schools are so few to be paid any attention to. In Suyue Wang's opinion (2017) many still believe that being a teacher at primary/secondary schools is more suitable for females especially those with less academic knowledge and skills, which is totally opposite to the increasing higher academic requirements of primary/secondary schools in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai (Wang, 2017; Zhou, 2018). Furthermore, Wang in her essay (2017) argues that the expertise of teachers is questioned due to the feminized career and thus these teachers suffer a relatively lower social status and less salary, which in turn aggravates the difficulty of social recognition. Huang in her latest research (2022) also shares similar concern that after the launch of 'Double Reduction', female teachers complain about being like a nanny to look after students and there are more trivial work to do besides daily teaching. Receiving a small amount of money but do a lot of work both at school and at home according to Huang's study (2022) have greatly decrease these female teachers' passion towards work not to mention their willingness of professional development. In this study, the participants in her research to some extent also reflects 'invisible resignation' in that many participants' perceptions express their hope to do other work other than teaching but fear not to find a job in face of age discrimination and gender discrimination (Huang, 2022). Under such circumstance, female teachers are believed



to have less space for professional development because they have to spend more time on household chores and child-rearing, approximately 2.8 times than their male counterparts (Wang, 2017). It is perhaps ironical to see that in China, in order to encourage more well-educated female graduates to enter into teaching in primary/secondary schools, the charming point of being a female teacher in primary/secondary schools is that female teachers have more time to take care of the family and give birth to a second child (Wang et al., 2018). It seems that in this article being a primary/secondary school's female teacher has a relatively stronger advantage on maternal aspects (giving birth, taking care of family, etc.) thus the current trend of resignation of teachers should not be worried about too much if the salary could be further lifted by the government (Wang et al., 2018). Though witnessing a quick development of teacher identity or other teacher studies in China with emphasis on improving welfare and salary or more caring for female teachers' work-family imbalance, it is still a pity that very few of studies in China (e.g. Zhou, 2018) have discussions on highly educated teachers' status quo of occupational ecology in primary/secondary schools. There are also very few studies published on the discussion of highly educated female teachers' identity or perception of their dilemma at primary/secondary schools.

To sum, for highly educated female teachers, the pressure are dualistic, they on the one hand have to suffer from the pressure of the overburden of house chores and perhaps pregnancy. On the other hand, according to Zhou's research (2018) on highly educated teachers in primary/secondary schools in Shanghai, these teachers also have to deal with low achievements, jealousy from peer colleagues and exorbitant expectation from the headmaster. It is also reported that the happiness index of these teachers in primary schools is the lowest (Zhou, 2018). However, if put the scope narrower, the number of highly educated female teachers' related studies is small. There are only two articles (2013, 2014) written by Yang discussing what challenges

and conflicts highly-educated female teacher may encounter. Yang discusses the vertical segregation of female teachers at universities and point out these female teachers not only face severe academic competition with male counterparts but also have to deal with family chores. They even have narrower choices of spouse for male prefer female who is less educated, earning less salary and having more time to care about family (Yang, 2013). Yang (2013, 2014) points out highly-educated female teachers need to face less choice in spouse choosing and more challenges in academy compared with highly-educated male teachers. She argues to eliminate such gender inequity, the government, university, social media and even each highly-educated female teachers' family need to provide more support for these female teachers (Yang, 2013 & 2014). For highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools, besides challenges discussed in Yang's article, since the workplace is different, there is still nuance between highly-educated female teachers who work at universities and those who work at primary/secondary schools. To be detailed, this cohort of teachers may face more sense of loss between their academic degree and welfare. However, currently this cohort of teachers (teachers with a full-time master of doctoral degree working at primary/secondary schools) especially female ones are marginalized in China according to the above reviews. Relative research only looks at things such as the professional competence of teachers with a master's degree in secondary schools and pressure of female graduates with a master's degree. Moreover such studies are rare and mainly master's theses. (e.g. Wei, 2020; Chen, 2020)

### **3. 7 Summary**

In a nut shell, female teachers' socio-economic status is still relatively low with certain authorized improvements being implemented such as higher income and better working environment (Liu & Hao, 2013; Zhou & Wu, 2016; Deng, 2019). Low

incomes, overburdened with workload, excessive intervention of students' parents and lack of development are still the main issues that teachers, especially those in primary/secondary schools have to overcome (Liu & Hao, 2013; Hu, 2015). Based on previous studies, it is widely acknowledged that women particularly in teaching profession are experiencing visible and 'invisible discrimination' especially in China. Debates on negative influence brought by feminized education and smaller occupation of male teachers are still matters which vary across countries throughout the world. Contestations such as negative impact on boys' behaviors and less male role models are mainstreams in the voice of criticizing schools being 'feminized'. Yet I deem it is still complicated to attribute them only to feminized education. Influential elements such as an absence of father in family and the mistaken understanding of being masculine like simply being audacious are also essential hinderances on boys' trajectory of education.

Moreover, to increase male teachers at primary/secondary may not seem to be as easy as to just elevate the level of income. It seems that not only is the low socio-economic status as a barrier to blocking men from teaching, the social stereotyped views, less space for professional development and prejudice towards primary/secondary teaching can be seen to be parts of the reasons that explain the current crisis in teaching and is a crisis which is unlikely to be eradicated soon (Drudy et al., 2005). But it is necessary to point out that collaboration among community, schools and parents, as well as an updated and feasible improvement in educational policy is far more useful to bring about changes, rather than blaming the large amount of female teachers as a barrier. Yet it is also worth noting that gender imbalances, stereotypes and social blame are problems that are sensitive and complex and whilst they need to be resolved, authorities should not have a complicit attitude towards inequality in schools. To do so is worrying and problematic (Gan et al., 2014).

## **Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter elaborates the paradigm and methods which were applied to answer the research questions. A brief introduction and analysis on different paradigms and reasons of selecting constructivist paradigm in this research was explained and discussed. The methodology of applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was elaborated to see how this psychological approach is appropriate in analysing small sample based individuals' lived experience. Methods such as interviews and documents analysis were introduced with explanation on the process of coding and data analysis. Limitations and ethics related to the protection of teachers' privacy were also discussed in this chapter.

### **4.2 A General Discussion on Paradigm: Ontology and Epistemology**

#### **4.2.1 Positivism vs Constructivism**

Considering the nature and research questions of my research project, the research paradigm adopted constructivism in terms of ontology and epistemology.

Paradigm refers to 'a theoretical framework or worldview within which middle-range theories and generalizations regarding social reality are formulated and tested.' (Elwell, 2013, p. 314) Paradigms in social science are based on the understanding of ontology (what exists) and epistemology (the action of humans' knowing the world) Before jumping to the utilization of specific methodologies that is going to be applied in this research, it is necessary to think about different paradigms on ontological,

epistemological level, or as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest, that ontological assumptions paves a way to epistemological assumptions; these two furthermore, give rise to methodological thoughts; and in turn, all these three support and provide issues of instrumentation and data collection' (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, as cited in Cohen et al., 2002) The word 'paradigm' originated historically in philosophical thought and its meaning varies from a model by Plato to an example by Aristotle (Corbetta, 2003). Its meaning in respect to social science is to an extent inflated and confused, since the meaning of paradigm varies from a synonym of a theory, to a school of thought (Corbetta, 2003; Lodico. et al., 2010). Until Thomas Kuhn in his essay "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (1970) which briefly reviews and comments on the meaning given to paradigm, with this essay first refuted the traditional view of science, with regards to understanding as 'a cumulative and linear progression of new acquisitions' (Kuhn, 1970, as cited in Corbetta, 2003, p. 9). In this way, traditional understanding of science is perceived as construction of a building. However as Kuhn notes, there are also 'revolutionary' moments when 'an old brick building is blown up to make room for a structurally different one' (Corbetta, 2003, p. 9). Thus, for Kuhn, paradigm is a conceptual network which is the orientation and criteria for scientists; it guides and directs them with legitimate methods and techniques. (Corbetta, 2003) In conclusion, 'a paradigm represents a cluster of beliefs about the proper conduct of science' (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 14). In the field of science, a commonly accepted paradigm has the following characters of posing a question, collecting data, analysing data and interpreting and report findings ( Lodico, et al., 2010) whilst social science which is argued to lack a mutual consensus on one paradigm becomes a 'multi-paradigmatic one' (Corbetta, 2003, p. 11).

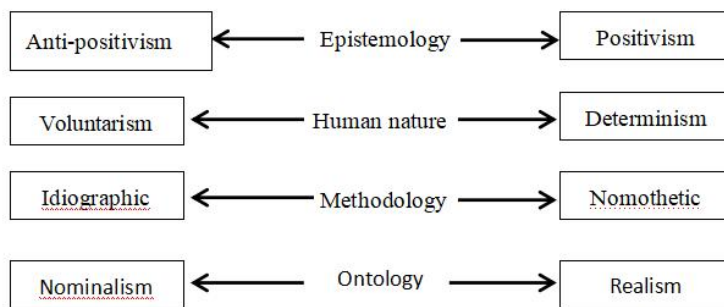
Currently, there are three paradigms in the field of social science namely positivism, constructivism and mixed methods, all of which have an ontology, epistemology as well as methodology which frame their foundations – or, what Corbetta refers to as

‘Essence, Knowledge and Method’ (Corbetta, 2003, p. 12; Cohen et al., 2002; Alasuutari et al., 2008). Since the last one, mixed methods appears later in scholarly discussions, it will be elaborated on only after a detailed explanation of the previous two and the ‘paradigm war’ between them. The primary differences between positivism and constructivism relates to their positions on subjective and objective dimension, shown in a chart as below:

Figure 3

The subjective-objective dimension

A scheme for analyzing assumptions about the nature of social science



Source from Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 3

In more details positivism first was set up in the field of science. Its ontological position is that the world is objective and endowed with autonomy, it is a place that exists without the human mind to conceive it; if the world exists regardless of whether the mind perceives it then, epistemologically, this world can be discovered through finding and observing it, and this is done by quantitative methods such as observation and experiments. (Cohen et al., 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Lodico. et al., 2010; Alasuutari et al., 2008) The findings of investigation are regarded to be universally applied to these natural phenomena. It is static and law-like (Cohen et al., 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Alasuutari et al., 2008).

Just like Durkheim asserted that social facts are resistant to human interventions and will not be changed according to human will. Thus social facts for most positivist sociologists consist of a deterministic and objective structure which can be discovered by a series of scientific research methods (Durkheim, 1895). It is understood as inductive which ‘means moving from the particular to the general’ (Mill, 1843, p. 288) ‘the process by which generalizations or universal laws are derived from empirical observation, from the identification of regularities and recurrences in the fraction of reality that is empirically studied’ (Corbetta, 2003, p. 27). Sociological positivism was founded by Comte and Spencer in advocacy of ‘searching for the general laws of human organization and assess these against empirical facts.’ (Ritzer & Smart, 2003, p. 38). In short, positivism reorganizes the definition of initial presupposition and objectives, whilst still utilizing and regarding observational language, such as operationalization and quantification as cornerstone (Corbetta, 2003).

Constructivism by contrast, conceives on a level of ontology that the construction of reality is varied in form and content and shaped within the interaction between individuals and society. This paradigm appeared later than positivism, actually it ‘emerged from the shadow of positivism in 1970s’ (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 14). German philosopher Dilthey in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883) distinguished the difference between natural science and social science, emphasizing unlike a natural reality which is external to the researcher, knowledge from society is a different process of *comprehension* (*Verstehen*), thus an ongoing and not stable process (Dilthey, 1883, as cited in Corbetta, 2003). It can be concluded that on a level of epistemology, constructivism denies the dualism widely such as black and white, good and evil or male and female, accepted by positivism and supports the idea that researchers and objects of study are inter-dependent and the world is non-dualistic (Cohen et al., 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Alasuutari et al., 2008). Thus, qualitative methodologies such as case study and narrative study are adopted by researchers to

explain dynamic and individual phenomena. Different from positivism or quantitative research, constructivism/qualitative research focuses on the crucial role of human and attach importance to the interaction between human and the external world. However, though supported and practiced by many researchers, it is still conceived to be unscientific by some scholars and regarded by some as a mere preparation of the conduct of quantitative research (Alasuutari et al., 2008).

Because these two paradigms philosophically differ with each other on a fundamental level; on how society and humans can be known and the essence or the very nature of society, research within these two adopts different methodologies to explore the world; namely quantitative research (positivism) and qualitative research (constructivism/interpretivism). Quantitative research advocates the utilization of experiments and scientific observation to induce universal law from phenomena; whilst qualitative research focuses on the study of humans' interaction with the external world by employing interview, observation and narrative analysis (Cohen et al., 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Ritzer & Smart, 2003; Alasuutari et al., 2008). Nevertheless, contemporary research finds some quantitative and qualitative research is mixed in certain social studies. Charles Ragin (1994) suggests that these two paradigms form a continuum in using empirical data to validate and defend an interpretation (Ragin, 1994; Alasuutari et al., 2008). Thus some scholars contend it is not necessary to take a binary position with paradigms because many scholars are willing to adopt more varied methods to analyze data (Alasuutari et al., 2008).

Under such situation comes the key stage in the development of 'paradigm war': the emergence of mixed methods which literally means the combination of using quantitative and qualitative methods supported by pragmatists (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Alasuutari et al., 2008). Pragmatists, to some extent ignore or care less



about the divergence between quantitative research and qualitative one but more focus on exploring questions with more tools to use. They contend pragmatism emphasizes on using practical and effective tools to evaluate both objective and subjective knowledge (Alasuutari et al., 2008). Certainly not all scholars agree with this contention on merely appreciating function rather than philosophical origin. Some writers like Smith and Heshusius state strongly of the resistance of the combination, the 'smorgasbord of data sources' which neglects the irreconcilable ontological foundation between the two paradigms (Smith & Heshusius, 1986 as cited in Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 15). It now still stays in the position which is far away from the end of paradigm war and there are still different voices in the utilization of mixed methods. The conclusion which I concern can be best summarized for this conflicted and multi-developed status quo is by what Alasuutari et al (2008) stated that 'it may be that postmodernism's commitment to the co-presence of different ways of viewing the world and the diffusion of constructivist ideas has resulted in a greater tolerance of such paradigm diversity' (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 23&24).

#### **4.2.2 Conclusion**

To sum up, the key difference in research paradigms are that while a positivist paradigm and quantitative methodology aims to gain a single and independent reality, an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology aims to understand a social phenomenon from its unique and diverse characteristics (Pring, 2004; Sarantakos, 2012). By employing scientific methodologies, a positivist paradigm ontologically assumes that 'there exist an objective reality driven by immutable natural laws' (Pring, 2004, p. 48; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) for example, the rotation of the earth or the growth cycle of plants are driven by certain stable natural laws and will not be influenced by human will. It epistemologically regards the observer as standing '*outside* the arena of the observed' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Pring,

2004, p. 48, their italics). In short, this paradigm believes in an ‘objective reality’ (Pring, 2004), whilst the constructivist paradigm emphasize that ‘the reality is a social construction of the mind and the external world is not objective but subject to human perception’ (Pring, 2004). It means humans’ perception of the external world are not stable and only dependent on natural law, but engaged in the environment and constructs specific context through interpretation (Cohen et al., 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Alasuutari et al., 2008).

### **4.3 Research Design**

The attitudes, perceptions and practices of highly-educated female teachers towards the role of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools are seen as a result of their interaction with society and are influenced by diverse factors such as context of classroom, student behaviors, parents, policy and family. It can be interpreted from both previous studies and my own working experience of observing my peer-colleagues that not all these teachers lost their passion at the beginning of their teaching career, but gradually became less motivated during the process of teaching. Thus the process of exploring and understanding their identities is considered to be unique, dynamic and complex. To address the questions I proposed above, this research is embedded in a constructivist paradigm of ontology and epistemology and qualitative methodology. This is because highly-educated female teachers conceive their roles in the interaction with and engagement of daily teaching. It is dynamic rather than stable for these teachers to perceive their roles as teachers at primary/secondary schools with the increasing experience of daily work and media report (such as reports of lower social status, less salary or bias towards teachers). Individuals’ conception towards the role as a teacher in primary/secondary school varies from family background, schooling experience and even subjects they teach, which is hard to be revealed in mere quantitative data. If framing my research within a constructivist paradigm, it makes sense to recognize therefore, that there is no stable

natural law to understand a single teacher's identity, due to individual differences in background, working condition and personal ambition.

In conclusion, the general design of this research is a qualitative study using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a primary technique to analyze teacher' beliefs and practices through interviews, teachers' reflection and class observation, because this cohort of teachers form their professional identity through interaction with social expectations from schools, students, parents and their own family (Martel, 2013). It is a process how their lens of the teaching as a career is like (Sarbin, 1986; Saldana, 2011; Wertz et al., 2011).

#### **4.4 Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

This research falls under the paradigm of constructivism in terms of ontology, and aims to explore highly-educated female teachers' personal experiences and perceptions of their transit as well as current status as teachers in primary/secondary in Beijing, and the role of gender and status in these experiences. A social constructivist view is employed in order to let participants' experience make its own sense instead of exploring objective facts (Wartenweiler, 2022). It therefore makes sense to explore an individual and personal focused story and trace back the trajectory of their professional journeys to try, pinpoint and identify key moments in the development of their teacher identity formation.

Based on this premise, the research adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to study how this group of teachers identify with their job. IPA is an

approach combining phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). It focuses on research participants' own perceptions and reflections on a given experience, which is a feasible and suitable method to offer meaningful insights into how individuals make sense of their own experiences and feelings towards exterior activities (Smith et al., 2009; Moriah, 2018). First Husserl's work on phenomenology set the foundation which is closely relevant to IPA that is to focus on individual's own experience and its perception (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Satre later developed this thought into more interpretative and less transcendental way which emphasized individuals' relationship with and involvement in the lived world. Besides phenomenology, IPA also is underpinned by theory of hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). By following the hermeneutic circle to think the relation between fore-understanding and the new phenomenon back and forth to facilitate meaning and sense, this theory has provided important theoretical support to IPA. The last but not least important theory which constitutes IPA is idiography. Idiography, contrast to 'nomothetic' deals with particular (Smith et al., 2009). Thus IPA also has the character of in-depth analysis on particular incidence provided by individuals to develop general statement and enables researcher to retrieve back to particular incidence of individuals. To conclude, IPA advocates detailed examination and interpretation of personal lived experience. It combines important knowledge depriving from phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography which is to focus, investigate and interpret particular lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Since the definition of identity in this research emphasizes the importance of individual's personal reflexive and dynamic process of understanding the job, the influential factors which is classified as three levels: institutional, interpersonal and personal also function differently on each individual. As a matter of fact, this methodology enables to break the 'predefined category system' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 48) and let participants tell their feeling on recalling memory of a given experience,

which helps researchers investigate participants' private, personal and profound perceptions before jumping to a general claim (Smith et al., 2009; Moriah, 2018). IPA is based on a small sample size of participants focusing on each participant's biographic experience, which enables researcher to have better and deeper exploration of participants' unique characteristics in forming their identity (Smith et al., 2009). IPA thus is a potent way to offer rich and personal responses through semi-structured interviews which provide practicable information to research questions.

IPA is believed to be able to present deeper information by analyses which cover and exceed participants' expressed claims through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009) It focuses on letting participants' own voices be heard which meets the essence of the research that highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools are absent in voicing their feelings and showing their professional identity process. This research method as Smith et al. (2009) discussed is providing researchers a process of understanding what participants reflect on their lived experiences and meanwhile enabling researchers to analyse, illuminate and make sense of the collected data. By applying this method, the inquiry focused on a small sample sized of selected highly-educated female teachers whom I contacted within my previous professional career with owning teaching experience more than five years, a period of transforming from novice to experienced teachers. One-to-one interviews, observation and document analysis were used to help to offer more deeper, reflexive and personal voices in order to reach a hypothetical answer.

#### **4. 5 Methods of Data Collection**

There are three proposed sources of data that were used throughout the data-collection

stage: participant observation, interviews and document analysis. Data analysis is primarily based on interviews data, while also referencing interview observations and available documents such as recruitment criteria and teacher reflections to enhance the reliability and validity of the data.

#### **4.5.1 Participant Observation**

Participant observation is a method focusing more on ‘insider’ rather than the ‘research imposed from the outside’ (McNeill, 1996, p. 95). Since this research focuses on the internal formation of highly-educated female teachers, thus it is necessary to explore their dynamic psychological process from a novice teacher to an experienced one. And unlike interviews which concentrate on the context and can be risk at being imposed on sociologists own values, participant observation enables a researcher to take part in the research as an insider to involve in activities with those being studied and learn their sharing of experience of social reality (McNeill, 1996). In general, there are four roles for researchers namely ‘complete participant’, ‘participant-as-observer’, ‘observer-as-participant’ and ‘complete observer’ (McNeill, 1996, p. 96).

As a researcher I believe that to have a role in this research project can add much depth to the quality of the data collected, I therefore plan to be a participant-as-observer because the participants I study and interviewed are within my previous social network who are currently working at primary/secondary schools. Therefore as an insider researcher I could form closer relationship when launching interviews to explore the formation of identity. Insider researchers are believed to be native to the settings and share same experience (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), so participants and researchers can have a certain extent of resonance in communicating which is benefit for exploring in-depth data. I believe my previous working

experience and the trust built during interviews with them can to some extent create a trusting relationship and helps me to explore deeper and better understanding into attitude, behaviours, self-dedication and motivation of participants in this study. However, as Brannick and Coghlan in the article (2007) pointed out disadvantages for insider researcher such as less distance with participants and research topic which may lead to more subjectivity and cause the research not valid enough. Thus, during the interviews, I tried to reduce my words to avoid guidance and encourage participants to talk more. All the interviews were recorded and the translation transcripts were checked by a Chinese PhD colleague to ensure less subjectivity and the more validity of research.

During interviews, participants facial expression and gestures were noted down to form a better understanding of their attitudes and feelings towards interview questions. Limited by pandemic policies, not all participants were able to receive face to face interviews, also some participants preferred to receive voice-only interviews. Thus voice changes such as sighs and tones were also recorded as materials in supporting interview data analysis. I noted down their reactions like sound or facial expressions and gestures which are resources to prove their attitude or feelings towards certain events in their lives.

#### **4.5.2 Interviews**

The research is embedded in constructivism; the ontological as well as related epistemological perspective is to explore more subjective knowledge based on unique and personal experiences and insights (Cohen et al., 2002). Thus I believe a face to face interview allows me to delve in great depth and richness, into this cohort of teachers' experience and their understandings towards their current role as a teacher in

family, workplace and society. Different from questionnaires, interviews are particularly helpful for uncovering stories behind participants' experiences interviews with a presence of an interviewer can collect nonverbal data and clarify the meaning if participants cannot understand a question (Quad, 2016). So interviews can contain much more information than the written answers to questionnaires such as participants' facial expressions, behaviors and tone. Moreover a series of semi-structured and open-ended questions were utilized through the interview to ensure the whole process of conversation was flexible. During the interview, researcher can further ask several levels of questions to get more information whilst questionnaires cannot. The whole process of interview focused on listening to these participants' stories of their pursuit of higher education, the perception of primary/secondary school's teachers' role, adaption to the working environment and puzzles towards future professional development. In conclusion, in this research, interview is an important tool for me to understand participants' inner mind and allows me to ask for further explanation and clarification on area which I cannot fully understand or hope to delve greater depth.

Interviews were carried out at participants' working schools or in cafeteria on weekdays' lunch break time in order not to occupy their weekends. Due to pandemic's influence, some interviews were carried out online. The semi-structured questions were designed based on research questions mainly about participants' perceptions of their decision of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools, current perceptions of their professional role, the environment of school, family support and their future plans. The questions were followed up with open-ended questions, in order to explore and clarify more information during interviews. The time span of interviews depended on the willingness of participants and their length of answering questions and story-telling. On average, every participant took part in at least three interviews with roughly sixty minutes each.



The first round of interview focused on participants' general background and their reasons of having post-graduate study as well as being a teacher at primary/secondary school. Since most participants expressed their ideas at first that such research interviews usually prefer a certain kind of answers so they were not sure whether to express their true feelings or not. So the first interview was a process of receiving participants' trust and encouraged them to say explicitly what they feel about their work experience. The interview process thus could also be perceived as a communication to gain trust with participants in order to receive valid and true data. Followed by the first interview, the second and third interview concentrated more on aspects of their daily work routine, interpersonal relationship, welfare including salary, gender related welfare or discrimination and future career plan as well as teacher training. The aim was to gradually increasing more individual and personal questions to make participants more willing to talk about issues such as salary and gender issues. Depending on the content collected, further interviews or documents were required for certain participants on the premise of their consent. All interviews were recorded by my cellphone as well as written notes on a notebook to ensure there is no missing information. The information collected then were first transcribed into Mandarin Chinese and then English. The translation was also given to a PhD students whose mother tongue is also Chinese mandarin to check the translation.

#### **4.5.3 Document Analysis**

I asked permission to check participants' reflection on their professional development as well as class teaching. As teaching reflection is a direct and explicit way to understand teachers' perception of their classes and professional training. Posner's equation of teacher's professional growth that Experience + Reflection = Growth (Posner, 1989, as cited in Qiu & Wei, 2024), thus reflection on teaching is also seen as a key resources to see teachers' perception of teaching as well as daily work. To some

extent, reflection they wrote also mirror their conscious or unconscious thoughts towards the work. Qiu and Wei in the latest research (2024) indicates that according to reflection measurement, teachers' reflection differs from teaching years, academic degree and grade they teach. The research tests Posner's equation of teacher's professional growth and points out the connection of teacher's initiative and teacher's reflection. Whilst it cannot be denied that some reflection diaries are written in a way to meet schools' requirements, and so therefore may not truly reveal participants' real perception or feelings. During interviews, some participants also admitted that they wrote some reflection just to meet the needs from school. So in reading and collecting such data, I at first double checked that all such information is expressed in participants' true feeling. To counter this problem, I moreover planned to ask further questions and clarifications with respect to these materials in order to make sure all the materials are valid.

Furthermore I got access to some of these schools' recruiting requirements online to see the current standard of hiring a primary/secondary school's teacher. The requirements are evidence to show participants previous ability before entering teaching career. Then relative training regarding professional development were checked to see whether schools provided enough training which is suitable for these highly-educated teachers and whether these teachers are content with these training.

To conclude, documents such as teachers reflection diaries or notes and other possible documents which are accessible online such as recruitment requirements and training sessions' content were used as supplementary materials. These documents support the validity and credibility of interview data and provide strength to check participants' true feelings in perceiving their teacher identity.

#### 4.5.4 Sample

In research, a sample is a selected group of people taken from a larger population for measurement and generalization (Cohen et al., 2002). In this study, the sample comes from primary/secondary schools' highly-educated female teachers within my previous professional career. Since the sample is chosen within my previous professional career and the perception of identity is varied due to different family and educational background. The conclusion cannot be seen as a generalized one but more like individual narrative study.

The definition of highly-educated in this context refers to graduates with at least a master or even a doctoral degree. The cohort of these teachers I studied own at least five years' experience of teaching. The working experience is the transition from novice teachers to experienced ones who have accumulated their perception and experience towards teaching at primary/secondary schools.

The selection of participants was based on convenience sampling namely purposefully select participants from within my professional networks due to the nature of insider-research. This is partly because while being a PhD student, it is difficult to invite teachers I did not get in touch with before to express such inner feelings and attitude based on current school's strict atmosphere in Beijing. Most teachers if I did not know before would say no to participate since the research is not compulsory from a school level and would not bring benefits to them but only occupy their rest time. Also, gaining access was held at the personal teacher's level since the participants choosing was embedded in convenience sampling. I asked participants with showing them the purpose of the research as well as detailed process of the research to gain their approval of taking part into the project. The reason why I did not choose to gain

access of approval from the school level namely asking permission from schools' headteachers is that some headteachers would ask teachers not to express their true feelings about some topics like gendered issues and welfare. In order to make sure all the data collected are valid, I hence chose to directly connect with teachers and gain their approval. Such actions were necessary to protect privacy of participants and guarantee the validity of data collected since one participant told me a lot about her anxiety at first taking part into interviews, fearing that her complaints would be known by headteachers and expressing her experience of not answering interview questions truthfully in previous other research held at a school level.

Convenience sampling as the name itself indicates means data are collected from a convenient and available pool of respondents (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of selection is based on the principle that the teachers have at least a master or doctoral degree, female teachers at primary/secondary schools and working for more than five years which means they are currently in the period of transforming from novice to experienced teachers.

Since IPA research method concentrates on working with small sample size to see how individuals perceive certain phenomenon based on their own biographic experience, therefore seven participants were selected with teaching experience over five years at primary/secondary schools. In order to protect participants' privacy, a general background of schools they work at were introduced without indicating too detailed information. The first group of schools are secondary schools. Some are at the rural-urban fringe area of which the history is not long in Beijing. Some are in urban area with better equipment and own more fame compared with rural ones. The requirements of these schools' recruitment are stringent and high though some of them do not share the same fame with their counterparts. It is also worth noticing that

half of the students at rural secondary schools are left-behind children living in the rural-urban fringe area in Beijing or migrant workers' children who may have learning problems or low self-empowered. It means teachers there have to take more of their rest time to help these children or deal with school bullying issues.

The second group is of primary schools. All are with a long history and are just normal ones in Beijing. Though they are located at downtown but since the fame of these schools is moderate so the requirement of recruitment is not high. Instead caring about professional learning or development, teachers at primary schools pay more attention to students' daily behaviors and have to deal with discipline issues such as misbehaviours of students or bullying issues. Basically, teachers at primary schools are mainly with a bachelor's degree but recently the requirement is enhanced so the number of teachers with a Master's degree is increasing. I asked for their permission to participate in interviews and further research and elaborate typical cases to have deeper explanation and clarification. The principle of selecting typical cases followed the rules that firstly the participant was willing to receive further interviews or clarify in details based on their previous answers and secondly the contents they gave were fully detailed with respect to research questions. Overall, all participants are working at normal secondary/primary schools. Teachers from a relatively renowned schools may have different working experience from those at normal secondary schools with respect to welfare and work-life balance, thus the schools in this research are homogeneously normal schools.

#### **4.6 The Impact of Covid-19 on Data Collection in Beijing**

The pandemic during data collection played an considerable role. First returning from UK needed almost a month of quarantine before I could talk with participants face to

face. Thus the time cost was bigger than planned. Second, due to strict policy like close contact policy(2022) (If one is in a public area where positive cases commute or stay in a given time period, one may be judged as indirect contact and needs to have self-quarantine or collective quarantine and entering into public area including parks after May 2022 needs 72 hour negative PCR test result. The policy were changed for several times according to Beijing's pandemic's status quo in 2022), I should ensure that I had not visited high-risk area namely area where positive cases might stay and the apartment building I lived did not have positive cases before I contacted participants. Also for them, they needed to make sure that the place of interview was safe without positive cases visiting before, otherwise they may at risk of facing a short-time of quarantine at home or even a lock-down of school they work at. As a result, online interview turned out to be a wise choice to tackle this difficulty. However, during the data collection, the process was accompanied with a new turn of lock-down in Beijing in May 2022, which meant most schools needed online teaching. In answering interview questions, most participants expressed both time and energy consuming of online teaching since they needed to pay attention to students' online learning condition, attendance as well as manipulate online teaching and meetings. The working hours became obscured and some told me that they barely had rest time even at night sometimes. Working ten to twelve hours a day without extra payment was normal to them, just like a Chinese proverb to describe teachers' self-sacrifice that 'dead silkworm silk until end; candles burn into ash still'. Hence, their time left for interviews became scarce and I needed to adjust the length of questions as well as time according to participants' convenience.

Besides the impact brought by Covid-19 on data collection, it indeed acts as an element on shaping participants' future plan and identification with the job as well. Some of them pointed out during interviews that though they hoped to change a job, it was difficult to realise it currently due to pandemic which caused a vast increase of

unemployment rate. To some extent, pandemic plays a role which stops them escaping from current status, comforting them that they have a stable job but meanwhile has brought them new pain in daily work and life such as long and ever lasting working hours. The paradox and impact brought by the pandemic is beyond previous hypothesis but is interesting and worth discussing since it has been impacting participants continuously on their perception of work and identifying with the job. I will discuss this issue at length in later findings part together with other key factors like economic status, cultural capital and gender.

#### **4.7 Ethics**

Ethical issues in this study had been carefully considered by the University Ethics Committee before all the fieldwork was undertaken. Ethical considerations were also addressed in accordance with the BERA guidelines and the code of ethics of the University of Reading.

The trusting relationship between researchers and participants are essential in this research since the research questions deal with more of the inner thoughts and feelings of participants.

Thus during the project, a positive and trusting relationship between research participants and the researcher will be highlighted in order to achieve authentic, sufficient and valid insights.

In Freud's case study of Emmy Von N. (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1957, as cited in Wertz et al., 2011), we see the 'importance of a trusting relationship with the investigator, the earliest account of free association, the value of detailed and honest descriptions of experience, the role of the analyst as an accepting and respectful confidant, the role of the patient as truth teller and moral agent, and the necessary use of narrative on the part of both patient and researcher' (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 20).

Norton (2014) furthermore states the importance of building a trusting relationship with participants in regard to ethics. I am fully aware that the participants are busy with every day's teaching task so I tried my best to condense my interview time during the lunch break and helped them correct students' homework to relieve some of their burden if possible and shared latest related research content with them if they were also interested in them. All the access to documents such as teaching reflection and diaries were completely based on the full consent of participants and the protection of their privacy. All information collected from participants were kept in confidentiality and pseudonyms were used for participants as well as the name of the schools. Participants were informed of the confidential nature of this research at first. A statement of ethical concerns were presented which requires the participants' signatures to verify their consent. They were informed in advance of having the right to refuse answering any questions and the whole process of data collection were voluntary. Based on the ethical rules, participants' names as well as schools' names were anonymous to protect privacy. Also in introducing participants' school information, I skipped any detailed information or information which may expose participants' schools' names in order to protect participants' privacy. Relative documents and materials were kept in my own computer or lock drawer to pretend revealing.



## 4.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided according to the research themes that have guided the research questions and literature used. Besides the software programme such as NVivo to support me for organizing the data, I also used notebooks by hand to code, categorize and compare all the materials I have collected. Since the primary data is in Chinese which cannot be directly analyzed in NVivo, I at first coded, categorized and compared these materials by translating them into English. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the resources, I also invited one Chinese PhD colleague at University of Reading to double-check my translation of the transcripts. I am aware of the loss of contextual meaning during the translation which is to some extent unavoidable and manage to maintain the core essence of the content.

The whole process of data analysis followed the rules of IPA. IPA research is embedded in the essence of exploring participants' own voices and reflection of certain experience in a given circumstance (Smith et al., 2009; Moriah, 2018) so the analysis process was both inductive and deductive to enabling data to reveal more. This research with the aim to explore the dynamic identity formation of highly-educated female teachers utilized IPA to analyse data. The analysis follows the six steps of IPA (Smith. et al., 1999). In detail, the first stage of analysing the data was guided by Coffey & Atkinson's idea (1996) that the data need to be categorized into units to identify key themes. Therefore the first step was to read and re-read interview transcript (See Appendix 3). Through reading, there were insights based on researcher's interpretation and I noted down preliminary notes and my comments in order to see connections of different codes. After the first round of coding the first participant's transcript, I summarised and categorised these codes which can cluster together into emergent themes. The process needed more reading and checking back trying to build some order from emergent themes and my own interpretations. After

forming a list of emergent themes, the analysis can be continued to the second participant's transcript to see whether these themes can fit the second one and added new themes or sub-themes if necessary. After finish reading all transcripts, I coded and categorized the emergent themes (See Appendix 4) generated from interview contents according to influential factors namely gender, age, socio-economic status and family contribute. During the process, structural analysis and performative analysis were also considered to see how participants structured their answers and what gestures or facial expressions they used to convey their deeper feelings. Structural analysis has an emphasis on the way story is told, its syntactic and prosodic features in interviews so it is suitable for detailed case studies or with small number of participants to learn their individuals' perception (Riessman, 2005). But simply using structural analysis may avoid some key factors such as facial expression and the interaction between participants and interviewers. So, performative analysis was adopted to help the researcher explore more details. Performative analysis emphasized that the interest is beyond the spoken words but also on more features such as positioning, facial expressions and gestures (Riessman, 2005). This way of narrative analysis is appropriate for studies of identity construction (Riessman, 2005) so it was utilized in this research so as to explore the dynamic process of identity construction.

#### **4.9 Trust Worthiness and Integrity**

The research adopted IPA approach. It combines induction and deduction approach together which ensures the closeness to the data and access to theory. The abductive approach is flexible to theoretical framework as well as empirical framework and is in accordance with needs of data analysis (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

In order to validate the research findings, interview transcripts, field notes from observation of participants during interviews and possible document analysis such as reflections were taken to make data more valid. Different sources of data may help to achieve more valid findings. Also interpretation was presented to participants and further questions based on previous interview and paper materials such as reflective diary were asked before the second and third interviews to ensure my interpretation is in accordance with participants' thoughts. During the process of coding, I also discussed the findings with my supervisors to ensure the validity and transparency of the data.

#### **4.10 Limitations of the Research Design**

My research is based on a qualitative study. The paradigm allows me to have profound and in-depth study of highly-educated female teachers' identity formation. The process of identity formation is believed to be dynamic so using a paradigm of qualitative and adopt narrative enquiry enables me to explain and elaborate the process in more details.

However, I do realize that there are limitations in this research because firstly the sample size of IPA is relatively small and the result cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the purposive sample is only in Beijing with selected schools so the conclusion cannot be applied to all highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools in China. Considering the time constraints and difficulties of finding suitable and willing participants, it would be difficult to implement in-depth research comparing cases between two or more cities. Thus, the research will focus on the purposive sample only in Beijing to explore more profound details. In the

future hopefully, more comparative work such as comparing with similar cohort of teachers in other cities in China can be conducted.

## **Chapter 5 Findings: Teachers' Experience and Perceptions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, participants' basic information related to the research such as the important current and historical background which influence teachers' behaviors and habitus are introduced and discussed. Given that qualitative combined IPA research was carried out, the number of participants is limited to a small amount which enables a deep exploration into their true feeling and deeper reflection on their experience. The sample size of teachers from primary school and secondary schools are primary ones three teachers and secondary ones four in which some teachers have both experience of teaching at this two kinds of schools. I invited teachers who are willing to take part into this research from my previous professional social network.

All the female teachers who undertook interviews have over five years of working experience and graduated with a Master's degree at least. It is a pity that a female teacher who graduated with a PhD degree working at a secondary school refused to take part in due to her rest time was limited and she was not quite willing to share some of her experience, especially unpleasant ones. Thus, with all seven participants with a Master's degree, I interviewed them either face to face or through online texting or voice messages due to the limitation brought by Covid-19 pandemic in Beijing China. During the data collection, I and my participants experienced lock-down for almost a month, which enabled me to ask how their feelings may have changed towards work under the impact of pandemic. The impact of pandemic also manifests one fact that interviews related research is difficult to be carried out in China at least in Beijing because of the close/secondary contact policy (It is a policy published in China since pandemic. This policy indicates that if someone gets in touch with positive cases in public places like shopping malls or schools, he/she should be

quarantined for given days and people who get in touch with this person also are judged as secondary contact who also need quarantine. It is a beneficial way to stop the spread of the virus) In my case, I should ensure I did not have close contact when launch a face-to-face interview with my participants. If not, they may have to face not only quarantine of themselves or even quarantine of classes she teaches or the whole school lock-down. The responsibility and outcome is severe so some of them prefer an online interview rather than an offline one. Moreover, the time of interviews is also distressing at first since online working had brought them hardly any rest time during a short lock-down in Beijing. The time they could give to interviews is scarce and I needed to cater for their time schedule to ensure the research has brought no bothering influence on their daily routine.

Thankfully, through interviewing three times, I received deep data from them. These seven participants at first to some extent showed their worry that their complaints or true negative feeling towards current work may not make them comfortable enough to speak because usually if they receive interviews on a school level, few of them would feel able to express true feelings. The process of ethics approval and a guarantee that their names were pseudonyms, responses not to be reported to their headteachers and personal details related to schools were not to be revealed explicitly to protect their privacy.

In this chapter, participants' personal experience using the lens guided by the research questions are presented based on the data collected. The data are elaborated within stages of reasons to be a teacher, experience of being a teacher and future career plan, from lens of institutional, interpersonal and personal level to see how the participants deal with external factors such as wages and welfare as well as internal factors such as personal perceptions towards gender issues, social status and so on.

According to participants' current perceptions towards their work, their individual experience are explored through the lens of institutional, interpersonal and personal factors. Being a teacher at a primary as well as secondary school for almost six years, I also attached my change of relationship with participants during interviews to see how participants changed, shared and commented their personal experiences with me as a teacher like them in casual talk and as an insider researcher during interviews. In conclusion, this chapter provides participants' lived experience from the very beginning of their career to current status. The chapter works to present a comprehensive overview of the details of interviews' responses and my interpersonal and interaction with participants, which contextualize as well as situate the findings to provide better understanding of being a highly-educated female teacher at primary/secondary schools.

The following information provides some context to the participants before exploring their experiences of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools. The basic information of the seven female participants is categorised into a table shown below. The table shows participants' years of working, academic degree, their working experience and basic information of their personal lives.

Table 3. Basic information of participants

Pseudonym	Years of working	Academic degree	Working experience	Status of marriage
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Heng	Over 10 years	Master's degree after working	Heng works at a primary school in Beijing which is a not famous one but in a relatively urban area. She has worked at this school for almost ten years since graduation. Feeling bored of current work, she chose to have a post-graduate study five years ago to enhance her ability as well as opening new possibility of work.	Married with one daughter
Tanmei	Over 6 years	Master's degree after working	Tanmei at first worked at a primary school in Beijing which is not famous then she had her post-graduate study. The time when she received interviews, she had successfully graduated and now is teaching at a secondary school in Beijing.	Married with one daughter
Rui	6 years	Master's degree	Rui graduated with a Master's degree and chose to work at a primary school since her major is about children education and this primary school though not a famous one but can solve her Hukou and Bianzhi.	Married with one daughter
Yanyan	8 years	Master's degree	Yanyan used to work at a secondary school in rural area of Beijing when she graduated with her Master's degree and then chose to work at a primary school which locates in urban area of Beijing and near her home.	Married without a child



Xiao Wu	8 years	Master's degree	Xiao Wu chose to work as a teacher under the influence of her parents and being a teacher can solve her problem of settling down in Beijing with a Beijing Hukou. She now is working at a relatively famous secondary school in Beijing urban area.	Single
Xiao Qi	8 years	Master's degree	Xiao Qi has the same situation as Xiao Wu who also loves teaching under her university's part time work influence and desires to have a Beijing Hukou. She is now working at a secondary school in Beijing rural area. She worked at the same school all these years.	Single
Yingying	8 years	Master's degree	Yingying became a teacher at a Beijing rural secondary school when she graduated with her Master's degree. The school solved her Hukou and Bianzhi problem. She worked at the same school all these years.	Single

## 5.2 Educational Pursuit and Reasons to be a Teacher

This section looks at participants' reasons for pursuing higher education, their personal perception towards their highly educated experiences and the connection of it with being recruited as teachers at primary/secondary schools. The section also

reveals participants' imagined images towards being a teacher and their attitudes towards this job during working. Generally speaking, for participants in this research, pursuing post-graduate study is not simply an academic enhancement but more importantly a credentialism that specifically enables them to be recruited by primary/secondary schools in Beijing. A higher educational background is a key to be able to compete for Bianzhi (authorised personnel - a proof of stability) and Beijing Hukou. According to interviews, participants' reasons for having a post-graduate study can be divided into two groups. For participants who directly had their post-graduate study after graduation with a Bachelor's degree, they tended to regard their pursuit of higher education as a means to increase knowledge but more importantly, to hunt for a decent and stable job. For two participants Heng and Tanmei who did their post-graduate study after working at a primary school, they tended to regard their pursuit of higher education either as a way to escape from daily dull work or as an improvement of personal teaching ability – a form of CPD (Career Professional Development). The following part gives a thorough and detailed explanation of participants pursuing higher education.

### **5.2.1 Reasons of Pursuing Post-graduate Study**

For participants who had undergraduate study and post-graduate study successively, they told me that their reasons to continue receiving education instead of seeking for a job straight away, was partly due to what they perceived as a harsh and competitive labour market after their graduation with Bachelor's degrees. Xiao Wu said that her educational background was not so good since the university that she had studied had a ranking not considered very high in China. Having post-graduate study was a way to remedy and enhance her educational background in hopes to find a decent job. Her pursuit of post-graduate study was not smooth, however. The first time she was not enrolled by her dream school and her parents' attitude also changed from support

to hesitation. Thus, for the second time she had to compromise and change to another university where she finally was enrolled after entrance exams. In contrast Xiao Qi's response stressed more on the fact that she had made the decision of pursuing a post-graduate study due to fierce competence in job hunting market. She told me that due to the harsh competition in current Chinese labour market, she had considered being a tour guide at first, like her schoolmates after graduation with a Bachelor's degree but she later thought her personality did not fit this job. Plus this work was not stable. So, she gave up her thought of being a tour guide. She said she enjoyed her intern experience at a secondary school in her hometown but due to a very limited amount of *Bianzhi*, an authorised personnel which represents stability in China. A key issue was the threshold of recruitment was that the candidate should at least have a Master's degree. Hence, at that time she realised she need a Master's degree to be able to work at a secondary school. With the support of her parents she embarked on her journey of post-graduate study.

Xiao Qi (R1<sup>4</sup>): The reason why I chose to have post-graduate study is because of the employment environment in China. I had my bachelor's degree in a northwestern Normal University. Most of my peer fellows worked as tour guides after graduation due to a tough employment environment and the amount of *Bianzhi* is relatively small. I thought being a tour guide is suitable when I was young but still it is less stable compared with being a teacher. Plus my personality is not suitable too. So I chose to have a post-graduate study. I thought being a tour guide is suitable when I was young but still it is less stable compared with being a teacher. Plus my personality is not suitable too. So I chose to have a post-graduate study. My plan at that time was that maybe I could do some research stuff and it would not be late to be a teacher after graduating with a Master degree, which may be a key for finding a job in a better city or teaching students of higher quality. Well, mainly I chose to have further study because of the tough employment environment. At that time, I worked as an intern teacher at a very famous and outstanding secondary school in a big city located in the northwest of China. I really did hope to be a teacher at that school because that school has a short history, with young and passionate students and teachers. I really liked the vibe there. But in that year there was no *Bianzhi* for us. And having a Bachelor's degree is not qualified to be a teacher at a secondary school.

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<sup>4</sup> R1 refers to the first round of interview, whilst R2 refers to the second round and R3 the third round.

So I think it is OK to have a post-graduate study.

My parents supported me to have a post-graduate study. Though I had a gap year, they still supported me. I am grateful I have open-minded parents. They hope I can gain something from learning and that is enough. They believe as a girl if you work hard, you are honest and have one professional skill, you can find a good job. So they were supportive for my choice of having a Master's degree. Of course they will also support me if I have other choices I think. I think parents are all quite similar, they hope us to learn hard, the more knowledge the better.

In her response, Xiao Qi was grateful towards her parents, that even though she had one year gap, they still supported her decision of undertaking post-graduate study. For her, a one-year-gap was not easily accepted since age discrimination and increasing competition annually made some people feel that a year gap undertaking further study might be a waste of time. Xiao Qi also mentioned her parents' attitude, that they strongly believed if a girl worked hard, was honest and had one professional skill, it would nearly be impossible for her not to find a decent job. Influenced by this thought, Xiao Qi felt supported and also believed that hard works paid off. Similar experiences and views were also shared by Yingying, Rui and Yanyan. They also expressed that the view that having a decent job was the main reason for them pursuing higher education. Rui explicitly told me that her parents did not have any strong social networks which could help her find a well-paid job. She was from a rural family so the only way for her to settle down in Beijing was to have a Master or doctoral degree. She said "My university ranking is not quite good, plus my parents don't have strong social network to help me find a decent job, so I chose post-graduate study" (R1). Rui's attitude showed her perception of the labour market, that in the current Chinese context, there are two ways to have a decent job, strong social relationship from parents or enhancement of personal educational background. She believed that at least a Master's degree could provide her more opportunities as well as possibilities of being recruited in a primary or secondary school with *Bianzhi* or maybe *Hukou* in a big city. Her belief was right. She was finally recruited by a primary school in Beijing with *Bianzhi* and *Hukou* and worked at this school for about seven years until now.

Like her, Yingying also said “The reason why I chose to have a post-graduate study is because I hope a higher academic degree can help me find a decent job” (R1). Her hometown is located in the northwest of China. Her parents supported her choice of having a post-graduate study. She said “Since they hope I can find a stable job. And a stable job requires high academic degree.” So, the reality is, her parents’ support made up her mind to continue studying and finally she realised her dream to be enrolled by a secondary school in Beijing’ outskirts with Bianzhi and Hukou.

Yanyan also expressed her first and foremost reason of having a post-graduate study was to settle down in Beijing with Hukou. She also added another two reasons for pursuing higher education as a certificate to show her ability and a better platform for life-long learning and finding like-minded peers.

Yanyan (R1): I am capable of English translation, love reading and have great passion and the spirit of exploration on academic research. So, I hope to enhance my ability by receiving post-graduate education. The third reason is the influence from my parents who are both intellectuals. They told me the importance of life-long learning when I was a kid. Also, on a better platform, it is more possible for me to find like-minded peers who are interested in reading and researching.

When asking her the attitude of her parents towards further study, Yanyan told me that her parents strongly supported her. For her parents, a better educational certificate not only brought a stable job but also let her family enjoy much better resources in a big city.

Yanyan (R1): My parents strongly suggested me to have a Master’s degree in Beijing because Beijing has a comprehensive system of education, medicine and transportation. My parents can receive good services for the aged when they live with me in Beijing. Also, my hometown is in the northeast of China. It shares the same habit of eating, similar climate and living habit which means my parents can adapt to Beijing easily.

To conclude, it can be seen that all the participants above who continued their study after graduation from under-graduate received support from their parents, even one year gap was accepted by their parents. Both these participants and their parents realised that without strong social network, the only way to settle down in a big city with stable income was to elevate the academic attainment and improve educational background. Having a Master's degree indeed benefited them from various parts including knowledge, broadening vision and providing new perspectives for them to deal with daily lives. However, it is worth noticing that a higher educational background also played as an essential step stone for them to be able to pursue a stable work and life. Under the impact of Covid which brought the economic recession worldwide and rising unemployment rate, participants in this research to some extent showed that they felt they were lucky that being a teacher at primary/secondary schools with Bianzhi protected them from anxiety of unemployment.

Two participants, Heng and Tanmei who had their post-graduate study during work, gave more nuanced answer to why they had further education.

Heng (R1): Maybe because my daily life is boring as the work has no challenge and no sense of freshness. Also currently a teaching career asks for higher educational background, so I need to enhance mine. Now many primary schools require teachers to be with Master's degrees. And learning can bring me a sense of achievement; let me feel I am of value.

Tanmei (R1): The reason why I chose to have post-graduate study was that after teaching at primary/secondary schools I felt a sense of incapability of teaching, realising that I lack new professional knowledge, academic study and accumulation on pedagogy. I eagerly need an opportunity to enhance my knowledge. Having post-graduate study benefits me mainly on widening my knowledge and enriching my experience. Now I know more on how to study, solve difficult issues and etc.

Heng initially complained about the dullness of her work at a normal primary school in Beijing. And this had become one of the main reasons for her to embark on further study after working at a primary school with Bianzhi for some years. She described her work as having “no challenge and no sense of freshness”. Heng had worked as a language for years and she doubted whether this work had brought her a sense of achievement. The other reason for her to undertake further study was again due to the fierce competition. She indicated that she felt pressured that more and more primary schools in Beijing asked for candidates to be with a Master’s degree. In order not to be left behind by these novice teachers in pedagogical theories as well as other education related knowledge, she thought having a post-graduate study was a wise choice to free her from daily dull work and enhance her ability on the other hand. She explained to me that learning had brought her a sense of achievement and let her feel that she was of value. She also felt grateful to her parents that though she had a stable job already they still supported her to have a further study.

For Tanmei, she shared similar ideas with Heng. She emphasised more on her feelings that she lacked academic ability. The incapability of knowledge troubled her and she knew she needed a post-graduate study to enhance her knowledge as well as teaching ability. Plus, she did not have a Bianzhi at the primary school she previously worked at. So, a better educational background also benefited her from hunting for a better and more stable work. She was finally accepted as a post-graduate student by a top university of education. After graduation she changed her job from a public primary school to a private one, where she described the work was better paid than the previous job. She told me that she was grateful to her parents and her husband’s help, especially her husband who had quite a good educational background and gave her a lot of advice.

For them, an academic certificate not only worked as a key to better job but also provided them confidence, new challenges and new hope towards work. Heng felt she was of value after having her post-graduate study and told me she was happy she regained her enthusiasm in learning. Tanmei also realised her dream of finding a better paid job by having a Master's degree and felt more capable of handling teaching problems. For all participants in this research, with support from their families, they did not regret from having a post-graduate study and said they benefited a lot.

### **5.2.2 Benefits of Post-graduate Study**

According to interviews, all participants expressed a view that they gained a lot from their post-graduate study. For those who had undertaken their further study successively, they told me that the experience was valuable and of great importance in cultivating their academic skills as well as attitude towards life. However, most of them felt that what they had learnt during post-graduate study had little to do with their current teaching. Xiao Qi told me that the influence brought by a post-graduate study was more on her life-long learning and attitude towards life rather than on her teaching work.

Xiao Qi (R1): Having a Master's degree has more influence on my life than on my work. For instance, when I read some negative news or meet difficult issues, my knowledge of literary theories impacts me a lot on how to conceive these things. My peer staff may complain that students are difficult to teach, student' parents have given too much pressure on teachers or the new policy of decreasing the amount of homework is not reasonable whilst I can deal them with a peaceful mind. Maybe before I didn't have that kind of inner peace, but having a post-graduate study majoring in English literature let me know to see everything from different perspectives and avoid dead end. However I have to say the knowledge has no influence on my daily teaching.



Xiao Qi mentioned during interview that her knowledge gained during further study helped her to deal with negative influences or news positively or to think about issues from a different perspective. Post-graduate study for her was an essential element in balancing her work and life, keeping a good working status, and moreover keeping her in a relatively positive attitude towards work. But since she majored not in education but in English literature so she found out that the knowledge had little relevance or use in daily secondary school English teaching. The knowledge of English literature theories was obviously too advanced for secondary school's students according to Xiao Qi's student's situation. Like her, participants who did not major in education during post-graduate study found that the knowledge they learnt had little impact on their current work.

Yanyan (R1): I think my experience of having post-graduate study has little to do with my teaching. I am not majored in education, and I even got my certificate of teaching after three years working at a secondary school. But my parents believe I can be a good teacher because I am kind, patient and nice to children. After graduation, I aimed to find a job related to translation but received no reply after sending my CV. I only applied for one secondary school, and they recruited me because of my experience of working as an intern teacher. So, you see, my major during post-graduate study is about translation especially translation related with transportation. Now, I tend to care more about how to educate students and impart my knowledge to them.

Likewise, Yanyan shared similar views towards the impact of post-graduate study. For her, majoring in translation or English literature meant they were engaged more with specific knowledge in English related fields but not teaching. Especially for Yanyan, who became a teacher at a suburb secondary school and currently a primary school by accident. Though she believed she had the ability and qualification to be a good teacher, her post-graduate study might have little to do with teaching but was more useful as a form of credentialism in hunting for a decent job. So, they felt instead of imparting some profound and difficult English knowledge to students; their experience of further study had more to do with how they perceived their current

work and dealt with issues of students, students' parents, principals and negative news of teachers. Yingying, who shared similar views gave me a more detailed explanation in elaborating how her post-graduate study benefited her future work.

Yingying (R1): During the post-graduate study, half of the time is spent on learning and half for internship. So besides professional knowledge, I also could gain some social or life experiences during post-graduate which I believe is helpful to teaching. I believe teaching pedagogy is flexible and only learning pedagogy without teaching practice will not catch students' attention and create good class activities' vibe.

She believed that teaching was flexible and how to teach efficiently depended on audiences, namely the students one is going to teach, not just from textbooks. So instead of emphasising on knowledge of pedagogy, she was grateful to her plenty of time spending on internship or other social experiences which she thought was helpful to her teaching. Here it can be seen that post-graduate study for her not only provided more academic knowledge and skills but also enabled her to own more time spent on social activities she thought were useful for future job hunting. Unlike an explicit advantage to their daily teaching, post-graduate study for these participants was a potential benefit in their perception and early preparation of their current work.

There was also Xiao Wu who told me that her post-graduate study played an important role in enhancing her academic thinking and paved a road for her future study. She talked a lot about how post-graduate study brought her passion for doing research. She planned to do a PhD study at first after graduation but, after settling down and becoming a teacher at a secondary school in Beijing, she had now quit her decision on PhD study telling me that the current labour market was not friendly to doctorate graduates especially there was age discrimination. She was over thirty-five years old so for her to quit her current work and embark on a PhD study was challenging, she would need not only financial support but also courage to give up all

the welfare like stability of Bianzhi she already had. Plus, she had no idea what she would do after doctoral graduation. What if the job she found after doctoral graduation was not as good? So she thought maintaining her current work was what she needed to do. She was curious and also asked me what pushed me to quit my current stable job with Bianzhi and do a PhD study abroad.

Xiao Wu (R1): At first, the passion of doing research is strong and I even considered doing doctoral study after graduation. Now I don't have this kind of ideas and haven't had any new plans too. Because you know having a PhD is pretty tough and the current recruitment environment is also not so friendly for doctoral graduates. I also feel like I don't have the guts and courage to have this challenge. Maybe my plan for the following years is to work with more focus on daily after-school life. My work, just let it be, I guess.

...After thirty years old, there is lots of pressure, you cannot avoid pressure living in a big city like Beijing, all kinds of work are accompanied with pressure. Not only do I face this pressure but also my roommate who is also a teacher tells me she has such troubles too. She hopes to have a PhD but she cannot take the risk to quit her job. So we decided to make future plans for the sake of reliability. We are puzzled now, sometimes I really want to have a PhD study. But finishing it is a tough task plus what kind of work I will do after graduation, [sigh] I am on the fence. Can I ask you a question? What gave you courage to quit the job of being a teacher with Bianzhi and have PhD abroad? About finding a job in the future, what is your plan?

Xiao Wu talked about her unrealised plan of pursuing a PhD study. Like what she had said previously, she faced two options, quit her job and do a PhD study - which may not receive support from her family and which she may encounter difficulties in finding a job after graduation due to competition and age discrimination or, keep her current work. She made her choice by choosing the latter one though maybe it was not what she really wanted. The economic recession, age discrimination and pressure of living pushed her to continue work at a secondary school. But she still seemed to feel hesitant and desired to pursue a higher academic degree. I could sense her being entangled by this issue during the interview and though I answered why I chose to undertake a PhD study instead of securing a stable job. She still felt that she did not

have the courage to do so. “Pressure” was the word she used many times in answering this question. For her, either to choose a stable work or challenge to have a further study both meant pressure, pressure for the future job hunting, pressure for current living cost and pressure from her growing age. It is not an individual problem just for Xiao Wu but faced by other participants as well. They all had different attitudes towards pressure, “lying flat” (to slack off) or trying to ignore it or cope with it peacefully. The related content is elaborated in the chapter of institutional influence and welfare to discuss their coping with pressure. In talking about the influence brought by further study, it is also worth noticing that besides research passion, Xiao Wu also mentioned her role model, her supervisor who influenced her on how to treat students and respect students, which she thought was beneficial to her work.

Xiao Wu (R1): I think the experience of having post-graduate study has a great impact on my attitude of doing academic research. And I found what I love in doing research so I can stick to it when I face difficulties. Another impact which is from my tutor is on teaching. He told me to stand on students’ points, for example, if you are not pleasant with some teachers’ words or behaviours when you are a student, don’t do it when you are a teacher. What he said of students and teachers relation are helpful for me especially when dealing with students’ issues.

Overall, from Xiao Wu’s answer, it is sad to see she did not continue her academic study due to difficulties of facing turbulence after quitting her job and age discrimination as well as unknown future challenges in the labour market. She dared not sacrifice her current stable job for a PhD study. But it is encouraging to see that her post-graduate study and her supervisor had given her a positive influence on her passion of research and daily work with students’ management. Rui also mentioned the importance of role models to her current teaching work. Though unlike previously discussed participants, who did not major in education, Rui majored in education for both her Bachelor and her Master’s degree. However, majoring in education also seemed not to bring any influence on her teaching. During the interview Rui did not mention how the knowledge she learnt in education or pedagogy benefited her current

work but told me the positive influence her supervisor had brought. Therefore, like Xiao Wu, Rui owed her gratitude mainly to her supervisors whose attitude towards research and ideology of education inspired her on her daily work with students.

Rui (R1): Having a Master's degree can increase the possibility of finding an official and stable job in Beijing. My professors' attitudes towards research and their ideology of education during the post-graduate also influenced me a lot. I hope I can give my students such positive impact.

From their answers, it is notable that participants in this research who regarded a higher academic degree was a to some extent secured tool in seeking for a stable and well-paid job tended to have their post-graduate study after graduation or one year gap for preparation of exams. For them, post-graduate study could be a good step stone to a decent and stable job in a city like Beijing but it played little impact on their future teaching. However it does not mean that there is no influence on their work. They mentioned the positive ideology they gained, positive attitude towards life they learnt from literature theories, social experiences and positive role models like their supervisors which all brought benign impact on their current work of being a teacher at primary/secondary school.

For the other two participants, their situations were slightly different. Heng and Tanmei, they continued their further study after working at primary school for several years. Like previously discussed, Heng told me her decision of embarking on a post-graduate study journey was to escape from daily dull work and equip herself with better academic qualification to face fierce competition in this career. She also held different views towards the potential benefit of further study brought to her work.

Heng (R1): The impact is that postgraduate study always engaged a lot of self-learning and discussion. Teachers encourage students to elaborate their ideas, which I think is good. So in my daily teaching, I remind myself that I should

keep my own ideas and encourage students to have theirs too. Also, my major of post-graduate study is not the subject I teach. It makes a difference on my work, which means I am able to get in touch with a total new subject and related work. This sense of feeling makes me passionate with my work, and makes my work more challenging.

She mentioned the importance of self-learning and independent critical thinking. She was inspired by the activities she received during post-graduate study and reminded herself that she also needs to create a space for her and her students to think critically and independently. In order to escape from her dull work, Heng even changed her major for her post-graduate study from education to another subject. She expressed the passion of learning this subject she was interested in. She hoped that she could be a teacher of this subject in the future instead of a teacher of the current subject.

Heng (R1): For being a teacher for many years, I have lost the passion, only to ensure the normalcy of teaching and students' proper behaviours. Being a teacher of the subject I learnt during post-graduate study on the contrast is quite fascinating, I make best of the time and seize every opportunity to learn new knowledge. I think it is challenging.

At the time of Heng's interview, she worked as an language teacher most of the time but the primary school also asked her to take an extra-curriculum class about mental health for students. Heng explicitly expressed her discontent of being an language teacher though she majored in English education for her under-graduate study. She told me the teaching was boring and all she did was to secure that the work followed the normalcy and nothing went wrong. However, when talking about the subject she learnt during post-graduate, I could sense the happiness she felt of doing the work of teaching it which to some extent also eased her anxiety and being bored about her daily teaching.

Compared with Heng, Tanmei's answer was much simpler. She happily told me how

she benefited from post-graduate learning. She said “I eagerly need an opportunity to enhance my knowledge. Having post-graduate study benefits me mainly on widening my knowledge and enriching my experience. Now I know more on how to study, solve difficult issues and etc” (R1). Though she did not tell me in detail how the knowledge benefited her daily teaching, her answer was indeed showing how post-graduate study addressed her problem of being stuck at the period of stagnation.

### **5.2.3 Reasons to be a Teacher at Primary/Secondary Schools**

After talking about their choices of post-graduate study, I asked the participants why they chose to work at a primary/secondary school instead of other work like civil servant which is also stable. Actually, during answering the question about why pursuing further study, some participants had already expressed their thoughts on choosing to work at primary/secondary schools, which was stability. In this part, they gave me further elaboration on their reasons why.

Participants like Heng, Rui and Yingying all told me that the reason why they chose to work at primary/secondary school or even why they chose “Shifan” (which means majoring in education and will be teachers after graduation in China) was because of stability this major can bring. Heng said “I graduated from a Normal university (or called Shifan university in Chinese referring to university which cultivates students to be qualified teachers) majoring in education. The reason for choosing to be a teacher is that my parents think this job is more stable.” Rui also mentioned the stability of being a teacher. She gave me three reasons why she chose to work at a primary school after graduating with her Master’s degree.

Rui (R1): There are three reasons. First my major during post-graduate is STEM

related education which matches the requirement of teachers' recruitment. Also being a teacher can solve Beijing Hukou (registered permanent residence in China). The last reason is I worked as an intern teacher during post-graduate and I did not dislike this job, you know.

She mentioned that a school could provide both Beijing Hukou and Bianzhi plus she majored in STEM education at a Normal university. Based on her internship as a teacher during her post-graduate study, she felt like this job was good and with an advantage of addressing Beijing Hukou and Bianzhi. So, she chose to work at a primary school instead of companies. For Yingying, even though she did not major in education at a Normal university for either her Bachelor or Master's degree, she expressed her love towards teaching since childhood as well as her pursuit of Beijing Hukou. She said "I chose to be a Chinese teacher at a secondary school because it is stable with Beijing Hukou. The second reason is I liked this job when I was a child, so I didn't choose to be a civil servant or other stable job." The second reason for Yingying to be a teacher was also shared by some other participants. They all told me their passion and love either influenced by their parents or formed during childhood towards teaching.

Xiao Wu (R1): My parents are both primary/secondary schools' teachers so I hope to be a teacher when I was a child because being a teacher can have a sense of achievement that you educate and guide many young people. I think I am familiar with this job and love it after all these years.

Moreover, Xiao Wu mentioned that she held an idea that teaching is a job with less unnecessary social contact, which means one does not need to please leaders all the time. All a teacher needs to do is to educate students well. She added that it was another reason which she found this job was suitable for her and attracted her. For Tanmei, she also expressed that teacher was a stable and decent job but her dream of becoming a teacher was because of her love towards Chinese.

Tanmei (R1): My dream is to become an outstanding Chinese teacher which



never changes all these years. Why do I have this dream? Well, maybe because I knew little about other different kinds of jobs and I really like Chinese. This subject, this language, is fascinating to me. I love everything about literature.

From their answers, one can sense that their love towards teaching was either influenced by parents or formed at an early age because of the love of one subject. Xiao Wu and Tanmei both expressed the idea that they knew little about other work so they hoped to become a teacher based on their love of this job. Yanyan also said working at primary/secondary school was attractive and she believed she had qualifications to be a good teacher. Her passion of teaching was formed during working as an intern. Previously she mentioned the reason why she had a post-graduate study was because her parents hoped she could settle down in Beijing with stability. So, it can be said Yanyan's choice to be a teacher was also partly because of stability but she furthermore indicated that she chose this job also because of her personality and intern experience. She further explained to me her experience of finding a job.

Yanyan (R1): After graduation, I aimed to find a job related to translation but received no reply after sending my CV. I only applied for one secondary school, and they recruited me because of my experience of working as an intern teacher. So, you see, my major during post-graduate study is translation especially translation related with transportation. Now, I tend to care more about how to educate students and impart my knowledge to them.

She told me her choice at first was to try both working as a translator or a teacher at a secondary school. Her mainly intention was working at a publisher so she only applied for one school. To her surprise, she was recruited by this school because of her experience as an intern teacher during post-graduate study. She discussed the unpredictability of finding a job and now she hoped she could focus on education instead of her previous major translation. She further explained to me that she thought she was capable of being a good teacher.

Yanyan (R1): I think I am recruited because I am kind and caring, with an experience of working as an intern teacher. Also I like challenging so I am happy to help secondary school's students with puzzles on learning such as Gaokao (Gaokao is national college/universities entrance examination (NCEE) which is super important to all secondary school's graduates in China) or growth. But now I guess teaching at a secondary school is not fascinating to me. Plus, I need to work near my family. I have my new home after getting married and it is far from my workplace. So now I am working at a primary school, which is attractive to me.

Furthermore, her recruitment by a good suburb secondary school in Beijing addressing her Beijing Hukou was a dream come true to both her and her parents since she told me the reason for her to have a post-graduate study was partly because of having a Beijing Hukou to receive welfare in Beijing. She also mentioned the reason she quit her first work at a secondary school in Beijing's outskirts. This school solved Yanyan's Beijing Hukou but provided no *Bianzhi* for her. So, she quit this job after the contract ended and moved to a primary school which was near her home. Though one may have disappointment of moving from a secondary to a primary school, Yanyan showed me that the current work was also attractive to her.

Like Yanyan, Xiao Qi also mentioned the influence of being an intern teacher at a secondary school. She told me she enjoyed the good atmosphere at that school though at first, she wanted to teach at a senior secondary school, influenced by the good vibe of this junior secondary school, she changed her mind and applied for this junior school.

Xiao Qi (R1): Being a secondary school teacher is an accident. I hope to teach senior secondary school. But when I worked as an intern in junior secondary school, I thought students were active, energetic, and lovely. And my tutor is experienced. She is a senior teacher working at a not famous secondary school. The amount of senior teachers is not large at that school. Her passion and optimism influenced me a lot at that time. I sent my CV to publishers as well but because of my tutor's influence and my belief that realizing one's value has

nothing to do with jobs. So, I chose to work at a junior secondary school.

From her answer it can be seen that Xiao Qi was influenced by the good vibe of the school she worked at as an intern and also her tutor at that school inspired her a lot. So instead of working at a publisher, Xiao Qi chose to work at a junior secondary school. After sharing her experience of choosing her current job, she also told me her feelings towards teaching at a normal school not a renowned one.

Xiao Qi (R1): I believe my dream is to teach normal people's children and live a mediocre and normal life. If I become a teacher of an outstandingly renowned secondary school, I will teach elite students who are maybe egoists, which is not what I want. Of course, I was biased at that time. But think about it, a normal person in a big city living a normal life experiencing the sweetness and bitterness. That is enough. I don't want my life to be full of work. If I work at a good school, my time of leisure and hobbies may be occupied by work, this is not what I hope. Oh, plus my tutor will retire this year and it's like the end of my first period of work. I sometimes hope that she can still work at this school.

Xiao Qi's perception was interesting that she regarded working at a renowned school as busy but not happy due to less leisure time. Like what she said, her perception at that time towards students at a renowned school was biased. But she indeed revealed one important element to that she considered important in influencing teachers' passion or sense of self-efficacy, which is time of their own. In fact, after telling me their love and passion towards teaching, they also told me about their disappointment about their work. The change of attitude towards teaching is elaborated in the next sections, which explore how participants found their daily teaching work different from what they expected.

#### **5.2.4 Attitudes Towards Daily Teaching**

I asked the participants about their perceptions of, and feelings towards their daily teaching work. Though many of them showed enthusiasm towards teaching before

entering the career, when I asked them about their current feeling or perception, their attitudes had changed to relatively negative ones. Some participants even explicitly expressed their disappointment or loss of passion towards the work. Like Heng, Rui and Yingying, who both said they had lost the passion and felt the sense of achievement was lost from them.

Heng (R1): My current teaching is quite busy. Being a language teacher for many years, I have lost the passion, only to ensure the normalcy of teaching and students' proper behaviours. For being a teacher of the subject I am learning, this work is quite fascinating, I make the best of the time and seize every opportunity to learn new knowledge. I think it is challenging, seeing students changing is an achievement to me.

Heng compared her work as a language teacher to a teacher of some other non main subjects. Her main work was teaching a language to primary school's students, but she found this work busy but boring. She only ensured that she met all the learning aims of students and kept them behaving properly in her class and that was all. She put more energy on the currently learning subject relate teaching and felt it was challenging and rewarding. Unlike Heng, Rui did not choose to teach another subject. She had worked as a STEM teacher at a primary school all her teaching career. She also felt that she was no longer passionate about this work as before.

Rui (R1): Every time I see students' growth, I will feel that this job is rewarding and valuable. But now, my passion for teaching is dying because of the strict policy, pressure from school and students' parents' unreasonable requirements. Now I only hope I can safely finish my work.

Rui in her interview revealed that she was tired of strict educational policy and some students' parents' unreasonable requirements towards teachers. As a teacher in charge of a class (head teacher of a class) she needed to pay attention to students' safety during the break and ensuring that they were not naughty or hurt others. I saw her daily routine in person and sometimes she barely had time to go to the restroom since

she would have lessons to teach after the break. Though she worked hard and diligently, from my perspective like she mentioned, she still received some complaints from students' parents. So, she expressed that under such pressure her passion was dying and she now only hoped that she could finish one day's work safely so she would not lose this job. Even though Heng and Rui both told me that they felt happy when they saw students' growth or improvement, this sense of achievement failed to elevate their feelings of self-empowerment and passion towards teaching. Busy but not rewarding work, unreasonable students' parents complaints and policy issues all contributed to them losing their passion towards this job.

Yingying also shared similar experiences at a secondary school. She explained her discontent in detail.

Yingying (R1): The current working environment is quite different from what I thought. Students dislike learning. Their parents do not support or cooperate with teachers' work such as daily students' behaviour management. There are also many illogical or unreasonable rules in school and the educational system with numerous requirements on teaching, while my students cannot achieve the goals the authorities set. I believe these hinder teachers' positivity and daily work a lot. My school also asks teachers to do much trivial stuff other than teaching which I think this work should be done by relative functional departments. These works occupy teachers' time and energy. So many teachers may feel snowed under and lose their passion for teaching. What I am concerned about is that teachers should have enough time to rest so as to ensure positivity on dealing with teaching and students' issues.

Her loss of passion towards teaching came from the gap between real teaching work and her expectation before entering the career. She complained about how students did not love learning, but the authorities kept setting unreasonable goals for teachers to achieve, ignoring the real learning need of these students and the challenges they were creating for teachers. For Yingying, she indicated that the authorities needed to know more about the students' real learning need and their level of learning ability,

not just setting a general rule for these students and then blaming students' failure on teachers. She was disappointed that some students' parents also did not cooperate with teachers to help their kids in learning and daily behaviours. She told me she was tired of illogical and unreasonable rules from both school and the whole educational system that she had experienced in this school. She further added that the last straw for her, to lose passion, was the school she worked at even allocated trivial work to them which should be done by administrative departments. She indicated that these works occupied too much time and many teachers at the school felt snowed under. She told me that there should be more time for teachers for preparing teaching and students' management, not on trivial work like photography or financial accounting. Her answer was very straightforward but to some extent revealed the issue the school had brought to her which severely hurt her passion for teaching. Both Rui and Yingying mentioned the illogical rules from authorities and the unreasonable complaints or noncooperation of students' parents. Unlike Heng who emphasised the dullness of teaching English and students' management, Rui and Yingying emphasised the unreasonable institutional and social aspects. These three teachers explicitly expressed their loss of passion and disappointment towards their current work whilst the other participants also, to some extent, showed their complex feeling or loss of passion to me but in a milder way. Tanmei also expressed the gap between real daily teaching and her expectation.

Tanmei (R1): I really like Chinese. This subject, this language, is fascinating to me. I love everything about literature. But now my daily work is different from what I expect teaching Chinese should be like. My ideal class of learning Chinese is of more in-depth discussion, more creation, more discussion between students and teacher on literature and great thoughts. But the current teaching mode is settled with certain criteria and doesn't allow any changes. So, I have to find a proper way of realizing my ideal class without breaking the current rules.

She mentioned that she had some design of Chinese teaching, but the teaching mode set by authorities was strict and fixed with certain criteria and goals so the authority of

rules in teaching was difficult to challenge. She had to give up her design and align with current rules. Like Rui and Yingying, Tanmei also showed discontent towards the educational rules which she thought needed to be changed, with time and students. Xiao Wu expressed her feeling towards daily work as complicated. She was very tired but happy to see the students' improvement. Now, being a teacher in charge of a class, she had little time of her own. There was a tremendous amount of work waiting for her. She admitted that this can drain her ability in class management and was quite tiring. This kind of fatigue was to some extent killing her passion that she told me sometimes she even asked herself why she chose this work. Apparently, her passion was also dying like the other participants in this research but still she held some passion towards the work. She gained her energy from seeing students' achievement. Just like other participants mentioned, though they may worry about students' learning or behaviours, still it was students who also brought happiness to teachers.

Xiao Wu (R1): Now I am happy and tired. It is complicated to say. I must admit now I have little passion, maybe sometimes some expectation or surprise from students, but almost in a period of stability. Now I am a teacher in charge of a class, I have my lessons of teaching English and am responsible for a whole class of students' safety, behaviours and arrangements of school's activities. I can learn something from it, but it is also quite tiring, so tiring that sometimes I even doubt why I chose this job... About the salary, it is not too much but can afford my living. This amount of salary means that you do not focus on money.

It needs to be aware that Xiao Wu also mentioned salary. Though quite busy she said the money she earned was not a big sum. She felt it was okay for her since she was single and lived in the school dorm. With this amount of money, she could afford her living. But living in a big city like Beijing costs a large sum of money in renting an apartment studio and daily groceries. The wage a teacher earned at primary/secondary school cannot be said to be a large sum of money to support their living though the recruitment threshold was quite high. The institutional rules and welfare issues will be elaborated further in the subsequent sections

Xiao Qi and Yanyan held a relatively more positive attitudes regarding their feelings towards teaching, though they also expressed their disappointments in some aspects. Xiao Qi first told me that she was happy with her current work but said that she had barely learnt new skills and to my surprise, she had also applied for psychological courses herself, to learn some knowledge about mental health.

Xiao Qi (R1): I have not learnt any new skills. It has been my seventh year of working as an EFL teacher at this school. I have gotten in touch with many kinds of students, receiving both happiness and difficulties. The goals and mindsets of parents and students are changing. I need to adjust myself to meet their needs. I still regard myself as a novice at teaching. To help students with their difficulties, I applied for the test of psychological therapist's test, just to have a try. The bad influence of the Covid pandemic is severe and I think it is necessary to consider mental health. I also hope to learn something new to enrich my knowledge.

Like what she said, she was doing her best to meet students and students' parents needs though she knew she could not satisfy everyone. She described her teaching experience as accompanied with both happiness and difficulties. Now she hoped to learn some more knowledge on mental health so that in the future she could use it to help students with mental health issues. The negative impact of Covid also reinforced her thoughts about learning psychology, since online learning had brought some mental health problems to some of her students. By the end of the last interview, I also received Xiao Qi's good news that she passed the test of psychological therapist so could now also work as a therapist to help her students.

Xiao Qi felt the need to learn new knowledge, so she applied for the psychological therapist's courses to improve herself. Though her feelings towards the work was complicated, she still chose to face it positively. Yanyan also shared similar experiences towards her work. She had worked at a secondary school located in the suburbs of Beijing before working at the current primary school at the city center. She



described her perception towards teaching at a secondary school as “not fascinating” and in order to move to a school which could be near to her home, she changed her job to work at a primary school. She found working at this primary school attracted her. Also, she indicated that there were differences between teaching at a primary school and a secondary school.

Yanyan (R1): Compared with teaching at a secondary school, now I have more classes to teach, four classes in total. I need to correct a lot of homework everyday (each student has four kinds of homework). And there are difficulties in class management because primary school’s students sometimes are naughty. But the pedagogy of primary school teaching attracts me a lot. I have learnt the importance of designing each stage of teaching and making delicate slides. I am hopeful with the passion of teaching and exploration. But I am tired in making a progress.

However, Yanyan seemed to be bothered by many classes to teach and much homework to correct. Managing students was also an issue for her to deal with, she said she did not encounter such problems during working at a secondary school. She was on the one hand passionate about exploring new teaching pedagogy for students whilst, on the other hand, tired in making progress. She told me the importance of keeping a work and life balance so she hoped that she would not only focus her life on her work. It seemed that she did not want to be bothered by too many school issues. Her aim focused more on her daily rest time thus she then told me how she planned her rest time to gain more hobbies and exercise. Participants like Yingying and Rui also mentioned that they hoped to focus more on their daily lives not just work and they were trying to get rid of problems brought by work by making efforts to manage and care more about their physical and mental health. How participants’ deal with work and life balance is discussed in next section to see how they coped with overwhelming pressure at work.

### 5.2.5 Summary

To conclude, in this section the participants shared their reasons for choosing further study and to be a teacher at a primary/secondary school as well as their perceptions towards current teaching work. Reasons for pursuing post-graduate study can mainly be summarised as securing a stable job and improving one's ability as well as escaping from dull daily work. For most participants who successively had their Master's courses they mainly explained their reasons to choose further study was impacted by the harsh competition from labour market in China, in order to realise their own wish or their parents' wish to settle down in a big city with Hukou and Bianzhi, they had to have a post-graduate study to be more competitive. Though some may have wishes to have a PhD study, but due to the age discrimination and other limitation in finding a job after thirty years old, having a PhD was quite a hard choice to make. For instance Xiao Wu expressed her worry that she may not find a stable job after graduation of PhD thus she did not have the guts to quit her current job and embark on the journey of further academic study. For participants who had worked for a period before resuming their further study, their goals were more purposeful, aiming to solve problems emerged in their daily teaching like lack of professional knowledge to support the teaching or getting bored with repetitive teaching work without any challenges. Thus academic credentialism here worked not just like a proof of ability for competition but more like an opportunity to enhance skills and provide new knowledge. It is also notable that most participants mentioned that the knowledge they acquired during post-graduate study and the role models like their supervisors influenced more on their thoughts than their lesson teaching. These experiences played more like a ideological guidance in showing them how to treat students, how to ask more open-ended questions to encourage students' critical thinking and how to think negative news from a more positive perspective. However, most of them admitted that the specific knowledge like English literature, STEM, translation and linguistics did not and could not be applied in daily teaching.

As for choosing to be a teacher. Most participants mentioned two key reasons which let them to be teachers. The first one is stability without complex social contact. Providing Beijing Hukou and Bianzhi, being a teacher at a primary/secondary school ensured them to be able to settle down in Beijing and having better welfare like their children can receive better education and their parents better medical care. Facing harsh competition in current Chinese labour market, they were satisfied to find such a stable job. The second reason was influence during childhood. Either influenced by their parents or their pure love of one subject since childhood, they knew little about other work and set their goals to be a teacher from a very early age. It can be seen for most participants in the research that simple social contact and stability attract more post-graduates to choose to be a teacher at primary/secondary schools. Also participant like Tanmei who would like to use mainly their knowledge to make a living or would love to be engaged into one area of research also preferred to be a teacher. Positive childhood influence from parents also increased the possibility of choosing teaching work, like Xiao Wu in this research.

However, though participants were passionate and strong self-empowered before entering into the career, they all showed that to some extent they were less passionate towards working as a teacher due to multiple reasons which are elaborated in the next chapter. Those whose choice was influenced by parents' work or love of this work like Tanmei and Xiao Wu expressed their disappointment less explicitly, they held a more complex love-hatred feeling towards this work and did not straightforwardly express their discontent like participants who chose the work from the perspective of stability. Due to different school culture and other institutional impact, some participants like Yingying, Heng and Rui expressed their anger, disappointment and tiredness straightly to show their discontent. Some of them chose to slack off to fight against the unfairness and unreasonable policy at the workplace but also felt impotent to change the current situation. Xiao Qi was the only one in the research who was still

hopeful albeit that she was also less passionate than before. Xiao Qi held a less negative attitude towards her current work thanks to positive influence from knowledge of literature she learnt during post-graduate and her tutor. She was the one who could deal with negative feelings more wisely and would not be influenced by negative vibe from surroundings. In the next section of institutional and welfare influence, participants' explanations of their low self-empowerment including time consuming, low wages and unreasonable policy impact were analysed to see how these factors to what extent negatively influence their passion of teaching.

### **5.3 Gender Experiences of Being Female Teachers**

Interviews questions related to gender were mainly asked from the perspective of policy impact such as 'Third Child policy', potential gender discrimination during recruitment and gender related welfare. Participants answered these questions based on their experiences and own perceptions. Before formal interviews, I had several talks with participants asking for their consent on disclosing their status of marriage and how many children they have, chatting about their recent off-time lives and their perceptions towards some heatedly debate topics in terms of gender on the internet to help them be accustomed to some possibly private or sensitive questions in formal interviews. After the talks, most participants felt like to respond to gender related topics and express their thoughts on some policy issues. In general, they had different attitudes and diverse perceptions towards certain phenomena and shared attitudes towards some welfare related gender issues. Overall, their responses to interview questions on gender issues are elucidated from three lens based on interview questions, namely perception towards gender related policy/traditions' impact, gender discrimination before/at work and gender related welfare issues. Each of these are discussed in the following sections.

### **5.3.1 Impact of Gender Related Policy and Traditional View**

After the launch of the ‘Third Child Policy’, a report on Baidu search engine used ‘Pregnant Female Teachers are Resisted and Strongly Against by Students’ Parents’ as a topic revealing that students’ parents discontent that pregnant teachers may not have enough energy to take care of the whole class and furthermore hinder their students improvement (Zhang, 2023). The article may be a little bit radical on issues of female teachers giving birth to a second child but it indeed discloses potential problems between the benefits of students’ parents and teachers and furthermore, problems of workload brought by more pregnant female teachers asking for maternal leaves given that most primary/secondary schools’ teachers are female. Unmarried female teachers, unfortunately may also face pressure to marry from their parents or relatives embedded in the current Chinese context. Will highly-educated female teachers also be influenced by such gender related policies or views in planning their career’s professional development or do they have different attitude towards such policies and views ? With these questions in mind, I asked my participants their views towards ‘Third Child Policy’ and pressure for marriage from family.

Overall, all participants felt that there was hardly any influence at all brought by ‘Third Child Policy’ or marriage pressure. Unmarried participants, Xiao Qi, Yingying and Xiao Wu gave me similar answers that their parents were to some extent open-minded plus they used reasonable explanations to dissuade their parents from urging them to get married all the time. Yingying, who was tired everyday due to busy work told me that she was not bothered by such issues. She told me her parents fully respected her decision as well as choices on marriage and they were open-minded.

Yingying (R2): I haven't married and have no child so it (Third Child Policy) has no influence on me. My parents are also open-minded and they don't urge me to get married or give birth to children. I believe giving birth to children is beneficial if considering it from the point of social progress. If a couple loves each other and maintains a good relationship, giving birth should be encouraged as a good relationship has positive influences on a child's growth. However, if a couple's relationship is not stable or has economic issues, it is better not to have babies. After all, giving birth should depend on each individual's economic and emotional conditions.

Yingying showed her positive attitude towards 'Third Child Policy' from a perspective of social progress, which means with its focus on providing more labour forces. She was also grateful that her parents were open-minded so she did not need to be bothered by marriage pressure from her family. Like Yingying, Xiao Qi told me her parents were also open-minded although were not at first but changed after her patient talks with her parents on marriage. She told me in details that since she was over thirty, which was generally believed in China, as being over the golden age of getting married for a woman. Hence, she could sense that her parents were anxious but did not give her too much pressure. Moreover she was proud that she used knowledge learnt in university and information from the internet to persuade her parents that she did not need to worry about marrying right now. Good communication, in her view, also played an important role to avoid family conflict in dealing with this issue.

Xiao Qi (R2): About parents urging me to get married, this year my parents did not urge me when I came back to home for the Spring Festival. Maybe since I am over thirty, they have already accepted the fact that I will get married late. Another reason for they are not anxious about my marriage is that being exposed to fast updated information on the internet they are also more advanced and open-minded to keep pace with the time. I consider people at our parents' age are the ones who are good at learning, which means they are willing to accept new information and knowledge. I believe they also know to some extent that the divorce rate is getting higher these years. Marriage has different meaning compared to theirs. It is not easy to manage a harmonious and happy relation so we have to be more cautious towards marriage. My parents often say that it is better to live a happy single life than have an unhappy marriage. If you will meet

your Mr. Right, seize the opportunity and if not, as long as you are independent (economically and emotionally), you can live happily. To some extent, I understand why some parents are anxious about their children's marriage, because they think it is comprehensive to get married or they worry that you won't take good care of yourself when you are old and it is better to have someone accompany you. They think this issue on a more macro-level so they cannot understand why someone choose not to marry, why someone won't fall in love or why someone always unsatisfied with his/her partner etc.. The current society has so lots of pressure that cannot be compared with days before. Therefore parents cannot keep pace with our thinking they are still looking forward to some ideal dreams. But I believe they can also understand my pressure and problems. Hence they are urging but not too much and not that extreme one with lives sacrificed.

Xiao Qi's response mirrored that the recent heatedly discussed issue of parents' marriage urging pressure played little influence on her life nor on her work. Her parents were aware of the increasing divorce rate and wished more of their daughter to live a happy life than simply asking her to get married. Xiao Wu also gave me a similar answer that she hoped to skip this question since she was still single and there were a lot of work at school to care about besides marriage. During our interviews, though she did mention about marriage urging from her parents. She said little about it except telling me she also experienced it as a woman in her thirties.

For participants who have married, they expressed their belief that they would not give birth to a second or third child. Unexpectedly consistent, they all said that for them their current work was frustrating to some extent. They neither had energy and time nor had enough money to support two kids' and the associated costs of living and education. Some of them expressed their attitudes in a relatively radical way. For example, Yanyan thought that parents who urge young couples to give birth to second or third child were self-centered. She might have a biased view towards rich people having three or more children but, did reveal the fact that giving birth to children is closely related with personal finance in her view. Like Yanyan there were other

participants who just accepted the policy as a fact but were not influenced by it, in that they felt that they did not have energy to think about such issues or the economic support for more kids given that there were already tremendous amount of work to do with low wages.

Yanyan (R2): As a teacher who has much work I don't want to give birth to children because I don't have money to buy an apartment and have no time to breed a child not to mention three children! Only wealthy family will consider having three kids. I think policy has little influence on such families anyway because they need children to inherit property and many ways to escape from strict policies. For me, the 'Third Child Policy' is more like government's general control to prevent the decrease of newborn and labour forces. I know some parents urge their children to give birth as quickly as possible based on a fact that they can help to take care of babies. Their intention is good but also selfish. I believe getting married or giving birth to children is young couples' own business and no one can decide these for them.

Tanmei (R2): This policy has no influence on me. I do not have energy to have a third baby. I do not have time, energy and money to raise a third child. If the policy is implemented, families who want to have a third baby will have. Also social infrastructure and relative facilities should be built because the biggest obstacle to prevent people from having a third child is too much pressure from life.

Rui (R2): It has no influence on me. I will not consider having a second baby. Because it costs too much such as money on education and time of caring, which are all issues you know.

Like other married participants, Heng at first expressed her worry about lacking finances, time as well as man-powered support.

Heng (R2): There is no influence. From the prospective of a nation, 'Third Child Policy' is good. But for me, I will not choose to have a second and a third baby because my energy and manpower of my family is not allowed.

She further explained that after a day of work, she then needed to consider activities for her baby daughter. Though the time she spent with her daughter may not be long



due to long and tiring work as a teacher, she regarded education at an early age as something quite important so she hoped to design proper activities for her daughter.

Heng (R2): I spend my off-time looking after my child after finishing house chores. I spend time reading or playing with her, but the time is not long. When looking after her, I need to have a plan of what to do, for example, how to activate her to do an activity. During playing, I will consider how to plan the activity systematically and cultivate her some interests on subjects she is going to learn in the future and also teach her how to interact with others or cultivate her personality.

When talking about this issue with participants, it seemed that explicitly they were not bothered by such issues. However, they indeed mirrored some of the challenges identified in the literature such as their lack of rest time after work, poor wages, no relative supporting facilities and their social class which were different from wealthy people who may consider more kids to 'inherit their heritage'. In order to prove that they were reasonable and not radical people who were against such policies, they added their support of the policy after expressing how they understood the reasonability and necessity of 'Third Child Policy' for giving families who want more children permission. But for them, it seemed that before considering more kids, they cared more about their own rest time and welfare as without this, they were unable to care for more children.

### **5.3.2 Gender Discrimination at Workplace: Invisible or Cultural Shock**

After asking participants about some general policy related influences, I moved on to more sensitive questions like gender discrimination during their recruitment and at their workplace. Before asking, I explained the definition of gender discrimination to participants as discrimination such as valuing males than females during job interviews and reducing female teachers' welfare like shortening the time period of

maternity leave. I further informed them that the range of gender discrimination I defined may not be wide enough to cover all issues and if they concerned they met gender discrimination out of the range, they can also discuss it with me. After explaining I asked the participants about these more sensitive issues; like if they have ever experienced gender discrimination during or after recruitment, , they surprised me with how willing they were to answer them and provided me with details. Three participants mentioned they had met such discrimination during/after recruitment. Yingying, a Chinese teacher who graduated with her Master's degree from an excellent university in China, told me her experience of gender discrimination during work. Even though she did not mention any gender discrimination during recruitment, she did express her displeasure when the school headteacher had some requirements regarding her plan of pregnancy when she worked as a teacher in charge of a class (In China, a teacher in charge of a class means the teacher not only teaches lessons but also is responsible for one class of students' behaviours, activities, students' parents complaints and other trivial stuff related to students' school life. Usually, the number of students of one class ranges from 30 to 50 in Beijing).

Yingying (R2): I have experienced gender discrimination. A principal told me that I should not give birth to a child when I am a teacher in charge of a class in five years. I believe teaching is a career which has less gender discrimination than others. But still, you know...

Yingying's headteacher asked her not to get pregnant in five years when she need to work as a teacher in charge of a class. Another participant Heng also had a similar experience but Heng was not aware of such gender discrimination at first. When I heard about Yingying's story, I was curious whether Heng, a mother of a daughter might have also encountered such situation. In discussions, Heng, mentioned about reporting plans of pregnancy to principals or being asked by principals not to get pregnant. But unlike Yingying, who regarded this kind of requirement as gender discrimination, Heng perceived it from a different perspective.

Heng (R3): Yes, I had such experience. But it is for principals to plan the work as a whole. They can make time plans for female teachers who have intention of pregnancy, but no compulsory plan of sequence of pregnancy.

It can be seen from Heng's answer that Heng's headteacher unlike Yingying's headteacher who asked Yingying directly not to get pregnant in five years used a more indirect way to require or enquire as to Heng's plan of pregnancy. It is worth noticing that Rui, another participant who worked at the same school as Heng, also did not mention such discrimination. In fact, she actually returned to work earlier during her maternity leave. She was a little unpleasant but understood the school's action, since she stated that if a class of students need to have lessons and every teacher at school was busy, it makes sense to plan. This kind of requirement was seen as a reasonable way for the headteacher to manage teaching plans and can best ensure students' benefit - since the headteacher will know which teacher is planning to get pregnant. When the headteacher plans the school work, she can avoid asking teachers who are pregnant to be teachers in charge of a class or to have too much work. Pregnant teachers who are in charge of a class may need to leave for medical checks during work, which might trigger students' parents discontent as Zhang discussed in the mentioned report (2023).

Though Rui did not regard the above situation as gender discrimination, in her interview she did mention that she had met gender discrimination but it was during her job interviews, namely during recruitment. She said that "I met this kind of discrimination. Some workplaces prefer a male without diploma than an outstanding female. I think they should value ability more" (R2). Rui disliked such gender discrimination but she did not consider reporting a pregnancy plan as any kind of gender discrimination. Based on anecdotal conversations with some female teachers in the UK, reporting pregnancy plans or being required by headteachers not to get

pregnant when doing an important is very clearly stated as discrimination. However, based on the interviews of participants in this research, perceptions towards this phenomenon are very individual and may have cultural influences, just like Heng explained it to me that the reason why she did not feel discriminated or offended was that she fully understood why the headteacher asked such questions is mainly from the purpose of managing school affairs.

Besides such a disputable point, Tanmei was another participant like Rui and Yingying who shared her experience of gendered discrimination during a job interview.

Tanmei (R2): Yes, there is gender discrimination. For example, as an applicant who competes for the job of Chinese teacher, if the applicant is male, school will hire him with fewer tests compared with females. Females will on the contrary receive many tests. I am angry about it.

Though Tanmei at first told me that she was angry when meeting such gender discrimination, she added an explanation after the complaints to show that such unfair phenomenon was also to some extent reasonable.

Tanmei (R2 and R3): but meanwhile I understand what and why schools have done such inequity. Honestly speaking, recruitment should focus on ability but schools are lack of male teachers especially in art and languages related subjects and male teachers do not have maternity leave or baby break. After all, few male students choose to major in education in universities and few of them choose to be a teacher after graduation. Besides, teachers' welfare is not good enough for a male teacher to support his family, especially for outstanding males who have higher expectation for career. Obviously being a teacher is not a choice for them. So what I want to express is that this issue is complex and cannot be solved by simply asking schools to stop gender discrimination.

She seemed to accept that schools did unequal interviews due to a lack of male teachers at primary/secondary schools. She also mentioned that males have

advantages since they do not have maternity leave. It is interesting to note that she was furthermore much less confident around men who were with high academic background, claiming that such outstanding men might feel unsatisfied with schools' welfare given that they had higher expectation for career. I noticed that she seemed not to realise that the not-so-good welfare was also unfair to her since she herself was a highly educated female, just like outstanding men she mentioned previously. What she indicated was females, be them highly educated or not, seemed not to be bothered by such financial issues compared with men who are breadwinners. She also believed that men, as bread winners of a family, might care more about welfare and it was understandable for schools to lower the threshold of recruitment since they cannot improve welfare in a short time. Later, she stopped this topic and told me it was too complex for her and it was not an easy solution to simply ask schools to stop it. Likewise, another participant Yanyan gave me quite a similar explanation showing her perception and impotence towards gender discrimination happening in a workplace. Instead of giving me her personal experience, she explained her understanding towards this social issue.

Yanyan (R2): Now the society is experiencing economic recession so hunting a job is difficult with some social issues being revealed like gender discrimination. Gender discrimination in my opinion is like The Emperor's New Clothes. Everyone knows there is gender discrimination in the recruitment but no one mentions it, or it cannot be solved by someone mentioning it. What I have to do now is doing my best and accept the result. Recruitment is a two-way selection right?

Yanyan used a widely known Danish story written by Hans Christian Andersen. The fairy tale is of an Emperor who ordered new clothes. Alas, he was deceived by two tailors and without realizing was wearing nothing all. However, people were too afraid and did not dare to say anything. Instead they pretended the emperor's new clothes were wonderful. She used the story title as a kind of metaphor to show me that she was no longer annoyed by such issues since it was hard to change it. Instead of

being bothered by gender discrimination, Yanyan chose to build up her ability because she believed as long as she was a professional teacher, she did not need to worry about gender discrimination too much. For her, it is easier to improve self ability than change social inequity. It is worth mentioning that we later talked about one secondary school in Beijing which taught women's moral codes, things such as keeping chastity, to female students but no such content was taught equally to male students. Yanyan gave me another response to this issue.

Yanyan (R2): I don't know about girls' virtue classes in details but I believe these virtues like keeping purity, being a good mother and hard-working wife and being tame are parts of Chinese tradition. So it must have its historical value. Also I believe some modern values on women like independence and self-assertion also present the development of gender equity.

Like her attitude towards gender discrimination. Yanyan shared a similar mild and unexceptional way towards this issue indicating that she agreed with Chinese traditional gender views as it is indeed a tradition, meanwhile she also supported the more developed modern view of female independence, which forms her individual perception towards gender issues.

There are also two participants who expressed they were lucky not to meet gender discrimination in the workplace or during the recruitment's interviews. Both these participants Xiao Qi and Xiao Wu are single now so for them they may not encounter issues like reporting plans of pregnancy to headteachers. Xiao Wu told me she heard of gender discrimination however. She indicated that such phenomenon was more prevalent in careers where males were in greater need or more suitable for males. Her perception towards gender discrimination; like intending to hire more male teachers was similar to Tanmei's. She understood such unfairness though she knew it was unfair it still could not be denied that primary/secondary schools needed more male teachers.

Xiao Wu (R2): About gender discrimination, I believe many people may encounter it during job hunting. Especially some jobs, not teachers, some other jobs, which need males or are suitable for males, will explicitly write standards like they only hire males. This is how I understand gender discrimination. For teachers, I think female teachers weigh more in this career and male teachers are few. Chinese proverb says a thing is precious when it is rare, so you know.

When talking about her own experience, Xiao Wu said she was lucky not to meet such discrimination either during interviews of recruitment or at workplace. She said “I think I did not experience such discrimination. I believe gender is not a main element in recruitment, employers also focus on ability. I think my school has done well on avoiding gender discrimination” (R2). Her perception was similar to Yanyan indicating that she believed ability weighed more than gender advantage and she was grateful the school she worked at was a school which held similar belief that teachers’ ability was more essential.

Xiao Qi, like Xiao Wu who also did not experience gender discrimination, gave me more of her positive experience in the workplace regarding gender issues and how her students broke gender stereotypes. At first, she told me about her experience regarding discrimination.

Xiao Qi (R2): I haven’t met gender discrimination during work because most of the principals in the school I work at are females. There are only one male principal among three vice principals and he is in charge of logistics. Principals who are in charge of teaching and teacher training are all female and leaders who are in charge of managing teachers of one grade are also female so I don’t pay much attention on this issue.

We also discussed ideas associated with the girls virtue class event in Beijing and instead of commenting on this event, Xiao Qi told me of her positive experience in terms of gender education at the secondary school.

Xiao Qi (R2): About educating students on this issue, I notice that the gender difference between boys and girls are not distinctive as before. Even one student in my class has transsexual cognition. He thinks he is a homosexual and regards himself as a girl. I think gender education should first cultivate students how to behave well and then how to use gender advantages wisely. I believe genders are complementary. For instance, many girls now like to challenge boys in some areas like football. In my school, there are more girls choosing football as a hobby, my school also has female football team. In my hometown, female football training schools are quite popular and there is one player in current national female football team who graduated from my hometown's training school. Then what I want to add is that there is no gender discrimination in my class and it is interesting that some boys are afraid of girls. In my class, some boys are getting better at doing house chores and cook dishes quite well. Maybe I have these thought because the school I work at is small and the competition is not as fierce as other famous schools so I haven't experienced gender discrimination during work. Perhaps teachers at extra-curricular training schools may experience it.

I can sense how happy and proud she was when she talked about them. Unlike other participants, she gave me a sense of positive attitude towards gender issues. As an EFL teacher, Xiao Qi mentioned her student's case to show girls were getting more powerful, energetic in engaging male-dominated sports and boys becoming more patient and good at house chores which were perceived widely as a work for females.

To sum up, it can be seen that seven participants shared quite different experiences with respect to gender discrimination according to their individual lived experience. Most of them mentioned that they hoped schools valued ability more than gender advantage but they were not annoyed too much by gender discrimination. Some of them mentioned their experience of being discriminated against whilst the others were lucky to avoid such unpleasant experience.



### 5.3.3 Attitudes Towards Gender-related Welfare

In the last of the interviews, I asked the participants about welfare for female teachers, things like maternal leave and facilities such as mother-and-child facilities. Based on my own working experience at schools in Beijing, whether primary or secondary schools are fully equipped with mother-and-child facilities vary according to financial conditions. It cannot be denied that some famous schools have large spaces and enough financial support which may provide such facilities for their female teachers. For teachers like Heng and Rui who were mothers themselves, they showed their concern and hope for schools to be equipping such females friendly facilities to ease some of the difficulties of new mothers, such as preparing milk during work. The other participants who did not have babies during interviews only told me there was no facilities for female teachers who were breast-feeding their child during work. Naturally they expressed very little concern about this, not being directly impacted. .

For teachers who had children, Heng and Rui expressed similar worry regarding some post-partum female teachers' plights like the school having no private spaces for preparing breast nursing.

Heng (R3): In the school I work at, there are no mother-child-facilities. I consider it is necessary to have these facilities. When some post-partum female teachers are breast-feeding women, they need personal spaces and relative facilities. Office is obviously not the proper place.

Rui (R3): There is no such facilities. There are many teachers who are women at school. It is quite inconvenient for them if they are breast feeding their children. They sometimes may need milking during work. There are currently two female teachers I know who need milking at school during work. They have to look for a vacant office or classroom, which is super inconvenient.

As a mother themselves, Heng and Rui showed their dissatisfaction at the lack of mother-and-child facilities at schools and thought it was inconvenient for female

teachers who had such need. Likewise, other participants gave similar answers that there was no such facilities in the school they worked at. For unmarried teachers like Xiao Wu, Yingying and Xiao Qi, it seemed to be a faraway question to think about. Some of them at first were unclear about the answer, not being sure whether there were mother-and-child facilities since they were not married. Unlike wages or other financial welfare, gender related welfare such as well-equipped mother-and-child facilities were not considered carefully after entering into the teaching career.

Xiao Wu (R3): The first question, what do you mean by mother-and-child facilities? Are they facilities convenient for post-partum female teachers like a certain room for them to prepare milk? In my memory, we do not have such facilities or rooms. Perhaps because I am not married, so I did not pay much attention on it. If the school is equipped with such rooms, I believe they would have advocacy or introduction. I think it is necessary to facilitate post-partum females friendly rooms or something like it. There are many female teachers who are at the age of getting married or giving birth to a child. In my memory, some of my colleagues need to commute back and forth between their departments and school. It is inconvenient.

Even though for unmarried female teachers whether a school was equipped with mother-and-child facilities is not an essential question, they did express their concern over lacking such females friendly welfare or equipment and hoped that in the future schools' facilities can be improved. As a matter of fact, all participants in the research to some extent voiced their hope of improving this area. Like what Xiao Qi said: "I think it is necessary because new hand mother and mothers who are going to have a second child need this kind of facilities." Or Yingying: "...there are many female teachers at school who are at breast-feeding period and feel very inconvenient when they need to milk at school."

It is worth noticing that for some participants, though they also thought it was necessary to build mother-and-child facilities, they also expressed their ideas on why

schools did not have these females friendly establishments. For instance, Tanmei who was pregnant during the interview told me that she was not sure about whether the school she worked at had these facilities or not. Like unmarried teachers, such welfare was not seriously considered by her. To some extent, her explanation taking from the perspective of the school also conveyed her attitude that she understood schools' overlook of such needs.

Tanmei (R3): I did not notice it. I guess my answer is no. (It means no convenient facilities for post-partum mothers at the school.) I think it is necessary for schools to equip them, especially for some female teachers who have just resumed their work from maternal leaves. But perhaps due to less teachers who are going to give birth to children in recent years, so the need is not noticeable taking the perspective of the school.

Like Tanmei, Yanyan also expressed her idea of this issue from the point of school. Personally she supported the establishment of more mother-and-child facilities. However, she thought it was not necessary for schools to build them as something compulsory.

Yanyan (R3): I hope we can have one (Room for post-partum female teachers) but I also think it is not necessary. Because usually we have lots of class like 4 classes in the morning, when it is time to have a rest, my colleagues prefer feeding their kids back at home, than milking in a bottle at school, sometimes they even feel nervous to do these at school. Also, the secondary school I used to work doesn't have these facilities too. Not to mention the primary school I am working at. It doesn't have enough spaces, they even put psychological counseling and broadcasting into one room so it is impossible to plan one room for post-partum female teachers.

It cannot be denied that she commented it from a total different but realistic perspective. She told me that the primary school she worked at was much smaller than the secondary school she used to work at. A lack of enough spaces was bothering every headteachers at primary schools in her opinion. It was a problem hard to be addressed if facilities for students were still not well-equipped, not to mention those

for post-partum female teachers. In Yanyan's opinion, if there are enough spaces, school will at first improve students related facilities and then for teachers. So she to some extent was not bothered by such issue since it is a question which may need longer time to resolve than expected.

To put it into a nutshell, female friendly welfare or facilities especially like rooms for post-partum female teachers are not treated as an essential part of schools' welfare by participants before or after work in this research. For them, despite being aware of the significance and necessity of mother-and-child facilities and other female friendly facilities, they still felt that it was not obligatory for schools to equip such facilities and they would not complain about the missing of such welfare. More directly speaking, they did not place such welfare as an essential part like wages and pension during job hunting. For both unmarried and married female teachers in this research, the gender-related welfare is important but meanwhile not important to some extent considering that schools have more work to concern or more students related welfare to care like Yanyan mentioned in her response.

#### **5.3.4 Summary**

To conclude, most participants, discussed gender related issues and gender discrimination during job interviews or in workplaces. For the impact of policy and traditional views, every participant claimed that they felt no influence on their daily life nor work. For unmarried participants like Yingying, Xiao Qi and Xiao Wu, they showed that their knowledge acquired at university could be a good weapon to persuade their already open-minded parents from marriage urging. For most married participants, they expressed their worry that time and money were two things which should be considered first before discussing marriage or children. Given that they did

not own enough money and off-work time, 'Third Child Policy' played little impact on their lives.

As for gender discrimination at workplace, situations vary between participants. Schools' culture and headteachers' beliefs are key elements to decide whether a participant may encounter gender discrimination at workplace or not. Also, cultural difference and personal belief are needed to be considered since different female teachers may have different perception towards school's rules like reporting plan of pregnancy. Explicit gender discrimination like valuing male than female during job interviews were strongly against by all participants but meanwhile some of them understood schools' plight since male teachers are less at primary/secondary schools, society calls for more male teachers whilst the welfare is not attractive to males. The others felt it was difficult to change the current situation than to improve their own abilities. In a word, gender discrimination especially ones during job interviews is a complex social phenomenon even though participants in this research loathe it, they have to persuade themselves to accept it. Being powerless in facing such inequity is explicitly or implicitly conveyed in their responses.

Last but not least, gender related welfare such as comprehensive mother-and-child facilities are not yet equipped at schools participants work at according to interviews in this research. For participants with children, they were in hope of more mother teacher friendly facilities to be set. But they seemed not to be greatly bothered or worried by the current dissatisfied situation. For the other participants, such welfare was not carefully considered by them since it seemed to be a faraway issue. Even some participants pointed out that schools might need to consider improving students related facilities before teachers', harsh but realistic, if there was no enough spaces to facilitate students-related equipment, it was reasonable for teachers to bear that there

was no mother-and-child facilities since a school and teachers should consider students' benefits at first. It can be summarised that participants in this research hoped to improve such welfare but currently were not bothered and did not regard female friendly facilities at schools as a priority to check when thinking about school's welfare.

## **5.4 Impact of Social Respect and Institutional Policies**

In this section, the themes that appeared to impact and shape participants' identity are divided into two groups, namely institutional and interpersonal impact. Institutional impact, such as policy as well as the pandemic are those things which modified working hours and payment are elaborated based on participants' personal perceptions. Participants shared their perceptions and expressed their exhaustion because of the long working hours and little payment. Institutional influence such as policy of 'Double reduction' and Covid-19 played roles in pressuring teachers with longer working hours or blurring the boundary of on-off – work/home life. Furthermore, the interpersonal impact at both micro and macro level such as peer influence, social respect including relationship with schools, students and students' parents and social media reports towards teachers are discussed aiming to explore how interpersonal impacts shaped teachers' understanding of their professional role. According to interviews, all participants in this research showed that they were tired of long working hours and had insufficient rest. Moreover, they told me that such long working hours and little payment were also killing their passion towards the work and influencing their health.

Regarding social respect, participants also shared their experiences of dealing with

issues of students' parents and the connected social respect. Their perception towards it was shaped by both their own experiences and peers' experiences they witnessed. Thus it can be found that participants' perceptions of whether they felt they were receiving enough social respect varied and all participants who worked at primary schools felt that they did not receive enough social respect. Participants from secondary schools had different perceptions. The following parts elaborate these factors which contributed in shaping participants' professional identity at institutional, interpersonal and personal level.

#### **5.4.1 Institutional Impact**

##### **Long Working Hours and Little Payment Before/after 'Double Reduction'**

Though according to some participants' hearsay, anecdotally there were already implementation of university's flexible working mode (teachers come to school when there are lessons for them to teach. After finishing the work they can leave school at any time they want.) in some renowned secondary schools. Participants claimed that they were however, still following the old pattern instead of a flexible working mode. Participants first expressed their support towards 'Double Reduction' in that it relieved students' learning burden but they also shared difficulties in balancing their work and home life, especially after the 'Double Reduction'. They discussed how they managed to finish the work during working hours and had rests when they were back to home. It is noteworthy that all participants mentioned that they slept during rest time, for example Yingying said she could barely do anything after work. She would just lie on a sofa and was even felt too tired to watch a TV show or drama series. All she wanted to do was to sleep to relieve the fatigue. Whether participants had children or not, they all expressed similar experiences - that they felt too tired to do anything else but sleep. Especially for teachers from secondary school in this research, their fatigue was sometimes even sensed during interviews that they

appeared not to be able to concentrate and appeared to be badly in need of a good rest. Being aware of such situation, I offered to reschedule interviews in order to let participants adjust their status.

For some participants like Yingying, Tanmei, Rui and Xiao Wu, they managed to reach a work and home life balance but to some extent felt it was quite difficult since the working hours were long and energy consuming. During the interview, Yingying told me that she had learnt to deal with her work more efficiently and tried to ask for help from other teachers or headmasters if she felt she could not solve a particular problem. She also expressed the importance to say 'No' to unnecessary work when she already had too much work to do.

Yingying (R1): Now I have three ways to keep a good state and a balance between life and work. I have managed to enhance the efficiency of work in order to have a rest after work time. If the work or issues can be done at school I won't bring them back to home. I also try to adjust my mentality. A teacher cannot solve all the problems of students instantly. They are in the process of growth which means there will be new problems emerging after you solve the old one. If I have some unresolved students' problems, I will ask for help from the headmaster at school. The last one is to say 'No' to some unnecessary work.

She had found ways to balance her work and life, believing that work was not everything, but a tool to survive in society. However, Yingying still found that she had to spend most of her time on work especially after the launch of 'Double Reduction'. She told me that after the implementation of the policy, the working hours were even longer than previously. The working hours for secondary schools' teachers before this policy were long and now it had become much longer so that Yingying found herself finding it difficult to stand the intensity of work. She counted her working hours which now were almost ten hours a day without counting the time of lessons-preparation and homework correcting during break.



Yingying (R1): Take my daily work as an example, I have to be at school before 7:30 am because there are morning reading for Chinese and English subjects. There will be after-school service after 3:00 pm until 5:30 pm. So the working time is roughly from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm (about ten hours a day of working). Before, the working hour is from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm. Because Chinese is a main subject. This after-school service is the product of 'Double reduction' policy which brings more work to teachers. Also the school I work at does not have flexible working mode, so many teachers are sick or do not have enough energy to face the daily teaching. It in my concern has a bad impact on teachers' teaching and patience to students. The negative mentality of teachers will influence students as well. Teachers need time to help specific students with learning or other problems. Teachers also need time to study curriculum, pedagogy, students and rest. But now, it seems like we don't have the time

She also reminded me that this was just a routine for junior secondary school's teacher, the one for senior secondary school's teachers was much harsher though there was no after-school service for senior secondary schools, because the students and teachers worked hard for Gaokao, Chinese university's entrance exams (similar to A-Level in the UK). Also working as a Chinese teacher, Tanmei shared similar views towards long working hours. She said that she loved teaching Chinese, despite her complex feeling towards being a Chinese teacher. The reason she explained as to why she sometimes felt negative about this work was partly due to long working hours.

Tanmei (R1): The work of being a teacher is busy and trivial. I manage to finish all work during working hours and rest when I am back to home. The current difficulty is that the working hours are too long, too early and too many tasks to finish in one day. I now teach three classes' Chinese, which means there are so many students waiting for me for prompt guidance and loads of homework waiting for correcting and checking. It makes me hard to care every students. Some good plans or blueprint of teaching can't be realized because I don't have time to prepare. I sometimes feel really sorry for my students, but I am frustrated every day so I just can't care all of them.

Not only did she mention the pressure from long working hours, Tanmei also expressed her worry of not caring about every students' needs because of the large amount of students she taught and her limited energy. From her view, it seemed that

teachers fatigue and over-time work also played a negative influence on students' learning. Yingying also told me that though she felt exhausted and frustrated she was still responsible to every student she taught since responsibility was one of the characteristics a teacher should have. But, in her opinion being responsible did not mean she should sacrifice her rest. Their exhaustion may just mirror the situation of an imbalanced ratio between teachers and students. But the problem of such imbalance is difficult to address in a large populated country like China. It is also irrational to ask schools to implement a Western mode of small class size teaching since there would be a lot of classes in need of more teachers and spaces.

Working at a primary school may mean less pressure compared with secondary schools but Rui, a primary school STEM teacher told me that at the primary school she worked, she tried her best to finish important tasks during work time but still it was difficult for her as a teacher in charge of a class to finish all work within working time. Sometimes she needed to finish them on weekends. After-school service's implementation after 'Double reduction' no doubt had added more workload on her and she was more frustrated than before.

Rui (R1 and R2): I manage to finish all the work during working hours. I do important tasks at first then those less important one with less concentration. If I can't finish them, I have to leave them after work or finish them on weekends. I have to say after 'Double Reduction', the working hours are longer, I need to work for one to one and half hours or more. It was quite energy consuming for a teacher in charge of a class, totally 43 students! I hope the primary school I work at can adjust teachers' work like one teacher in charge of less students for instance. I hope principals can consider teachers' difficulties and adjust rules and workload of teachers.

Like Rui, Xiao Wu also felt tired and frustrated confronted with so much work to do. She attributed the difficulties to her lack of professional skills and experience. Luckily, she told me during interviews that she gradually gained more experience and learnt to

cope with pressure and finished her work in more efficient ways. She was still bothered by long working hours but her mind was changed. She felt that work was a tool to survive, but not to enslave her by sacrificing her rest and daily life.

Xiao Wu (R1): I have to say I have difficulties on balancing my work and life. The culprit is that I can't have a good rest and feel very tired. Being a teacher is quite energy consuming and I think I am tired because I don't have much experience and skills to balance the work and rest. I always need more time than others to find a solution but I guess it is also a necessary stage of growth. Now I am much better, I gradually find a way to finish my work without sacrificing my rest time. My solution is to increase my efficiency of work and learn from others. Sometimes if I feel tired I will have a rest like chatting with my peers, taking a walk or a snap. Later I can gain more energy to finish the work. For me, work is a source of income, without money I can't live the life I want, so I need to work. However, I won't be a slave of work. I guess I want to follow my heart. If someone gives me pressure to do something, I just want to quit.

Yanyan also changed her mind in order to cope with an overloaded work schedule. She was more positive than previous mentioned participants in dealing with long working hours. Having both experiences of working at primary and secondary schools, she told me the solution was to adjust goals and to lower self-expectations on professional development. Though she complained to me in a follow-up interview that the summer vacation for primary schools' teachers was shortened due to some students' parents' complaints of teachers' paid vacations. She was upset when hearing the news but she adjusted her opinion later and told me that she could still manage to balance her work and life though there were many difficulties.

Yanyan (R1 and R2): I manage to finish my work on weekdays and enjoy my life on weekends like having a lazy morning, watch documentary films, shopping, spending casual time with my husband, reading and boxing, all activities to have a relax except work. My aim is also becoming lower so as to have more spaces for progress. My goal now is to finish my work not finish it perfectly. After all, every minute in my life counts and my life is not all for my work.

Besides participants who directly showed their discontent towards long working hours

and now even longer ones after ‘Double Reduction’, the others also expressed their feelings towards work and life balance when confronting longer working hours. Heng expressed similar ideas that she tried to finish her work during working time and would not leave them during off-time. She was more experienced in dealing with her work compared with other participants who had this work straight away after graduation, however, Heng also told me her worry that she might sometimes bring negative feelings from work to home. Xiao Qi, another participant also highlighted to me that she could balance work and life better after working at a secondary school for over six years.

Xiao Qi (R1 and R2): I can balance my work and life well. I can bring some good form of activities into class like talk-shows or knowledge competition. So I don’t feel tired of my work. Of course there are something which makes me puzzled like the loophole in policies, restrictions of teaching and students’ problems. Maybe they are all difficulties every teacher needs to face. I just hope I can leave the bad mood at school and don’t bring them to home.

She told me that she added some popular activities into teaching based on her own hobbies like talk shows, which was popular among students. She was happy to see her students showed more passion in English learning. Though she admitted that she was also bothered by some loopholes in educational policies, restrictive rules on teaching and students’ management. She believed that these were not issues faced by herself but by almost all teachers in Beijing - even in China so she now could accept these problems peacefully and would not let them disturb her mental peace. But when asking her about the impact of Covid-19 on teaching. Xiao Qi showed a different attitude. She complained about the blur of the on-off boundary and explained in detail her exhausting work during the pandemic and online teaching. Though other participants also expressed that the on-off boundary was obscured due to online teaching during lock-down. On the fact that they felt that their working hours before the pandemic were indeed unreasonably long, they felt they were already numb about the long working hours during online teaching. In a word, for participants in this

research, online teaching during the pandemic influenced mainly on the boundary of on-off. For instance Heng told me the working mode before the pandemic was not easy either. Even though she told me “there was nearly no rest and I need to be busy all day during online teaching in pandemic.” She felt that it was similar to her work before pandemic so she would not classify the trivial changes to negative influence on her brought by pandemic. Like Heng, Yingying, Rui and Yanyan also expressed similar feelings. Yanyan said “The working hours are longer apparently. The attendance time doesn’t change but the time of knocking off is later. There is no boundary of on and off when it needs to work online.” Except Tanmei who thought online teaching was a burden-relief compared with daily teaching, at least she who was pregnant during pandemic could teach at home and did not need to go to school. For the other participants, they felt that to some extent online teaching was like adding fuel to fire which made their working status more exhausting.

Xiao Qi (R2): I nearly don’t have off-time. Especially when I need to teach online, daily working is like a nightmare, which means I need to stare at my laptop whole day. Since I am a teacher in charge of a class, I need to be on duty all the time to check students attend each class and if some student doesn’t answer when a teacher calls his/her name, I must connect the students’ parents to make sure this student doesn’t play truant. The frequency of communicating with students and their parents become pretty high.

In this research. Xiao Qi is a participant who always answered the interview questions in a more positive way compared with other participants. The impression she gave me was that she could deal with difficulties in work positively and sensibly without too many complaints. However, when she talked about working hours and payment, she expressed her anxiety and discontent. It is to some extent sad to see that even a passionate teacher like her was feeling anxious and frustrated in face of these two issues. During the interview, Xiao Qi used the word ‘nightmare’ depicting online teaching during lock-downs, a severe word in my opinion in describing one’s working status. Though in the previous question about work-life balance, she told me she

could balance well. In this question she showed her puzzle and worry. Xiao Qi's frustration based on her answer was due to long working time in front of a computer and tremendous amount of work in students' management as a teacher in charge of a class. Her working hours were nearly 12 hours a day without extra payment for her overwork. Overly long-time working was apparently killing her working efficiency as well as efficacy.

Xiao Qi (R2): I have counted my working hours in front of the PC. It is almost 12 hours per day. To be detailed, I begin my work at 7:30 am, half an hour before the beginning time. Since the students I teach are from graduate class, I need my students to attend morning reading at 7:30. Sometimes we make presentation to share problems and ideas. Then we have discussions of questions from social subjects like Chinese, history, English and politics. After all these, students have their first class of a day. We have noon break and the afternoon class is from 1 pm to 4:30 pm. During the class like I have mentioned, I need to be on duty all the time. Then students leave the online classroom. After students' leaving, the school may ask teachers to have meetings which last almost 2 hours.

So you are like a machine which needs to work all the time. Besides teaching and students care, we have a lot of forms related to pandemic to fill in. The forms also will change according to the severity of pandemic in our region. If the severity of pandemic is getting higher, we need to fill in new forms and all the forms teachers filled in before are all in vain. I have to say it is quite weary to deal with all these stuff. And the efficiency of online teaching is not ideal. Only one advantage is that students can use internet to search knowledge instantly so teachers can save some time for explaining. Usually I offer some guidance and advice to my students to help them search the knowledge they don't understand. It is a perfect way for social science related subjects. What worries me is the low efficiency of class and long working hours which make me frustrated when I finish work.

In her answer, Xiao Qi described herself as a machine to complete daily work and filled in different kinds of forms related to pandemic. Her exhaustion could be sensed in her words. She further commented that she was happy to see that students could gain more information in online self-learning but worried about students' efficiency

since she could not check students' status in person. Despite the fact that she was extremely tired after a day of work, she still cared more about students' learning compared with her tiredness. Like Xiao Qi, Xiao Wu also shared similar views.

Xiao Wu (R2): The negative impact brought by pandemic was that students' learning efficiency was not quite good. It means you need to do a tremendous amount of work but receive less effect. Compared with in-person teaching, online teaching means I can't check every students' learning status efficiently and even can't ask them to finish their homework on time. It is super difficult for me to urge students finish their homework during online teaching.

Based on their answers, it can be inferred that the teachers in this research always placed students' benefits as an important part of the role. Even though they might feel discontent with their own welfare, they still cared a lot about students. However, it can not be denied that long working hours indeed was killing teachers' energy and passion towards their work. Besides confronting longer working hours during online teaching, Xiao Wu furthermore added one negative point about it.

Xiao Wu (R2): Online teaching was also bad for my health. My colleagues like me all feel that their eye sight was worse after teaching online for a few months. After teaching, there are also work on Wechat (a Chinese SNS similar to What's app), we need to fill in a lot of forms. Trivial work you know, trivial but tiring and disturbing. Sometimes I even hope that there were no smart phones and computers in this world.

She jokingly said she hoped there could be no smart phones and computers. But her worry about health was indeed shared by other participants as well. What was good was that participants told me later that their school returned to in-person teaching after the pandemic. Though they still had to deal with long working hours at least they did not need to work for over twelve hours sitting in front of a computer/laptop all day. But there were new issues that emerged with fast changing policies. Like previously mentioned, Yanyan told me in a follow-up interview that the school she worked at had shortened the length of the summer vacation and arranged teachers' training during

summer vacation in order to reduce students' parents' complaints that teachers enjoyed two paid vacations.

To sum, it can be seen that the working hours for teachers at secondary/primary schools in Beijing were long before/during/after the 'Double reduction'. Also the pandemic inevitably pushed schools to have on-line teaching which increased teachers' working hours without extra payment. The normal working hours for a teacher was expected to be around nine to ten hours which were also quite long. Attuned with a working mode like 24/7 in companies and corporations, most participants were reluctant towards the harsh working mode, but had to accept it. Plus, for participants who had children, after work they also needed to do house chores or take care of children, which made them more difficult to reach work and life balance. It furthermore can be concluded that participants in this research held complex attitude towards 'Double reduction'. They supported this policy in reducing students' burden but were not content with the arrangement of after-school services which extended their working hours and gave them no time nor energy to care about their own families. Notwithstanding the dissatisfaction, most participants still thought that the last straw which made them disappointed about current status was the payment they received for their work.

### **Dissatisfaction with Payment**

During interviews, participants all expressed to a certain extent dissatisfaction towards their salary. Before the implementation of 'Double Reduction', participants told me that the payment they earned was not large compared with Beijing's high price of commodities. All participants expressed that the wages for them were not big, after the 'Double Reduction' and the negative impact of Covid-19 on economy, the situation had been even worse. Also quite noticeably, what was found during the



interviews was that each school that participants worked at seemed to have different standards of allocating the money of after-school services according to participants' answers. For instance Yingying told me that not only was she upset about the amount of her salary but also was confused about the way of allocating after-school service fees in the school she worked at. It was unclear for her how this amount of fee was allocated to each teacher, even when she asked the accountant, she still was puzzled.

Yingying (R3): First I am not content with the salary. Due to Covid the payment of teachers has decreased because the resource of teachers' salary depends on taxes from national owned corporations or companies. So now teachers have to work overtime due to 'Double reduction policy' with less payment. Now the payment of after-school services is about 5 pounds per hour or even less. Moreover, the school I am working at doesn't announce a clear standard on how to grant the money for this. What is ridiculous is that every teacher receives different amount of payment though all of us work for same hours. I don't know why. Everything is not clear, so I am very upset about the over-time work. I asked the accountant and she said it is according to the report of your work of education of morality and teaching times. What does she mean times and education of morality? I haven't been informed to report it since I began the after-school services. Even with all these unfairness and little payment, every teacher still works hard and is responsible on the after-school services. We work hard and are responsible. So you see, now teachers have to bear when they are bullied by students and their parents, now even by school's headmaster. I feel like teachers including me at the school have too much burden.

I could sense her anger and helplessness when she told me her experience. She was confused why she did the same amount of work as other teachers, but received a different amount of fee for after-school services. The work of education of morality was also something difficult to count and record in her opinion. She thought all these were unfair. She also complained about some students and their parents triggering unreasonable troubles, but was even more angry about the school headmasters who added more pressure and unfairness on teachers by ignoring their unfair treatment teachers. She told me her experience was not personal, at least in the school she worked at, as there were other teachers who also had this kind of burden. She further said her salary was less than ten thousand RMB per month before tax deduction (less

than 1089.6 pounds<sup>5</sup>), living in a big city like Beijing, this amount of money was not big if compared with price of commodities and working hours. Yingying showed her frustration when she told me this, after working for over ten hours, she received a little amount of money and not clear standard of extra fee for over-time work. She told me her current work was totally different from her imagination.

Yingying (R3): I have to say it is quite different from what I imagined of being a teacher. The burden is way too much with much trivial stuff bothering me from preparing for my lessons. Teaching competitions, training and homework presentations occupy too much of my time. And all these have little to do with my professional development. Many teachers including me complete them only because they are compulsory.

She mentioned her discontent about some teaching competitions and training as well which she regarded as useless in her professional development but teachers had to do them due to the fact that they were compulsory. Being a highly educated teacher, she said frankly that she had not found a proper teacher training yet. Back to the point of low salary, it is sad to see that Yingying's case was not individual. At least in this research, her feelings were shared by other participants. To a certain degree, they could manage with long working hours since in their opinion the current working modes in other careers were also tough. But the low salary was one factor which strongly hurt their passion for their work. Like Yingying, Xiao Qi and Xiao Wu also worked at secondary schools. Three of them were all single. For Xiao Qi, she felt that she was also suffering from these low payments. She told me the detailed amount of salary she earned after working for almost twelve hours a day to show she was little paid after all hard work.

Xiao Qi (R3): Well, I am not satisfied with my current salary. I think it is a little bit low. If I add all my payment including after-school services and two festivals

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<sup>5</sup> The currency converter in this research adopts the currency rate of 1 RMB≈ 0.11 pounds (time accessed around December, 2023)

bonus maybe the amount is up to 9000 RMB (980.6 pounds), less than 10000 RMB after tax (1089.6 pounds). And this is because I work as a teacher in charge of a class (class head teacher) which means I am responsible for a whole class's chores, I earn a little bit more money. If a teacher's length of working is short and not a teacher in charge of a class or has no after-school service fee, she/he will earn salary ranges from 6000-7000 RMB (653.8-762.7 pounds) which I think is quite low because teacher's work is really hard.

Working at this secondary school for almost ten years now, Xiao Qi still earned less than ten thousands yuan per month before tax deduction. After paying her apartment rent, the money left was not a big sum. Though compared with Yingying, Xiao Qi expressed her complaint in a milder way but still one can sense her upset towards the salary. Graduating with a Master's degree and working for over ten hours, her salary was indeed not high - not to mention that she had to use the salary to make a living in a big city like Beijing, one of the cities which have high price of commodities. Like previously mentioned, Xiao Qi was the participant in this research who maintained passion towards teaching and was the one who could manage well with work and life balance. However even a positive teacher like her could not escape being negatively influenced by so little payment.

Regarding the after-school service fee, when she told me how this amount of money was allocated out in the school she worked at, I was astonished to see that again the fee she earned was allocated in a different way compared with Yingying's. Even though their schools were in the same city, same district, the standard of allocating the money was quite different. But at least Xiao Qi was clear about the way of allocating after-school service fee and there was no difference in fee allocating among her and other colleagues. In the school she worked at, the accountant even gave out the fee separately to avoid this small amount of money was deducted as tax if together allocated with salary.

Xiao Qi (R3): The standard of distribution of after-school service is 85 RMB (almost 9.3 pounds) per hour. Every teacher in each subject will have a period of time to look after one class. This fee is distributed separately not with the salary because the amount is small. If the fee is added to the salary, it will be deducted for tax. So at the beginning of a month, we receive our salary and at the end of one month, the after-school service fee.

Xiao Qi understood 85 RMB (9.3 pounds) was not a big sum but she was content that the school she worked at regarded this amount of money seriously by ensuring every teacher received the money. Xiao Wu, who also worked at a secondary school, told me that though she thought the salary was not high. She felt lucky that she was single so this amount of salary was enough since she lived in school's dormitory without rent. If she had a family, she would have more troubles on money balance.

Xiao Wu (R3): ...about the salary after 'Double Reduction', well I don't know what to say. This work is hard and energy consuming especially when one is a teacher in charge of a class and a course teacher at the same time. It means there are many tasks for her to do which are both time and energy consuming. It is a challenge both physically and mentally. Of course there is news which says there is improvement on teachers' salary. If you work more, you earn more. Well, for me, I am OK with the payment since I am single. Maybe if I get married and have a family, the salary perhaps is not enough though. So, it depends on how many people you need to raise. Now, I can use this amount of money to survive in Beijing. After all it is a dynamic feeling, you know.

Compared with participants in secondary schools, the ones in primary schools complained more about payment since they thought the money they earned could barely make a living in Beijing. Yanyan who worked previously as a secondary school's teacher whilst now a primary school's teacher, told me the difference of wages between the two schools.

Yanyan (R3): To be honest, I am not satisfied with my current salary. I used to be a teacher at a secondary school for six years before I came to this primary school. A primary school's teacher needs more patience and the amount of homework correcting is three times larger than the one in a secondary school. But the salary is lower. Now 'Double Reduction' asks teachers to work more time but no

increase on salary.

She pointed out that she earned less than before but her work was not easier. She needed to spend more time on homework correcting and need more patience in student management. She was disappointed that the salary did not mirror her hard work. She even told me that she planned to switch to another secondary school near her home when the contract of this school ended. Primary schools' teachers earn less since anecdotally many people may have a belief that primary schools' teachers do not have a high academic background and the work they do was simply take care of children, neglecting the fact that some teachers now are with Master's degree and have many lessons to teach. In a later interview regarding social respect towards teachers, Yanyan moreover shared similar views saying that even secondary schools' teachers such as her previous colleagues held such prejudice that primary schools' teachers were less educated and their workload was small. Back to the point of salary, Rui, Tanmei and Heng who worked at primary schools also claimed that they were disappointed towards the poor salary. Again, Heng and Rui expressed differently on after-school service fees. For them, their attention to such fee is not strong due to the small amount. In face of the increase of working hours after 'Double Reduction', more requirements of teachers from society and schools, they said that they could not see vast improvements of welfare like payment albeit related policies of increasing wages for teachers.

Heng (R3): I am not satisfied with my salary. Now requirements to teachers are enhanced but salary is decreased. I think it is not balanced and not fair. My payment was about 7000-8000RMB (around 762.7-871.7 pounds) and there is nearly no payment on the after-school service.

Rui (R3): The salary is not satisfying. The working hour has been increased 1 to 2 hours per day but no increase on payment. Also, requirements to teachers are leveled up. Students' parents and social media make indiscreet comments or guidance on teachers' work. Being a teacher now means a lot of pressure, no status, no dignity and low salary.

Tanmei (R3): I am dissatisfied with salary. I think I work hard and my teaching ability is good. Above all, I love this job from the bottom of my heart and treat my students and their parents sincerely. But compared with the apartment's mortgage I have to afford, the salary is too low, working hours too long and pressure too huge.

To conclude, Tanmei, Rui and Heng were disappointed with the current working status partly due to the poor payment. According to Heng, the salary she earned was about 850 pounds per month which she said meant she could not afford her living. Just like Tanmei said, with this amount of money she could barely afford an apartment's rent or mortgage. These teachers also expressed that they had to rely on their husbands' salaries to make ends meet in a sense, further diminishing their sense of self worth. For Tanmei, after graduating with a Master's degree, she chose to work at a private school in order to earn more money.

Tanmei (R3): I now worked at a private-run school. There are services which are similar to after-school services. Working at a private-run school means the salary is better than that at a public school. The working hour is from 7:30 am to 5 pm. Tasks cannot be finished and there is rushing hours so I often have to finish my supper at school.

Though Tanmei felt her salary had been improved by changing to a private school she still considered her hard work and income was not balanced. Tanmei was the only participant without Bianzhi in this research. She said she was very tired from a day of work and did not have energy for private tutoring to earn extra money. She at least was permitted to do some extra work to afford her family. For the other participants with Bianzhi, according to their answers it was forbidden for them to provide private tutoring based on related policies of fair education. At least in Beijing, if found, they might lose their Bianzhi and work. So for teachers with Bianzhi in Beijing, their monthly salary is the only income.

But it was not just the poor salary, in Rui's answer, she said there was neither high social status nor dignity as a primary school's teacher. In her opinion, she blamed these on social media's wrong guidance in magnifying some teachers who had misbehaved and also schools which connived with some picky students' parents. According to some participants' answers, principals mainly chose to blame teachers and persuaded teachers to be more patient towards students' parents and neglect some rude behaviours from these parents. Like Yingying said, even a teacher was beaten by a student's parents, she should not complain about it but to apologise to the parents for not managing the class well. Her answer indicated another issue that some participants in this research also worried about, namely social respect of teachers. Every participants in the research showed different personal recognition towards social respect, but they all seemed to worry that the social status of teachers may decrease due to negative reports in the news and more emphasis on teachers' role as a service provider. Thus in next part, interpersonal influence including social respect and related peer influence are elaborated to see how highly educated teachers in this research perceive such burden.

To sum up, for participants, 'Double Reduction' did not simply mean relief of students' learning burden but also mean increasing working hours for teachers especially at primary and junior secondary schools. For most of them, working hours before the implementation of this policy were indeed long, and the after-school service based on 'Double Reduction' aiming to help students' parents taking care of their children undoubtedly pushed teachers to work longer. Participants in this research showed their complaints regarding after-school service and longer working hours which furthermore negatively shaped their perceptions towards professional identity.

It is noteworthy that what made them even more upset was the unclear paying

standard of after-school service and the overall poor wages. Like what they said in the above, more work did not mean better payment. Some schools the participants worked at even could not give teachers a clear standard of after-school service fees-allocation. Though working the same amount of time participant like Yingying had to suffer unfairness of different payment from some other teachers at her school. Or like what Heng said, she even did not receive this amount of fee at all since it was not clearly stated in the payroll. Besides, all participants in this research claimed that they were not satisfied with the current salary. Living in a big city like Beijing, they had to consider how to survive by paying the apartment mortgage or rent and other fees. The money they earned apparently could barely afford all these costs. For married participants, they admitted that they had to rely to some extent on their partners' salary. For unmarried participants, they said this payment was not enough after paying their house rent. According to them, after working for almost ten hours a day, the payment of teachers at primary/secondary schools in Beijing was disappointing. Apparently, participants' passion was greatly killed by losing their time of rest whilst receiving a small sum of wages. In a word, both macro and micro institutional policies of teachers' welfare still had spaces of improvements.

Apart from the poor salary and related influences on working hours brought by 'Double Reduction' policy, pandemic also played a role in increasing teachers' working hours and blurring the boundary of on-off. According to participants' response, they found the working hours were even longer than teaching in person. What bothered them most was they had to work in front of the laptop or on the phone for almost twelve hours and some students' parents also texted or phoned them at night, making participants barely had rest time. What was moving was that under such circumstances, they were also concerned about students' learning efficiency during the online learning which they thought was difficult to grasp due to distance learning. The participants in this research though feeling unhappy towards salary and working



hours, still felt responsible to their students and sometimes considered students more than themselves. Meanwhile, just like what Yanyan said in the follow-up interview, there were some students' parents protested that teachers should not enjoy two vacations with basic payment. Facing such protest from stakeholders, the school Yanyan worked at had to shorten the summer vacation for teachers by adding some teacher training, which for Yanyan, meant less rest and more burden. Though there are still now no official document to prove the cancel of vacations for teachers, Yanyan's answer mirrored some teachers' worry of less rest and personal time.

#### **5.4.2 Interpersonal Influences**

When asking about how these participants perceived social respect, their answers greatly depended on their experiences, schools' atmosphere and peer influence. First for participants who worked at primary schools, they consistently claimed that they did not receive enough respect. Heng told me working for more than twelve years, she sensed that the respect towards teachers from both students and students' parents were decreasing nowadays. She explicitly said that she felt she did not receive deserved respect.

Heng (R3): I do not think teachers receive deserved respect. For example, some students show no respect and challenge teachers work. Some students' parents show little respect when they communicate with teachers on Wechat during our off-time. You can feel that disrespect in their words, thinking they are just teachers at a primary school. From the social level, some reports say the standards of teachers' recruitment are not high. Also, some negative reports of teachers are magnified so more people show little respect to teachers.

According to Heng, she said that primary schools' teachers were still regarded as teachers with poor educational background, earning small sum of money and thus obviously lower social status. She complained that besides students and students'

parents stereotyped perceptions towards primary schools' teachers, social media was another one to blame which magnified negative reports of some misbehaved teachers and caused more people to show little respect to all teachers. It was not only Heng who thought she did not receive enough respect. Participants who worked at public primary schools all felt the same according to responses in the research. Rui who worked at a normal public primary school also told me her feeling regarding social respect which was similar to Heng's.

Rui (R3): I don't think I receive enough respect from some students, students' parents, school I work at and society. Now some students pick a quarrel with teachers if teachers ask them to finish their homework or behave well and their parents support them to do that. Facing this kind of cases, schools compromise and only blame teachers. Every time when there is news about misbehaved teachers, people hotly discuss it and blame teachers as a whole cohort; whilst when there are positive news reports about teachers, people take it for granted and think it is not worth reporting.

Like Heng, Rui also explained that the reason why she did not feel she received enough respect was that she experienced disrespect from students, their parents, the school she worked at and even the society. She felt powerless regarding students and their parents' disrespect because the school always chose to only blame teachers. She thought it was not just, nor fair to only blame teachers when they were just doing their job like asking students to behave well or finish their homework. She also mentioned the influences brought by social media. Every time she said if there was negative news story about teachers, it spread at a fast speed, almost everyone talked about it. Whilst there was positive news about teachers, most people thought it was what a teacher should do and did not deserve a report. Rui felt she was tired of the current situation. What she hoped was to just finish her daily work safely without triggering any troubles.

Yanyan, who used to work at a secondary school and now a primary school shared

similar views but she also posed more information towards teachers' perception of social respect that secondary schools' teachers also held disrespect towards primary ones.

Yanyan (R3): About this question (teachers' social status and social respect from stakeholders), I was influenced by some social rubbishy opinions and don't have personal ones. So I will talk about my colleagues' opinions at first. Compared with primary school teachers, secondary school teachers have higher social status and earn more wages. I used to work at a secondary school and my pre-colleagues look down upon primary school teachers. They think primary school teachers have no knowledge, no teaching design and all they need to do is asking students to behave well. Now I am working at a primary school, I begin to think about this question and am still quite puzzled. You know, because now teachers don't receive enough respect so I have puzzles, if we receive enough respect, we won't have those puzzles.

Yanyan later claimed that she could no longer be bothered by such negative thoughts. She seemed not to care much about whether primary schools' teachers receive enough respect. She told me that "this issue is not important to me anymore. What I pursue is to receive objective and equitable evaluation. My own respect towards this job values more than social respect". For Tanmei who currently worked at a private run primary school, she told me a slightly different and positive answer. She felt that she received respect from most students and their parents. Despite some teachers who misbehaved, other teachers had received social respect well in her sense. However, she later added that the social respect for teachers was still not enough, though for her, she was lucky to receive respect from stakeholders and students, she knew there were teachers who worked hard but did not receive deserved respect. For her it greatly depended on students' parents' qualification and their perceptions towards this job.

According to their answers, participants from primary schools especially public ones gave consistent answers regarding social respect, whilst participants who worked at secondary schools showed different experiences regarding this issue. There was

participant like Yingying who told me her understanding towards teachers' lower social status and experience of meeting unfair treatment from students' parents and headteachers.

Yingying (R3): Teachers are emphasized as someone who offer good services to students so the social status of teachers is becoming lower. Students' parents and schools take the lead of disrespecting teachers, so how can students show respect under such circumstance? It is just a vicious circle.

For Yingying, teacher had become a job of service provider not just educator. In her perception, this shift of the nature of this job caused more students and their parents to be picky at teachers' work and refused to cooperate with teachers on some tasks like asking their children to finish homework or behave well in class. What was worse was that even school's headmasters had to compromise with such situation. Yingying further told me an experience of her colleague which she confronted the whole accident.

Yingying (R3): One students' parents may come to school to beat a teacher or make complaints of a teacher to district's educational administration because she asked the student who did not finish the homework to do it during rest time. Students' parents think this teacher occupies their child's rest time just to finish homework. For instance my colleague met such situations. She asked one student not to sleep during class and was criticized by this student's parents that she was picking a hole in everything their kid does. Also two students' parents are not content with a teacher's solution of students' fight so they call the police to report the teacher being irresponsible. You know, too difficult to be a teacher. Now the situation is that if you are responsible to remind students of finishing homework or listening carefully during class you will receive complaints from students' parents; if you do not remind students to behave well, these parents will also complain and make troubles to you like phoning the school to change a teacher because they think you are irresponsible. Schools only blame teachers and do not investigate the whole event. Headmasters ask teachers to reflect mistakes and that is all.

For Yingying, she felt she was trapped in a dilemma that she did not know how to act responsibly to satisfy her students and their parents. For her, finishing one's

homework is a primary task for students in order to grasp new knowledge, but now she felt she barely could ask her students to do so since there were some students' parents who might blame her for asking their kids to do 'too much' homework. However, if she did not assign homework 'responsibly', there were also some students' parents who blame her for being irresponsible. Her view is similar with Rui's, puzzling at what to do to let some students and their parents satisfy with their work or services they provided. Furthermore, it is worth noting that headmasters did not play a positive role in solving issues or contradiction between teachers and students' parents. Teachers like Yingying, Rui and Heng felt that the headmasters of the schools they worked at used a simple solution by just attributing all faults to teachers. Perhaps facing pressure from current social media of criticizing some misbehaved teachers, it is the only way for headmasters to stop such issues from spreading to the internet. However, such actions caused teachers becoming the only victims and made them feel irresolute and passive in daily teaching.

According to the research, such situations may greatly depend on the school's atmosphere and students a teacher teaches. For example Xiao Qi said that she did not receive prejudice or disrespect during her work at all. She could fully understand some students' parents may phone her about their child's learning or behaving problems during her off time and she would regard such as trusting her ability as a teacher. But she also admitted that this view varied from teachers to teachers. Some of her peer colleagues felt that they did not receive enough social respect especially from some students' parents.

Xiao Qi (R3): I have chatted this question with my university schoolmates and colleagues. All of us have different answers. Personally I can feel I am respected by my students and their parents. They trust me and some parents will phone me when they meet problems of educating children. But my colleagues met some parents who are picky. Maybe it is a kind of destiny of what kind of parents and students one will meet. My friend (also a secondary school's teacher) and I

discussed this question before, she works at a famous school now and maybe because her students' parents have great expectation of their kids so she receives a lot of complaints. She mentioned this problems to me and she said she is very tired. Maybe because her students' parents are from higher social class so they have different expectations of teachers.

Xiao Qi's answer revealed that students' parents' quality was vital in their behaviours towards teachers. Though she was lucky not to meet picky and rude students' parents, it did not mean other teachers at the school did not meet such students' parents too. For her, she thought that students' parents who owned higher educational background might sometimes on the contrary show little respect to teachers since these parents had higher expectation of their children's education and personally believed that they had enough knowledge to challenge teachers. Xiao Wu was the one who experienced such prejudice from well-educated students' parents. She now shifted from a normal secondary school to a renowned one. She felt that she received less respect compared with the previous normal secondary school she worked at.

Xiao Wu (R3): The quality of students is pretty good since the school I now work at is a renowned one. So students' parents also are polite to teachers. But I have to say there are some students and their parents show no respect to us. For instance, some students' parents who work as teachers at famous universities in Beijing. When their children misbehave or use dirty words, they always said they had better educational methods to cultivate their kids or they think the teacher was lying. Actually their methods and theories are not good to children, but they ignored teachers' persuasion and they looked down upon teachers at secondary schools. They are also extremely picky at our work.

According to her answer, she felt that some students' parents who were with better educational background and worked at famous universities showed little respect to teachers at secondary schools. They often had their own theories of educating children and ignored teachers' suggestions.

To conclude, participants in this research shared their perceptions towards social

respect based on their personal experiences, beliefs and those of their peers. Though they may have different understandings towards respect of teachers. Some views are commonly shared among them. All participants working at primary schools felt that they received little respect from students and their parents. They indicated that this phenomenon was not personal but universally acknowledged by their peer colleagues. They also attributed less social respect to social media's wrong guidance in reporting more negative news of teachers but ignoring positive ones.

Participants from secondary schools also indicated the above feelings. But their situation was more greatly dependant upon a school's atmosphere including specifically headmasters' management and quality of students and their parents. Anecdotally, believing that renowned schools may have less prejudice and disrespect towards teachers is also not true according to participants' answers. On the contrast, as Xiao Wu said, some students' parents who worked at famous universities or owned higher educational background showed more disrespect towards teachers since they believed these teachers had poorer educational background. What is dramatic is that Yanyan who had experiences of working at both primary and secondary schools indicated that some secondary schools' teachers also held such prejudice towards primary schools' teachers as well. It is ironic to think that it seems to form a chain of contempt. Though now more and more teachers from secondary schools own the same qualification (a PhD degree) with university's teachers, they are still looked down upon by teachers from higher education due to their job. This can also be applied to secondary schools' teachers' contempt towards primary schools' teachers. In spite of same educational qualification they may have, their job remarked them with different professional identity and formed despise.

### 5.4.3 Summary

To put it in a nutshell, this section discussed how institutional factors such as educational policies and interpersonal factors such as social respect and status influence participants' welfare and perceptions towards the job, which furthermore shaped their professional identity. It can be seen that most participants indicated that they were disappointed or upset regarding the question of working hours and payment. Though there are as some news (Jingwei Education, 2022; Chinese News of Education, 2023; Hemeng Educational Forum, 2023) reported improvements after the implementation of 'Double Reduction', participants working at Beijing's primary/secondary schools said that they still follow the traditional mode of working instead of flexible one. Long working hours have caused participants exhausted and could not on one hand efficiently finish their work, on the other hand could not balance between work and life well. The negative emotion brought by over work is not just killing these teachers' passion of the job but also is negative to their mental health. Despite the hard work, the poor payment is another factor which makes the teachers feel disappointed and more frustrated. According to the answers of participants, the salary they earned could barely support themselves not to mention a family. Most of them explicitly or implicitly indicated that they also need to rely on their partners' income to afford daily cost. Long working hours in their perceptions should equal to more payment but the current situation showed the contrary. Even some participants stated that the fee of after-school service after 'Double reduction' was not clear. Such unfairness also added more upset for the participants regarding work and pay.

Regarding interpersonal factors. Participants from primary schools felt that they did not receive deserved social respect. For the others who worked at secondary schools, their answers varied based on specifically students and students' parents they met. For



some of them, the students and their parents they met were rude due to multiple reasons. One possible factor might be the parents working at universities were well-educated and held prejudice towards primary/secondary schools' teachers thus showed little respect to them. According to responses of participants, a chain of contempt that teachers from higher education despise secondary schools' teachers whilst meanwhile these secondary schools' teachers look down upon primary schools'. It to some extent could be concluded that though teachers might hold same educational certificate, the quality of work still divide their social status.

After analysing possible factors such as gender, welfare and social respect which contributes shape participants understanding of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools, in the next section, the writing aims to explore how participants plan their professional development including attitude towards teacher training, peer competition and future career development.

## **5.5 Attitudes Towards Professional Improvement and Future Career Plans**

In this section, participants shared an overall attitude towards individual's professional improvement and their own perceptions towards their future career plan. In the research interviews, professional improvement mainly dealt with teachers' attendance of, as well as attitudes towards, teacher training and academic essays writing which was related to job promotion for primary/secondary schools' teachers in Beijing.

With respect to teacher training and essays writing, the training in this research includes both training at the level of school and district. It can be seen that participants' attitudes towards teacher training varied and to some extent was influenced by their understanding of their professional role. Teachers from primary schools in this research showed discontent towards teacher training and expressed that some training did not meet their needs - whilst participants from secondary schools showed more varied attitudes to training based on their daily work.

As for future professional development, participants universally showed not very positive attitudes. They felt powerless towards planning career development since they could not control it and all plans depended on principals' choices and related educational policies. Some participants held good wishes towards their future, trying to master more skills or shift to another position, whilst the others chose to be at a goblin mode, spending more time on leisure activities instead of being bothered by career development which they could not control.

### **5.5.1 Attitude Towards Professional Improvement**

Participants at primary schools universally expressed how they had neither time nor energy to focus on professional improvement. For Heng, she expressed her idea that teacher training was important but now she preferred to concentrate on the learning of psychology instead of training related to pedagogy after working for almost ten years. She frankly said her plan was to receive training which was of her interest but still it depended on her time availability. As for essays writing, Heng said that if she was too busy she would choose not to write essays. So were her attitude towards self-refelction. Instead of self-reflection diaries which were compulsory, Heng did not have habit of recording and reflecting her daily teaching. She further explained why she chose to do so and told me her understanding in the different essay writing

standards of post-graduate ones and ones written during work.

Heng (R2): The reason why I choose not to write an essay is that writing a qualified essay need time to think and write. Now I don't have clear goals like promotion which need publication. I don't have very high self-request. I work as a teacher at a primary school. The standards of essays are not very strict and are not compulsory. The standards of essays during post-graduate study on the contrary are strict and you need to guarantee the quality meet the standard so you can finally receive the certificate. Honestly speaking, I don't have enough time on essay-writing and I only think about it when headmasters require teachers to submit essays.

For her, writing essays now did not simply mean academic writing but more like a tool to promote. The standards of essays writing during work in her opinion was not as strict as academic essays during post-graduate study hence the quality she deemed was not quite good either. She to some extent deemed that writing such essays improved little of her academic ability. And, the time did not permit her to write qualified essays like ones she wrote during post-graduate study. As a result, instead of wasting time on writing she preferred to learn more of the knowledge she was interested in. Plus, she explained to me that she now did not have the motive of promotion - another reason which made her not to choose to spend her time on essays writing. When I asked her how to deal with peer competition under the circumstance of fierce competition in the current labour market. Heng told me that her attitude towards current competition was she did not care too much and to some extent was in a goblin mode.

Heng (R2): I feel like one will feel anxious if he/she is influenced by the 'involution' (fierce competition in Chinese labour market). For example, a kindergarten kid's parents would feel anxious if they knew many children at their child's age begin to have extra-curricular such as learning Chinese characters, and they may think it is time for their kid to learn these too. For people at work like me, if you have the need of promotion, it is without doubt, accompanied with competence. But it is all up to you, if you don't care about promotion, you won't feel the competence.

It can be seen that Heng would prefer not to be involved in the competition. Her wish of promotion was also not strong. Instead of writing 'useless' essays, she thought learning psychology was more useful. In this research Heng's idea of professional improvement and promotion was not an exception. Participants from primary schools to some extent shared similar attitudes.

Rui, another primary school's STEM teacher in this research explained to me that she was happy to attend teacher training but after 'Double reduction' her time for studying was less. Also she pointed out that she was discontent about some training which was of the same content each year with just different titles.

Rui (R2): I am very happy to attend training with practical knowledge but now there is no much time for me since after the 'Double Reduction' I have two after school services. Besides, there is much training which is just formalistic, with no new knowledge. I found some just change a title and the content of training is the same as before.

Rui was upset that though now many primary schools in Beijing began to recruit teachers with better educational backgrounds, however apparently the teacher training was not upgraded to meet these highly educated teachers' needs. She was also disappointed to see that some training was of the same content each year that receiving training was not to learn knowledge but just to complete a compulsory procedure, to feign learning. Furthermore she told me her personal experience which brought her negative feeling towards essays writing.

Rui (R2): About essays, if there is a competition or promotion requirements, I will consider writing one and make sure it is in accordance with the essay standards. When I just graduated I managed to write something based on my working experiences but the content did not meet the preference of teacher educators in Education Committee. Then I lost my passion plus now I do not have enough time for essays.

She told me when she first began her work. She had passion of attending essay competitions and writing essays based on her daily teaching. However, she realised afterwards that the Education Committee wanted to read certain contents in essays. Similar phenomenon can be found on the requirements of self-reflection as well. Some participants quit writing non-compulsory reflection and compulsory ones were more or less products due to teacher educators' limited preference. Rui's case is a mirror to reflect such phenomenon. The content she wrote was not of their interest. She felt now it was difficult to analyse some teaching cases in essays, which may not be of the Committee's preferences. So she lost her passion of writing essays and plus she did not have time to spend on writing after the 'Double Reduction'. Rui frankly admitted that she slacked off now and would rather choose to live a life at a goblin mode. She said she would choose to have rests with her family instead of improving professional skills during off-time. Though the fierce competition was still there, she thought she would not be bothered by it anymore.

Rui (R2): I sleep during off-time, do some house chores, take my daughter to a park or shopping. I think I am a person who is not impinged by involution (fierce competition). This kind of pressure only brings bad impact on our next generation. Moreover, it has almost no difference whether you are troubled by involution under this current circumstance.

Like Rui, Yanyan who also worked at a primary school expressed that she had almost no time focusing on teacher training.

Yanyan (R2): Well, 'Double Reduction' means that students have too much homework and extra-curriculum classes. I am a teacher who doesn't put too much pressure on students' scores so I don't give students repetitive homework like transcribing new words or too much homework. I just assign homework based on students' level according to government's requirements.

But I have to say, now the government prevents students' parents spending money on extra-curricula training at after-school tutorial agencies and increases teachers' working hours, which means teachers don't have enough time on

essays writing or professional training. What I expect now is 'Double Reduction' can assure teachers more time for individual's professional development and rest.

Yanyan expressed her support of 'Double Reduction' in reducing students' learning pressure but she was worried that her time of rest and development was also reduced. Like mentioned in the previous section, working overtime also meant that a teacher might not have enough time of self professional development. Similar with Heng, Yanyan now preferred to utilise her spare time more on things of her interest. She told me she had developed some healthy hobbies like jogging and boxing in her spare time in order to gain a healthier body.

Primary schools' teachers in this research showed high similarities in planning their professional development. Most of them showed disappointment towards current teacher training and chose to be either at a goblin mode or rest, instead of professional improvement. The situation for participants working at secondary schools was a little bit different. Though they also had little time on professional development, but still some of them showed their positive attitudes on teacher training and essays training. For instance Tanmei now worked at a private school and she said she was content with the current teacher training.

Tanmei (R2): The system of teacher training is comprehensive from school level to district level. Under the circumstance of 'Double reduction' there is no change and so do standards of essay publication for teachers. Overall I think it is good. Training units also do their best to enhance the quality to meet teachers' need. They avoid weekends to arrange time of training. Personally I do not have a special plan. I just attend them, learn hard and enhance my teaching ability and broaden my sight.

Though Tanmei frankly said she did not have a detailed plan of professional development. She still learnt a lot from current training and had a passion towards

essays writing. She told me there was no requirement on the amount of essays in the school she worked at. But she preferred to write her experience of teaching into some essay-formed writings.

Tanmei (R2): Actually there is no requirement on essays. You can choose to write or not. One semester one piece of essay is enough. Because I have experience of teaching so it is easy to write. School has account of database which is convenient to search for journal articles.

It is worth noting that since the school Tanmei worked at was a private run one, different from public ones, private schools had sufficient money to support teachers' development like purchasing academic database for teachers to search related academic resources whilst public schools' teachers in this research claimed that they could not freely access to these databases. So apparently Tanmei's case cannot be applied to other participants who worked at public secondary schools. For participants who worked at public ones, their attitudes also varied towards professional development due to different school's atmosphere and school culture. For instance Yingying criticised the standards of essays writing for teachers actually did not meet the academic standards in referencing. In her opinion, such unqualified essays could not be called essays at all.

Yingying (R2): I concern that we don't have enough time to write essays of good quality so many of my peer colleagues' essays don't meet the standards of academic requirements actually. These essays can hardly be called academic essays in my opinion. I think I don't have enough energy to be dedicated to academic writing for it is already quite energy and time consuming to focus on students, lessons teaching and lessons preparing.

Like what she said, it was already too much work thus she could not allocated enough time to professional development. She also told me that since she worked at a secondary school with not good quality of students. She found the teacher training of little help in guiding her how to teach these students.

Yingying (R2): Personally I am not the type of person who is dedicated to professional training and essays writing. The contents are too theoretical to practice because the students I teach are different from the students discussed in the training. I believe teaching is more practical than theoretical because a teacher needs to adjust the teaching content according to students' learning ability. About writing essays, I know I am not good at it but I am quite good at teaching, reflection and caring about students' learning problems.

Yingying in the interview admitted that currently she did not concentrate on professional development and the training she received was also in her opinion, too theoretical and not practical. Overall, she showed disappointment in the training she had received. Compared with her, Xiao Wu did not mention too much about her attitude towards training. She told me after thirty years old, she would like to live a free life without too much bothering. So she now chose not to be bothered by training or professional promotion. She planned to write essays but like mentioned before by other participants, she did not have time after 'Double Reduction'. Xiao Wu said "Essays are related with job promotion. My plan is to try my best to write essays but have no time. I am a person who values learning. I would like to learn from others including their research. For writing, it depends." Tired or disappointed, one can sensed these participants' helplessness in face of fierce competition, insufficient support on professional development and tiring daily work.

From her words, it can be seen that Xiao Wu hoped to learn more knowledge but she also hoped that her life was not all about work. She told me instead of professional development, she hoped she could have opportunities to receive systematic academic development like having a PhD study. But fearing of not finding a job after graduation due to fierce competition in current labour market, she now almost gave up this thought. Xiao Qi was another participant sharing similar thought with Xiao Wu who also hoped to have a systematic academic training. Xiao Qi told me that the



headmaster in the school she worked at might recommend her to have a part-time PhD study but it had not been decided yet. For teacher training, Xiao Qi was the only participant from public secondary schools who thought the current training was good and useful.

Xiao Qi (R2): I think they are good. Training I received up to now are mainly about new technology in teaching like Seewo system in teaching. It is an android based screen which can help teachers create more activities for students during teaching just by tapping the screen. The principle is very much like a smart phone. My school updated the screen every year and the system of the screen has become more intelligent so teachers need to learn how to manipulate the system during teaching. I also find materials for lesson preparation distributed by training are quite useful.

Also Xiao Qi told me how she planned her essays writing. She further said she would not have a detailed plan of what to write, she liked to record and reflect on teaching experience. If time permitted, she would write them into essays.

Xiao Qi (R2): Personally, I don't have a clear plan of writing, it is up to what I come across during work. For example, if I come across issues how students grasp new English words and use them, which methods are good for their English words learning or if I have students who are naughty or rebellious, which need my reflection, I will consider to write them as an essay. Some like how to educate and help naughty students, I will hand such essays to school's office of moral education, and pedagogy one to teaching office. I write essays annually because I come across with new problems and I need to write them down as records.

About writing essays, I usually have time to write during winter/summer vacation. At first I would write down problems I met in this semester on a notebook and then explore them when I have time during holidays. Normally I need to do teach and work on workdays and on weekends I need to deal with chores or prepare lessons and design tests for students. Compared with my post-graduate study, I think the biggest difference is that I don't have much time on reading and there are no people like professors who can guide me or give me advice. Also the atmosphere of doing research is not strong so I think at first it is hard to write essays after graduation. So I think the quality I write now cannot be compared with ones I wrote during post-graduate.

Though Xiao Qi herself held passion towards professional development, she had to admit that the atmosphere of academic study could not compare with the one during post-graduate study. She also frankly said that she found little time on reading and if she met some problems in writing there was no professional guidance or training. The quality of her essays in her thought could also be not as good as ones she wrote during post-graduate.

### **5.5.2 Future Career Plans**

The last question I asked the participants was about their future career plan. After all questions about how they perceive their current role as a teacher at primary/secondary schools, I was curious about how they plan future professional development whilst experiencing passion loss during work. For participants at primary schools, they claimed that if possible they hoped to change jobs but due to age discrimination and other limitations for people who were over thirty years old, they might just continue this work without a clear career plan.

During the third interview, Heng said now held no passion towards her original work namely, what she hoped to do was to shift of work at the school she worked. Like Heng, Rui also said now the working environment was hard to realise her dream of being a passionate teacher dedicating to teaching. She said “I have worked as a primary school teacher for seven years so it is difficult for me to change to another job. I hope I can work as an employee of logistics in the school I work at so that I don’t need to communicate with students or their parents.” Yanyan though did not show

tendency of changing another job but implicitly expressed her thought of working at a secondary school when the contract with the primary school was due. She told me she just could not make a clear plan since the policies changed fast.

Yanyan (R3): Recently, my mind is changing all the time and so do my actions. Especially the recent three years under pandemic, my plan has changed a lot. Government has new plans almost every week so I couldn't have a detailed plan. To put it into another way, I still have not found a career which I do love. If I could find one, I would have a clearer plan.

From her words, it can be sensed that she was confused about her future professional development, one reason might be the mentioned policies changes but also she added that the loss of passion towards the current work was also one main reason, if she could find what she loved in this work or another career, she might come up with more detailed plan about professional development.

Compared with primary schools' teachers in the research, participants from secondary schools indicated more complex emotion towards career development. From their answers, it can be seen that there were more possible opportunities for them in improving their professional skills. However they were still puzzled since these opportunities were not controlled by themselves but by schools' principals. During the interview, Xiao Qi at first shared her good news of passing the test of therapist. Like Heng, she hoped to on one hand use her knowledge of psychology to help more students; on the other hand she still loved teaching English as her main work, which was unlike Heng who did not want to teach lessons. Xiao Qi did not want a job shift to only mental therapist. For her, being an EFL teacher and a therapist did not contradict. She said she could also put the mental health knowledge into her English class to help students deal with learning anxiety or puberty. Moreover she told me that she was excited the principal might recommend her to have part-time PhD study. I was glad to hear the good news but later she added that it was up to principal's

decision and if the school needed teachers for senior secondary school's teaching, she would be designated to shift to the senior section.

Xiao Qi (R3): For my future plan, I hope I can put my knowledge into practice. Like psychology which I hope can be used in my English class. Because you know, recently many students have mental issue due to online learning. The students in the school I work at are not so good at learning like I have mentioned before. However, their parents who didn't experience this kind of online learning don't understand their children's feeling and want them to have good scores so the relationship between children and parents are intense. I hope I can help these students and comfort them not to have too much burden. As for the future, I don't have a clear plan because there are some uncertainty. The school will have senior secondary school this year, so perhaps I need to teach senior secondary school or still stay at junior one or I will have work shift which means I will be shifted to work at another new school. I am now in a passive status waiting for being chosen. Consequently, I don't have guts to plan my future.

In a word, I hope I can have further study like a PhD study and receive promotion. I don't have a clear one since there may be job shift. The job shift is not up to my decision after all.

Xiao Qi mentioned besides waiting for the principal's decision of her future career, she still needed to consider about work shift held in Beijing. She told me it was a new policy to let teachers work at another school for a period of time aiming to reach equity of education by asking teachers from renowned schools to work at normal schools. The policy was mentioned also by other participants except Tanmei, who worked at a private school. They more or less indicated that this policy added more unpredictability to their career plan. Like what Xiao Qi said, she could not draw a clear plan of her future career development, there were too many uncertainties. The passive status she was in made her have no guts to plan the future development. This sense of powerlessness was also shared by Xiao Wu and Yingying. Xiao Wu frequently told me her yearning for a PhD study. However she did not have courage to quit the current job and she told me it was difficult to find a job even graduating with a doctoral degree due to age discrimination towards people who were over thirty five

years old and devaluing of academic certificate. Thus she deemed she would still stay at the school she worked at. Being powerless of her future development, Xiao Wu showed me her perplexity. She felt she was at sea not knowing where to flow.

Xiao Wu (R3): I don't have a plan not now I guess. I will just have Professional Title Evaluation just like other teachers. Keep doing the work as a headteacher of a class. I don't know, just flow the main trend. I guess this is my plan, teach lessons, receive evaluation, cultivating students, year after year.

In this research every participant to some extent expressed similar feelings as Xiao Wu, they have no clear goals for their future professional development. It is notable that if participants received face to face interview, they answered this question with a facial expression of being puzzled. Most participants frankly admitted they were not very interested in training and did not make clear plans since the change of policies and social environment was fast and their plans could not catch up with the speed of changing. Only Tanmei who was working at a private school told me her plan which was still quite rough. She said "My future plan is to be devoted to teaching. I hope to teach every students well. I hope I can become an outstanding teacher."

Overall, participants did have aspiration for their future development however it was also apparent that their passion was greatly influenced by current welfare, timetable and changing policies. It can be sensed from their answers that they felt powerless in controlling their own fate.

### **5.5.3 Summary**

To sum up, it can be concluded that participants in this research gradually lost their passion in professional development especially towards academic writing. The reasons can be discussed based on different school they work at. For participants in both primary and secondary schools, one reason was that they found there was neither

time nor energy for them to concentrate on professional development. All participants chose to sleep during off-time as their prior choice instead of self-study. Moreover, some also complained about some training was of poor quality. For instance Rui complained about the repeated content of training and barely no training suitable for highly educated teachers. Yingying said training was not quite useful and practical since she told me the students she taught were different from ones discussed in training. It should be worth noticing that some experts personal preference of essays also might play a negative role in influencing teachers' passion of writing. Rui said her passion of essays writing was negatively impacted by experts who only wanted to read articles catering to their preference. Like Yanyan mentioned, writing essays had become a tool of promotion. If there was no compulsory requirement, she would prefer to use her spare time on rest for example sleep or other hobbies. Some participants from secondary schools also shared similar views. Besides factors discussed above, Yingying furthermore pointed out that the standards of essays required at the workplace were not strict so the quality could not be compared with essays written during post-graduate study. For her, she did not want to write essays of poor quality plus she had to admit there was no time for her to search for materials and reading them. As a result, she barely spent her time on further academic improvement after work. What she valued was the practice of teaching accumulated on lessons teaching. Xiao Wu though did not explicitly expressed her idea against essays writing since she believed it was a useful tool of promotion, admitted that she now could not find time to be involved in academic writing. Xiao Qi was the participant besides Tanmei who worked at a privately run school, showed passion for essays writing and teacher training. She was content with training of new technology and used her spare time to write. She agreed with other participants' ideas that the quality of essays were not as good as ones written during post-graduate, but she still thought she needed to record her teaching experience. The loose requirements on essays seemed to become another factor which made participants thought such writings were of less academic value. Last but not least, it is worth noting that only

Tanmei said the school she worked at bought data base for teachers to search for academic materials, other participants who worked at a public school had to spend their own money on buying academic journal articles. This factor also potentially influenced participants' passion towards academic writing.

To conclude, though secondary schools' teachers in this research had more passion of professional development than primary schools', their passion towards teacher training and academic writing were negatively influenced by being lack of time and energy, no suitable training, no academic standardised requirements on writing and restricted range of research subjects.

As for future career development, participants tended to give obscure and unclear answers in this question. Most participants expressed their powerlessness in face of fast changing policies. Lack of love towards current work made some participants either chose to be at a goblin mode or wished to change another job at school. Limitation of proper training, less leisure time and energy as discussed before indeed shed negative influence on participants' plan of future according to their answers. But it cannot be denied that fast changing educational policies and more limitations of recruitment in labour market also restricted participants' choices of future professional development.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the presentation and interpretation of data outlined in chapter five and sets out to explore how highly-educated female teachers perceive their current role of being teachers at primary/secondary schools and hope to understand and discuss what factors potentially contribute to shape their teacher identity.

All the discussion of findings are based on the following research questions:

1. How do highly educated female teachers perceive and situate their role of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools in Beijing, China?
2. How do external factors (Institutional and interpersonal factors) such as peer influence and family contribute in shaping the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?
3. How do factors such as gender contribute in shaping and being shaped by the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?

The study firstly set out to see how highly-educated female teachers understand their role before and after entering into the workplace, their perception of teacher identity was presented and outlined within the frame of Kelchtermans's theory of professional self namely self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future



perspectives. Furthermore influential factors collected from participants are discussed. The discussion is informed by a macro sociological theory - Bourdieu's theory of field to deductively adopt the concept of 'capital' and 'habitus' together with extension by feminist scholars who further argue gender as symbolic violence to see how the three levels of factors (institutional, interpersonal and personal) may influence and shape teachers' perception of teacher identity and may provide prospective impact on teachers' future career plan.

Participants in this research are female teachers with at least a Master's degree at primary/secondary schools in Beijing with teaching experience of at least five years (a period transferring from novice to experienced teacher). The background of these seven participants are all middle/working class or rural dwellers without outstanding social network or economic advantages. Mostly the schools they work at also are not renowned and famous. Data from this study were collected with a series of semi-structured individual interviews adopting IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) to see how personal lived experience tell teacher's perception towards professional identity. The questions were open-ended in order to let participants express more and let tell more of their stories of life. The interviews were divided into three stages, at the first stage, questions were more of general questions like family background, educational experience, reasons to have higher academic degree and become a teacher at primary/secondary schools. The first interview normally lasted one hour or more. When participants got familiar with the process of receiving interviews, second interview aimed to have some reflexive questions based on the first and followed with questions of how they perceive their current work and welfare, work-life-balance and gender issues. Since there were more questions to be answered during the second round and some of them might need to have more time to think so the time lasted more than one hour. The last interview was held mainly focusing on participants' perception of teacher training and future career plan and adding

explanation to previous answers, the last interview also allowed participants to have a reflection of the previous two interviews and overall their view and feeling of receiving these interviews such reflection could give more explanation of previous questions and give interviewer thoughts on how participants value the interviews, which contributes to improve future research ethics.

Findings show that teachers in this study have more or less lost their passion towards work and to a certain extent more negatively perceive their role as a teacher compared with their perception before entering into workplace. Influential factors such as salary, social recognition, training, work time and gender are discussed being framed in institutional, interpersonal and personal level (Day et al., 2006; Day & Kington, 2008; Ye & Zhao, 2019). The factors are discussed and explored abductively adopting Bourdieu's theory of field and a perspective of post-structural feminism to see how they shape teacher identity and possible impact on future professional development.

In the rest of this chapter, I discussed these in detail to see what results are important in understanding highly-educated female teachers' teacher identity and what influential factors may need to be paid attention to.

## **6.2 Highly-educated Female Teachers' Teacher Identity in This Research**

According to the data collected, participants' perception towards teacher identity can be divided into two groups - with almost no passion towards work and with passion but less compared with the one before work. Though all participants in the study said

that their passion towards work has been decreased but the two groups differ from each other in some specific aspects. The discussion are elaborated based on five aspects of teacher identity namely self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives (Kelchtermans, 1993).

For participants who express that they have lost passion towards the work. They are more inclined to negatively describe their attitude as well as personal perceptions towards being a teacher at primary/secondary schools. The data show that these participants in this study all to a certain extent felt less passionate and had a sense of gap compared with their attitude towards and anticipation of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools before work. Their description of self-image and self-esteem reflect their change of perceiving being a teacher. Before entering into the workplace, many participants express that they had great passion and love towards teaching believing they have the knowledge, quality and skills to educate the youth. Now they used 'service provider' to depict their self-image and explained that such depiction is a mainstream for the public too. For Participants who totally lose their passion, they used words like 'boring', 'not fascinating' and 'frustrated' to express their loss of interest in current work. The repetition of daily teaching, excessively long working hours and unreasonable school rules to some extent bore them and kill their passion according to answers they gave. Some of them even mentioned their trouble of dealing with trivial non-teaching stuff and students' parents' lack of respect. Some even doubted why they chose this job at the beginning. Such sense of gap after entering into the career echos to previous empirical study on non highly-educated teachers who may hold imagination towards the job and be lack of nurturing on teacher as a work in realistic social context (Ye & Zhao, 2019). The findings are also in consistent with previous research like Huang's paper (2022) that especially after "Double Reduction" policy, female teachers at primary schools regard themselves more of a nanny instead of a teacher. In this study, highly-educated female teacher at

both primary and secondary schools showed their concern in fear of decreasing social status and a lack of social identity to prove their academic attainment. Daily overwhelming workload and emphasis on teachers' caring of children may further reinforce these teachers' worry and bad status of mental health as previous studies indicate how long working hours may negatively impact teachers' perception of the work (Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017). It is obvious that some participants show their intention of resignation or 'invisible resignation' in face of frustration and lack of personal professional development, which echoes to previous studies that less job satisfaction, feeling overwhelmed, unattractive financial income and family burden may all lead to teachers resigning the job (Zhai, 2010; Kelly et al., 2019). Besides what previous research has indicated on teachers losing of passion, this research reveals that some teachers at least highly-educated female teachers feel lack of school support on training of pedagogy and students management, suggesting a potential lack of improvement of such teacher training though the quality of teachers is enhancing. Such finding is in accordance with previous studies which show concern about whether schools may fall into the vicious circle of competing the quality of teachers but fail to provide further professional support (Zhong, 2020; Zhao, 2021; Xu & Chen, 2023). After working for more than five years, it is striking to see some participants still regard themselves as rookies who need more support in class management and pedagogy.

In terms of self-esteem, these teachers' self-esteem is described as feeling challenged socially due to poor payment and the decreasing respect of teachers in society. They frankly said that their perception is based on their personal perception and other colleagues' feelings. The feeling of decreasing social status due to unsatisfied financial income is an issue frequently discussed by researchers in China and even though some policies have been implemented to bridge the gap between teachers' income and those of government public servant, teachers' socio-economic status is

challenged and further may be related to teachers' negative perception of their job (Liu & Hao, 2013; Zhou & Wu, 2016; Deng, 2019). If considering such phenomenon from a perspective of Bourdieu's habitus and capitals, it is obvious that these researched objectives explicitly represent how exterior environment like policies of payment, school rules, school culture, workload and interpersonal relationship within the field of school interact with their own personal beliefs to shape their habitus. As Bourdieu points out that habitus is 'an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 95, as cited in Grenfell & James, 1998). Thus the changing of attitude towards being a teacher can be perceived as being greatly influenced and shaped by the existing habitus and capitals they have in the field of school. The detailed exploration of these factors shaping teacher identity is expounded in section 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5.

To conclude these teachers' self-image and self-esteem, teachers who lost the passion of work imaged themselves as people who received not enough social respect and were less passionate towards the current work. It means that they on one hand, were negatively influenced by their income, overall school atmosphere with some unreasonable and unpleasant school rules or other colleagues in the field who also hold negative attitude; on the other hand, they themselves could not have an effective way to release their burden accumulated during work and thus formed a negative attitude. It is necessary to point out here that such changes of one's perception also differs from person to person depending on different personal perceptions since working experience and personal disposition of each participants is different hence generate diverge historical trajectories in their teaching lives.

As for the job motivation, currently these teachers have weak job motivation

especially for participants at primary schools. When working as novice teachers, participants normally held strong job motivation and good anticipation. Their perception of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools were positive either influenced by their family members who also worked as a teacher in Basic Education (primary/junior secondary schools), or regarded this job as a stable one which can provide them 'Hukou' to stay in Beijing since some universities may not be able to provide it (Chen, 2010). 'Hukou' has become a driving force which attracts more Master and doctoral graduates to work at primary/secondary schools instead of universities. No matter what expectation they had towards this job, one thing for sure is that the job is rewarded and provides platform for them to display skills. Their ways of thinking to some extent reflect how family and collective social imagination working as a kind of cultural capital to influence one's disposition and decision of work since some participants reinforce the influence of their parents as well as their childhood dream of being a teacher. Moreover, driven by the fierce competition in current Chinese labour market, teacher is a work which is believed to have better payment, welfare and social status (social and economic capital) in that it is stable and respected by the public though the realistic situation may vary from regions to regions according to previous studies regarding teacher social status (e.g. Hu, 2015; Hu, 2017; Huang, 2022). This is also another reason mentioned by participants why they prefer to work as a teacher at primary/secondary schools. In a way, Beijing Hukou and Bianzhi empower the participants to trade their academic credits for a stable and respectful work and furthermore construct strong job motivation at the beginning. It is also what may not be unveiled before in terms of Chinese studies on teachers in Beijing that Hukou and Bianzhi are playing significant roles in attracting more Master and doctoral graduates becoming teachers at primary/secondary schools.

Besides the advantages of the work, some participants also mentioned not having a strong social network, working as a teacher is perhaps the best way to both have

stability and realise one's value. As middle class or working class, they admit that their parents do not have strong social network namely social capital to support them to have a better job at state-owned companies or in other occupations. Social capital of their family like social network is limited and thus limit their choice of work. Being a teacher at primary/secondary schools is the most possible way for some of them to have a decent job after finishing post-graduate education. In sum, the job motivation of these participants before entering into the field of work is primarily driven by their personal family background and the social imagined advantages of the work like stability interwoven with exterior social factors like competition of labour market.

After entering into the field of work, their job motivation is decreasing, mainly being influenced by factors such as their biographical working trajectories, social status, payment and work-life balance. These factors presented as certain types of capitals reshape their actions within the field and potentially impact their beliefs. Up to the time of data collection, teachers' negative attitudes towards the job have not been changed. Emphasizing on being responsible to the work, they also expressed their intention not to dedicate all time to teaching. For them, the work is only a tool to survive rather than a career to realise one's value. It is a dilemma that they hold the belief formed in this field that a teacher should be responsible (a habitus traditionally formed in this field) , which also supports Ye and Zhao's finding (2019) that Chinese teachers' thinking and some actions are more subject to the institutional system (expert teachers' evaluation, state's related policies and schools' expectation) but meanwhile for highly-educated female teachers in this research their construction of teacher identity involves more of personal characters and cognition independent from institutional rules. A little different from Ye and Zhao's research (2019) that teachers develop teacher identity in the form of how to make sense and make use of policies, highly-educated female teachers in this study form their professional identity more complicatedly and the process reveals that to some extent they are less bothered by

fast changing policies but value more of the importance of work-life balance and their own perceptions of education.

The job satisfaction also reflects these teachers' negative attitude towards the work. They admitted that after working for more than five years their passion are apparently decreasing, killed by overtime work and less payment. It can be seen that words like 'boring', 'tired' and 'busy' are frequently used by these participants in expressing their thoughts on current work. Though it greatly depends on different schools' rules and students they teach. But all seven participants with one accord indicate their dissatisfaction towards endless long working hours and overwhelming work which breaks their work-life balance and killed their passion of work. Though five participants who have lost passion of work say that they are pleased to see students' improvements, but such sense of achievements could not change their overall disappointment towards the job. Their job satisfaction is also influenced by their perception of teacher training and other academic related job enhancement. Limited preference of teacher educators killed some participants' passion towards academic writing. Meanwhile, no sufficient support are provided on practical pedagogy and academic development. Repetitive content in teacher training and more elite students-oriented teaching performance are killing some participants' trust towards professional training from authorities. Instead of catering to expert teachers and teacher educators' taste, some of the highly-educated teachers chose to quit academic writing thinking and only wrote one when necessary like for job promotion. Lack of time and academic support, most participants chose not to follow the institutional expectation of highly-educated teachers and some of them showed rebellion against some unreasonable requirements from expert teachers.

Based on their description, it is not surprising to see that these participants can not have a clear goal of future career plan. Teachers who lost passion of the work said that



they also hoped to set a goal but the reality was that they felt they could not control their own fate due to limited economic and social capital (this part is elaborated in section of institutional and inter-personal influential factors). Professional development and promotion, which is dependent on schools' principals and administration to some extent are not things they can fully control and there are new policies launched each year like teachers' rotation (Teachers and principals who work at the same school for more than six years are asked to shift to another school to work and share teaching experience). To conclude, for participants who lose the passion of work, their perception of teacher identity is negatively influenced by job-burnout and poor payment. Being a highly-educated teacher, there is scarce place for them to use the knowledge and a higher academic degree sometimes simply places more burden on them like essays publication and leading research projects besides loads of teaching work. For them, this work is more like a service-oriented work than an educator as they anticipated. The image of teacher in their eyes is not a knowledge imparter but more like a service provider. To understand it from the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of field, the process of capital trading for these teachers can be perceived as a failure since they cannot see the rewards this job has brought to them. The social capital (status), cultural capital (training) and economic capital (salary) do not meet the needs of them. The fascination of being a teacher is dying, for these participants, teacher is a job which is tiring and of little interest, though they can gain a sense of achievement from students' improvements, such rewards still can not boost their passion towards the job. The finding meets the description of some previous studies concerning the increasing rate of teachers resignation (Fu, 1996; Liu & Hao, 2013). Instead of schools seeking for more qualified and well-educated teachers, the methods to guarantee teachers' working passion is also a task for schools to concern.

For participants who to some extent lose some passion but still hold hope like Xiao Qi and Tanmei, their description of self-image and self-esteem is milder. They admitted

that they were still hopeful about the career though they also had some complaints. They still described teaching as a good way to realise their value and they were able to find a sense of achievement from students' improvements. As Bourdieu (1977) indicates that habitus is formed through the dialectical process of individual's thoughts and the objective world. Thus unlike previously discussed participants who lose the passion of work, these two participants' personal disposition, characters and experience can better adjust themselves from overwhelming work and can gain energy from students' improvements which still impact positively on their perceptions of teacher identity.

As for job-motivation, like the group of teachers who lose passion, these two teachers chose to have post-graduate study as well as work as a teacher mainly from the nature of the work namely its stability. Family, role models and personal characters are elements which influence their career choice too. To a certain degree, before entering into the field of teaching at a primary/secondary school, all seven participants expressed that being a teacher was a wise choice for them to settle down in Beijing and they held strong expectation and love towards this job. It can be inferred that their job motivation is greatly driven by the stability and ability-valued of teaching at primary/secondary schools. Compared with the motive before entering into the career, teachers who are still positive towards the job are also experiencing loss of passion due to job-burnout and not ideal welfare. However, they have more positive perception towards overtime work and can adjust themselves. They admitted the fact that daily work was overwhelming but they were still happy to see students' achievement. It is interesting to see that they used more neutral words to describe their daily teaching and do not set high goals. Perhaps these teachers were just pretending to be optimistic when receiving an interview as many participants claimed after interviews that they were happy to say something which they would not say in an official interview held by institutions or teacher training agencies. Or maybe they

were better at adjusting themselves in meet of difficulties or unfairness because of their personality, positive experience of being an intern teacher and optimistic implication from gained in post-graduate study.

As for task perceptions, these two teachers have more passion of teaching, essays writing and research compared with teacher who lose passion. However, their research interest and time of academic writing is greatly restricted due to there are many stuff of class management, homework correction and lessons preparation. Therefore, though they have motive towards professional development and job promotion, trivial stuff other than teaching and overtime-work still limit their actions.

What is interesting and astonishing to see is their attitude towards future career plan. Teachers who have negative attitude and lose passion of work indicated that they have not set clear goals of career plan due to fast-changing policies and job-burnout. Similarly, teachers who still have passion of work also gave negative attitude and perception towards their planning of future career. Only one participant indicated that she hoped to become a better teacher. But such plan is still quite blur and not clear as a professional plan. Unlike attitude towards the job, future career plan is more vastly influenced by exterior factors especially at institutional level like principal's choice and policies than personal factors like positive attitude. So it is unavoidable to think that besides positive disposition, teachers who still had work passion were also negatively influenced by over workload. Though habitus of keeping passionate to work and love one's work is inscribed deeply in these teachers' actions and thoughts, realistic restrictions on them like workload and limited rest time still kill their passion and hinder their plan of career development .

In conclusion the transition of these highly-educated teachers is a procedure from being positive to negative or indeed less positive. It can be seen participants in this

study transferred from their positive perception of being a teacher to a more passive and negative one when entering into the field of primary/secondary schools' teaching. Such negative shift potentially reveals tensions of personal ideal anticipation of teaching and real career expectations and form a personal conflict for participants (Norton, 2012; Flores & Day, 2006). The existing teaching and schools' managing system are not strongly aligned with highly-educated female teachers' personal aspirations, their plan of ideal teaching and academic pursuit thus resulted in a conflicted sense of personal identity. Misconceptions from either their parents or social media influence them and contribute to form an unrealistic ideal image of teacher, which continuously shape participants after entering into the field of teaching. Participants experiencing difficult transition from student to teacher also is aligned with previous study that idealistic expectations, challenges, isolation, limited professional agency and insufficient support (Flores & Day, 2006). Such mismatch or tensions between teachers' perception and anticipation versus schools' reality can be explained that 'tensions between matching strong personal beliefs with external expectations and demands causes teaching professionals to either modify expectations, or resist and leave the teaching profession' (Kelchtermans, 2017 as cited in LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022, p. 6). Kelchtermans's view (2017) to some extent gives a reasonable explanation of why some participants in this research hold an intention of 'invisible resignation' (LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022).

It can also be perceived as their habitus which constitutes personally and contextually changes according to the atmosphere, common beliefs and facilities of the school they work at and the capital they own within this field. Participants are influenced by the traditional habitus formed in the field of school that a teacher needs to be responsible, passionate and dedicated to teaching and students' education, which explains why all participants emphasize themselves being responsible though suffering from job-burnout. This phenomenon is potentially cultural context-based since Ye and Zhao

also in their study (2019) indicate that Chinese teachers are greatly institution driven and their teacher identity is more about how to make sense and use policies and be adhere to what policies require them to do. However, it is also interesting to note that not all highly-educated female teachers in this research adhere to the doxa and habitus in the field based on their varied personality and anticipation before becoming a teacher. In fact their actions and teacher identity is dynamic in response to experiences they had and disposition they own (Beijaard, 2004). Based on different personalities and dispositions they form during childhood and post-graduate study, participants were diverse with each other in perception of being a teacher and in face of fast-changing policies, over-time work and poor payment. For some participants, educational policies are not playing great influence in shape of teacher identity and highly-educated teachers potentially have more independent recognition and perception towards the job, which is different from previous findings of Chinese teachers' identity formation (Ye & Zhao, 2019). Most participants explicitly indicate that now teacher was just a work to make a living, to survive. They refuse to work overtime or to be too dedicated. Thus some of them form tensions between their own pursuit of profession and schools' goals. On the contrary, they prefer to utilize their spare time on hobbies like jogging, further learning of subjects or simply to rest. For them, being a highly-educated teacher almost means no difference from other teachers though they admit knowledge they gained during post-graduate to some extent provides them more perspectives in understanding subjects they teach and issues they have met, still the function of higher academic degree is limited in the context of schools they work at. Theoretically such claim potentially meets the view that social structure (professional culture of school) may limit their passion due to inadequate support, over-strict expectations and limits on pedagogical support (Beijaard, 2004). It is sad to see the brain waste is an issue which is not fully addressed by schools. To sum, though some participants may still hold passion of work, most highly-educated female teachers lose their passion after working for more than five years. There are common issues which negatively influence highly-educated female teachers'

perception of teacher identity like job-burnout, poor payment and limited support of professional development, which are factors also discussed previously on normal teachers (e.g. Zhai, 2010). The findings furthermore reveal that highly-educated teachers pay more attention to the development of professional development and thus have formed a fierce tension between imagined development and real teacher training. Higher expectation of school work ended in a vast disappointment towards reality and as a result negatively shape their teacher identity. Thus in next section, influential factors from institutional, interpersonal and personal level are expounded to see what factors are influencing and how they interact with each other to influence teacher identity.

## **6.3 Institutional Influence**

### **6.3.1 Economic Rewards and Work-life Balance**

In this section, economic rewards are considered from the perspective of the amount of income, work-life balance and the stability of income. According to data collected, all participants expressed their dissatisfaction towards the amount of salary in interviews. For them, earning a monthly payment of about 1000 pounds is not a large amount of money living in a big city like Beijing. Especially for participants who get married and have children, such income is not enough to support a family. Like Zhou and Wu (2016) mentioned the imbalance of primary/secondary schools' teachers' income and GDP growth rate in Beijing. Limited income may cause these teachers cannot survive in Beijing (Zhou & Wu, 2016). In fact, the issue of unattractive income of teachers is frequently discussed not just in China but worldwide (e.g. Guarino et al., 2006; Zhai, 2010). Imposed on higher expectation from students' parents and headteachers, highly-educated teachers sometimes have to face reality that they are overwhelmed but under paid (Liu & Li, 2005; Hu, 2017). To be specific, from the perspective of those interviewed, the amount of income is not considered equivalent

to the high educational certificate they have. The non-equivalence of payment and academic degree breaks almost all participants or their parents belief that a good educational background can receive good payment. Such payment is moreover not inadequate and, considering the academic degrees these teachers have, not relative to the efforts and exertion invested in their career. Participants reinforce their discontent towards the economic rewards they receive. Some participants implicitly show that they feel their ability, educational attainment and workload are not fully valued through the income. For them, it is not just the problem about the amount of salary and the ability to survive in a big city, , it is the imbalanced ratio of workload/intelligence and income which triggers their dissatisfaction.

Most participants emphasised one factor that their daily work was trivial, overwhelming and extremely tiring. On one hand, like these participants figure out, they barely have their own time to have further study or rest. Time especially spare time here works as a close link to both economic and cultural capital accumulation for these teachers. Time as Bourdieu theorized is essential in accumulating economic as well as cultural capital which enable an individual to attain her/his desired position in the field (Fiske, 2023). This also supports what is revealed in this research. Spare time loss is negatively influencing highly-educated female teachers not just because, as they indicate, they cannot take care of the family or rest, but more about their loss of time in accumulating knowledge, regaining energy and experiencing other relaxing activities other than work. It can be seen according to data that these teachers' time is greatly occupied by merely work and sometimes as some participants point out meaningless work. Too much time on work and less time for these teachers to do what they want to do besides work reflects teachers' dissatisfaction of free time and more deeply dissatisfaction of loss of time to accumulate possible capitals like cultural one. On the other hand, more time on work also causes health issues. Especially during the pandemic lock down, many participants complained about their eyes being

uncomfortable for sitting in front of the computer for too long. The less healthy condition of teachers especially dry eye disease can be found in a recent medical article discussing causes of increasing number of teachers who have DED (dry eyes disease) such as longtime work, longtime of using computer, anxiety and depression (Sun et al., 2024). Many teachers frankly express that they feel the worsen health condition is not worthy since the payment seems not to be able to cover the medical costs.

Different from the pure economic capital like income, it can be seen personal spare time is also greatly valued by these teachers. The loss of spare time means these teachers have little time spent on personal development and even a good rest. However, such imbalanced work and life for these teachers is not the worst, since in traditional Chinese culture, teacher is a job which means sacrifice a teacher's time and energy without asking rewards to cultivate students who are the future of one nation (Jiang, 2008). The 'vocation of sacrifice' sets the foundation of the job that being a teacher means earning less money. Such value is widely accepted and seen as a kind of habitus among teachers worldwide (Tully, 2023). However, it also cannot be denied that frustrated mental status and less time for teachers to freely develop their professional ability discourage these young female not to say they have to struggle for survival though being hardworking (Liu & Li, 2005). Therefore according to the data, all participants feel disappointed that their hard work are not proved through payment. Though the value like mentioned above is that teacher is a job with the vocation of asking for no rewards, realistically a teacher is a job for survival so it is impossible for these highly-educated female teachers not to think about the payment.

The implementation of 'Double Reduction' to some extent worsened these teachers' condition. Doing extra work similar to baby sitting after work but receive only about



10 pounds makes them rethink the meaning of their profession. Like what they said when they explained reasons of choosing post-graduate study and being a teacher at primary/secondary schools. They hoped and believed that through their hard work and knowledge, they could earn a decent salary and at least survived in a big city with more advanced medical and educational resources, but the reality is different from their anticipation. To some extent their academic certificate is not manifested in salary. Currently Chinese research with respect to ‘Double Reduction’ is more related with implementation with more efficient pedagogy, improvements of teacher training and overall evaluation of policy implementation (e.g. Wu, 2024; Zhu et al., 2024; Qi & Zhou, 2024). Few studies focus on how teachers perceive the policy especially after-school service (Huang, 2022). The study reveals different attitude of teachers of different academic background compared with Huang’s study (2022) of primary school’s teachers’ attitude towards after-school service. Different from teachers who have a Bachelor’s degree, highly-educated female teachers emphasise more on disappointment of wasting their knowledge and their helplessness in face of ‘involution’ that they cannot find other jobs which can guarantee them a stable job as well as not wasting their knowledge. From the perspective of Bourdieu, economic, social and cultural capital interact with each other to influence a person’s position and influence within a field. Among capitals, the economic capital working as a universal currency in all fields is ‘at the root of all other forms of capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.88, as cited in Tully, 2023). Salary to a great extent ensures one being able to pursue or buy goods, services and opportunities to both guarantee basic survival and enhance social status. Stable monthly income is assumed to be an essential tool to survive in a big city like Beijing, moreover guaranteeing one’s independent living, supporting a family and sufficient money for hobbies and further learning (Bourdieu, 1986, as cited in Tully, 2023).

It is believed by Bourdieu (1984, 1986) that certain required qualification (cultural

capital) can secure a higher salary (economic capital) (Tully, 2023). However, there is exception. Teachers working in public service are low-paid. ‘Vocation’ of doing more and asking for less is a prevalent value in such field that one’s commitment in work is closely related with low salary while more attention to personal interest is perceived as a kind of uncommitted (Tully, 2023). Tully’s exploration echoes to similar belief in Chinese context discussed above that teachers should be committed in the work without seeking for higher salaries (Jiang, 2008). Such belief is deeply rooted in Chinese culture that teacher is a job with lower salary but high social position. However, Chinese teachers’ social status is challenged in recent decades due to consumerism and marketisation. Yan (2006) claims that though Chinese has a tradition of respecting teachers in history, such tradition is greatly embedded within and connected with power classification and regime’s allocation of social resources like salary. In the past, teachers were seen as belonging to intellectual elites enjoying high social status with incredible income. Now China has entered into the era of marketization and teachers’ high social status has become a kind of illusory folk culture which is believed that teachers are still respected. But actually, poor payment and more media reporting and magnifying negative news of mis-behaviour teachers are challenging teachers’ status. Credentialism and more Master’s and doctoral graduates choose to work at primary/secondary schools have also consolidate people’s views that ‘learning is useless’ and teachers gradually are excluded from the intellectual elites (Yan, 2006). Yan (2006) concludes that increasing teachers’ welfare seems to be more essential in improving and consolidating teachers’ social status, compared with simply revitalizing ceremony of inviting teaching (a Chinese traditional ceremony to show respect to teachers).

Moreover, either depending on their parents or their husbands, these female teachers seem not to be able to have total economic independence using their academic background, especially for married primary school teachers. Gender pay gap,

glass-ceiling and work-life balance are subjects frequently mentioned, discussed and reported as women issues which further prompt conversation on women and work (Cameron, 2018). Unlike traditional argue which focuses on women's work at home being devalued or elite women ignore less privileged women's dedication in that those female elites are more powered and better educated to gain a decent income (Cameron, 2018). Interestingly, teacher at primary/secondary schools is a complex career at least in China a job which is complicated in perceiving its nature. It may be perceived as a decent job with satisfying and stable income. It is also perceived by many teachers at least in this research as a job which is losing its social respect and receiving poor wages whilst the threshold is terrifically high. As a result, highly-educated female teachers' gendered issues are far more complicated than anticipated. These elite females may also face problems that less privileged women may face and be in a position of being marginalised in public. Though they received good quality of education thanks to Chinese policy in relieving the burden of fees for many rural students to ensure educational equity, they still face gender/age discrimination during recruitment, gendered challenges at workplace (maternity leave, glass-ceiling and more) and economic shortages (low income) after graduation with a decent academic degree. These are issues about gender and not only gender if taking age discrimination into account.

Economic influence may be valued the most by participants as they frequently mention their dissatisfaction about income and furthermore how it may affect their family, future development and perception of daily tasks. According to Wang et al.'s research (2018) exploring the relation among the index of happiness, income and economic independence. The study suggests that female who is economically independent enjoys higher index of happiness, but if the income has overcome the sweet spot (a sociological term which means one need to work overtime to earn higher income), the index of happiness drops down. It can be inferred from this

research that economic independence is essential in how females perceive happiness. However, it is disappointing to see highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools fail to have higher index of happiness due to poor payment. High academic degree, a guarantee of decent salary does not provide enough economic welfare to these women. Moreover, long working hours add more burden on these females without increasing their financial income. Though this research deals with teacher identity, it can be seen that the unhappiness brought by not being fully economic independent influence these female teachers' identity as well. Detailed discussion on how gender as an symbolic violence shape teacher identity is explored in Chapter 6.5.1. Furthermore they also do not have the courage to quit current work to seek for another one due to both gender and age discrimination. Such phenomenon reveals the second issue related to economic capital which is the stability of payment.

Though participants complain a lot about low payment they have received, none of them dare to change their job. These highly-educated female teachers are in a dilemma. Though teachers complain about the poor payment based on long working hours, they do not have the courage to easily quit the job since according to their answers now the unemployment rate is rising due to pandemic side effect and discrimination of gender and age so no one dare to quit a job on one's initiative. Described as a job similar to 'iron bowl' (a Chinese proverb to describe stable jobs wit'Bianzhi' referring to authorised personnel), teachers in this research tell their struggle in complaining about payment but cannot give up the work due to the need for survival and stability. They frankly said that if they quit the job to find another one or to have PhD study, they are at risk of not finding a new job in that most workplaces recruit employees who are less than thirty years old and universities prefer to hire doctoral graduates who are less than thirty-five years old. Like Kang and Wang describes (2021), 'involution' is becoming more fierce due to pandemic and its side effect economic recession. The article also points out the plight of employees who are

over thirty-five years old, which means they are less competitive than the young and may face the danger of unemployment. Unlike gender discrimination which is sometimes implicit in job recruitment, age discrimination is explicit in many employers' requirement lists for job seekers. Over thirty-five years old means that the possibility for an individual to find a job is quite scarce. Although such discrimination is criticised by the public media and essays (e.g. Yan, 2019), it is still universal and accepted in current Chinese labour market. Interestingly, despite of criticising the vicious circle, Kang and Wang (2021) used a case of reality show to prove that only elites and outstanding candidates can have good job opportunities and young people should invest more time on accumulating knowledge and devoted more time in self-elevation. Such point also reflects that in current China that society and academic research intends to conclude 'involution' as not existing, on the contrary, it is young job seekers who should reflect on themselves why they could not find a decent job. It is therefore sad to see that the discrimination of age will still be universal and accepted in China. As a result, simply considering from the age, these participants know they are not qualified. So apparently age here is working as a kind of symbolic violence which hinders the way of finding a new job or further academic study. Choices are limited for these teachers. A detailed elaboration of age as symbolic violence is argued in section 6.5.2 to see how it may shape teacher identity. Their attitude towards poor payment is conciliatory in that the poor payment is accompanied with an advantage which is stability. Being in a dilemma of poor but stable income, many teachers confess that their current status is just to keep them working according to school rules and to be responsible to their work, almost no passion left for them to consider about doing work well or further professional development. Such phenomenon meet what Hu (2015) points out the issue of 'invisible resignation' among teachers at primary/secondary schools. It can be inferred that the weak salary (economic capital) with an advantage of stability in current turbulent labour market is one of the reasons which trigger such problem. One step further, this research reveals besides the above factors, age is also becoming a factor which may influence

graduates' choices of job hunting and even obstruct employees from seeking for better jobs,

To put it in a nutshell, highly-educated female teachers are trapped in a vicious circle of less salary together with social status being challenged, such 'site of struggle' potentially sheds negative influence on participants in this research in perceiving their values of being teachers at primary/secondary schools. They believe they are responsible to students and follow the guidelines of being a qualified teacher. To their disappointment, the hard work is not rewarded with a decent payment. It may also suggest that these participants feel a sense of disrespect from authorities. Most participants in the research is in a situation of working hard but receiving not enough income if conclude their plight in a sentence. Being a highly-educated female, a decent academic degree may assume by participants as a credential to prove their ability but poor payment to some extent devalue their ability and re-produce gendered inequity on them. The poor payment also proves gender bias and stereotypes that teaching is perceived to be a career emphasis on caring and care-giving thus is paid less. It potentially means that these highly-educated female teachers do not have enough salary (economic capital) to fully survive in a big city by themselves and can not own spare time which is not just for rest but also an important medium of capital accumulation. Moreover, participants claimed that they also did not have enough spare time to rest or simply do hobbies. Relationship between payment and work-life balance is potentially not positive correlated. Though there are summer and winter vacations, their time is still occupied with compulsory training which may not actually meet their needs not to mention that the payment during vacation is lower. Highly-educated female teachers are in face of economic gender inequity when receiving low payment after gaining a high academic degree and due to economic recession after pandemic and high rate of unemployment. Some highly-educated female teachers claimed that they neither had courage to quit the job nor held passion

to teaching. Hence the plight also reveals how participants interpret their helplessness in face of fierce competition and unsatisfied treatment in school. Such tensions explored above may kill teachers' passion towards work and finally result in 'invisible resignation'.

### **6.3.2 Teacher Training and Professional Development**

Besides poor economic capital, it can not be ignored that further professional/academic development is seen as an important cultural capital in shaping highly-educated female teachers' identity. Before entering into the field of primary/secondary schools' teaching, it is perceived that these teachers own strong academic background thus can be regarded as strong cultural capital. Owning a Master or doctoral degree let them competitive in labour market. In the previous section, it can be inferred that the transition of cultural capital into economic capital failed to some extent, which triggers teachers' complaints about poor payment. In this section, participants' attitude and experience of receiving further professional development and training is explored to see within the field of primary/secondary schools' teaching how cultural capital has been accumulated and developed and how highly-educated female teachers value such cultural capital.

As for teacher training, participants who work at primary schools claim that they do not satisfy with current system of teacher training. Repetitive training content and not practical pedagogy fail to provide new knowledge to experienced teachers and not to mention there are no suffice academic resources for highly-educated teachers to develop their academic ability. Obviously, teachers at primary schools in this research feel that they cannot gain ample knowledge nor academic resources to support their professional and academic development. Though the schools participants work at ask teachers to write essays each year, participants frankly admitted that the quality and

normality cannot compare with ones they wrote during post-graduate study. Many participants expressed their contradiction to essays writing. One reason is no time for it since they work overtime each day and there are work about correcting homework, lessons preparation, students management and answering students' parents questions. Not academic content, no standard format and yearning for more rest hinder these participants' essays writing. Despite the fact that essays writing now is closely linked with job promotion, participants from primary schools still hold negative attitude towards it. For them, the cultural capital (academic ability) is not improved but lost gradually after entering into the field of primary schools' teaching.

Participants from secondary schools hold varied attitudes towards this topic. For participants who still hold passion towards this job, they show positive attitude towards teacher training especially like training with respect to new technology use in classroom, though they also agreed that some training repeated each year they still said that overall their evaluation towards teacher training was positive. Though they may not have time to write, they supported authorities' choices. On this topic, the other two participants from secondary schools held a more negative attitude since they also have similar experience like participants at primary schools that some teacher training is not quite useful for their current professional development. According to interviews, some individuals also expressed that class and students management is more complex and dynamic than the training taught them. Even for some participants who work as teachers for more than six years, students management is still a issue which can not be fully solved by attending training sessions. There are some harsh opinions thinking teacher training does not consider the needs of highly-educated teachers and the reason of attending is just because training is compulsory. It is criticised by some participants that the training and performance class used elite students to show how wonderful and ideal a lesson can be taught but fail to inspire teachers how to teach students who have weak basis. As for essays writing, these



participants agree with one accord that they use spare time to write essays partly because there are some reflections which need to be recorded or for the need of job promotion. Participants who overall hold a more negative attitude towards teacher identity tend to regard essays writing as merely a tool for promotion and point out that such writing on one hand does not meet the normative standards of academic essay, on the other hand the overtime work makes them too exhausted to write essays. Writing essays which once was perceived by these teachers a way to accumulate cultural and symbolic capital is to some extent gradually losing its value.

Overall, the perception towards professional as well as academic development within the field is not quite satisfying. Primary/secondary schools together with professional teacher training agencies to some extent do not provide enough materials, spaces and time for highly-educated teachers to further improve their academic ability, at least for some teachers in this research. Moreover, as they work, these teachers are gradually losing their academic knowledge due to long time non-use. The current situation of teachers training as a result is that on one hand, schools ask highly-educated teachers to accomplish academic tasks such as essay-writing and become a role model in positively influencing other teachers; on the other hand, school to a great extent cannot or ignore highly-educated teachers' needs on academic support such as training of latest trend of research topics. The issue of recruiting Master or doctoral graduates in primary/secondary schools may cause 'brain waste' is previously discussed (e.g. Zhao, 2021) but it seems that such problems still exist without practical policies being implemented. Since Boudieu points out that cultural capital is essential in the field of education which in some circumstance can be transferred into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984 & 1986, as cited in Tully, 2023), it is ironic to see that highly-educated female teachers in their career at primary/secondary schools fail to successfully gain decent income whilst gradually lose their ability of academic writing mastered during post-graduate and are in need of more practical training like

students' management and pedagogical ones which are not provided. Such failure not only kills these teachers' passion in teaching but hypothetically sheds further influence on their professional development as well.

## **6.4 Interpersonal Influence**

### **6.4.1 Peer Influence and Role Models**

During the interview, some participants mention how their tutors at primary/secondary schools positively influence them when they were novice teachers. However, not all participants mentioned the importance of having a tutor who may provide positive implication. Compared with school tutors, most participants said that peer influence and peer pressure were factors which were more closely linked to their daily teaching.

In face of peer competition or peer pressure, participants all claimed that they had their own ways of doing work or get promoted. So they were not quite bothered by other colleagues, instead they preferred to do the work at their own pace. On the issues of competition and essays writing, peer pressure seems not to provide negative influence on these teachers. By contrast, on the topic of social respect, peer influence is more powerful than being thought. Most participants admitted that some of their senior and experienced colleagues complained about how students were difficult to manage, how students' parents were hard to communicate and comfort and how poor the payment was. Participants did not deny that these colleagues are just saying some true facts however, they were still influenced by such negative thoughts and also began to think in similar patterns. It is also undeniable that even without these colleagues they would still think about these issues because they exist.

In a word, negative peer influence is toxic to a teacher's perception of professional identity. Some participants in this research are influenced by peer's negative thoughts especially negative comments towards current payment, students management and social respect are frequently discussed and mentioned by their colleagues which to some extent reinforce their negative thoughts towards these issues and even teacher the job as a whole. Such finding supports Day et al.'s frame of how interpersonal factors may shape teacher identity (Day et al., 2006). In the next section, specific issues such as social respect and teachers' relation with students and students' parents are discussed to see how these factors working as social capital impact the formation of teacher identity.

#### **6.4.2 Recognition: Social Status and Respect**

Social respect and social status is a complicated issue for participants in this research. Some of them express their disappointment saying that before entering into this career they believing that, although it is a job not well-paid, it received social respect. It can be inferred that these participants hope to comfort themselves with the fact that even though they may not earn a large sum of money, namely a kind of economic capital, they would receive high social status (a kind of strong social capital and symbolic capital), which can be presented in the form of social respect. So, in this sense, being a primary/secondary school teacher is still considered a decent job, despite its disadvantaged financial income. However, such belief is challenged under the impact of marketisation in China (Yan, 2006). Some participants said that they were disappointed to see that many students and their parents just regarded teachers as service-providers, who should cater to all needs of them. In fact, it is difficult to meet every student's and parents' needs since there are almost 40 students in one class. These participants felt exhausted in face of such large needs and were also afraid that

some students and parents were not satisfied and might complain to the headmasters. Cases of teachers and students' parents dissonance and even these parents violence to teachers were reported by some participants as negative influence which made them feel difficult to deal with class management. From these teachers' point of view, social respect of teachers seem to be greatly challenged and the discourse right of teachers is also decreasing due to the public's changing view towards teacher.

Though such experience of witnessing teachers and students' parents' dissonance may be quite individual and not a general case, there are still other participants who also express their disappointment towards teachers' social status and respect. In this study all participants, from both primary school and secondary schools, admitted that they felt they did not receive respect from some students and parents. For them some rude behaviours and words from impolite students and students' parents not just hurt their feelings but also potentially challenge their academic credentialism since some participants mentioned that they felt they were misunderstood as not highly-educated and were looked down upon by some students' parents. The public as many teachers argue in this research is greatly misled by such reports. With a quick development of internet, students have more access to knowledge which also may influence their attitudes to teachers (Liu & Liu, 2021). Moreover, according to participants' response, such disguise is a chain in that secondary schools' teachers look down upon primary schools and universities look down upon secondary schools. Some teachers complain that some students' parents who worked at universities as lecturers showed less respect to them though some secondary school teachers also graduated with PhD degrees. Such chain of disguise to a certain extent proves the hierarchy of teachers despite their perhaps similar academic background. It also reflects one concerning issue that the credentialism is more obvious when highly educated graduates enter into the field of teaching, since their social status is not equivalent to their academic degree.

In a nutshell, the academic degree does not necessarily shift into social status as anticipated when highly educated teachers enter into the field of primary/secondary school teaching. Currently, though there are still Teachers' Day to thank teachers' dedication to education, such festival is only kept as a tradition whilst the idea of respecting teachers is diminishing with marketisation (Yan, 2006). According to the findings of this research, teaching is becoming more like a service provider which means teachers lose their social respect, which also reflects Yan's worry of the dying of teachers' social status. Decreasing social status potentially lets highly-educated teachers doubt their work's meaning and value (Liu & Liu, 2021). Poor payment, social media's negative reports and teachers' lack of autonomy on teaching and insufficient teacher training may also be elements which cause teachers' social status decreasing (Zhai, 2010; Liu & Liu, 2021). These elements can further be perceived as not only shape teacher identity but also interact with each other to reinforce existing recognition. So if payment, welfare and prejudice to teachers are not changed or improved, it is difficult to improve teachers' social status.

### **6.4.3 Family Influence**

Family influence indirectly affects shaping highly educated female teachers' identity in this research. Choosing a stable job at a big city has to some extent formed as a habitus deeply rooted in participants' as well as their parents' mind. As Bourdieu (1990) indicates, the people, especially those from middle-class, follow dispositions which are adjusted to positions, therefore generating practice adjusting to situations. Bourdieu believes it is like 'fish in the water' (1990, p. 108) for these people to think about their social position without complexities. In this research, all participants' parents come from middle-class or working class living in either rural or urban areas.

Their parents are influenced by traditional cultural beliefs that entering into a university guarantees a stable job and as long as you have a skill you will not fail to find a decent job. Living in a middle-class or working-class family, some participants frankly said that their parents' did not have strong social networks to help them find a good job and settled in Beijing. A job as a teacher at primary/secondary school is one of the jobs which do not require a strong family social network. For example, Rui thought teaching is the best choice for a person like her, while her parents also think that teaching is a job greatly valued by society. There are journal articles which prove Rui's parents thoughts that teaching is a job worth wide social respect (e.g, Yan, 2006; Zhao, 2020). Participants and their parents' deep beliefs are based on working experience or media publicity form a disposition of settling down with a stable job that do not require a strong social network. But it should be noted that such beliefs are challenged by current teachers' gradual loss of social respect and status (Yan, 2006). Such phenomenon, according to the data collected and recent research on teachers in primary/secondary schools, show that teachers' welfare and social status have been changing and challenging (Yan, 2006; Hu, 2015; Huang, 2022).

Some participants in this research admitted that their good impression towards the job was influenced by their parents who mostly held the traditional views of profession. Their parents' praised those being teachers and believed that a stable job requiring practical skills is the most important thing, especially for a woman, to have economic independence. Such interpersonal influence to some extent reinforces some participants disappointment, since the reality they experience is different from what they anticipated it to be. As explored in the previous section, perception of social status according to participants' responses is potentially shaped by personal interpretation and interpersonal interactions. Though there are standards to define a job's social status, the detailed individual perception and experience of interpersonal interaction still may vary from person to person. Participants in this research also

perceive their parents' understanding of the teaching profession differently. Some participants said that they thought their parents were not aware of current trends and that teaching is a job far different from their understanding. There are also participants who felt disappointed because of their beliefs before entering into the career, when they agreed with their parents' that most people show respect towards teachers but they later learned to accept the change of the nature of being a teacher.

## **6.5 Other Influential Factors**

### **6.5.1 Gender Related Influence**

As an influential factor, gender in this research is working as a form of symbolic violence in shaping these highly educated female teachers (McCall, 1992; Skeggs, 2004). Previous studies manifest that currently there are still severe gender discrimination in Chinese labour market making females at a disadvantaged position (Li, 2015; Zhai, 2019; Chen, 2020). Such gender inequity sheds negative influence on females' agency and mental status (Huang, 2022). In China, facing traditional expectation of female taking care of family and giving birth, more female candidates are assigned to some stable work which is below females' capacity like teaching at primary/secondary schools (Liu & Liu, 2021; Huang, 2022). Based on previous empirical studies on this issue, 'Third Child Policy' and related maternity welfare, pay gap, parents' marriage urging and gender discrimination at workplace or during recruitment are factors which are mainly discussed and explored in this section (Yang, 2013; Huang, 2022; Qian & Kong, 2024). According to the findings of this study, participants' attitudes towards gender related issues are complex. Gender as a symbolic violence in this research specifically refers to 'women' attributes which may negatively impact a female's career decision and social positioning like prevalent discussed issues of pay gap, bias treatment during recruitment and discrimination

regarding maternity leave at workplace (Cameron, 2018) and related pressure from parents.

As for parents' pressure on marriage and maternity, most participants claimed they at first faced pressure from their parents' didactic urge on marriage and giving birth to children. Many social media reports that Chinese parents are urging their children on marriage which can drive youngsters crazy (Zhou, 2019; Li, 2022). Participants claimed that whether to get married, or to have a second or third child was greatly based on one's economic condition. The claim echoes Zhang et al.'s research (2023), revealing that the level of income has a positive correlation with willingness of having a child. Females with lower income in big cities show less will in having a child. Though it seems to be an issues for most participants, it is interesting to see most participants stated that they are equipped with knowledge gained during post-graduate to persuade their parents and they frankly say that their parents understand their plights regarding limited income.

For gender discrimination at workplace, it needs to be reiterated that gender issues are complex in this research. Maternity leave and marriage are reported as huge influence on females' career development but participants' attitudes towards such unfairness vary; some participants do not claim such discrimination as a main culprit in that they did not encounter it. Unlike previous studies (Li, 2015; Wu, 2018) indicate that time of marriage and pregnancy may cause discrimination during recruitment, participants in this research react mildly in terms of such issues. Such reaction may unveiled the power of education in protecting women to fight for their rights or may suggest that the discrimination is more implicit and hidden in shaping highly-educated female teachers' attitude towards gender inequity. As mentioned in chapter 2, predominant in career of teaching and nursing, women are perceived to be more forgiving and some



women intend to compromise in face of inequality under the impact of social structural forces, assumptions and expectations of society and career (Brown & Stern, 2018). Findings in this research echo to the mentioned results in previous studies. Considering from the perspective of post-structural feminism, such results reveals and emphasise how social structures shape identity shifts in relation to individual beliefs, positioning and values (Tisdell, 1998). Participants' different attitude towards certain gender discrimination also manifest their different extent of tensions between their personal anticipations and social structural forces as well as expectations. The reasons behind such findings are worth exploring and may reveal potential harm of gendered discrimination on highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools. There are two points worth discussing with respect to gender discrimination in this research according to participants' response: one is diverse opinions towards gender issues (gender discrimination and gender related welfare such as maternal leave), and the other is participants different recognition of gender discrimination.

In this research, participants' opinions as well as their attitude towards gender discrimination varies from each other. All participants claimed that they were disappointed to see there was such unfairness during recruitment and at the workplace. Part of the reasons why they chose to be a teacher is that schools is perceived to be a place with less gender discrimination issues. However, some participants reported that they experienced gender unfairness during recruitment interviews. They recalled that at that time they felt upset and mentioned that it was unfair to see that male candidates receive more opportunities just because they are male. Even if male candidates have weaker academic backgrounds, they are more likely to be hired than their female counterparts (Yang, 2012; Gan et al., 2014; Chen, 2020). As discussed in the literature in chapter two, schools prefer male teachers mainly from a perspective of boys need more male role models and males do not have maternity leave (Yang, 2012; Gan et al., 2014; Chen, 2020). Such concept out of anticipation, however, is also accepted by

some participants in this research claiming that they can accept schools recruiting male candidates even the males are less competitive since schools need more male teachers to set role models to boys and they do not have maternity leave. Base on previous research on gender discrimination (e.g. Yang, 2013; Zhou, 2018) studies mainly talk about how female teachers feel trapped in face of school tasks and family chores, juggling work and life. In this research highly-educated female teachers' attitudes are complex, their perception towards implicit gender issues are mild and even the habitus they formed in the field of teaching is re-shaping their perception towards gender inequity. It may suggest that these teachers think more from the collective benefits rather than themselves or simply they being influenced by masculine dominated thoughts believe that female teachers cannot set masculine role models to boys. Or perhaps such way of thinking can ease their upset in face of gender discrimination.

Similarly participants showed different recognition towards some gender issues like reporting maternity plan to principals. Some participants did not think reporting maternity leave as discrimination, more an efficient way for principals to manage teachers. Being objective as they said, they believed such unfair gender treatment exist with reasons, and instead of being bothered by this they prefer to focus on their lives namely their salary and spare time. Finding a proper job is a two-way selection, hence they think gender discrimination is not a big hinder since they believe at least school is a workplace with less gender discrimination compared with other workplaces like companies. Similar attitudes were seen when asking participants about gender related welfare, such as access to a baby care room or maternal leave. Some participants hoped that there would be such facilities to provide convenience for female teachers whilst the others frankly said they prefer schools to build library for students instead of maternity room though female teachers may take longer time to commute for breast feeding. Considering the schools' perspectives, all participants

showed understanding when considering a lack of gendered welfare. Even when there are complaints, such complaints, as participants pointed out, cannot compare with their dissatisfaction with salary and having to work over-time. Moreover compared with poor payment and abuse from some students' parents or media's exaggerated report of teachers' negative news, gender issues seem not to be considered problematic to some participants. There is only one participant showed extreme antipathy towards such unfair requirement, as she felt offended when the principal of the school asked her not to get pregnant during working as a teacher in charge of a class. Her antipathy towards unfair treatment is actually not just manifested on gender discrimination but also on welfare, poor income and extra working hours too. Thus instead of being influenced more by external environment or policies, her attitude is perceived to be more closely related with her personal characters that she to some extent is not fully submitting to the habitus in the field.

After seeing participants' diverse response, here comes two questions, why most participants in the research hold mild view towards gender discrimination? Can we conclude that gender issues do not influence highly-educated female teachers' identity negatively? Firstly it may seem that participants regard payment and gender issues separately deeming that issue of income is more practical with their survival in Beijing. However, participants who hold such a view may miss one factor that teaching as a career with more female teachers receives unfair finance allocation is partly due to one fact that it is a highly feminine job. Poor payment of teachers at primary/secondary schools potentially reflects sex segregation and gendered pay gap which means work done by women are paid less simply because it is done by women (Cameron, 2018). Being emphasised more on its service providing and children caring part, teacher especially teachers at primary/secondary schools are perceived by some as an extension of work at home like taking care of and educating kids (Cameron, 2018; Huang, 2022). Such thoughts derived from patriarchal society may also be one

reason which causes poor payment and public's misunderstanding of the work thinking it may not require a high academic degree. In short, teachers' poor payment is not an independent problem but closely affected by gender bias in society. If there is still gender prejudice and sex segregation, issues of payment may also not be sorted.

Secondly there are possible reasons to explain why Chinese employers ask about marriage and maternity leave during interviews like from the benefits of companies or schools. By repeating the process, it is subconsciously concerned by some that asking for maternity plan is just one part of a normal job interview. So under such context females may take it for granted as a process of recruitment. Or perhaps most of the participants intend to ignore or avoid talking about such inequity as there are other discrimination like age limitation and they just hope to live an easier life rather than thinking and being bothered by discrimination. Plus as they have said at the end of the third interview they are lack of power to let their voices be heard, so they choose to overlook it in order to live a more pleasant life. It may sound like turning blind eyes to issues like an ostrich burying its head under the ground, however it is still a way for these participants to survive and stay positive in a harsh labour market.

Their acceptance may also be explained as what Bourdieu argues in gendered symbolic violence that females who lack of power may accept the unfairness without questioning or even support such gender inequity (Bourdieu, 1998). Moreover, under the influence of doxa and habitus in the field of teaching (Tully, 2023), some of them may choose to sacrifice their own interests to cater to collective interests such as school's overall management. If considering it from the relationship between capitals and habitus as Bourdieu indicates that gendered symbolic violence is legitimizing and maintaining gender inequity within a system of social and cultural domination. The essence of symbolic violence is that one group dominates another in a way accepted by all. It should be noticed that in face of symbolic violence, the dominated

may submit to unfairness due to lack of strong capitals, ‘collective expectations or socially inculcated beliefs’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 103 as cited in Muldoon & Fuller, 2024). Thus females tend to subconsciously adhere or submit to unequal treatment without questioning. Compared with personal interest, collective expectations or schools and students’ interests are more important in these teachers’ mind since according to ‘vocation of sacrifice’ in the field of Chinese teachers, teachers should consider more about students and school’s benefits than their own. For them, one possible explanation for their unawareness is perhaps such requirement is just for principals to better plan work not to discriminate anyone. Thus there are two facets of subordination for female teachers, one is subordinating to socially constructed ‘vocation of sacrifice’ for teachers; the other is to masculine cultural and social anticipation. It can be concluded that female teachers are facing double enforcement both driven by requirements from school rules and masculine cultural expectations (Cameron, 2018).

Secondly as for negative influence of gender discrimination, it may suggest that gender inequity and its influence seems to be less apparent on highly-educated female teachers’ identity but actually contains lasting and harmful influences. Previous studies focus more on how gender issues negatively impact teachers’ professional development (e.g. Yang, 2013, 2014; Zhou, 2018) but to some extent do not provide enough empirical studies on how female teachers perceive such problems. It is striking to see that in this research most participants hold different levels of recognition towards related discrimination and most of them react to such issues mildly. But if exploring deeply, gender discrimination still potentially shapes female teachers’ perceptions of their work and even their career choices. Possible reasons behind such phenomenon are complex. From a gendered perspective it is like what Cameron argues that ‘femininity is not just a cultural construct but a cultural imposition’ (Cameron, 2018, p. 70), being a female, one has to face social and cultural

expectation and prohibitions. Female teachers are facing double-enforcement since being a teacher means she needs to consider the impact and benefits of school and students whilst being a female means submitting to masculine society. Bourdieu terms such symbolic violence as ‘a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims’ (Bourdieu, 2001, p.1 as cited in Muldoon & Fuller, 2024). The unfair social orders built under such symbolic violence can even be perceived as natural and reasonable, which in Bourdieu’s view, a kind of doxa rooted in people’s mind within the field (Bourdieu, 2001 & Charlesworth, 2000 as cited in Muldoon & Fuller, 2024). Culturally women are expected not to ask too much and be happy with what they get: be thankful and do not challenge. Specific in the field of education, contextualised by Chinese traditional culture (doxa) of abiding collective benefits as a moral of being a teacher, some participants in this research show a disposition of obeying even to unfair gender treatment. Moreover participants’ nonresistance reflects their powerlessness in face of authority. Poor salary has deprived their power of discourse. The current social status of primary/secondary schools’ teachers also make them hard to resist unfair gender treatment or express their dissatisfaction. Bourdieu defines power as material and symbolic capital which influence one’s habitus in a certain field (Christensen, 2023). In the field of teaching, the existing habitus inform teachers to be collective-oriented and think more about profits of the school and students, not themselves. Embedded in such a field, highly-educated female teachers fail to claim more income by their academic background. Moreover socially constructed gender bias towards females makes their education, economic income and social status devalued and furthermore makes them silent in face of gender unfairness.

Therefore, these participants face a lack of power and opportunities to express their discontent, Thus they choose to be quiet and ignore such inequities. Furthermore, from some participants’, it can be seen that their numbness to gender discrimination is also possibly a coping mechanism so as not to be overwhelmed in the face of too

many challenges and dissatisfaction. All in all, it can be concluded that gender influence teachers' identities reciprocally and potentially shape teachers' perceptions towards their current social status, based on the findings of this study. It is clear that gender awareness and recognition of these participants are greatly impacted by social status and economic income. It could be suggested that having less income and decreasing social status drives them to be blind to symbolic violence reluctantly. Symbolic gendered violence in turn affects the participants who have less resources that they even lose more on agency and autonomy (Muldoon & Fuller, 2024).

### **6.5.2 Age as a Symbolic Capital**

What is interesting to see in this research is that teachers in the research not only face gendered symbolic violence like gender discrimination, but also age discrimination. Currently China is facing a trend of limiting age in recruitment due to fierce competition in labour market. Age in the current Chinese context has become a threshold during recruitment which indicates younger people are more competitive in hunting jobs. Most schools and universities have age limits for advertised vacancies (Huang, 2022; Liu & Su, 2024), with normally Master graduates expected to be no more than thirty years old while PhD graduates less than thirty-five years old.

Such symbolic violence like gendered one, built by dominating group over dominated to potentially control the overwhelming number of more and more highly-educated graduates each year. People are valued partly according to their age, which seemingly their experience, education and knowledge also devalued together by their growing age. Compared between men and women, women are less valued if their age is over thirty-five years old being unmarried. Since it indicates to employers that such women are old to shoulder tough tasks and may have risk to ask for marriage and maternity leave. Age violence may not be apparently shaping teacher identity, but the potential

harm of it on teacher identity like future plans and perceptions of work is hard to be ignored.

Previously in the Western context, Bourdieu's symbolic violence theory is seldom used to analyse age as a capital to see how it impacts peoples' career choices and further development. Though age discrimination emerges in China in recent decades, there are still not a large amount of studies on how it may harm teacher identity and career professional development (Liu & Su, 2024). This study tries to explore how it shapes teacher identity and surprisingly finds that age discrimination potentially shape teachers' career and academic development especially after the Covid pandemic. On the one hand, it controls teachers from resigning due to the fear of not finding new work while; on the other hand, it limits teachers' pursuit of further academic development or desire to change a job thus may accumulate the possibility of 'invisible resignation'.

### **6.5.3 Disposition, Educational and Working Experience**

Since the research is embedded within the concept that identity is dynamic and greatly depends on personal perceptions based on individual's experience, personal experience such as educational and working experience also contribute and shape teachers' identity. According to the findings, participants' perceptions, without exception, are negatively impacted by factors such as poor low salaries, over-time work and imperfect interpersonal influences such as disrespect from students and their parents; their personal experience, to a certain extent, works to harden or relieve their negative feelings. Participants who work at a school with a good atmosphere or have quite, smooth and positives experience in post-graduate study, tend to think more positively. On the contrary, participants who complain more about the school's atmosphere tend to think more negatively when facing difficulties or unfairness.



Individual experiences of working and learning contribute to person's understanding of her/his current status.

It cannot be denied that personal disposition, which is based on one's personal trajectory since childhood, is important. Previous studies focus more on how external and inter-personal factors in shaping teacher identity (e.g. Deng & Xu, 2015; Zhou, 2017) but to some extent less discuss the power of personal experience and character in impact one's perception. In this research, participants with more positive disposition tend to show a more positive way of thinking in dealing with poor payment and lack of rest. The significance of external working environment provides essential implications for policy makers to attach importance to building a more teacher-friendly school atmosphere. However, this study also suggests that, together with family influence, participants' personal experiences, especially their experiences at school and the school's atmosphere or what class they teach, affects their perceptions of in relation to their job, but cannot fully release their burden in face of poor financial support (poor payment).

## **6.6 Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, highly educated female teachers working in at primary/secondary schools, that took part in this research, show, overall, a more negative attitude towards the teaching profession, compared with their previous ideal anticipation before entering the career. It is worth noting that influential factors include: salary/payment, over-time work and decrease in social respect possibly influenced by media and marketisation, which affect negatively teacher identity.

Bourdieu's theory together with a gender-perspective view, adopted in this study, provide a possible explanation for how the above mentioned factors influence and interact with each other to shape these highly educated female teachers' identity. It is also worth noting that the analysis and discussion is embedded within a contextualised framework so there are cultural nuances in applying theories to explain some phenomena. From the theoretical perspective of Bourdieu, economic and social capital are important and vitally relevant in shaping highly-educated females teacher's professional identity.

With the dynamic change of the payment related policy, turbulent labour market and price of commodities, economic capital greatly influences the participants' perceptions of their job in this research. Such perceptions are furthermore related to teacher's social status. given that the public is focusing more on evaluating one's social status based on their economic capital in a market-oriented society. In this research, participants' strong cultural capital does not successfully translate into a good economic and social capital, which triggers discontent towards their profession. Poor payment, lack of social respect and no access to teacher training negatively affect participants' economic, social and cultural capital which forms a vicious cycle and negatively shapes teacher identity. Gender as a symbolic violence, although it does not directly impact participants' professional identity, it reflects highly-educated female teachers' powerlessness in face of authority due to poor economic and social capital and in turn exacerbates these teachers' negative experience via gender discrimination. The concept of the importance of spare time enriches Bourdieu's theory of field in providing empirical evidence that prove how time affects significantly cultural capital accumulation.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

This research aimed to explore how highly-educated female teachers perceive and develop their teacher identity at primary/secondary schools in Beijing China. I have sought to look at both a macro level, namely how institutional policies like national policies, school rules and school atmosphere could be seen to impact highly-educated female teachers in terms of payment, working hours and workload as well as a more micro level, which is how individual perceive their experience of interaction with peers, family and society. The study also sought to explore how salary, working hours, welfare, feeling connected to their sense of social status and gender issues interact and intertwine with each other in a vicious circle to shape highly-educate female teachers' professional identity at primary/secondary schools in Beijing. In conclusion, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do highly educated female teachers perceive and situate their role of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools in Beijing, China?
2. How do external factors (Institutional and interpersonal factors) such as peer influence and family contribute in shaping the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?
3. How do factors such as gender contribute in shaping and being shaped by the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?

In the following sections, I initially reiterate key findings and then discuss the contribution to knowledge and the potential of this research for policy making of this research. In addition, limitations of the study and further research implications are described in the last two sections of this chapter.

## **7.2 Key Findings**

Participants in this research are highly-educated female teachers at Beijing's primary/secondary schools with teaching experience of at least five years. Highly-educated as defined in this research refers to graduates with a Master or doctoral degree. There are total seven participants with nearly homogeneous background in education, family condition and school atmosphere. Five of them began their work as a teacher after graduation and two of them had their post-graduate study after working and then retrieve their work after graduation. The research adopting a guide of IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) methodology, launched a successive of semi-structured interviews with these participants to deeply explore how they perceive their experience of being a primary/secondary school's teacher. How this research has addressed the research questions are addressed below:

**Research question 1: How do highly educated female teachers perceive and situate their role of being a teacher at primary/secondary schools in Beijing, China?**

This study at first discusses the overall image of teacher identity of the participants embedded in the concept that identity is dynamic, fluid, gendered and greatly shaped by external environment and personal experience as well as personal perceptions. Based on participants' descriptions and data analysis, it can be revealed that overall, participants lost their passion of work and held a more negative attitude towards current condition than before to a different extent. Adopting Kelchtermans' concept of presenting teacher identity (1993, 2009), the overall image of highly-educated female teachers in this research is presented from five aspects: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives in the primary/secondary schools' context in Beijing. According to interviews, negative words were frequently chosen in describing their self-esteem, job-motivation and future perspectives. Most participants feel powerless and a lack of autonomy in planning their future career development due to fast changing policies and lack of autonomy. Being exhausted is also frequently mentioned through interviews while they were depicting their daily work. It is with no doubt that such emotional and physical condition passively effect these teachers' attitude and moreover professional identity development. Their own description of self-image is also more of a service-provider instead of a professional educator or research-oriented teacher as most schools anticipated about highly-educated teachers.

Therefore with respect to future career plan, no clear plans were presented as a manifest of less positive teacher identity due to lack of control of their work, little spare time and limitations in recruitment. It can be inferred that holding a less passionate attitude towards work is unavoidable and potentially sheds negative influences on future career planning. Work is perceived as a tool to survive with less emphasis on its professional development. Meanwhile, it is striking to see that participants who may complain about welfare but still hold a positive view of work

also have no clear goals of their future development. Previous studies emphasised more on teachers' tensions between practical teaching and policy requirements which may cause teachers' complaints and less empowered (e.g. Huang, 2022), this study further manifests that lack of autonomy on personal professional development and resource support from authorities may shed vast negative impact especially on highly-educated female teachers who feel that their development is firmly restricted due to the job. To be specific, they put down their unclear professional plans to the fast changing policies, economic recession and the loss of discourse and controlling of their job decision. Most teachers in this research tend to be at a status of dumb working but are afraid to quit due to age/gender discrimination and other potential limitations in recruitment under the fierce competition in the labour market in China, meeting the characteristics of 'invisible resignation' (Hu, 2015). It can be seen that less socio-economic support, fast changing educational policies and reform as well as schools' overall plan to a great extent negatively impact teacher identity including limiting teachers' personal choice and plan of professional development as Hu suggests (2017) that bureaucratic management's tough tasks being allocated on teachers to a great extent cause teachers' mentally tired and this research further argues that such strict limitation on teachers' choices on pedagogy, essays writing and professional development may lead to severe job-burnout of teachers which may moreover negatively influence the construction of a consistent teaching faculty of high quality . Echoing the title of the research which adopts W.S. Maugham's book *The Moon and Sixpence*, the moon represents idealism and professional pursuit whilst sixpence refers to daily income or the real life one has, unlike the hero in the book who abandons all to pursuit his dream of painting, participants in this research is juggling work and life. Teachers' vocational codes of working more and asking for less makes them keep silent in face of poor income but the harsh life pushes them to think more about financial balance and survive in a big city. It seems that data show

almost all participants tend to focus more on daily life as well as income which namely means the sixpence. But actually the truth behind such phenomenon is their compromise to survive in a metropolis and being powerless in face of fast changing policies, symbolic violence related discrimination and fierce labour market. Professional development design seems far away for them like the moon since they have scarce choices and autonomy in planning.

It can be concluded that the five aspects presented in previous chapter depict highly-educated female teachers' potentially negative perceptions towards their work in detail and reveals potential issues of teachers' anxiety, burnout and 'invisible resignation'.

**Research question 2: How do external factors (Institutional and interpersonal factors) such as, peer influence and family contribute in shaping the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?**

### **Perceptions of Status**

Status here indicates how a teacher's level of income and the social status she perceives from her peer colleagues, principals, students' parents and media reports. The research suggests that participants show diverse perceptions towards social status which is more dependent on the environment one is in. Overall, participants feel that the status is being challenged since more and more media intend to only magnify negative news about teachers. Meanwhile, the attitude towards poor payment is in accordance and it can be regarded as one of the main factors which may severely impact teacher identity. Their disappointment can be inferred as tension between real

work and previous anticipation. Such findings echo to previous studies indicating that unattractive financial income and decreasing social status caused by poor income bring influence on shackling teachers positive attitude towards the job (Zhai, 2010; Liu, 2013; Hu, 2015).

In detail, as Bourdieu and Wacquant indicate economic capital as a key capital in obtaining more rights and power in certain fields (1992), poor income could potentially make highly-educated female teachers in this research in a position of not only finding it difficult to survive in a big and competitive environment but also losing the right of discourse, which furthermore labels a failure of transferring their academic knowledge (cultural capital) into payment (economic capital). It should be noted that the negative influence of poor payment is also manifested on these teachers' perceptions of their social status and gender issues. Though primary/secondary schools in Beijing is believed to be contextualised with Chinese tradition of respecting teachers. However, such respect is losing its meaning, under marketisation's value of worshipping economic income (Yan, 2006), which means Teacher's Day and other forms of emphases on respecting teachers are becoming simply a formalism. To sum, apparently, under a circumstance of marketisation which values more of financial income, without a decent payment, highly-educated female teachers' social status is also potentially challenged.

What potentially makes these teachers' perceptions of status worse is the insufficient support of teacher training. Being a graduate with a Master's degree, most participants in the research show great interest in academic research and are with good qualification of doing it. However, their passion of doing academia is limited by long



working hours, no access to data base, teacher educators' narrow preference, less professional guide and not ideal academic atmosphere. Teacher training as many participants point out is mainly dealing with pedagogy which is repetitive every semester without new update. It is worth mentioning that some participants also figure that teacher training fails to provide effective pedagogy for students with weak learning ability. According to these participants that teacher training is a kind of performance without practical guide on how to teach students with special learning needs or students whose basic knowledge is weak. In conclusion, highly-educated female teachers may feel they are not valued by educational authorities since some teacher training to a certain extent is unable to provide sufficient and corresponding training to help these teachers develop their skills. Moreover highly-educated female teachers' academic ability is decreasing after they enter into the field of primary/secondary schools' teaching, which costs brain waste.

### **Public, Peer and Family Influence**

In analysing inter-personal factors, the study explores how family, peer influence and public recognition shed impact on highly-educated female teachers. As data reveal, family as an influential factor works positively for some participants in this research. Either holding a belief of teacher as a stable job or parents working as teachers at primary/secondary schools, participants' parents intend to retain an opinion that being a teacher at primary/secondary schools is a decent job with good payment. Such ideal belief and good anticipation are also possible factors which cause the tension after work.

Peer influence also works potentially in shaping teachers' perception of daily work

and social status. To be specific, other teachers' negative experience and perceptions may also widely influence her/his peer colleagues. Public recognition like students and students' parents attitudes towards teachers and school's treatment of teachers also work as factors in shaping teachers' perception of their social status. Moreover, the current media report exaggerated negative news of teachers, which triggers and may further reinforce public discontent of teachers. Hence, it may suggest that even trivial interpersonal interactions and social recognition may also contribute in shaping teachers' overall perception of their teacher identity and to some extent cast negative influence on their identity formation.

**Research question 3: How do factors such as gender contribute in shaping and being shaped by the identity formation of these highly-educated female teachers?**

### **Gender and Age**

In further exploration of how personal factors shape teacher identity, firstly gender appears to cast complex influence on teacher identity and is in turn shaped by teachers' habitus and disposition in the field of primary/secondary schools' teaching. Highly-educated female teachers in this research show different recognition and perception towards gender discrimination like reporting pregnancy plan, lack of gendered welfare and facilities (mother-infant room) and schools hiring less qualified male teachers. Many participants express their dissatisfaction or reluctance in face of such inequity. Even with a decent educational background, these female teachers have to meet gender discrimination during recruitment and accept the fact that they are less 'competitive' than their male counterparts who are sometimes less qualified. However, over half of the participants also show understanding in such unfairness and some claim that being a teacher means one need to consider more about school's profits not

personal interests and some admit that being powerless and with less social-economic status, their voice is barely heard and nothing will be changed. Such compromise is perceived to be a product of the cultural context they are in which emphasize teachers to think mainly from collective interests and a position decided by teachers' power (payment and social status).

Such claim echoes to what Bourdieu indicates in gendered symbolic violence that it is an ideology of one group dominates over others that those with less economic, social and cultural capital, the agents intend to accept or submit to unfair treatment without questioning. Here though these teachers are equipped with high academic educational attainment, the field of teaching at primary/secondary schools fail to provide enough support in maintaining it and meanwhile guarantee decent payment and social respect. Gendered symbolic violence moreover devalued highly-educated female teachers' academic degree in their job hunting and is further reinforced during their work with the loss of practicing knowledge in teaching and insufficient economic-social support. Habitus in the field of teaching indicates that the intention of doing more and asking for less (Tully, 2023) is influencing teachers as 'a collective expectations or socially inculcated beliefs' to complain less and even submit to inequity without questioning in face of discrimination like gender issues (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 103 as cited in Muldoon & Fuller, 2024). As data indicate, it is not just gendered symbolic violence which hinders the way of development of highly-educated female teachers but also age working as a symbolic violence embedded in Chinese context which also explicitly limits these teachers' anticipation and practice of future professional development. Age discrimination as explored in discussion chapter is symbolically violating participants' choice of future development in this research. To conclude, gendered symbolic violence and age symbolic violence are working to devalue

highly-educated female teachers in their recruitment and work, lack of enough social-economic support make these teachers have no rights of discourse and have to accept the status quo.

### **Personal Disposition**

In this study, it is obvious to see that participants who felt a more positive disposition tend to hold a more positive teacher identity. Regardless of the fact that they are also negatively influenced by institutional, interpersonal and gender/age factors, overall these teachers though small in number in this research are inclined to hold a more positive view and be energetic in face of troublesome. But it can not be concluded that cultivating teachers' positivity can solve issues related to job-burnout or loss of passion since these positive teachers also show puzzle in career plan and be negative about payment. The study highlights that positive personal experience, the power of role models at work, parental influence and personal beliefs may all contribute to the form of positive disposition but since this research does not focus on the formation of disposition so the relationship and interaction among these factors need further research to be explored. Also it is worth noting that it can not be concluded that cultivating teachers to be positive can solve issues related to job-burnout or passion loss since teachers with positive attitude in this research also manifest dissatisfaction and less empowered in face of poor income and long working-hours.

As discussed in previous chapters, teacher identity is a dynamic process influenced by institutional, inter-personal and personal factors. Institutional factors like policies and school rules mainly impact teachers' welfare and daily work routine like working

hours and workload. Poor payment and imbalance of work-life to a great extent influence participants' attitude, not to mention the pressure brought by rapid educational reform. In fact, dissatisfaction towards poor salary is not just because of the amount of money but more in that the imbalance of work-earning. Long working hours do not guarantee a decent payment and it further means that these teachers may lose more of their leisure time which they can arrange with activities with family, hobbies or academic writing. Leisure time which can be freely arranged therefore appears to be a precious method in accumulating social, cultural and economic capital which is valued by participants in this research. It can be inferred that working for more than eight hours but receiving poor payment is one of the root causes of highly-educated female teachers' complaints towards financial income. It is also noticeable that highly-educated female teachers need more professional and academic support in doing research required by schools or job promotion. However, training agencies to some extent fail to provide sufficient and practical support and training sessions to meet these teachers' needs. Moreover, gender and age discrimination make these teachers difficult to find a new job or embark on further study, which potentially contribute to 'invisible resignation' especially for those who lost their passion in work.

In a word, under the challenge of economic recession and harsh labour market after pandemic, the inadequate financial and academic support, long working hours, gender and age bias within the educational context and decreasing social status interacting with each other and finally form highly-educated female teachers' teacher identity which in turn shape these teachers' recognition to eco-social status, academic study and gender bias. The shaping and re-shaping process of identity and influential factors thus form the social re-production and lead to highly-educated female teachers'

tendency of ‘invisible resignation’.

### **7.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

By exploring highly-educated female teachers’ professional identity at primary/secondary schools in Beijing from a perspective of constructionism, this research contributes to the current knowledge in the following points:

1. This study bridges the gap of a clear lack of qualitative studies in this area in China and provides empirical studies of how individual teachers perceive their teacher identity based on personal experiences. This adds an important dimension to understanding of teachers and their lived experiences.

To be specific, previous studies in China mainly focus on highly educated teachers in Higher Education and comparatively less attention is paid on this cohort of teachers at primary/secondary schools under the influence of credentialism. According to CNKI database in China most research adopts quantitative research methods so there is a lack of data on individual teachers’ experience and perceptions. Currently there is few research focusing on especially highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools. It can be summed that though the amount of this cohort of teachers is increasing rapidly, related research is still in a small number and asks for more studies to reveal these marginalised people’s feelings. The study offers a window into highly-educated female teachers’ teacher identity transition after entering into teaching career within a model of combining Kelchtermans’ five aspects of teacher identity and post-structural ideology that teacher identity is fluid and dynamic across

time. The deep exploration of teacher identity offers new understandings and perspectives in analysing teacher identity, especially highly-educated ones.

2. In addition, this study provides access for these marginalised female teachers to express their individual thoughts towards income, perceptions of social status, workload, gender issues and age discrimination in recruitment and at workplace. Previous related studies provide a macro view on how economic, social and interpersonal factors may affect teacher identity. Nevertheless, individual experiences based perceptions from highly-educated teachers are not fully explored.

The study reveals key potential influence of income, workload and social status, which is also discussed and proved by previous quantitative studies. Furthermore, the study explores how gender, age and teacher training may also contribute in shaping teacher identity. Gender discrimination, age limitation and dated training may also cast negative influence on highly-educated female teachers' teacher identity formation. By analysing the data collected in this study, this research suggests that teacher identity is not only decided by institutional policies but also to some extent affected by personal experience and perceptions. In turn, the existing teacher identity may also affect one's perceptions towards daily work and welfare. The research extends related empirical studies in China in that it provides valid qualitative data on how individual highly-educated female teachers perceive their role diversely based on personal perceptions as well as experience and how their teacher identity in turn may also shed impact on their perceptions of working experience. It offers essential clues to the importance of understanding and improving teachers' working experience and furthermore forming a positive teacher identity.

3. This research sheds light on highly-educated female teachers' individual experiences and perceptions of working at primary/secondary schools in Beijing through qualitative in-depth IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) study. Such approach enables researchers to focus more on individuals' perceptions and experiences in forming their identity. Nevertheless IPA is currently seldom adopted to explore teacher identity in China and as mentioned above current studies in China more focus on quantitative data which however to some extent ignore regional and individual differences. There are still spaces for this approach to be further utilised to analyse education related qualitative studies. As a result, the research bridges the methodological gap in research of teacher identity by applying IPA to reveal more individual-oriented thoughts.

4. The research adopts Bourdieu's theory of field to explore highly-educated female teachers' professional identity at primary/secondary schools. Bourdieu's theory of field provides explanation and discussion on how individual interacts with social structure and social norms to form disposition and doxa. The theory though originates from a Western context, its flexibility enables different context from the world to adopt it as a tool to explain social phenomenon hence extend its empirical studies in different cultural context. On one hand, the adoption of Western theories prove the flexibility and universality in explaining similar phenomenon in different cultural context and on the other hand, the study enriches the empirical studies with respect to teacher identity and Bourdieu's theory of field. By analysing how external social structure interacts with and shapes individual perceptions of teacher identity as well as age as a symbolic violence in limiting people's pursuit of further development. Such arguments further enrich the application of Bourdieu's theory of field in analysing Chinese teacher identity and provide implications to related research worldwide.



5. This research extends empirical studies by providing evidence of educated females' nuances on recognition of gender discrimination between Western and Chinese context. Different from Western context's perception of gender discrimination, highly-educated female teachers in Beijing's primary/secondary schools tend to compromise in face of such discrimination due to cultural and school context. The nuances in recognition of gender inequity implies interesting points which also provides food to thought of future related gender research.

#### **7.4 Implications of the Research**

This research has confirmed a gradual loss of passion for work, which indicates that some highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools in Beijing may lack a sense of belonging to this profession. It is suggested that income and long working hours lead to an imbalance in work and is one of the main causes of teachers' negatively identifying with the job. Also the gender issues and potential age discrimination need to be addressed from a government level to release teachers' anxiety and imbalance in face of such unfairness. The study aims to provide following suggestions to local authorities, schools and teacher training to improve highly-educated female teachers' experience.

First, local government should consider how to improve teachers' welfare to ensure teachers are rewarded for their work in a financial and practical way. In implementing policies like 'Double Reduction', teachers are required to provide extra service like

after-school service. It means that teachers have to work for longer hours and undertake more risks in guaranteeing students' safety yet receive relatively scarce payment. Such imbalance in work-payment may dampen teachers' enthusiasm to work. Poor income also means that highly-educated female teachers cannot fully realise their economic independence, which is important for women. Teachers' negative perceptions of work and negative attitude are not just influencing their own work, such negative feeling may also work as peer influence to impact other teachers and furthermore bring negative impact on daily teaching, which is harmful to students' learning. Therefore the local government and Ministry of Education should consider improving teachers related welfare to ensure that teachers' rights are protected. Otherwise it is difficult to change this cohort of teachers' negative perceptions towards their current economic-situation and may provide potential negative influence on school atmosphere and daily teaching.

As for teacher training, it is necessary for teacher training agencies to improve and update their courses with more academic related training and more practical pedagogy training to meet highly-educated teachers' needs and address issues such as helping students with weak learning ability. In this research , highly-educated female teachers potentially lose their academic ability and are confused about daily teaching partly due to the fact that teacher training agencies fail to provide sufficient support and extra targeted training. Teaching performance is too elite students-oriented. It means that weak students are missed and such performance provides little implication and practical pedagogy to teachers for their daily teaching. As some participants described, such performance works as a way to please teacher educators but fail to address practical teaching problems and cannot be applied in daily teaching. Moreover some training's content is repetitive every year is another domain issues which need to be

addressed. Teachers have to attend these compulsory training each year but since the content is the same so it is to some extent a waste of time for these teachers to learn repeated content and also kill their passion towards professional learning. The current teacher training according to data in this research to some extent fail to provide sufficient for these teachers in practical teaching strategies and class management since most highly-educated teachers are not graduate with a major of education. Non-practical training on vague and general content of teaching methods and only manifest ideal teaching to elite students to a great extent increase highly-educated teachers' confusion and anxiety towards teaching. Moreover further academic related sessions to improve highly-educated teachers' needs of subject related deeper knowledge based on their post-graduate study are not enough, which potentially increase these teachers sense of loss on their professional knowledge and dullness of daily work.

For schools, most schools simply put great hopes on these highly-educated female teachers but fail to provide sufficient support in offering access to academic data base for these teachers to search for academic articles. According to the study, most public-owned schools do not provide access to data base for teachers, which means teachers need to go to local national library to search for resources for academic writing. As academic writing is a tool for promotion and is compulsory in some schools, therefore schools should also be equipped with accessible resources for highly-educated female teachers to use. Also long working hours and some schools' unreasonable and unfair treatment to teacher (not-clear after-school service's payment and extra trivial work on weekends) are pushing these teachers unable to focus on their daily work and further academic writing. Such issues need to be addressed and paid attention by principals to avoid highly-educated teachers' anxiety and 'invisible

resignation’.

Apart from those mentioned above, schools should also consider implementing more facilities in support of female teachers’ maternity leave to improve gender related welfare. It is difficult to ask every schools not to have gender discrimination and age limitation in recruiting due to prevalent and take-for-granted gender/age discrimination at workplace in Chinese context. Still schools themselves should try to treat every colleagues fairly in order to avoid teachers’ dissatisfaction and further negative attitude towards work.

In understanding highly-educated female teachers’ professional identity, it is striking to know that in this study they use words like: anxious, frustrated or depressed in when discussing doing daily work. Thus it is also a domain issues to be addressed. Both authorities and schools need to offer more mental support in supporting these teachers and facilitate schools with mental therapists for teachers if possible. Such emotional support could be helpful in supporting teachers’ working pressure.

## **7.5 Limitations of the Research**

In order to gain a fully understanding of the research contribution and shed light on possible perspectives of future research, the limitations need to be confirmed. The research has several limitations regarding methodology, sample and region. Teacher identity in this research refers to personal perceptions and experience thus findings cannot be generalised to all highly-educated female teachers in Beijing or in other

regions. Though the findings echo previous empirical quantitative studies launched in other regions in China to prove the reliability of the study, since the number of studies on this topic is still scarce, the findings of this research may be useful as a starting point to other relative studies in different regions.

Second, the research focuses on how female teachers with more than five years working experience perceive their current role at primary/secondary schools, there is no comparison between novice highly-educated female teachers with experienced ones and there is no comparison between them with highly-educated male teachers as well to see this cohort of highly-educated teachers' overall recognition of teacher identity. How working experience and different genders may experience and perceive their professional role is not considered in this research.

It should be noticed that public-owned schools and private owned schools also diverse from school rules, specific policy implementation and teachers related welfare. Since this research mainly deals with highly-educated female teachers from public-owned schools so its results and discussions cannot be applied to the same cohort at private-owned schools.

The research undertook all data analysis for consistency but it is unavoidable to produce potential bias. Therefore the researcher discussed all the analysis with supervisors, checked coding, interpretation and analysis to self-challenge, aiming to be vigilant and self-reflective.

## **7.6 Implications for Further Research**

There are points to be studied further in terms of methodology and the research theme which is highly-educated teachers' identity at primary/secondary schools in China. Since this topic is still not frequently discussed in China so there are much to be further explored. In this section, closely related potential topics are discussed to provide new perspectives and thoughts on further studies. First, the research though based in Beijing's schools, it does not aim to focus on and provide detailed comparison between rural and urban schools' highly-educated female teachers in the city. Beijing as a big city in China has characters of having nuances among different district in policies, teacher training and financial allocation, thus teachers from rural based schools may have different experience and perceptions towards same issues mentioned in the research such as working hours, after-school service payment and gender/age discrimination. Therefore specific comparison between these two sections in Beijing can be a further research waiting for deeper discussion and exploration. Besides, since there are vast and diverse differences among regions in China, it is also necessary to compare highly-educated teachers' experience and professional identity based in different Chinese context to gain a more comprehensive and systematic view of the topic.

In terms of the researched, as mentioned in the limitation section, the research focuses on exploring highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools with teaching experience of more than five years. Even though interviews include questions of describing their experience as novice teachers and even memories before

entering into the career, it cannot be denied that there are still spaces for further studies on how novice teachers perceive their current feelings as teachers at basic education (primary/secondary schools) in China. Gaining these teachers experience and personal perceptions may also help to better understand highly-educated teachers' personal trajectory of professional identity forming. Moreover, the research has placed its focus on female teachers' experience. Future research can place key points on comparison of two sexes' diverse and similar recognition towards working experience and teacher identity thereby extending the broader topic to see how gender work in shaping both sexes' perceptions on this job. By emphasising on comparing two or more different sample groups, for instance how novice highly-educated female teachers perceive challenges and experience after they enter into the career or how different gender hold different perceptions and identity of being a highly-educated teachers at primary/secondary schools in China, research in the future may aim to present more comprehensive and generalised results to rich content of this area.

As it is discussed in the discussion of contribution to knowledge, the research reveals Chinese educated females' different perceptions towards gender discrimination compared with a Western context. It is interesting and worth exploring to see how and why females from different cultural context diverse in understanding and dealing with gender issues provided that they may hold different values, beliefs and personal trajectories. Such studies can further develop gender studies especially post-colonial feminism related studies in extending empirical studies in the global south.

Moreover, with respect to methodology, the research aimed to gain deeper insights of individual experience thus adopting IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Approach)

as methodology and semi-structured interviews as a main method in order to gain more insightful view of participants. Future research with more possibilities to receive supports from local government or authorities to gain approval from gate keepers of schools, aims to expand sample size using mixed methods to gain more comprehensive and generalised conclusion on highly-educated female teachers' identity at primary/secondary schools in Beijing.

## **7.7 Chapter Summary**

This research is the first of its kind in the area of highly-educated teachers' identity at primary/secondary schools in China adopting an IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Approach) to explore how highly-educated female teachers form their professional identity based on their description and feelings of experiencing this job and perceiving daily their working.

As revealed, the research confirms the negative change of attitude of these teachers to different degrees due to dissatisfying income, long working hours and decreasing social status based on personal interpretation. Such change of attitude also unavoidably forms a relatively passive and negative identity represented in self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives. Besides economic-social factors which mainly impact highly-educated female teachers' working experience as well as identity. There are interpersonal and personal factors such as peer influence as well as symbolic violence like gender/age discrimination, which bring negative experience to participants in the research.



Gender has been discussed to provide more gender-perspective views on understanding plights of this cohort of female teachers experiencing both being gendered and economically marginalised. It is worth noting that in context of primary/secondary schools in Beijing, highly-educated female teachers in this research tend to compromise in face of gender discrimination or to some extent also support the idea of schools preferring male teachers. In exploring, there are several potential factors which may shape such disposition like weak income and obeying to the vocation of sacrifice embedded in the school context. The research reveals and reiterates the plight faced by well-educated females in face of gender discrimination during recruitment and how economic factors may decrease their power socially in fight against the discrimination despite rich academic knowledge they mainly own. Besides gender, age discrimination is another symbolic violence faced by both sexes in China, which extend and rich empirical studies of Bourdieu's related theory on symbolic violence. Highly-educated female teachers in this research show their desire for further learning like PhD study or shifting to another job but are greatly limited by the threshold of age. Age on one hand prevent these teachers from resigning the job but on the other hand limits these teachers' professional plan and cause 'invisible resignation' under the circumstance of job burnout experienced by most participants. It can be said that age is working potentially as a negative factor in limiting these teachers' development. From this perspective, the study extends Bourdieu's theory of field in discussing age also working as a symbolic violence in limiting these teachers' pursuit of further academic and professional development, which sheds negative influence on their formation of professional identity.

The results of this research show that most participants have an inclination of

‘invisible resignation’ or at least become more negative after working for over five years at primary/secondary schools. The findings and discussion implicate that policy makers should check more of the implementation of teachers’ welfare with respect to after-school service fees allocation to avoid killing teachers’ passion by unclear allocating. Related welfare and better payment should be paid attention by local government to improve teachers’ welfare and guarantee their basic rights in rest. Teacher educators need to at first avoid too much repetitive content and update the training to address more practical pedagogical problems to meet every students’ needs and provide more tips of students management to help highly-educated teachers be accustomed to daily work. Schools’ headmasters also need to consider more about highly-educated teachers’ needs in academic support and manage a better way in managing female teachers’ working plan instead of direct request of postponing pregnancy plans in order to create a more supportive and less gender biased atmosphere. Some of the issues above are for sure difficult to be solved at once or permanently be addressed, so it needs more economic support from the government and more related scholars in revealing the unheard voices from these marginalised teachers.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Questions

### First interview:

1. How do you find your post-graduate study? Why did you choose to have it?  
(Participants can describe some unforgettable experiences which have profound influence on their later professional career.)
2. Basic questions of their family background including details:
  - family members' attitudes towards higher education and economic background  
(Optional, if participants are unwilling to answer the question can be altered to be general family background or their primary/secondary schools background)
3. Questions about their current daily work routines:
  - Why did they choose to be a primary/secondary school's teacher?
  - How do they perceive their teaching? Excited, boring or tired when they think about the teaching.
4. How do they balance their work and family?

### Second interview:

1. Under the circumstance of 'double reduction', what is your opinion towards teachers' training and requirements of essays?
2. What is your professional plan?
3. Recently, the discussion of females' virtue, gender discrimination and wrong gender education in secondary schools are on the top trend in Weibo (a famous SNS in China).

What is your idea towards gender discrimination in recruitment and education?

(The researcher needs to define gender discrimination for participants before



interview.)

Have you experienced similar issues of gender discrimination?

4. What influences have the third child policy or parents' marriage urging had on you?

Or any comments towards these issues?

5. What activities do you choose during leisure time? How do you perceive peer pressure and involution?

6. With the implement of 'double reduction', the working hours are much longer, so how do you feel about the income and welfare?

### **Third interview:**

1. For female welfare, are facilities like mother-and-infant rooms equipped in school?

Any advice related to female welfare like this?

2. Under the impact of Covid-19, how do you perceive your status of working? Any comments towards working hours or payment?

3. How do your working peers describe and perceive of being a teacher? What about you?

4. Do you consider your job has received deserved social respect? Why or why not?

5. What is your future plan?

## **Appendix 2: Information sheet and consent form**

### **Participation Information Sheet**

#### *Highly-educated female teachers' perception of professional identity at Beijing's primary/secondary schools*

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Reading. You are being invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this research project is to explore highly-educated female teachers' perceptions and experiences of working at primary/secondary schools in Beijing with the aim of informing possible continuing professional training for this cohort of teachers including ITE (initial teacher education) and offer feasible advice to policies makers.

This aim will be achieved through a two-stage qualitative narrative study. Stage one includes observation, interviews with teachers and documents analysis (such as teaching reflection, schools' recruitment standards); stage two includes in-depth interviews with teachers.

### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

All the participants will be contacted within my previous personal professional network not by going to schools. You have been identified to take part as someone who has experience being a teacher at a primary/secondary school in Beijing and have a Master degree or higher.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

You will be invited to take part in a one-to-one interview lasting between 30-45 minutes based on your experiences of module evaluations. This interview will take place face to face at a mutually convenient date and time. Questions about your perception towards being a female teacher at primary/secondary school, family burden and future career plan will be asked and some educational as well as family background will be interviewed during the process. With your agreement, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving reason by contacting me via email on [f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk).

### **What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

In agreeing to take part in this study there will be a time commitment to consider, as the interview is likely to last between 30 and 45 minutes. While there will be a time commitment required from participants, it is felt that the benefits of involvement will outweigh the costs: your involvement will allow us to explore key issues related to teachers' welfare and professional training and make recommendations for improved policy and practice.

**Will what I say be kept confidential?**

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). In order to protect the anonymity of each participant, pseudonyms will be used to ensure participants cannot be identified. The schools' names will also be changed. All electronic data will be held securely in password protected files on a non-shared PC and all paper documentation will be held in locked cabinets in a locked office.

In line with University policy, data generated by the study will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

The organisation responsible for protection of your personal information is the University of Reading (the Data Controller). Queries regarding data protection and your rights should be directed to the University Data Protection Officer at [imps@reading.ac.uk](mailto:imps@reading.ac.uk), or in writing to: Information Management & Policy Services, University of Reading, Whiteknights, P O Box 217, Reading, RG6 6AH.

The University of Reading collects, analyses, uses, shares and retains personal data for the purposes of research in the public interest. Under data protection law we are

required to inform you that this use of the personal data we may hold about you is on the lawful basis of being a public task in the public interest and where it is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. If you withdraw from a research study, which processes your personal data, dependant on the stage of withdrawal, we may still rely on this lawful basis to continue using your data if your withdrawal would be of significant detriment to the research study aims. We will always have in place appropriate safeguards to protect your personal data.

If we have included any additional requests for use of your data, for example adding you to a registration list for the purposes of inviting you to take part in future studies, this will be done only with your consent where you have provided it to us and should you wish to be removed from the register at a later date, you should contact Carol Fuller.

You have certain rights under data protection law which are:

- Withdraw your consent, for example if you opted in to be added to a participant register

- Access your personal data or ask for a copy

- Rectify inaccuracies in personal data that we hold about you

- Be forgotten, that is your details to be removed from systems that we use to process your personal data

- Restrict uses of your data

- Object to uses of your data, for example retention after you have withdrawn from a study

Some restrictions apply to the above rights where data is collected and used for

research purposes.

You can find out more about your rights on the website of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) at <https://ico.org.uk>

You also have a right to complain the ICO if you are unhappy with how your data has been handled. Please contact the University Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

### **What happens if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Professor Carol Fuller, University of Reading; Tel: 118 3782662, email: [c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk](mailto:c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk)

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more information, please contact Ms Fei Lian, email: [f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The data will be analysed and used in an PhD thesis. It may also be used in future publications in appropriate academic journals and/or books. If you would like a summary copy of the research findings, these will be sent to you on request.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This application has been reviewed following procedures of the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for

conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

<b>Name, position and contact address of Researcher</b>	<b>Name, position and contact address of Supervisor</b>
<p><b>Fei Lian</b>            PhD candidate            Institute of Education            University of Reading            London Road Campus            4 Redlands Road            Reading            RG1 5EX            UK            Email: f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk            Tel: 13651299569</p>	<p><b>Carol Fuller</b>  <i>Professor of Education</i>  <i>Head of the Institute of Education</i>            Institute of Education            University of Reading            London Road Campus            4 Redlands Road            Reading            RG1 5EX            UK            Email: c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk            Tel: +44 (0)118 3782662</p>

## CONSENT FORM

**Research Project:**

*The identity formation of highly-educated female teachers at primary/secondary schools in  
Beijing*

<b>Name, position and contact address of Researcher</b>	<b>Name, position and contact address of Supervisor</b>
<p><b>Fei Lian</b> PhD candidate Institute of Education University of Reading London Road Campus 4 Redlands Road Reading RG1 5EX UK Email: f.lian@pgr.reading.ac.uk Tel: 13651299569</p>	<p><b>Carol Fuller</b> <i>Professor of Education</i> <i>Head of the Institute of Education</i> Institute of Education University of Reading London Road Campus 4 Redlands Road Reading RG1 5EX UK Email: c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)118 3782662</p>

This application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee and has



been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

**Please initial box**

- |    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | I agree to take part in the above study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Please tick box**

- |    | <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>                |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. | I agree to the interview being audio recorded.           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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Name of Participant

Date

Signature

### **Appendix**

**This application form includes:**

1. Interview schedule for teachers
2. Translation of consent form and participation information form

**In the appendix you must include copies of your interview schedule, questionnaires/survey, observation sheet as relevant.**

## Appendix 3: Transcription Example

### **1. How do you find your post-graduate study? Why did you choose to have it? (Participants can describe some unforgettable experiences which have profound influence on their later professional career.)**

Heng: Maybe because my daily life is boring (I think several participants mentioned they lost their passion or the work is not fascinating. They complained about students' management, unreasonable educational policies and rules or parents impoliteness. I wonder whether these are main culprits. ) as the work has no challenge and no sense of freshness. Also currently teaching career asks for higher educational background, so I need to enhance mine. Now many primary schools require teachers to be with Master's degrees. And learning can bring me a sense of achievement; let me feel I am of value. (All of them mention the necessity of receiving higher education due to the high standards of recruitment)

The impact is that postgraduate study always engaged a lot of self-learning and discussion. Teachers encourage students to elaborate their ideas, which I think is good. So in my daily teaching, I remind myself that I should keep my own ideas and encourage students to have theirs too.

Also, my major of post-graduate study is mental health. It makes a difference on my work, which means I am able to get in touch with a total new subject and work. This sense of feeling makes me passionate with my work, and makes my work more challenging.

Xiao Wu: I felt regretful of not being enrolled by my dreamed university so I decided to have post-graduate study. I think the experience of having post-graduate study has great impact on my attitude of doing academic research. And I found what I love in doing research so I can stick to it when I face difficulties. Another impact which is from my tutor is on teaching. He told me to stand on students' points, for example, if you are not pleasant with some teachers' words or behaviours when you are a student, don't do it when you are a teacher. I concern these words are helpful for me especially when dealing with students' issues.

At first, the passion of doing research is strong and I even considered about have a

doctoral study after graduation. Now I don't have this kind of ideas and haven't had any new plans too. Because you know having a PhD research is pretty tough and the current recruitment environment is also not so friendly for doctoral graduates. I also feel like I don't have the guts and courage to have this challenge. Maybe my plan for the following years is working with more focuses on daily after-school life. My work, just let it be I guess.

Xiao Qi: The reason why I chose to have post-graduate study is because of the employment environment in China. I had my bachelor's degree in a northwestern Normal University. Most of my peer fellows worked as tour guides after graduation due to a tough employment environment and the amount of Bianzhi is relatively small (Almost all the participants mentioned Bianzhi and Hukou in explaining the reasons of choosing to be a teacher at primary/secondary school in Beijing)(Bianzhi is similar to authorized personnel which ensures a stable job and low risk of being redundant). I thought being a tour guide is suitable when I was young but still it is less stable compared with being a teacher. Plus my personality is not suitable too. So I chose to have a post-graduate study. My plan at that time was that maybe I can do some research stuff and it would not be late to be a teacher after graduating with a Master degree, which may be a key for finding a job in a better city or teaching students of higher quality. Well, mainly I chose to have further study because of the tough employment environment. At that time, I worked as an intern teacher at a very famous and outstanding secondary school in Xian. I really did hope to be a teacher at that school because that school has a short history, with young and passionate students and teachers. I really liked the vibe there. But at that year there was no Bianzhi for us. And having a bachelor's degree is not qualified to be a teacher at a secondary school. So I think it is OK to have a post-graduate study.

Having a Master's degree has more influence on my life than on my work, (Other participants have similar thoughts) for instance, when I read some news or meet difficult issues, my knowledge of literary theories impacts me a lot on how to conceive these things. My peer staff may complain students are difficult to teach, parents have given too much pressure on teacher or the new policy of decreasing the amount of homework is not reasonable whilst I can deal them with a peaceful mind.

Maybe before I don't have that kind of inner peace, but having a post-graduate study let me know to see everything from different perspectives and avoid dead end. However I have to say the knowledge has no influence on my daily teaching.

Tanmei: The reason why I chose to have post-graduate study is that after teaching at primary/secondary schools I felt a sense of incapability of teaching, realizing that I am lack of new professional knowledge, academic study and accumulation on pedagogy. I eagerly need an opportunity to enhance my knowledge. Having post-graduate study benefits me mainly on widening my knowledge and enriching my experience. Now I know more on how to study, solve difficult issues and etc.

(It seems that participants all wish to have more knowledge to enhance their ability of teaching but resulted in having little impact on daily teaching according to previous participants' answers.)

Rui: My university ranking is not quite good, plus my parents don't have much social relationship to help me find a decent job, so I chose post-graduate study. Having a Master's degree can increase the possibility of finding an official and stable job in Beijing. My professors' attitudes towards research and their ideology of education during the post-graduate also influence me a lot. I hope I can give my students such positive impact.

Yingying: The reason why I chose to have post-graduate study is because I hope a higher academic degree can help me find a decent job. During the post-graduate study, half of the time is spent on learning and half for internship. So beside professional knowledge, I also could gain some social or life experiences during post-graduate which I believe is helpful to teaching. I believe teaching pedagogy is flexible and only learning pedagogy without teaching practice will not catch students' attention and create good class activities' vibe.

Yanyan: The first reason of having post-graduate study is for job-hunting. With a Master's degree can help me find a decent job and settle down in Beijing with Hukou not a small city (Hukou is registered permanent residence certificate in China.) The second reason is that I am capable of English translation, love reading and have great passion and the spirit of exploration on academic research. So I hope to enhance my ability by receiving post-graduate education. The third reason is the influence from my parents who are both intellectuals. They told me the importance of life-long learning when I was a kid. Also, on a better platform, it is more possible for me to find like-minded peers who are interested in reading and researching.

I think my experience of having post-graduate study has little to do with my teaching. I am not majored in education and I even got my certificate of teaching after three years working at a secondary school. But my parents believe I can be a good teacher because I am kind, patient and nice to children. After graduation, I aimed to find a job related to translation but received no reply after sending my CV. I only applied for one secondary school and they recruited me because of my experience of working as an intern teacher. So, you see, my major during post-graduate study is about translation especially translation related with transportation. Now, I tend to care more about how to educate students and impart my knowledge to them.

## Appendix 4: Example of data analysis

Emergent themes	Details
<p>Relatively negative feeling of work</p>	<p>boring</p> <p>no challenge</p> <p>no freshness</p> <p>no passion [3]</p> <p>happy but tired [2]</p> <p>doubtful of choosing this job</p> <p>restrictions of teaching and students' issues make her puzzled 5</p> <p>Loophole in policies [2]</p> <p>busy and trivial [2]</p> <p>working hours are too long</p> <p>frustrated</p> <p>Students' parents: incorporative with students' behaviours' administration</p> <p>Parents have become more impolite and they disrespect teachers</p>
<p>Interior reasons of having post-graduate study [2]</p>	<p>Not enrolled by dreamed university [2]</p> <p>After teaching at primary/secondary schools I felt a sense of incapability of teaching, realizing that I am lack of new professional knowledge, academic study</p>

	<p>and accumulation on pedagogy.</p> <p>widening my knowledge and enriching my experience [2]</p> <p>need an opportunity to enhance my knowledge</p> <p>My parents don't have much social relationship to help me find a decent job.</p> <p>influence from my parents who are both intellectuals</p> <p>boring life, no challenging</p> <p>A sense of achievement</p> <p>I am capable of English translation, love reading and have great passion and the spirit of exploration on academic research.</p> <p>On a better platform, it is more possible for me to find like-minded peers who are interested in reading and researching.</p>
<p>Exterior reasons of having post-graduate study</p>	<p>recruitment's requirement is higher than before [3]</p> <p>Bianzhi (Bianzhi is similar to authorized personnel which ensures a stable job and low risk of being redundant) asks for higher academic degree, a stable and decent job [3]</p> <p>Loves the vibe of the school she worked</p>



	<p>as an intern</p> <p>settle down in Beijing with Hukou</p>
<p>Impact of post-graduate study on teaching thoughts and new subjects like psychology.</p>	<p>On students: elaborate ideas, encourage students to say their ideas; Tutor's impact of considering from students' points; I remind myself that I should keep my own ideas and encourage students to have theirs too.</p> <p>On their thoughts: 1. My major of post-graduate study is mental health. It makes a difference on my work, which means I am able to get in touch with a total new subject and work. This sense of feeling makes me passionate with my work, and makes my work more challenging.</p> <p>2. Positive impact on her attitude of research, even hoping to have a PhD at first but now no such plan because recruitment is tough, having no guts and encourage and wanting to focus on daily after-work life;</p> <p>3. more on life than work (conceiving difficulties from different perspectives based on the literature analytic knowledge she learnt and avoid dead</p>

	<p>end);</p> <p>4. no influence on daily teaching</p> <p>5. some social or life experiences during post-graduate which I believe is helpful to teaching</p> <p>Post-graduate study has little to do with my teaching because I majored in translation.</p>
<p>parents' support</p>	<p>They supported my choices and encouraged me to do this. [7]</p> <p>1. They believe as a girl if you work hard, you are honest and have one professional skill, one can find a good job.</p> <p>2. My parents supported me very much because it can help me find a better job in a big city.</p> <p>3. My parents supported me very much because it can help me find a better job in a big city.</p>
<p>Reason of becoming a teacher at primary/secondary school</p>	<p>stable, Hukou [3]</p> <p>Parents' influence: Parents are both teachers.</p> <p>Familiar with this job [2]</p> <p>No complex social contact such as</p>

	<p>ingratiating the boss.</p> <p>Accidental: Her tutor at the intern school influenced her and she loves to teach those common, energetic and lovely students</p> <p>She doesn't want to teach at an elite secondary school which may occupy too much rest time.</p> <p>Dream to become an outstanding Chinese teacher [2]</p> <p>Likes the subject she teaches</p> <p>Every time when she sees students' growth, she will feel that this job is rewarding and valuable.</p> <p>Qualified to be a good teacher</p>
Time plan of balancing work and life	<p>finish work at school [6]</p> <p>Difficulty: bring bad mood back home and sometimes lose temper at her daughter</p> <p>Cannot rest well, tired</p> <p>Energy consuming because of less working experience</p> <p>Gradually finding solutions and learning strategies to adjust like chatting, snap or taking a walk</p> <p>There are so many students waiting for</p>

	<p>me for guidance and loads of homework waiting for correcting and checking. It makes me hard to care every student. Some good plans or blueprints can't be realized.</p> <p>Good at balancing work and rest</p> <p>Won't bring bad mood back home</p> <p>busy with baby rearing</p> <p>doing hobbies: watch documentary films, shopping, spending casual time with my husband, reading and boxing, all activities to have a relax</p>
Attitude towards parents' urging marriage	<p>Telling her parents her thoughts of marriage: finding a right person and no hurry; follow her heart</p> <p>Difficult to find a proper partner</p>
Positive feeling or work [1]	<p>Pedagogy of primary school teaching attracts me a lot.</p> <p>I am hopeful with the passion of teaching and exploration.</p>
Future goal [3]	<p>My aim is also becoming lower so as to have more spaces for progress.</p> <p>My goal now is to finish my work not finish it perfectly. After all, every minute in my life counts and my life is not all for my work.</p>

	<p>The current difficulty for me is that I have fewer opportunities to have lesson observations in performance management and less chances of attending competitions on teaching. So I am lack of professional guidance and grow slowly on teaching.</p> <p>passion towards psychology and being a mental health teacher [2]</p>
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